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Cultural heritage as a medium for the establishment of sustainable development

Jasna Fakin Bajec

Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Centre for Interdisciplinary Research, Ljubljana, Slovenia

ABSTRACT: Nowadays the concept of cultural heritage takes on different roles, meanings and appearances, which are the results of the newest postmodern paradigms and contemporary social, cultural and economic situations around the world. The main point of paper is to present the development category of cultural heritage in formulating various contemporary national and regional development strategies for improving the social, economic and cultural way of life of populations. The focus is on analyses of how activities in dealing with intangible heritage can help to establish sustainable development in a local place and the development of sustainable communities. The paper first reflects on methodological issues in education, awareness and uses of intangible heritage for development potential. It then presents some insights gained from a case study from Slovenia, where local residents are becoming aware of new heritage approaches for a better quality of life in future.

INTRODUCTION

In a postmodern global world, cultural heritage takes on different roles, meanings and appearances. Until recently the theoretical concept of heritage and its investigation have attracted many scientist and experts, who have had distinct understandings of its ontology, epistemology, meanings, process of constructions, roles of practitioners, etc. Although professionals take differing views, the “concept in its everyday commonplace has grown into a deeply, socially embedded attitude that sits at the heart of the culture of most regions of Europe” (Fairclough 2009). There is no country without a list of national monuments, or region where old customs are not revived for tourist purposes.

A review of different definitions and criticisms, uses, abuses of heritage shows that nowadays the concept of heritage can be interpreted in many different ways (Sting Sørensen, Carman 2009), and used to cover just about everything that a human has made or changed. It refers not only to material remnants but also to intangible elements including “the character or feel of a place, its aura as well as customs, traditions, language, dialects, musical styles and religious or secular rituals. There is no need that the tangible or intangible things are architectural or aesthetic features, but it can be painful, ugly, unsafe and unprepossessing; old or new; something that can be valued by society, by a specific group within society and by individuals.” (Schofield 2008: 19) Furthermore, heritage is not restricted only to actions from state officials or bodies, but can include the most basic and ordinary ways of life of people. As a result, in the context of the newest postmodern paradigms and theory of practice (Bourdieu 2002), the main point of doing research on heritage lies less in investigating the materiality or immateriality of heritage elements, but more in understanding social practices and the constructions of meanings and values which particular tangible and intangible cultural elements embody (Fakin Bajec

2011). The new heritage paradigms emphasize that heritage must be understood as a present social action or process, where the focus is on context and not so much on the object itself. Fairclough emphasizes that “heritage is object and actions, product and process. It means not only the things (‘goods’, properties, immobilier – ‘stuff’ (and the perceptions or ideas) that we inherit, irrespective of whether we want to keep them, but it can also be taken to mean the processes by which we understand, contextualize (physically and intellectually), perceive, manage, modify, destroy, and transform the inherited world” (Fairclough 2009). Its theoretical concept is also understood as dynamic and contested; as a construct of contemporary needs, concern, experiences, values and desires of ordinary people, who should have an important role in its management. Special attention is given to recognition of the validity and usefulness of a multiplicity of values and ways of valuing. Heritage at its base is still linked with the work, thinking, actions, and experiences of our predecessors; however, it is not only about the past but “draws on the power of the past to procedure the present and shape the future” (Harrison et. alt. 2008).

Up until now, the criteria of what constitutes heritage and how its elements should be protected have not always been in harmony with the views and needs of local residents. Traditional heritage methods poorly reflected local or personal concerns such as context or sense of place. But today the question “why should we enhance its value and for whom” (Fairclough 2008) is important. Researchers have begun to stress that “what ‘ordinary’ people value might be different from what experts value, or they might value the same things but for quite different reasons, such as for reasons of association, memory, or locality” (Fairclough 2008: 299). New approaches to the investigation of heritage focus on the perception of cultural landscape and sense of place constructed by material and immaterial things, which we identify as cultural heritage. As people’s lifestyles change together with world situations, so do perceptions of landscapes and heritage.

