

## **THE VALUE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: THE STATE IN BELARUS AND LATVIA**

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**Abstract.** *It is widely recognised that cultural heritage is increasingly important as a strategic resource for encouraging sustainable economic growth. Traditional cultural expressions such as traditional handicrafts and other expressions of traditional cultures are valuable cultural, social and historical assets, which promote income generation and economic development, particularly in rural areas and at regional level. Moreover, encouraging local cultural expressions contributes to the growth of culture-related economic activities such as revitalising food traditions and producing handicrafts, including artisan or craft foods. Nowadays the relations and collaboration between producers and consumers, so-called co-creation increases significantly. The offer of goods and services is largely determined by consumers' wishes, their degree of awareness and preferences. The aim of the research is to estimate the influence of nationality on attitude to the cultural heritage as well as cultural heritage functionalities in today's conditions. Two surveys of the population were performed – in Belarus (n=66) and in Latvia (n=120). Despite the sample group is not representative, the obtained data and results provide insight into the issues of cultural heritage in today's circumstances through the population views in both countries. The findings show that some similar and some different attitudes and preferences are observed in Belarus and Latvia. All respondents in both countries (Belarus and Latvia) recognised that the cultural heritage as value could be preserved and maintained. They consider that only a small part of the population is sufficiently aware of this value. Regarding the socio-economic value and historical value of cultural heritage, first is higher than second in both countries, but the Latvian respondents ranked the historical value 3.6 times higher than Belarusians. Furthermore, there are popular historical forms (e.g. farmers, 'green' markets) of purchasing gastronomic goods in Latvia. In Belarus preference is given to special departments in the supermarkets.*

**Key words:** *cultural heritage, value, awareness, rural.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Taking into account the urgency of regional development and in particular rural development, the importance of finding a new kind of measures and activities, which would encourage sustainable development, is gained. It is widely recognised (Loulanski, 2006; EC, 2014) that the cultural heritage is increasingly important as a strategic resource for encouraging sustainable economic and social potential. This is in line with UNESCO general policy aims: "to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community" (UNESCO, 1972).

Traditional cultural expressions such as traditional handicrafts and other creative expressions of traditional cultures are valuable cultural, social and historical assets of the communities and serve as a promoter of income generation and economic development (UNESCO, 2013). Traditional cultural expressions may also serve as a base for new cultural expressions, as they may be a source of inspiration to other creators and innovators, who can adapt them and derive new creations and innovations from them.

The cultural heritage applies to several government policies: cultural, such as those related to regional development, social cohesion, and others, for example, agriculture, maritime tourism, education (Council..., 2014). These policies have a direct or indirect impact on cultural heritage and at the same time cultural heritage offers the potential for the achievements in sectors such as agriculture, for example. Daugstad et al. (2006) emphasize the role of agriculture in the maintaining of cultural heritage.

The scholars (Daugstad et al., 2006) argue that the authentic cultural heritage is local, old, traditional and sustainable, where the globalisation is seen as a threat, which makes everything less local and less authentic.

Moreover, encouraging local cultural expressions contributes to the growth of culture-related economic activities (Facchinetti, 2014). Although, it is outlined (EC, 2014) that the major problem faced by the heritage sector is the progressive disappearance of traditional skills and crafts, which could be renewed.

Primary agricultural production has a decreasing role in rural economy in terms of population, employment and GDP (Moreddu, 2013). Hence, the diversification of farm activities, multifunctionality and pluriactivity become a more significant solution for farms' viability (Bergman et al., 2007; Blad, 2010; Turtoi et al., 2013), especially for semi-subsistence farms (Davidova et al., 2013). The socio-economic vitality of rural areas needs local employment beyond agriculture, such as micro-business, small and medium sized enterprises, and crafts, artisan activities, where cultural and social traditions play a significant role (Dwyer, 2003). Beside traditional rural values, habits, arts and crafts have been revitalised (EC, 2014).

