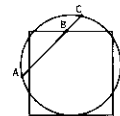# Heritage and Society

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First Steps Forward: Social Dimension of Heritage-related Projects in Belarus

Stsiapan Stureika
European Humanities University, Vilnius (Lithuania)

Introduction

During the last 20 years Belarus experienced an old, Soviet-style command-and-control approach to culture and heritage. While experts and active players from civil society sector observed best Western and Central-European cultural practices, they concentrated mostly on social or political issues. It seemed that political changes will push other sectors. However, after the disappointment in both protest-based and constructive political transformations, and the launching of Eastern Partnership with its instruments, it became obvious that the sphere of heritage is also a relevant place of focus, where positive social and cultural effects can be achieved in a calmer mode.

During the last 8 years several heritage projects with aims of societal development were implemented in Belarus. Now we need to analyse their first results. In this article I am going to examine the current situation and the outcomes of these pioneer projects.

Generally speaking, the overall situation can be characterised as the beginning of a shift in thinking on heritage. These changes are more likely if we can answer the following questions. Can grass-roots heritage initiatives[1] be vital and sustainable even in an adverse environment, without state support and with little public awareness? What is the role of external actors in establishing good practices? What kind of projects are the most demanded and what are the main problems of free growth?

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1   Here and further in the paper initiative is understood as a spontaneously developing group aimed at heritage-related action.

This article is based on the results of research on developing cultural heritage sector in Belarus done under the supervision of Culture and Creativity programme by the British Council, conducted from October 2016 to February 2017.

The purpose of my research was to provide an overview of the cultural heritage sector and to identify the most important areas of its development, taking into account both the latest European approaches to heritage and the interests of local actors.

One of the topics covered is the social potential of heritage in Belarus. In order to examine this domain, five questionnaires were developed for heritage experts, museum professionals, businessmen, public servants, and NGO activists working with heritage. Using these questionnaires, and within the framework of two research trips, more than 30 interviews were conducted in Minsk, Brest, Hrodna, Mstislau, Niasviž, and Ašmiany with public servants, heads and activists of NGOs and informal initiatives, directors and employees of museums, houses of culture and creativity, restorers, representatives of the tourism business and creative industries.

Theoretical Context

"Sustainability" and "participation" are two concepts relevant for examining the social dimension of culture today. Both pertain to specific communities.[2] Intellectuals and researchers, such as Gregory Ashworth,[3] Laurajane Smith,[4] David Brett,[5] Krzysztof Kowalski,[6] Rodney Harrison,[7] Dominique Poulot,[8] and Nathalie Heinich[9] are increasingly focusing on the need to move away from an expert-led model in monuments conservation

to the needs of specific local communities. Previously only professionals and experts (restorers, archaeologists, and art critics) could lead such communities. Interest in heritage was the prerogative of the social elite.

The new community-oriented rhetoric is increasingly appearing in international documents and expert speeches. The early indication of this turn was the adoption of The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2003. The document put communities in the center of the very heritage definition. The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society was signed in Faro, Portugal on 27 October 2005. Its main achievement was the introduction of the concept of "heritage community" linked with all types of heritage.[10] For the first time the right of communities to participate in heritage management was not just stated, but also enshrined. Communities have been also placed at the centre of the concept of cultural landscape. Thus, sustainability of cultural landscapes inevitably raises the issue of the participation of local residents.

Capacity building of heritage communities, sustainable development, social mobilisation, and inclusion through heritage – these words became key words for the new heritage thinking. However, since there was still a lack of practice, many of the statements looked more like declarations and ideology.

In recent years, new initiatives have already reached Eastern Europe. The Lviv City Council and the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in Germany are implementing a project to restore the balconies, doors, and windows of Lviv's historical houses with the participation of residents. Without the participation of local communities (even if they have to be re-identified for that purpose) the project cannot exist. Property owners pay 30% of the cost of work (the rest is sponsored by the German organisation) and the restoration is carried out by local artisans who have undergone training in Germany.[11]

2 For more details see Jacek Purchla, "Cultural Heritage and Social Capital," [in:] *The 1st Heritage Forum of Central Europe*, Jacek Purchla (ed.), Krakow 2012, pp. 71-77.

3 Gregory J. Ashworth, "From History to Heritage, from Heritage to Identity: In Search of Concepts and Models," [in:] *Building a New Heritage: Tourism, Culture and Identity in the New Europe*, Gregory J. Ashworth and Peter J. Larkham (eds.), London 1994, pp. 13-30.