With the awareness that the concepts of heritage also continue to evolve in the light of contemporary social, cultural and economic situations around the world, the main point of this paper is to present the importance of heritage in formulating various contemporary national and regional development strategies for improving the social, economic and cultural way of life of populations. It is necessary to go beyond the mentality that heritage can be used only to ensure socio-political and economic capital for the construction of collective identities and the development of tourist programmes: it can and should be incorporated into processes aimed at advancing sustainable development. Cultural heritage identifies an intermingling of past and present practices and also represents a bridge between the different periods, cultures, localities and the natural and the built environment, or between nature and humans. Material and immaterial elements and their meaning and values are the result of specific human acts which preserve or destroy the natural environment. If the known, already experienced and positively valued practices and meanings of heritage (for example, building with stone), which reflect sustainable management also today, are preserved, protected, restored, upgraded and represented among the local population in a particular local place, the local population will more easily recognize, try, and begin to consider contemporary sustainable guidelines for development of the environment and for building sustainable communities. For this reason, understanding and recognizing the past, and determining its significance for the present and future, are of vital importance. Despite the socio-political and economic role of heritage in the contemporary world, insufficient attention is given to the development category of heritage, even though we are becoming increasingly aware that our predecessors lived in a way which did not destroy the environment, but rather developed the environment they inhabited in a sustainable way.

The aim of this paper is to present the development category of cultural heritage, with special attention to analyses of how activities focusing on intangible heritage can help to establish sustainable development in a local place and the development of sustainable communities. In my view, intangible heritage consists of not only immaterial things, but especially knowledge, skills, ideas, experiences, and understanding of our ancestors, all of which have value and positive meanings in contemporary times. The paper first reflects on methodological issues in education, awareness and uses of intangible heritage for development potential. It then presents some insights gained from a case study from Slovenia, where local residents are becoming aware of new approaches in dealing with heritage concepts for a better quality of life in future.

HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Many discussions on the development and the conservation of the cultural landscape take place in the context of observing the principles of sustainable development, which ought to be a key regulator of economic progress and society. Although the concept of sustainable development has become a politically abused word, its definition, with the main emphasis placed on a careful balance between environmental, social, and economic development in order to meet the needs of current and future generations (The World Commission on Environment and Development 1987), assures welfare development policy. New development strategies also promise that the economic, cultural, and social development of local communities will be adapted to the constraints imposed by environmental capacities and the potential of the cultural wealth. We must develop these skills and knowledge in such a way that the environment is not threatened, and through the wise use of natural resources (for example, solar energy, wood, stone, herbs) and other elements ensure development. Sustainable development must anticipate the mutual and complementary connections of the past, the present, and the future.

In the application of sustainable guidelines we unfortunately encounter two discussions. One is to inform the wider public of the importance of valuing, preserving, and maintaining the balance between protecting nature and cultural heritage and introducing technological progress. On the other side, we run up against incomprehension, rejection, and displeasure from stakeholders in a given local place when we try to transfer and disseminate scientific and expert knowledge and solutions. On the one hand the local residents would like to live in a clean environment with a high cultural and natural value, but on the other hand under the influence of market processes they want to live in technologically modern conditions which may be environmentally unacceptable. In many local environments the local government is under the pressure of the influence of economic capital since it often happens that municipal councillors are not sufficiently informed regarding the importance of protecting the environment and its culture, and hence easily succumb to political and economic interests. At the same time, experts do not familiarize themselves sufficiently with the life of the local community (the experience, needs, and expectations of the local population), and hence meet with resistance on the part of the local population in planning development.

In this way crucial questions arise as to how to balance sustainable development, respect for the achievements of our ancestors, and the richness of the natural environment while at the same time adapting to a life in which the power of capital tends to forget about historical, cultural, and geographical features. How can experts, the state and/or local authorities achieve better awareness among the local population of the ideals of sustainable development, which among other things also incorporate the values and knowledge of our ancestors, who because of different ways of life and less technology than what we have today knew how to make use of natural resources and live in better coexistence with nature than is the case in the modern world? Economic development in the modern age (and in the case of Slovenia the age of a socialist economy) has undoubtedly contributed to an improvement in people's quality of life, but at the expense of threatening natural resources (air, water, landscape) which represent the basis for human existence. In addition it is necessary to address the following important questions: In what way can we encourage experts and politicians to take into consideration the meanings and needs of the local population in drawing up guidelines and legislation for development? How on the basis of past cultural practices can we garner important knowledge and experience of our ancestors and, using modern technology, build appropriately on them for the purpose of raising national competitiveness and establishing a healthy environment? Finally, in what way can we draw the local population into the discussion of sustainable development?

