

## Local identity in material culture as part of wellbeing and social sustainability

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### Abstract

The act of bringing local identity into material culture – into the design of buildings, interiors and products – is a part of socio-cultural well-being and social sustainability. In the contemporary era of globalisation and unification in material culture, it is very important to maintain and apply elements and concepts that are special and unique for single localities and regions. Cultural identity and tradition are inseparable parts of every society and can influence the character of a local built-environment and its elements. The socio-cultural aspects affects the typology/morphology and semiotics of crafted products and architecture, and it creates the basics of the design language of a country or region. Local identity can be understood as the essence of a cultural heritage and genius loci and plays a very important part in self-identification of individuals and social groups. This is unfortunately very often misinterpreted in the design of contemporary building or products. Although there exist many research studies in the field of architecture and design theory, ethnography, cultural anthropology, history and archaeology, they are very rarely available and understandable for practising architects, designers, investors, producers and services providers directly in the regions. Preserving local identity is also a big challenge for local industry and eco-tourism. The last part of the study is questioning the ways of working with “the known” and shows some examples from Europe and Slovakia.

After an evaluation of the relation between regional identity and wellbeing, we have set four main issues dealing with local identity as reflected in material culture that contribute to the well-being of users during all kind of interactions with built environment, and these are: attachment to place –building a self- and social group identity; comfort from interaction with “the known” – shared cultural values and signs, archetypes, and stereotypes; authentic experience and satisfaction through one’s own hands-on experience and interaction with handcrafted objects. Together with the phenomena of local self-identity, they are explored further on in the paper. The paper also shows the first results of the project – IDENTITY SK – a common platform of design, architecture and the social sciences in the form of regional concepts for products and services, coming from interdisciplinary literature and field research and storytelling.

**Key words:** local identity, material culture, regional products, environment, human being, human centred design, interdisciplinary research

ISSN 2384-8677

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13135/2384-8677/3274>

**Article history:** Submitted April 20, 2019. Accepted June 10, 2019. Published June 21, 2019

**Citation:** Kotradyová, V. (2019). Local identity in material culture as part of wellbeing and social sustainability. *Visions for Sustainability*, 11: 17-28.

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**Competing Interests:** The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Aspects of wellbeing and Local /Regional Identity

#### 1.1. Principles of well-being applied in human centred design.

**Wellbeing can be supported by 11 principles that were summarized after long-term multidisciplinary research of human centred design on the BCDlab platform.** Wellbeing can be defined as the state of absence of stress and it can be supported by:

- feeling of safety, combined with the competence to manage risks and attractions,
- possibility to combine prospect with refuge, usually related to protecting one's back with a simultaneous overview of the situation in a given space. It is clearly reflected in space occupation, especially in public spaces. This need also relates to seeing and being seen, whereas humans need to have this status strongly under control
- contact with the outdoors, at least visual, during the day and the possibility to control it – which is still strongly undervalued in many working and housing environments
- need for personal and intimate space, one's own territory, and the competence to occupy and control it
- possibility to switch between privacy and socialisation in dependence on the current situation
- appropriate scale and harmonised proportions of buildings and their indoor environment –with possibility of adaption in spaces for long-term stay
- possibility (or competence) to be attached to a place or products, to have the competence to adapt and personalize them, to mirror and extend the self /ego into the occupied space where the human lives, and thus gain a state of self-identification.
- protecting or implementing local identity in private and public spaces and preventing its loss as a result of globalisation and equalisation
- possibility to prevent pain and body deformation due to the using of inappropriate products and environmental settings; freedom in choice of body position and use of body-conscious products are needed here
- selection of adequate sensual stimuli – less stimulation in spaces of long-term stay
- choice of appropriate materials, prevailing of authentic natural materials supporting biophilia and regenerative effects for the nervous system, that can also influence the measurable parameters of well-being.

The objective of this paper is to explore more deeply the topic of local identity - protecting or implementing local identity in private and public spaces and preventing its loss as a result of globalisation and equalisation.

#### 1.2. Theoretical framework with Hawkes, Podoba, Danglova & Sartori

Putting socio-cultural comfort/wellbeing and local identity in material culture as a prior interest of this paper gives another perspective to other issues of well-being. At the beginning it necessary to investigate the phenomena in social sciences like anthropology, ethnography and environmental psychology.

According to Hawkes (2001) knowing where we have come from helps us to discover where we want to go. Our social memory and our repositories of insight and understanding are essential elements to our sense of belonging. Without a sense of our past, we are adrift in an endless present. The role of the museum and the protection of built heritage are obvious aspects of this area (both benefit from creative initiatives concerning their current use, for example, outreach programs, active community interaction). But there is much more that can be done. Perhaps most important is the acknowledgement of the extraordinary diversity upon which our present is founded.

What we do in the breaks between the struggle to survive is profoundly important to our wellbeing, to our sense of belonging and connectedness, to our understanding of ourselves and our relationships – to our culture.

Tradition and regional- local identity can be seen as something that is special for a place, or was spread in the region and has been transferred, used and popularised through many generations. At the same time, it is a socio-cultural and socio-economical process.

