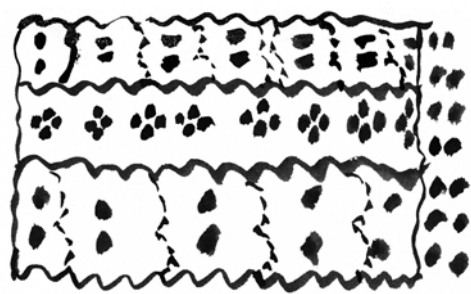




I. Writing Orality.  
Production and Legitimation of the Past



# Heritage-making: Written Texts in the Transmission of Traditional Knowledge of Natural Dyeing

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## ABSTRACT

Natural dyeing is an element of intangible cultural heritage which is gaining new relevance today. Heritage-making as a set of purposeful activities has become an object of interest for researchers relatively recently, and this study is reflective of that. The paper aims to focus on natural dyeing as a component of cultural heritage, its documentation process, and how written texts have influenced the living tradition of natural dyeing. One of the sources for the study was ethnographic material, which provides insight into the little researched tradition of natural dyeing. To understand how the tradition was described and explained, Latvian press publications on natural dyeing were evaluated by applying qualitative and quantitative research methods. In order to study the situation today, a survey was conducted in 2016 and 2017 among dyeing workshop participants in different parts of Latvia. The results of the study indicate that the use of written sources plays an important role in practicing natural dyeing. With various activities organized by professional and amateur ethnographers, artists, handicraft teachers, etc., as well as its coverage in the press, natural dyeing has preserved its relevance. Written texts have documented the activities in the field of natural dyeing and encouraged further development of the tradition. Moreover, various sources have been used to preserve and develop dyeing skills, through both direct observation/oral tradition and written/visual materials. In addition, one's personal experience as a significant part of the construction of identity was relevant in the past and still is today.

## KEYWORDS

Heritage studies; heritage-making; natural dyeing; traditional craftsmanship; Latvia.



## Introduction

In today's changing socio-political context, cultural heritage continues to play a role as the foundation for the preservation and expression of identity, in which many of today's cultural processes are rooted. In this paper, the term cultural heritage is used and understood mainly as intangible cultural heritage, as defined by UNESCO in the *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2020: 5). According to Azoulay, "Living heritage—

performing arts, oral expressions, social practices, rituals, festive events, and traditional knowledge—is an integral part of human life. Handed down from parents to children, from masters to apprentices, from teachers to pupils, it is safeguarded through transmission" (2020: V).

The concept of heritage-making has been often referred to in scholarly publications in recent decades (Petrova 2018; Maags and Svensson 2018; Steiner 2016; Heinich 2011, etc.), especially in the field of museology, although there is no one common definition for it. In this article, the notion is used to

mean a set of deliberate actions with the aim of drawing the public's attention to a certain cultural phenomenon or a heritage object, with the desire of increasing its value to society. The use of cultural heritage to create contemporary national cultures began in the previous centuries. Conscious heritage-making was initiated in many European countries in the nineteenth century, as part of the nation-building process. Additionally, intangible cultural heritage, as well as its inventorying and instrumentalizing, have been an important component in the "cultivation of culture" (Leerssen 2006).

In Latvia too, the heritage-making process was encouraged with the aim to strengthen national self-awareness. Seeing as traditional craftsmanship is one of the fields of intangible cultural heritage, information on craft skills began to be collected and distributed in the late nineteenth century. The first publications on natural dyeing appeared in Latvian periodicals around this time as well. But the tradition of dyeing with plants continued to develop and coexisted with written texts.

Nowadays, natural dyeing, or the use of natural substances for coloring textile materials, is relevant both as one of the forms of traditional craftsmanship and as a means of ecologically sustainable development. Since the discovery of the first aniline dye in 1856, using natural substances for textile coloring has become an alternative dyeing technique; however, the knowledge of natural dyeing has not been forgotten.

Today in Latvia, scholarly publications on natural dyeing focus on topics related to the dyeing process or chemical analyses (Bernava 2013; Karlson and Valkovska 2019; Valkovska and Orola 2021a), the plants used for dyeing (Karlson 2017; Valkovska and Orola 2021b, 2021c), or, relatively less, on the place of tradition in society and its historical development (Karlson 2018, 2019). Although some papers deal with how the living tradition has been reflected in the publications (Karlson 2016, 2021), there is a

lack of information on how written texts have influenced the practice of natural dyeing.