Answers to these questions can also be sought in the processes of heritage practices. Although the main constructor of heritage is the expert public (museum workers, conservators, archivists, organizers of tourism content, etc.), who through authorial discourse formulate measures and values of negotiated heritage products, in recent years actors in particular societies, village and local communities, civil initiatives, etc. are becoming increasingly active. By researching the local history, organizing village and local celebrations, reviving old customs or restoring local architectural objects, they keep certain knowledge, memories, objects, etc. from being lost in the rapid changes of time. We are insufficiently aware that in researching the representations of the history of a way of life and encountering the changes between the past

and the present we can seek new opportunities and challenges for establishing sustainable development in a given local community. Although heritage in international conventions and recommendations to date has not been regarded as an important regulator of sustainable development, UNESCO as well as many international scholars (Fairclough 2008, 2009; Bandarin, Hosagrahar 2011; Long, Smith 2010; Clark 2008; M. Low 2008, Nurse 2006, etc.) are making efforts to highlight the developmental significance of culture and heritage, since they represent the values and meanings of the practices of a certain way of life in a particular local place which are also crucial for the further development of a sustainable community.

The development role of heritage is seen in sustainable consumption and production; in energy use; in the economy and in the development of so-called sustainable communities (Clark 2008). If we highlight the important role of heritage in constructing sustainable communities, where members live a sustainable life, the creation of heritage and its representation can make an essential contribution to cohesiveness, reciprocity, and consequently a healthier population. Including people in activities such as research, preservation, restoration, and the presentation and re-use of elements from the local past brings a number of advantages, from personal benefits to individuals through wider community benefits, including social cohesion, community empowerment and self-determination, local image and identity, imagination and vision, and health benefits. People can meet needs for personal development, such as gaining new skills, experience, confidence and self-esteem, as well as needs for changed attitudes, cultural awareness, communication and memory. The inclusion of young people in heritage projects and other activities related to learning about ancestral ways of life leads to intergenerational ties and enhancement of the meanings and values associated with heritage elements. At the same time young people through their youthful creativity fundamentally improve the use of heritage and its representation, which gives heritage added value in the contemporary world with its high level of technological development. Through the reconstruction of the many skills and knowledge of our ancestors, who due to different values, needs, and a lower level of technology lived in better harmony with nature than we do today, we may discover new opportunities and economically competitive products with added value, which can be used to facilitate economic recovery. We should be aware that heritage, which represents the acts by specific people in a certain place, represents a bridge between culture and the environment. It is difficult to separate the cultural dimension from the natural environment, as it is difficult to isolate modern creations from their cultural historical roots. Thus the natural environment surrounding us as well as modern culture comes from the past. For this reason, understanding and recognizing the past, and determining its importance for the present and future, represent a springboard to a better tomorrow.

Besides the UNESCO and Council of Europe conventions (*Convention on World Cultural and Natural Heritage* adopted in 1972, the *Convention on the Protection of Non-material Cultural Heritage* adopted in 2003), *Agenda 21 for culture* and Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters also emphasize the importance of including the local population in development efforts and in the conservation of natural and cultural wealth, which calls for cooperation and participation by people in the management of natural resources. The connection between heritage and the environment is crucial for establishing a connection with sustainable development. In addition, another connecting element is culture, which is a decisive catalyst for development. Culture here is understood in a broader context, as a process of shaping values and meanings possessed by elements of culture. Values which are established in a given community are of critical importance in the management of heritage since they reflect past and present experience, needs, desires and expectations of the local population on the one hand and broader socio-political and economic flows on the other. To the extent that an expert or political (state) authority attempts to impose development practices which are valued negatively by a local community or have no tradition in a given environment, the local population will have more difficulty adapting and may even resist in some cases.

There is also the problem that although many development projects are based on sustainable development of the economy and environmental policy, insufficient attention is paid to ways of applying this knowledge for specific users, i.e. the wider population, who represent the main actors of development policy. Moreover, oftentimes the local population is too little included in the development of sustainable development guidelines, since there is no successful cooperation

between scientific experts, municipal and national authorities, and the local population. There is still a big gap between scientific research and the specific needs of the local population. Usually the European and national methodologies for formulating the development programme, as applied by the European Union, require that the local people are included in formulation processes through the organization of workshops on particular topics. But this so-called bottom-up approach is also called into question. In Slovenia it is very difficult to get local residents to attend lectures by experts on the preservation of nature and culture and take part in discussions of development problems, let alone get them involved in shaping development guidelines for their local environment. For the most part the participants in workshops are representatives of state agencies, who are simultaneously representatives of the expert public. There are very few local residents with secondary or vocational education among the participants. But these represent the majority of middle and older generation population and those local residents who are the main actors in expediting or hindering development of the landscape. It is also a problem to obtain views at expert workshops in the form of proposals from the local population: some local residents feel inhibited about expressing their opinions or do not dare to talk about current problems, while others need more time to formulate their views.

