

III. Orality on Display



Images 1 and 2
Amulets for Beauty by Laura Dimitrova. Photo credits by the authors.

Creative Traditions and Cultural Projects: Re-thinking Heritage through Experience

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Krastanova, Krassimira. 2022. "Creative Traditions and Cultural Projects: Re-thinking Heritage through Experience." *Martor* 27: 154-178. [DOI: 10.57225/martor.2022.27.12]

ABSTRACT

The article investigates the potential of project activities and project culture in creating novel conditions for introducing and re-thinking the complex nature of heritage, its transmission, practice, and new applications. Today, preindustrial knowledge, skill, and practice are interpreted rather as heritage that carries the potential of "creative traditions." In modern societies, they can be incorporated in different fields—from educational programs for kids and adolescents to the tendency to integrate them into creative projects and cultural and creative industries. A key role in this process is played by ethnologists and anthropologists as researchers and interpreters of cultural heritage, but also as "cultural workers." The paper is based on the case study of a project in the textile field, where elements of intangible cultural heritage were used and re-thought in the context of new forms of culture (ArtLabs for experimenting and innovation in textile art, a storytelling event, a festival, creative interpretations, and sensory and emotional experiences). Here we present and analyze a project that used an integrated approach to cultural heritage, carried out in 2019 in the city of Plovdiv, with the participation of ethnologists, anthropologists, artists, and students.

KEYWORDS

Creative traditions; cultural heritage; cultural projects; re-thinking heritage through experience.

Inherited preindustrial technologies are a key issue today. In most cases, the knowledge and experience coming from the past are devalued and, in order to be perceived and understood as tangible and intangible heritage, actions are needed for their valorization and reconstruction. This article shows the potential of project activities implemented in the framework of a "culture of development" concept, which provides an opportunity to create new conditions for introduction to and re-thinking of the complex nature of cultural heritage, its transmission, practice and new

applications. The culture of development is characterized by the ability to mobilize the skills necessary for creating and carrying out projects with certain aims, assigned on the basis of analyses, strategies, and policies. The anthropological knowledge of local context features can supplement and significantly enhance the approach of development specialists (Bouju 2013: 34–36). Furthermore, anthropologists can include their expertise in the projects not only for clarification of the context characteristics in a given project, but also to impart and apply their knowledge towards



achieving certain goals fundamental to the development of society. Anthropology mobilizes one of the most complex concepts that offers a framework for understanding human activities, *culture*. Marshal Sahlins defined it as a symbolic order, which mediates perception and action in the world, and a set of meaningful schemes informing a variety of human activities (1976). As they participate in applied (cultural) projects, anthropologists become cultural workers, a case study of which we discuss in this text.

Understanding and evaluating textile, cultural technologies and artisan practices as heritage passed on from preindustrial societies is a step towards a shared experience between generations. While the objects of that production have a material dimension and can relatively quickly have their qualities and characteristics evaluated, the skills involved are extremely fragile and can easily be lost, as they represent the living and non-artificial character of cultural expression (Fabre 2007: 1–4). Intangible cultural heritage seen through the prism of temporality to a large extent sets the policies of its preservation and sustainability. According to Nathalie Heinich, the aspiration to conserve so-called traditional practices—storytelling, singing and dancing, artisan skills and production—creates a form of “symbolic protection”; it is based on the studying, reporting and documenting of such practices, as a primary means of understanding and acknowledging them as heritage (Heinich 2009). Chiara Bortolotto stresses that this kind of protection of cultural heritage has its disadvantages, because it does not reflect its viability, practice, and transmission as important steps in the process of its preservation—which are specifically mentioned in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Convention 2003; Bortolotto 2011). In actuality, the difficulty in accepting the “preservation through practice” thesis stems from the dynamic character of knowledge and skills,

but also from the requirement to always take into account the community and its applied forms of cultural expression. This approach provides an opportunity to turn attention towards and insist on their actual practice and transmission, through which they would achieve sustainability in time.

A European Union policy goal, the sustainability of cultural heritage is the focus of a process of transformation today, i.e., it is perceived as an important pillar of identity, at the same time as a source of social innovation for an intelligent, sustainable, and inclusive growth (Communication 2014). An integrated approach is recommended for its preservation, directed towards its inclusion in the overall cultural sphere, in order to revitalize and make it meaningful according to the needs of contemporary society. To that end, the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe was created in Bulgaria in 2008 under the auspices of UNESCO. Its mission is to “carry out initiatives for safeguarding and popularization of the intangible cultural heritage of the countries in South-Eastern Europe; Encourage and coordinate the research of practices of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage elements applied in the South-Eastern European countries” (Regional Centre SICHSE Europe 2022). In support of this task, the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture created a National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and a National Living Human Treasures System, whose aim is “to encourage those who embody intangible cultural heritage to practice the activities and pass the knowledge and skills to the next generations” (Ministry of Culture 2022). As a result of the Living Human Treasures campaigns, national elements of intangible cultural heritage were recorded in the Register and were thus prepared to be listed as UNESCO heritage. For the period 2008–2016, there were thirty practices listed in the Register, most of which illustrate, in a well preserved form, folklore in its



syncretism—as a complex of sound, motion, speech, ritual, etc. Among them, there are five crafts listed, i.e., weaponry, woodworking and woodcarving, carpet weaving, belt weaving,¹ and fishing net making (Ministry of Culture 2022). The collected data shows that the preservation, valorization, and transmission of traditional crafts to the next generations present challenges.

Here we have to also take into account the way in which cultural technologies and crafts are practiced, considering the social and economic context. First, following Vintilă Mihăilescu's reflections, we can note that transmission of artisan knowledge and skills in preindustrial societies is regulated by the power of custom (2017: 9–13). For a long period throughout their existence, crafts were an inseparable part of the other spheres of human knowledge and experience. Technology plays an extremely important role as mediator between a person and the environment in the context of mastering natural resources and production of all things necessary. It combines the applied tools and techniques that are subject to the logic of knowledge. Technology is viewed not only as a range of operations and recipes, but as a specific knowledge set that reflects the overall level of collective experience (Haudricourt 1987). As a result of the distribution of social roles between genders, the tangible production is concentrated in two main spheres—masculine and feminine. The mastery of artisan knowledge and skills by a person in a household or professional society to a large extent determines their place in the social hierarchy (Krastanova 2002). The significance of status for sustaining the established organization in a society gives a sense of value, which, in turn, promotes the safeguarding of traditional means of production.

