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QUO VADIS „LIVING HUMAN TREASURES”?

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Abstract

„Living Human Treasures” (LHT) is a program supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). According to the Regulation of the Ministry of Culture in Bucharest, the title „Living Human Treasures” is the life contingency, personal and in transmissible. The person „must, simultaneously fulfill bearing, preserving and creating qualities of intangible heritage, be able to transmit traditional cultural models and be recognized as so by other LHT and the scientific community”. In six years, between 2010 and 2015 in Romania were granted 45 titles: half to craftsmen (weavers, carpenters, iconographers, furriers, builders of musical instruments, pottery etc.) and half to performers of folklore (folk interpreter, rhapsodists, dancers etc.). Most distinctions, eight and seven, were awarded in Cluj and Alba county, followed by Braşov, Suceava county, each with five distinctions. Discussions are held about the possibilities of granting life annuity, following the model of athletes and some artists and writers. It is clear however that the title holders and their performance can be assimilated to tourism assets, as attractions of itself, transforming communities they belong to genuine tourist destinations. Furthermore, it would avoid the exhausting movements of artisans at the various trade fairs, being preferable to receive the audience in their personal household tranquility. A series of semi structured personal interviews with some LHT confirm this hypothesis. Strong promotion of those tourist destinations should no longer delay. At the central level it would require that the Tourism Authority take the „dossiers” for those LHT and promote them in a centralized manner, dedicating them an advertising brochure and a map.

Keywords: Living Human Treasure, keepers and transmitters of traditions, immaterial heritage, anthropogenic tourism potential.

JEL Classification: Z13, Z32.

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Introduction

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/ UNESCO), founded in 1945, with headquarter in Paris, strives for systematically safeguarding, preservation and entrusting of cultural heritage towards future generations – including tourist aspects. Romania is a member since 1956.

One of the missions of UNESCO is to manage a catalogue of sights with natural and historical connotations, therefore representing an worldwide high priority for being preserved and secured against possible risks. Likewise, in 2014, the National Authority for Tourism – ANT edited „UNESCO World Heritage Map in Romania”. Moreover, UNESCO is setting the premises for an worldwide catalogue of intangible cultural heritage of humanity. According to the website of the Romanian Ministry of Culture, Romania has remitted nominalization for 4 files that were approved by UNESCO, namely: Călușului ritual, Doina song (Romanian threnody), techniques related to traditional ceramics from Horezu, carols sung by Romanian/Moldavian men bands. The files were submitted to UNESCO during 2002-2012’ period.

Another program UNESCO is „Living Human Treasures” – identifying individuals that proved exceptional performances, therefore being able to hand over to next generations a certain element of intangible heritage, in a genuine and undistorted form-extending the lifetime’ expectation of the element. Along these lines, upturns ahead of the local communities, professionals and national wide, the visibility and awareness of the individuals which are preserving and handing over towards next generation the cultural heritage items.

Currently, such programs are on-going in the Republic of Korea, Japan, France, Czech Republic, Hungary etc.

1. Evaluation of international experience

The preservation of the intangible cultural heritage is implemented based on Japanese legislation, which protects since 1954 the intangible national heritage. In 1962, it was the South-Korean government who has empowered a special legislation related also to preserving the intangible heritage. Lately afterwards, during 80’s UNESCO has approved own procedures for preserving the intangible heritage, procedures similar to ones related to preserving tangible heritage. During the 25th anniversary of UNESCO’ General Meeting, Nov 1989, it was approved a recommendation procedure related to protection of traditional cultures (Baumann, 1991). Finally, in 1993 UNESCO has announced the launching of the project: Living Human Treasure, recommending to each UNESCO’ state member to implement the project. Therefore the member states were encouraged for this purpose to establish public institutions, to archive documentation and to assign standard procedures for worldwide promotions (Howard, 2002). Afterwards the recommendations were implemented in national legislations of different countries, generating different results.