The search for tradition and coming back to roots leads very often to “folk kitsch” a misinterpretation of tradition. To find solutions that satisfy this need for continuity is interrupted in post-communist societies but also in other strongly modern - postmodern societies, where human beings need to be surrounded by something stable and known as a reaction to the constantly changing forces in society. This contemporary strong “thirst” of the market for traditional and regional solutions is clearly based on the rupture of cultural continuity that feels the need to be healed by something traditional and stable, something that we can rely on. It is also an obvious reaction to strong social transformations in late modernity societies.

According to the anthropologist Juraj Podoba (2018) pre-modern societies are characterised by their regional differentiation, while modernization processes erase those differences. Depending on geographical and historical contexts, the extent of the decay/transformation of regional and cultural characteristics varies in line with the pressure of innovations. At the same time, however, the “invention of tradition” appears within the modernization processes. Podoba is here inspired by Eric Hobsbawm's theoretical concept of the “invention of tradition” which highlights the ambivalent relationship between autochthonous local traditions and the fostering of folklore as a tradition. In late

modernity societies, it becomes impossible to separate local cultural traditions from this “invention of tradition” as represented on the level of the nation state, since the two are deeply interconnected. Hobsbawm’s paper analyses the phenomenon of the regional peasant cultures, which are supposed to become the base for the construction of invented tradition, created by the professional designers of artefacts/items/objects/environment, created for use by the people of the late modernity era. He focuses on the phenomenon of (vernacular) architecture, which has been dominant in the efforts to create regional identity(ties) characteristics. Invented tradition works with pictures of a past that is ‘under construction’ and in constant transformation.

We can see the solution in changing the attitudes of respected and admired social and economic elites from ignoring local identity and cultural context. This can happen through building one’s own house or public workplace, e.g. in the countryside a local medical doctor can sensitively convert and rebuild an old house for the purposes of his clinic, or a local business man can settle his company in a sensitively reconstructed or tastefully designed building as opposed to some irrelevant new built luxurious setting.

We can also interpret the role of elites in municipalities where investors that create public space use the opportunity to educate and to show a good example to a wider range of consumers. Institutional support of this process is clearly also necessary.

In the post-communistic countries there exists the phenomenon of big housing projects constructed during the later communist era and considered to be cultural equalization.

Sixty years ago there were enough traditional vernacular objects that were used for their original purposes. Now these are mostly objects in institutional care and under protection, but still there are “gatherings” of traditional objects – usually in more remote previously poor regions where, being in the lower part of social stratification, being attached to tradition and local identity was a matter of survival. Now these localities have become interesting for new forms of tourism and are often already protected like preserved memorial zones.

According to Danglova (2006), a key role in the forming of local identity can be ascribed to territorial space. The good news for local and regional development is that the inhabitants identify themselves emotionally with the living space of the village or region. Emotional ties encourage more active involvement in the treatment of local issues, inspire the enhancement of local community and so of local culture. Indifferent ties and ignorance of the living space are likely to result in negligence that contributes to devastating of the community and can end up in thoughtless treatment of the surrounding environment. Emphasis on decentralization, autonomy of local authority or on the local community is therefore of extreme importance. Decentralized society means putting the accent on the the key

position of the local community. The more varied are the fruits of decentralization, the more identified the key figures of local life and local authority become in the local micro-world; the more they understand its needs and wishes but also its seamy sides, which they are then in a position to artfully overcome.

According to Sartori, human beings do not live happily alone and in ideological disorientation, which is why they are constantly trying to belong somewhere, to be in gatherings, to identify themselves with organization and organisms.

An important accessory of identity is being different – what we are depends on what we are not, If we are not surrounded by “the others”, no “we” can be created.

Although according to Danglova (2018) it is natural for the rural environment to be heavily influenced by external globalization forces which erode the ties to the region, landscape and culture, the importance for its inhabitants to identify with the surrounding local space remains, and does not disappear despite the presence of “modern life” in rural areas. For local and regional development, it is a positive phenomenon for the people to emotionally identify themselves with the living space of the local amenities. Emotional attachment encourages intensifying involvement and engagement in local issues and so improving the situation in the local community and local culture. Lack of perception of the living environment leads to neglect of the community and to an indifferent relationship to the surrounding environment. If this indifference prevails, it will wipe out the abundance of vivid live tracks of local regional cultural differences. In this context, Danglova concludes with a paraphrase of Zygmund Bauman: Europe represents the greatest cultural diversity and extraordinary mosaic of ways of life - often two different strains less than 20 kilometers away – but this Europe will disappear if local traditions do not fight for their survival.

### 1.3. Regionalism and local identity

Maintaining cultural sustainability through a fostering and strengthening of local identity in the built environment and life style - this means bringing local materials, principles, concepts and legends back into the material culture – architecture, housing, lifestyle, product design.