With the advance of industrialization in production and the modernization of society, artisan production was partly or fully abandoned. Today it is increasingly reconsidered in light of tradition that

contains in itself, like a reflection in a mirror, the complex character of craftsmanship.

Because of crafts transformed nature, we can include crafts and craft technologies in the wider field of “creative traditions” (Mihăilescu 2017). According to Mihăilescu, “creative traditions’ are not a field in its own right but rather a means towards an emerging ecology of heritage. They are a pragmatic means of linking past and present into a sustainable and meaningful development” (2017: 23). For precision, Mihăilescu defines these traditions not so much as objects and practices, coming from the past, but as an inherited life and creative experience and a shared “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld 2005). This makes it possible to include creative traditions today in a variety of fields—from educational programs for children and adolescents, through striving to include them in creative projects, to their development in cultural and creative industries.

In order for this to come true, it is necessary for crafts to undergo innovation and be given new life. From reading UNESCO policy documents on ways to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage available on their website, it becomes clear that this requires an act of invention, rediscovery and reconstruction, which is a conscious recreation, including an attempt to resurrect elements of the intangible cultural heritage. We believe that this endeavor would be more successful if craftsmanship and craft technology were perceived as a whole consisting of knowledge, skills, technologies, views and beliefs, aesthetics, and values. At the same time we have to keep in mind how lifestyle changes from one generation to the next, and so the approach needs to vary accordingly. This would mean new approaches for attracting the public's attention and, using contemporary methods, offering opportunity for familiarization, training and use of the skills. Lastly, we should keep in focus the role of ethnologists and anthropologists as researchers and



mediators of the transmission of knowledge and experience, but also as agents in the cultural field.

Positioning itself in this theoretical framework, the aim of this article is to present and analyze the process of creative traditions and inherited experience exchange among different groups—students and adolescents, design students, people with impaired vision, and artists. In 2019 the non-governmental non-profit organization Stoyna Krastanova Foundation created and implemented the project *Textile and City. A City Lab for Experiments in Textile. Nettle Creations Textile Festival*. A main goal of the project was the safeguarding of textile art and preindustrial experience and knowledge as cultural heritage.² The focus was on nettle as an ancient material, used in different textile and cultural practices little known to our contemporaries. Main drivers in the project were also the authors of this text—Krassimira Krastanova, Maria Kissikova, and Elitsa Stoilova—ethnologists familiar with heritage and the features of preindustrial culture, including textile technology, but also cultural policies and mechanisms for transmission and re-thinking of cultural values and traditions today. Combining their scientific expertise with the potential of project culture, the team developed a methodology and actions that would allow for the transmission of scientific knowledge, the presentation and preservation of heritage in a new way, allowing certain knowledge and practices to reach a wider public. Using the title *Textile and City* as a means for presenting and preserving knowledge and abilities acknowledges the potential that project culture has for implementing cultural policies. In this case, our work was directed towards transmission of traditional skills through an experimental approach to placing old textile technologies in a contemporary context. The project provided for the transmission of knowledge of archaic materials in textile crafts, which have a folkloric, mythological, and symbolic

value, and whose connection to weaving in the past was extremely strong and defining the choice and application of certain weaving techniques and skills. Our task was to use elements from the intangible cultural heritage and in the context of the project to give an opportunity for experiments and innovation in textile art.

For the implementation of the project, we tried to create a new situation in which to show and tell a story based on folklore and traditional technology to transmit knowledge and skills to young people who would participate in, acquire and experience textile techniques and artistic skills in a new way, using an ancient material, the nettle. What led us to choose the nettle was that even today this plant is replete with practical and symbolic meanings. In terms of embedded project actions, we applied the model of knowledge and skills transmission characteristic of preindustrial societies to new circumstances, using narratives, demonstration, and testing out the technological practices in the context of transmission of experience (learning by doing). Along with the activities in the project, we intended the participation in a particular ritual involving nettle (a nettle “tea ceremony”), fulfilling creative tasks and carrying out artistic projects (learning through experience), displaying the newly acquired skills and the created objects in exhibitions and a festival (experience, celebration of artistic achievements). Achieving those milestones was possible due to the rest of the project activities such as: Creative workshops for presenting nettle as a tangible and intangible heritage (Nettle Anatomy); creative workshops that involved experiments and creativity (Art Labs); traditional and anthropological interpretation of folk tales (Nettle Stories); project results (exhibitions, new rituality, festival). A novel feature was also building connections and relationships between different kinds of public—school children and adolescents, majors in Design and

Fashion from the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts in Plovdiv, visually impaired people, designers, and artists in the field of textile.³ Using the work in our cultural project as a case study, we will present the specific approaches used in the project to harness preindustrial knowledge and technological experience as a source of inspiration for contemporary creative work. Applying a case study methodology, we look at creative traditions as a form of transmission, preservation, and usage of intangible cultural heritage and as a process in which knowledge and skills stemming from the past are connected to contemporary creative work. To delineate the similarities and differences between the traditional and the new model and to compare their function is an important problem for us.



Traditional Knowledge and Its Creative Interpretations: Nettle Anatomy Creative Workshop

Perceiving textile through the raw material allows for an appreciation of its qualities. Christel Sola (2015) stresses that this is particularly true for artisans, where every action on the material requires the participation of the body—sensory, emotional, and motor actions. She points out that some of the senses are formed implicitly in the process of mastering the techniques of processing the material, and the way of producing an artifact and the ability to feel the material are inseparable and part of building the collective knowledge and skills needed for production (Sola 2007: 37–50; Sola 2015). In working with textile, the human-matter interaction is complex and involves sensory, aesthetic and technological knowledge and abilities needed to obtain the functional qualities of the produced objects. Furthermore, in preindustrial societies, besides all these crafting conditions, there

are also recommendations regarding the choice, use or rejection of a given material, according to its intrinsic qualities, certain notions around it, and the symbolism it carries (Krastanova 2001: 517–526, 2007). In this way it becomes possible for craft technologies and materials to acquire symbolic characteristics and enter into interaction with other sign systems. A very good example of this is the encyclopedic work of Robert J. Forbes *Studies in Ancient Technology*, where the author shows the application of materials and the development of related tools and techniques not only for direct use, but also for their place in religious ceremonies and their role in marking social, religious and power positions (1964: 1–8). The materials, tools and techniques related to their production become part of the symbolic system of a given society and are found in a state of interchangeability with other sign equivalents.

