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## LACE IN CROATIA – TRADITION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### Abstract

On the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage in Croatia, art has taken its place, respectively the skill of textile handicrafts, better known as lacemaking, which rests on preservation, promotion and sustainability tradition. Consequently, sustainable development is based on an integrated, comprehensive approach to economic, ecological and social values through the natural, social and human sciences. Interweaving threads using a needle or a stick forms a characteristic shape of textile activity that requires exceptional calmness, patience, precision and specific work of hands whose product is a handicraft called lace. This work aims to explore and compare the role and purpose of Croatian lace in the past and today to raise awareness of tradition and the value that Croatian lace still carries today.

The lace tradition in Croatia has been nurtured for centuries, especially in smaller rural areas where women have woven their traces in the rich history of folk art by making lace. Silk, cotton, linen, silver and gold threads form a hollow work worthy of admiration. With their technological and artistic characteristics, lace works are not only an integral part of the culture of the community but also an indicator of artistic creativity in Croatia.

**Keywords:** Croatian lace, intangible cultural heritage, sustainable development, tradition, art

## **Lacework in Croatia**

The Renaissance period marked the emergence of the first lace, whose task was to replace embroidered decoration or adorn existing clothing, but over time, it reached the stage of independent production of various handicrafts. Lace on a needle and lace on sticks are two basic techniques of making lace, and knowledge of weaving and embroidery is the basis for the development of lacemaking skills.

Špoljar (2011: 45) finds that the beginnings of lacemaking in Croatia were related to nuns and nobles who passed on the knowledge and tradition of lacemaking to their people. The practice of lacemaking in Croatia has been nurtured for centuries. However, essential confirmation of the emergence of lacemaking in Croatia is in the writings of the Senate of the Republic of Dubrovnik from the 15th century. The laws on the appearance of lace works are written in them, where the technique of lacemaking is specifically emphasised. However, lacemaking activity ceased due to the earthquake that hit the city of Dubrovnik in 1667. The most significant material evidence is the alba or mass shirts still preserved in monasteries throughout Croatia (Eckhel, 2012). Therefore, we can conclude that “through traditional tradition and material remains, lacemaking comes to us as part of the ethnographic heritage” (Eckhel, 2012: 30).

Eckhel (2012) also notes that today's Croatia was under the rule of certain European countries (Italy, France, Austria), and therefore, the works of Croatian lacemakers are often presented in the world as Venetian, Italian or Austrian works. Although the beginnings of lacemaking in the world were quite similar, the further development differs significantly, which leads to the conclusion that as the technology of lacemaking improved, so did the development of lacemaking. Geometric patterns, floral motifs and depictions of human, animal and, mythical figures are just a few of the artistic elements employed by the “Danica Brössler” work society in Lepoglava (Bracanović, 2020).

Petrović Leš (2017) finds that Danica Brössler, a Croatian intellectual and creator, worked with a lot of will and love in the era of socialism and left an indelible mark on the social and cultural history of Croatia. In addition, a woman who, through her works, presented the situation in Croatian lacemaking in the past but is also vital for the development of lacemaking in Croatia is Zlata Pl. Šufflay, a teacher, researcher and promoter of Lepoglava lacemaking. Klobučar (2009) notes that Zlata Šufflay has published numerous publications, and the most significant one is *Croatian folk lace at home and on the altar*. It emphasises the characteristic differences between Croatian and European lace and advocates

the introduction of lace in every home and altar, which would be the pride of the homeland and people in Croatia.

Lepoglava, Pag and Hvar lace are included on the UNESCO representative list of intangible cultural heritage. The rest are on the list of protected intangible cultural assets of the Republic of Croatia, which promotes respect and appreciation for human creativity and cultural diversity (Skelin, 2019).

### **Sources of lacemaking in Croatia**

Eckhel (2012) notes that the development of lacemaking in Croatia had a different course of development than in other parts of Europe. In Croatia, lacemaking was more developed in smaller rural areas as an additional source of income, while in other European countries, lace was made by citizens, noblewomen and women from the church. Consequently, there is a visible difference in domestic and foreign lace's artistic and technological characteristics (Eckhel, 2013).

There are three main centres for making lace in Croatia - Lepoglava, Pag and Hvar. However, in recent decades, lacemaking activity has been taking place in Primošten, Sveta Marija in Međimurje, and in the villages of Brodsko Posavlje in Slavonia, where lacemaking has been an integral part of everyday life and continues to thrive today.

