THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL CRAFT CENTERS IN SAFEGUARDING CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Maintaining cultural heritage is an essential element of any effort to realize the growth potential and promote sustainability and vitality of rural areas. Founding of traditional craft centers in Lithuania was initiated in 2009 as a way to implement heritage safeguarding measures. Scientific problem was formulated as follows: did these centers prove to be an effective instrument of heritage policy? The present paper aimed at investigating the extent, to which traditional craft centers had implemented its role in safeguarding cultural heritage, and present recommendations for the improvement. Interview questionnaire was sent to 20 municipalities and 51 LAGs, responsible for the establishment of centers. It was identified that craft centers implemented measures, related to safeguarding of cultural heritage, rather actively and qualitatively. On the other hand, not all measures were implemented sufficiently, what made the process of safeguarding traditional crafts not continuous but partly fragmented. Improvement of traditional crafts centers resource management along with promotion of cooperation between TCC, operating in the same municipality, is recommended.

Keywords: cultural heritage, sustainable development, traditional crafts, traditional craft centers, UNESCO.

JEL Codes: H51, H54, Q01, Z18.

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage is being recognized more and more often as a strategic resource for sustainable development in many official national and European statements (Communication..., 2014; Conclusions..., 2014; Lietuvos kaimo plėtros..., 2015, Report..., 2015; Cork 2.0 Declaration, 2016; Proposal..., 2016). It is assigned with a specific role in achieving strategic European Union goals for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, since it has social and economic impact and contributes to environmental sustainability.

The most recent Cork declaration urged policy makers of the European Union “to invest in the identity of rural communities” (Cork 2.0 Declaration, 2016). Cultural and natural uniqueness of rural areas is called one of the main attributes of sustainable rural development and vitality. It contributes to the diversification of economic activities of rural population, creation of innovative jobs, social inclusion of rural population, especially young people, promotion of tourism economy, renewal of rural infrastructure, use of local resources and formal as well as informal education and life-long learning.
In Lithuania, founding of traditional craft centers (TCC) was initiated in 2009 as a way to preserve cultural heritage. Craft centers were expected to become certain regional centers, safeguarding and transmitting local culture, ensuring sustainability as well as integrity of the process of traditional craft production and consumption (Daukšienė, 2015). According to national law acts, the establishment of these centers was designated to safeguard cultural heritage, renew and preserve objects of valuable historic, cultural as well as architectural heritage, uphold technologies of traditional crafts, and support craftsmen in presenting and selling traditional products (Lietuvos kaimo plėtros…, 2009; Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės…, 2011). Development of TCC activities will be further supported in the new financial framework for the years 2014–2020, and all functions of the centers, corresponding with the five above identified measures, are clearly laid out in the most recent wording of the law on Lithuanian national heritage products (Lietuvos Respublikos tautinio…, 2015).

Many authors have analyzed the development of traditional crafts in Lithuania from different perspectives (Aleksandravičius, 2008; Ramanauskienė, 2010; Parafinavičė, 2010; Ėruomskaitytė, 2011; Aleksandravičius, 2012; Rudzkienė, 2012; Daukšienė, 2015, etc.). Profound analysis of common situation of traditional crafts in Lithuania, including legal regulation, was provided and a wide range of challenges and problems, being faced in the process of safeguarding cultural heritage, was identified. Benefits of traditional craft development in rural areas were presented comprehensively. Most of the earlier mentioned authors have made certain recommendations, designed to improve traditional craft development as well as ensure a more effective process of preservation. On the other hand, only few authors have attempted to explore the potential of TCC as a means of safeguarding cultural heritage in their publications. V. Rudzkienė and R. Skrodenytė (2012) have performed the most detailed analysis of the establishment perspective of such centers so far. Therefore, a more thorough and relevant examination of the development of TCC is lacking.

The aim of this paper is to investigate, to what extent TCC have implemented its role in safeguarding cultural heritage in Lithuania so far, and to present recommendations for the improvement.

The subject of the research – activities of TCC until 2015.

The main method used in this research is a structural interview with TCC, which allowed ensuring systematical data collection, wide scale of survey and its representativeness as well as reliability and comparability of data.