In running the Nettle Anatomy creative workshop, we started from this close connection between the feel of a material and the acquiring of technological skills to process textile. We drew on research on the history of technique and cultural technology (Leroi-Gourhan 1965: 9–78; Haudricourt 1987: 37–121; Sahlins 1976), according to which societies construct their own socio-technical system, in which tools, gestures, knowledge, and skills establish specific relations to each other. These relations are at the same time technical and social and reflect the overall level of collective experience. In preparation for the workshop, we studied how nettle was perceived and used in the past, being a part of nature, but also a resource for constructing culture. This research gave us an opportunity to get closer to understanding and arranging the environment people inhabit. In the Nettle Anatomy creative workshop, our goal was to show the participants the complex character of nettle, i.e., as textile, food, medicine, and cosmetics, but also its symbolic meanings, knowledge, and experience weaved into



a society's narratives (tales, legends, and myths). The presentation of the rich practical, symbolic and ritual use of nettle was combined with lectures, discussions, and sensory experiences. Participating in the workshop were artists, culture and heritage specialists, students, and interested public.

Evidence of ancient use of nettle is found not only in specialized ethnobotanical and phytopharmaceutical studies, but also in ethnographic research concerned with the history of technology or rituals. Nettle has been, as a material and in use, enmeshed in a net of meanings, integrated in everyday communication, and known in the premodern societies of the Balkans. Today a big proportion of these meaningful connections are missing, and the significance nested in them also lost. It is hard to collect a full corpus of such data, as they are preserved in limited and separate village regions, fragmented and preserved in the memory of predominantly older people. The knowledge and practices related to nettle today belong to cultural heritage, as long as there exists a memory of them.

The work on the Textile and City project gave us an opportunity to revive this knowledge and reveal it to the participants. We applied different forms of experience, which would connect a different audience with nettle as a natural and cultural material—sensory (to see, to touch, to smell the aroma, to taste), educational (various information about the material), creative (artistic experiments, restoration of ancient technologies, innovative works). Applying the “creative traditions” approach allowed us to build a sensitivity towards (nettle as) cultural heritage and to understand its value as a connecting thread to our forebears, and after that to be actively included in “learning by doing” and “experience through art.” Here we can mention the work of researchers in the cultural field, which helps to bridge the gap between scientific and everyday knowledge and to apply it in social and creative practice. It allows the audience to come into contact

with the cultural heritage, to recognize it as such, and to include it as a symbolic resource in modern activities.

The project is indicative of the potential of the interaction between ethnologists and anthropologists as researchers and cultural workers, on one hand, and artists, on the other, relying on the symbiosis between cultural heritage and its contemporary interpretations in the art field. Three artists were invited as participants in the Nettle Anatomy creative workshop, Laura Dimitrova, Dinka Kassabova, and Tsvetomir Petkov. Our aim was for the results of our research on nettle and the knowledge that we, with our anthropological expertise, presented at the workshop to serve as inspiration to the artists who, on that basis, would make their own works of art. What artists learned was also a driving force for their artistic re-interpretation of the traditional materials, technical and symbolic knowledge. With the means they had at their disposal, they were stimulated to express their creative ideas, thoughts, emotions, feelings and to weave the multilayered nature of nettle into their art works. The original interpretations of the ancient techniques for processing and using nettle presented at the workshop, as well as their mythological and cultural meanings, were displayed during the final project exhibition as part of the Nettle Creations Textile Festival. The exhibition was a result of the Nettle Anatomy creative workshop where the diverse cultural, symbolic, technological, gastronomic, medical and culinary uses of nettle were presented to artists and the broader public. That exhibition followed the logic that traditions and heritage are not static. They are re-thought and transformed according to the needs of the contemporary cultural and personal contexts.

We believe that art might be seen as another path to traditional knowledge sustainability (both tangible and intangible). Contemporary art works could enable intangible cultural heritage to keep up with



society by attributing new interpretations and uses to it. In view of this aim, we used the “arts-sustainability-heritage” model that puts the values and actions of creative workers in relation to cultural heritage. Artistic work could be essential for preserving cultural heritage not only by re-interpreting culture, but also by reflecting on the current state of society. The term “creative traditions” coined by Vintilă Mihăilescu is imbued with similar suggestions, making it apparent how artists interact with preindustrial knowledge, not by trying to keep it within a static model, but, instead, by transforming it through their creative interpretations (Mihăilescu 2017: 21). The author stresses the role artists play in renegotiating and reusing heritage by claiming that “modern artists have frequently proceeded in this way, picking up inherited updated versions from ‘archaic’ societies (their own or ‘exotic’ ones) and transfiguring them into ‘creative’ works of art” (Mihăilescu 2017: 22). Mihăilescu also reveals the other agents of this interaction. According to him, not only contemporary artists take part in constructing creative traditions, but also artisans, designers and patrimony specialists (ethnologists and anthropologists), and organizations that are interacting with the creative industries. He concludes that the creative use and interpretation of what is being re-thought as heritage is “neither one-way inspiration nor cut-and-paste fusion, but the shared building of a field of ideas and practices devoted to such a sustainable and meaningful development” (Mihăilescu 2017: 22).

That is why in the context of the project the involvement of modern artists was of utmost importance. Each of the artists we worked with had a different approach, due to the specifics of his or her personal and artistic biography. One of the participants was Laura Dimitrova.⁴ Her artistic interpretation, shown in the project’s final exhibition, was *Beauty Amulets*. These were a series of mixed technique panels, the main

materials used being nettle and recycled paper. The art work linked her previous works in artistic textile, painting, drawing, paper art with the various cultural contexts of nettle, popularized during the *Nettle Anatomy* workshop. Through her artistic interpretation, Laura Dimitrova popularizes traditional knowledge and applications of nettle by using art as a mediator. In a video material, a part of the exhibition, she verbally expresses those connections:

In folk beliefs nettle is a universal apotropaic. In the context of traditions, nettle is useful, medicinal, protective, even when causing pain... Its advantages are many. Are useful things beautiful? ... Is nettle beautiful? ... Actually the adjective “beautiful” is never used for the stinging nettle. The series *Beauty Amulets* is influenced by the unusual, hardly noticeable beauty of nettle.

The quote allows us to understand the values and actions of creative workers in relation to cultural heritage and sustainability. As Bennett, Reid, and Petocz stress, “the artistic work is essential both for cultural heritage through the work’s reference and re-interpretation of culture, and for sustainability as a reflection on the current and future state of society” (2014: 2).

