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# Safeguarding Threads

## Inscriptions on the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage and their Impact on Rural Communities in Vojvodina

TATJANA BUGARSKI

### Abstract:

By analysing two elements that are inscribed in the National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Serbia, this article examines the impact of an ICH inscription on rural communities. The first example is the craft of weaving the Stapar carpets/kilims, which has been preserved among the female population of the village of Stapar, Province of Vojvodina (Northern Serbia). The second example is naive Slovak painting, which encompasses the knowledge and skills of self-taught painters – members of the Slovak minority in Serbia, mainly in the Banat region. Both inscriptions encompass economic and political objectives: from creating jobs to gaining international recognition. Since the inscription, a growing difference in the understanding of these elements and some “loose threads” between the bearers, institutions, local authorities, and heritage experts have emerged. The paper focuses on the implementation of safeguarding plans and how the relationships between the stakeholders and the different definitions of risk and conservation measures affect the process.

*Keywords:* *intangible cultural heritage, Vojvodina, rural regions, weaving, naïve painting practices, cultural identities*

Rural regions have undergone major demographic and economic changes over the last decades, and cultural heritage is regarded as a resource that offers hope for progress. In the 14 years since the beginning of the implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in Serbia, and the twelve years since the formation of the National Register, 63 elements have been inscribed in the Register. More than 20 elements are actively practised as part of the living heritage in Vojvodina, a province in the north of Serbia. It is evident that over the course of several years since the inscription, there have been various changes in the relationships and roles of stakeholders, differences in the definition of risks and safeguarding measures, and motivations for involvement in safeguarding. This has led to innovative approaches to safeguarding measures

in the communities. Recognising the process of safeguarding of ICH as an important mechanism for strengthening their communities, the bearers adjusted to the changing conditions by altering their roles and positions in the network of stakeholders, advocating for their perspectives and interests.

The paper will focus on examples of two elements: the carpet (kilim) weaving in the village of Stapar in Bačka, and the Slovak naive painting from Kovačica in the Banat region. Local communities are connected to both elements in various ways. Due to the skills and products of local weavers and painters, both places are well-known to the wider public for their specific and recognisable products. In this way, the practice of these crafts and arts is intertwined with the lives of many people in both places. I have conducted interviews with stakeholders and analysed media reports and the results of funding bids from state and provincial authorities. Although I am a regional coordinator for this region, these two elements had already been inscribed before I was appointed to that position. I have been working as a part of the National network for ICH as a regional coordinator for the Province of Vojvodina since late 2019, just before the pandemic. At first, I mostly worked on new nominations, as the work with communities was very limited, but recently I started working on elements that had been inscribed in the National Register years ago. In this way, the research was conducted from the position of a dual role as a researcher and a professional involved in the work of a national network for the preservation of intangible heritage. This position also implies the role of an intermediary between local communities and the heritage management bureaucracy with its own conceptualisations of heritage. Recognising the contradictions and paradoxes that accompany the already complex concept of ICH, the purpose of this paper was to show how these rural communities were able to utilise heritage as a resource. How did different actors and stakeholders direct and coordinate their activities in the process of safeguarding registered heritage elements and why did disagreements arise? What transformations occurred in the processes of identifying their cultural elements as registered intangible heritage?

## Intangible Cultural Heritage in Vojvodina

Vojvodina has the status of an autonomous province within the Republic of Serbia. It consists of three major geographical areas: Srem, Banat, and Bačka, which are separated by the Danube and Tisza rivers. According to the latest census of 2022, 1.7 million people live in Vojvodina. The area of today's Vojvodina is characterised by a long history of numerous and diverse migration processes, which has led to the province being an ethnically diverse region. Over 70 per cent of the population is of Serbian nationality, Hungarians make up about 10 per cent of the total population of Vojvodina, while the rest are Slovaks, Croats, Roma, Romanians, Ruthenians, and more than 20 other nationalities. In addition to the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet, the Hungarian, Slovak, Croatian, Romanian, and Ruthenian languages and their scripts are in official use, in accordance with the law. There

are cultural institutions established and financed by the provincial government and local authorities, including institutions dedicated to minority cultures, such as institutes for the culture of national minorities. In addition to funding from ministries and other republican bodies, institutions and associations involved in the safeguarding of living heritage also receive funding from provincial secretariats. However, there is no additional form of heritage management that would provide an intangible heritage system that is better adapted to the specificities of this province.