The aim of this paper is to focus on the documentation process of natural dyeing in the context of cultural heritage, and how written texts have influenced the living tradition. The tradition of natural dyeing has not yet been studied from this angle. Furthermore, the paper addresses the importance of cultural heritage in the construction of identity. As stated in the book *Understanding Heritage: Perspectives in Heritage Studies*: "The heritage of humanity has to be understood as a crucial factor in the processes of identity formation and as a fundamental resource for human development" (Albert et al. 2013: 2). Traditional handicrafts rooted in cultural heritage are a popular occupation (which includes making Latvian folk costumes) and hobby for leisure time. There are many handicraft groups in Latvia, most of which are under the umbrella of the Latvian Folk Art Union. The Latvian Folk Art Union has been a full member of the European Folk Art and Craft Federation (EFACF) since the year 2007, and its members are non-profit organizations with a clear aim to promote and engage in folk art and crafts. The network aims to strengthen contact between craftsmen in European countries in the context of exchange of skills and knowledge. Today the Federation is a network consisting of twelve European organizations in eleven different countries" (Priberga 2020). Natural dyeing as a traditional craft skill is actively used by both Latvian handicraft groups and individual master craftspeople in handmade textile production to create contemporary folk art objects.

This paper is based on both published and unpublished written sources, as well as a survey conducted by the author in 2016–2017. The tradition of natural dyeing is reflected in ethnographic materials, mainly manuscripts from the repository of the Latvian National Museum of History (LNMH) and the Repository of Ethnographic



Materials at the Institute of Latvian History of the University of Latvia (REM ILH UL). The published written sources are mainly texts in Latvian periodicals from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth century, in which natural dyeing is mentioned. They have been analyzed to determine how the tradition was described and interpreted. In studying these materials, both content and statistical analysis were used. In addition, the responses to the survey reflect the practice of natural dyeing, its level of preservation, and the application of these skills and knowledge today.

The first part of the paper provides insight into the evidence of the tradition of natural dyeing as reflected in ethnographic material. Next, it provides an overview of Latvian press publications on natural dyeing, describing their content as well as their dynamics. The paper then examines the results of the survey regarding the significance of written texts in the development of the tradition. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings of the study.



## Ethnographic Material

Regular collection of ethnographic material organized by Latvians themselves began comparatively late.<sup>1</sup> The first ethnographic expeditions with the aim of obtaining material for the first Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition (1896) took place at the very end of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, and yet understandably, attention was not paid to collecting materials on natural dyeing during these expeditions. This happened only in the twentieth century, after the First World War. The largest collection of unpublished written historical sources documenting dyeing with plant dyes consists of records of ethnographic fieldwork, also called expeditions. There are two main such collections in Latvia:

the repository of the Latvian National Museum of History (collected in 1924–1931 and 1942–1943) and the Repository of Ethnographic Materials at the Institute of Latvian History of the University of Latvia (collected from 1947 to the present day). Both professional scholars and amateur ethnographers—mainly handcrafters, artists, and students—were involved in gathering the ethnographic material. Despite the large number of documents containing information on natural dyeing, the data is rather scattered and uneven, as dyeing was not the main interest of ethnographers and their assistants. Nevertheless, the fieldwork descriptions contain valuable information. These materials cover all regions of Latvia but are not evenly distributed across the country.

At the LNMH, the ethnographic documents mainly comprise standardized forms filled in by fieldwork participants in which information on natural dyeing was recorded as shorter or longer narratives. In several cases, color samples were also added to the description of the natural dyeing process or to the list of dye plants. In addition, there are some examples of herbaria. The descriptions contain information on practicing natural dyeing mainly from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s.

At the REM ILH UL, the ethnographic materials on natural dyeing consist of both standardized forms and free recordings of narratives. There are also some samples of naturally dyed yarn, but no herbaria. The information on natural dyeing covers the period from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1980s, mostly dealing with knowledge from the 1920s and 30s, as well as from the Soviet period.