The other two authors who took part of the project, Dinka Kassabova and Tsvetomir Petkov, also showed not only their visual works, but also, in short video materials, revealed more about how their work interprets and weaves together old technique and cultural usage of nettle into something new intended for a modern audience. Dinka Kassabova⁵ works with textile and slow fashion and named her work *Nettle Anatomy*. In the context of the project, she used a textile print technique on a fabric whose smooth and pleasant touch contrasted with the pattern of stinging nettle leaves. Here is how the author herself contextualizes her work and again becomes not only an interpreter, but also a popularizer



as she uses old techniques and knowledge in her work:

Impressed by this extraordinary plant, I decided to study its structure, to test out some of its properties and to tell about its character through images ... This is how Nettle Anatomy was born—the theme, which I will develop on original fabric, in which I visualize parts of the plant, “play” with its structure and recreate in graphic form the feel of its touch (...) Nettle Anatomy is in a way a research process, which tries to recreate two sides of the nettle “character,” its properties and content, which in turn are connected to pain and cure - lightness.⁶

The first two artists see nettle as combining pain and remedy and focus their work on symbolic interpretations of using nettle as a miracle cure. The third artist with whom we worked, Tsvetomir Petkov,⁷ offers a different interpretation. Petkov is a fashion designer and owner of the original fashion brand Vezba, where traditional Bulgarian embroidery (*shevitsa*) is interpreted in modern clothes. The work he did for the exhibition, inspired by the Nettle Anatomy workshop, focused on the forgotten and almost extinct application of nettle in fabric production. The artist started from nettle threads to present and experiment with this artisan technology. His story about nettle is a presentation of the technology he tried to reconstruct in the closest possible way to its preindustrial form. Thus the creative interpretation is connected to a return to what is thought as an ancient textile knowledge and practical experience. His presentation is a telling of the steps needed to produce a thread from nettle.

After nettle picking, it has to be let to dry. After drying up, the leaves are removed ... The dried-up nettle stems are tied in bundles, around twenty or twenty-five stalks each. The next step is about getting the pectin out of the plants (this is the binding agent that

would not let us extract a thread). It dissolves in water, but needs time. The tied-up bundles can be placed in a slow flowing water, calm river waters being suitable ... The bundles are taken out of the water and squeezed. After that they are let to dry again. The already dried plants are broken (scutched). The goal is for the fiber to separate from the stem ... To form a good thread, the extracted fiber needs to be heckled with a hackle or with two fine brushes, through which it is pulled. A yarn is then formed from the extracted material, which can then be used for weaving.

Tsvetomir Petkov made various original works from nettle fibers, such as parts of clothes and accessories, others with independent artistic character that he describes as carrying an “ethno” resonance.

A more in-depth analysis of how artists interact with heritage, and their eventual participation in its transmission and interpretation, is possible thanks to the arts-sustainability-heritage method developed by Bennett et al. (2014). The researchers have identified two possible interaction variants: “the value dimension” and “the action dimension.” One is referring to the values and symbolic meanings, the other to the work process and use of technological features. What they underline is that artists cannot always see the connection between their artistic work and heritage and sustainable development (Bennett et al. 2014: 5–6). In cases such as the ones presented above, we can see a manifestation of the two approaches to heritage. The works of Laura Dimitrova and Dinka Kassabova approach heritage more interpretatively in the value dimension context, while the interaction of Tsvetomir Petkov illustrates the action dimension. In the context of interpretative uses of heritage in creative work, Bennett et al. claim that “creative work is an expression of a particular worldview, in which the role of the artist is as guardian of cultural heritage and a critic of society’s future direction” (2014: 6). Such a particular





Images 3 and 4
Anatomy of Nettle by Dinka Kasabova. Photo credits by the authors.





Images 5 and 6
The Nettle Textile by Tsvetomir Petkov. Photo credits by the authors.

artistic worldview is connected to their creative and personal biography, viewpoints, and understanding of the role art has in interpreting and transmitting heritage. So regardless of the fact that Laura Dimitrova and Dinka Kassabova do not underline their role in popularizing the preindustrial and artisan textile traditions, being art university lecturers, they undoubtedly work hard in that direction. In that way the integration of old techniques and knowledge into art works, but also in the curricula of schools and universities, helps to popularize heritage. They are a great example of the role of the artist as an important figure in the valorization of “traditional” knowledge and practice, reconciling the practice of specific ancient textile techniques with teaching them to students. Their artistic and educational work helps with re-thinking and innovating the use of preindustrial textile technologies.

The work of Tsvetomir Petkov clearly fits in the action dimension context. His work is based on a detailed understanding of nettle fiber and fabric production. The knowledge he acquires while experimenting and learning, and then applies to an art work, shows the potential of this traditional knowledge. Petkov also sends a message with his work, a message that helps to communicate views of nettle as a resource, as knowledge, as offering a multitude of practical usages to the audience.

Connecting creative work with experiment, aesthetics with experience, sensibility with sense, and feeling with knowledge is part of sensory sharing that transforms into meaning sharing (Filiod 2011). In this way each participant, after attending the seminars and workshops, created an artwork that changed the perception of nettle and produced new knowledge about it. All three artists interpreted the collective knowledge from their own aesthetic and artistic viewpoints, so that the art works carried a powerful authorial signature.



Learning by Doing and the Democratization of Cultural Heritage: Art Laboratory Creative Workshop

In the context of valorizing textile knowledge through its presentation as a “creative tradition,” we organized different workshops (Art Labs). Those activities followed the Textile and City project’s aim to provide a creative environment for understanding, experiencing, and valorizing cultural heritage. In our Art Labs, the focus was learning about nettle use in preindustrial societies by creating a meaningful experience. The main aim was to avoid static modes of learning and to encourage active participation from the learners, as well as to stimulate their own interpretation of the knowledge and technical skills acquired during the workshops. The activities that were held during the project and the Textile Festival were organized following the logic that the future of intangible cultural heritage lies in communicating heritage effectively.