Among the initiators of the internationally program is included Republic of Korea. Promoting especially the folklore, considered by many to be inferior to other arts that were cultivated by the social elites, its program has led to the safeguarding of many elements of folk tradition, which, amid urbanization, industrialization and modernization in recent decades would otherwise have disappeared. South Korean system for protection of intangible heritage is well organized and implemented. „Living Human Treasures” are

involved in training others in their respective fields of excellence. For those beneficiaries (young people) the training is free, South Korean' State paying artisans with a remuneration of 850 USD/ month, plus social& medical benefits. In this way, in addition to economic benefits, people recognized as Living Human Treasure are taking advantage of higher dignity inside their society. Training for transmitting knowledge to the new generations includes three stages (Yim, 2004):

- Beginners – „Living Human Treasures” recruits „juniors” and provides them the induction training. Also the „Living Human Treasure” are recommending the best students for a scholarship sponsored by the state;
- Advanced – passing from beginners level is based on a test led by one/ more „Living Human Treasures” of the studied area. Thus, beginners who are considered to have reached a higher level of functional or artistic skills are reconsidered as advanced students;
- Assistant Instructors – advanced students who demonstrate outstanding ability are selected to attend „Living Human Treasures” in structuring & implementing the previous two stages. These assistant instructors receive financial remuneration from the state.

Overall, were selected 109 intangible cultural heritage items and 213 people were designated as Living Human Treasure. At the same time, there were 302 assistant instructors, 2473 „advanced” and 92 „beginners” who received the scholarship. Individually or in groups, people awarded as Living Human Treasure, once a year, organize a public event (show), to demonstrate skills and transmission of the skills to the next generations. The government is involved in providing the necessary infrastructure and audio-video recordings of the events. Subsequently, the records are saved for future generations. According to a study realized in 1999, more than 79% of respondents believe that the Living Human Treasure' system has a major contribution to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

Japan's situation is slightly different from the Republic of Korea and other countries, especially through the fixed upper limit of Living Human Treasures' portfolio – 116 seats – and the selection criteria. In addition to the technical and artistic skills of the candidates, the evaluation committee pursues other issues, such as health status, number of previous awards, the number of successors, position or status in the local community, their character. Those designated as Living Human Treasure receive from the Government a life annuity of 16,200 euros/ year, conditioned by: training successors that are able to perpetuate techniques or know-how, development of artistic skills and knowledge, organizing shows or exhibitions for presenting the individual or group skills, to document the relevant performances on audio-video tools. The State achieves the resulting documents, using them as model for transmitting the tradition to the next generations. Given the fixed number of „Living Human Treasures” and the reality that candidates can be appointed as Treasure only after the death of an existing Human Treasure, it is difficult to structure the Japanese heritage on criteria like geographical/crafts types (Miyata, 2008). Although the system contributes to the preservation of an important part of the intangible heritage of Japan, there have been identified a number of deficiencies (Aikawa-Faure, 2014):

- Awareness is limited to a fixed number of persons/ groups which are performing excellent into a limited sector of intangible heritage;
- Once selected and documented, models are restricting the creativity of new artisans;

- Fixed number of title holders, mostly elderly with limited mobility, does not allow including new holders-younger and more active to participate as Living Human Treasures;
- If a craft or an art can't be represented at a very high level, then that craft would not have national appreciation, even if the craft has a special historical or artistic value (depending on the craftsman).

Another country that has achieved notable results by implementing UNESCO' program is France. The beginning was in 1993 when they have applied through their Ministry of Culture and Communications. Among the criteria for awarding the Living Human Treasure' title include: at least 15 years of experience in performing the art/ craft, contribution to innovation, previous training session with a disciple which confirms improved performance of the craft. There are 115 Living Human Treasures which have trained 112 other artisans. They were selected by a selection and evaluation committee of artisans and students. A national research has identified the main strong and weak points of the program (Cominelli, 2014).

The positive aspects:

- The title functions like a label;
- Increases the visibility of all artisans (including those not in the program);
- It is appreciated and certified the quality of skills/ techniques;
- Enhances the volume of available information;
- Creates a formal link between craftsman and disciple;
- Provide financial resources for training (16,000 euros/ year);
- Ensure the preservation and hand over to next generations of rare crafts.

Negative aspects:

- It is a highly selective process – only 115 people were recognized as Living Human Treasure out of a total of 43,200 craftsmen;
- Subjective desire of people to obtain that certification;
- Can create excessive „crowdedness” and „excitement” in the presence of artisans awarded as Living Human Treasure;
- Distribution of funding do not necessarily reflect the performance level.

Other reported problems are related to the elitist character of the program in France, based on excellence and rarity, but not being updated to new skills and crafts, concluding that it is a less dynamic process.