In both of these collections, the ethnographic expedition records not only provide information about dye plants, their methods of use, and the obtained colors but also describe the intensity of the practice of this traditional skill in the span of the narrator's memory. Moreover, the materials



not only provide evidence of the tradition of using dye plants in general but also specify their relevance during a particular period of time, for example, during the war. As mentioned in the descriptions held at the LNHM, the difficult economic conditions during the First World War created a demand for ancient skills that had not yet been completely forgotten. This facilitated their updating and extended use, enabling the next generation to acquire this knowledge.

When analyzing the materials, the way in which the narrator spoke about plant dyeing was important. Therefore, I could determine three levels of accuracy:

1) The narrator spoke in the present tense, showing that she was well acquainted with the process and had participated in it herself, perhaps relatively recently.

2) The narrator spoke in the past tense, showing that she spoke about activities she had observed or performed in the past and that had been practiced at some point in the past, possibly during her youth. This suggests that inaccuracies or errors may have occurred over time, as the narrator's memory may have lost something previously known.

3) The narrator spoke in the oblique (inferential, conjunctive) mood in the past tense. This mood refers to action that the narrator herself did not witness, indicating a set of actions that had almost disappeared and were no longer practiced, which the narrator may not have witnessed at all, but only learned about from other people's accounts.

The samples of yarn or herbarium plants supplementing several documents show a high degree of reliability of the information told by the narrators; moreover, they indicate that the use of natural dyes was still practiced at that time. These examples suggest that the people who spoke about dyeing with plant dyes were aware of the

processes themselves. However, it was much more common for them to recount actions that had taken place in the past and they most likely had only observed without capturing significant details and nuances.

The ethnographic field records from the 1920s and 30s and the period of the Soviet occupation do not contain direct information on the influence of written texts on the living tradition. This can be evaluated through the study of other sources.

The recipes mentioned in the records are usually quite approximate and often incorrect, which indicates that the use of dye plants was uncommon and even largely a disappearing tradition in the twentieth century. In this context, the presence of written texts in the press was helpful for maintaining the tradition. With various activities organized by amateur ethnographers, artists, handicraft teachers, etc., natural dyeing acquired new relevance.

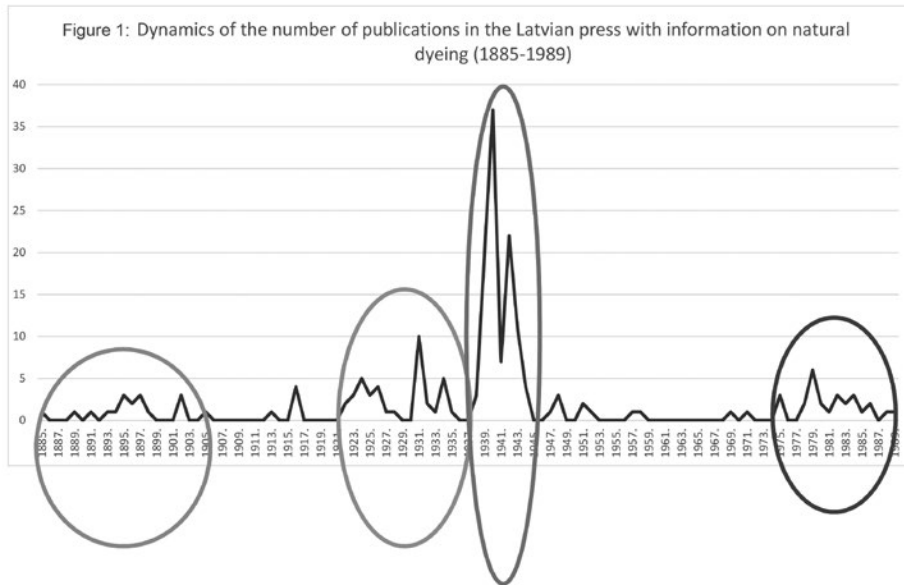


### Articles in Latvian Periodicals

The Latvian press is a valuable mirror that reflects important developments in the life of society on both a large and small scale. The emergence of a topic, and especially its recurrent presence in the press, shows that it can attract the attention of a more general audience and not just a narrow circle of stakeholders—that is, it has a certain role in the current life of society. The content and context of the information may indicate this importance, as well as testify that the publications are a part of the heritage-making process.