These ideas were expressed already in 80thies in theory of critical regionalism. It was first used by the architectural theorists Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in their publications and, with a slightly different meaning, by the historian-theorist Kenneth Frampton (1983). The stylings of critical regionalism seek to provide an architecture rooted in the modern tradition, but tied to geographical and cultural context. Critical regionalism is not simply regionalism in the sense of vernacular architecture. It is a progressive approach to design that seeks to mediate between the global and the local languages of architecture. Due to Thorsten Botz-Bornstein (2015) in architecture, the concept of critical regionalism gained popularity as a synthesis of universal, “modern” elements and individualistic elements derived from

local cultures. Critical Regionalist alternatives are more than a postmodern mix of ethno styles but integrate conceptual qualities like local light, perspective, and tectonic quality into a modern architectural framework.

And what about social stratification and local identity? We can observe that the “blue collars” usually live their lives in contact with the local identity whereas white collars leave their former local community and constantly search for a new one. But in the traditional community too we can see enthusiasts coming from outside working contentedly. For older adults, being in an environment that reminds and supports local culture and place of origin is highly appreciated. If it is not possible to do this on a general level, it is at least possible within one’s own microenvironment, as was mentioned in the previous section.

Another need and necessity is being a valid part of participatory and activities and projects in the local community. Older adults can share their wisdom, experiences and deeper cultural values with younger generations, and thus support socio-cultural sustainability. This can secure identity in private and public spaces and prevent the loss of local identity associated with globalization.

Individual “coming back to roots” usually happens later in life, often after one has their own family, and brings with it higher respect for parents and their values. Continuity is thus ensured.

#### **1.4. New forms of tourism and well-being**

Regional or local identity can also be massively supported by new forms of responsible and sustainable tourism, thus the local identity has to be experienced, explored and shared, to be alive. Here we can speak about the potential of agro-tourism, eco-tourism, ethno-tourism that need also infrastructures with built environments and their elements – products to be used during the experience or brought home as reminders or displays connected with an attachment to certain objects.

It is not possible to describe local identity without respecting the geomorphology together with the climate of the place, which essentially is a main creator of everything that ever happened to human beings. Only a connection with the nature and cultural signs and marks can bring a complex overview about a locality or region.

So why nature watching? Practicing nature watching brings an overall slowing down during exploration as well as the experience of amazement and fascination, respect and empathy for the natural environment and nature self. It offers relaxation and regeneration for the nervous system, being in flow, being here and now and having authentic experiences connected to a place. At the same time, it addresses our origin as gatherers and hunters.

According to the Norwegian architect Tormod Amundsen (2016), a specialist in architectural objects for nature watching, one key understanding is that architecture is not a goal in itself; of outmost importance is how we engage with nature. The

conception of the architect as someone working with nature in a meaningful way and not at the expense of nature is just emerging, and its opportunities are wide-ranging.

Agrotourism is another tourism concept that is nature-bounded. It represents a coming back to roots in the period when human beings were farmers bound to the soil and the place and processing the first fruits of their agro, forest and horticultural work. It reminds us of our later past, deeply inbuilt in our genetic memory. It also transforms the clan/tribe into the agricultural community, where other social skills were needed.

Here there is always a gap where this kind of activity starts to be relaxation and an escape from urban life and not normal daily life, where man experiences all the difficulties connected with a way of life often remote from civilization’s conveniences.

The need for a deeper relation to the earth shared with a community is reflected in the contemporary concepts of urban farming, community gardens in cities etc. or by the moving of families to remote rural areas and the attempt to carry out a certain sort of traditional or permaculture farming in a consequent way.

Even when ethno-tourism is defined by Guevara (2012) as a series of activities that are linked with travelling, where the tourist participates actively and is involved in a “town” or “race” that articulates the elements of cultural history value and convictions, and also the daily activities that represent them, it can nonetheless function also in civilized cultures. For example, it can become the sort of tourism that we define as visiting local authentic storytellers, places that have interesting histories, etc.

The power of storytelling has a significant role in wellbeing and is particularly presented in every culture by fairytales, especially national ones, told to children. But story telling also for adults too is strongly present in for example Irish culture. It is also deeply analyzed in the books of psychoanalyst and story teller Clarissa Pinkòla Estes (1995). Maintaining regional language dialects of course forms a part of local social sustainability.

For this kind of infrastructure are needed tangible material objects - visitor centres, hotels, restaurants and buffets, shelters, regional products and gifts - slow architecture and design objects. All of these create an opportunity to implement the principles of local sustainable design and performance. Good service design and conscientious people to manage and guide this kind of business are crucial issues. Together they can create a positive user experience connected with wellbeing. These objects, in the ideal case also holders/stakeholders in a local identity, contribute significantly to creating a place, a site, tangible point, point of interest, motivation to come and reach the goal, an attachment point.

One of examples of infrastructure for nature watching was student project EWCC of Faculty of Architecture and Bergen school of Architecture in 2015/2016 that have led to building of wooden birdwatching platform DUNA on river Danube, 18 km from Bratislava (Fig.1).