The system for safeguarding the ICH was established in accordance with the experiences and guidelines of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which has been ratified by Serbia in 2010.<sup>1</sup> The institutional framework for the systematic and organised safeguarding of ICH in Serbia was established through a network of expert bodies, including the National Committee for the Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia, the Commission for Inclusion in the National List, the network of regional coordinators, and the Center for the Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade. Regional coordinators collaborate with bearers and local communities towards identifying the ICH elements and implementing safeguarding measures. A regional coordinator “conducts activities to find and identify elements of ICH and helps establish cooperation between communities, groups, individuals, experts, professional centers and research institutes in order to collect, document, archive and preserve heritage data.”<sup>2</sup> The National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage was formed in 2012 and, since then, it has been based at the Center for the Intangible Heritage.<sup>3</sup>

The National Register includes elements that are mainly found in one part or the entire area of Vojvodina, and those whose distribution is characteristic of other parts of Serbia, as well as for the neighbouring countries, as a result of frequent and numerous migrations. In total, more than half of the elements included in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage are found in Vojvodina.<sup>4</sup> Some of them are also included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Many elements of the intangible heritage that are present in Vojvodina have developed as part of the common heritage of the various ethnic, religious,

1 Bendix, Regina; Eggert, Aditya; Peselmann, Arnika (eds.): *Heritage Regimes and the State*. Göttingen 2013 (Göttingen Studies in Cultural Property, 6); Kuutma, Kristin: Inside the UNESCO Apparatus. From Intangible Representations to Tangible Effects. In: Natsuko Akagawa, Laurajane Smith (eds.): *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage. Practices and Politics*. London 2019, pp. 68–83.

2 <https://nkns.rs/cyr/mreza-regionalnih-koordinatora>, 3. 2. 2024.

3 Filipović, Danijela: *Нематеријално културно наслеђе Србије. Intangible cultural heritage of Serbia – Le patrimoine culturel immatériel de la Serbie*. Belgrade 2022, p. 5.

4 Among the elements registered during the previous years are: slava – celebration of family saint patron's day, Kosovo-style embroidery, singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle, groktalica singing, traditional folk dance Kolo, playing the bagpipes, ojkača singing, Easter ritual of guarding Jesus Christ's tomb, St. George customs, šljivovica – social practices and knowledge related to the preparation and use of the traditional plum spirit, coppersmith's trade, cipovka – knowledge and skill of preparing traditional bread in Vojvodina, Bezdan damask – the art of hand weaving, Vertep, and numerous other elements from the National Register.

and linguistic groups living in these areas. At the same time, some of these elements are currently part of the cultural identity of certain communities, while in other communities they are largely forgotten, for example parts of the ritual practice connected with the Easter holidays – dousing on the second and third days of Easter. These customs were widespread in most communities in the recent past, whether they were Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant, but only some of them still practice them as part of the Easter holiday celebrations. Among Serbs, this custom was abandoned in the second half of the 20th century and is now forgotten, while among Catholics (Hungarians, Croats, Bunjevci), Protestants (Slovaks) and Greek Catholics (Ruthenians) it is often emphasised as a symbol of identity and presented in the form of folklore stage performances. It is similar with some types of food traditions, both everyday and ritual. With such elements, it is more difficult to identify the communities where this heritage is cherished in the process of documenting and nominating intangible heritage elements, as well as its importance among the bearers themselves. Access to such elements requires wider, systematic research and closer cooperation of the stakeholders with research institutions and museums from the very beginning of work on their identification.

### **Naive Slovak Painting / Naïve painting Practices of Kovačica: Actors and Dynamics in the Heritage-Making Process**

The element of Naive Slovak painting / Naïve painting practices of Kovačica encompasses the painting knowledge and skills of painters – members of the Slovak ethnic community in Serbia, mainly in the municipality of Kovačica, but also in other villages and towns in Vojvodina predominantly inhabited by Slovaks. One of the basic characteristics of this naive painting is a distinctive style of expression based on motifs from the rural environment and the everyday life of the painters. The artistic expression determined by the rural environment and Slovak folk tradition is particularly typical of the older generations of artists, while the works of younger artists, exposed to the influence of life in more urbanised areas with extensive social communication, also include modern motifs. Although this artistic expression was known to the general public and to artistic circles as Kovačica painting or the Kovačica school of naive painting, the element was nominated and inscribed as “Naive painting of Slovaks”. The reason for this was probably to emphasise the importance of this practice for the cultural identity of the entire Slovak minority in Serbia. The nominators were the International Ethno Center Babka fund from Kovačica and the Municipality of Kovačica.

