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Cultural Heritage as a Mass Medium

Abstract

Cultural heritage can be perceived as an inimitable and highly original type of information (in the broader context of communication), and thus from a certain point of view as a medium. In the long term, cultural heritage can be viewed as a means of communicating the social identity of a community and a person, in the short term it can be a means of communicating various goals – in addition to cultural or educational, also marketing, political, and cultural heritage can be used/abused as a propaganda tool.

Communicated “cultural heritage links” are inadvertently/intentionally implemented in various media products, including film production, in the form of various themes and in various formal designs. In film production, we can record a whole range of elements of cultural heritage, which the recipients also evaluate according to cultural, national and ethnic affiliation and create a relationship and build an attitude towards the works on the basis of various codes (verbal, sound, visual, cultural).

Key words

Cultural Heritage. Cultural Identity. Film. Ideology. Media Product. Propaganda.

Introduction

Denis McQuail¹ states that perhaps the most basic feature of culture is communication, because without it, culture cannot develop, survive, expand and generally succeed. “*The symbolic communication of group members is among the visible and unique manifestations of every culture. Communicated contents and meanings strengthen the sense of belonging, cohesion and identity of communities. For the internal cohesion of any social unit and for its maintenance, the sharing of meanings and the feeling of belonging from this sharing is an irreplaceable important activity. The basis of the functioning of social groups and units is the mutual transmission of different meanings in symbolic communication. Cultural activities provide many stimuli and much potential for symbolic communication in its most diverse forms and representations. The history of communication testifies to the fact that people use the unique potential of symbols in various ways: in the form of the collective remembering of unwritten information, in the form of oral stories, in the phenomenon of so-called memorial places that facilitate “remembering” and manifest and remind us of the importance of remembering itself, in the form of specific customs, ceremonies, celebrations: within*

religious ceremonies, within traditional folk culture, within civil/ civic ceremonies or in the daily rituals of individuals”². We define the medium in the broadest sense of the word as a mediator of something, in the media context it is the mediation of information in its various forms. We can also perceive cultural heritage as an inimitable and highly original type of information (in the broader context of communication), which is in meaning (in another place) perceived and communicated primarily through the prism of its non/material nature, in terms of the characteristics mentioned before. From this point of view, it is usually associated with various objects, buildings, customs, traditions.

The presentation of cultural heritage in various types of media products is present in various forms, not only in the modern history of the media. Communicated “cultural heritage links” are also unintentionally/intentionally implemented in various media products, including film production, in the form of various themes and in various formal designs. In film production, we can record a whole range of elements of cultural heritage, which the recipients also evaluate according to cultural, national, ethnic affiliation and create a relationship and attitude towards

the works based on various codes (verbal, sound, visual, cultural). Cultural heritage can be perceived as an inimitable and highly original type of information (in the broader context of communication), and thus from a certain point of view as a medium.

1 Objectives and Methods

Cultural heritage is a frequently discussed topic at different levels and in different contexts (in some contexts there is also talk of redundancy and commodification of this topic), but research focused on the connection of media and cultural heritage abroad and in Slovakia are very rare (partial topics were discussed by, e.g., Hatagalung³, in the Slovak environment, e.g., Hamar⁴, Marčín⁵, Pitoňáková⁶).

² SLUŠNÁ, Z.: *Aspects and Trends of Contemporary Culture*. Bratislava : National Awareness Center, 2013, p. 20. [online]. [2022-04-15]. Available at: <<https://www.nocka.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Aspekty-a-trendy-s%C3%BA%C4%8Dasnej-kult%C3%BARY.pdf>>.

¹ See: McQUAIL, D.: *Introduction to Mass Communication Theory*. Prague : Portal, 2009.

³ HATAGALUNG, I.: Media And Cultural Heritage. In *Journal Sampurasun: Interdisciplinary Studies for Cultural Heritage*, 2015, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 26-30. [online]. [2022-03-12]. Available at: <<https://journal.unpas.ac.id/index.php/sampurasun/article/view/21>>.