**Figure 1:** DUNA bird watching near Bratislava is a great occasion for observing birds and other nature, a project of the Faculty of Architecture and the Bergen school of Architecture, Source: [www.watchamber.com](http://www.watchamber.com), photo: Noro Knap

The issue of wellbeing is also part of the social sustainability agenda and is related to the sustaining of local identity. After evaluation of the relation between regional identity and wellbeing, we set four main issues for dealing with local identity as reflected in a material culture that contributes to the well-being of users during all kind of interactions with built environment - these include:

- attachment to place – building an identity for the self and the social group
- comfort from interaction with “the known” – shared cultural values and signs, archetypes, and stereotypes
- authentic experience
- wellbeing from own hands-on experience and from interaction with professionally crafted objects

These are the main issues of local identity that are related to the well-being phenomena and, together with a phenomena of local identity self, need to be explored further.

The main idea of the interrelation between local identity and well-being or socio-cultural comfort is the awareness of one’s own origin, roots and own role in it. Being surrounded by the marks of local identity creates support for this process – the process of coming back to the roots and the “Self”.

In describing the phenomena of “coming back to roots” or back to the “Self” we can build upon the theory of individuation coming from the father of psychoanalysis – Carl Jung. In the broadest possible

way, individuation can be defined as the achievement of self-actualization through a process of integrating the conscious and the unconscious.

The tradition and the culture, as shared knowledge and preferences, is a part of both the conscious and the unconscious. The process of coming back to the “Self” is a main part of building one’s own personal identity and integrity.

## 2. ATTACHEMENT TO PLACE

### Building a self- and social group identity

Human beings build the “Self” through extending, mirroring, processing and getting feedback and self-identification through the extensions as were defined by Hall (1969), which is why we need the possibility to be attached to objects, places and environmental settings.

The important thing is to have the possibility (or competence) to be attached to a place or products, to have the competence to adapt them, to personalize, mirror and extend the Self /ego into the occupied space where the human lives, and thus gain a state of self-identification. This feature is important for the human as a cultural creature, but also as an animal that needs its own marked habitat. This need is extremely intensified during aging.

According to the environmental psychologist Robert Gifford (1996), place attachment represents a deep experience of feeling part of a place. It is related to the richness of meaning and sense that is developed out of acquaintance with a place and, subsequently, when the place gets to be more familiar. This attachment can be to

our homes, properties, communities or local nature sceneries and settings. Where the attachment rises, the intensity and meaning of the place and the meaning of Self become affiliated. Then the meaning of the place can become so strong that self-identity starts to be restricted by the place. On a smaller scale, many people are identified with their neighborhood, quarter, village, farms, house and rooms.

Attachment to a place has some serious implications. Its close relative - the identity of the place / place identity, is an important dimension of the personality of the individual. The ability to adhere to spaces and things, to mirror them, to build the Self upon them, to identify oneself with them, are very strong human needs. Each individual has a different intensity of projection of unprocessed unconscious issues into their immediate living space, into the things they own, depending on their life strategy and the evolutionary stage of personality development. With elderly people, the process can be very intensive. The meaning of place can be so intensive that somebody's Self-identity is bordered /limited by the place.

Through identification with a place, we build our own personal identity, whereas changes inside of a person are reflected in the desire and action to change the surrounding environment, and vice versa. To have the choice and the ability to change anything (on one's own body or in the immediate space around the person) means creating an opportunity to continuously grow.

Another important issue here is the social unconscious and "the Joneses" - others and their opinions are very important for us, according to studies of cultural anthropologist Daniel Miller (2001).

### **3. COMFORT FROM INTERACTION WITH "THE KNOWN" Shared cultural values and signs, archetypes, and stereotypes**

The phenomena of "the known" is based in a culture, whereas a culture is defined as the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understandings learned through the process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing them from any other group.

Culture works like lens through which we perceive the world, in order to protect our nervous system from overloading from stimuli. That's why using and sharing patterns that enable orientation in the material and immaterial world serve to make life easier.

Archetypes expressed in psychoanalytical Jungian theories can be interpreted also in design and architecture forms. The collectively-inherited unconscious idea, pattern of thought, image, etc., that is universally present have reflection in human preferences in building and furnishings.

One example of architecture form archetype is a classical saddle roof structure, reminding us of living in

provisional shelters in prehistorical times.

That is why people feel so good in an attic space or in an inner space that has a visible wooden roof structure. We have lived 6 million years in the wilderness in some primitive shelters, and just some ten thousand years in buildings.

Contemporary human beings have inherited a preference for environments that are supportive for a survival that is independent from culture. Signs that are based on archetypal knowledge communicate safety and belonging as a tool of self-identification.

Human nervous systems relax when facing something "known", based in the genetic memory, the personal or collective unconscious or conscious. What makes us feel really relaxed is being in autopilot mode thanks to habituation, somatization - embodied habits through doing things regularly, practicing family rituals or community rituals, supported by storytelling.

Archetypes and stereotypes are also hidden in fairytales and folk stories (Pinkola Estes, 1996). Good example is also the story about the 3 little pigs teach us that a wooden structure is less durable than one made of bricks. Also stories from history tell us about great fires that have destroyed towns and villages because they were made of wood - it creates an unconscious fear of having wooden house, even though nowadays they have the same durability and safety as other building materials and technologies.