According to Portada (2010), one of the most critical events for lacemaking in Pag was the opening of a lace school whose main goal was to provide quality lacemaking, which positively impacted economic development and culture and enriched the tradition of the Pag community. Eckhel and Zorić (1995) point out that Pag lace is one of the symbols of the town of Pag. The method of creation and production is recognised among the world-famous laces throughout Europe. Pag lace is lace sewn with a needle and can be significantly different from other laces primarily due to the thin, white thread that makes it so precise and meticulous. Motifs such as *handle, bannock, sun, leaves, and almonds* can still be seen today at the International Lace Festivals in Pag, where lacemakers from Croatia and European countries present their unique works (Grašo, 2018).

Although it is believed that Pauline priests brought the technique of making lace in Lepoglava, its spread is due to hardworking women who accepted and continued the art of lacemaking and created a tradition that shaped history but also encouraged future generations to respect and learn new skills of making lace (Spoljar, 2011: 45-47). Lepoglava lace on batiks was made by girls from the

village and shepherdesses who sold their works at local fairs, resellers or even in exchange for groceries in village shops. Recognisable motifs for Lepoglava lace are vegetation motifs - tulips, primroses, poppy flowers, flowers, zoomorphic motifs - butterflies, birds and curly motifs - teaser, bun (Eckhel, 2013).

Sun lace is one of the youngest traditions of lacemaking in Croatia, whose motif is reminiscent of the sun's rays and appeared in the mid-19th and early 20th century on the island of Hvar, where it is also called agave lace. Nuns make it in the Benedictine monastery in the town of Hvar, as they are dedicated to keeping the tradition of making agave lace exclusively within their church order. It is created without a template or blueprint using white, thin threads obtained from agave leaves, which signifies the originality of each work, and its final appearance represents the imagination and freedom of the person who creates it (Eckhel, 2012).

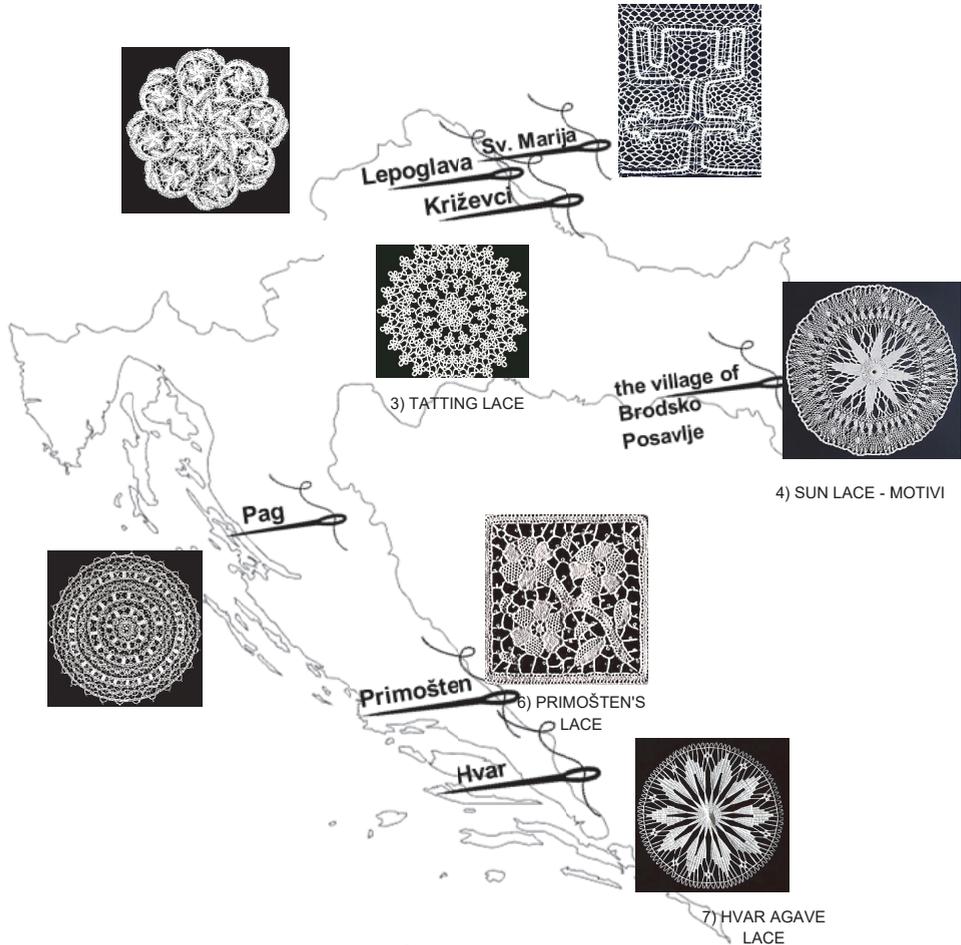
In Slavonia, more precisely in the villages of Brodsko Posavlje, there are recognisable motifs, sunny lace that we find on parts of folk costumes and examples of linen utensils. It is recognisable worldwide and can be confirmed by various specimens exhibited in the world's largest lace museums (Eckhel, 2012).