⁴ HAMAR, J.: Contemporary Reflection of Traditional Folk Culture in the Media. In *Issues of Presentation and Medialization of Traditional Folk Culture*. Strážnice : National Institute of Folk Culture, 2006, pp. 108-116.

⁵ MARČIN, J.: Folklore in the Slovak Television Environment. In *9th Student Scientific Conference ISMKŠ 2013*. Prešov : FF, University of Prešov, 2013, pp. 408-414. [online]. [2022-03-12]. Available at: <https://www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/Olostiak6/subor/6_Marcin.pdf>.

⁶ See: PITOŇÁKOVÁ, S., AUGUSTÍNŮVÁ, E.: The Present and the Prospect of Increasing Literacy in the Field of Cultural Heritage. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 116-130; See also: PITOŇÁKOVÁ, S.: Themes of Cultural Heritage in the Media Environment. In *Mediamatics and Cultural Heritage: Review of New Media and Cultural Heritage*, 2016, Vol. 3, No. 1. [online]. [2022-02-25]. Available at: <https://fhv.uniza.sk/mkd_revue/01_2016/01_2016_pitonakova.pdf>; See also: PITOŇÁKOVÁ, S.: *Introduction to the Study of Media Products*. Žilina : University of Žilina in Žilina.

We state the above on the basis of the so-called library research with the aim of identifying the current state of development of the topic we are researching. We focused on primary (articles in professional periodicals, monographs) and secondary (overview publications, textbooks) sources, while the WoS and SCOPUS databases were an important part of creating a theoretical overview. Based on the research of the source literature, it can be concluded that the presented topic (as we perceive it) is very little developed and in the context of our point of view, only very few authors are devoted to it.

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Due to the very small discussion of the topic, our work is exploratory research (focused on new phenomena) as the basic type of research, which is aimed at initial familiarization with the problem. Since we cannot rely on any pre-existing relevant theory, relevant hypotheses cannot be established. Descriptive parts of the work attempt to capture the investigated phenomenon in context and capture their relationships⁷. In the theoretical parts of the work, we draw on primary and secondary sources, primarily from the field of media in connection with partial topics of cultural heritage. For this reason, the main goal of the work is to design a contextual framework of information and to stimulate and develop a discussion about the current state, possibilities and benefits of the presentation of cultural heritage in media products, also in relation to questions of cultural identity and in relation to questions of the positive and negative potential of cultural heritage as a medium of communication links and messages in the most varied forms. In the article, we also note the repertoire of Slovak films with ethnic and political themes, which is also related to the setting of the current state of public opinion in Slovakia, which is largely characterized by misunderstanding and fear of other subcultures. The current media

image in Slovakia creates a kind of mosaic of human artistic creations trying to solve long-standing socio-political problems through enlightenment, which often slips into violent behaviour in the form of vulgarity. The value message of the media product in the given case recedes into the background, as such film works are produced with a goal to achieve economic profit.

2 Cultural Heritage as a Mass Medium

We understand cultural heritage as “a system of values, a configuration of cultural elements, norms, patterns and ideas, which, as a permanent collective property and a generally accepted result of the material and spiritual activity of members of a certain culture, are handed down to subsequent generations, as a specific type of heritage”⁸. This term includes “all traces of human existence having a cultural, archaeological and historical character”⁹. “However, all scientific definitions of heritage are based on the common basis that cultural heritage connects past, present and future generations and is transmitted through the preservation and transmission of cultural values and knowledge about tangible and intangible culture. An indispensable element in this development process is today’s

ubiquitous globalization. Different peoples are endowed with local roots, but they cannot understand their existence without engaging in a global context...”¹⁰. Moreover, “cultural heritage is increasingly perceived as a commodity and degraded to the level of a mere commodity, calling into question its authenticity”¹¹. In today’s world, the vast majority of information is disseminated through the media, and culture, politics, and economics significantly influence the nature of media production. Cultural heritage products can be supported through the media (increasing publicity), but at the same time cultural heritage products can increase the value of the media product (depending on the specific situation and the recipient, elements of cultural heritage can influence the emotional value of the work).