2. Distribution of Living Human Treasures awarded in Romania

In 2009 it was adopted the Regulation for granting the title of Living Human Treasure, in order to implement the law 26/2008 (The Parliament of Romania, 2008; The Ministry of Culture - Romania, 2009a; 2009b). Thus, in Romania, the distinction is granted to „those individuals who are appreciated by the community as creative and transmitters of elements related to intangible cultural heritage, through undistorted traditional means and form” (art. 1 of the Regulation). Living Human Treasure title is the life contingency, personal and non-

transferable. The holder „must be fulfill simultaneously the characteristics of know-how, preserver, creator and performer of intangible heritage; being able to transmit traditional and cultural patterns, to be appreciated by other performers of his craft but also by the scientific community”. „.... can't candidate the people who have attended some form of vocational education” (art. 4). According to the Ministry of Culture - Romania (2014a; 2014b), applications shall be remitted to a national commission on behalf of the community by the directors of cultural organizations/ schools/ priests, etc. or professionals on their own.

The results were not delayed, hence in 2010 were granted 45 titles of Living Human Treasure (figure no. 1). If in the early years the number of titles awarded annually was capped at 5, in 2013, by adopting an amendment to Regulation, maximum annual number of titles increased to 20. Among the 45 titles holders, already eight of them died.

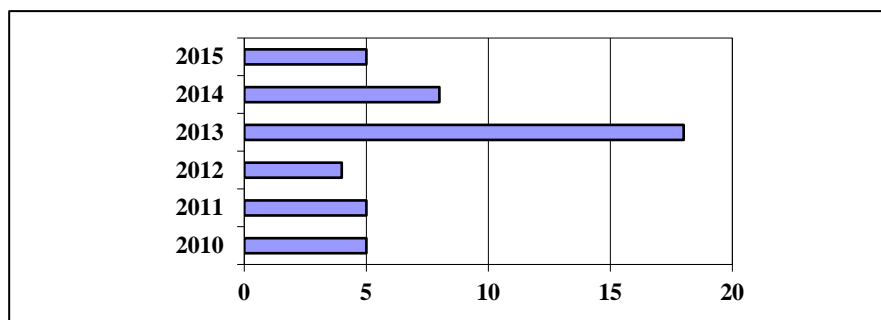


Figure no. 1: Living Human Treasure, titles awarded/ year

Source: Ministry of Culture, 2015

Counties' distribution – total of 16 counties – is shown in figure no. 2. Regional spread: Transylvania record 27 titles (including the counties of Harghita, Satu Mare, Hunedoara, Sibiu and Mureş), Muntenia and Oltenia, with 7 titles (including the counties of Dolj and Calarasi) and Moldova 6 titles.

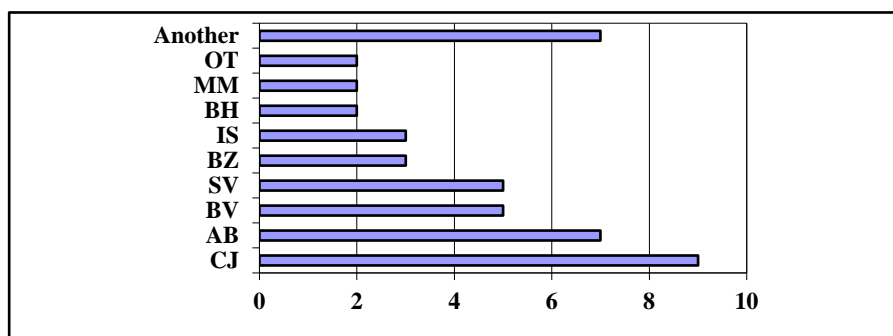


Figure no. 2: Living Human Treasure titles, counties' distribution

Source: Ministry of Culture, 2015

Without denying the value of tradition in counties such as Cluj, Alba, Braşov, Suceava and, especially of their representatives, the relevance of such a ranking can't be overrated. To a large extent, the ranking reflects the degree of concern of the local community and local

authorities for recognition of their skills and traditional values. For example, in Alba, application files are prepared at the Cultural Centre „Augustin Bena”. Also in 2013, in the presence of President of the national committee during that period - made up of 23 specialists from across the country - Virgil Ștefan Nițulescu, general manager of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest, hosted the national Gala in Alba Iulia awarding titles Living Human Treasure. Additionally, Alba Iulia started to award the title of „Treasure of Alba” and the diploma of excellence in 2014 handing being made during a gala-event; Five titles were awarded „Treasure of Alba” and five certificates of excellence to the most diligent custodians of ethnographic exhibitions in the county (Roman, 2014). Thus, Alba is an example of focused concerns and a model of good practice.