An example of the specifics of what we called an “art laboratory” were the workshops for eco-prints, which involved experiments with the technique and dyeing of fabrics with plant-based materials. They were held once as a standalone event and one more time as part of the Nettle Creations Textile Festival. The eco-print workshops were carried out in cooperation with the eco-print designer Dinka Kassabova, who took the role as the expert, passing on her practical knowledge on eco-printing. The participants in the eco-print Art Labs were schoolchildren and Fashion and Design majors. They not only learned about the specifics of the textile use of nettle, but also how to master the eco-printing techniques and dyeing with natural materials in a context of learning by doing. The opportunities of acquiring these sets of preindustrial knowledge and skills were not limited to the use of nettle, but also inspired new creative interpretations





Images 7 and 8

ArtLaboratory Eco-print. Photo credits by the authors.

from the participants themselves. Thus the demonstrated eco-printing techniques with nettle were used on materials other than fabric (such as paper), or with different plants. On the other hand, the participants improvised themselves with nettle and the possibilities of their own artistic interpretations (nettle prints, drawing of nettle leaves, nettle inlays or painting).

We applied the learning by doing approach in the eco-print workshops believing that the best way to transmit tangible and technological knowledge is through experience and, in that particular case, by learning how to use plants for eco-printing. Similar workshops might be offered in order to present the use of nettle as nutrition, cosmetics, medicine, and construction material. This approach stemmed from our conviction of the potential that play and art carry, as for the informal education of a participant, so for the assimilation and valorization as heritage of preindustrial knowledge on extracting nettle fiber, fabric production, or dyeing.

In preindustrial societies, technological knowledge was part of education in culture, establishing gender, age and social differentiations. Knowledge on processing fabrics, manufacturing foods, practicing crafts, as well as medicinal knowledge depended on the geographic position of the

settled community and the natural resources it had access to. In premodern societies, technological knowledge and practice were heavily loaded with meaning, because the preindustrial person used the interpretative schemas of religion, mythology, and folklore. These essential features of traditional culture distinguish it from the global, rational, and highly technologized world we live in. Direct “translations” of experience and traditions from these times are impossible due to the differences in the social and interpretative structures. Even while the learning by doing method is a traditional way of transmitting cultural and practical knowledge in the preindustrial society, our workshops serve as an example of how transmitting knowledge can differ today, as well as how that knowledge can be used. In our case, Dinka Kassabova, the expert, became the new mediator, the transmitter of preindustrial knowledge and craftsmanship to the workshop participants. The way in which heritage is popularized today is linked to a certain democratization of knowledge. If we take for example the textile practices and the wider knowledge of nettle usage we introduced through the project activities, we could say that integrated in cultural projects of the sort, local forms of inherited knowledge, practices and techniques of processing specific natural materials

become available to a wider public. The mentor would not have to be from the same local group as the pupil. In the eco-print workshop, textile technologies were taught to a gender- and age-diverse audience. For transmitting intangible cultural heritage, a similar democratization can in some cases have an impact on issues of safeguarding and sustainability. In order to recover the knowledge of preindustrial use of nettle, and present it to a broad auditory, each one of the activities we planned was meant to involve a variety of publics, not limiting the learning experience to children and adolescents but also including adults.

In the context of a democratization of the cultural heritage of forms and its transmission and interpretation, we believe that the artistic re-thinking and re-interpreting of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage is also an important part of its modern existence. The project recognized the key importance of both anthropologists and artists in giving value and creating meaningful transmission experiences for a particular intangible heritage.



Narrative, Storytelling, and Creative Traditions: Nettle Stories Creative Workshop

Homo narrans is a wonderful metaphor, expressing an essential human trait—the ability to construct meaning and transmit meaning through narratives. As Frederick Mayer remarks, storytelling is an immanent dimension of the human situation and societal being. According to Mayer, “our narrative capacity is at the heart of what it means to be human; to be human is to share a common code of narrative” (2015: 67). Roland Barthes stresses that the story is an universal phenomenon, “narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes,

all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds” (1966: 1–27). Anthropologists and folklorists examine cultural differences in narrative not so much in terms of its presence or absence, as its place and function in a given society and its connection to the mechanisms of memory, reproduction, and creativity (Boyadzhieva 1994: 4–12). And this is where the tale, told in premodern times, comes in becoming an instrument of transmitting knowledge and arguing the necessity of knowledge for humans and their full participation in society.

We turned our attention to the inherited cultural practice of telling folk tales related to the transmission of knowledge and abilities that are part of the cultural technology and social skills. In the Balkan rural culture, for example, technology and weaving skills stand in close relation to the social roles of a woman in preindustrial societies (Kotseva 1994: 33–44; Drettas 1979: 23–37). Transmitted mainly in a family environment and the neighborly community via practical experience and storytelling, the technological knowledge and skills are applied in gender defined groups and are based on the complex acquisition of specialized production experience, which to a large degree carries the characteristics of creative work. The transmission form and process, acquisition and application of the cultural technology of manual production (crafts) are recognized today as cultural heritage, which includes not only the tangible expression of the artisan objects and their practical usage, but also a multitude of intangible characteristics related to them— aesthetic qualities, creative opportunities, artistic imagination, but also values, symbolic meanings, or identity markers.

Meanwhile today different genres of oral culture (folk tales, fables, parables, legends, myths, etc.) are safeguarded as intangible cultural heritage. In premodern and modern societies, narrative have similar

functions and characteristics, in so much as they serve for the transmission of messages in the current social and cultural context. The peculiarity in the contemporary context is that premodern narrative is also studied, analyzed and interpreted by ethnologists and anthropologists. These experts not only know the cultural models of premodern society, where storytelling is a common practice, but also have the ability to transpose and interpret this narrative by reconstructing “imagined pasts” through the traditions—the difference that Mihăilescu makes between customs and traditions is especially relevant here (2017: 12).

In the Textile and City project we developed the Nettle Stories Creative Workshop, which relied on storytelling as a common practice for transmitting cultural knowledge and heritage and built on that by constructing a storytelling event around “A Nettle Tale.”⁸ We chose the folk tale as a popular narrative practice in premodern societies, in order to share knowledge of different applications and symbolic meanings of nettle in a contemporary context. The National Storytelling Network defines storytelling as “the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener’s imagination” (2022). The inclusion of a storytelling event in the project’s activities corresponds with Mihăilescu’s notion of “creative traditions” as a creative re-thinking of premodern symbols, practices, and rituals in works of art. “Creative traditions’ are trespassing/transgressing classical boundaries of culture and/or heritage” (Mihăilescu 2017: 23), and we, as anthropologists and cultural workers, have the necessary skills to re-think and give value to this heritage by representing it in a new way in the current social context. We chose the storytelling method as part of the project’s activities because it allows history to turn into a performance, by enhancing it with interactive elements, sensory challenges, and creative cooperation. During

the actual events, storytelling was mixed with games and creativity, and learning with doing.