4 Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, Routledge 2006.

5 David Brett, *The Construction of Heritage* (Irish Cultural Studies), Cork 1996.

6 Krzysztof Kowalski, *O istocie dziedzictwa europejskiego – rozważania*, Kraków 2013.

7 Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, Routledge 2013.

8 Dominique Poulot, "The Birth of Heritage: 'le moment Guizot,'" [in:] *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 11 (1988), pp. 40-56.

9 Natalie Heinich, "The Making of Cultural Heritage," [in:] *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no. 40-41 (2010-2011), pp. 119-128.

10 "Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005)," [in:] *Council of Europe*, https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMcontent?documentId=0900001680083746 (access: 20 March 2017).

11 Municipal Development and Restoration of the Old Part of Lviv City, "Programme for the Restoration of Doors," [in:] *Муніципальний розвиток та оновлення старої частини міста Львова*, http://www.urban-project.lviv.ua/ua/gtz-projects/

The key to communities' participation is the mechanism for accounting their positions.[12] A clear definition of the goal of their participation is required to create this mechanism, as well as both changing the principles of carrying out restoration projects and changing the principles of decision-making at the management level.

Improperly managed restoration can create conflicts between and within communities. Minimising costs and balancing interests is the task of development experts. Organising restoration based on principles of social inclusion is a demanding undertaking in terms of time and resources. However, this is the only way to implement social, economic, and other effects of heritage projects.

The Field: Actors of Heritage in Belarus
Cultural heritage in Eastern Europe is often a field of conflicts. While international experts in Europe or America debate on how to launch its cultural, social, economic, and even ecological potentials or how to use it as a tool for social inclusion, heritage, or rather monuments professionals in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia are occupying places behind institutional and discursive barricades.

There are at least five types of actors dealing with cultural heritage in Belarus:
1. "Historians," who create narrations of the past and produce an authorised heritage discourse (in Laurajane Smith's terminology).[13] They promote an ideology of compulsory and universal care of monuments ("they belong to all of us, everyone is responsible for them" – a typical marker of their discourse). They appeal to abstract ancestors who created something "for us" and argue for preservation of monuments for the benefit of descendants who "undoubtedly" appreciate it. They raise the alarm about the threat of danger and the need for renovation (sometimes it even seems that an unthreatened monument is simply a nonsense). They are absolutely convinced that judgements about restoration and preservation can only be made by professionals, and that all "amateurs" should step

out. It is they who pack heritage with particular meanings justified by "scientific truth" and present a certain set of values in preserved objects.
2. "Heritage activists," who convert their love toward their native cities into protest and expressions of alarm. As David Lowenthal jokes: "How many preservationists does it take to change a light bulb? [...] Four: one to change the bulb, one to document the event, and two to lament the passing of the old bulb."[14] They are ready to confront the system in order to prevent interventions into their comfort zone, their lovely historical quarters. Among the most characteristic features of their discourse are idealisation of everything lost, demonisation of modern architecture, permanent statements on the crisis of national culture, and regrets that there is nothing left to show to the tourists.

This discourse dates back at least 200 years. Probably its earliest expression can be found in Victor Hugo's *War on the Demolishers!* (1825–1832):

> While who knows what bastard edifices are being constructed at great cost (buildings that, with the ridiculous pretention of being Greek or Roman in France, are neither Roman nor Greek), other admirable and original structures are falling without anyone caring to be informed, whereas their only crime is that of being French by origin, by history, and by purpose."[15]

In Belarus, this discourse still remains in this above-cited "classical" form.
3. "Bureaucrats" or "officials" – a product of a technocratic attempt to process efficient heritage management in the age of modernity. These invent and establish rules, control their implementation and have power to penalise those who act outside of their limits. Officials are united in the system. Their most important characteristics are hierarchy, aspiration for expansion, control, and monopolisation of decision-making.

There are more than 20 various legislation acts on a national level that regulate preservation, renovation, and storing of various kinds of heritage. Sometimes officials are confused themselves by their regulations. For example, a high-quality restoration done without full official approval is illegal and inevitably will be fined. Also, the number of listed

restavraciya-pamyatok-architektury/programa-po-restavratsiyi-dverey (access: 12 April 2016).

12 Nico J.M. Nelissen (ed.), *Urban Renewal Participation Experiments: Heralds of a New Democracy?*, Maastricht 1982, p. 19.

13 Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, op. cit., pp. 29–34.

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14 David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge 2006, p. 11.