The earliest mention of natural dyeing in the Latvian press dates to 1769 ([Vilde] 1769), but in this case it was merely supplemental information in an article on medicinal plants used by Latvians. More significant mentions in the context of heritage-making appear from 1885





onwards. The number of publications varied considerably over time, larger or smaller peaks alternating with completely empty periods. This study analyzed 175 articles, reports, and notices covering the period from 1885 to 1989 (Fig. 1). This is not a large amount for the span of a century, but it nevertheless provides insight about the interest of the public and its dynamics over time and evidence about activity in the field.

We can identify four periods when publications on natural dyeing occurred more often. The first one covers the late nineteenth and very beginning of the twentieth century, when ethnographic materials on plant dyeing began to be published in the Latvian press. At that time Latvians, who were still citizens of the Russian Empire, became more and more aware of the unity of their nation, and the Latvian intelligentsia became actively involved in cultivating national culture, including the collection and description of cultural heritage. Information about natural dyeing was gathered as part of the intangible cultural heritage, as a traditional craft skill. Papers on natural dyeing ([Blaus] 1885; Saržants 1893; Zilumkalns 1894) were included in the collections of materials on

Latvian folklore and language that began to be published by Latvian cultural workers. Although there were only a few articles on natural dyeing, the publications contained valuable, detailed information and were later used as sources by other authors. In the Latvian-language periodicals published in the late nineteenth century, information on the use of dye plants is quite rare. Nevertheless, this period is characterized by the publication of the first ethnographic materials: descriptions of dyeing methods and lists of dye plants, as well as the first scholarly articles on natural dyeing. The papers written by Miķelis Skruzītis illustrate the first attempts to give an overview of the Latvian dyeing tradition (1895, 1902). These studies were based on information collected by the author himself. They were also significant as part of the heritage-making process because they drew readers' attention to the fact that dyeing with natural dyes was not simply an outdated technology, as opposed to the use of aniline dyes, but it was a value to be preserved, a treasured set of knowledge inherited from our ancestors.

The next rise in the activity of publications on natural dyeing occurred in the 1920s and



30s, i.e., after the First World War and the establishment of the independent Republic of Latvia in 1918. The new political situation led to increased interest in folk culture, for example, in ethnographic and archaeological heritage, folklore, and traditional craftsmanship. Women's magazines, ethnographic and cultural history publications, and regional newspapers published a variety of information, including on natural dyeing. In the 1920s and 30s, public interest in Latvian traditional culture, including crafts, increased significantly, as national values were the basis for the new state's cultural policy. Moreover, women's handicrafts—embroidery, knitting, weaving, etc., as well as dyeing with plant dyes—were included in the curricula of handicrafts, home economics, and agriculture schools.

Ethnographic material also continued to appear in the press during this period (Ziemels 1924, 1935; Riekstiņš 1925). On the one hand, these publications provided information on known dye plants and their methods of use, while on the other hand, the articles also contained information on the attitudes toward this field of traditional knowledge that existed at the time ([Birģele-Paegle] 1923; Liepiņa 1931, among others). Moreover, public opinion was influenced through these written texts. As mentioned in many publications, natural dyes were valuable because of their aesthetic qualities but also as ancestral heritage. Several reasons were given to justify natural dyeing at a time when chemical dyes dominated textile dyeing: (1) aesthetic (soft, pleasant colors; a great variety of shades; a range of colors corresponding to the local natural landscape; all shades are in harmony with each other<sup>2</sup>); (2) practical (colorfastness of the dyed textile [high washing fastness, does not fade], low cost of the dyestuff); (3) cultural-historical (an ancient, inherited skill; beginning in 1934 it was emphasized that this was an ancient Latvian skill<sup>3</sup>); and (4) ecological (dye plants as untapped natural resources).

The only drawback was that natural dyeing was more labor- and time-intensive.

Craftspeople, home-economics teachers, and instructors of courses offered by the Mazpulki children's agricultural education organization (the Latvian equivalent of 4-H, an organization based in the United States dedicated to developing children's potential) were the authors of most of the interwar publications on natural dyeing (Zauls 1934a, 1934b; Niedra 1938; etc.). Amateur ethnographers also produced articles on the subject (Niedre 1931).