Developing and running the Nettle Stories workshop included research and creative work. We did research on various cultural knowledge and uses of nettle, as well as folklore aspects of storytelling and heritage transmission. The creative work included developing the main messages, arranging a plot line around them, integrating interactive elements, sensory challenges, and an original story. According to Peterson and Langellier, cooperation between storytellers and audiences is realized due to the potential of both sides to mobilize shared “discursive resources and conventions” (2006: 123), or as Roman Jakobson calls them, “supplies of ready-made patterns” (1976:170). “A Nettle Tale” was built on known folk tale prose narrative models, plot line, and stylistics. The story plot is organized around an existing motif in the Balkan folk tale about a little village and its inhabitants who face a cataclysmic event and are forced to deal with different obstacles until they restore the village and social order. This motif is a local realization of the popular narrative model of rebirth/revival (Mayer 2015: 57–62; TEQ 2018: 17–18). Here we find interwoven many syntactic constructions and stylistic figures that remind of a folklore text (e.g., “Today I will tell you a story...”; “The rain fell and fell and fell... fell for three days and three nights”, triple repetitions of simple question-answer dialogues, epithet accumulations, and so on). In constructing the story, we used the familiar narrative tradition, which corresponds to the audience’s experience and presents positive expectations, in order to re-create it in a new way in the current context.

We integrated new content into the well-known folk tale form, and did it on two levels. On the surface level, the folk tale placed an accent on the use and application of nettle, and on a deeper level, we planted messages that are important from the



viewpoint of cultural and creative workers and correspond to the current social context, where the storytelling occurs. As noted by Peterson and Langellier, stories are expected to be about something, to have a point worth telling (2006: 127). What do we actually want to tell with this story? Which are the things “worth telling”? The main messages we coded into the folk tale relate to the significance of shared communal living (togetherness), the role of the knowledgeable and skillful person (expertise), and the focus on the creative beginning. The idea of the significance of shared communal living is advanced in the story in a few ways. On one hand, by stressing the communal efforts instead of individual characters (the heroes are more like types). On the other hand, through the repeated affirmation of sharing—to have for oneself, but also for the others: “I took all the bread I could carry so that I could eat, when I was hungry, and give to the others, who became hungry on the road.” Underlining the role of the knowledgeable and skillful person was another important message we placed in the folk tale, realized mainly through the image of “the master.” The master in our plot is the one who has at their disposal the necessary knowledge and skills to use nettle, but also to repair the ripped social fabric after the cataclysm. The significance of creativity and the creative beginning reflects the third message we integrated in the folktale. The idea of creativity was illustrated in several ways. On one hand, through the artist’s image—one of the character types in the folk tale, who in fleeing the flooded village took their violin. “And my violin is magical, when I touch its strings, it will remind me of our precious home in the valley and will bring you solace even on the most difficult days.” On the other hand, by highlighting the role of imagination in (re)discovering new uses of nettle (“But there were people who wanted to invent new things and experiment”) and by stimulating the listener’s imagination. While in premodern societies folk tales (as part of the communal narrative tradition)

are used to transmit cultural meanings and moral messages, the contemporary reconfiguration of the folk tale as an element of creative traditions loads it with ideas and messages that correspond to the current social processes and postmodern audiences.

The last step in constructing the storytelling event was the integration of interactive, sensory and creative elements in it. The French anthropologist François Laplatine turns our attention to the fluid character of sensibility, which defines its ability to penetrate and take part in the social life, and this makes the author wary of drawing a firm line between sense and sensibility (2005: 185–249). Stimulating the senses of the audience engages their perception, interest, and memory long-term and influences the experience of and participation in an event (Johnsson 2006; TEQ 2018). Guided by these principles, we added three types of elements that supplemented and enhanced storytelling event “The Nettle Story”: sensory impacts, interactive challenges, and creativity. On one hand, we included stimuli that would engage the senses in constructing a situation or scene in the folk tale, the setting (such as sounds of birds, domesticated animals, children playing, pouring rain, or water spray). On the other, we also used stimuli that related to a certain moment in the plot or were connected to a certain character and involved audience participation⁹ (they shared a glass of water, piece of bread and nettle tea, when the protagonists of the folk tale found a safe harbor after the flood, thus stimulating the taste receptors, touch, and smell). Another way to actively engage the audience was by involving them in contributing to and finishing the story, which gave them a chance to empathize, experience, and co-create the folk tale. Their interactive co-operation enabled us to stress further the message of togetherness integrated in the folktale. The creative elements in the storytelling event corresponded with our emphasis on creativity and took the form





Images 9, 10 and 11
The Tale of the Nettle Storytelling event.
Photo credits by the authors.



of the call to action at the end of the folk tale to create nettle inspired art. The event attendees were encouraged to participate in creative workshops, use various materials, techniques, and technologies, such as working with paint and clay, dyeing textile with natural dyes, and more. The applied techniques of participant engagement in the storytelling event turned storytelling into performance, in which storyteller and audience can change places. This allowed for a rich variability of the event, which was guided by the given participants and the context that was constructed every time in a new way according to the contact and communication situation.

The potential of the storytelling event to achieve the set goals is also determined by the configuring of the event according to the intended audience. As Emily Johnson notes, "each telling of a story is uniquely re-created for each fresh audience" (2006: 3). We organized the event twice with a young audience and twice more with a diverse audience. For each of the events we created a specific, concrete, situational communication to enable the involvement of all participants in creating and thinking through what was happening. With the help of the National Blind Rehabilitation Center in Plovdiv we organized the Nettle Stories creative workshop with visually impaired participants. The event was adapted by focusing the sensory experiences towards hearing, taste, and touch, and the creative workshop was geared towards plastic arts (clay work). This built on top of what we had learned in previous iterations of the event and produced valuable results.

The last storytelling event held happened during a science conference that brought together ethnologists, folklorists, anthropologists (experts in storytelling and the scientific study of narratives), in order to show the method's potential. In this specific situation the interactive and creative elements were removed, and the event focused on storytelling and collective

experience. Despite removing a large part of the elements stimulating involvement, the audience demonstrated active engagement in (co)telling and (co)creating the story. A further development of the storytelling event could include different interactive, sensory and creative elements in accordance to the specifics of the given audience.

