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The Polish system for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage AD 2023 – achievements and challenges

*Polski system ochrony niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego
Anno Domini 2023 – osiągnięcia i wyzwania*

At the threshold of the process of building a management system for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, several texts appeared in the scientific circulation, which today can be easily called programmatic. They were motivated by Poland's ratification of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted on 17 October 2003 in Paris at the 32nd Session of the UNESCO General Conference, which came into force in Poland on 16 August 2011.¹ The adoption of the Convention imposes a number of generally formulated obligations on the State-Party, among them the inclusion of the protection of this heritage in general planning programmes, the designation of bodies responsible for its protection, the development of scholarly, technical and artistic studies and research methodologies, the support

¹ Konwencja UNESCO w sprawie ochrony niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego, sporządzona w Paryżu dnia 17 października 2003 r., Journal of Laws dated 19 Aug. 2011 no. 172 item 1018. See the aggregation of UNESCO and state documents: Schreiber 2023. English version: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>.

of training centres for the management of this heritage resource, and allowing access to it (Cicha-Kuczyńska 2013: 35).

The process of building a national system for the protection of intangible heritage began with teams of experts working for two years² on the translation of the text of the 2003 Convention into Polish, as well as with legal and organisational consultations that resulted in the announcement of the protection system on 15 January 2013 together with the opening of the call for submissions to the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Brzezińska 2013: 110–118; Schreiber 2010: 8; Brzezińska, Schreiber, Smyk 2012; Mazur 2012). It took into account the suggestions made by the lawyers initiating the involvement of the Polish state in the ratification of the 2003 Convention, namely, Katarzyna Zalasieńska (2014a; 2014b) and Hanna Schreiber (2009; 2014a; 2014b; Jodełka 2005). The expectations of the communities involved in the protection of traditions and intangible qualities were great at the time, but it was clear to all that it was up to the communities involved in traditional-type culture to decide whether and how they would take advantage of “this unique opportunity to give this heritage its proper rank in the consciousness of our whole society” (Schreiber 2010: 8).³ The objectives articulated at that time remain relevant after nearly a quarter of a century, despite the passing years and the changing political and cultural contexts or cultural policies.

From the very beginning of the Convention’s existence in the public space, circles involved in the cultivation of tradition pointed to the important role of local government units in the system of heritage protection and reported from the outset the need for proper identification of the pertinent functions of these units (e.g. Majcher 2011: 112). Yet even then an uncertainty, in this and many other fields, could already be sensed (Mazur 2012: 50).

The activities of many milieus at the time were judged to be more or less sensible, and consisted in intuitive – as Anna W. Brzezińska put it – associating and organising of joint events of various types, e.g. by the Association of Folk Artists and the Polish Folklore Society, in order to inform “each other about what is currently happening in a given community” (Brzezińska 2013: 122). That grassroots spurt of self-help activity – which began in the early 2009 and was reinforced by the debates in the Presidential Palace (20 September 2011) (*Forum 2011*) and in the Parliament building of the Republic of Poland (25 February 2013) (Rottermund 2014), then by the Oskar Kolberg Year (2014), and the self-help activity of folk artists, researchers of folk culture and its promoters – should, in retrospect, be regarded as a decisive moment:

2 The beginning can be dated to January 2009, when the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage organised the first public consultations on the ratification of the 2003 Convention by Poland (Schreiber 2010: 8).

3 All citations from non-English-language sources have been translated solely for the purpose of the present article.

without these actions, which were – fundamentally to the 2003 Convention – intuitive and grassroots, the system of heritage protection would not have been implemented, and certainly would not have taken its present shape.

National Programme for the Protection of Intangible Heritage of 2012 and its implementation

A multi-stage debate, conducted across various milieus and harmoniously linking the central level (i.e. the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage plus the National Heritage Institute, a body entrusted with the implementation of the 2003 Convention) with grassroots associations working for the benefit of the bearers of intangible heritage, resulted in working out the assumptions for the planned National Programme for the Protection of Intangible Heritage (hereinafter: the National Programme) for Poland. These assumptions were presented and offered for discussion by Bartosz Skaldawski, the then Deputy Director of the National Heritage Institute (hereinafter: NID), on 25 and 26 October 2012, during a conference at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin dedicated to intangible cultural heritage, co-organised by NID (Adamowski, Smyk 2013: 13–14). This concept for the implementation of the UNESCO 2003 Convention was developed by NID based on the original proposals of experts Adam Jankiewicz, H. Schreiber and K. Zalasńska, as the task of planning the system for implementing the recommendations of the 2003 Convention was entrusted to this Institute by the decision of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. In the following sections of this essay, I propose to recall the draft of the National Programme (Skaldawski 2013: 111–121) and, on the threshold of the second decade of its functioning, to attempt a concise, overview answer to the question of what elements of this plan have been achieved. In this, I unavoidably adopt the perspective of someone who since 2009 has been involved in the work on the protection of Polish intangible cultural heritage under the 2003 Convention.