For this reason it is also important to deal with the question of how experts, the state and/or the local authorities in one region can involve the local population in the discussion of sustainable development of the place in which they live, and how to achieve a better awareness of contemporary development among the local population, which would be receptive towards the wealth of nature and the unique features of the culture. At the same time, the question must be addressed of how to formulate appropriate ways and opportunities for the local population to make efforts so that the experts and politicians will take their meanings, experiences, desires, needs and expectations into consideration in setting guidelines and development regulations.

METHODS AND TOOLS FOR BETTER IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN A LOCAL COMMUNITY

Heritage practices can contribute to wider sustainable development goals. On the one hand sustainable development policy has influenced a variety of heritage practices (for example, in seeking eco products) while on the other heritage can be a powerful driver for the establishment of sustainable communities. Members of such communities are socially connected, respect and help one another, communicate, learn and develop personally. They manage natural resources sustainably, develop a high-tech economy which is sustainably oriented, prevent social inequality and respect the past of their ancestors. At the same time the environment in which they live encourages creativity and the development of new and innovative products.

The awareness that heritage practices can facilitate sustainable approaches requires reflection on the possible methods of heritage management that can be used. Until recently, researchers studying heritage for the most part discussed three broad categories of methods dealing with heritage: textual/discourse analysis; methods for investigating people's attitudes and behaviour; and methods aimed at exploring the material qualities of heritage (Sting Sørensen, Carman 2009). Although there are a growing number of works on how heritage as a phenomenon can be investigated, very few reflect on how heritage investigation methods can foster sustainable development in a local community.

The methods and techniques for managing cultural heritage have improved greatly since the end of the 19th century, when the concept of cultural heritage began to be developed, up until today, when the meaning of cultural practices and processes of creating heritage is at the forefront. Scholars from many academic disciplines study the processes of creating heritage: archaeologists, geographers, architects, historians, ethnologists and cultural anthropologists, sociologists, and others, each formulating their methods from their own point of view. For this reason Graham Fairclough emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary connection (Fairclough 2008). As part of this it is also essential that the voice of the local population, whose members actually shape the values and meanings of heritage elements in a given environment, be heard. Since experts until recently did not take into consideration the meanings and values of cultural elements of the local population which arise from their way of life, past experiences, current needs and desires, many projects for the revitalization of heritage places met with resistance.

As Fairclough notes, “heritage management, with many nationally or regionally distinctive approaches, is still very diverse. It will always be so, because heritage practice /.../ is deeply rooted historically and culturally. The idea that better or superior methods can be imported simply and un-problematically into one country from another is delusional.”(Fairclough 2008) From this standpoint UNESCO’s concept of world natural and cultural heritage is also problematic, since it applies universal criteria and values which may not be in keeping with national histories, culture and its development (see Stig Sørensen, Carman 2009).

In order for cultural heritage to contribute to better regional development policy it is necessary to take an interdisciplinary approach, in which local residents play a crucial role alongside experts and policy-makers, since it is on them that the future of heritage is dependent. Although the expert public at the theoretical level is aware of the importance of an interdisciplinary relationship between different expert points of views and criteria as well as the importance of including the local population, in Slovenia such approaches more often than not are missing. Experts in different projects are not prepared to compromise, and the will, energy, and in particular money to include the local population in a wide range of processes are often lacking. The inclusion of the local population in development projects for the preservation and marketing of heritage is most often reflected in the inclusion of experts drawn from the local environment who are familiar with local problems and also draw attention to them, but if they do not inform and educate the entire local population – including those with a lower level of education and those who may be passive or uninterested, who usually comprise the majority – then no development strategy will take root and will exist only on paper.