15 Victor Hugo, *Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo*, Paris 1864, pp. 279–287.

heritage sites in Belarus is growing: from 4,662 in 2008 to 5,527 in 2015 – a 15% rise in 6 years.[16] In the meantime, listing of the monuments also means restrictions of property rights.

4. "Preservation professionals, restorers," who, on the one hand, are the heralds of heritage ethics and stakeholders of main concepts such as authenticity or restoration, but, on the other, often just lobby for their own individualistic creative ambitions. However, they have learned how to legitimise themselves by the concept "scientific restoration" (quite problematic in itself). In Belarus, they believe simultaneously in the Venice Charter approaches and 19th-century belief that restoration is a return of some previous appearance. And since the more restoration occurs, the less authenticity is left, restoration itself turns into an endless field of conflict.

5. "Communities" – in Belarus they are just starting to become active and ask for more rights (mostly with the help of professional managers implementing European projects).

6. Other categories to mention are businessmen, developers, artists, ecologists, various politicians, experts themselves, etc.

All these actors lack reflections and critical analysis of their activities which should be done in order to turn heritage from the field of conflicts into the growth point.

The given brief critical examination makes us face the wave of new questions which can be answered only through a new interdisciplinary research. It shows the need to establish a new critical heritage studies focused on Belarus and Eastern Europe in general.

Belarusian Civil Society Heritage Associations
There are more than 700 non-profit and non-governmental organisations and foundations operating in Belarus that are involved in one way or another with various forms of cultural heritage.[17] Informal initiatives, which are not registered and carry out mobilisation on an *ad hoc* basis

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16 "В список историко-культурных ценностей Беларуси включено 5278 недвижимых объектов наследия," [in:] *Архитектурный портал, ais.by*, http://ais.by/news/14459 (access: 16 April 2012).

17 Ирина Мурина, "Почему в Беларуси общественных организаций в 20 раз меньше, чем в Чехии?," [in:] *Ежедневник*, https://ej.by/news/sociaty/2016/07/13/pochemu-v-belarusi-obschestvennyh-organizatsiy-v-20-raz-menshe-chem.html (access: 20 March 2017).

Table 1	
"Official" cultural institutions	Non-governmental organisations
• well-subordinated network all over the country; • good relations with local bureaucrats; • need in external intellectual and financial sources; • paternalist top-down approach	• "hipsters" and heritage lovers from big cities; • problematic collaboration with state-funded cultural institutions and government; • spreading of new values; • paternalist top-down approach

Source: author's own compilation

(for example civil society initiatives for urban preservation) are of great importance because of the politicisation of the work of NGOs and the ensuing difficulties in registering such organisations over the past 10 years.

The problem faced by all independent projects in Belarus (especially in the regions) is the excessive control exercised by local authorities. It is impossible to organise serious events without their consent. There is also the segmentation of the civil society, as not all initiative groups are recognised by the authorities, the fact which undermines joint projects.

State cultural institutions are their most common counterparts and also competitors. In total there are 6,691 such institutions in Belarus including 2,716 clubs (of which 2,296 are in rural areas).[18] Each district and large city has a house (centre) for crafts engaged in identification and popularisation of traditional Belarusian crafts. There are also 151 functioning museums in the Ministry of Culture's system.

The main problem these state institutions must address is extremely low wages and low status of the work. Additional incentives for professional growth are also insufficient. This explains the lack of initiative on the part of their staff and the absence of distinct trend setting leaders locally. Difficulties are also created by a constantly changing management structure. In some places institutions are independent legal entities, in others they are subordinated to the Departments of Culture of regional authorities.

Some general characteristics of both NGOs and official institutions are compared within Table 1.

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18 "Інфармацыйныя матэрыялы аб дзейнасці сферы культуры (на 30.09.2016)", [in:] *Official page of the Ministry of Culture of Belarus*, http://kultura.by/uploads/files/dlja-sajta-Sovmina.doc (access: 20 March 2017).

As can be seen, both parts paradoxically assume the same paternalist top-down approach. This will be explained further.

Most organisations focus on specific types of heritage. The Belarusian Committee of ICOMOS restores and popularises the heritage of Ašmiany. Kreva Castle Foundation and Lubcha Castle Foundation are engaged in the restoration of castles in their small towns. There are organisations and initiatives specialising in popularising Belarusian ethnic culture, such as the Students' Ethnographic Association and Speuny Skhod [Singing Meeting], using new forms of audience engagement and mainstreaming folklore for youth in the urban environment. The organisation Otdykh v derevne [Country Escape] works on developing a sustainable network of farmstead owners. All of these organisations are coordinated from Minsk even if they operate in regions. This shows the centripetal nature of relations inside Belarus.