Sometimes it is necessary to directly show the way or to manipulate the public opinion through designs of public places that can serve as social constructs and social praxis. Bringing children and young people who are personally evolving into such public places has a consistent influence on their mind sets and later preferences in creating their own living and public places.

Being a "Vorbild" by showing respect and empathy to cultural values in everyday life is also a way of inspiring and teaching the next generation within strategy of copying authorities. Also institutional learning supported by courses about architecture and design, organized trips and excursions can support the increasing level of material and building culture. We can see such positive examples e.g. in Austria in the Vorarlberg region, in South Tirol in Italy or in North Sweden, in Kyoto, Japan etc. In Vorarlberg we can see the local or regional identity reflected in modern architecture and design in a way that deserves respect and admiration, even though it is also a kind of invented identity. In small villages we can see modern architecture coping with the traditional one in a great synergy, built from local materials, with local architects and craftsmen, matching perfectly to the local genius loci. This phenomenon was explored in many publications. Let's mention at least one of them. Architecture as a social Praxis from Prechter, 2013. During a number of excursions, we were amazed by public buildings like schools, kindergartens, community centers, factories, power houses. It is a part of the social transformation connected with architecture in the 90-ties (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: Field research of transformation and interpretation of elements of regional traditional culture into modern architecture and design, Vorarlberg region in Austria. March 2018, Source: V. Kotradyová, 2018*

For children and young adults, it is crucial to be surrounded and shaped by material and immaterial elements of regional and local identity. It is a natural way of sustaining the local culture. Even so, there can be a form of rebellion and resistance during the formation of Self-identity in the adolescent period. It is a process that can be misused, but at the same time it can be used for sustaining the local culture heritage.

#### 4. HAVING AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

While working with abstracts values, plastic and glass devices, there is a contemporary desire for authentic experiences – for being surrounded by something real, something that can be relied on, verified over time. Tradition like a term is declined and questioned a lot.

Here belongs experiencing believable sensory stimuli that are also culturally accepted and whose context is understood.

##### 4.1 Visual authenticity

A main sign of **visual authenticity** is aging, whereby colour changes on a surface may be accepted or diminished. One advantage of most traditional natural materials (such as wood, stone, or leather) is that they age with grace. For example, wood ages both indoors and outdoors as a result of UV rays and other outdoor conditions, including the usual physical obsolescence. Aging can either be accepted or denied by eternally exchanging worn-out parts.

##### 4.2 Tactile authenticity

It is significant that this is more connected with our inner instincts than with our eyes. According to Hall (1969) the pleasure of touching a surface and enjoying the smoothness and balanced temperature is connected to tenderness and caressing. The intimate touch of textiles on human skin has already been thoroughly studied, and is a must in many fields of industrial design and interior design, in cars for example. Meyer (1999) provides a

profound survey on the measurement, design and impression of tactile effects.

During the research project Interaction of Man and Wood at IHF, BOKU in Vienna, we investigated the tactile interaction in depth and employed the term 'contact comfort' to express the state of body and mind during tactile interaction. When touching some object, feeling the contact comfort is a basic condition for being relaxed and avoiding irritation and stress. There is a direct linkage to tactile authenticity. From our past experience, we have certain expectations/ predictions about the tactile properties of materials and shapes. So when contact is about to happen, we approach the material with certain predictions and our nervous system is then irritated and stressed when the interaction is completely different. When the surface or shape provides certain features that we recognize by sight, and the contacted material turns out to be a fake, a stressing/frustrating reaction by our nervous system might occur. And on the reflective level we can be disappointed.

So we have to trust in the object with regard to its tactile properties if we want to avoid such situations. This relates to quality of surface, but also to shape and weight.

##### 4.3 Acoustic authenticity

Juhani Pallasmaa in his book *Eyes of the Skin* (2012) writes that sight isolates, whereas sound incorporates; vision is directional, whereas sound is omni-directional. The sense of sight implies exteriority, but sound creates an experience of interiority. I regard an object, but sound approaches me; the eye reaches, the ear receives. Hearing structures and articulates the experience and understanding of space. We are not normally aware of the significance of hearing in the spatial experience, although sound often provides a temporal continuum in which the visual impressions are embedded.

Every building or space has its characteristic sound of intimacy or monumentality, invitation or rejection, hospitality or hostility. A space is understood and appreciated through its echo as much as through its

visual shape, but the acoustic precept usually remains as an unconscious background experience. Sight is the sense of the solitary observer, whereas hearing creates a sense of connection and solidarity. The acoustic properties of some materials and shapes are very important for creating acoustic balance - intimacy but not isolation. It is suitable to create a balance through the gentle mixing of softer and porous materials without finishing or echoing materials with hard and smooth surfaces that reflect sound waves.