Experts must first become familiar with the meanings and values that are embodied in the community by the cultural elements that we wish to include in its development (for example, architectural buildings). This requires that experts who are collaborating in the revitalization of, for example, settlements of historical significance, in economic development (in the form of tourism development) or other forms of creating heritage come into contact with people and learn more about their past and also the environment in which they live, in order to become acquainted with their (human) experience, understanding, and feeling for the cultural landscape. Only in this way can the logic of the community be constructed from their history, experience, and current practices, and guidelines provided for the future based on valuing important elements of their life. It often happens that experts work in their cabinets, following European and national strategies, conventions, and agendas on formulating development guidelines for a particular environment, yet never even talk to anyone who actually lives there. For their part, local residents do not find the time, will, or interest to begin thinking about what kind of environment they would like to live in. For this reason the local population must be sufficiently informed and educated to recognize the values of cultural heritage as development components from which the economic, cultural, and social advancement of their place of residence is realized. As part of this, methods of raising awareness must be perfected not only through organizing expert workshops and consultations, but also through the active participation of the expert public with local associations and active local communities, where members enthusiastically research the past and directly construct local heritage.

Here is where ethnographic research can come in useful: the techniques of interviews, participant observation, and analysis of historical sources (see M. Low 2008; Palmer 2009) enable experts to better recognize the history and contemporary way of life of local residents. The role of the expert, in addition to offering expert assistance in the research, preservation, and presentation of heritage, is also to encourage the local population to value past practices for contemporary development needs. In so doing the expert on the one hand becomes familiar with the logic of the community, experiences and the desires of the population, while on the other the local population can become an active participant in shaping further development guidelines. The fact is that the active members of associations or village/local communities already have a positive attitude towards the local history and their environment. For this reason they will be more receptive to the acquisition of additional knowledge about and ways of using heritage for sustainable development. A presentation of their activities and products can then gain the attention of others, who for various reasons (age, education, health reasons, passivity etc.) had not been interested in the topic. By attending or taking part in public presentations (for example exhibitions and plays), educational events (expert lectures, courses, etc.) and discussions with active members of societies, they may be motivated to join a society or change their attitude

towards cultural activities. Active participation and therefore education is reflected in part in individual interviews, which allow experts to inform and educate people/questioners about the problem which is being researched while also themselves learning about the specific features of their way of life and the main values for a given environment. As Marie Louise Sting Sørensen notes, interviewing is one of the most commonly used methods in social studies. But it is also “important to recognize that interviews can have different purposes: they can and should aim at different kinds of insights and discoveries, and in turn their form, how they are conducted and, even more significantly, how they are evaluated must respond to such differences.” (Sting Sørensen 2009). Last but not least, experts must cooperate with municipal and national authorities so that the meanings and needs of the local population and the proposals put forth by experts will be taken into account in identifying spatial guidelines. Achieving these goals requires continuing education and training of municipal councillors through expert articles in local municipal newspapers and expert lectures in the framework of municipal meetings.

PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

The theoretical bases for the use of heritage research methodology for encouraging sustainable development of the local community were tested in a case study in the Upper Vipava Valley, which is located in western Slovenia. The Upper Vipava Valley and its major urban centre Ajdovščina have been strongly affected in recent years by the global economic and social crisis, hence many programmes are being developed by research and educational institutions aimed at helping the population find new sources of employment. The effects of the crisis are most visible in the urban centre, where many important industrial plants (wood, textile, and construction industries) which have offered a livelihood to local residents since the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy have been shut down. The surrounding rural areas have been less affected, since Vipava Valley residents have for many years been engaged in agriculture, in particular crop-growing, especially grains (at one time corn but today also wheat), fruit-growing, and wine-growing.

The Upper Vipava Valley is also known as a centre of interesting historical, ethnological, and art historical heritage, which is studied by local cultural societies as well as state institutions (the Goriška Museum and Archive). Research is aimed primarily at recording local history, reviving village cultural events, and developing local cultural tourism. The use of heritage as a development potential for creating new innovative and competitive products among the population of the Vipava Valley is not as much in evidence. But it should be noted that the People’s University in Ajdovščina in collaboration with the Employment Service has this year offered a free educational programme called *PROVIDER of traditional products, crops, and services*, whose primary aim is to once again encourage the development of domestic crafts and other traditional products, and in particular to set up networking among different providers.

In the text to follow, the Society of Housewives from Planina pri Ajdovščini, which today is one of the most active societies in the Vipava Valley, will be presented in depth. The main purpose of the society, which joins together girls and women from the village and includes a drama group, is to enliven the cultural and social life of the village and present the tradition of their ancestors to younger generations. The society began its activities in 2005 with the collection and recording of old recipes. It published a book titled *Lest We Forget: Planina pri Ajdovščini: Customs and Recipes of our Ancestors* (2005), and in the course of presenting the publication also prepared an exhibition and amateur play depicting work on Vipava farms. In later years they launched several projects: *Grain by Grain*, in which they offered a bread-baking course as part of ethnological research on bread, and the production of two dramatic films *There will be a wedding, a wedding*, and *Welcome, friend, I planted a grapevine* and one documentary film *Hidden Treasure*, a reference to the underground world below the village. At the end of the year the society presents its annual research activities to the wider public, and stages a play which depicts the former way of life in the village in a humorous way.