The Slovak population in Serbia lives mainly in Vojvodina, Serbia's northern province, and most of the Slovak cultural and educational institutions and organisations are located in the Bačka region (the Museum of Vojvodina Slovaks, the Jan Kolar gymnasium – the only gymnasium in Serbia with a high school educational programme in the Slovak language, the Institute for the Culture of Slovaks in Vojvodina, the National Council of the Slovak National Minority and most of

the media in the Slovak language). On the other hand, along with galleries, art festivals, and painters, naive painting is the most recognisable cultural feature of the Slovaks living in the Banat region and the municipality of Kovačica.

The element was inscribed in the National Register as soon as it had been formed. The painting and the painters were already internationally recognised – the peak of their popularity was in the 1970s and 1980s. From the very beginning of the organised work on the safeguarding of ICH, the goal of the nominators and the most active stakeholders, accepted by others – painters and the wider community –, was to increase international recognition and the inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage inscribed Naïve painting practices of Kovačica in December 2024. The nomination for the Representative List required additional work to develop safeguarding plans and measures, as well as additional research and work with the community, which was undertaken over the past year. This programme has been led by the Center for the Intangible Cultural Heritage and I have been involved to a lesser extent. The initiative for the nomination originated in the community itself and one of the main goals was to reconcile different ideas about what should be done to safeguard these practices. In this way, I was involved in the process of determining whether the practice met certain criteria for nomination.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the conditions under which the entire nomination process takes place are largely defined, as well as the relationship between the actors in the entire process. One of the necessary prerequisites is that the nomination is written with the widest possible participation of the nominees, with their free, prior, and informed consent, so on this occasion it was necessary to conduct additional interviews to ensure that these conditions were met.

These interviews revealed differences in the understanding of certain aspects of this element between the nominees and the experts who led the nomination process. When listing the safeguarding measures taken in the past, the representatives of the community emphasised the exhibitions and projects held abroad, in the Slovak Republic, France, Belgium, and other countries. They also mentioned workshops for schoolchildren of diplomats in Belgrade, the Serbian capital, as important educational activities. On the other hand, heritage experts pointed out that the nomination form should pay more attention to community-based programs, educational programs, and the involvement of community members in organising exhibitions, festivals, and other activities related to naive painting. The painters' exhibitions in their local communities always have a festive character, with traditional music and

<sup>5</sup> The criteria for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity are: “R.1 The element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention. R.2 Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage, encouraging dialogue, reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity. R.3 Elaborated safeguarding measures for protecting and promoting the element. R.4 The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent. R.5 The element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage of submitting State(s) Party(ies)”, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/procedure-of-inscription-00809>, 31. 1. 2025.

costumes, while neighbours, family, and friends prepare traditional food. I realised the importance of community involvement and its recognition a few years ago in Novi Sad when we organised the exhibition of the late Jan Bačur, a member of the older generation, in the Museum of Vojvodina. The exhibition was well organised, but I remember the painter's disappointment at the somewhat cold atmosphere of the museum, which was completely different from what he was used to. There was a rich programme on the opening day, including a performance by children from the painter's hometown, who sang traditional songs while dressed in folk costumes, which is common at the opening of exhibitions of naive painters from Kovačica. But when I compared the videos of the exhibition opening in his hometown of Padina with our exhibition in Novi Sad, the difference caused by the lack of community audience participation was obvious. The positive effect of this was that we understood the importance of community involvement for this element of ICH as a whole.