B. Skaldawski identified a positive impact on the persistence of the manifestations of intangible heritage, and their effective intergenerational transmission, to be the main objective of the National Programme (Skaldawski 2013: 115). In his understanding, caring for these manifestations translated into a superior goal, which was the survival of “socio-cultural systems” and the shaping of “directions for the change in their structure” (Skaldawski 2013: 114), invariably taking into account – to be exact – the principles of sustainable development that format all UNESCO activities (Schreiber 2017a). “At the same time”, B. Skaldawski said in presenting the assumptions of the National Programme, “it must be emphasised that the most important carriers of the living elements of intangible heritage are human consciousness and social collective memory. Consequently, any conscious interference in this sphere should be carried out extremely carefully and responsibly” (Skaldawski 2013: 114). He then

broke the National Programme down into four areas: the central, regional, local levels plus the expert community (Skaldawski 2013: 115–120), which shall dictate the structure of this review of the state of its implementation for 2023.

The central level of implementing the National Programme

The first objective of the National Programme has been successfully implemented: the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage is being filled with entries since 2014. As of the last day of December 2023, it counted 85 entries (*Krajowa Lista Niematerialnego Dziedzictwa Kulturowego* 2023). The List is managed by NID on behalf of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. In consultation with the Council for Intangible Cultural Heritage⁴ established by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage at the beginning of 2013 (hereinafter: the Council), NID has prepared the application form for entry (together with guidelines and other legally required attachments). It also announces and updates the National List and promotes the items entered therein. The route for entering the National List is today implemented fully according to the draft National Programme; this includes the system of monitoring the entered phenomena. Since 2019, the monitoring procedure is carried out by NID five years after the given phenomenon is entered in the List (Łabuda-Iwaniak 2020: 32).

Poland's additional achievement in this respect is the steady increase of NID staff cooperating with the bearers of intangible cultural heritage during the process of applying for entering in the List, public consultations, promotion, ongoing cooperation and simply friendship between people dedicated to a common cause. Recently, there has been a slight increase in the number of NID coordinators and currently one employee of the NID field offices is assigned for each voivodship, even though usually it is one employee for two to three voivodships; this, in fact, may make it difficult for this employee to reach all interested parties (in the case of very active areas, e.g. the Lesser Poland, Opole or Silesian voivodships) or to successfully promote the List in areas rich in living traditions but with a small number of entries (e.g. the Lower Silesian, Sub-Carpathian, Lublin, Podlachia, Holy Cross Mountains, Łódź, Pomerania or Kuyavia-Pomerania voivodships). To counterbalance this view, it must be stated that NID has fulfilled a task that had not been planned in 2012: it maintains a constantly updated intangible.nid.pl website. Also, in consultation with the Council, NID has developed rules for entry in the National Register of Good Practices in the Safeguarding

4 The basis for the Council's work since 2019: Zarządzenie Ministra Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego z dnia 18 września 2013 r. w sprawie Rady do spraw niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego [Decree of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage dated 18 September 2013 concerning the Council for Intangible Cultural Heritage]. *Journal of Decrees*, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, issued 2013, item 35, amended *Journal of Decrees*, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, issued 2018, item 79.

of Intangible Cultural Heritage and has been maintaining this register since 2018, with ten entries by the end of 2023.