Svetomarska lace is one of the simpler laces due to the way it is made - one long, unbroken thread that is enough to make the whole handmade lace. It was created by women and young girls in the winter as there were no agricultural jobs during that time, so it is important to note that it was made in the villages of Međimurje, respectively with the centre in Sveta Marija, which is why it got its name (Vuković, 2015).

In the area of Primošten, Primošten lace is made on a needle similar to Pag lace due to the technique of making lace, but also the ornaments that are incredibly identical to Pag lace (Eckhel, 2012). In the past, lacework was a vital aspect of culture and customs, practised exclusively by selected women whose patterns were passed down from generation to generation. Vuković (2015) points out that it takes up to a few years of knitting to make an individual garment from lace. Therefore, it is important to recognise the value of work in which a lot of effort, patience, and dedication have been invested.

The youngest Croatian lace, which appeared a few years ago and is also the newest souvenir in Križevci, is called *čunčana* lace. It consists of knots and eyelets and is mainly used to decorate curtains, collars, edges, etc. There is an exceptional interest in *čunčana* lace in Križevci, which has become an

essential part of the cultural heritage, and lacemakers still maintain it today by participating in exhibitions, public events and festivals (Sitta, 2019).



**Picture 1.** Map of Croatia with lacemaking locations  
(Illustration by: T. Vekić).<sup>1</sup>

1 Downloaded and adapted from:

- 1) <https://mdc.hr/hr/mdc/zbirke-fondovi/zbirka-muzejskih-plakata/pregled-zbirke-plakata/svetomarska-cipka,1093.html>
- 2) <https://www.turizam-vzz.hr/istrazite/kulturna-bastina/159-lepoglavska-cipka>
- 3) <https://arteist.hr/slikocipke-su-pravi-simbol-upornosti-i-preciznosti/>
- 4) <https://muzejbp.hr/zbirka-tekstila/>
- 5) <https://fabijanic.com/photos/paska-cipka/>
- 6) <https://www.primostenplus.com/udruga-primostenskih-cipkarica-pekljica-promovira-lijepu-tradiciju-sivanja-cipke/>
- 7) <https://visithvar.hr/hr/see-and-do/hvarska-cipka/>

### **Application of lace in the past and today**

As “there is no craft without tools” (Eckhel, 2005: 177), it should be noted that a needle, thread and a round base or a hard-filled pillow are needed to make lace whose original purpose in the past was to decorate women’s clothing and linen furniture, but it also showed the long, rich tradition of each society. Schools were organised where lacemakers were introduced to the techniques and ornaments of European lacemaking without neglecting traditional elements and skills. The school’s work programmes focused on “adopting new lace products: tablecloths, mats, curtains, collars, handkerchiefs, and pieces of civic interior decorations or ornamentation” (Eckhel, 2012: 45).

Juzbašić (2004), as cited in Ćorkalo (1997), states that in the Slavonian area at the end of the 19th century, textile objects that were exhibited showed the rich traditional handicrafts of the eastern part of Croatia. The works displayed at national and international gatherings and exhibitions have not only achieved exceptional success, but have also led to the organisation of the purchase, sale, and custom production of lace. One of the curiosities is that every female child born in Lepoglava received a wooden stick as a gift in order to become a skilled lacemaker in the future. Moreover, the sound made from wooden sticks was often a lullaby for children, so it is often said that lace “accompanies a man from birth to death” (Eckhel, 2012: 83).

Eckhel (2012) further explains that part of the tradition that continues today is the items that make up the maiden dowry - towels, pillows, bedspreads, and tablecloths- which thus represent the reputation and pride of the family. Although they may not be part of everyday life, but they remain part of a tradition celebrating solemn family, religious and homeland significance. It was also an occasion where generations of women would gather, which was one of the ways to socialise within the rural community.