The press became a channel for spreading information about traditional craftsmanship. In addition, already published ethnographic material on natural dyeing was used as a source for other publications by different authors. In fact, some recipes were reprinted several times, and their 'journey' from one author's publication to another can be traced. Thus, information about certain dye plants was kept in the public awareness, although this did not always mean more frequent use of these particular plants in an earlier time. However, it may have contributed to their use at the time of publication of the text. It should be noted that many of the authors of these articles—Jānis Niedre, Helēne Vollenberga (also H. Zariņa), Žanis Ventaskrasts, among others—as well as several anonymous authors were not dyers themselves (as can be concluded from their publications), and they only collected information on natural dyeing from different sources without testing its credibility. In this way, the inaccuracy or misinterpretation introduced by an author traveled from publication to publication, creating inconsistencies with the original ethnographic material. In this context, publications by home-economics instructors and teachers contained more plausible knowledge on dye plants and the related techniques. In the context of heritage-making, the introductory parts of articles contained ample statements about the main value of natural dyed colors being their aesthetic qualities and ancestral heritage.





The third period of activity of publications on natural dyeing occurred in 1939–1944, right before and during the Second World War, when Latvia was occupied first by the Soviet Union and then by the Nazi regime.<sup>4</sup> We see a rapid increase in the number of publications in 1939 and the first half of 1940 (up until the Soviet occupation). After a short fall in 1941, the next peak in the number of publications was reached in 1942, only to gradually decrease until the summer of 1944.<sup>5</sup>

During this period, ethnographic material obtained from individual narrators was no longer published in the press. Nevertheless, there were still publications with practical information on natural dyeing, as well as information about public activities in the field, especially in 1939. Although direct warfare did not take place on Latvian land until July 22, 1941, it is possible that the beginning of the Second World War in Europe amplified tensions in Latvian society as well, leading to increased activities connected with cultural heritage, including traditional crafts, with the aim to strengthen national identity. Lists of dye plants that should be collected in a particular season were published regularly (Keņģe 1940a, 1940b; Strauta 1941; [Anonymous] 1942a, 1942b, 1943, 1944; Šillere 1944; etc.). These written texts helped to maintain and spread information about natural dyeing. Natural dyeing continued to be presented as valuable Latvian heritage while emphasizing the practical considerations regarding its usefulness. As economic conditions deteriorated because of the war, practical considerations began to dominate the topic and justify the need for using dye plants. The traditional knowledge about using local plants compensated for a lack of chemical dyes and mordant.

After the Second World War, publications on natural dyeing almost completely disappeared from the Latvian press, although a few articles with practical information could still be found here and there (Lapsiņa

1947; Skujiņa 1951a, 1951b). As shown in the diagram (Fig. 1), mentions of natural dyeing made a comeback in the late Soviet-era press. There were reports and articles about handicrafts and weaving studios that produced woven fabrics for interiors and garments using naturally colored yarns that the artisans had dyed themselves. There were no publications of ethnographic materials in this period, and practical instructions were usually compilations from previous issues, written by different authors. However, the practical instructions written by Ilga Madre stood out as an exception. She was a skillful dyer who shared her personal experience in articles appearing in the supplements to the women's magazine *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete* [Soviet Latvian Woman] and later in a book (Madre 1990). All of these texts published in the Soviet press documented the activities in the area of natural dyeing: several handicraft groups practiced natural dyeing, and a number of lectures, masterclasses, and exhibitions were organized that were of great interest to the public. The authors of the texts reflected natural dyeing as a valuable inherited skill inspired by the local nature of Latvia; additionally, they emphasized the artistic qualities of the colors of naturally dyed yarns (Silma 1978; NeĶedova 1982; Kalniete 1983, etc.). In the Soviet era, traditional folk art and the beauty of Latvian nature had become symbols of Latvian identity and served as a way for people to maintain ethical and aesthetic ideals rooted in the Latvian cultural heritage.

