Article

Inclusion of Vanishing Cultural Heritage in a Sustainable Rural Development Strategy–Prospects, Opportunities, Recommendations

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Abstract: Cultural heritage consolidates regional cultural identity, expands social capital, and stimulates local communities. These functions make it an important component of sustainable socioeconomic development. The objective of the article is to identify vanishing components of cultural heritage in Małopolskie Voivodeship and propose ways to use them to enhance regional development and promote rural cultural heritage. Moreover, the article aims at identifying such components of cultural heritage that could be included and presented more extensively in future strategic documents despite being disregarded or only superficially acknowledged to date. The research involved a representative sample of the adult residents of rural areas in Małopolskie Voivodeship, Poland ($n = 400$) using the computer-aided telephone interviewing method (CATI). The research shows that the awareness of the people in Małopolskie Voivodeship is dominated by the 'classical' perception of cultural heritage components. The respondents confirmed that traditional professions were still practiced in the voivodeship, and that artisan products were available. The most common of these were beekeeping, sculpture, carpentry, lacemaking and embroidery, smithery, pottery, plaiting, weaving, and musical instrument production. According to the respondents, the most frequent components of vanishing cultural heritage were shrines on trees, old barns (69%), wells (55%) and old root cellars (40%). The respondents most often mentioned farmers' wives' associations as independent social and professional organizations in rural areas that promote food traditions. A survey, literature review, and study of strategic documents demonstrated that digital cultural heritage was absent in the responses and strategic documents, even though it is found in rural Małopolskie Voivodeship as rustic cyberfolklore, for example. It is a research gap worth investigating.

Keywords: regional development strategy; cultural heritage; local communities; social capital; promotion of culture

1. Introduction

Sustainable socioeconomic development occurs in the environmental, economic, social, and cultural domains [1]. The development of this is stimulated by innovation founded on research, development, and entrepreneurship. Strategic documents for Małopolskie Voivodeship in place today emphasize the important impact of new technologies and digitalisation on socioeconomic growth, with the preservation of cultural heritage components [2].

Małopolskie Voivodeship is considered a 'moderate innovator'. The largest growth dynamics are identified in innovative technology businesses in such domains as online games and digital entertainment, big data, the Internet of Things, and data analytics. The challenges to the implementation of digital technologies and automation and the robotisation of production still remain. Strategic documents emphasize the need for business and public administration digitalisation to improve service availability. Another focal

point is the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and exploiting its economic potential [3].

Nevertheless, culture is another, or perhaps the primary, underpinning of long-term regional development. The public is affected by culture through cultural education and participation in culture, which together develop cultural competencies [4]. These, in turn, boost creativity, intellectual and social capital, and innovation. Therefore, it is necessary to invest in the cultural sector, which fosters cultural belonging, civic identity, and social inclusion of marginalised groups [5].

Cultural heritage is a crucial element of socioeconomic growth. It bolsters the regional cultural identity, builds social capital, and activates local communities. The cultural heritage of Małopolskie Voivodeship consists of multiple unique objects. All of this suggests that spatial development and long-term sustainable socioeconomic development based on innovation and digitalisation should also be founded on cultural heritage.

There are many publications on how to protect cultural heritage from destruction and oblivion—mostly by using new materials, techniques, and technology, also digital processes [6–8]. Many researchers emphasize the need for preserving cultural heritage and employing historical heritage in regional socioeconomic development [9–11]. The approach proposed here is slightly different, focusing on a research gap. Our research hypothesis is that the cultural heritage of 'little homelands' in Małopolskie Voivodeship is well investigated and described but insufficiently promoted. This is evident in the strategic documents of Małopolskie Voivodeship drafted to date. They describe cultural heritage relatively well. The descriptions include such contexts as the historical multiculturalism of the voivodeship, which contributed to a strong regional identity, diversified spiritual and tangible cultural heritage, the symbolic significance of Kraków as a cultural capital of Poland, the potential for culture creation, and the occurrence of the cultural heritage of national and ethnic minorities. On the other hand, the documents point out the growing importance of the effort to improve the availability of culture access opportunities, particularly in the digital domain. They further devote more space to the improvement of marketing communications, which should draw on the riches of the region by promoting the voivodeship's cultural heritage in general [12]. Therefore, the objective of the article is to identify vanishing components of cultural heritage in Małopolskie Voivodeship and propose ways to use them to enhance regional development and promote rural cultural heritage. Research shows significant potential and opportunities for using cultural heritage in shaping sustainable development by including it in the decision-making, strategic, and planning processes on local, regional, and national levels [12]. Moreover, this article aims to identify such components of cultural heritage that could be included and presented more extensively in future strategic documents despite being disregarded or only superficially acknowledged to date. This way, the unique cultural heritage of the region could assume a more central position in the strategic documents, potentially leading to its protection, institutional support, and promotion.

