

# Intangible cultural heritage, cultural landscape, synergy... (The example of the Polish inscription (2021) of the tradition of the colorful carpet for Corpus Christi processions on the World Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage)

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**Abstract:** Polish nomination file for the Corpus Christi procession is an outstanding example of a document related to the intangible cultural heritage, which takes into account both the creative force of the human factor and the existing natural assets, as actively involved in modelling the integral value of the element, related to identification processes.

**Keywords:** Intangible cultural heritage, cultural landscape, synergy, nomination file for the Corpus Christi

**Ключови думи:** Нематериално културно наследство, културен пейзаж, синергия, номинация на Corpus Christi



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On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, at its 16<sup>th</sup> session in Paris, France, the Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted its Resolution 16.COM 8.b.3 on inscribing on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity the Polish nomination of 'Flower carpets tradition for Corpus Christi processions'. Its inscription, of course, means that the Evaluation Body of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (the 2003 Convention) has recognized the element as deserving a place on the World List. It also means – which is the important point in this case – that the Committee has appreciated the actual quality of the nomination file. Item 4 of the above cited Resolution of the Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (No. 16.COM 8.b.33) explicitly states that '[The Committee] Commends the State Party on the preparation of a well-elaborated file and on a well-prepared video that demonstrates

strong community participation.’ (LHE-21-16-8b\_Rev.2+Add.3-En, p. 55).

The wording of Item 4 is not at all accidental. It directly relates to the way in which the element is presented in the nomination file and the manner in which its characteristic features have been outlined. I should recall here that the Evaluation Body of the 2003 Convention formulates its opinion based upon the way an element has been presented in the nomination file, and the facts about it that have been included in that file, rather than on any direct or general familiarity with it. In the case described, Item 4 refers to nothing other than the presentation of the element in the nomination file.

The assessment of the nomination file of the element (the laying of a carpet of flowers for the annual Corpus Christi procession) is widely available for perusal. Together with the remaining documents of the 16<sup>th</sup> session (2021) of the Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, it is published on the relevant page (LHE-21-16.COM-8.b\_Rev.2+Add.3-En) of the UNESCO website, dedicated to the intangible cultural heritage. In item 3 of that assessment, which already refers directly to the actual element, the decision is formulated as follows: ‘[The Committee] Decides to inscribe **Flower carpets tradition for Corpus Christi processions** on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (LHE-21-16-8b\_Rev.2+Add.3-En, p. 54).

Of interest here are the expert analyses in support of Resolution No. 16.COM 8.b.33, similarly published on the web page. In those, one can find some connections being made, such as a mention of the fact that *the flowers* from which the colorful carpet is made *are picked from the surrounding fields or from family gardens* (p. 60), that *the collection of the flowers for the carpet is done by the actual families participating in its preparation, etc.* According to the file, the making

of the colorful carpet amounts to an ephemeral collective work related both to an aesthetic perception and to the building of a *local identity, one that is also nourished by traditional forms of diachronous transmission.*

From its very beginning, the assessment, which is built upon the text of the case file, underscores the presence of an all-embracing *cultural environment*: the participation of nature, the collective act of creation, the modelling of identity as the overarching theme – this is a *cultural environment* with its tangible and intangible sets of values. We are talking about an integrated whole based upon two key points of reference: nature and man. This actually leads towards a newly-realized essence of things, that has been persistently referred to in recent decades as a *cultural landscape*.

If we try to look at the nomination file of the element and the manner in which it is structured in the broader context in which (and the approach applied in it) it is situated, we are bound to notice some interesting connections.

The Council of Europe provides in the *European Landscape Convention* (Florence, 2001) the following definition: *Landscape’ means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.*<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis is on how the human individual and the community perceive a given environment, and thence the resultant link between the role of the landscape for the self-identification of the human being or the community with the inclusion of the respective natural environment. To this we should add the understanding that the natural environment and the human individual interact with, and influence each other. This how a new, integral value is born<sup>2</sup>.