As envisaged in 2012, the National List has a prestige function, which manifests itself, among others, in the fact that not all applications submitted to the Minister of Culture and National Heritage meet with a positive recommendation from the Council. Moreover, following B. Skaldawski's plan, the phenomena included in the List are successively applying for inclusion in the International Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. At the same time, practice has shown that the activities related to the application for inclusion in the Representative List should be handled on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Polish state by the Department for Monument Protection (Departament Ochrony Zabytków, DOZ) of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Thanks to the counselor for UNESCO Joanna Cichej-Kuczyńska, at the end of 2023 Poland can boast the following entries: Cracow Nativity Scene (*szopka*) Making (2018),⁵ Floral Carpets for Corpus Christi Processions (2021), Polonaise: a Traditional Polish Dance (2023), The Honey-Gathering Culture (2020, with Belarus), Falconry (2021, a multinational entry), Raft Transport (2022, with Austria, Czech Republic, Spain, Latvia and Germany). Further applications are being prepared (also for entry in the Register of Good Practices for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage) or await UNESCO's decision. The intensification of relevant work is, however, hindered by insufficient staff resources at the Department for Monument Protection at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

The second objective included in the National Programme, related to the obligation of the State-Party to create adequate financial conditions, was more than fulfilled: a new separate task dedicated to intangible heritage was included in the "Folk and traditional culture" programme of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, stated as "the preparation of expert assessments, estimations and protection programmes concerning the phenomena in traditional cultures, which includes conducting evaluations and public consultations related to the implementation of the postulates of the UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage" (Brzezińska 2013: 126).⁶ Crucially, the ideas and guidelines of the 2003 Convention on the Protection of Folk and Traditional Culture are embedded in the strategic objectives of this programme. Activities in this field have also yielded other momentous results: thanks to J. Cicha-Kuczyńska, in close cooperation with Dorota Ząbkowska from the Department of National Cultural Institutions of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the "Master of Tradition" Task dedicated to the transmission of intangible

⁵ H. Schreiber and K. Złasińska were the promoters of this entry.

⁶ See the programme: *Kultura ludowa i tradycyjna. Regulamin i specyfika* (2020). <https://www.gov.pl/web/kultura/kultura-ludowa-i-tradycyjna2>.

heritage was placed in the aforementioned Ministry programme (Cicha-Kuczyńska 2015:2). In 2023, NID, on the initiative of Director K. Zalaśińska, inaugurated the “Intangible – Pass It On” Programme financed from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage funds.⁷ Thus, the tools for systemic financial support of intangible heritage phenomena by the central authorities have been developed and evaluated; what remains to be done is to successively increase the budget for these programmes.

As envisaged by B. Skaldawski in 2012, NID was to interact with entities and communities dealing with intangible heritage at other levels, emphasising the regional level, which is indeed being done.⁸ Following the plan in the National Programme, since 2014 NID has been organising conferences, training sessions, workshops and exhibitions at venues located all over Poland, as well as implementing promotional campaigns, European Heritage Days open to intangible heritage, and intangible cultural heritage galas combined with the celebration of the entries in the National List and in the National Register of Good Practices. In addition, NID raises and discusses further issues, such as the understanding of the provisions of the 2003 Convention, public consultations, the creation of community archives, the role and principles of cooperation between various communities for the benefit of intangible heritage, etc. (e.g. Łabuda-Iwaniak 2020:31–33, 34–35, 63–66). The NID websites “Education” (edu.nid.pl) and “Local Government” (samorzad.nid.pl), the latter being an informative website on heritage management, are important components in the system of spreading knowledge about intangible heritage. NID also carries out publishing work dedicated to this heritage, e.g. by issuing biennial publications collecting all entries on the National List and the National Register; by publishing an “intangible” volume of *Kroniki zabytkomaniaka*, a *sui generis* handbook for schoolchildren (Zarzycka 2016); by including the topic of intangible heritage in a guidebook on heritage management at commune level (Chabiera, Koziół, Skaldawski 2016:24–26 and others); developing detailed presentations of phenomena included in the National List (e.g. Banik 2020) and co-publishing strictly academic studies.

Two of the tasks identified in the National Programme in 2012 have not been achieved to date. One of them was to “introduce knowledge of intangible heritage in its concrete local manifestations into formal education (at all levels)” (Skaldawski 2013:116).⁹ This was planned to be done through cooperation between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education. The resultant lacuna is being filled by NID’s own effort to successively post educational packages and lesson plans on the

7 See the programme: *Niematerialne – przekaz dalej* (2023). <https://nid.pl/dotacje/niematerialne-przekaz-dalej/>.

8 Recommendations contained in the unpublished study by H. Schreiber, K. Zalaśińska and A. Jankiewicz were thus included in the National Programme.

9 A series of educational booklets from the National Institute of Rural Culture and Heritage meets some of these needs (Brzezińska et al. 2023).