The following research questions are posed: (1) Is rural cultural heritage in Poland vanishing? (2) What are the impacts of cultural heritage components on the rural social space? (3) How can cultural heritage be included in rural development strategies? The article is divided into the following parts: section two describes the development strategy as a primary document of the voivodeship government. It outlines the potential of cultural heritage for defining strategic directions of regional growth and presents cultural heritage components that are included in the development strategy for the Małopolskie Voivodeship, especially digital cultural heritage. Section three concerns cultural heritage components, particularly food heritage, traditional breeds of animals, and varieties of plants, folk customs, art, culture, and handicraft. Section four concerns the research methods founded on the microhistory approach. Section five shares the results, including respondents' experiences with vanishing components of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The next section discusses the results in search of an answer to the question of whether cultural

heritage is vanishing and analyses the role of local communities in the protection of heritage. The article ends with practical implications and a summary.

2. Cultural Heritage Components

Cultural heritage components are most commonly classed as tangible, intangible, natural, and digital. Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, and groups of buildings and sites that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological, or anthropological, scientific, and social significance [13]. Tangible heritage includes immobile and movable assets, museums, museum artefacts, contents of archives, library resources, and cultural landscape. According to UNESCO [14], 'intangible cultural heritage' means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is manifested, inter alia, in the following domains: oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage; social practices, rituals and festive events; performing arts; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. The term 'intangible cultural heritage' replaced what was referred to in an earlier UNESCO document of 1989 as "traditional culture and folklore" [15]. According to UNESCO [16], natural heritage is natural features consisting of physical and biological formations or groups of such formations, geological and physiographical formations, and precisely delineated areas which constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants, and natural sites or specifically delineated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation, or natural beauty. This includes nature parks and reserves, zoos, aquaria, and botanical gardens. Regarding digital heritage, it consists of unique resources of human knowledge and expression, including texts, databases, still and moving images, audio, graphics, software and web pages, among a wide and growing range of formats. It embraces cultural, educational, scientific and administrative resources, as well as technical, legal, medical, and other kinds of information created digitally or converted into digital form from existing analogue resources [17].

2.1. Food Heritage

Local cultural heritage components have a special place in regional and global promotion. Therefore, an effort to protect and share cultural heritage is needed in order to create conditions for economic growth based on local entrepreneurship that would employ cultural diversity as the strength behind its competitiveness. Aid to cultural heritage is an important factor in social development. It shapes the identity of citizens, enhances the sense of community, displays positive social models, and instils pride and a sense of local exceptionality of their surroundings in residents [3,18].

Food heritage is an important part of cultural heritage. Traditional and regional food products reflect local traditions and customs along with unique environmental conditions. What is more, they testify to the impact of socioeconomic circumstances and history on the region. The production of traditional food is an opportunity to promote local and regional food heritage and stimulate local business. With their roots firmly in history, traditions, and customs, local and regional products often determine the tourist attractiveness of the locality [19–21]. Nevertheless, being highly specific and locally bound, which makes them hard to standardise, dishes are seldom listed in national strategic documents. Instead, they are much more often used in local promotion leaflets. Many dishes occur only regionally. Plenty of recipes are known solely to local communities or even single individuals. A lot of them are unique and yet to be included in official registers or lists. They also have no special packaging or labelling. More often than not, in order to taste these delicacies, one has to appear in person at the agritourism or agricultural farm. Therefore, there is an untapped potential in food heritage that could improve strategic documents and help determine directions of socioeconomic and cultural development. Some areas it could

influence are agricultural production, food processing, trade, culture, and regional image and brand building.