Since 2014, the title of Living Human Treasure is made by the National Commission for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, formed by 21 members, having as president academician Sabina Ispas.

At the level of representative, folklore and artistic handicrafts share the 45 titles for Living Human Treasure in equal percentages (figure no. 3).

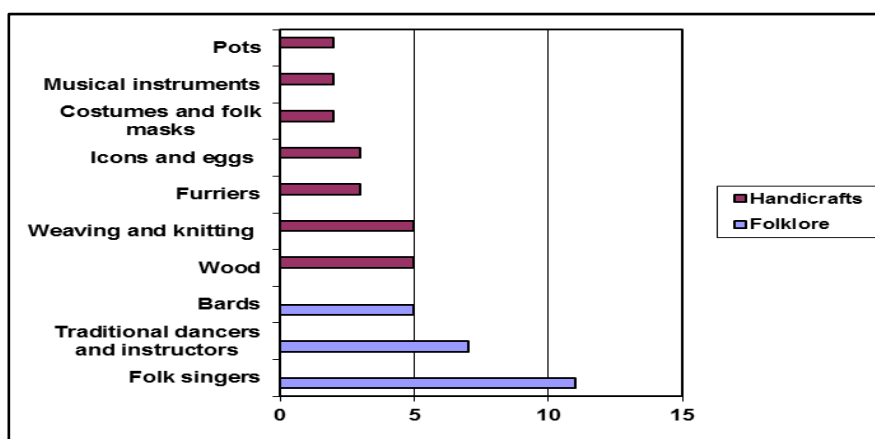


Figure no. 3: Living Human Treasures, titles on craft type

Source: Ministry of Culture, 2015

Category of folklore have been regrouped: folk singers, including traditional pastoral instruments, taragot and violin; bards; traditional dancers and instructors, including troop of călușari. Artistic Crafts category were reunited: weaving and knitting rush; wood's traditional processors, including a wood box craftman; picture and eggs painters; furriers; designer costumes, ornaments and folk masks. Manufacturers of musical instruments (bagpipes, alphorn, zither); potters. But wood is not including the wood processors, like craftsmen renowned as the architects of gates, houses and churches in Maramureș Country.

Should be noted that granting the titles is not followed by the proper promotional campaign. On the site of the Ministry of Culture, Living Human Treasure awarded during the current year also the ones from previous years, they are not even made public. The reason for all this could be related to lack of resources to stimulate interest at this title. If at the beginning of the project, the Living Human Treasures were awarded also with a

symbolic financial prize, nowadays they get only the diploma. Gala for award titles take place once at 2 years. In November 2015, Gala that take place at the National Village Museum „Dimitrie Gusti”, the Ministry of Culture was represented at the level of Deputy State Secretary. At the same time, by decree of the President of Romania (President of Romania, 2015), all „Living Human Treasures” from 2010-2015 were awarded the Medal of Cultural Merit Class III.

3. Research methodology and results

The award of pecuniary rights, respectively, understanding the importance accorded to them by the „Living Human Treasure” in Romania is the objective of a semi-structure interview (Balaure, 2000). The sample is formed from „Living Human Treasure” from Alba County and person from the Gala held in the National Village Museum in November 2015.

In the interview guide, specifically semi-structure interview were included following topics:

- The needs and desires of the respondents;
- Average monthly income;
- The right of „Living Human Treasure” to receive a life remuneration;
- The manner in which should be made possible to offer financial support.

Recruiting subjects were made at interview, by mutual agreement. For this research, the interviewer was restricted from taking rigorous details in writing. In both structure and conducting the interview was respected methodological studies bases on motivational principles represented by non-directivity (Cătoi, 2002).

At the time of analyzing the information/ content analysis could be detected and synthesized interesting results.

Because of the age and their financial position, most of the „Living Human Treasures” are health’ lack. Secondly, they would like more appreciation from the authorities. Without exactly realizing it, they seem interested to be promoted as tourist attractions, avoiding strenuous travels at the various fairs, preferring to get the tourists/ visitors into their personal household and the community to which they belong. Other desires were: descendants’ affection, fostering and respect for traditions.