2. Theoretical assumptions of the research

In 1987 the Brutland Report presented the most widely recognized definition of sustainable development. It resulted in sustainable development being implied as equilibrium between its three pillars: economic, social and environmental. “Agenda 21 for Culture” was the first document advocating connection of cultural development with sustainable development. This first attempt to consider contributions of culture to the three other pillars paved the path for further establishment of culture as a self-standing fourth pillar.
In the role of autonomous dimension of sustainable development culture is understood as a set of specific activities involving heritage, using specialized skills and leading to the creation of symbols, goods and services (Greffe, 2012). When economic, social and environmental perspectives are considered, cultural heritage appears as a potential source of employment, confidence-generation, social capital, cultural diversity, energy savings, etc. Though this qualitative concept of culture and cultural heritage is sometimes assumed as narrow and limited (Dessein, 2015), it enables evaluation of quality as well as development of indicators for assessing the effects of a particular practice or program.

The term “cultural heritage” encompasses tangible as well as intangible cultural assets. According to UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, apart from monuments and collections of objects, cultural heritage also includes inherited traditions or living expressions, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts (Convention…, 2003).

Since traditional craftsmanship is recognized as one of the domains where intangible cultural heritage is manifested, it has to be addressed with respective safeguarding measures. These measures are aimed at ensuring viability of the heritage, through its continuous practice, ongoing creation and re-creation, maintenance of the process of heritage production, knowledge and skills transmission to succeeding generations (Convention…, 2003). Safeguarding measures along with its multiple interactions were organized into a model by F. Proschan (2007) (Fig. 1).

According to this model, competent bodies or institutions, established to safeguard cultural heritage, including traditional crafts, should implement five main measures:

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Fig. 1. UNESCO model of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage

Revitalization Revival

Practice Creation Maintaining Transmission

Transmission Dissemination

Preservation Protection

Research Documenting Inventorying

Promotion Presentation Recognition

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• measure of *revitalization*, which means reactivating, restoring and strengthening of traditional craft practices that are vulnerable, threatened and in need of safeguarding;

• measure of *research, documenting and inventorying*, presupposing systematic investigation of traditional craft history, meanings, aesthetic features, social, cultural and economic functions, practice, etc., and recording crafts in tangible forms as well as collecting documents that relate to it;

• measure of *promotion, presentation and recognition*, which covers promoting awareness of traditional crafts, increasing its visibility through presentation in the mass media, performances and official cultural institutions;

• measure of *preservation and protection*, encompassing all efforts to maintain continuity in the practice of traditional crafts over time and deliberate measures to defend crafts or particular elements from threat;

• and measure of *transmission and dissemination*, which means passing on of knowledge and skills in traditional forms (from master to discipline, from teacher to pupil) or spreading it outside of a community.

Only proper implementation of all above mentioned measures ensure a constant and continuous process of safeguarding cultural heritage.

3. Methods

In the Lithuanian Programme of national heritage products preservation, development of its market and development of crafts for the years 2012–2020, establishment of TCC was foreseen as a gradual process, starting with five centers being founded in 2012 and reaching eighteen centers in 2020 (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės…, 2011). TCC could have been founded exclusively under the measure “Village renewal and development” of Lithuanian Rural Development Programme 2007–2013 by the local municipalities, using the so called planning approach, or by the local action groups (LAGs), using Leader approach. According to the information, provided by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, 20 TCC were established by the municipalities until 2015. On the other hand, there was no publicly available statistics on the number of centers, established solely by the LAGs, at the moment of survey. Therefore, one of the prime objectives of the survey was to determine the exact number of TCC in Lithuania.

Structural interview was conducted from October to November 2015. In order to ensure the higher representativeness of the survey, interview questionnaire was sent to 20 municipalities mentioned above and to all 51 LAGs operating in Lithuania. Fully completed questionnaires were received from 18 craft centers, founded by the municipalities, and 23 LAGs, which founded 28 centers. Municipalities of Kalvarija and Ignalina founded three centers each and municipality of Vilkaviškis founded two centers, however LAGs operating in the indicated municipalities fulfilled three questionnaires overall. The rest of 28 LAGs were reported not to found any TCC. So, in aggregate, 41 centers constituted a final sample of the survey.
Most of the interview questions were designated to investigate, whether TCC were implementing activities related to safeguarding cultural heritage. Safeguarding measures, outlined in the UNESCO model, were operationalized into activities carried out by centers in order to define rather abstract concept of measure and allow it to be quantified (Fig. 3).