Based on this foundation, we decided to examine the space of Slovak film production in an effort to draw attention to the contents connected with the presentation of

cultural heritage, but also the values of the postmodern era. According to Appignanesi and Paladini, we can perceive material cultural heritage as a symbol, an icon, and therefore, in a certain sense, as a mass medium¹² (the study discussed i.e. how events connected with the destruction of monuments can start so-called cultural trauma). Following on from their idea, the idea can be established that any element associated with cultural heritage, in the broadest context with culture, and especially dominant expressions (buildings, clothing, literary, musical, artistic works...), can be perceived as mass media, which is often communicated as a reference to cultural identity very effectively in a non-verbal way. In the long term, it is also a means of communicating the social identity of a community and a person, in the short term, it can also be a means of communicating various goals – in addition to cultural, educational, marketing, political, and it can also be used/abused as a propaganda tool. From this point of view, cultural heritage can communicate with two groups with diametrically different communication goals:

1. Cultural Identity
2. Ideology and Propaganda

1) Communication of Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is characterized by intense communication, and “mass media, thanks to which communication spreads, have become the dominant tool of this process”¹³. Adler talks about cultural identity as a fundamental symbol of human existence, and a person without culture practically does not exist¹⁴. “A person is looking for himself, his position in society, in other words, his own identity, the formation of which is not made very easy by the mass media. On the contrary, they offer him a very advantageous, at first glance tempting “global identity – all in one” (a mix of identities that form as if one whole) all “modern” people, which is supposed to guarantee him happiness and the fulfillment of all desires with just a simple promise of loyalty and trust. Modern man has put the mass media on a pedestal – they are an idol or a god who controls everything and knows about our needs, which he/she wants to satisfy at any cost”¹⁵. The individual loses their own identity and relies on the identity of others.

2021; See also: PITOŇÁKOVÁ, S.: *Metamorphoses of the Presentation of Cultural Heritage in the Media Space*. [Habilitation thesis]. Žilina : University of Žilina in Žilina, 2022.

7 According to SEDLÁKOVÁ, R.: *Media Research*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2014, pp. 74-75.

8 SOUKUP, V.: *Overview of Anthropological Theories of Culture*. Prague : Portal, 2000, p. 23.

9 BENČIČ, S.: *Cultural Tourism*. Bratislava : Progressus Slovakia, 2007, p. 12.

10 KRIŠKOVÁ, Z.: Cultural Heritage – An Economic Source of Tourism Development or a Reflection of Cultural Identity? In KLÍMOVÁ, V., ŽÍTEK, V. (eds.): *International Colloquium on Regional Sciences: Collection of Contributions*. Brno : Masaryk University, 2020, p. 363.

11 BITUŠÍKOVÁ, A.: Cultural Heritage in Education and Research: New Trends and Approaches. In CHOMOVÁ, S. (ed.): *Cultural Heritage in the Context of Education: Collection of Papers from the Conference Cultural Heritage in the Context of Education*. Bratislava : National Awareness Center, 2017, p. 8. [online]. [2022-03-14]. Available at: <http://www.nocka.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Kult%C3%BArne-dedi%C4%8Dstvo-zborn%C3%ADk.pdf>.

12 APPIGNANESI, L., PALADINI, M.: Cultural Heritage as a Mass Medium: The Cold Case of the Gilt Bronzes. In *Hermes. Journal of Communication*, 2020, No. 17, pp. 211-238.

13 GOGOŤÁ, L.: Cultural Identity in Danger? In HARČÁRIKOVÁ, G., CHOVANEC, M., SÍPKO, J. (eds.): *5th Student Scientific Conference: Collection of Papers*. Prešov : University of Prešov, 2010, pp. 903-910. [online]. [2022-10-16]. Available at: <https://www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/Chovanec1/subor/77.pdf>.