The Nettle Stories creative workshop draws on the narrative traditions in Balkan premodern societies in order to construct an interactive and creative event based on storytelling. Our work in the project was consistent with our expertise as ethnologists and cultural workers, but also closely connected to Mihăilescu's idea of "creative traditions," which implied a re-thinking of folklore knowledge and practice in new creative forms. Thus the folk tale as a well-known narrative convention was reconfigured through a storytelling event. Via "The Nettle Story" we shared somewhat forgotten knowledge about nettle use, conveying messages and ideas tailored to the current social context, and provoked creative cooperation. The project allowed us to innovate the traditional narrative form, to place a new emphasis on the forgotten cultural knowledge of nettle (valorization), and to create an experience engaging the senses and the imagination.



The Creation of Meaningful Transmission Experiences and the New Rituality: Nettle Creations Textile Festival

The project's last stage was the Nettle Creations Textile Festival. The transmission of knowledge and skills within the community, as well as the declaration of a specific heritage and cultural identity, often happen via collective celebration. This is why the festival format was also included as one of the possible ways to popularize nettle knowledge and transmit it to a wider



audience, since within the festival there is ample opportunity to demonstrate the connections between art (visual, digital, fine, music), textile, cuisine, fashion, ethnomedicine, and others. The highlight was the feast celebrating the knowledge and creative skills for creating art works from nettle. During the festival the Nettle Creations exhibition was opened, where Laura Dimitrova, Dinka Kassabova and Tsvetomir Petkov showed their original works inspired by nettle. Along with that, the works created by participants in creative workshops were also displayed in parallel exhibitions, showing the great potential of a modern reading of preindustrial technologies and folklore knowledge. The Art Labs and the storytelling event were adapted to the festival format, as one more effort to present and popularize nettle in its various contexts, in front of an audience that interacts with the given knowledge and has a tactile and emic experience.

Just for the festival we developed a new interactive event that would capture the ritual specifics as a communal experience and interpret it as a creative tradition in the current social context, Nettle Tea Ceremony. According to Jan Assmann rituals are “a form of preserving and reproducing of cultural meaning” (2001: 20); they are an expression of a communal interaction and have an important role for cementing the communal identity in time. The ritual action is repetitive, it carries a certain cultural knowledge and in this way contributes to the reproduction of cultural identity (Assmann 2001: 55). Setting up the nettle tea ceremony in the context of the festival again aimed for an innovative interpretation of shared meals, building on elements already integrated in the preceding events and creative workshops—all our meetings included drinking nettle tea, sharing bread or nettle *banitza* (a traditional pastry dish). Such ceremonies involving nettle tea are not abundant in the Bulgarian cultural context, but preparing a hot drink from various herbs

and plants is a common practice.

The ceremony was characterized by its emphatically ritualized nature with an internal repetitiveness, cultural meaning-making, and the interactive participation of all attendees. The main highlight were the senses as means to get to know the environment, which engages considerable rational and emotional resources of the individual and enhances memory (TEQ 2018: 20). The participants in the ceremony were arranged in a circle and the host prepared them for the shared sensory experience that awaited them. The ritual action sequentially unlocked different senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste), presented challenges, raised questions. Guided by the instructions of the ritual master, the participants perceived the nettle tea with their various senses, interpreted their sensations, shared associations and memories, and constructed a new sensory experience and cultural meaning.

The nettle tea ceremony was developed with the goal of covering all different aspects of transmitting cultural knowledge and cultural heritage known to preindustrial societies (via speech, action, and objects). It relied on a sensory connection not only as a means for creating a memorable experience, but also as a specific way of perceiving the environment. The shared drinking of tea and telling of stories by every participant in the ceremony underlined the crucial part of every ritual to sustain the community and its cultural identity.

All these different activities organized during the project were presented in the context of the festival and helped showcase the diverse knowledge and uses of nettle. We used different forms of communication and learning such as lecture, discussion, art experimentation, tasting food products, storytelling, and other. The aim was to valorize nettle as a significant part of both traditional and modern culture by identifying preindustrial and craftsmanship nettle textile technologies as cultural heritage. This



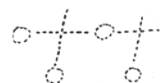
was not meant to be a one way process, but rather as a creative and liberal process where participants might attribute multiple values. Following the heritage specialist Donna Mitchenson's assumption (2015) that the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is closely related to the creation of meaningful transmission experiences, we believe all activities mentioned above are working in that direction. Moreover workshops and festivals enable both organizers and participants to establish their personal meaningful transmission experiences that (re)connect them to the traditional practices and knowledge about nettle.

The forms chosen to represent heritage and include participants in the festival activities echoed the context set by Mitchenson (2015), who stresses that providing meaning, interpretation and use relevant to modernity and modern persons is essential for understanding and transmitting heritage. According to Mitchenson, in many cases where heritage is represented, the forms chosen do not meet the needs and understanding of the modern person, which leads to further incomprehension and breaking with a lot of knowledge and practice from the past. During the festival, as well as during the preceding workshops and discussions, we established interpretative spaces, where the participants had the freedom to find their own way to the nettle and its traditional technological, cultural and symbolic uses in preindustrial societies. The creative workshops and festival activities were a way to build a cultural connection between participants and the promoted cultural practices.

In creating this kind of symbolically and emotionally laden experience, which can help heritage valorization and transmission, an important role is played by people working with art, anthropologists, and ethnologists, i.e. artistic and cultural workers. While the artists creatively interpret heritage or are themselves carriers of knowledge and practical experience, which is part of their

creative techniques, the anthropologists and ethnologists, regardless of their high level of knowledge in the social and cultural fields, rarely practice the heritage that is the subject of their scientific research. Heritage specialists see cultural heritage transmission as an ongoing process between different generations within a community, where knowledge and skills necessary for the normal functioning of society and each of its members are transmitted with different means. The joint work of artistic and cultural workers could be beneficial not only for re-thinking and valorizing old knowledge and practices as heritage, but also for stimulating their transmission and re-interpretation.

Including various publics in practicing different cultural forms and technological activities, which would be the basis for adoption, preservation and practice of heritage, was key to every activity in the project, as well as to the different workshops, demonstrations, and activities included in the festival program. A good example of that is the Nettle Stories event during the festival, where a main aim was to elicit a proactive attitude from the participants, who would not only absorb, but also play a part in the construction of the event and its cultural meanings. Besides the activities that stimulated the audience's participation, the festival presented a context, with different exhibitions displaying a number of art objects, the results of the series of creative workshops. During the festival, they were not only given a new use as exhibition artifacts, but also elicited memories, emotions, associations for both participants and the festival visitors. The syncretistic nature of the process of transmission was integrated in the different project workshops, so that the cultural knowledge could be presented through telling, action, imitation, sensory involvement, creativity, and the participants could experience the process of knowledge transmission and sharing experience.