Some of them, which are recommended as a tool for raising income, are revitalising food traditions and the production of artisan or craft foods and handicrafts (UNESCO, 2013). Besides, there is growing interest by consumers in the different kind of fairs and fests, in which crafts and artisan products, inter alia, food, have been offered. Nowadays the relations and collaboration between producers and consumers, so-called co-creation (cocreation) (Hoyer, 2010), increase significantly. The offer of goods and services is largely determined by consumers' wishes, their degree of awareness and preferences.

Previous research studies conducted in Latvia focused on the progress of cultural heritage products as value and the introduction of such products by businesses in Latvia's rural areas (Jeroscenkova L., Kruzmetra M., Rivza B.). During the course of research, a question arose regarding how people in other countries perceive the trend in globalisation expansion and, at the same time, the trend in maintaining and preserving the national identity, as well as what their assessment of the role and availability of cultural heritage are; a research study on the situations in Belarus and Latvia was a response to this question.

Taking into account the abovementioned considerations, **the aim** of the research is stated as follows: to estimate the influence of nationality on attitude to the cultural heritage as well as cultural heritage functionalities in today's conditions. The tasks of the research are: 1) to estimate the similar and distinctive attitudes of awareness, regarding cultural heritage, in Belarus and Latvia; 2) to assess the understandings and value of cultural heritage in both countries.

Especially this activity expanded with initiating the government-funded research project "Rural and Regional Development Processes and Opportunities in the Context of Knowledge Economy" whose one of the key goals is the development of a strategy for smart rural and regional development to obtain an integral vision, including social and economic values of cultural heritage (EKOSOC-LV 5.2.3.).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology of the research. Globalisation and cultural heritage theories serve as a methodological basis for the present research. One of the leading researchers of globalisation, Manfred Steger, underlines that „The transformation powers of globalisation reach deeply into all dimensions of contemporary social life” (2010). Globalisation is characterised by two trends of change. The first one is the growing flow of goods, services, capital, money and individuals among countries, the trend of equalisation that emerges from the transfer of techniques and technologies from others, which is usually viewed as a positive trend. On the other hand, a number of negative effects of this process are highlighted, especially in the social sphere – the increasing geographical movement of labour force and the formation of ethnically and nationally mixed societies (Reinert E.S.2008; Castells M., 1997). As John Tomlinson writes, „globalization has been associated with the destruction of cultural identities, victims of the accelerating encroachment of a homogenized, westernized, consumer culture” (Tomlinson J., 2003:269)

The principal **materials** used for the research are as follows: 1) different sources of scientific publications, research papers, the EU legislation, and the reports of international and EU institutions; 2) results (data) of surveys in Belarus and Latvia.

The surveys were carried out in the period from November to December 2014 for two groups of respondents: one in Belarus (n=66), and the second in Latvia (n=120). Despite the fact that the sample group is not representative (does not reflect the views of the entire population), the obtained data and results of its analysis provide insight into the cultural issues in today's circumstances through the population's views.

The suitable qualitative and quantitative research **methods** have been used for various solutions in the process of the research: survey, analysis and synthesis; the logical and abstract methods, the constructive method; data grouping and comparing; expert evaluation and etc.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

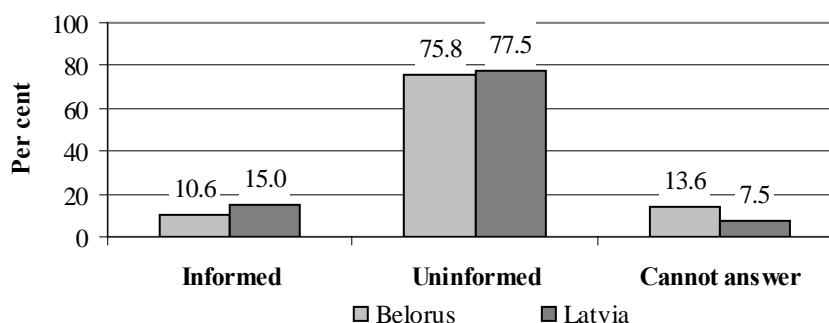
The preconditions for comparing the opinions of residents of several countries are created by the difference in the process of assessing the roles of globalisation and cultural heritage. Different globalization processes operate in different combinations in different regions, with different results. There is no one rural experience of globalization, and no pre-determined outcomes. National, regional and local factors can all intervene to shape impacts and responses. (Developing Europe’s..., 2011).