At the same time the number of regional cultural initiatives is growing. There are many knighthood clubs across the country. Initiatives dealing with heritage have gained more visibility recently. They reveal a trend in edutainment and are becoming more specialised.

Organisations are focusing on the public's interest and promotion of their own values and ways of thinking about heritage. They like to collaborate with environmentalists and urbanists - two fashionable informal movements. They note society's increased attention to topics relating to local heritage, history, and ethnic culture. And at the same time: "People are not ready for contemporary art. They did not understand the contemporary photography exhibition. The heritage theme turned out to be much more accessible."[19]

Opportunities for cooperation with state institutions have expanded lately in view of the economic crisis and the need for state structures to become financially viable. Therefore, cooperation is often of a business transaction: "They allow the exhibition to be held, but you have to pay for renting the space. You can hold a museum event, but the museum will charge admission fees. There are examples."[20]

Organisations can also be divided into two types according to their goals. Most initiatives focus on popularisation, research, and conferring

a protected status to heritage sites. Also, the activists' central argument often becomes the development of tourism even if they do not really deal with tourism. Tourism here appears rather as a rhetoric argument.

The traditional operation methods of European NGOs and the possibility of influencing those officials are generally ineffective in this case since Belarusian legislation imposes restrictions on mass public events and grant assistance. Also, Belarusian local authorities are not elected officials to follow a public pressure in a direct way. In this case organisations can either put forward semi-professional proposals for heritage preservation or organise advocacy campaigns of little success.

The other group of organisations, which remains in the minority works on developing the public's social imagination and responsibility, and tries to take heritage to a new level of perception by local communities by working with values rather than monuments as such. For them a project on heritage is only good when it is designed to re-think the past and incorporate it into the existing context, i.e. to enrich modernity. At the same time "the sustainability of cultural practice and preservation activities are achieved through the creation of strong artistic images, and not new norms or scientific works."[21]

The choice between strategies is based on the organisation's access to financial and intellectual resources. There is a shortage of both in the regions.

Grass-roots Heritage Initiatives

The emergence of grass-roots initiatives in Belarus is slow because of the general context of social and political life of the country. They are formed mostly by young people. Often it is a transferred experience, with successful examples from the capital and abroad reproduced. A critical mass of initiative-taking citizens with European degrees is gradually growing in the regions. These are mainly people who were children in the 1990s or the 2000s. The development of social media has had a great influence on them. They inevitably face the need to seek external support in case of self-engagement. They can receive assistance from both state cultural institutions and NGOs.

The National History Museum (Minsk) works fairly actively with external initiatives such as collectors, popularisers of Belarusian cuisine,

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19 Interview no. 25. Here and after the author uses materials collected during research interviews. The names of the informants are encrypted.

20 Ibidem.

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21 Interview no. 8.

communities of young Belarusian documentary filmmakers, and many others. Roughly 50% of events in the museum's annual plan are initiated from outside the museum. The museum provides the infrastructure and helps in organisation.[22] The National Art Museum (Minsk) works with civil society organisations such as the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, University of the Third Age, the club of young poets "Litaraturnaje Pradmesce" [Literary Suburb] (poetry readings in the museum café), collectors, Union of Philatelists, and music collectives.

The Brest Regional Local History Museum cooperates with music collectives and clubs such as vintage car fans; radio enthusiasts (they organised an exhibition of radio stations and demonstrated how to work with them); private structures and civil society organisations, collectors, Union of Artists, Military-Historical Club. The museum took part in the organisation of events for the 350th anniversary of the local mint, which was initiated by local historians. The museum is proud of its Museum Week project.[23] However, mostly museum itself initiates cooperation with the public. "The museum itself determines what it needs, and seeks partners."[24] The same situation exists in many other regional museums.

In comparison to larger cities, regions have far fewer citizen initiatives and civil organisations. In small towns, work with civil society associations bears an even more pronounced official character. In the absence of grass-roots initiatives state cultural institutions try themselves to organise various kinds of associations working with heritage. Regional cultural institutions have on average eight folk groups per institution (the number is considered as their efficiency indicator according to officials).