Re-thinking Cultural Heritage and New Applications

Developing the project Textile and City. A City Lab for Experiments in Textile. Nettle Creations Textile Festival offered us an opportunity to analyze the functioning of the cultural technology in two different contexts, the preindustrial society and a contemporary setting. In the preindustrial society, cultural technologies were a means to develop the national art culture as a system, as part of the sociological structure, and to express practical, symbolic, and conceptual meanings. Preindustrial cultural technologies were a functional and instructive element of the economic and social cycle of a rural community, and they provided an emotional-artistic connection of the collective by regulating its existence (Zhivkov 1977: 9–37). The technological knowledge and skills were acquired within

the family or a specialized craft community through informal practical education. The participation in production played an important role, while being supported by the syncretic nature of culture. Participation enabled the transmission of the same skill and experience, expressed through the possibilities of language and speech, ritual, and the festive system (in particular the rites of passage according to van Gennepe). The symbolic and practical aspects are equally significant and have a decisive importance in asserting what Mihăilescu calls “retrospective rationality” (2016: 11). In modern times, the situation looks quite different, because our society has long since freed itself from the social and economic constraints of premodern life, and relationships are highly individualized (see Table 1).

Yet the notion of cultural heritage as a foundation and legitimation of relationships in a given community (Pomian 2010: 45–56; Thiese 1999–2001: 163–261) prompts

	Preindustrial society	Contemporary situation
Technology and product adoption and implementation	A cultural reality Production activity	Cultural heritage and creative transformation
Training and transmission of knowledge and skills	Practicing knowledge in the family, intergenerational transmission across genders	Experiment within a project, transmission of knowledge from specialists (scientists, artists) to different groups
Form of transmission	Informal learning and acquisition of knowledge, skills and values through participation in production, rituals, storytelling	Planned education with clear pedagogical methods, storytelling, creative process, play and experience
Relationship between the technological knowledge and experience with the social environment	Transmission of traditional values and social norms aiming to (re)produce the social fabric and relations	Embodied values, integrated lessons, and messages are tailored to the contemporary situation.

Table 1. Models of transmission of cultural traditions and cultural heritage



people to look for their roots in the past. If we accept Tornatore's brief definition of heritage as an "object of attachment, a connection, constructed and realized in or through the material expressions of the past" (2011: 75–91), we have to turn our attention to the fact that the community itself has to value and accept material expressions of the past as witnesses of time and to affirm their significance. This is a shared collective activity that is subject to constant negotiation, choosing solutions among multiple possible answers.

This is not just about the identity-oriented inherited culture, but rather about its actual existence and meaning in real life, more precisely those possibilities that traditions have for representing and dealing with the past (Mihăilescu 2016: 13). European cultural policies do play a role in activating traditions, as they are aimed at the use of cultural heritage and traditions for the development of creative industries. Cultural heritage itself is presented as part of cultural and creative industries, but also as a resource for the sustainable development of communities and territories (Capello et al. 2020: 11–19). However, it is more interesting to look at the very process of their interpretation, acceptance, and application in modern life. This is exactly what we tried to do in this project—to build an experimental space where we can introduce a different type of audience to the complex nature of heritage and see its interpretations, according to the group and individual characteristics of the participants.

The project went through several stages, in which different types of activities were implemented, each of them aiming to present and convey different elements of the cultural heritage embodied in the processing and uses of the nettle. Its realization showed that these processes can be strengthened and developed even more if artists as creative workers cooperate with ethnologists and anthropologists as cultural workers. Ethnologists, anthropologists and

specialists in the field of culture and heritage know traditional culture theoretically and in a static version. They can help valorize preindustrial knowledge and practices as cultural values and heritage. The innovative and creative interpretation of this knowledge and experience by artists (artists, visual artists, modelers, designers, and others) breathes life into new applications and uses of traditions. Close cooperation between artistic and cultural workers supports acknowledging, re-thinking and reinstating of the value of nettle as cultural heritage, as well as the specific use of ancient knowledge and practices in a modern context. It is such an interaction, we believe, that can be the basis of sustainability in managing the legacy of a given tangible or intangible cultural heritage and its creative transformation.



NOTES

1. "Belt weaving" is an ancient technique for handcrafting belts. It involves small wooden or leather tiles, which are used for shaping the base. The yarn is weaved in with a wooden knife (Krastanova 2007).
2. The Stoyana Krastanova Foundation Project Textile and City was funded by the Plovdiv Municipality Programme to be included in the city's Cultural Calendar. The project was carried out in 2019 in Plovdiv with the participation of ethnologists and anthropologists (also the authors of this article), artists, and students. All activities were free and open to the public. They were attended not only by young people, school children, and students, but also by business people and people interested in cultural heritage and contemporary art. This article includes our reflections on our work as ethnologists, anthropologists, and cultural workers.
3. All activities in the project were carried out in Plovdiv's Old Town (<http://oldplovdiv.bg/en/>), which was named an architectural-historical reserve of national importance in 1956. The Creative workshops, Art Labs and Festival activities were concentrated in houses with Revival architecture, which are listed as national immovable cultural



heritage. Their remarkable atmosphere encourages an emotional attitude towards urban spaces and the activities carried out there. Only the work with visually impaired people required that our meetings be held in the National Blind Rehabilitation Center Plovdiv.

4. University professor Laura Dimitrova is a specialist in Decorative Arts and Combinatorics and Theory of the Artistic Image.

5. Dinka Kassabova is a university professor in fashion design and an experienced designer by herself. She dedicated her work to slow fashion and eco print.

6. The Bulgarian word *lek* is a homonym, having two different

meanings: (1) lightness, i.e., an object that is not heavy; and (2) medicine or cure. Dinka Kassabova plays with the two meanings of the word.

7. Tsvetomir Petkov is a fashion designer and owner of his own fashion brand *Vezba*, in which Bulgarian needlework is interpreted in modern clothes.

8. We owe gratitude to Magda Raluca Oprea-Minoiu, expert at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest, for the inspiring discussions on storytelling and here ideas regarding the nettle fairy tales.

9. The settings, the plot and the characters are basic elements of each story; see more in McAdams (1993: 25-6).



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