The second example relates to the process of obtaining letters of consent (that is, consent of communities). The community representatives would collect and deliver letters from ambassadors, ministers, and European officials confirming the importance of this way of painting, but not from the members of the community, explaining their involvement and their connection to the element. Therefore, in further interviews and meetings we tried to find the balance between the obvious wish of the community to emphasise the number and importance of international exhibitions and positive criticism from the international public and officials in high places, and the criteria according to which, in accordance with the Ethical Principles for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>6</sup> and in the spirit of the Convention, the focus of the nomination should be on the importance of the element within the community itself. In one interview, a painter, who is also involved in the work of the most active gallery, was very excited when talking about her exhibition in Japan. She talked about how the Japanese audience spent a lot of time looking at her paintings, paying attention to the details, and how they could understand her paintings of life in her village, even though they came from a very different culture. This proved to me that she felt that the potential for intercultural dialogue was a very important characteristic of her painting as part of the ICH. As a member of a minority, speaking a different language, and even living on the margins within her minority, her paintings can speak, be understood, and appreciated all over the world – and that is an important characteristic of elements inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, in accordance to ensure “visibility and awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage”, to promote “dialogue” and to represent “cultural diversity”.<sup>7</sup> This has been important for the Kovačica naive painting from the very beginning. The most famous painter, Zuzana Halupová, created many paintings for humanitarian causes, and one of her paintings was printed as a UNICEF Christmas

6 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/ethics-and-ich-00866>, 31. 1. 2025.

7 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/procedure-of-inscription-00809>, 31. 1. 2025.

card when the tradition of sending cards was flourishing, and this is the heritage that today's bearers are very proud of.

The promotion of naive painting in Kovačica has led to greater participation of women in public life. Being a painter involves travelling to exhibitions in Serbia and abroad, which had previously not been a part of life of women from small towns and villages. Women now participate in receptions held at embassies and other official events, they are present in the media and are affiliated to various organizations. Women who take up painting now find it easier to make changes in their lives because other community members are aware of the accompanying obligations. The acceptance of painting as a characteristic of culture and its impact on the lives of many people in Kovačica and other places has led to changes in the attitudes and position of women in the community. Since this is a multi-generational process, lasting several decades and much longer than the period during which this element was inscribed on the national list, it is difficult to assess how the inscription into the National Register itself brought changes to the lives of the residents of Kovačica and other settlements where this painting is practised.

## Rug-Making in Stapar: Adaptability in the Safeguarding Process

Rug-making in Stapar was inscribed in the National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2016. Rugs, or kilims (ćilim), were prized possessions that had great symbolic value in traditional households, and there are very rich museum collections of kilims woven in Vojvodina, including Stapar, the village known for its kilim weaving tradition. Even though kilim weaving has long been a part of rural traditions and cottage industry, the influence of the Central European textile industry on this craft can be traced back to as early as the mid-19th century. Production was modernised, wide looms were introduced that could weave entire rugs, whereas previously the rugs had been woven in two parts, and there was also a change in ornamentation, where new motifs, colour arrangements, and other features were introduced: "Modernized production, arrival of new aesthetical standards, primarily for the wealthy classes, in the second half of the 19th century, culminated around the year 1900 when home weaving was abandoned in some local ethnic communities. Projects involving village weavers untouched by acculturative processes have led to a revival of home weaving in some communities, by means of the introduction of home industry."<sup>8</sup>

After the expansion in the early decades, the middle of the 20th century brought about stagnation in kilim production in Vojvodina, including Stapar. Even though I was not familiar with textile traditions, I was surprised to learn the knowledge that the element of rug-making in Stapar had been inscribed in the National Register. However, it turned out that during the previous years, a series of trainings and workshops had been organised by an organisation that promotes

8 Idvorean Stefanović, Bratislava: Old weaves and forgotten interlaces: exhibition. Novi Sad 2014, p. 7.

handicrafts and teaches local women how to weave kilims using old techniques. Seeing how the rugs have endured as symbols of local cultural identity in Stapar, this skill was quickly adopted and developed in a new, modern form. However, the way in which kilim-making in Stapar currently endures in this environment is somewhat different from what was envisaged in the nomination and the planned safeguarding measures. The nomination form describes the element as the “craft of making the Stapar *kilims*, which are, along with the Pirot *kilims*, the most famous native Serbian rugs was developed in the context of local handicraft activities in the village of Stapar, in Bačka, in north-western Vojvodina, in the 18th century. The Stapar carpets are usually woven in pairs, on specific wide horizontal looms. [...] They are made of white or beige thread, less commonly green, and reach two by two meters in size. The craft of weaving the Stapar carpets has been preserved by the local community primarily as part of the heritage transferred among the female population of the village of Stapar.”<sup>9</sup> After the revitalization of this weaving technique in the village of Stapar, this skill has come to life in a certain way, adapting it to the current conditions in Stapar and the skills and capabilities of its practitioners.