14 ADLER, P.: *Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Multiculturalism*. [online]. [2022-10-16]. Available at: <https://www.mediate.com/beyond-cultural-identity-reflections-on-multiculturalism/>.

15 ORTEGA y GASSET, J.: *Revolt of the Masses*. Bratislava : Remedium, 1994, p. 44.

But on the other hand, individuals living in a world full of technology and industrialization cannot exist in isolation without being influenced by other civilizations/cultures¹⁶.

“Mass media offer a lot of new impulses and allow for further pushing of the boundaries of communication possibilities. They are an important part of our culture and have an increasingly significant impact on the lives of individuals and society. In the globalized world, which is overflowing with diverse content, “zones” or such cultural areas are created in which dependence on imported cultural contents is visible. People in some zones lose the ability to encode their unparalleled and unique knowledge: they rely on distributed flows of information (imported cultural contents through globally disseminated media formats, but also the import of leadership systems – scientific knowledge, norms, values, etc.), thoughts, ideas and resources. Such cultures lose their creativity and ambition to remain original and unique, not to merge into other cultures”¹⁷.

Cultural heritage, as a manifestation of cultural identity in the most basic sense, communicates the legacy of the tradition of previous generations, ideas transformed into works of material and immaterial nature with high historical and moral value. These communicated links are implemented in different media products in the form of different topics and in different formal designs. They are perceived in a positive way by the relevant communities and such media products (if they are processed in a more attractive way) are extremely popular (we have already mentioned, for example, the show *Zem spieva*). Media products communicate ideas through symbols, and the media itself is also a symbol.

Film works (pictures and sound recordings) are part of the material cultural heritage of the Slovak Republic because they document history (contemporary context) with all its attributes – morals, values... and in their own way contribute to the reconstruction of identity, i.e. collective memory of humanity through the theme, as well as the main protagonists of the mass media work. By the way they present and portray the topic, the way they highlight symbols associated with culture and cultural identity, they contribute to how the target groups perceive and evaluate the topic and how this topic is (not only) discussed in the public space. They often build on whipped-up emotions and specifically emphasize an unnecessary sense of collective guilt. Films are tied to space and

time, they are key categories of ethnographic field research approximating the happenings in the respective community. “The principle of a work of art is thus defined as an inclusive space with its specific and unrepeatability leading inevitably to the ability to open its system towards communicability and the possibilities of perceptibility by the audience”¹⁸. A film script is generally based on a precise subject, it is the key idea of a mass media work, the meaning of which lies in approaching the subject in accordance with the author’s intention (it is questionable to estimate the impact of the works on the target audience). Cinematic art is defined by a symbiosis of psychological and cultural elements, through which it tries to materially approach objective reality, but this does not always bring the appropriate effect in the form of gaining the attention and trust of the viewer.

The current Slovak film industry in general reflects the values of the postmodern era, which mainly reflect the prevailing way of life of the marginalized sections of the population (members of the Ukrainian and Roma minorities are the most inclined in the Slovak media space). In the last decade, for example, film and documentary series such as *Border* (2009,

directed by Jaroslav Vojtek), *Calling* (2019, directed by Erik Praus), *Gypsy* (2011, directed by Martin Šulík), *All My Children* (2013, directed by Ladislav Kaboš) caused a stir among the media public). Media products depict difficult human destinies, namely the struggle for their rights to self-determination, finding the meaning of life, further escape from the material world to spiritual mysticism, in addition to pillaging senseless racial, ethnic and cultural prejudices in society. We commonly encounter these problems in the form of provoking senseless cultural wars in almost every human civilization (e.g. persistent prejudices against individuals, and groups). In the environment of various community groups, the idea of participatory culture is promoted, the purpose of which is to arrive at a cultural dialogue through the creation of a platform for the opportunity to express oneself¹⁹. Providing space for societal discussion is very important in the media space, even necessary. From the value point of view, in the aforementioned films, the missionary and educational activities in Roma settlements through personalities radiating charisma (priests, monks, young men, etc.) are remarkable. The main characters who come into conflict with the worldly authorities experience life crisis situations