The non-governmental sector also contributes to the development of initiatives. The goal of the European Commission's CHOICE project (Cultural Heritage: Opportunity for Improving Civic Engagement)[25] was precisely the institutional support of formal and informal civil society associations active in heritage. Sixty applications were submitted from all Belarusian regions from non-formal initiatives and organisations to take part in the project; out of these twelve projects received support. Each initiative organised events to present the results, in addition to achieving the project's goals.

NGOs try to become hubs and be resource centres for local grass-roots initiatives. So far, this has only been created in big cities. The most notable ones working with heritage are Y Gallery (Minsk), Gruntoynya, Dzedzich, Prastora кнh (all three in Brest), Vitebsk4Me (Vitsebsk), Kola (Mahyleu), and Tsentr Garadskoga Zhytstsya (Hrodna).

Thus heritage-related initiatives are mainly concentrated and supported in large cities. In smaller ones they are mainly supported by state cultural institutions but this is predominantly done using old standards within the framework of educational activities or classical heritage protection barely using new methods of social work and cultural management.

Heritage-related Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Community Building

Tourism is the most obvious kind of heritage-related entrepreneurship. There are 669 tourism organisations operating in Belarus according to the information from the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. Of them, 476 organisations work with inbound tourism and 555 with domestic tourism.[26] Belarusian centres of tourism are Minsk, Mir, Niasviž, Dudutki, Brest, Hrodna, and Polatsk. Lately a growth in the number of visitors has been observed,[27] especially after the introduction of visa-free travel for foreigners.

New trends in the tourism business include the development of a network of green routes, branding regions, implementing projects on the creative economy in small towns (e.g. a project for the Valozhyn District, implemented by the Country Escape farmstead owner association, with

22 "Белкіналета–2016," [in:] *Нацыянальны гістарычны музей,* http://histmuseum.by/by/news/509/ (access: 20 March 2017).

23 Interview no. 24.

24 Ibidem.

25 "CHOICE – Cultural Heritage: Opportunity for Improving Civic Engagement," [in:] *European Association for Local Democracy,* http://www.alda-europe.eu/newSite/project_dett.php?ID=84 (access: 20 March 2017).

26 "Реестр субъектов туристической деятельности," [in:] *Ministry of Sport and Tourism of Belarus,* http://www.mst.by/ru/actual-ru/view/reestr-subjektov-turisticheskoj-dejatelnosti-11567-2017 (access: 20 March 2017).

27 "Итоги безвизового эксперимента: Гродно и окрестности посетили 2,2 тысячи туристов из 25 стран," [in:] *Гродно-24,* http://grodno24.com/society/itogi-bezvizovogo-eksperimenta-grodno-i-okrestnosti-posetili-2-2-tysyachi-turistov-iz-25-stran.html (access: 20 March 2017).

the support of UNDP).[28] Also the guided tour business is gradually introducing new forms of communication and interpretation such as the guided tours of the Kraina Zamkau [Country of Castles] Foundation and the Kuferak Padarozhzhay [Chest of travels] agency.

Nevertheless, "90% of the commercial potential of cultural heritage in Belarus is unused. The most interesting in this respect is intangible heritage. However, most successful projects in Western Europe cannot be automatically replicated in Belarus."[29]

Dealing with heritage can contribute to the development of tourism and thus help locals to strengthen their identity, but it can happen only when tourism is managed purposefully and not left to run freely, as something that automatically accompanies restoration. An example of a Belarusian project that was not successful in this regard is the state programme "Castles of Belarus."[30]

To achieve the desired economic and social effects, small towns and individual estates are best combined into tourist clusters, i.e. a number of owners unite under the umbrella of one brand. For example, the clusters Kray Zhyvotvornykh Krinits (Mogilev Region),[31] Mukhovetska Kumora (Brest Region),[32] Valozhynskiya Gastsintsy (Minsk Region),[33] Severnye

Afiny,[34] and Zelenyy Obereg Hrodna[35] (both in Hrodna Region) have already been created. The development of regional tourist attractiveness is also stimulated by fairs and festivals such as Motalskiya Prysmaki (Motal) and Gannenski Kirmash (Zelva), which actively use the theme of cultural heritage. Unfortunately, the cluster approach is still underdeveloped in Belarus. Difficulties are encountered in interactions between private entrepreneurs and state institutions from various regions and districts.