“Education” website. The second of the unimplemented tasks, concerning the “provision of resources for the development of research on intangible heritage and its protection” (Skaldawski 2013:116), would require the involvement of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Meanwhile, it is only the Minister of Culture and National Heritage that supports research projects under the “Folk and Traditional Culture” programme, even though they have to compete with dissemination projects; this is not conducive to the realisation of this objective of the National Programme.

At this point, it is necessary to mention achievements not planned in the National Programme. Firstly, the institution that strengthens state activities at the central level is the Polish Committee for UNESCO, whose secretaries general, Prof. Sławomir Ratajski, Dr. Alicja Jagielska-Burduk, and secretary Aleksandra Waławczyk offer the Department for Monument Protection their support in the process of preparing applications for the UNESCO listing; they have also repeatedly supported the Council in many discussions on problematic or controversial issues. Equally important are the informational and educational functions of the Polish Committee for UNESCO’s website and publishing activities (e.g. Rottermund 2014). A tool for strengthening the visibility of intangible cultural heritage among the international community of young scholars is the Polish Committee for UNESCO Scholarship, in recent years implemented at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (under the supervision of K. Smyk) by two researchers from Belarus, Tatsiana Marmysh (2020) and Alena Leshkevich (2023/2024). Secondly, national institutions not related to the Ministry of Culture have perceptibly increased their activity in the field of intangible cultural heritage. The National Institute for Local Self-Government (Narodowy Instytut Samorządu Terytorialnego) has been organising the annual conference “Cultural heritage: opportunities and challenges for local governments” at Uniejów since 2022, bringing together experts, bearers and, above all, interested representatives of local government units at different levels, integrating intangible heritage into the broad context of heritage and sustainable development. Additionally, in its strategy for the promotion of rural culture, the National Institute of Rural Culture and Heritage refers to phenomena included in the National List, the National Register and the UNESCO List. Thirdly, some Polish third-sector organisations operating on the national arena, namely, the Polish Folklore Society, the Serfenta Association and Association of Folk Artists, have been granted the status of NGOs accredited to UNESCO, granted (with continuation after periodic reports are favourably evaluated) by the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

To sum up the above overview, it can be said that, on the whole, the system for the protection of intangible heritage in Poland has been established, is multidimensional and comprehensive, is developing, and is able to protect heritage increasingly effectively from year to year, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the UNESCO 2003 Convention.

The regional level of implementing the National Programme

When in 2012 B. Skaldawski announced the National Programme, in accordance with the project for the implementation of the provisions of the 2003 Convention developed on behalf of NID by K. Zalasńska and H. Schreiber, he envisaged its regional level as involving the leading role of local self-government and stressed that this would “require the involvement of the Marshal Bureau in each province” (Skaldawski 2013: 117). He described his vision of Regional Intangible Heritage Inventories as follows: “Each of the 16 Inventories should reflect the richness of the region’s traditions and the entire diversity of the manifestations of intangible heritage discernible in the territory of a given province” (Skaldawski 2013: 117). Yet so far, no provincial list of manifestations of this heritage has been created in Poland.

“The next step (...) should be to integrate it into provincial heritage protection programmes and regional development strategies”, he continued (Skaldawski 2013: 117). A review of the existing development strategies on the level of the provinces reveals four attitudes: (1) the word “intangible” is absent (Lower Silesian, Kuyavia-Pomeranian, Lubuskie, Łódź, Podlachian, Sub-Carpathian, Silesian, Western Pomeranian voivodships); (2) the words “intangible” or “non-material cultural heritage” do appear, but it is not certain whether they refer to the UNESCO 2003 Convention (Lublin, Mazovian, Opole, Holy Cross Mountains, Pomeranian; same in the National Strategy for Regional Development 2030); (3) the term is absent in the provincial strategy, but appears in the strict convention sense in the Programme for the Protection of Historical Monuments of the Greater Poland Voivodship for 2021–2024, where intangible heritage is included in the general characteristics of the region’s monuments (2. 13) and included in the main objective of the programme as well as in three of the five specific objectives and directions of activities related to them (*Program opieki nad zabytkami Województwa Wielkopolskiego...* 2021). The case of the Lesser Poland voivodship (4), whose development strategy clearly includes intangible heritage in the understanding compliant with the provisions of the UNESCO Convention 2003 in terms of definitions, functions and protection tools, deserves a separate discussion (*Strategia Rozwoju Województwa „Małopolska 2030” 2020*). Also the Provincial Programme for the Protection of Historical Monuments refers to the UNESCO Convention 2003, refers to National List entries, includes this heritage in the SWOT analysis, and establishes priority I.2. on nurturing regional traditions dedicated to intangible cultural heritage (*Wojewódzki program opieki nad zabytkami w Małopolsce na lata 2022–2025* 2022).