Nurturing the tradition, courses, workshops or schools are organised in certain regions today, where lacemaking is often reflected as craft production, so its primary purpose is promotion and marketing (Eckhel, 2013). The Bartul Kašić High School in Pag implements a one-year programme to raise awareness and revive the tradition while integrating it into the educational programme. In regular classes, female students can be professionally trained to independently produce all Pag lace forms and types. Kostović-Vranješ (2015) points out the importance of integrating cultural heritage and tradition into educational plans and programmes through which students will become aware of the importance

of nurturing and preserving national heritage treasures, which will make them themselves become creators of traditions and new values over time.

Exhibitions of lace works have been frequent and widespread since the beginning of the 20th century; as in 2012, the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb hosted the exhibition Praise to the Hand-Lacemaking in Croatia in honour of the inscription of lacemaking in Croatia on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage. Juzbašić (2004) explains that exhibitions are organised on cultural and entertainment events or the occasion of celebrations, holidays, anniversaries and similar events. Accordingly, Petrović Leš (2019) points out that festival cultural heritage helps present traditions and culture and contributes to popularising heritage. The most famous lace festivals in Croatia are the International Lace Festival in Lepoglava, held since 1997 and the International Lace Festival in Pag, where lacemakers from Croatia and other European countries present their lacemaking skills and customs. It is important to mention the "Green Flower 2004" award and the "Originally Croatian" label worn by the lace produced by the Lepoglava Lace Cooperative as recognition of its originality and quality. On Hvar and Pag, in the summer along the waterfront, we can meet several lacemakers who tie handmade work and allow visitors to learn how to make and sell a single copy of lacework. Eckhel (2012) cites some authors who used Croatian lace in their work: academic sculptor Akiko Sato, fashion designer Boris Pavlin, academic sculptor Tomislav Kršnjavi, photographer Damir Fabijanić and many poets such as Ivanka Benzija. The fact is that lace on the market has a high price that should not be lowered as it represents the quality and authenticity of cultural heritage. However, Kostović-Vranajesh (2015) warns against contemporary globalisation trends that slow down the maintenance of the distinctiveness of the identity of certain regions, which creates an additional need to preserve awareness of cultural heritage and tradition. Damijanić (2021) concludes that lace is a vital part of cultural heritage and an integral part of a specific local identity, so it is necessary to preserve the tradition of making lace in all localities in Croatia and pass it on to younger generations.

### **Sustainability of tradition through new creativity**

Lace is used in various ways and is present in all periods of life. In addition to requiring technological skills in making, it is a product that develops creativity. The lacing technique determines the process of creating materials and ornaments in work, but the final product is the work of a talented lacemaker. The application of lace depended on cultural criteria and novelties in fashion because lace is

considered high elegance regardless of whether it is lace on separate objects, folklore materials, or modern application. Accordingly, products promoting Croatian lace have been designed. One of these products is gold coins issued by the Croatian National Bank in cooperation with the Croatian Monetary Institute d.o.o. as part of the Mini Coin series. The coins feature Pag and Lepoglava lace motifs, aiming to promote Croatian ethnographic heritage, which is one of the reasons behind the production of gold coins. Furthermore, in cooperation with the Spanish Post, the Croatian Post has issued postage stamps with lace motifs on the sticks intending to promote the cultural value of the link between Croatia and Spain.

Interestingly, postage stamps have several holes, making the lace on the stamp look real. Another effortless and innovative way to promote Pag lace is in the form of a wooden box with a framed lace with the name of the lacemaker who made the lace and a brochure in Croatian or English. These lace items are decorative and mostly bought and given as souvenirs, whereas one of the novelties is earrings made of Pag lace. Grašo (2018) advises that it is desirable to varnish them with hairspray to maintain the whiteness of the lace and prevent destruction. Another way in which they try to revive and refresh traditional motifs is the addition of natural dyes from plants such as willow, chamomile, elderberry, etc., which adds quality and provides a new component to work (Kučar et al., 2009). Plant and animal motifs on lace are often the central theme of festivals and exhibitions whose purpose is to preserve, promote and pass on a long-standing tradition.

In terms of fashion, the famous Croatian fashion brand CHYPKA, founded in 2016, aims to combine street fashion with elements of tradition and offers a large selection of simple yet functional pieces of clothing that represent Croatian tradition and culture, containing local lace motifs in authentic fashion products they create (Draškić, 2016). Products are used multiple times; for example, a canvas bag has a multipurpose role. In addition to its use in everyday life, it represents another way of caring for the environment. In this case, tradition and fashion are closely related to the concept of sustainability, which promotes modern recognition of cultural heritage.



