

EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

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16+1 Expert-Level Forum: China and East-Central Europe on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Kraków, 11-14 October 2016

“不薄今人爱古人，清词丽句必为邻。” 杜甫
Bu bo jinren ai guren, qing ci li ju bi wei lin.

The beauty left by our ancestors is there to enchant us
in the pursuit of our own identity./
The beauty left by our ancestors is there to inspire us
yet not to limit us.

Du Fu

The words of the most renowned poet of the Tang dynasty (8th century AD) about the dialogue between the past, the present, and the future – the basis of our cultural identity – accompanied the representatives of the 17 countries that were hosted in Poland on 11-14 October 2016. The renowned experts arrived in order to discuss intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding. The organizers of this meeting were the Ministry

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of Culture and National Heritage and the Polish National Heritage Board. It was additionally supported by the Polish Council for Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The Forum was realized within the framework of the interregional cooperation “16+1”, namely, 16 countries from East and Central Europe and China. This format was proposed in 2012 by the People’s Republic of China itself. It includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. All these countries are parties to the UNESCO 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Owing to its interregional character, the Forum constituted the first opportunity to exchange opinions and examples related to the practice of safeguarding this type of heritage between Europe and Asia.

The meeting was attended by state institution officials (Ministries of Culture of the respective countries were represented by persons that work daily on the safeguarding of intangible heritage at the central level); members of councils and committees whose task is to safeguard intangible cultural heritage; representatives of government bodies, museums, NGOs, and academic centres; as well as the bearers of heritage themselves. This allowed for a broad and interdisciplinary discussion on how to protect the cultural wealth of each of the countries that participated in the Forum.

An important element of the meeting was the possibility to compare the administrative structures, legislative solutions, and best practices in safeguarding. What was particularly interesting was the juxtaposition of the experiences from the region of East and Central Europe with the Asian country that is the most experienced in the area of the safeguarding of international intangible cultural heritage – China. It has the largest number of inscriptions on the increasingly popular UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity; it was also among the first five countries to ratify the 2003 UNESCO Convention.

During the conference, the experts from respective countries shared their knowledge and experiences in the area of creating and applying legal regulations used to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, their practices of conducting research and documenting intangible cultural heritage in their countries, and presented good practices in the sphere of sustaining intergenerational dialogue. A discussion was also started on how to practically link the principles of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding with the concept of sustainable development, which was accepted in September 2015 by the UN General Assembly as the primary rule of the 2030 Agenda; which sets the goals of the international community for the next 15 years and is reflected in the new Chapter 6 of the Operational Directives to the 2003 Convention.

The guests from abroad also had an occasion to familiarize themselves with the elements of Polish intangible cultural heritage, the exhibitions of which had been planned as an essential part of the Forum. The rooms of the International Cul-

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tural Centre in Kraków hosted presentations of the representatives of societies, communities, groups, and sometimes entire families practicing intergenerational traditions such as the Lajkonik procession, Nativity Scenes (*szopka*) from Kraków, block lace-making, communion wafer cut-outs, making colourful paper flowers, glass painting, plaiting, toymaking from the Żywiec and Suskie regions, Kashubian lace-making, or the “perebory” weaving. Other representatives included falconers, honey hunters, and representatives of the Esperanto language associations.

The forum was accompanied by the festive 2nd Gala in the Sukiennice (Cloth Hall) in the Kraków Main Square during which the representatives of the communities and groups were granted decisions by the Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage to inscribe 12 new elements on the National list of intangible cultural heritage: Esperanto as a carrier of the Esperanto culture; the art of making and playing bagpipes; the Żukowo school of the Kashubian embroidery; falconry – a living tradition; Polish national dances; celebrations in honour of St. Roch with the blessing of animals; traditional bronze work used by the Felczyński family for producing bells in Taciszów; Easter rhymes in Szymborze; the Warmia dialect as a carrier of oral traditions; toy making traditions in Żywiec and Sucha Beskidzka; honey hunting, and the Perebory weaving traditions in the Bug river region.

The conclusions of the Forum and the Gala were accompanied by reflection on the words of Polish sociologist and philosopher Florian Znaniecki (1882-1958), the creator of humanist sociology: “[t]he wise man is the one who not only highly values various cultural systems and knows how to validate them in many ways, but can also appreciate culture in all its richness and versatility and is interested in its persistence and development”.