According to the National Programme, in the next step it was planned to “launch regional funding programmes for educational and research-documentation projects aimed at maintaining the cultivation of tradition and transmitting living manifestations of intangible heritage to the next generation” (Skaldawski 2013: 117). Research on traditions and their transmission was for many years, and still continues to be,

subsidised from cultural development funds of the provincial marshals; with intangible cultural heritage coming to the fore, a nascent awareness of the need to subsidise its protection is now discernible as well. For example, in 2023 the Board of the Łódź voivodeship announced an open tender entitled “Łódzkie pełne tradycji” for the implementation of public tasks of the Łódź voivodeship in the areas of culture, art, and protection of cultural goods and national heritage in 2024, “aimed at expanding the cultural offer of the Łódź voivodeship and supporting the generational transfer, protection and popularisation of phenomena in the field of intangible cultural heritage, as well as supporting regional ensembles cultivating and popularising local traditions in the field of folklore”.¹⁰

B. Skaldawski’s plans included “supporting local communities and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and skills of experts employed at cultural institutions specialising in protecting and researching intangible heritage and collecting knowledge about its manifestations, for which the Marshal is the organiser” (Skaldawski 2013:117). In implementation, this took the form of handing over the issue of this heritage to several provincial and former provincial cultural centres (e.g. Nowy Sącz, Łódź, and Lublin until the dissolution of the Provincial Cultural Centre in 2023) and to museums under the auspices of the Marshals (e.g. the M. Znamierowska-Prüfferowa Ethnographic Museum in Toruń).¹¹ The best example is the opening, in January 2024, of the Institute of Intangible Heritage of the Carpathian Peoples in Ludźmierz, a branch of the Lesser Poland Cultural Centre “Sokół” in Nowy Sącz. On the downside, the plan to establish “within the structures of the Marshal Bureaus, the position of Regional Consultant for Intangible Heritage as a plenipotentiary of the marshal of the voivodeship” failed (Skaldawski 2013:117). The venture showed the most promise in the Warmia-Masurian voivodeship (Majcher 2011:112), where the plenipotentiary published an impressive volume on intangible heritage in keeping with the UNESCO 2023 Convention (Majcher 2014), but was soon abandoned by the local marshal.

Summing up this overview, it can be stated that the path adopted in Lesser Poland should gradually become a model for the authorities and bodies of the other voivodeships, providing their marshals with arguments in the years to come. However, they clearly still need time to perceive the importance of the “social function of intangible cultural heritage, (...) its potential as an enabler of regional development through the flourishing of tourism, creative industries and social capital” (Skaldawski 2013:118).¹²

¹⁰ See the *Czwarty otwarty konkurs ofert pt. „Łódzkie pełne tradycji” na 2024 rok* (2023, 20 Dec.). <https://www.lodzkie.pl/kultura/czwarty-otwarty-konkurs-ofert-pt-%C5%82%C3%B3dzkie-pe%C5%82ne-tradycji-2024>.

¹¹ See the *Dziedzictwo niematerialne/ulotne tradycje* website, which, in existence since 2016, describes only six phenomena; <https://www.ut.etnomuzeum.pl>.

¹² For intangible heritage as a potential motor for tourism, see e.g. Godlewski, Rosiak 2016.

The local level of implementing the National Programme

In order to protect intangible heritage, according to Article 15 of the UNESCO 2003 Convention, communities, groups and individuals create, preserve and transmit it to the next generation, constituting the most important link in the protection processes. The National Programme emphasised the issue of “actively involving them in the management of heritage” (Skaldawski 2013: 118), with constant support coming from NGOs, municipal authorities and local leaders/cultural animators representing them (Skaldawski 2013: 118). Such cooperation makes it possible to perpetuate living manifestations of tradition and heritage, to preserve the intergenerational transmission of cultural practices, skills and content, and to increase the involvement of bearer communities in conservation processes.