The trade in handicrafts is another common heritage-related type of business in Belarus. In 2005 President Alexander Lukashenko signed the executive order On Some Issues of Carrying Out Handicraft Activity by Individuals, which involved tax concessions and entailed the mass legalisation of freelance artisans. There were 17,660 artisans[36] in 2015 according to the information from the Ministry for Taxes and Levies of Belarus, which are predominantly family businesses. Although it is difficult to say how many of these businesses were related to traditional culture, considering an emerging trend for ethnic culture, this is a large number of artisans. There is an increasing number of ethnic souvenir shops, including online stores. Special zones for selling souvenirs have been organised in historical centres including Minsk, Brest, Hrodna, and Polatsk among others.

These businesses are not very profitable, so artisans are motivated not so much by commercial interest as by patriotism and the desire to convey certain values to society. Artisans often work in schools and hold workshops. It is also a great help if an artisan can travel at least 10 times yearly to various festivals or ethnic fairs.[37]

28 "Креативная экономика в Беларуси как нельзя близка Целям устойчивого развития ООН," [in:] *БелТА*, http://www.belta.by/regions/view/kreativnaja-ekonomika-v-belarusi-kak-nelzja-blizka-tseljam-ustojchivogo-razvitija-oon-mnenie-168259-2015/ (access: 20 March 2017).

29 Interview no. 13.

30 See Stsiapan Stureika, "Castles and People: Towards an Understanding of the Social Dimensions of Conservation Projects in Belarus," [in:] *The Power of Heritage: Socio-economic Examples from Central Europe*, Joanna Sanetra-Szeliga and Katarzyna Jagodzińska (eds.), Krakow 2017, pp. 198–217.

31 "Туристический кластер 'Край животворных криниц' обзавелся каталогом-путеводителем," [in:] *БелТА*, http://www.belta.by/regions/view/turisticheskij-klaster-kraj-zhivotvornyh-krinits-obzavelsja-katalogom-putevoditelem-191417-2016/ (access: 20 March 2017).

32 "Муховэцька Кумора, [main page]" [in:] *Муховэцька Кумора*, http://kumora.by/index.php/home (access: 20 March 2017).

33 "Валожынскія гасцінцы, [main page]" [in:] *Валожынскія гасцінцы*, http://www.hascincy.by (access: 20 March 2017).

34 "Стратегия развития туристской дестинации 'Северные Афины,'" [in:] *Организация Объединенных Наций в Беларуси*, http://un.by/f/file/severnie-afini.pdf (access: 20 March 2017).

35 "Стратегия развития туристской дестинации 'Зеленый оберег Гродно,'" [in:] *Организация Объединенных Наций в Беларуси*, http://un.by/f/file/2014-zelenii-obereg-grodno.pdf (access: 20 March 2017).

36 Алексей Иванов, "Количество ремесленников в Беларуси продолжает расти," [in:] *Белорусы и рынок*, http://www.belmarket.by/ru/369/1/28700/Количество-ремесленников-в-Беларуси-продолжает-расти.htm (access: 20 March 2017).

37 Ibidem.

Heritage Communities and Features of Their Engagement

As was previously stated, "heritage community" is a fairly new and not yet common notion for Belarusian heritage discourse. It is thus more appropriate to talk about such communities from the point of view of their barely begun process of self-identification.

The incentive here was Belarus joining the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2004. Belarus was among the first ten states to sign it.[38] Introduction of the concept of "intangible heritage" was the key to the new practice of working with specific communities that are carriers of living heritage. The coordinating centre for Convention implementation is the Department for Scientific and Methodological Support for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage at the Institute of Culture of Belarus (reorganised in 2017).

The Practical Guide for Identifying Intangible Heritage[39] developed by this institution encourages applicants (regional centres of folk art or culture departments of district executive committees) to identify bearers of cultural tradition as a community that ensures preservation and continuity. It provides for the listing by name of tradition bearers and those who assist them. By doing that many people identify themselves as a community for the first time. Further actions to support traditions involve first of all work of responsible public bodies with established community.

At the end of 2016, 60 elements of intangible heritage were registered in the state list of historical and cultural assets, each of which presupposes the existence of a heritage community. The distribution of intangible cultural heritage across the country is uneven. The Lyelchytsy, Hlybokaye, and Hrodna districts have three registered elements each, while many districts do not have any. The process of identification is still underway.

Work with intangible heritage is conducted in the context of a predominantly Belarusian and traditional culture. Local Houses of Culture and district executive committees provide premises for rehearsals/creative work, and provide transport, help with the purchase of groceries as in the case of culinary traditions (during festivals). Methodology seminars are conducted twice a year for their employees. Bearers of tradition represent their own localities at various festivals and fairs and promote local culture. Most of them are elderly people receiving special assistance.