From its very first clause (Art. 1), the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the world Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972) speaks

<sup>1</sup> Art.1.a: European Landscape Convention. – <http://www2.ecolex.org/server2neu.php/libcat/docs/TRE/Full/En/TRE-001326.txt>;

Art.1.a: European Landscape Convention. – <http://www2.ecolex.org/server2neu.php/libcat/docs/TRE/Full/En/TRE-001326.txt>.

<sup>2</sup> In this part of the text, I proceed from a set of systematizations and interpretations published by the participants in a collection of articles in *Krastev 2009*, and, specifically, the study included in it: *Velkov 2009*, on which this text is largely based. [3.11.2022].

about natural and human creations and their place within the landscape, and their expanded interpretation within the text of the Convention leads towards the concept of cultural landscape<sup>3</sup>. A vector takes shape according to which *cultural landscapes* emerge thanks to the interaction between natural phenomena and anthropogenic (attributable to human activity) factors. The natural factors are essentially processes taking place in the natural world that end up serving as the background for human expression, usually through activities related to a natural setting<sup>4</sup>. For their part, the anthropogenic factors come from various spheres of human activity. The encounter between the two types of factors causes the emergence of a homogeneous integral environment<sup>5</sup>.

Seen in that light, the Polish file for '*carpet for Corpus Christi processions*' offers a solid image of an integral environment borne by the active interplay of natural and anthropogenic factors. But there is more than that. The evaluation of the element's nomination file ((LHE-21-16.COM-8.b\_Rev.2+Add.3-En) referred to herein above contains a host of important aspects and actional and semantic details such as the claim that the element ('*carpet for Corpus Christi processions*') is an original form of re-affirmation of communal relations; that by being a collective practice is also points towards opportunities for transmission between generations within the bosom of the family; and that its being practiced by the community re-energizes respect for the local traditions while highlighting the viability and the sustainability of the element... Etc., etc. As is well stated in the file, the element constitutes a complex pattern of a series of formal (actional) and content-related parameters functioning in an integral unity.

Here I will also recall the conceptuality developed and proposed by the well-known 'Summit Meeting' at Rio de Janeiro 1992 (Rio

'92, as well as its follow-up, Rio '20+), related to the active placement in circulation of a term like 'sustainable development', which assigns to the landscape a primary role as a factor of balance between cultural and natural heritage<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, the example of the *Corpus Christi* nomination file demonstrates in practice that cultural landscapes are made up of series of structure-defining elements, a whole that is more than the sum of its parts but amounts to a system whose constituent parts are bound together into a single whole by visual, semantic, historical, functional relations at different hierarchical levels. They constitute a cultural heritage of integral value. The cultural landscapes comprise natural and anthropogenic traces, integrating them into a qualitatively new value<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, we find ourselves in the fields of the nature of integral values, the cumulative value of which exceeds the sum total of each one of them taken separately. This leads us towards synergy, one of the most popular definitions for which is 'the kind of relationship whose resultant effect is bigger than the sum of individual effects'. (Aristotle wrote that 'the whole is larger than the sum of its parts'<sup>8</sup>). 'Synergy' comes from the Greek *συνέργια*, meaning 'things that work together'<sup>9</sup>.

And if thus far we have been looking at the nomination file for the element of *Corpus Christi*, which situates in a certain way inherent content-related characteristics identified for the element itself, the perspective presented by modern methods of analysis/interpretation and thence, the cultural policies applicable to those elements, may add a few more strokes to the picture painted thus far.

In 2013, the specialized UNESCO services for evaluation/audit and governance in connection with the conventions of the international organization for safeguarding

<sup>3</sup> Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972. Art.1. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote no. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Picard 2002.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote No. 2.

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://bg.awordmerchant.com/hol-stico> [3.11.2022].