B. Skaldawski pointed out the importance of entries on the National List in the fulfilment of these goals and also their importance for local communities (Skaldawski 2013: 119), so the further review of ways to implement the National Programme at the local level will begin with activities that do not translate into entries on the National List or the National Register. The first example of those is the Municipal Programme of Monument Protection for the City of Lublin, which since 2015 has included Section 5.2.7. “Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Municipality of Lublin – Task Catalogue and Recommendations” (*Gminny program opieki nad zabytkami miasta Lublin na lata 2021–2024* 2020). The second example is the Team for the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Warsaw, operating since 2020 at the Culture Bureau of the City of Warsaw, which has resulted, among others, in issuing research reports (Klekot, Schreiber 2020, 2021) and a series of films available on YouTube, on the History Meeting House channel, under the common title “Intangible Warsaw”. The third noteworthy area are NID’s activities in the field of revitalisation, which, according to the materials prepared by the Institute, should also include elements of the intangible heritage of municipalities (Kozioł-Słupska et al. 2022).

However, the most important actions result from the inclusion of a phenomenon into the National List of Intangible Heritage and the UNESCO List, or the inclusion of animation and conservation activities in the National Register of Good Practices. For example, a Team for the Intangible Heritage of Cracow was established under the Mayor of Cracow in 2023. New non-governmental organisations are being established to protect traditions in the process of inclusion into the National List, e.g. the “Spycimierz Corpus Christi” Parish Association (since 2016) or already included therein, e.g. the *Comber* Gathering Society (since 2023). Non-formalised initiatives are also being developed, such as the St Roch’s School in Mikstat (since 2011) – a venture launched by the parishioners, the parish priest Father Krzysztof Ordziniak, and the local leader Małgorzata Strzelec. New institutions and branches have been established, such as the Centre for the Interpretation of the Intangible Heritage of Cracow – a branch of the Historical Museum of the City of Cracow, the “Spycimierz Corpus Christi” Centre (Łódź voivodship; since 2021)

or the Woodcut Centre in Płazów, set up from scratch in the building of the former village school (Sub-Carpathian voivodship; from 2024). The Poznań Programme for Culture, updated in 2024, takes intangible heritage into account, with the City Hall securing a two-year budget to develop research and preserve the ephemeral traditions of the capital of Greater Poland. The 2024 programme for subsidising the activities of non-governmental organisations of Gdańsk provides for a separate task "Intangible Heritage of Gdańsk", under which support will be provided for the following issues:

Identifying, researching, documenting and experiencing the phenomena defined in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (...). Grassroots initiatives nurturing local identity, diversity, traditions, behaviour forms and living practices that make the residents of Gdańsk feel their distinctiveness and community. Educational and popularising activities, social and artistic actions, and all initiatives that tell of the complex history of the city and its inhabitants.¹³

A separate and important place at the local level must be assigned to community archives. The creation of such an archive in Spycimierz, for example, continuing the earlier digitisation and dissemination of materials on the Corpus Christi flower carpet tradition, dates to 2020 (Jełowicki 2022, 2023). In late 2021, NID signed an agreement with the Centre of Community Archives (Centrum Archiwistyki Społecznej, cas.org.pl) to collaborate on the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage and to train bearers of this heritage in preserving and safeguarding their collections.¹⁴

It is worth emphasising in the conclusion of this review that the idea of intangible cultural heritage enjoys considerable and growing interest among local government units and the bearers, uniting them around the protection of tradition, inspiring them to reflect on its protection and to undertake concrete, long-term actions, behind which there are considerable financial resources from their own budgets and external sources. While, therefore, at the regional level the effects can be described as moderately satisfactory, the grassroots and more or less institutionalised activities of the local communities can be regarded as a major achievement.

The role of expert milieus

According to the assumptions of the National Programme, an important role was assigned to promotion experts, scholars and researchers of various disciplines, museum workers, cultural animators, and regionalists. "The main tasks of these milieus are to

¹³ See the *Ponad 3 miliony dla NGO na działania kulturalne w 2024 roku* (2023, 4 Dec.). <https://www.gdansk.pl/urzad-miejski/wiadomosci/ponad-3-miliony-dla-ngo-na-dzialania-kulturalne-w-2024-roku,a,254734>.

¹⁴ See the *NID i CAS na rzecz niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego* (2021, 15 Dec.). <https://nid.pl/2021/12/15/nid-i-cas-na-rzecz-niematerialnego-dziedzictwa-kulturowego/>.

determine and support the best practices for the protection of intangible heritage, to identify and document the phenomena of this heritage in the territory of Poland (...), to draw attention (...) to threats. Experts should also provide substantive support to local communities in maintaining their indigenous traditions” (Skaldawski 2013: 119). It must be admitted that, as can be seen from the first paragraphs of this article, the experts have fulfilled the duties incumbent upon them.