This wave of interest in natural dyeing was promoted both by the political situation (the deterioration and stagnation of living conditions in all areas of life created a desire to resist) and the positive activities of certain individuals, for example, the amateur ethnographer, handcrafter, and dyer Madre. She was not only a skillful dyer and leader of the Atspole handicraft studio but also the author of a handbook on natural dyeing, as mentioned above. This book, which showed a very wide variety of color tones derived



from plant dyes (although the printing was of poor quality, as was the case with most Soviet-era publications), led to a widespread desire to practice this traditional craft. For many years, Madre's book remained the only handbook in the Latvian language on this topic, albeit a very popular one. Interest in traditional cultural heritage, including dyeing with plants, and knowledge about the local nature of Latvia was an element of the Latvian Third Awakening. Natural dyeing as a part of traditional craftsmanship, authentic folklore, folk costumes, an idealistic rural lifestyle, etc. were interpreted as real cultural values.

To sum up, the publications mentioning natural dyeing or dye plants studied here can be divided into several groups: (1) descriptions of ethnographic material with lists of dye plants and explanations of dyeing methods with reference to particular places in Latvia; (2) lists of dye plants and recipes without reference to their sources; (3) research articles in which information on the tradition of natural dyeing was collected, systematized, and analyzed; (4) informative reports regarding public activities in the field of natural dyeing; and (5) mentions of dye plants in publications on other topics.

In other words, written texts documented both practical information on dyeing and activities that reflected a living tradition, with much remaining however outside the press publications. The significance of these published texts for the development of the natural dyeing tradition can be understood from other sources, for example, from a survey conducted in the present day.



### 2016–2017 Survey

In order to study the tradition of using natural dyes today, in 2016 and 2017, I carried out a survey among dyeing workshop participants in different regions of Latvia. The workshops

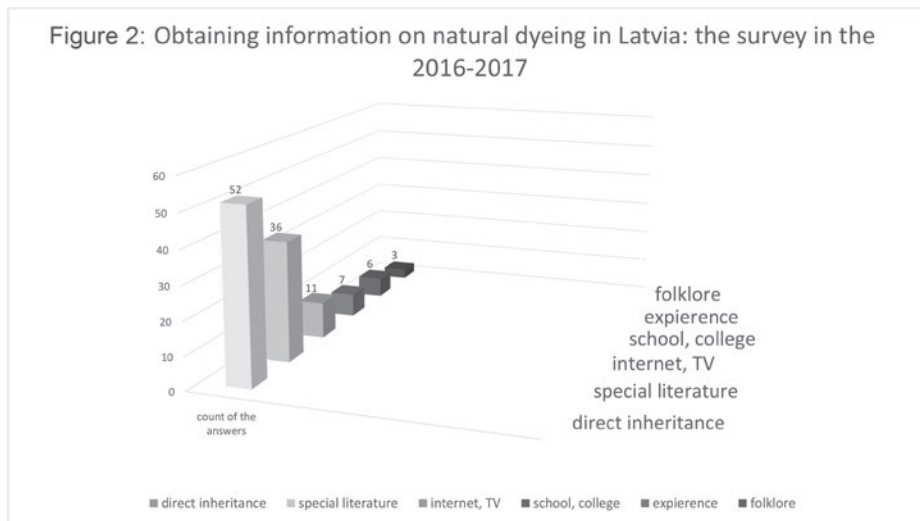
were public events that often took place in an open-air museum area, so the participants as well as casual museum visitors were asked to complete the questionnaires. Due to various circumstances, not all participants completed the questionnaires. Nevertheless, responses from a total of ninety-eight respondents were used in the study. Because it is mainly women who are interested in natural dyeing, more of them participated in the workshops than men; there were only six men among the survey respondents (active dyers as well as casual observers). Moreover, the men's answers were similar to those of the women, with no particular differences in content or otherwise.

The majority of respondents were between the ages of forty and sixty, although the youngest ones were only twelve and fifteen years old, respectively, and the oldest was seventy-nine. Accordingly, most of the respondents were born between the late 1950s and the 1980s. Among the workshop participants were both masters of dyeing with a long experience and persons without any experience. However, the aim for everybody was to both improve existing knowledge and acquire new information. While the results of the survey allow the main trends in the development of the tradition of using dye plants in Latvia today to be identified, dyeing workshop participants are only a part of the people actively interested in the field.