<sup>9</sup> <https://bg.Wikipedia.org/wiki/D0%A1%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%8>

of the cultural heritage<sup>10</sup> conducted a series of inspections, and the assessment contained in the documentation may suggest aspects in addition to the above<sup>11</sup>. The documents presenting the findings of the 2013 audit: *Evaluation of UNESCO's Standard-setting Work of the Culture Sector* (Evaluation of UNESCO's Standard-setting Work of the Culture Sector – [https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/IOS-EVS-PI-129\\_REV.-EN.pdf](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/IOS-EVS-PI-129_REV.-EN.pdf)) and, particularly, *Audit of the Working Methods of Cultural Conventions* (Audit of the Working Methods of Cultural Conventions – <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/IOS-AUD-2013-06-EN.pdf>), feature and make active use of notions like *synergy* and *sustainable development*, as seen in the light of a discussed approach of the theory of change. It may be assumed that these documents, in a certain sense, formalize those notions with respect to the subject matter of safeguarding of the cultural heritage.

Those documents logically emphasize exactly the preservation and safeguarding of the cultural heritage, which means that they focus of the cultural policies developed and applied with respect to that heritage. The determinant factor here is that in recent years, the idea has been taking shape of the joint application of the cultural heritage conventions, of the need for uniformity in their implementation. An even bolder idea is being put forward: of merging those conventions into one. This would imply imposing the vision of joint efforts for the safeguarding of the cultural heritage in its different forms; it would mean identifying a suitable mode of operation within whose parameters the collective operational toolbox of the cultural conventions developed and adopted by the international community in the past several decades would start working in synchronicity. This brings us into the domain of a concept of synergy developed at the level of methods and approaches of safeguarding. It is logically accompanied by the process of research and exploration.

It can safely be said that today, synergistic processes are taken into account both in characterizing the essence of (an) element/s, and in identifying the manner of safeguarding it/them as heritage.

Even by solely merging the targets of the 1972 Convention (tangible and natural cultural heritage) and the 2003 Convention (intangible cultural heritage), we are bound to arrive at the concept of synergy already present in the documents, at the level of methods and



<sup>10</sup> <http://www.Unesco.org/culture/ich/fr/evaluations-audits-et-gouvernance-00717> [6.11.2022].

<sup>11</sup> Another such large-scale audit was carried out in 2021 – Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See also: <https://ich.unesco.org/fr/recherche-00795?q=audit> [6.11.2022].

About the work carried out in this field since 2013, see: <https://ich.unesco.org/fr/valuations-audits-et-gouvernance-00717>.

approaches of preservation and safeguarding, and thence, of the study of the heritage. The internal interactions of the ingredients, both in the texture of the element (human individual-landscape-cultural landscape) and in the approach towards preserving it as cultural heritage (the combined toolbox of the different Conventions), seen through the notion of synergy (in relationships with sustainable development), appear to paint a clear enough picture of the status of vitality of the element and its safeguarding as a means of ensuring its sustainability. It seems to me that it is in that sense that it would be appropriate to also interpret Item 4 of Resolution 16.COM 8. b.33 of the Intergovernmental Committee for

the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Thus, the Polish nomination file for the *Corpus Christi* procession is an outstanding example of a document related to the intangible cultural heritage, which takes into account both the creative force of the human factor and the existing natural assets, as actively involved in modelling the integral value of the element. In in, the cultural landscape participates as a significant structural element in the processes of identification.

*The pictures for this article are taken by Janusz Tatarkiewicz, Poland, 2018, and are available at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/flower-carpets-tradition-for-corpus-christi-processions-01743>*

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## Нематериално културно наследство, културен пейзаж, синергия

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Статията се занимава с примера на полската кандидатура (2021 г.) за традицията на килима от цветя по повод процесията за *Corpus Christi* в Световната представителна листа на нематериалното културно наследство.

Полското досие за *Corpus Christi* е прекрасно доказателство за свързан с нематериалното културно наследство документ, в който се отчита както креативната субстанция на човешкия фактор, така и природната даденост като участващи активно в моделирането на интегралната ценност на елемента, свързани с процесите на идентификация.