on their own skin, which is clearly depicted in the documentary series demonstrating the authentic reality of the film story. The theme of the film works is enhanced by literary (Hamlet’s motif “To be or not to be” – the film *Gypsies*), mythological (Sisyphus complex – the film *All My Children*) and philosophical (spiritual mysticism – the film *Calling*) historical motifs (the senseless division of the eastern border by the Red Army, it is the village of Slemence in August 1946, the film *Border*) completing the overall structure of the realized plot. Film directors draw methodical inspirations from the inspirations of the mainstream, reflecting modern cultural and political trends that move society the most (the fight against ethnic prejudices, gender stereotypes, manifestations of corruption). The reason for the action of the film crew results from a very simple reason, which is the cyclicity of cultural contents in the field of development of the mass communication means of the Slovak Republic. On a similar principle, there were also films made for social and audience orders, fulfilling the function of a kind of cry into the darkness, but some of them gradually contributed to the establishment of a new political set, e.g., *Kidnapping* (2017, directed by Mariana Čengel Solčanská), *Sharp Knife* (2019, directed by Teodor Kuhn), *Amnesty* (2019, directed by Jonáš Karásek). Media products pillage the behind-the-scenes political games of the post-November government outfit in Slovakia (e.g. the kidnapping of

the son of former president Michal Kováč – the film *Kidnapping*), the extremist tendencies present in Slovak society (the murder of student Daniel Tupý – the film *Sharp Knife*) also portray revolutionary political events (e.g. the Leopold Prisoner’s Rebellion – the film *Amnesty*). The central heroes of the film stories are dissidents, national artists persecuted by members of the state security forces. Film works generally outline the desire for justice, and they also mention key events of contemporary importance in Slovakia.

The narrative value of the mentioned film works has a debatable nature bordering on tendentiousness, meaning that it is difficult to determine the truth of individual facts, because they sound like a one-sided commercial perspective and the typical dictates of consumerism. In today’s society, information obesity often fades under the baton of presenting a distorted image of the media world, regardless of the criterion of information quality²⁰. The didactic dimension of media products contributes to the formation of cultural identity, i.e. of the social consciousness of the nation, that is, it affects the relevant public opinion in a positive (history, literature, art, cultural heritage) and in a negative sense (spreading

¹⁶ According to GOGOŤOVÁ, L.: Cultural Identity in Danger? In HARČARÍKOVÁ, G., CHO-VANEČ, M., ŠIPKO, J. (eds.): *5th Student Scientific Conference: Collection of Papers*. Prešov : University of Prešov, 2010, pp. 903-910. Available at: <https://www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/Chovaneč/subor/77.pdf>.

¹⁷ SLUŠNÁ, Z.: *Aspects and Trends of Contemporary Culture*. Bratislava : National Awareness Center, 2013, p. 20. [online]. [2022-04-15]. Available at: <https://www.nocka.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Aspekty-a-trendy-s%C3%BA%C4%8Dasnej-kult%C3%BAry.pdf>.

¹⁸ SABOL, J.: *Interpretation of a Film Work*. Košice : Publishing House ŠafárikPress, 2021, p. 50.

¹⁹ ŠKRIPCOVÁ, L.: Participative Culture in Community Media. In *European Journal of Media, Art and Photography*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 100.

²⁰ GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Media and Truth in the Perspective of the Practice and Life Form of the Modern “Homo Medialis”. In *Communication Today*, 2019, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 16.

hatred, specifically aversion towards individuals, selected groups of the population). Films stimulate the audience to reflect, because often fictional content is implemented in them through the introduction of an imaginary world (e.g. changing the names of the main characters in film dramas for a kind of anonymity), which includes decoding the message for the public in the form of reactions²¹.