The questionnaire *Pētījums par krāsaugu lietojuma tradīciju* [Study of the Tradition of Using Plant Dyes] comprised twelve questions.<sup>6</sup> These included basic personal information about the respondent and issues related to various aspects of the use of plant dyes. The answers fell into several categories that could not be anticipated, because the questions were open-ended.

This paper analyzes one of the questions in more detail, because, in the context of heritage-making, the source where the knowledge about natural dyeing came from is relevant. The visualization of the survey





results allows a better understanding of the different ways in which information is obtained today (Fig. 2). In addition, the respondents were able to indicate more than one source on this issue. However, six participants in the survey did not respond to this question.

The sources of information mentioned in the answers to the questionnaire can be divided into six main groups. These are direct inheritance, specialized literature, the internet and television, the education system, personal experience, and folklore. There is a big gap between the first two groups and the rest. The most common way to gain knowledge about natural dyeing was through direct transmission, meaning information was obtained from other dyers. Usually these were older relatives, such as one's mother, grandmother, aunt, etc., or craftspeople in a hobby group. In several cases, knowledge of natural dyeing was also obtained from a neighbor. It can be emphasized that the relatives who had dyeing skills were always women, but some of the craftspeople were also men—such as the weaver and dyer Māris Maniņš, who leads the Rīdzene craft studio. The respondents mentioned eight studios that operated during the Soviet era and are still active today. The direct transmission

of dyeing skills from master to apprentice was also realized by attending public masterclasses and summer schools run by experienced natural dyers. Consequently, it can be stated that knowledge of natural dyeing is nowadays acquired not only from relatives but also public groups and events.

The second most common way to obtain knowledge in this field was from specialized literature, namely, articles in handicraft or women's magazines and Madre's above-mentioned book (1990). Specific publications were only occasionally quoted. For example, respondents indicated the magazines *Zeltene* [Latvian Maiden] and *Atpūta* [Rest] published between the two world wars during Latvia's period of independence, and *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete* published during the Soviet occupation. In reality, *Atpūta* had only one article about natural dyeing (Pāvuliņa 1935), but the women's magazine *Zeltene* published a considerable amount of information. However, the magazine ran no documental publications of ethnographic materials, although it did publish Jānis Niedre's interpretation of fieldwork descriptions stored at the museum and in his private collection (Niedre 1931). It also published several articles with practical instructions and lists of dye plants, complemented by poetic descriptions of the



Latvian natural dyeing tradition (Retels 1927; Liepiņa 1931; Niedra 1938). These interpretations written by cultural workers during Latvia's period of independence influenced the level of knowledge of natural dyeing. The survey respondents also remembered articles published in *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete*, although the magazine in fact ran only two articles (Madre and Ošiņa 1979; Madre 1984)—the latter published in three installments. Likewise, Madre's book was very popular and was mentioned several times by name and title, as well as only descriptively. As shown by the survey data, these written texts have played an important role in the development of the natural dyeing tradition. So, the publications on the topic increased the public's interest in natural dyeing, and, moreover, the textbook on natural dyeing was actively used many decades after its publication.

There were also a number of other ways in which people obtained information about natural dyeing, which the respondents mentioned both separately and in addition to direct transmission and specialized literature. However, all these information sources were much less popular than the first two sources. One of them was the internet, as well as television in a few cases. It should be noted that the internet was used as a source of information more by middle-aged people but not so much by the youngest respondents, as one could have presumed. The internet was used to gain or supplement knowledge of natural dyeing by female and male respondents aged forty-one to fifty-two, as well as by one respondent aged sixty-two. Although they did not mention the particular internet sources consulted, there are a number of groups on Facebook and elsewhere on the internet that focus on natural dyeing. This indicates that electronic media do play a role in the spread of craft skills.

According to the survey, expertise in natural dyeing was also obtained or supplemented through schools. The

respondents mentioned several high schools and universities: the Riga Secondary School of Applied Art (nowadays the Riga School of Design and Art), the Art Academy of Latvia, the University of Latvia, and Riga Technical University. These educational institutions offer no special courses in natural dyeing; instead, the acquisition of these skills is a personal interest of some teachers, which was also the case in the past.