The concept of heritage leads us to a discussion of the continuity between past and present. Heritage provides historical depth and a permanent pattern in a perpetually changing world. Heritage is part of the present, and at the same time holds promises for the future; the problem of the past is a modern one. (Besiere J. 1998) Cultural heritage valuation is based on two main categories – historical values and socio-economic values (Szmelter 2013). Socio-economic values of cultural heritage provide opportunities for small businesses and crafts in rural areas.

**1. Similar and different perspectives on cultural heritage as value**

All the respondents, both in Belarus and in Latvia, with no exception (100%) regarded their cultural heritage as a value to be maintained and preserved in both the first and in the second country. Yet, they believed that only a small part of residents were informed about this value.

The respondents explained residents’ low awareness of their cultural heritage by several reasons: first, the unavailability of information, followed by the poor content of information and the poor setting/design of it. They also pointed to the fact that part of residents had low interest in this phenomenon.



Source: authors’ calculations and construction based on the survey data

Figure 1. **Percentage distribution of the respondents’ awareness of cultural heritage in Belarus and Latvia, 2014**

The limiting factors of awareness and their percentage distribution are represented in Table 1, which shows the differences in the significance of the factors between the countries. Latvians have higher (nearly 5 times) interest in information than Belarusians and have accentuated the shortage of information, as well as the too flat and inconspicuous advertising (Table 1).

Table 1

**The limiting factors\* of awareness and their percentage distribution in Belarus and Latvia, 2014**

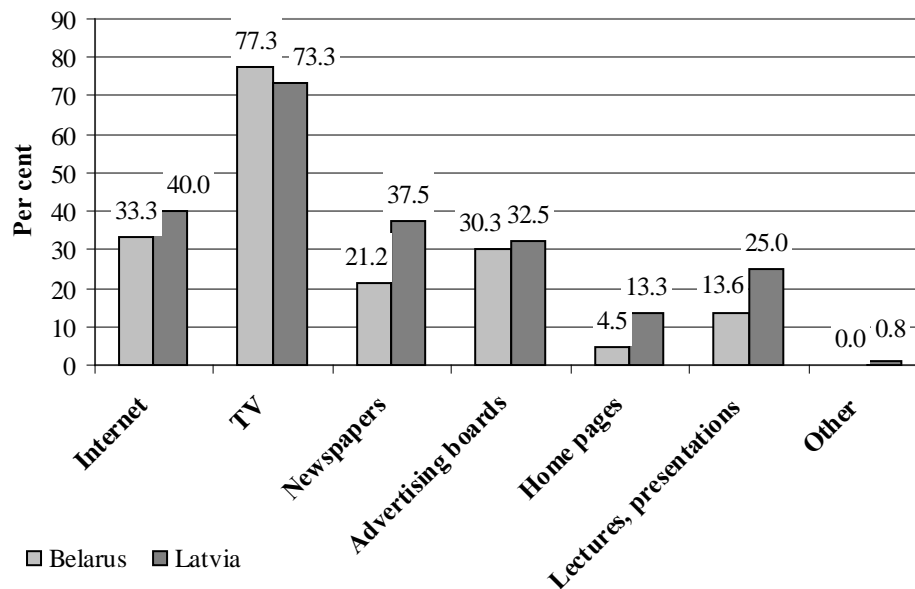
Country	Limiting factors			
	Shortage of information	Ineffective marketing measures	Too flat and inconspicuous advertising	No interest in information
Belarus	33.3	48.5	7.5	19.7
Latvia	60.8	45.8	25.0	4.2

\* – Several answers possible

Source: authors’ calculations based on the survey data

Yet, according to the respondents, most individuals (80.3% in Belarus and 95.8% in Latvia) wished more and detailed information about their cultural heritage.