Several years after the inscription on the National List, many positive effects have been noticed in the community itself, but even more so among the weavers, who cultivate their work, present it at various fairs, gatherings, and during official visits of politicians to their village, and who collaborate with local schools and receive recognition and praise for their work. They also collaborate with the local museum, where they have organised an exhibition. Their work is well known and sometimes serves as an inspiration to younger designers, especially fashion designers. Furthermore, the public has become familiar with their interpretation of the Stapar kilim-making, rather than that of textile industry experts and officials, ministries, and others. The inscription on the list has ensured the transfer of weaving skills and craftsmanship, as well as the preservation of awareness of the importance of kilim weaving for cultural identity, although it has not contributed to the revitalization of kilim-making in a strictly traditional sense, which was the aim of the inscription, most likely due to the lack of market demand and financial gain for the weavers. They know what would be necessary to completely revitalise all aspects of the weaving tradition, including the acquisition of traditional raw materials (wool from a breed of sheep that is no longer reared), but they are also aware that they cannot achieve this with their current capacities. By finding the right balance suitable for themselves, they have managed to make their activities sustainable and pass them on to future generations. Their work and activities are in line with the community, the available resources, and their own skills. This was a starting point for the development of further activities. The initiatives that came from the community itself were more successful because they had the support from the local population, the municipality, the province, and the Ministry of Culture. Using the existing funding for rural women’s associations, as well as contests

9 <https://nkns.rs/en/popis-nkns/rug-making-stapar>, 3. 2. 2024.

created with the aim of safeguarding ICH, the members of the association were able to secure a venue in the centre of the village.

Looking back at the nomination of this element and the safeguarding measures that were developed at the time of its nomination, we can now see that certain aspects have played out differently than planned. The initiative for the inscription came from an external actor – the Ethno-network association, which promotes home craftsmanship and networks associations and individuals practising this craft. However, thanks to its experience in working with women's and rural associations producing handicraft items, this association in turn recognised the potential of this particular community to safeguard this element: first of all, the importance these rugs have as a symbol of cultural identity in Stapar; secondly, the nomination itself was based on other, different registered practices that are nurtured in other communities, and therefore the nomination dossier emphasised certain elements that are not as important when it comes to the Stapar kilim-making. Also, it was based on an almost extinct tradition, but it did not imply its revitalisation – only the revitalisation of parts of the technique and some ornaments, mainly the rose, which can be seen on newer kilims, from the first half of the 20th century and was imported in the later phases of the development of the kilim, but for the bearers – the weavers – the rose is the definitive symbol of the Stapar kilims.

Expectations and implementation have led to numerous misunderstandings among stakeholders and officials, including government ministries. As I later found out, the nomination process and the concept of ICH was not fully transparent and clear to some weavers, even though they were involved in the process. In addition, at one point it appeared in the media that a top-down initiative had been launched, which was in fact poorly designed and not in accordance with the concept of safeguarding ICH.<sup>10</sup>

One of the bearers of this element is the Stapar Rose organisation, named after the best-known ornament on the Stapar kilims and, according to them, their main characteristic. The organisation is very active and, in addition to weaving, takes part in numerous projects, including weaving colonies, staging exhibitions, and co-operating with schools. The heritage bearers have successfully combined different approaches to its safeguarding and adapted them to their needs. The organisation's activities, media statements, and promotion of the Stapar kilim-making emphasise the material features of the kilims and their craft, as well as the rose symbol, which is the dominant and the most recognisable motif they place on all of their products. According to them, the rose is a motif characteristic of all the kilims found in the households of their village and they try to incorporate it into modern weavings as accurately as possible, adhering to the rule that each flower is woven in at least three colours, while the leaves surrounding it are woven in two colours. The focus on tangibility has facilitated the instrumentalisation of weaving as a heritage. This makes their work recognisable, and the aim shifts from producing a large tradi-