**Picture 2.** Product sweatshirt of the fashion brand CHYPKA  
(Photographed by: T. Vekić).



**Picture 3.** Products- bag and fan of the fashion brand CHYPKA  
(Photographed by: I. Bogut)

As lace represents symmetry and harmony and is often called a symbol of purity, it has inspired many Croatian artists due to its uniqueness. The artist Branka Frangeš Hegedušić introduced a combination of world design and

Croatian tradition into Croatian art by designing various modern compositions using Lepoglava lace. Silvija Jonjić decorated the bathroom with ceramic tiles and elements with motifs of Lepoglava and Pag lace, with which the artist wants to connect the past and the present, respecting the traditional and modern way of life (Skelin, 2019). An excellent idea presented by Šterman and Krešević Vraz (2017) is works of lace in the shape of Slovenia made by students at the University of Maribor. The goal of making fashion accessories was to promote Slovenia. The green lace indicates the vegetation of Slovenia, and the structures and contrasts contribute to the freshness and symbolic meaning of the country. Examples are given where fashion details for women and men can be created using the lace technique. For example, a fashion accessory in the shape of Slovenia can be worn in many ways, and the work represents the connection between people and nature, regarding the work seeks to feel life in Slovenia (Šterman and Krešević Vraz, 2017). Timeless lace is all around us, an eternal inspiration that raises awareness of the value of cultural heritage and provides the possibility of unlimited application.

## **Conclusion**

The technique of making lace is a complex task worth the effort and patience. The elegance and uniqueness of wearing lace will intrigue many creatives, fashion designers and audiences. A lot of effort, precision, and knowledge are invested in doing lace work, as making lace is one of the most demanding skills of textile handicrafts, so it is important to pass on knowledge and skills to future generations. The paper presents various examples of lacemaking where emotions and visual signs are used through clothing, fashion accessories and objects, behind which a beautiful, rich story is hidden. Laceworks offer almost unlimited possibilities of wearing, so it is vital to maintain and recognise the value of tradition and know-how to promote it.

In 2009, lacemaking in Croatia was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which provides expansion opportunities. Therefore, it is necessary to continue working on the protection, research, and evaluation of lacemaking in Croatia. In addition, to maintain the lacemaking tradition, not only are various lacemaking societies and cooperatives established, but festivals are also organised to present the peculiarities of local identities as part of Croatia's ethnographic heritage. However, lace is a valuable and esteemed handicraft that has survived difficult times - wars, poverty, and other hardships. Nevertheless, it is still unknown to the general population, so

bringing this intangible heritage closer to domestic and foreign populations is crucial for its survival and protection from oblivion and disappearance.

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## **ČIPKA U HRVATSKOJ – TRADICIJA I ODRŽIVI RAZVOJ**

### **Sažetak**

Na UNESCO-vom popisu nematerijalne kulturne baštine u Hrvatskoj svoje mjesto zauzela je umjetnost, odnosno vještina tekstilnoga rukotvorstva poznatija kao čipkarstvo koje počiva na zaštiti, promociji i održivosti tradicije. Slijedom toga, održivi razvoj temelji se na integriranom sveobuhvatnom pristupu ekonomskim, ekološkim te društvenim vrijednostima kroz prirodne, društvene i humanističke znanosti. Preplitanje niti iglom ili batićem tvori karakterističan oblik tekstilne djelatnosti koja zahtijeva iznimnu mirnoću, strpljivost, preciznost te specifičan rad ruku čiji je produkt izrade ručni rad zvan čipka. Cilj je rada istražiti te usporediti ulogu i namjenu hrvatske čipke u prošlosti i danas, odnosno osvijestiti održivost tradicije i vrijednost koju i danas nosi hrvatska čipka.

Čipkarska je tradicija u Hrvatskoj njegovana stoljećima, posebice u manjim ruralnim sredinama gdje su žene izradom čipke isplele svoj trag u bogatoj povijesti umjetnosti naroda. Svilene, pamučne, lanene, srebrne i zlatne niti tvore šupljikavi rad vrijedan divljenja. Čipkarski radovi svojim tehnološkim i likovnim obilježjima sastavni su dio kulture zajednice te su ujedno i pokazatelj umjetničkoga stvaralaštva u Hrvatskoj.

**Ključne riječi:** hrvatska čipka, nematerijalna kulturna baština, održivi razvoj, rad, tradicija, umjetnost