As it was mentioned earlier, heritage safeguarding measures are highly related, intertwined and interacting, what makes a separate activity of TCC in many cases corresponding with more than one measure.

Respondents were also asked to conduct a self-evaluation on the quality of implementation of these activities. To provide some context for the results of interview and enable a more thorough analysis, an additional question about obstacles, which prevent TCC from safeguarding traditional crafts more actively, was included.

4. Results

According to survey results, a quantitative goal, set in the Lithuanian Programme of national heritage products preservation, development of its market and development of crafts for the years 2012–2020, was greatly exceeded in 2015: instead of 12 TCC, there were 48 centers founded altogether (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriaus-
In the territory of at least seven municipalities there were two or more TCC founded.

Such a great number of TCC founded in the recent years and a rather high concentration on a municipality level was questionable. First of all, it put in question the effectiveness of founding more than one craft center in the territory of a municipality, and choosing competition instead of cooperation and resource pooling. Moreover, it raised doubts about the influence of such multiplicity on the vitality of TCC and successful implementation of all measures they had been appointed with. For this reason, craft centers, established by the municipalities, were further surveyed and evaluated separately from ones, established by the LAGs.

Survey results also showed that most of the interviewed TCC, established under the planning approach, were reported to allow production of national heritage and development of traditional crafts (Fig. 4). These centers created 52 jobs for traditional craftsmen and 30 jobs for administration personnel. Only two centers did not create any jobs since they were just starting operating at the moment of survey. Share of TCC implementing the first activity was almost identical among craft centers, founded under the Leader approach (Fig. 4). On the other hand, increase in the number of centers of the second origin did not increase the number of jobs – only 41 jobs for traditional craftsmen and 10 jobs for administration personnel were created. Similarly as in the first case, one center did not create any jobs because it was not operating at the moment of survey.

Fig. 3. Share of TCC, implementing activities corresponding with UNESCO safeguarding measures
Comparison of two types of TCC also showed that centers, established by the municipalities, implemented the first activity better (81 per cent compared to 72 per cent) (Fig. 5).

The share of interviewed centers, allowing presentation and selling of national heritage products, was similar for both types (Fig. 4). On the other hand, results on the quality of this activity implementation varied significantly by the type of centers. Centers, implementing it well or very well, accounted for 71 per cent of centers, established by the municipalities and reported to carry out the latter activity, while in the case of centers, established by the LAGs, it accounted only for 47 per cent. Moreover, the latter centers were frequently reported to implement the second activity poorly (Fig. 6).

![Fig. 4. TCC distribution according to the assessment of activity “Allowing production of national heritage products and development of traditional crafts” implementation](image-url)
The share of centers, providing training and consulting for traditional craftsmen, was rather low in both types of TCC (Fig. 4). The quality of implementation was usually evaluated as “moderate”, but in total craft centers, founded by the municipalities, appeared to implement this activity better.

The majority of all TCC, established under the Leader approach, organized educational sessions (Fig. 4). The quality of implementation of the fourth activity was usually evaluated as “well” and “very well” by centers of both origins (around 75 per cent).

Relative to other activities, the least share of TCC of both origins organized historiographic and ethnic culture researches (Fig. 4). The most frequent evaluation of activity implementation was “well” and “very well” – around 60 per cent in both cases.

Frequency of implementation of the sixth activity - collecting and publishing information about certified national heritage products and producers – revealed the most significant gap between the two types of TCC. The share of centers, founded by the municipalities, exceeded nearly twice the share of centers, founded by the LAGs (Fig. 4). The same tendency was observed in the quality of implementation, with 71 per cent of centers, established by the municipalities, and just 25 per cent of centers, established by the LAGs, characterizing it as “well” or “very well” (Fig. 6). The majority of the latter type of centers was reported to implement the sixth activity poorly.
The share of interviewed TCC, organizing lectures, conferences and exhibitions, did not vary significantly by the type of origin (Fig. 4). On the other hand, centers, established by the municipalities, tended to implement this activity well and very well more frequently than centers, established by the LAGs (71 per cent and 47 per cent respectively) (Fig. 7).
Survey data analysis showed that the most frequently implemented activities by both types of TCC were organizing educational sessions and allowing production of national heritage products and development of traditional crafts. The majority of centers were reported to allow presentation and selling of national heritage products and organize lectures, conferences and exhibitions. The least implemented activities – organizing historiographic and ethnic culture researches as well as providing training and consulting for traditional craftsmen. TCC, established under the Leader approach, were also very inactive in collecting and publishing information about certified national heritage products and producers.