It is essential to add that the association of Poland’s best ethnologists and cultural anthropologists, the Polish Folklore Society, is accredited to UNESCO. The series “Intangible cultural heritage in Poland and its protection” (Adamowski, Smyk 2013; Przybyła-Dumin 2016; Brzezińska, Smyk 2019) has been established, and a number of multi-author monographs have been published (e.g. Kwiecińska 2016, Schreiber 2017a, Smyk 2020a, 2022; Banik, Smyk 2023; Smyk, Szoszkiewicz 2023). These volumes are also backed up by specialised interdisciplinary field research, dedicated not so much to traditions as to the forms of their protection in keeping with the UNESCO 2003 Convention. The first atlas of intangible heritage has appeared, based on systematised research conducted in the Greater Poland countryside by the Rural and Agricultural Heritage Research Department of the National Museum of Agriculture and Food Industry in Szreniawa (Brzezińska, Jełowicki, Mielewczyk 2015). Issues of recognised journals have been dedicated to intangible heritage, published by the Polish Folklore Society (“Łódzkie Studia Etnograficzne” 2016, 2024; “Lud” 2020; “Literatura Ludowa” 2024), the Association of Folk Artists (“Twórczość Ludowa” 2023) and the museum in Szreniawa (“Diedzictwo Kulturowe Wsi” 2024).

The scholarly community has been debating this heritage on a fairly regular basis at conferences organised since 2011 by Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS), Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University (UKSW), the International Cultural Centre,¹⁵ the Historical Museum of the City of Cracow (e.g. Kwiecińska 2016; Niedźwiedź, Okręglicka 2021) and other institutions of learning, with the permanent participation of NID. Course discussion of the UNESCO 2003 Convention has entered university curricula on a permanent basis. Several doctoral degrees have been gained on the basis of dissertations strictly concerning intangible cultural heritage (Karolina Dziubata-Smykowska, Adam Mickiewicz University, 2021; Karolina Echaust, Adam Mickiewicz University, 2023), and in 2022 the first Chair of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Poland was established at the UMCS. Intangible heritage brokers, the need for whom was reported a decade ago by S. Ratajski (Ratajski 2016: 23–24), have begun to operate; at present, they are mainly the leading employees of the NID field branches: Joanna Banik (Opole), Agata Mucha (Katowice) and Tomasz Łuczak (Poznań).

15 First Expert-Level Forum: China and East-Central Europe on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2016 (Schreiber 2017a).

The community of experts and researchers, although still not very numerous, cooperates directly with the bearers of intangible heritage,¹⁶ approaching this topic in new ways. Cases in point are, to name but a few, the context of the cultural/natural/historical landscape as a whole (Smyk 2022; Banik, Smyk 2023), the climate crisis (Dziubata-Smykowska 2023) or the redefinition of terms (“new honey-gathering”; Echaust 2021). All in all, this body of work deserves an annotated bibliography with full-text access, which would show its interdisciplinary and multifaceted nature.

The challenges and needs

Finally, joining the demands and observations made so far (Adamowski, Smyk 2013: 14–16; Adamowski 2017: 82–83; Schreiber 2017b: 467–498), it is necessary to briefly summarise the challenges and the most urgent needs facing the circles responsible for the protection of intangible cultural heritage in Poland in accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 2003 Convention:

- the term ‘intangible cultural heritage’ is still not sufficiently well understood, is treated metaphorically as an embellishment to studies on tradition, or is understood simply as folklore or tradition;¹⁷ therefore, it is worth promoting a strict understanding of this concept in the spirit of the UNESCO 2003 Convention, opening up to the current of critical studies on heritage (see Stobiecka 2023);
- the concept of the protection of intangible heritage should receive an exhaustive definition;¹⁸
- results of the monitoring of the phenomena inscribed on the National List, which is carried out by NID every five years from the date of inscription, should undergo analysis, so that the conclusions can be taken into account in the evaluation of the system of management of intangible heritage in Poland;
- there is a need to design and implement systemic care on the part of the State for the Polish phenomena inscribed on the UNESCO List, with the leading role assumed by the Department of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Polish Committee for UNESCO, and NID, despite the still persistent shortage of human resources in these institutions;¹⁹

16 See e.g. hundreds of recommendations in multi-author monographs concluding field research on intangible heritage phenomena (Smyk 2020a, 2022; Banik, Smyk 2023).