Although members of the society are extremely active, enthusiastically researching their local history, the attitude of local residents towards their activities has changed greatly. According to the president of the society, in the beginning their research activities and staging of plays were

better received by the population of the Vipava Valley than in the village itself. Since the village of Planina is known for its wine tradition, members strived to have their activities relating to wine-growing somewhat better received, but many vintners had a negative attitude toward the wine-making traditions presented due to unpleasant memories of very hard work on the farm in the past. However, the president of the society stressed in an interview that over the years the attitude of the local population began to gradually change, something which was influenced in part also by new discourses of heritage in the Slovenian space.

The heritage activities of the society were carried out without the assistance of experts until 2012. In the first year a museum worker from the Goriška Museum did collaborate in the preparation of the book and exhibition, helping the president in publishing the book and setting up an ethnological exhibition, but there was no further collaboration. The reasons for this lie both on the side of the Goriška Regional Museum, which due to the size of the territory covered and numerous research projects cannot cooperate more intensively with local societies, and on the side of the society, who were reluctant to cooperate with experts. The responsibility for the rejection of expert assistance can be assigned to the experts themselves, since in the past we have often acted like all-knowing teachers who had to “cultivate” the rural population. The knowledge, wishes, suggestions, and expectations of the local population have often been dismissed in the work of experts. Expert assistance was also offered to the drama group, since the current scriptwriter and director comes from Planina. However, Planina residents also rejected this help since they felt that if someone with some sort of “high philosophy” came in, it would ruin the relaxed and lively atmosphere at rehearsals.

It is a fact that expert assistance would better place heritage practices in a historical time, improve the presentation and enhance the content of a presented custom and habit/practice, which the president also recognized in our interview, but for a long time she did not want to oppose the wishes of the other members, who regarded these activities as being amateur in nature. In 2012 the president nevertheless decided to invite an ethnologist to participate in a new research project, since she wanted to take a step forward and improve the functioning of the society. Other members also agreed with this principle, but nevertheless had some reservations about the expert assistance.

Collaborating with the society represented an important challenge to me, since I carried out my research work in a space which had been previously unknown to me. I was aware that an expert who is considered an outsider by the members of the society must be extremely circumspect in order to be accepted by the locals, proposing changes with care, and above all must assist in the realization of their ideas, desires, and expectations. Since the society determines topics of research for each year on an ongoing basis, the president proposed that the research work in 2012 be directed towards the area of learning about the importance of corn in the local history of Planina. We were interested in learning about methods of cultivation, uses of its parts (kernels, husks, stalks), the preparation of various dishes made from corn (polenta, bread), and the making of various items (doormats from corn leaves, mattresses from cornhusks). Based on ethnographic methodology, I proposed that we first conduct interviews with older local residents in order to learn the role that corn played in the history of the way of life in Planina, then based on this research collect the main valued products towards which the locals have a positive attitude and which can be built on in contemporary times using new knowledge, techniques, and needs.

I established a good rapport with the participants and during an informal interview they provided a lot of interesting information. After conducting field research and a survey of the ethnological and agricultural literature, I performed an analysis and synthesis of the data gathered, which I presented textually in a brochure titled *We ate polenta every day, sometimes even for breakfast: on the cultivation of corn, husking, and cooking of polenta in Planina in the past and challenges in the future (2012)*. The text was written in the spirit of a search for possibilities for using knowledge, experience, and old customs of ancestors for a better and higher quality life in the future, in which local tradition and heritage will represent elements for new innovations and a more competitive residential environment.