On average, the pension and other sources, including harness the skills so that they qualified as Living Human Treasure, interviewed subjects have income of at least 1200 lei/ month. Despite empathic attitude of the interviewer, we believe that due to the event where the interview was hold, the subjects were not expressed with utmost sincerity. Equally true it is that between „Living Human Treasure” can be found who are not even entitled to old-age pension and work, simply because they have never been employed. One such case unfortunately become social event, is Constantin Perța, wood carver in Alba, who never was never engaged nor married and lives alone in an isolated village (Lupescu, 2011). Being invited to Bucharest for an official ceremony at the Cotroceni Palace, local authorities found him at home, seriously ill. While uninsured, he was hospitalized urgently, in the first instance assuring the minimum package of health services is subsequently seeking a compromise. Faced with such precedents or not, the Republic of Korea is providing free medical assistance for their „Living Human Treasure”.

Regarding monetary reward, generally the answers ranged between compulsory or the possibilities of the country. The fact is that, without an absolute priority, appears as an obvious need. Have shown that informally „Living Human Treasure” are qualified as instructors to teach their crafts, the assumption being that this activity under the aegis of cultural centers or museums, occasionally or regularly, can get some financial income. In any case, the subjects seem unanimous claiming the monthly income as a pension (additional) and not, for example, as a lump sum granted once with the title even if would be a large amount; the monthly income to be applicable also for already awarded titles.

The youngest but also the most active respondent has proved iconographer Nicolae Muntean, born on 19 October 1949 in Cunța in Alba county. It is among the youngest „Living Human Treasure”. He currently resides in Vinerea (Alba county), his house being transformed into an workshop, but also in a small museum. He was a former student of the school of folk art in Cugir, but remains essentially an autodidact. He received guidance from Maria Deac Poenaru „Living Human Treasure” (deceased in 2015). „... i wanted to emphasize holiness in my work” seems to be the artistic credo of Nicolae Muntean (Curta, 2013). When it starts painting he says, „God help me to get out an icon and a good work!” (Predescu, 2013).

He exhibits since 1998. He had exhibitions in Romania, as well as in Austria, Czech Republic, France. Since 2005 he is member of the Academy of Traditional Arts in Romania, initiated by ASTRA Museum in Sibiu. Acting as instructor in the craft of iconographer, under the aegis of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

Moreover, the iconographer Nicolae Muntean seems to have clear opinions. Recently in the press, stated: „During a meeting of the Association of artisans, whose member I am, I proposed that those who are truly artisans to be granted a financial support therefore for the artist to secure more or less a bread, to cover the expenses with materials or trips to various exhibitions” (Predescu, 2013).

Conclusions

International experiences relevant on monetary recognition of „Living Human Treasures” are somehow converging: the Republic of Korea, Japan and France, at least, monetary reward/ annuity is granted in connection with training the successors.

Also in Romania might put this problem to offer a life income, according to the model for former great sportsmen and creators such as writers; or a special pension, without exception, being allocated to persons over 60 years for Living Human Treasure. For comparison, to the former great sportsmen paid monthly 525 life annuities, amounting to 1.9 million lei (2013) – an average of 3600 lei per person/month (The Ministry of Youth and Sports – Romania, 2013). Not even one percent of supplementary pension would not solve the problem, as can be recorded cases of „Living Human Treasure” are not entitled to old age and work (as for Constantin Perța).

With the eventual consecration of life annuities but after international model should set clear conditions and obligations. Moreover, in Romania, but somewhat formal regulation for granting the title requires the capability „to transmit the traditional cultural models”.

We believe that the title holders of the Living Human Treasures and their performance can be assimilated heritage tourism, in particular tourism potential anthropogenic elements,

some tourist attractions in themselves. Therefore, it should be promoted with conviction. At the central level would require the appropriate authority (ANT) take „files” title holders, realizing for every title at least a promotional brochure and map. The precedent is the seat map of UNESCO, edited by ANT in 2014.

Assimilation of „Living Human Treasure” as tourism attraction should lead to the creation of a network of „alive” museums. Without ostentation, naturally, personality and performance title holders of Living Human Treasure could transform the whole community they belong to a center of tourist interest and a genuine tourist destination. Furthermore, it would avoid strenuous travel of artisans at the various fairs, being preferable for them to get their own audience into their household and the community to which they belong. Semi-structure series of interviews with title holders confirm this hypothesis. Promotion of those tourist destinations should no longer delay.

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