

# EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Hanna Schreiber\*

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## The First Nomination from Poland Submitted to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2018 Cycle)

Six years after the ratification of the 2003 Convention, at the end of March 2017 Poland submitted its first nomination to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Minister of Culture and National Heritage decided, upon the recommendation of the Council for Intangible Cultural Heritage, to nominate the Nativity Scene (*szopka*) tradition in Kraków. This intangible cultural heritage (ICH) element was one of the first inscriptions into the National ICH List in 2014, which today comprises almost 30 ICH elements from all over the country.<sup>1</sup>

The Nativity Scene (*szopka*) tradition in Kraków is a social practice originating from Christmas celebration customs, centred around the construction of cribs, with its elements based on skills and knowledge that have been passed on for generations, mainly by the citizens of Kraków. The cultivation of this tradition is based on transmission within families and participant observation, as well as through workshops and master-apprentice relationships.

The *szopka* is a lightweight construction, which shows the Nativity Scene surrounded by representations of houses and

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\* **Hanna Schreiber** is Assistant Professor at the Institute of International Relations, University of Warsaw, Poland, and serves as Deputy President of the Polish Council for Intangible Cultural Heritage.

<sup>1</sup> See: <http://niematerialne.nid.pl> [accessed: 20.12.2017].

monuments of Kraków, fantastically transformed by its constructor. The most frequently “quoted” architectural feature is the representation of the towers of the St. Mary’s Church in Kraków. Through the use of figurines – often mechanically animated – as well as artificial lighting, other scenes are also presented, depicting historical, cultural, and contemporary social events related to the life of not only the City of Kraków, but also of Poland and the world. Each maker has their own method and style of constructing the crib, together with a specific colour palette and derives inspirations from various architectural styles; however, all the cribs share a common feature: their precision-making and the attention to detail. Every year, on the first Thursday of December the makers gather at the footsteps of the Adam Mickiewicz Monument on the Kraków Main Square to present the results of their artwork skills. Afterwards, the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków renders their works accessible to the public for a longer period of time, from December to February.

The oldest mention of the Nativity Scene tradition connected with the city of Kraków goes back to the second half of the 19th century. Initially, Christmas cribs were used as portable puppet theatres which aided carolling. While they have undergone many changes for over a hundred years, the tradition remains alive and continues to thrive in today’s present conditions.

During the inter-war period, a group of szopka enthusiasts decided to organize a competition for the most beautiful szopka in Kraków. Its first edition took place in 1937 with the aim of rejuvenating the tradition and popularizing it among the citizens of Kraków and its tourists. Since then, the competition has been held every year, except for a break during the Second World War when the occupying authorities had banned it (although the tradition continued secretly).

Since the inter-war period, many projects and initiatives have been continuously undertaken to preserve and protect the szopka tradition, both by the bearers themselves as well as by supporting institutions (e.g. community centres, schools, museums). They include szopka construction workshops in Poland and abroad (e.g. from 2015 to 2017 as many as 235 workshops have been organized) conducted by the crib makers, as well as exhibitions and purchases for private and museum collections, publications (including scientific ones and those of general interest), web-pages, and documentary films about the Nativity Scene tradition and its bearers.

All these actions sustain awareness of the importance of this tradition and thus contribute to its sustainability and continuous transmission.

The nomination was prepared in an atmosphere of cooperation between the bearers (represented by Dariusz Czyż and Marek Markowski), Dr. Magdalena Kwiecińska (ethnographer), and the author of this note, who was the main coordinator of the works on the nomination and its final outcome. The application was supported by the Polish National Commission for UNESCO and a number of institutions from Kraków engaged in the safeguarding and promotion of this element, including members of the City Council and the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków.