

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS IN THE PROCESS OF ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Activities relating to the discovery of local history, revival of rituals, and modification of traditional knowledge that are undertaken in local communities or associations have placed the reflection on the role and significance of heritage practices in contemporary society under scrutiny. We are becoming increasingly aware that heritage activities play an important role in the development of an innovative local economy, a creative community, and the achievement of sustainable development, but this is something that the local community must recognize. The purpose of this article is to describe the informal ways of raising awareness on the development potential of heritage activities and their uses for a higher quality of life through an analysis of the operation of associations in Slovenia that are involved in modifying traditional knowledge to create new products.

Keywords: *Cultural heritage practices, sustainable development, voluntary association, local community*

INTRODUCTION – THE ROLE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The policy of sustainable development, which in European and national strategies (cf. Europe 2020) represents a key guideline for the development of postmodern society, requires new approaches in community development and the education of people, who should be developing their economy, society, and culture, in such a way that natural resources are not depleted but rather conserved and utilized sustainably. Although the origins of the discussion of sustainable development date back to the 1970s and

were given a legal basis with the Brundtland Report in 1987, its vision has been continually developing and adapting to the contemporary needs and changes. Initially, the policy of sustainable development included only three main pillars: environmental, economic, and social development. Together with the conservation of nature, sustainable use of natural materials and the development of a so-called green economy, sustainable development should also include preservation or maintenance of social values such as cultural/social identity, mutual trust and cooperation, social justice and well-being (Nurse 2006:38). Today it also increasingly includes sustainable cultural development, which assumes the continuity of cultural values and identities and builds on the knowledge of the population in a particular cultural environment. Although in every society, new high technology processes, services, and products that enable progress and technological development are crucially needed, these should be created taking into consideration the experiences, practices, knowledge, values, and a way of life of the local people. Since humans are social beings that develop and improve themselves in communities, an understanding of the past and present cultural and social processes is of central importance in planning development; these processes can serve as a sound and effective development guideline for a sustainable future. *Agenda 21 for Culture*, adopted in 2002 and intended for local policy-makers, stresses the importance of culture for regional development, in particular steeped in the respect for local cultural differences, human rights, intercultural dialogue, participatory democracy, sustainability, and peace. By this document culture was designated the fourth pillar of sustainable development.

Every culture consists of numerous practices or activities of people who participate in creating sociopolitical and economic processes, and within these inherit, create, change or newly form numerous tangible and intangible elements. Monuments and knowledge from the past, which are evaluated in the present based on different criteria, knowledge, beliefs or purposes, are called cultural heritage. Just as the vision of sustainable development continually changes, so has the concept of cultural heritage been changing over historical periods and under the influence of global and national conditions. Today the concept of heritage is no longer understood as just the protection, restoration, and presentation of selected monuments from the past but also includes their use and upgrading or adaptation for various

contemporary needs and purposes. Heritage practices such as research, evaluation, recording, and awakening of the past and/or village tradition can help individuals, groups, nations, and transnational communities develop and reinforce social identity, improve visibility and enrich tourism content. The new roles of heritage connected with sustainable development can be seen in establishing better interpersonal relations and intergenerational connections, enriching the content of informal learning, improving the ideas for new commercial products (for example, cuisine), preservation and sustainable use of natural materials, and so on. Basically, heritage is still associated with the historical, art historical, ethnological, folklore, and other goods (such as knowledge, skills, memories, experiences, etc.) of our forebears, but it no longer refers just to the past but rather draws power from the past for the development of the present and the planning of the future (Harrison 2008).

For the ordinary people the concepts of sustainable policy and the activities derived from it for a better quality way of life, healthy society, and welfare can often be incomprehensible and lacking in specifics and applicability. This confirms many personal experiences that the author of this paper has had when giving various lectures and workshops in rural communities and in numerous conversations with people during fieldwork in Slovenia (especially in the Karst region and Vipava Valley). Although there is much discussion about the complexity of sustainable development in government institutions, academic environments, and various activities in primary schools and other educational institutions, when it comes to implementing research findings, and specialized knowledge and solutions for achieving a better life, we can still encounter a lack of understanding that sustainable development encompasses not only the natural environment and green economy, but also social and cultural values and practices. Furthermore, in some communities in Slovenia we even meet with resistance regarding the policy of sustainable development and preservation of cultural and social values. People do desire to live in a clean and culturally or naturally valued environment, but at the same time, under the influence of capitalist and media discourse, they want to enjoy the advantages of modern technology that may be environmentally and culturally unacceptable. Local authorities, who usually think only within the time frame of their political mandate, easily succumb to the desire for

modernization and rapid progress, which can lead to the destruction of the achievements from the past (e.g. the destruction of green spaces or old buildings in cities or villages because of the need for new buildings, more space or large shopping centres).

In the text to follow I will describe possible ways and paths for making sustainable development policy more understandable to people through heritage practices and informal forms of learning. Particular focus will be given to the interpretations of the activities of the Housewives' Association and its drama group from the village of Planina pri Ajdovščini, which from the 2004 has been contributing to the lively pulse of life in the Upper Vipava Valley in western Slovenia. Through its work – research and (re)creation of Vipava customs and habits, making traditional and modern cuisine recipes, acting in the drama group and singing – it strives towards sustainable development of the Vipava countryside and village community. The article will focus on how the association's activities are connected with the creation of local cultural heritage, how they influence life in the village community of Planina and the Upper Vipava Valley more widely, empower people in rural areas (especially women), achieve social innovations, and work towards the development of a competitive local economy.

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The findings presented in this paper are drawn from the postdoctoral project “*Cultural heritage – a medium for the introduction of sustainable development in a local place*”, financed by the Slovenian Research Agency in the period from 2012 to 2015. The project focused on the development of new approaches and methods to make people aware that heritage practices, which among other things represent a bridge between nature and human behaviour, can make an essential contribution to facilitating sustainable development and making it more effective. Another aim of the project was to define the role of humanities and social sciences in developing approaches to implementing sustainable policy. In contrast to natural, mathematical, and technical sciences, which develop sustainable economies, information, communication, and other innovative technologies, humanists and other social scientists assist in the application and implementation of these sustainable products and solutions in the real world. They deliver them to

the people who are the main agents of change in a natural landscape. In this project four research questions were posed:

How do we use the knowledge and experience of our ancestors, who lived in connection with nature and made use of natural materials in their lives, for the development of eco-friendly products and other forms of a healthy lifestyle?

How do we use heritage activities to strengthen the social and territorial cohesiveness, empower vulnerable groups (for example, women, young people, the elderly), create informal types of learning and awareness raising among the population regarding contemporary development challenges (sustainable development, gender equality, decreasing unemployment)?

How do we use heritage activities to establish cooperation and networking among local politicians, experts, the local population, and businesses?

How do we educate and activate people through researching the history of the way of life in a particular residential environment and especially through using ethnographic methods so that they actively participate in designing the local development strategies?

The main hypothesis of the research was that the ways of informing and educating the population regarding the valuation and use of cultural heritage practices are more effective if there is active cooperation between experts and members of various local associations that are involved in the creation of local heritage. Since active members of associations already have a positive attitude to local history, and consequently to their environment, they are more receptive to acquiring additional knowledge about the ways of using heritage in sustainable development. The presentation of their activities and products to a wider public can also serve as a reminder for people who are not interested in this topic for a variety of reasons. As an informal way of educating the local population the ethnographic research method can be used, in which the interviewer uses a semi-structured interview not only to obtain research material but also to make the interviewees aware of the applications of their knowledge, memories, and experiences for further development.

The presented hypothesis was examined through the active collaboration of the author with the members of the Housewives' Association, where several methods and tools of cooperation among experts and local residents were analyzed over four years of preparing the common heritage activities. During the preparation of the activities, semi-structured interviews with members were recorded, in which interviewees, in addition to sharing their memories of past events; spoke about what the association meant for their personal development and life in the local community. Some thoughts are presented below, where members talk *inter alia* about a different attitude towards experts and the dismissive attitude of their immediate surroundings to their activities. Due to the sensitivity of the information the names of interviewees are not given.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSOCIATIONS AND NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The goals of adopted strategies and development programs and public discussions about new ones revolve around the idea that Europe, if it wishes to compete with the rest of the world, must become economically stronger and socially more cohesive and innovative. There is a consensus among experts and policymakers that the global crisis, which was not just economic or financial in nature but also social, environmental, and cultural, represents a good opportunity for changes and new challenges in the field of economics as well as for establishing better social and territorial cohesiveness and environmental equilibrium. It therefore strives towards the development of new methods and techniques for the empowerment, education, connection, and cooperation of the main actors participating in the development (Ličen et al. 2015:5). More often than not, the uncoordinated actions of local policymakers, experts, and businesses, and the current passivity of the local population are identified as the key development problems. As a result, new approaches, methods and techniques have been developed for new ways of managing public spaces and infrastructure, such as multi-stakeholder platforms (Warner 2005; Arnkil and Spanga 2003); active participation methods (Slocum 2003; Zumaglini et al. 2008) and the quadruple helix approach (Arnkil et al. 2010). All of these are based on the awareness,

which was well known to our ancestors, that in order to achieve personal, social and consequently economic development, people need to have good relationships with others, connectedness, cooperation, and a receptive environment. Therefore, it is no coincidence that successful companies pay increasingly more attention to team building. They have realized that the key to success also lies in good interpersonal and friendly relationships among colleagues. Different forms of socializing and entertainment, establishing new social contacts, which consequently creates an inspiring environment for innovative products in local communities, are offered by voluntary associations and other forms of unions, which are classified under modern legislation as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The association of people based on common interests and purposes is a very old phenomenon in Slovenia. Its earliest legal foundations emerged at the time of the first national states in the 18th and 19th centuries. The authorities saw various clubs, associations, and fraternities as an enemy. Therefore, it was necessary to define their purposes, goals, and stipulate their permitted or unpermitted activities by law (Marušič 1999:179). The greater rise of associations' activities began after Bach's absolutism (in the 1850s), when legislation governing associations was greatly liberalized and the organizing of the people had special significance for the development of different socio-political and cultural processes. Towards the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, choral, reading, and educational associations dominated in western Slovenia, representing a central cultural and social nucleus for the development and strengthening of the national consciousness led by the desire to preserve the character of the Slovenian land, despite foreign political domination (ruled first by Austria-Hungary and then the Kingdom of Italy). Today there is practically no village without an association devoted to the discovery of local history and the customs and habits of the local area. In western Slovenia, more specifically the northern Primorje and coastal-Karst regions, 91 associations that list among their activities researching and preserving the local heritage were registered at the beginning of 2015.¹ This

¹ The research was conducted as part of the project of the Slovenian Research Agency: Multicultural heritage and the national state: the examples of the Prekmurje, Bela Krajina, and Primorska regions, basic research project, 1 July 2011–30 June 2014. (for more, see <https://heritageinthemaking.wordpress.com/>).

shows the strong need for socializing and having fun together. Members of the associations come from both the younger (most often students) and older generations, who do not have major family responsibilities, i.e. to children. For the most part the associations are involved in researching local history, reviving customs and habits, and organizing exhibitions and village events, but only a few of them include building on local achievements and skills of their ancestors with respect to contemporary social and economic needs. The problem is that association members, who wish to build on traditional practices with innovative products, must be sufficiently informed about the development aspects of culture and heritage while at the same time sufficiently economically strong and bold to use cultural practices of the past in order to achieve progress. Therefore, the crucial question is: how do we motivate people and provide them with expert assistance so that they can recognize the value of their environment's past cultural practices regarding sustainable development?

“ASSOCIATION ... LEARNING, LIFE, SINGING, LAUGHTER, FELLOWSHIP, FRIENDSHIP”...; ACTIVITIES OF THE HOUSEWIVES’ ASSOCIATION

The local community of Planina pri Ajdovščini includes the village of Planina together with its seven hamlets (Uštini, Štrancarji, Marci, Dolenja vas, Gorenja vas, Britih, and Koboli), which spread out along the southern part of the Municipality of Ajdovščina in western Slovenia. The local community has a population of 459, who preserve the heritage of their ancestors and develop it in their agricultural and cultural life. The village has a varied history and characteristic cultural monuments such as the churches St. Paul's, St. Mary's, and St. Cantianus, typical Vipava architecture, an old school with preserved and recorded school stories (Fakin Bajec 2013) and priceless works by prominent village figures (the most important among them being Matija Vertovec)² who have left a lasting economic and cultural imprint on the village life. Although the majority of the residents are employed in the nearby town centres, there

² Matija Vertovec, nationalist instigator, teacher, and priest from the 19th century, taught Vipava residents “intelligent” farming, especially wine-growing.

is virtually no household that does not engage in viticulture and to a lesser extent fruit-growing, particularly cherries, and apricots. Many villagers also participate in the association's activities, which have a long tradition in Planina. At the end of the 19th century the Catholic Slovenian Educational Association was founded³, and in the 1950s the Zarja Cultural Association was established, which focused on amateur theatre. Today, in addition to the Petrič Bocce Club and the Zarja Sports Tourism Club, the village also has the Housewives' Association and a Drama Group, which is very active.

The main purpose of the association, which brings together women and girls from the village and actors from the drama group (the total number of members is 44), is to enliven village social life and present traditions of their ancestors to younger generations. The earliest members of the society began to formally associate in 2004, when they collected and recorded old culinary recipes. They were encouraged in this task by a journalist from the regional newspaper *Primorske novice*, who wanted to collect recipes from the region of the Upper Vipava Valley. She turned to farm wives from Planina for help. After two years of collecting recipes, the women wanted to present them in a publication. A book entitled *Lest We Forget. Planina pri Ajdovščini: Customs and Recipes of our Ancestors* (Aktiv kmečkih žena) was published in 2005. Towards the end of the editing, the authors consulted and were assisted by a staff member of the Goriška Museum. The book provided the association with the momentum for new activities. At a book presentation, members, with the help of a drama group which had joined the association for that purpose, depicted a working day on a farm showing, among other things, the baking of bread (kneading in a special wooden vessel with legs - *mentrgi*, baking in a wood-fired oven) and husking of corn (*trsce*). Afterwards visitors were served the traditional farm dish of polenta with sour milk. Based on this event the association designed the concept of presenting its research activities and to this day they present a particular theme from local history at the end of the calendar year, and the drama group prepares a humorous play in the local dialect based on the selected content. The premiere of the play and presentation of the main results in the form of an exhibition, a brochure or a documentary or dramatic film always takes

³ It presumably ceased all activity in 1928, when all Slovenian societies were abolished.

place in Planina, whereupon it is hosted in other locations in the Vipava Valley in the following weeks and months. Particular attention is given to culinary traditions, and visitors are served traditional dishes that have been somewhat modified and improved with modern ingredients or preparation methods in recent years. All the members of the association participate in researching and presenting the annual achievements, coordinated from the outset by the president of the association, who has a remarkable inclination for the preservation of local history. During the eleven years of the association's operation the following major projects have been presented: *Grain by Grain*, in which they offered a bread-baking course as part of an exhibition on bread; two dramatic films *There Will Be a Wedding, a Wedding*, and *Welcome, Friend, I Planted a Grapevine*; a documentary film *Hidden Treasure*, a reference to the underground world below the village; *Up and Running* – about the introduction of the telephone, and *Milk Is Not Water*, in which they showed procedures for preparing dairy products.

The attitude of local residents to the association has changed over time. At first the association's activities were perceived negatively. There were very few Planina residents at the association's events. Activities were initially greeted with fierce resistance, on the grounds that they would evoke memories of hardscrabble farm life, poverty, and economic backwardness. As one member related:

“Everyone who had moved away from Planina due to marriage was invited to the event [*the first one*]. These people came, but at first there was no one from Planina, at least based on what I observed. The locals did not approve of the activities of the association, and in the beginning book sales were also minimal. We repeated the event the following week in Ajdovščina, and there were a few more locals, but still not to the extent that we see today”.

Although active association members were initially hurt by the attitude of their fellow villagers, they continued with their activities and slowly tried to win their good will and approval. Increased interest among the locals was expected in 2008, when they were reviving wine traditions, given that to this day the village is known as a winegrowing area, but at that time, too, they were greeted with a lack of understanding on the part of growers. “*At that time the comments of certain people seemed very nasty to me when they*

would say things like “*what do these hags think they’re doing, don’t they know how horrible it was? We don’t want to see or hear anything about it,*” a member of the association recounted in anger. Conversely, the members were of a completely opposite opinion, they wanted to showcase traditional knowledge about planting and grafting of grapevines, working in vineyards, making wine, and harvest customs and traditions in such a way as to make them more accessible to young people, through a dramatic film. In the film there are extremely valuable scenes of grafting methods that are being lost due to modern technology today but are important for the development of the science of viticulture. A member had this to say about the project:

“For me personally, this was by far the best project. We were working hard on it all year. (...) Even before that we had recorded an interviews about how grafting and digging were done. We filmed it in a vineyard that was 60 years old. We walked there, hauling all our gear, since the vineyard was not accessible by road. I expected something more from the winegrowers, that they would buy the film for their own promotion. But they didn’t. They always say how we need to work together, but they don’t support us. This was the most disappointing moment for me”.

The response of the fellow residents who had (or still have) a dismissive attitude towards heritage activities is understandable in view of the interpretation of the role and meaning of the past in different historical and social circumstances. Residents were under the sway of the public discourse that regarded the past as a symbol of poverty and backwardness, something which until recently had been widely accepted. In the modern era and in light of the modernization that was most pronounced during the decades of socialism in Slovenia and other former republics of Yugoslavia, the purpose of the past was not to teach about traditional societies in premodern times but rather only to understand the modern progress and historical achievements of a nation (Kumar 1995:79–80; Urry 1996:215–216; Fakin Bajec 2011:32–33). Although the history of the rural way of life was presented in museums and at tourist events (for example, the Peasant Wedding in Ljubljana), it was done primarily to showcase progress and reinforce the common roots needed to create a common consciousness. Furthermore, it is also necessary to examine the understanding of how

village communities function more closely: they should never be regarded as a unified entity but rather one in which internal disagreements among members of a group and also association are permissible and acceptable. Some members of the village communities are, for example, more involved in group activities while others are less so; some are more aware of the local history and others due to different experiences, knowledge, needs, and conditions are inactive but still have other skills and abilities that some others reject. The acceptance of differing opinions in a community is important since in this way personal rights are protected and democratic behaviour is maintained (Blake 2009). An external expert who is not caught up in the local disputes and experiences can examine the pronounced problems impartially and serve as an important mediator in the internal integration and forging of friendly relations.

With the exception of the first year, up until 2012 the association carried out its activities without expert assistance. While the president of the association was aware that expert assistance would enrich their operation, she did not want to oppose the other members, who up until recently had had reservations about cooperating with experts. Since they regarded their activities as amateur, voluntary work and gave a lot of attention to socializing, relaxed interactions among people, informal conversation and having fun, among other things, they were afraid that the presence of an expert would spoil the atmosphere. As an associate member explained:

“A staff member of the Goriška Museum assisted in the publication of the book and preparation of the first exhibition, but she was not accepted by the association. I was in dire need of her assistance but perhaps the other members were not aware of this. They had tremendous respect for her. Perhaps the entry of an outsider into the association happened too quickly. But time works wonders. In the beginning members were afraid of appearing in the media but later they realized that it was necessary if we wanted to progress”.

Expert assistance was also offered in the dramatic plays, which from the very beginning have always been directed by a volunteer director without any formal training in the field, who writes as well as directs the plays. But here, too, help from a professional director was rejected. The interviewee shared the following thoughts:

“If someone with some sort of high philosophy comes in, it has a dampening effect. We were offered an outside director of the play, and we deliberately went to other villages to see plays that had been directed by professionals. The quality of the staging and so on was outstanding, but there wasn’t the same response in the audience, we didn’t enjoy ourselves. This gave us pause, and so we said better to do something on our own, something simple. (...) What’s essential for us is that we have a good time at rehearsals, it’s a form of socializing, but if someone from outside comes, you have to pay them, they’d be here for just two hours because it costs a lot, and actors have a deferential attitude towards them”.

Although expert assistance in the field of local history would make the work of association members easier, and place a particular heritage practice in a historical period more accurately, help improve the presentation of customs and habits, and deepen its content, the reaction of members is entirely understandable. Many times experts come across as “all-knowing teachers”, and this can be more off-putting than encouraging to laypeople and amateurs. Experts are often unaware that only an equal relationship between expert collaborators and locals can enrich and deepen knowledge on both sides, which can subsequently lead to constructive development guidelines.

In 2012 the president, despite opposition from the association members, accepted the expert assistance I offered in the research project *Cultural heritage – a medium for the establishment of sustainable development*. Collaboration with the association members represented a significant challenge for me since I was conducting the research in a space I had not previously been familiar with, and I was a complete outsider for Planina residents. I somehow managed to establish a certain rapport as a speaker of the same Primorska dialect and because I was closely familiar with working on a farm, having grown up in a rural area. In conversations with residents about their lives I often mentioned personal memories of my childhood and living with my grandparents, which proved to be a successful way of creating an authentic relationship with older interviewees. The president of the association accompanied me in the fieldwork as she wanted to learn the ethnographic method. She supplemented my questions

and together we tried to explain the main purposes of the research to the other members. The ideas about which kind of local past to focus on and how to highlight the most important elements usually came from different conversations with the members of the association, the designer of the final products, the director of the theatre play, and modern developmental and economic trends. The president and I spent a lot of time in discussions on how to modify traditional skills and knowledge to prepare interesting and innovative final products, which are based on the local tradition of the community but modified according to modern needs, skills, possibilities, and aspirations. I always try to ground my suggestions in the findings from the field, the wishes of the president and other members, and theoretical findings on how it would be possible in reviving tradition not only to present the history of the village but also to enhance and adapt it. My personal approach is to achieve an equal relationship with the members, and show them that as an expert I am not more important in the process of development than they are. Scientific or expert public is just one of the many links in a good development group, in which the aspirations, views, and knowledge of the local population are of crucial importance. Old women have knowledge of how to use and prepare herbs and other culinary ingredients, while different experts know how to present the dishes and other products in a more attractive and functional way for the market, social or cultural purposes. After four years of active collaboration I can say that the association members gradually, year by year, accepted me as an equal member. As a researcher I have never experienced any problems interviewing people, but I could sense a certain reluctance and nervousness as well as deference in the relationship. It was only after three years that they began to invite me to their parties, multi-day trips, and training seminars and courses. In all these informal opportunities I tried to talk with them and explain my scientific interests and research objectives, which I hope to achieve by working with them. In relaxed conversations I also shared what I have learned from the collaboration, how I started to garden, cook and save old seeds, etc. Nowadays they are very pleased when they hear that I presented their work at international conferences, in articles, etc. or that I helped the president obtain better financial support. The most important thing that they appreciate is that I am open to debate, new proposals, and I really try to hear and understand their needs, ideas and wishes. In

addition to creating different cooking courses for members and sometimes for guests, the association organizes other interesting educational and cultural activities as well, which offer members the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills. In the ten years that we have worked together they have learned computer skills, sewing, and crochet. They have visited many historical places in Slovenia and abroad. In the last two years some members have attended an Italian language course, levels 1 and 2, taught by two members, a mother and daughter, who are teachers of Italian. According to the participants, the courses were very successful not only because they acquired language skills, but also because there were many occasions for having fun, laughing, relaxing, motivating each other, and forgetting about day to day family or work problems.

During the first year of collaboration association members and I researched the importance of corn in the local history of Planina. We were interested in learning about the cultivation methods, the uses of different 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). After conducting ethnographic research, findings were presented in a brochure titled “*We ate polenta every evening, and sometimes for breakfast, too*”: *on the cultivation of corn, husking, and cooking of polenta in Planina in the past and challenges in the future* (Fakin Bajec 2012). Particular attention was given to the presentation of ideas on how to use the heritage in sustainable development, especially to promote a healthy way of life and organic agriculture. At the end of the project the housewives themselves developed a new product rooted in both tradition and innovation. This was pasta made from corn flour, which is also suitable for people with celiac disease. Since there are a lot of young people in the association we put their creativity to work in coming up with new products made from corn husks. Thus at workshops with intergenerational participation we made advent wreaths, wedding bouquets, dolls, and brooches in the shape of butterflies. The drama group put on the play *Here are some domestic seeds*, which, in a humorous and informal way, taught people about sustainable policy, the importance of re-introducing the cultivation of old domestic varieties of field crops, and the benefits of intergenerational connections. In it the older generations teach the younger about the manual labour on a farm in the past while young people present

the use of visual media to seniors. Since the venues where association members present their play and culinary specialties are packed with people of all generations, similar nonprofessional activities can be extremely good examples of how informal methods of learning and teaching can be developed in order to acquaint a wider public with global concepts such as sustainable development, gender equality, alleviation of poverty and unemployment, and so on. The play used a very simple approach and the local dialect, to educate people about the importance of reviving traditional varieties of field crops and learning about the traditional skills of our ancestors in order to develop organic farming for example. At the same time, older actors and spectators were acquainted with the potential of new visual media (e.g. the Internet) as a source of acquiring knowledge from people in other parts of the world. In the words of the director, who is from Planina and has no formal qualifications in the field, but who with great creative boldness and an exceptional feeling for other people, enthusiastically writes the stories and directs the plays: *“the actors undergo tremendous personal growth over the years; they become more self-confident, daring, more persuasive, and happy”*. This is also acknowledged by actors themselves: the oldest actress likes to say that acting in the group is her *“anti-anxiety drug”*, otherwise she would have fallen into despair over life’s trials and tribulations. But at rehearsals she is able to relax, have fun, laugh a lot and in this way cope more easily with the challenges of ageing.

Another member stressed:

“We encourage one another in the association. We have a good president, very knowledgeable, and her husband encourages her. This means a lot to us and we can take pride in the association and our many achievements. This gives us determination and the awareness that we have done something good. What a good feeling it is when people come and tell us they like what we do. Money isn’t important to me, but a simple thanks means a lot”.

The Municipality of Ajdovščina awarded the project a municipal award. In presenting the award the importance of cooperation between society and experts was stressed, which led to further improvement in creating a more relaxed relationship between me and the members. This was the reason why the cooperation with the association continued in

the following years. In the project *A Good Old School* in 2013 we joined forces to learn about the role of the school and its former teachers in the development of the area. Once again we presented our findings in different forms, namely a play, an exhibition, and a book titled *A Good Old School: Scenes from School Life in Planina pri Ajdovščini Over the Years* (Fakin Bajec 2013). We tried to use the teachings of former pupils and teachers in order to improve the quality of life in the country. Hence, at a joint event we highlighted school activities that could be developed or adapted to modern needs and skills in the present day. We devoted particular attention to the school garden that Planina acquired at the end of the 19th century and where children learned farming skills, especially the marketing of their produce. Consequently, the onions and garlic they cultivated were sold to the Agricultural Cooperative in Ajdovščina, and the money earned was used to purchase manure for the garden. In order to strengthen friendly relations and mutual understanding in the village, a number of cultural events connected with national holidays were organized. From the School Chronicle from 1881 we learned, among other things, that the villagers had organized festivities on the occasion of the wedding of the Austrian Crown Prince Rudolf's and the Princess Stephanie of Belgium in 1881, which lasted for several days. Croissants with sweetened dried fig filling were enjoyed at the main celebration. Therefore, at the presentation of the project Planina housewives prepared a special dish – bread rolls called *planinčki* with sweetened dried fig filling, which could become an innovative food product from the Vipava Valley.

On the occasion of the association's 10th anniversary in 2014, we worked together to create a meaningful book titled *Lest We Forget II.: Customs, habits, and recipes from Planina pri Ajdovščini* (Rosa and Fakin Bajec 2014), an exhibition chronicling the 10 years of the association's activities, and a play which focused on the concept of gender equality and the importance of valuing different kinds of potential that men and women have.

Recipes for traditional and new dishes, reflecting the skills, experience, courage and boldness of modern-day housewives, were also a part of the book. The new recipes were created by the association members who used their knowledge to adapt traditional recipes to modern times and ingredients

that were previously unavailable or unknown. At the same time, the recipes still retained their local character. In addition, the book was enriched by presenting the customs and habits associated with a variety of holidays, when the family gathers around the table and enjoys together the foods which were presented (for example, Easter, Christmas, festivities, weddings, birthdays, times of major farm works, and so on). The book is further enhanced by subchapters titled *Lest We Forget*, which describe old skills for making use of natural resources in a particular area. In this way, the reader learns how to obtain seeds from traditional crop varieties, how to make pickled turnips, how to prepare wine vinegar, how to make a medicinal syrup from grape must, etc. All this knowledge is exceptionally important today in view of achieving sustainable development policy, and the book portrays the overcoming of significant development challenges. At the same time, it depicts the important role of women in achieving sustainable policy goals, through which it is possible to develop an environmentally friendly economy. Women in rural areas were not just mothers, housewives, and good cooks, they were also responsible for the running of the farm. Hence, in the book we tried to draw attention to the importance of women on the farm, especially in view of collecting, preserving, and production of seeds for indigenous field crops, which today, given the importance of organic farming and the development of healthy cuisine, people want to preserve and cultivate again. Seeds are also a symbol of new wealth, hope, and a better life. In this regard, the book describes how to cultivate indigenous seeds (for example, corn, turnips, beets, and others), and how, in the absence of preservatives and modern technologies, in the past people kept eggs fresh, made tomato paste, preserved pork meat, respected the laws of nature, and so on.

The book is further enhanced by presenting the thoughts of association members on the mission of home cooking and the importance of socializing, and by recipe authors' photographs displayed below the recipes.

Especially meaningful words are those by members, whose participation in the association enriched their personal lives, filling them with new strength and courage. Among others, we can read these words in the book:

We share happy as well as less happy life events with other members; they encouraged me to continue my studies and boosted

my confidence. I can therefore say that they are not just my fellow members but much more, they are my friends. (Rosa and Fakin Bajec 2014:64)

The association...learning, life, singing, laughter, socializing and friendship. I am proud to have been a part of this since the beginning. (Ibid. 76)

Looking back at the last ten years of the association's activity, I was struck by the realization that I came to know my neighbours and fellow villagers only through my membership in it. (Ibid. 98)



Picture 1: Some members of the association after finishing the Italian language course, 2015. Source: The Housewives Association and Drama Group.

It is evident from the words, and especially the photographs of the main authors of the book, how using heritage and combining tradition and innovation can help empower rural women. For many women the book represents a tribute to their activity, encapsulated in the recipes and photographs. As a member enthusiastically explained:

“The book is a product that will remain for posterity. This is our heritage. What has been recorded will remain. The purpose of the association is not just to go there, chat and hear a bit of gossip, as we women are often accused of doing. We don’t just gossip, we also get things done and we have something to show for our efforts. I give the book as a gift since it is a part of me and I’m very proud of it. It’s not just a book, it’s something more”.

At the same time, the book also shows that many different forms of cooperation can be achieved through intergenerational connections (members come from both older and younger generations), mutual encouragement, and exchange of experience: between younger and older, between experts and laypeople, between men and women. Young people in particular contribute greatly to the association since they are somewhat bolder in the presentation of products and uninhibited in the presentation of the village farming culture whereas the older members are still ashamed of it. A member commented on the energy of young people as follows:

“Twice we were on TV, on the Good Morning Show. /.../ They filmed us in the centre of Ljubljana, where we had a presentation of pickled turnips, sausages, /.../ home-made pastry, homemade cheese and sausage that were sliced in the old way, very simply. No packaging, and people really liked it. People no longer fall for fancy packaging. /.../ I got the idea from my son, I always thought, let’s set an extra nice table... What I want to say is, this is how young people think, and so I’m happy they are a part of our association. He said to me: ‘Mother, can’t you see that these Ljubljana residents know all about these fine points, you can’t hope to match that. Do something simple, that’s what they want’ and truly that’s what went over well. Still tastefully arranged, but not overdone. Let them see that we come from the village, not the city”.

Members of the younger generation had this to say about their participation in the association:

The association teaches me a lot, through it I experience new knowledge and have fun with it. As a member of the association I feel useful and capable. I enjoy discovering history, past customs and



*Picture 2: Members in the TV Good Morning Show, 2015.
Source: The Housewives Association and Drama Group.*

habits of our ancestors and transmitting them to others. (Rosa and Fakin Bajec 2014:46)

The association is like one big family. We are connected by the joy we share in our work, creativity, and revival of old traditions. (Ibid. 140)

The preservation of tradition, socializing, relaxation, mutual teaching/learning ... I soak up the knowledge of other housewives like a sponge and I am proud to say that I am a member of the Housewives Association from Planina. (Ibid. 166)

Based on what people said, we can confidently state that the attitude of fellow residents towards the activities of the association has markedly improved in the past year. An increasing number of local residents have started to plant older crop varieties (for example, an old variety of corn called *guštenca*), and locals are also giving more attention to the revival of traditions and becoming increasingly aware that local history is not something backward but rather an important resource for a better future.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The concept of cultural heritage has been changing throughout historical periods depending on the global and national sociopolitical, social, and economic conditions. Although the term heritage is rather old and originates from the vocabulary of pre-modern societies, discussions about the role of heritage began in the 19th century with the emergence of national states, when political public leaders needed common cultural elements from the past to create national consciousness and cohesiveness. Until recently heritage was regarded as something involving monumental, noble, good, aesthetic and universal memorials (Smith 2009:2), crucial for activating and strengthening communities, reinforcing local identity for new development paths as part of constructing nations. Today the term heritage no longer denotes only memorial monuments or folk dwellings, but also experiences, memories, skills, and behaviour of ordinary people, who are the main actors in the creation of heritage for posterity. In modern interpretations, intangible elements, such as the attitude of people to past monuments, are strongly emphasized in the understanding of heritage. In this way meanings and values of heritage elements are created that are of crucial importance in the understanding of heritage as a development category. Based on the presented description of the association's operation we can conclude that in the local environment through the preservation, protection, restoration, upgrading, and use of already known, experienced, and positively valued practices (for example, planting of old varieties, cooking using old recipes, cultivation modelled on traditional farming practices) that in modern times also reflect sustainable management, the local population can recognize, experience and begin to take into account modern sustainable guidelines more easily. Moreover, the case study has shown that association life can significantly contribute to establishing social connections, empowering vulnerable groups such as women, the unemployed, and the elderly, and preserving cultural differences, all of which serves as the foundation for sustainable development. Modern studies of the role of heritage also highlight the protection of human rights in discussions on tackling climate change, in forming creative industries, overcoming international political disputes and formally connecting politically divided local groups, reducing poverty and hunger (Lafrenz Samuels 2010), etc. It is essential therefore that the local population be the main actor in revitalizing heritage for development and that the experts be there to support and encourage their activities.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the policy of sustainable development, whose purpose it is to protect natural resources in a balanced way, enable innovative economic development, build compassionate and interconnected communities, and preserve cultural specificities, simply cannot be designed and implemented without the people. In this regard, a crucial role is played by women (wives, mothers, workers, farmers, experts, directors, and politicians), who with their knowledge, energy, capacity for empathy and sensitivity to the needs of different generations, can give an important contribution to quality progress. At the same time, the main approaches to solving contemporary social problems include fellowship, good friendships, mutual encouragement, and willingness to listen and arrive at compromise together. We the experts must not act as all-knowing teachers but rather as facilitators of development, which could never lead to new, innovative products and well-being without the people.

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Jasna Fakin Bajec

KULTURNA BAŠTINA I ULOGA VOLONTERSKIH UDRUGA U PROCESIMA POSTIZANJA ODRŽIVOG RAZVOJA U RURALNIM ZAJEDNICAMA

Aktivnosti povezane s otkrivanjem lokalne povijesti, oživljavanjem rituala i prilagodbom tradicionalnih znanja koje provode lokalne zajednice ili udruge stavljaju pod povećalo promišljanje o ulozi i značenju baštinskih praksi u suvremenom društvu. Sve smo svjesniji kako aktivnosti kulturnog naslijeđa imaju važnu ulogu u razvoju inovativnoga lokalnog gospodarstva, kreativne zajednice i postizanju održivog razvoja, ali to je nešto što lokalna zajednica mora prepoznati. Cilj ovog rada jest opisati neformalne načine osvještavanja ljudi o razvojnom potencijalu aktivnosti kulturnog naslijeđa te njihova korištenja za postizanje bolje kvalitete života kroz analizu rada udruga u Sloveniji koje se bave prilagodbom tradicionalnih znanja u svrhu izrade novih proizvoda.

Ključne riječi: baštinske prakse, održivi razvoj, dobrovoljna udruga, lokalna zajednica



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