<sup>10</sup> [www.rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/kultura/pirotski-staparski-i-sjenicko-pesterski-cilim-upisati-na-listu-svetske-kulturne-bastine\\_1079224.html](http://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/kultura/pirotski-staparski-i-sjenicko-pesterski-cilim-upisati-na-listu-svetske-kulturne-bastine_1079224.html), 30. 1. 2025.

tional kilim, which would require a lot of time and labour and would be harder to sell, to using traditional techniques to produce recognisable products that are usually sold as souvenirs. Recent projects for which the association received funds in regular annual calls of the Ministry of Culture and the Provincial Secretariat for Culture for the funding projects to safeguard living heritage, also focus on the weaving and use of characteristic bags to carry a special cake on important festive occasions, which are also considered part of the cultural identity of this village. In this way, this element also helps to raise awareness of the importance of ICH and the participation of the wider community in these projects, not just the weavers.

## The Significance of Intangible Cultural Heritage for Local Communities?

Over the last few decades, rural regions have undergone significant changes: shrinking societies, ageing populations, economic crisis, and cultural heritage is seen as a source of hope for creating resilience and revitalising peripheral communities and villages.<sup>11</sup> Although economic progress is always at the centre of stories about the importance of safeguarding ICH in rural areas, there are no mechanisms to ensure this. In fact, there are numerous projects and support programmes that are used by the bearers, but they are created in advance, not based on the bearers' actual requirements. As a result, their use and reach are limited.

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognises five domains of living heritage: oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship. However, many of the elements of living heritage are tightly linked to one another and simultaneously belong to different domains, implying more complex meanings in the life of communities. As one of the starting premises for its adoption, the Convention states "the importance of the intangible cultural heritage as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development".<sup>12</sup> The link between ICH and sustainable development lies primarily in their intersectional nature. On the one hand, ICH can encompass activities belonging to different sectors outside of culture, in terms of public administration and governance: health, agriculture, human rights, education, tourism, and others.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, it also means that the process of safeguarding ICH requires an interdisciplinary approach, research, and work with

11 Trummer, Manuel; Uhlig, Mirko: Intangible Heritage as a Factor of Cultural Resilience in Rural Areas of Germany. In: Christoph Wulf (Hg.): *Handbook on Intangible Cultural Practices as Global Strategies for the Future. Twenty Years of the UNESCO Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Cham 2024, S. 539–559.

12 Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>, 5. 3. 2024.

13 Blake, Janet: Further Reflections on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. In: Natsuko Akagawa, Laurajane Smith (eds.): *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage. Practices and Politics*. London 2019, pp. 17–35, here p. 21.

different local actors.<sup>14</sup> Cultural heritage has been identified as a resource for rural development in legal documents, such as the Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2014 to 2024. Although ICH is not mentioned in the Strategy, “Rich cultural heritage” and “Preservation of traditional knowledge and technologies” are listed as opportunities for rural development, without any further explanation or elaboration on how this could be implemented, nor were any specific possibilities discussed. However, insufficient use of cultural heritage is identified as a weakness of the agricultural sector and rural development, and innovative ways of using the potential of cultural heritage and biodiversity are recognised as development opportunities.<sup>15</sup>

The values of the ICH and the safeguarding measures, as conceptualised within the ICH-paradigm, are primarily defined by the community itself. In our examples, the activities of the bearers have contributed to their concepts prevailing, rather than the authorised heritage discourse. However, at first glance, it is possible to interpret certain community activities and attitudes as the result of state intervention. In the case of naive painting, this may refer to a community-initiated top-down approach, where the values attributed to naive painting in the community were interpreted and presented as the values of high-ranking officials, or where a kind of special value, recognised by outsiders, was attributed to painting, which was interpreted as an important feature of painting practices as a living heritage. Even though the values attributed to painting by outside observers are not necessary for the valorisation of living heritage, the bearers acknowledge them and proudly emphasise them.