#### 4.4 Olfactory authenticity

Can you recall a specific odor or scent that has the 'spatiotemporal' ability to transport you back in time and space to a very specific place from your past? Most of us have experienced how the unexpected whiff of a Proustian, Remembrance of Things Past, type of odor can instantly evoke flashbacks to somewhere long ago or far away. Until recently, the underlying brain mechanisms that encode these vivid time-and-place smell memories has remained a mystery. But now, for the first time, a new study, "Hippocampal Projections to the Anterior Olfactory Nucleus Differentially Convey Spatiotemporal Information During Episodic Odour Memory," (Aqrabawi, A. J., Kim, J. Ch. 2018) helps to explain how 'what-when-and-where' smell memories are stored in the brain.

Something irregular, unique, original, made by hand, can be classified as an authentic experience - beauty in simple functionality and usability. A good example is the phenomenon of owning, rebuilding, refurbishing old traditional houses for purposes of second - weekend homes. This is a reflection of the contemporary lack of real authentic complex experience explains the popularity of free time common creative workshops, labs and trainings where participants can share their joy from flow.

Traditional local materials like wood or clay have a great potential in the "do it yourself" issue, as construction or decorative materials that are easily available, formable and workable, which can quickly bring positive feedback and satisfaction even on the hobby level. This process is enabled by the great availability on the market of different prefabricated products that ease the work. But the creating process is much therapeutic, complex and consequent if the whole process is really traditional, with less help from modern technologies.

To hold something properly in the hand and to have a real control over the tool and material is a matter of deep satisfaction that increases along with practicing and raising skills up to mastery. This principle differs for men and women, with man preferring to work with hard and heavy materials in repairing, building or rebuilding with tools something large and women enjoying fine hand work with direct contact of the fingers with a material, even though for both sexes the goal and the primary need - satisfaction and direct immediate feedback through creating and completing something - is the same.

Robust or fine hand work as well as fine art is also a form of meditation and also part of ergotherapy - a

part of rehabilitation or psychotherapy. In every hand work there exists a certain kind of transfer of ideas, energy and emotions among the creator, material and user. The human energy and emotions embedded and transmitted into a material are then later further perceived and felt by the users of the objects. This transmission works especially with crafted objects, which makes them unique.

Here another way of interaction exists between the objects of mastership and users. Professional craftsmanship is nowadays being endangered and widely substituted by the amateur enthusiast, whose work can later be transformed as well into professionalism. Being surrounded by crafted objects and enjoying an authentic experience from them, combined with amazement and fascination, also forms an element of wellbeing.

The handmade object does not charm us simply because of its usefulness, but lives in complicity with our senses, and that is why it is so hard to discard it - it is like throwing a friend out of the house (Paz, 1987).

Using your hands as a tool to communicate thoughts and ideas; building a relationship between hand, mind, thought, and object; feeling the satisfaction of making something that you can use in your life - these are the things that make craft education important in my opinion.

The Penland School of Crafts (2004) in its anniversary book stated that reformed-minded writers in England and United States focused on two main topics: sincerity and simplicity. The halcyon days of the crafts occurred at a time when every workman was an artist and every workman was a workman, when gain was of less importance than quality, and when things were made to endure. The spirit of commercialism changed this and resulted in large production at low cost. This placed low price wares within the range of the multitude, and luxury, in the sense of the ownership of many things, rapidly increased. Consequently, the value of workmanship was lowered and the purchaser was satisfied with machine-made ornaments. Naturally, then, excessive adornment became the rule, and art became divorced from industry.

According to Charles F. Binns, human happiness is encompassed not by a maximum of possession but by a minimum of desires... The need is simplicity, both in home and life, and it is the mission of the crafts to promote this. In the home and in life, it is the mission of the crafts to promote this. In the home.... the simplification of surroundings does not necessarily mean a lessening of cost.... A few things, yes, but each one of the best, each one a masterpiece bringing and ever repeating the message of a master. These are works of which one does not tire. They become life-long friends and are fashioned so as to mellow but not to decay with age. In this way also daily life is affected ... the mission of the crafts is to teach these things.

In crafted design and the production process there is the dialogue of a creator- his mind and body - and the material. In this way there is a high chance that a product will be material conscious, but also human-centred, so that in this connection there are created



**Figure 3** Doses “Povabnice”, 2010 and bowl from collection Závrtý a Erózie, 2018, Tibor Uhrin, Sources: [www.uhrindesign.com](http://www.uhrindesign.com), 2010

objects that respect the material and thus bring also more relaxation for the nervous system of those perceiving them.

Around the world there are professionals working on this interface between craft, design and art, and their works belong among masterpieces. As an example, we can mention the Slovak designer Tibor Uhrin, who has based his design work upon craftsmanship (Figure 3).

The exhibition Homo faber first organised in September 2018 in Venice showed a huge collection of this kind of work and gave hope that professional craftsmanship was not dead. This phenomenon works also in the “hobby” version, where the creating and building process becomes a tool for regeneration and recovery of every unprofessional creator, although a certain quality of result must be attained to bring a true feeling of satisfaction at the end.

## 5. INTERPRETATION OF THE LOCAL IDENTITY

### Case studies

Last part of the study is dealing with questioning the

ways of working with the local identity, with “the known” and shows some examples from Europe and Slovakia.