Under globalisation, the key channels of information are associated with the latest technologies shaping the flow of information and the domain of use of cultural heritage. Figure 2 shows the information sources from which inhabitants receive information on cultural heritage and the importance of the main sources in Belarus and Latvia. The preference was given to TV and the Internet in both countries.



Source: authors' calculations and construction based on the survey results

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of the main sources of information (several answers possible) on the cultural heritage by popularity in Belarus and Latvia, 2014

The data obtained in the surveys show that both in Belarus and in Latvia mass media such as the Internet, television shows and websites of cultural organisations serve as important channels for getting new knowledge. However, traditional information channels such as newspapers and billboards have not become less important. And finally, direct contacts with the deliverer of information and knowledge in the form of lectures when questions can be asked and replies can be received have maintained their positions as a significant source of information and new knowledge.

In the result, one can conclude that there was interest in cultural heritage as value both in Belarus and in Latvia. An explicit wish to get more and detailed information on their cultural heritage was observed in both respondent groups. However, the greatest differences were observed in:

- the use of traditional information channels – newspapers, lectures and presentations were more popular in Latvia than in Belarus;
- the activities of getting additional information on the cultural heritage – in Belarus, according to the respondents, the less active population was greater than in Latvia.

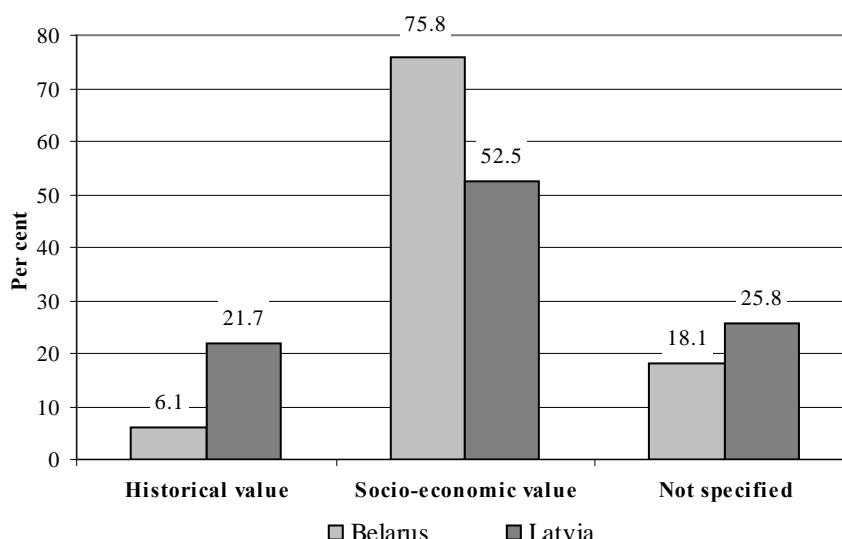
## 2. Accents of the understanding of cultural heritage values

The most recent research studies express an idea that cultural heritage as value has two aspects. On the one hand, cultural heritage is associated with a nation's efforts to preserve and be aware of its history and to maintain the understanding of belonging to it (landscapes, castles, churches, manor houses, monuments, etc.). On the other hand, in many aspects cultural heritage is important as a socio-economic value (traditional foods, crafts, elements in clothing, etc.) (Szmelter I., 2013).

The socio-economic aspect of cultural values closely relates to the opportunities to acquire such values and, first of all, the gastronomic cultural heritage which the public increasingly focuses on.

The results of the surveys show (Figure 3) that the preference of the socio-economic value of cultural heritage was higher than the historical value in both countries – Belarus and Latvia.

However, the Latvian respondents ranked the historical value 3.6 times higher than the Belarusians.



Source: authors' calculations and construction based on the survey data

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of the respondents' views on importance of the historical and socio-economic values of cultural heritage in Belarus and Latvia, 2014**

For this reason, there was a wish to get information about shopping places, the specifics of items and services, the production of goods and services and the available assortment. Interest in the production of goods and services prevailed in Belarus (36.4%), whereas every second respondent in Latvia expressed a wish to learn more about the specifics of goods or services (51.7%). Every third respondent (30.3% in Belarus and 30.8% in Latvia) admitted that it was possible to get additional information on the issues they were interested in. However, an explicit wish to get more information (53.0% in Belarus and 41.7% in Latvia) was observed, which might evidence that the information space regarding cultural heritage values was not complete in none of the countries.