Craft skills were developed also through experimentation and trial and error. Although not many people used this method as their main way of acquiring skills in natural dyeing, it nevertheless illustrates the creative potential of crafts. Personal experience is an essential and integral part of the acquisition of knowledge in traditional crafts, as no profession can be acquired only in theory. However, there may be several levels of experimentation depending on a person's goals and objectives.

Folklore was the source of information mentioned least often. It should be explained, however, that Latvian folk songs contain quite explicit information about natural dyeing. They mention several dye plants—such as bedstraw (*Galium* spp.), marjoram (*Origanum vulgare* L.), woad (*Isatis tinctoria* L.), and others—as well as the particular process of dyeing with woad according to Latvian folklore (for more information, see Karlson 2012, 2014). Respondents who were interested in natural dyeing as a part of Latvian cultural heritage were also familiar with the folklore tradition. Both of these elements were used in the creation of Latvian national identity.

The diagram shows that natural dyeing is still an inherited craft, as the direct transfer of knowledge from master to apprentice is the main way of obtaining knowledge and information in this field. Together with lived experience, the theoretical approach also plays an important role in the development of the tradition. The presence of written texts since the end of the nineteenth century has influenced the dynamics of natural dyeing



to the present day. The survey shows that a variety of sources have been and continue to be used for acquiring expertise in natural dyeing.



## Conclusions

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the sources used in this study allows us to conclude that natural dyeing as an element of Latvian cultural heritage has been documented and interpreted in written texts since the end of the nineteenth century. The first texts consisted of publications in the Latvian press that were used in the process of heritage-making to highlight special values of traditional skills. These publications drew readers' attention to the fact that dyeing with natural dyes was not simply an outdated technology as opposed to the use of aniline dyes, but it was a value to be preserved, treasured knowledge inherited from our ancestors. Regular documentation of information on natural dyeing began only after the First World War, in the 1920s. These were descriptions of ethnographic fieldwork, which were further partially used as material for articles appearing in the Latvian press. The authors of these articles interpreted the ethnographic records according to their educational levels and interests. However, the texts published in the Latvian press during this time influenced public opinion on natural dyeing as a particular Latvian craft and an ancient, inherited skill. Moreover, natural dyeing was included in the curricula at handicraft, home-economics, and agricultural schools. The press publications reflected a variety of public activities in the field and encouraged their further development.

Intangible cultural heritage, and natural dyeing skills in particular, was used as a resource to improve everyday life in times of crisis during the two world wars, and press

publications were a significant tool to realize this goal. The use of traditional knowledge during the First World War was documented in the ethnographic fieldwork records held at the NHML, while the situation before and during the Second World War can be understood through texts in the Latvian press, as well as from ethnographic records held at the REM ILH UL.

The situation changed during the Soviet occupation, when natural dyeing was popularized very little in the press. It was not until the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s, when the topicality of Latvian cultural heritage increased, that information about natural dyeing appeared in the press again. Publications were used to maintain Latvian national awareness and identity.

Publications have been useful in maintaining the relevance of traditional craft knowledge. Written texts have directly influenced the living tradition of natural dyeing, and the intangible cultural heritage today includes a living tradition that is constantly changing. The archival texts are currently being used for research and educational purposes, but also in the dyeing practice, including by small businesses. Moreover, cultural heritage has played a significant role in the construction of identity in the past and continues to do so today. One such example is the folk costume, still in use today at various cultural events as one of the Latvian national symbols, whose making involves a set of traditional skills and knowledge, including dyeing.



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## NOTES

1. The first expeditions with the aim of collecting ethnographic material about Latvians were organized by the Imperial Society of Friends of Natural Sciences, Anthropology, and Ethnography from Moscow University in 1869 and in the following years.
2. Although this last statement is not always true.
3. On May 15, 1934, the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis was established as a result of a military coup. Ulmanis' reign (1934–40) was characterized by a highly nationalist policy.
4. The first period of Soviet occupation was from July 17, 1940 to June 22, 1941, when the Nazi German army invaded Latvia.
5. In September 1944, the Latvian capital of Riga was again occupied by Soviet army units, and the Nazi occupation regime was replaced by a second Soviet occupation lasting until 1990.
6. For more information on the survey as a whole, see Karlsonē (2019).



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