How to preserve it, transform, interpret it, copy, refer to it? First of all it research about it, respect it, having a lot of respect and empathy by adding something new, use it with the context and telling stories, Not to embed in misinterpretation and be stranded in many form of kitsch.

How to define good taste and appropriate way of working with regional motives and features, how deal with it and not to copy literary? We can interpret it, refer to it, transform it and to question the process constantly and its result from the point of view of social sustainability and wellbeing.

It is possible to work with it also in a contextual way, in form of art acupuncture, as we did during the project BAETCH in the city, in Sandeleiten in Vienna, where there was built a temporary community center from waste brought by local inhabitants that were having many social problems in the area. This effort was to bring them together face to face by doing something hands-on (Figure 4).

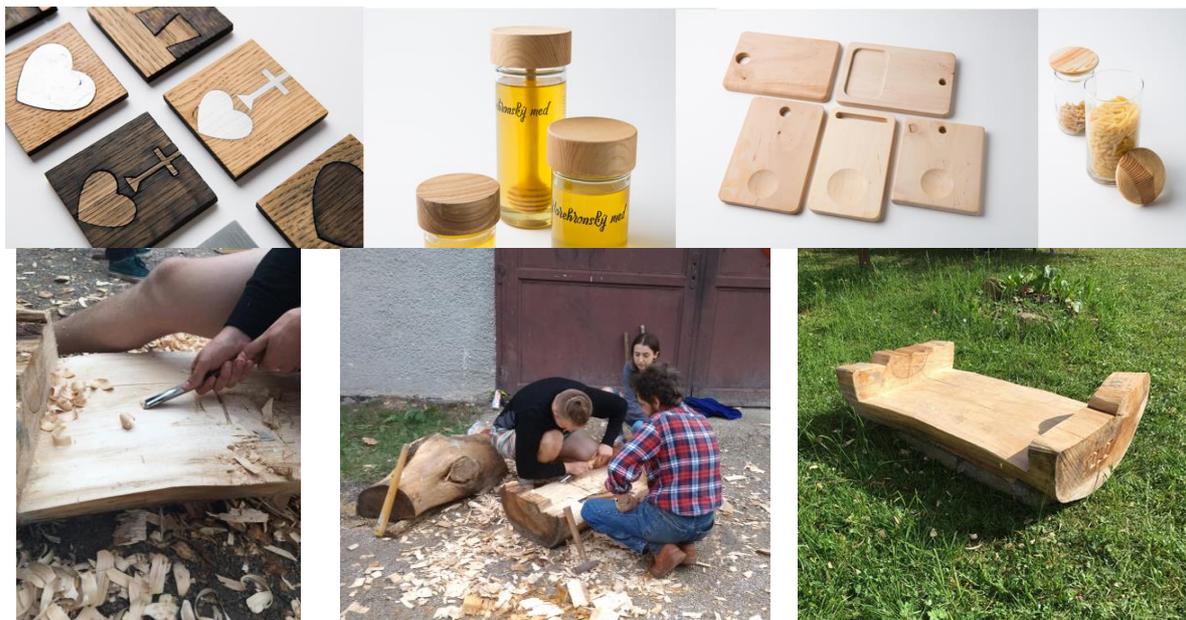


**Figure 4:** BAETCH in the city, voluntary built temporary community center in Sandeleiten, Vienna, workshop with participants from Austria, New Zealand and Slovakia, 2012, Source: Veronika Kotradýová, 2012

In 2018, we decided to choose a different - comprehensive research and development methodology. This resulted in the organization of a series of experimental workshops entitled "Regional Product". The methodology consists in combining literary research, ethnographic field research (observation, mapping, interviews, case studies, oral history collections) with local stakeholders - representatives of different groups of citizens involved in regional development, participatory design and development

and prototyping regional products or products inspired by the region.

The combination of research and "in situ" creation was, in line with the project's ambition, to bring inspirational and exemplary solutions for consumer products, gift items, souvenirs, furniture, entire interiors, and building constructions, referring to folk material culture. Therefore, the project includes experimental workshops combined with field research in the regions (Figure 5).



**Figure 5** Field research, transformation and interpretation of elements of regional traditional culture of Horehronie into modern design, authors: P. Daniel, T. Lesajová, V. Kotradyová, L. Uhlárová, Source: N. Knap, K. Krajčovičová and V. Kotradyová, 2018

The first was a workshop in Pohorela, with the topic: "Regional product of Horehronie" with the participation of professionals and students from the field of ethnography, architecture and design.

During field research, products and services were designed within the philosophy of research by design, and conceived with the aim of developing the potential to develop regional micro-businesses linked to eco-agro and ecotourism, with the possibility of production in the region and distribution to and from local tourist information centres. The concepts were further developed after returning from the workshop. Figure 6 shows the prototypes of products inspired by the Horehronie traditional culture in conjunction

A second workshop was placed in southcentral Slovakia, in the Hont region, with a basecamp in the village of Hrušov. This had a very different climate and geomorphology from Horehronie and thus very different available materials.