The identification and description of Stapar kilim-making as an element of living heritage as well as the definition of safeguarding measures take place within a dynamic relationship between the tangible features of traditional (i.e. what the community members consider to be traditional) and modern weaving. In this process, the symbol of the rose and the skill of weaving this motif work as a bond with the craftsmanship of previous generations which included the crafting of larger and more complex pieces. In this way, the weavers have helped to strengthen their craft as a symbol of their local cultural identity by customizing the narrative of ICH to their capacities, their needs, and their environment. This paradigm shift is similar to what Laurajane Smith observed: “The emphasis on materiality, and the experiences it represents, is fundamentally different from a sense of heritage as oral tradition, skills and knowledge – simply because the sense of audience for these performances is so very different [...] Intangible heritage, such as oral histories and traditions, tend to address much smaller audiences as intimate performances

14 Gavrilović, Ljiljana; Đorđević, Ivan: Sjenički sir kao nematerijalno kulturno nasleđe: Antropološki pristup problemu. In: *Етноантрополошки проблеми / Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology*, n. s. 11/4 (2016), pp. 989–1004.

15 [www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2014/85/1](http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/strategija/2014/85/1), 27. 2. 2024.

of cultural continuity and identity creation".<sup>16</sup> The conceptualisation of heritage is thus linked to its instrumentalisation and is specific to individual stakeholders.

These examples have shown that the dynamics of stakeholder relations are directly linked to the dynamics of conceptualising an element, its key features, and safeguarding measures. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has argued that heritage is a form of cultural production created through metacultural operations.<sup>17</sup> The Convention and the Operational Directives clearly point that all safeguarding measures require the "free, prior and informed consent of the communities, groups, and, where appropriate, individuals concerned".<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the communities are not pre-defined but are determined individually for each element, which means first and foremost that they are bearers with an intergenerational transmission of the element and with the perspective that this heritage is an important aspect of their cultural identity. The communities are not homogeneous, hence community involvement in various aspects of safeguarding elements of ICH relates to different measures and different levels and types of participation.

The process of finding a place for individual communities within the heritage regime is interconnected with all aspects of intangible cultural heritage. The examples described in this paper show the importance of communication between stakeholders who have a role to play in the safeguarding of inscribed elements. What these elements have in common is the proportionately lower involvement of heritage experts in the activities that are carried out with the aim of safeguarding them. Although ethnologists and other heritage experts have been involved with these elements in the past, they have not had much impact on them and their life as registered elements. Most of the activities related to the design of safeguarding measures came from the community itself and from individuals from the community who were successful in organising them, albeit with the cooperation and participation of experts. The influence of these individuals from the community is quite significant, and often the bearers rely on them when it comes to future plans, applications for various funding bids, and other activities. While cooperation between communities, local authorities, and experts already exists and is producing results, further progress would require their stronger cooperation, and above all, a dialogue about needs and opportunities.

### **Zusammenfassung:**

An zwei Beispielen, die ins nationale Register des immateriellen Kulturerbes Serbiens eingetragen wurden, untersucht dieser Beitrag die Auswirkungen einer Kulturerbeauszeichnung auf die Gemeinschaften und Trägergruppen. Bei den Beispielen handelt

16 Smith, Laurajane: *The Uses of Heritage*. London 2006.

17 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara: *Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production*. In: *Museum International* 56 (2004), pp. 52–64.

18 UNESCO: *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 2024 Edition; Paris 2024, p. 31, [https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/2003\\_Convention\\_Basic\\_Texts\\_2024\\_version\\_EN.pdf](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/2003_Convention_Basic_Texts_2024_version_EN.pdf), 6. 2. 2025.

es sich um die Handwerkstechnik des Webens von Stapar-Teppichen/Kilims, die sich unter der weiblichen Bevölkerung des Dorfes Stapar erhalten hat, und um die naive slowakische Malerei, die das Wissen und die Fähigkeiten von autodidaktischen Malern – Angehörigen der slowakischen Minderheit in Serbien, hauptsächlich in der Region Banat – umfasst. Beide Einträge verfolgen wirtschaftliche und politische Ziele: von der Schaffung von Arbeitsplätzen bis zur internationalen Anerkennung. Seit der Aufnahme sind allerdings auch Probleme zwischen den Trägern, Institutionen, lokalen Behörden und Denkmalschutzexperten aufgetreten. Die Beziehungen zwischen den Trägern und der Allgemeinheit haben sich in verschiedener Hinsicht verändert.

*Keywords: immaterielles Kulturerbe, Vojvodina, ländliche Regionen, Weberei, Praktiken der naiven Malerei, kulturelle Identitäten*