The research showed that a corn variety called *guštanca*, which was adapted to Vipava weather and geological conditions, was indispensable in Planina. Since the cultivation of older local varieties is once again on the rise, since these are better adapted to the natural conditions of the environment, the brochure concluded with the idea that in the Vipava Valley, which has

always been known as a good region for growing grains, we start discussing the renewed cultivation of different varieties from which products typical of the Vipava Valley would be produced (corn flour for making corn bread and meal for a better tasting yellow polenta). In the future we could also think about reconstructing the formerly widespread water mills, in which the old, domestic seeds of grain could be ground using old processes and ways. Since tradition is a process which changes with the times and is improved by modern trends and knowledge, the polenta and bread made from *guštānca* could be enriched with newer foods and dishes. It was known that polenta used to be eaten only with sour milk, fat from lard and cracklings, more rarely also with prosciutto and sausage, but today excellent Vipava chefs also serve it with new local delicacies. Local tradition could be cultivated and built on also in the area of other corn products and goods; using the leaves removed from the cobs, making brooms from cornstalks, and making stoppers for bottles from the corncob.

In the course of several conversations with some members of the society on the importance of heritage for sustainable development, members themselves came up with the idea of a new competitive product: pasta made from corn flour, which can also be suitable for people with celiac disease. Since there are many young people included in the society, the president and I tried to involve their creativity. I proposed that the young people take part in workshops building on the earlier tradition of making things from husks. In the past only doormats were made from husks, but at the workshops the young people displayed their creativity in making advent wreaths, wedding bouquets, dolls, and brooches in the shape of butterflies (Fig. 2). The drama group staged a play on the theme of learning about the features of sustainable development in which they emphasized that the entire policy is based on the idea that the knowledge of our ancestors, who in some way already followed the guidelines of today's organic agriculture, should be made use of and enhanced. The play titled *Here are some domestic seeds* depicted in a very humorous way the importance of cultivating old domestic varieties and intergenerational connections, in which older people teach young people about work on the farm in the past, and young people teach the elderly about the importance of using visual media, especially the internet, where one can likewise acquire new knowledge.

A special challenge, which has not yet been realized, was to present the knowledge obtained about corn heritage between tradition and innovation to municipal politicians and local businesses in a way that in the researched heritage they would identify possible ideas for alleviating the economic crisis. The local municipality did award the project with a municipal prize, and in explaining the award stressed the importance of the cooperation of the society with the expert public, but they did not recognize the project as an idea for improving the current economic situation. After the study the idea arose that with the help of municipal representatives, farmers would again begin cultivating the old corn variety, and the Ajdovščina food processing industry, which is still active in making pasta and bakery products, could begin to offer new products made from locally produced corn flour and semolina. Modern marketing genius could come up with attractive packaging from young designers, with an interesting story from the past attached to it. The realization of these development ideas, which originate from research on the past way of life, among the municipal politicians and business people requires more time and possibly new studies that would also be supported by economic analyses. Much has already been done for the municipality to give the project an award, thereby indicating to society members that it values their efforts. At the same time the award has increased the trust of the local population in expert assistance.

CONCLUSION

Cultural heritage in the modern, global world, which is facing drastic environmental, economic and cultural changes, should be understood in the context of new development components and content. Although the social, economic, and development roles of heritage practices are intertwined and operate in the direction of ensuring a better future, its role in local communities is still too modest and ineffective. The key to solving the problem presented can be seen in better cooperation among the main stakeholders of development, especially between experts and residents from particular local areas. The latter most feel the difficulties and burdens of the

modern world such as social inequality, poverty, climate change, and political pressures, but they are frequently without a clear idea of how to deal with the resulting crises. Although the local population are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the knowledge of their ancestors and realize that the past is not a symbol of poverty, technological backwardness, and a hard life but rather something of value which can in conjunction with modern innovative approaches be enriched for a better tomorrow, often they have no clear vision of the means of implementing past practices. Experts can contribute greatly to this effort, but they must not take on the role of an all-knowing teacher “cultivating” the local population with their theoretical knowledge. The expert with his or her knowledge must take on the role of consultant, facilitator, and proposer of different ideas and thoughts which the local population are willing to accept and supplement and enhance with respect to their own expectations and needs.

There are many methods and techniques for including the public in development strategies of local communities. Among other things they can also be seen through the practices of creating local heritage in societies, but the cultural products must not be understood as just a symbol of defining collective identity, an element for the display of technological progress or content for cultural tourism, but also as a fundamental component for ensuring sustainable development and the formation of sustainable communities. Let me conclude with the thought that planning sustainable development without taking into consideration people, the characteristics of their natural and built environment and culture is like writing a book using an unfamiliar alphabet; the book may lie on a bookshelf, but it will remain untouched, unread, unused, and uninterpreted. Do the planners of development strategies realize this?

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