2) Communication of Ideology and Propaganda

Cultural heritage is generally associated with communicating positive values. However, we can also identify situations when it is connected to the propaganda activities of politicians, states, ideology, and in the contemporary press or media archives we can find countless examples of such a “purpose” of cultural heritage. And since folklore is most commonly associated with cultural heritage, it is this topic that is often associated with different periods, politicians, artists and journalists who tried to combine traditional elements of folklore with ideological or propagandistic content (various events, works, appearances by politicians), which were transformed through the media into media contents served to the audience.

Cultural heritage, for example, is a frequent topic of military propaganda. Cultural trauma can be the source and beginning of conflict, an obstacle to peace negotiations. On the contrary, a positive approach to the protection and management of cultural heritage can be a motive for the gradual building of peace. In armed conflicts, the topic of destruction of cultural monuments is an extremely sensitive topic, which is sometimes abused to achieve military, political and economic goals.

Conclusion

Cultural identity can be defined on different levels – from national or ethnic to local or linguistic. Communication is essential for identity, including through the media. Various media products (from newspaper articles to film production and computer games) are also interesting for researching, learning and understanding the entire context of culture. Media among other things fulfill a cultural function, they become bearers of the dominant culture, discoverers of subcultures and new trends in cultural development, in the process of ensuring cultural continuity they are the spreaders of cultural traditions and, last but not least, also the means of acquiring cultural patterns of behaviour by members of different cultural groups²².

Cultural heritage is a frequently discussed topic at different levels and in different contexts, but research focused on the connection between media and cultural heritage abroad and in Slovakia is very rare. As part of the contribution, we present the so-called exploratory research, in which we focus on capturing the phenomenon we are investigating in certain connections and contexts, while the goal was to design a contextual framework of information and to stimulate and develop a discussion about the current state, possibilities and benefits of the presentation of cultural heritage in media products. We emphasized the connection with questions of cultural identity in relation to the potential of cultural heritage as mass media communicating references and messages in the most diverse forms, and we also note Slovak films with ethnic and political themes. We marginally point to the issue of commodification of cultural heritage, which negatively compares it to the commodification of media products, while the effort to achieve (only) economic profit in the field of media products or in the field of cultural heritage should be reduced as much as possible in a culturally advanced society.

Cultural heritage is generally associated with communicating positive values. However, we can also identify situations when it is connected to the propaganda activities of politicians, states, and

ideology, and we can find numerous examples of such a “purpose” of cultural heritage in contemporary press or media archives. Cultural heritage as a mass medium can communicate two main areas differing in purpose – cultural identity, ideology and propaganda. In the article, we have outlined both areas, each of which creates the potential for much more detailed investigation.

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²¹ HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., HALAMA, L.: Concept of the Camera at the Analogue – Digital Crossroads. In *European Journal of Media, Art and Photography*, 2021, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 70-81.

²² KAČINOVÁ, V.: Terminological Problems of Media Education. In *Communication Today*, 2012, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 24-39.

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Karol Orban is a university lecturer working at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts Academy of Arts, Banská Bystrica. Throughout his practice he has shown himself to be an expert and a practitioner who not only theorises, but also creatively and actively participates in the production of programmes, whether on radio or television. He has extensive experience as a presenter of television and radio shows. In his scientific research he focuses on the issues of Christian media in Slovakia, radio plays and ethical aspects of audiovisual media. He worked as an academic at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University in Prague and the Faculty of Arts of the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra.

Slavka Pitoňáková's work focuses on connecting the media with selected areas of marketing communication (especially public relations and advertising), as well as the presentation of cultural heritage, science, and research in the media. She is the author of publications, and she publishes in various professional journals and conference proceedings. Moreover, she was and still is a member of organizational teams of conferences/congresses, participated, or was a member of the research team of several projects. She worked in the project Research Centre of the University of Žilina where she coordinated public relations. She was a member of the working group for the preparation of the Concept of Media Education in the Context of Lifelong Learning (Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, 2009). Her focus in the field of pedagogical work is in combining theory with media and marketing practice, as well as on media and film education.