At the same time some rural communities view state registration with mistrust. For example, the bearers of the rite of Varvara's Candle in the village of Bastenovichi of the Mstislaw district were afraid of the violation of the sacred essence of the rite through its "revelation" to the public. In 2012 the rite was nevertheless registered. Despite fears, this contributed to its mainstreaming and attracted young people through increasing attention (even the national television filmed the rite).

There are also examples of excessive exploitation of particular registered heritage elements (for example, folklore ensemble "Dubrovitsa" gave 87 concerts in 2015, almost a professional tour)[40] or uncharacteristic use in their staging inspired by television or tourism agencies. In this regard the Institute of Culture is working on a national ethical code for the use of elements of intangible heritage.

In the case of tangible heritage, a similar process of identification and capacity building of communities is proceeding at a much slower pace. Examples of external activation impact with expert support are few. This is primarily COMUS (Community-Led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns) – the joint project of Council of Europe and Organization of World Heritage Cities,[41] implemented in the town of Mstislaw. It aimed at boosting social and economic development of the old town through the development of projects for the revitalisation of cultural heritage and strengthening of the local community, engaging all local stakeholders. For this purpose, local communication was enhanced and social ties were developed within the town. In Mstislaw communication among residents was conducted through regular meetings and surveys.

In the course of project implementation experts became aware of the community's weak mobilisation potential. "Only after six meetings was there a responsive reaction. People do not feel that they are participants in something, capable of influencing decision-making on urban

38 Алла Сташкевіч et al., *Ідэнтыфікацыя і інвентарызацыя нематэрыяльнай культурнай спадчыны: Практычнае кіраўніцтва*, Мінск 2013, pp. 16–17.

39 Ibidem, p. 164.

40 "Справаздача аб рэалізацыі мер па захаванню нематэрыяльнай культурнай спадчыны (НКС) Беларусі за 2015 г. С. 13.," [in:] *Жывая спадчына*, http://livingheritage.by/Publikacyi/Report_on_the_implementation_of_the_conservation_measures_of_the_Intangibl_Cultural_Heritage_of_Belarus_for_2015_.pdf (access: 20 March 2017).

41 "Joint Programme Community-led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns," [in:] *Council of Europe, European Union*, http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/comus (access: 20 March 2017).

Table 2	
Officials	Department for Ideology, Culture and Youth Affairs of the Mstislaw District Executive Committee
State cultural institutions	The Museum of History and Archaeology District House of Crafts Children's Art School District Centre for Culture and Folk Art
Quasi-official civil society organisations (most of them dating back to Soviet times)	Young Guides Club Red Cross Belarusian Republican Youth Union local charitable foundation Revival of the Historical and Architectural Monuments of the City of Mstislaw Belarusian Peace Foundation Belaya Rus Union Znanie Society Belarusian Trade Union of the Workers of Agricultural and Industrial Complex
Interest groups	Folklore collectives Local historians
Business	Local private developers Local craftsmen
Source: author's own compilation	

development. However, systematic work makes it possible to stir them up."[42] As a result, the project's main stakeholders became following institutions (Table 2):

The output of the project became a set of ideas for further work on establishing of the National Historical and Cultural Reserve in Mstislaw and fundraising for particular restoration and conservation projects.

Another example of launching a local community is the creative project "Zondazhy i mirazhy Ašmian" [Probing and Dreaming in Ashmyany] organised by Belarusian Committee of ICOMOS within the framework of the European Commission's larger-scale project CHOICE. Over the course of a year a theatrical performance devoted to the history of Ašmiany was prepared.[43] At first the scenario was written with the help

of schoolchildren and local historians. To create a story, they were using methods of oral history. Later children and amateur actors prepared the performance under the guidance of a professional theatre director, which was performed in the city centre on an open-air stage, and gathered several hundred viewers. The performance ended with the collective singing of the specially revived Ašmiany anthem (its text was lost until then). The project could not have taken place without the support of the local district executive committee, the school and the local history museum. It is difficult to assess its results now from the point of view of achieving its main goal, i.e. actualising a sustainable community. Nevertheless, the performance itself received a lot of enthusiastic reviews and wide acclaim.

Some non-governmental organisations and groups also work on identifying and launching local heritage communities. For example, the Lubcha Castle Fund, created in 2003, set the goal to restore the local 16th–17th-century castle. Despite the fact that relations with local residents are formulated in the activities of the fund quite paternalistically as "engaging the local population in the preservation and revival of the castle and its historical and cultural values,"[44] in fact the fund is activating the heritage community.