17 For details on the misrepresentations in the Polish scholarly discourse, see Smyk 2020b: 243–244. For instance, the course entitled *Intangible Cultural Heritage* at UKSW does not talk about this heritage (the syllabus does not include any item on the UNESCO 2003 Convention or the text of the Convention), but simply about ethnography (cf. https://ects.uksw.edu.pl/pl/courses/view?prz_kod=WNHS-HS-NDK).

18 This postulate has been valid for years; see Sadowska-Mazur 2013: 41–42; Brzezińska 2013: 119.

19 These shortages are discussed by e.g. Adamowski 2017: 83.

- the visibility of the organisations accredited to UNESCO should be increased and their functions clarified for the benefit of Polish bearers of intangible heritage and the shaping of the protection system, in combination with the consolidation of these organisations and the promotion of accreditation, serving to increase the number of accredited entities from Poland;
- measures to introduce intangible cultural heritage into the strategic documents of the country, provinces, districts, municipalities, education and heritage protection programmes should be designed and implemented;
- the debate on whether regional inventories of intangible heritage are needed should be returned to;
- the discussion launched during the All-Polish Culture Conference (Ogólnopolska Konferencja Kultury, 2017–2018) on the potential law on heritage, i.e. de facto on whether to make the conditions for the protection of ephemeral and extremely fragile heritage more rigid and formal,²⁰ should be returned to;
- obstacles causing areas rich in tradition (e.g. the Podlachian, Lublin and Sub-Carpathian voivodships) to have very few entries on the National List, especially in the last five years, should be diagnosed and overcome;
- activities aimed at raising awareness among bearers and experts of the need to keep to the Operational Directives and the Ethical Principles should be designed and implemented;²¹
- the National Register of Good Practices for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage should be promoted and its value and visibility enhanced;
- celebrations of the International Day of Intangible Cultural Heritage, established in 2023 by UNESCO at the initiative of Poland, should be organised;
- the information chaos and misinformation prevailing in the media, for instance related to the confusion of the names of the intangible heritage lists, must be counteracted.²²

During a global meeting held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on 25–26 July 2023 on occasion of the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the 2003 Convention, UNESCO adopted a document entitled *The Seoul Vision for the Future of Safeguarding Living Heritage for Sustainable Development and Peace* (2023). Its guiding postulate was “Unleashing the power of living heritage for sustainable development and peace”.

²⁰ This danger is pointed out by e.g. Brzezińska 2013: 118.

²¹ This is the aim of, for instance, the project carried out jointly by K. Smyk at Uniejów in the period 2023–2024.

²² Cf. the preceding point.

Hopefully, in another decade Poland's intangible heritage and all the milieus involved in its preservation shall feel the power of potential: the cohesion founded on the superior value that is intangible heritage.

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Summary

The author discusses the current state of organisation of the Polish system for the safeguarding of intangible heritage under the UNESCO Convention 2003 after twenty years since the enactment of the Convention and after ten years of functioning of the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the introduction, the author recounts the obligations of a State-Party to the Convention and the beginnings of the Polish debate on the shape of the intangible heritage management system. In the main part of the article, the author reviews and assesses the scope and forms of implementation of the National Programme for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, planned in 2011–2012 by the National Heritage Board of Poland. In the conclusions, the author indicates the next most urgent needs faced by the environment responsible for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Poland.

Keywords: UNESCO Convention 2003, safeguarding of heritage, UNESCO, Republic of Poland, local government units, National Heritage Board

Streszczenie

Autorka omawia stan organizacji polskiego systemu ochrony dziedzictwa niematerialnego w myśl Konwencji UNESCO 2003 w dwadzieścia lat po ustanowieniu Konwencji oraz w dzień lat funkcjonowania Krajowej listy niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego. We wstępie przypomina o zobowiązaniach Państwa-Strony Konwencji oraz o początkach polskiej debaty nad kształtem systemu zarządzania dziedzictwem niematerialnym. W głównej części artykułu dokonuje przeglądu i oceny stopnia i form realizacji Krajowego Programu Ochrony Dziedzictwa Niematerialnego, planowanego w latach 2011–2012 przez Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa. W podsumowaniu autorka wskazuje kolejne najpilniejsze potrzeby, jakie stoją przed środowiskami odpowiedzialnymi w Polsce za ochronę niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego.

Słowa kluczowe: Konwencja UNESCO 2003, ochrona dziedzictwa, UNESCO, Rzeczpospolita Polska, jednostki samorządu terytorialnego, Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa

Translated by K. Michałowicz