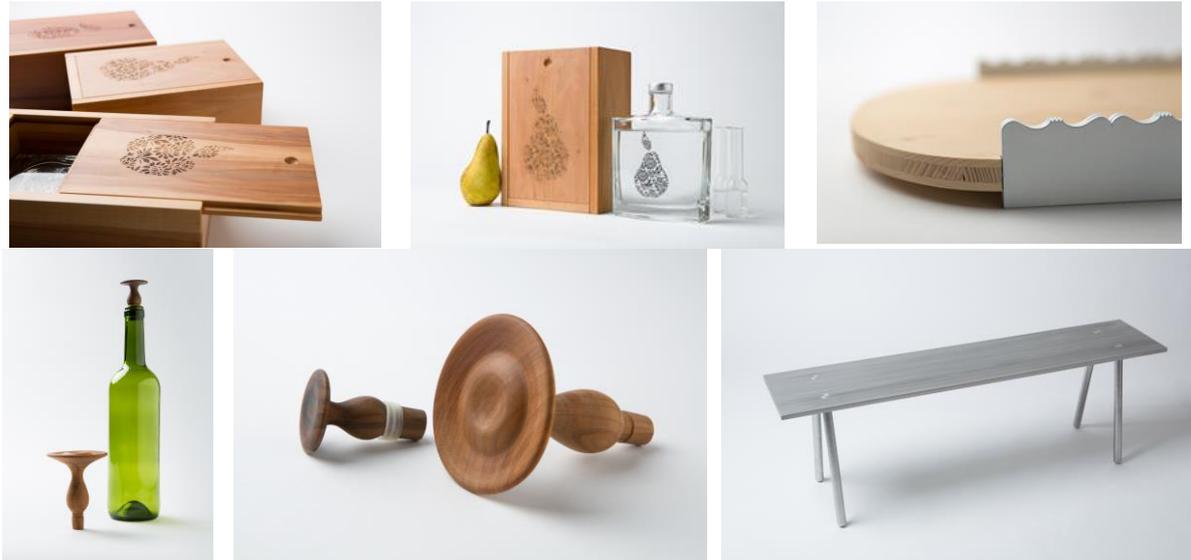
While in Horehronie is prevailing the use of soft wood, of sheep breeding with milk products and wooden objects used for their processing and home textiles production, in Hont there is a dominance of stone works, hardwood processing, and basketry, fruit and wine culture. This difference was also reflected in the products that were developed. A third workshop

was established in Northeast Slovakia, in a region of north Šariš and Zemplín, with a basecamp in the small UNESCO protected town of Bardejov. The region was special due to its multi-ethnicity, where Slovaks, Jews and several tribes of Ruthenians have lived side by side for hundreds of years.

The culture has been influenced by a strong history of wars in the region, many heavy battles during the First and Second World Wars. A speciality of this region are also the wooden churches of the eastern rite.

For the effectiveness of such a workshop, it turned out to be very important to have right from the early beginning a link to local activists in order to maintain regional / local identity and to promote regional development. Meeting local stakeholders and bringing them together around one table to discuss and be involved in the creative process also played a crucial role.

The objects that are being developed in the workshop (Figure 5, 6) will be further explored and tested regarding the preferences of respondents. Also the topic of physiological reactions with EEG sensors of respondents while in a built environment that has marks of local identity will be further explored.



**Figure 6** Examples of products inspired by regional elements of Hont, designed during workshop and field research in situ; design: A. Tóth, M. Kučerová, P. Daniel, T. Lesajová, Soruce: Noro Knap, 2019

## CONCLUSION

Getting into contact with regional identity involves exploration, watching, listening, feeling, being amazed and coming back to one's roots and to the Self.

Being attached to the place where we live and taking care of it in common community interest, being aware of our origin, having a relationship with it, is an important part of wellbeing. Belonging to a community, having a rich relationship with that community massively contributes to public health and wellbeing.

Creating something with one's own hands while being in a state of flow is a further important part of wellbeing. Also being surrounded by crafted products and being amazed by master craftsmanship contributes to socio-cultural comfort.

What exactly supports wellbeing while being in interaction with issues having signs, referring to local signs, marks brimming over with local identity in a complex way is locally bounded and naturally very much culturally conditioned. But what is common for every culture is the need of the Self; all around the world people need to be connected with their roots and traditions to build a personal identity and integrity – to be healthy.

These issues will be further explored in the near future and tested through physiological responses.

During our first pilot workshops the entire team experienced fascination from the exploration of local identity and the flow from being involved in local craft techniques based on profound admiration and respect. This all is reflected in the designed product.

It also shows the meaning for designers to come closer, to listen and observe, to be directly in touch with the resource, by the root of the tradition, by its context in geomorphology, climate, mentality connected with local life style, rituals, stories, reflected in immaterial and material culture. Then it

gains the potential to match with the local identity, to be accepted by the local community and to be further transmitted to users of the products and spaces.

Case studies have shown great potential for regional development and possibility to contribute to the wellbeing during everyday life and experiencing the new forms of tourism. This issue is in progress and it will be further published.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper was supported by project APVV 16-0567 IDENTITY SK- common platform for design, architecture and social sciences, <http://www.bcclab.eu/APVV-16-0567.html>

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