Working with the community is one of the priorities of the Brest Fortress Development Foundation created in Brest in 2013.[45] The fund contributes to the consolidation and development of the community around the heritage of Brest Fortress through the organisation of creative and academic events. It also engages volunteers and integrates them into the work of the Foundation.

From 2013, the Tadeusz Reyten Art Community has been operating informally.[46] It mainly consists of students and intellectuals from Minsk. However, it actively works with the residents of Grushevka village (Lyakhavichy district) – the site of the Reyten family former estate.

A significant condition for the success of the work of these organisations is the establishment of amicable relations with local authorities

42 Interview no. 16.

43 Наталья Волынец, "Необычный спектакль готовят жители Ошмян," [in:] *Гродненская Правда*, http://grodnonews.by/category/novosti_regionov/oshmyany/news27728.html (access: 20 March 2017).

44 "Фонд 'Любчанскі замак, [main page]'" [in:] *Фонд "Любчанскі замак,"* http://lubcza.by/mety-i-zadachy (access: 20 March 2017).

45 "Фонд развития Брестской крепости, [main page]" [in:] *Фонд развития Брестской крепости,* http://www.brestheritage.by (access: 20 March 2017).

46 "Арт-суполка імя Тадэвуша Рэйтана, [main page]" [in:] *Арт-суполка імя Тадэвуша Рэйтана,* http://reyten.blogspot.lt (access: 20 March 2017).

and cultural and educational institutions. So far, the practices of work with communities used by them are not very common; they are also not always properly reflected. Also in these not numerous cases there was a strong external influence on communities noticed; in general, locals do not take the initiative themselves but act as recipients.

Conclusions

The key actors of the sector in Belarus already have some positive experience in realising the social potential of heritage. Relevant European best practices are present in all areas, but concentrated in Minsk and big cities. With the adoption of the Culture Code in 2017 a trend emerged for decentralising cultural heritage management. Networks for dissemination of methods and information exchange have already been created among NGOs and state institutions (but not between the two). Extensive and well-managed networks of state cultural institutions have already established relations with the general society and gained some experience in working with modern European approaches in heritage-related projects. Lately, state cultural institutions are in search for any opportunities to increase their financial viability and are more willing to cooperate with grass-roots initiatives, among other also in search for new forms of work.

Also, Belarus has some experience in successfully using heritage as a tool for developing individual towns and regions. There are examples of successful business and productive inter-sectoral cooperation in projects focusing on heritage use (primarily agritourism and ecotourism); there is experience in attracting grant or sponsorship funds. The successful practice is an evidence of the existence of a small group of experts and professionals with experience in solving new development-oriented problems.

Nevertheless, most organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, use a top-down approach in their work. Their events are educational and even didactic. They mainly disseminate their own values, legitimised through historical and scholarly references in the context of heritage. Only a few deal with specific heritage communities. Many interviewed experts and professionals did not even understand the question about heritage communities. Conflicts are frequent between grass-roots initiatives and executive power bodies, grass-roots initiatives and business, and grass-roots initiatives and restorers.

The potential of the cultural development of heritage is far from being fully exploited. Cultural heritage in Belarus remains a personal hobby/

interest, a means of satisfying scholar curiosity, or a backdrop for entertainment (concerts by the walls of the Lida and Mir castles) instead of fulfilling its numerous functions aiming to unify and develop. Heritage is often something to pay tribute to ritualistically, without real appropriation or re-thinking.

Most of current Belarusian approaches to include heritage in economic relations are based on very simple models such as providing services to tourists and souvenir sales. More complex strategies are not applied. A big part of investments is made intuitively, without a developed methodology for result validation. Monitoring the development of entrepreneurship and other economic indicators relating to investment in heritage in towns is not conducted. There is no explored relationship between heritage listing and attracting public investment through various programmes. Work with heritage remains "charitable" to a large extent, instead of being an investment on the part of real patrons, the state, and even consumers.

The main threats to the sector relate to the threats to the overall social and economic development of Belarus: depopulation of regions, excessive fragmentation of society, and weak grass-roots initiatives.

There has been a separation between governmental and non-governmental organisations. Thus achieving positive, sustainable results in developing the sector is impossible without the partnership of the public and the state (especially in the case of regional grass-roots initiatives). According to most experts, regional organisations are lacking resources to generate quality heritage-related projects and they need all kinds of assistance. Their work has to be enriched with additional meanings, relevant for development goals; however, they do not realise the problems themselves and therefore do not ask for help.