Scholars (Tellstrom et al., 2006; Brulotte et al., 2014) argue that the cultivation, preparation, and consumption of food is used to create identity claims of 'cultural heritage' on local, regional, national and international level. The shopping places for gastronomic cultural values presented some differences. Direct producer-consumer contact places such as market places, including "green markets" and shopping on farms were mainly used in Latvia, whereas supermarkets' departments of ecological products were the most popular in Belarus.

Table 2

**Percentage distribution of various shopping places for cultural heritage products by popularity in Belarus and Latvia, 2014**

Country	Shopping places					
	Specialty shops	Farmers market	Department* in supermarket	Directly from farmers	"Green market"	Other
Belarus	21.2	15.2	25.8	22.7	6.1	0.0
Latvia	22.5	44.2	10.8	35.8	19.5	0.5

\* – department of ecological products

Source: authors' calculations and construction based on the survey data

From the perspective of the research aim, it is interesting to compare the explanations for why gastronomic cultural heritage products are not purchased by consumers. The respondents in Belarus explained this situation by the lack of information about why such products were better (50.0%), whereas in Latvia the reason was that such products were expensive and, consequently, many individuals could not afford to buy them (54.2%). Nevertheless, there was a great of proportion of the respondents in both countries (47.0% in Belarus and 67.5% in Latvia) who wanted to recommend their relatives, friends and others to consume cultural heritage products. The information obtained in the surveys indicates that there was the demand for gastronomic cultural heritage

products, as the respondents expressed their wish to recommend such values to their relatives, friends and other individuals in general; in this case, there are favourable preconditions for an increase in demand. Demand is always associated with supply, and it usually contributes to business expansion.

In Belarus, such a kind of entrepreneurship mainly takes the form of agro-ecotourism, which involves the Byelorussian national cuisine based on organic foods (Агроэкотуризм ...) and the entry of organic agricultural products into the market (Серая Т.). In contrast, in Latvia the so-called “green markets” and food crafts, in which individuals from small agricultural holdings are engaged, expand; they are not able to sufficiently provide for themselves and their families by producing such agricultural products. Those engaged in such an economic activity expand cooperation for the purpose of marketing their products (Pārtikas amatnieki...). Gastronomic tourism becomes an increasingly important pathway in tourism (Gastronomiskais ..).

So, the demand for gastronomic cultural heritage products might increase, which, in its turn, contributes to the supply of the goods and services demanded, the preservation of national traditions and the territory’s identity.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The findings of the research reveal that individuals in both Belarus and Latvia perceive their country’s cultural heritage as value. The differences may be observed regarding the most important aspect of cultural heritage or the focus on the current situation. The historical/ideological and socio-economic perspectives have existed simultaneously; the question can only be which perspective should be presently given the priority. One can think that from this perspective, according to the surveys, there are certain differences in the views between the public in Belarus and Latvia. It could be associated with the cultural policy accents of the government as well as some differences in the use of flows of information on cultural heritage and of information channels.
2. The gastronomic cultural heritage is important both in Belarus and in Latvia. The populations of both countries prefer traditional and organic foods. They wish to be more informed particularly about this kind of cultural heritage. The difference lies in the ways gastronomic cultural heritage products are purchased; in Latvia the historical shopping forms are still popular – different markets (e.g. farmers, ‘green’ markets)/ direct sales, which are affected by the agricultural policy in Latvia that focuses on engaging small agricultural holdings in entrepreneurship.
3. The problems that arose during the course of the present research suggest that more comparative research studies are necessary, which could be carried out within a joint project implemented by Byelorussian and Latvian scientists in order to identify a more profound and scientific perspective on the perception of cultural heritage as value and the ways of preserving, maintaining and using it in both countries and to take over the best practices from the cooperation partner.

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