Results of self-evaluation by TCC revealed that the most frequently implemented activities were also the most qualitatively implemented ones by centers of both origins. TCC, founded by the municipalities, usually implemented activities well or very well, with the lowest quality in organization of events. At the same time, four out of seven activities were implemented moderately and poorly (in aggregate) by TCC, founded by the LAGs. Collecting and publishing of information as well as providing of training and consulting were the most challenging for the centers of this origin.

In general, TCC implemented measures, related to safeguarding traditional crafts and outlined in the UNESCO model, rather actively in Lithuania. On the other hand, craft centers did not sufficiently implement research and documenting as well as revitalization, i.e. measures, which require specialized knowledge, skills and resources. This was particularly apparent in the case of TCC, established by the LAGs. Therefore, the process of safeguarding traditional crafts cannot be considered as wholly continuous but rather partly fragmented, since not all measures were implemented properly.

Reasons for fragmented process of safeguarding cultural heritage was provided by the very centers during the interview. The most common obstacles, preventing TCC from involving in the process of safeguarding more actively, were reported as follows:

- lack of funds for maintenance of employees and material base as well as purchase of raw materials;
- lack of human resources, in particular, with entrepreneurial skills;
- low demand for handicrafts and weak marketing;
- absence of tax concessions for national heritage creators;
- lack of publicity of TCC activities.

A slight distinction between different types of centers in the frequency of activities implementation and a more evident difference in its quality, at least partially validate the assumption about the negative impact of high number of TCC on its effectiveness. The distinction can alternatively be explained by a more solid foundation which is common to TCC, established under the planning approach, since they operate as divisions of local museums or cultural centers with a long-term experience in preserving cultural heritage.
5. Conclusions

1. Viability of traditional crafts, as an attribute of sustainable rural development and vitality, must be ensured through its continuous revitalization, research and documenting, promotion and presentation, protection as well as transmission.

2. 48 TCC, founded in Lithuania until 2015, rather actively and qualitatively implemented its role of safeguarding traditional crafts. The most frequently and qualitatively implemented activities were related to the promotion and presentation, preservation and transmission of traditional crafts in rural areas. On the other hand, activities, related to research and documenting as well as revitalization, were not fulfilled sufficiently by TCC, which indicates a lack of specialized skills and knowledge along with demand for cooperation with researchers and consultants. It also revealed that the process of safeguarding traditional crafts was not continuous but rather partly fragmented.

3. The gap between two types of TCC, distinguished during the research, was identified. Relative to centers, founded under the planning approach, centers, established under the Leader approach, implemented safeguarding activities less frequently and less qualitatively. It partially confirms a negative impact of high number of TCC on its effectiveness, and a more proper ground of the first type centers to carry out safeguarding measures.

4. The most common obstacles, preventing TCC from safeguarding cultural heritage more actively, were related to the lack of financial and human resources, low demand for handicrafts together with weak marketing, absence of tax concessions and lack of visibility of TCC activities. In response to the latter problems, it is recommended to improve management of TCC, with particular attention being paid to the training of human resources, improving marketing and raising the publicity of centers activities. In order to increase its financial resources, TCC are recommended to search for and implement European Union or state funded projects.

5. In the new programming period 2014–2020 financial support for TCC development should be differentiated in favor of centers, operating solely in the territory of municipality or on the basis of resource-pulling. All assistance, provided by the government, should be addressed to promote cooperation between TCC, in particular, between those, operating in the same municipality. A possibility to consolidate the latter centers should be considered.

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TRADICINIŲ AMATŲ CENTRŲ VAIDMENS SAUGANT KULTŪROS PAVELDĄ ĮGYVENDINIMAS

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