2.2. Traditional Plant Varieties and Animal Breeds

Małopolskie Voivodeship has numerous unique plant species and breeds of animals, such as Polish Red cattle [18]. This is largely due to local environmental conditions, such as relatively significant forest cover and characteristic topography that affected farming patterns and led to fragmented and extensive smallholding. These areas abound in food commodities: plants, edible mushrooms or products found in nature, such as European blueberry or the less-popular elder, rowan, bird cherry, or Viburnum genus. Mushroom picking is also a popular activity in Małopolskie Voivodeship. Moreover, traditional dishes from barley, black oat, common wild oat, potatoes, and swede are gaining popularity. This is mostly due to low environmental and crop requirements. These plants provide good yield on poor soils in the mountain and submontane climates typical of the southern part of the voivodeship. Note that Małopolskie Voivodeship has a well-developed food culture based on plants that are easily available, affordable, and very nutritious, like cabbage. Traditional plant and animal species provide inputs for local dishes, which can be used to build the image and brand of the region. Moreover, their effective use will help define strategic directions for regional development

2.3. Traditions, Customs, Art and Culture, Handicraft, and Professions

Values fostered through cultural heritage are handed down between generations. This requires a continuing effort to ensure cultural security, not only to protect the existing works and assets but also to aid in cultural development. Culture consists of more than works of art: languages, traditions, customs, regional products, folk handicrafts, and national or ethnic specificities. Traditional handicraft based on local materials, often of plant origin, is part of folk culture all around the world. Also known as craft products, they have specific purposes and are made manually or with simple tools. They frequently have aesthetic or decorative value, and many of them are of cultural or religious significance [22]. All of this, combined with traditional plant and animal species, food heritage, and components of intangible heritage, constitutes a unique capital which can direct strategic documents on municipal and voivodeship levels or even national levels if aggregated.

2.4. Vanishing Cultural Heritage

The literature fails to provide a clear-cut definition of 'vanishing cultural heritage'. In his work on temples in and around Kyoto, Shoji Yamada [23] used the term to refer to the phenomenon involving the in situ replacement of original wall paintings—considered national treasures and cultural heritage of Japan—with high-quality digital reproductions. He called it the vanishing of original cultural properties. The 'vanishing' of cultural heritage is defined in his work as the replacement of the original with a reproduction or substitute. Such digital substitutes are sometimes referred to as 'digital surrogates' [24]. The replacement of an original with a copy may have many reasons, such as to protect the original work or because it is impossible to reconstruct it. Vanishing cultural heritage also includes such components that are at risk due to natural events, like seismic or atmospheric (recurrent flooding and shoreline erosion [25]), but also socioeconomic, cultural, or infrastructural causes. For example, in many places, rapid urbanization and neglect of historic cores, sites, and buildings has led to the fading of the indigenous vernacular architecture, culture, societal values, and standards [26].

According to dictionaries, to vanish means to become invisible, unheard, or stop existing. Vanishing can be a gradual process. Therefore, it is often possible to observe the process of the vanishing of a phenomenon or object. Vanishing components of cultural heritage still occur and can be experienced, but became rare, which can make them attractive. This category encompasses heritage components that are identified as being at high risk of loss and exhibit limited reach, quantity, and negative trends regarding their

occurrence. In this framework, the vanishing of cultural heritage components may take such forms as a gradual decline in the number of artisans who specialise in a specific craft or hold traditional know-how or skills (no heirs, no new apprentices). They are so-called extinct occupations or—in a broader context—extinct languages, traditions, or customs. This problem occurs in all domains of cultural heritage: tangible, intangible, digital, and natural. Indeed, the vanishing of cultural heritage affects natural heritage as well. It is connected with the extinction of species and loss of biodiversity [27]. Note furthermore that the natural environment and human activity are closely entwined, which means that the vanishing of natural heritage can contribute to the vanishing of (human) traditions and customs related to it. Although the pace of the vanishing process varies, it is digital cultural heritage that is reported to be fading the fastest [28–30]. In conclusion, vanishing cultural heritage is at risk of complete loss (physical absence of a component or object, also deletion from server storage) or discontinuation (of cultivation, practice).

3. Cultural Heritage in Development Strategies

3.1. Cultural Heritage in the Development Strategy for Małopolskie Voivodeship

The development strategy is a primary voivodeship government document which sets the areas, goals, and directions for the local development policy. The voivodeship development strategy specifies the directions and pace of regional changes to remove barriers to sustainable development through active support for local communities in the effective identification of potential and full utilisation of development opportunities [12]. The Act on Voivodeship Local Government [31] lists objectives that should be included in the voivodeship development strategy. Some of them are to stimulate business, improve the innovativeness of the economy, preserve the value of the cultural and natural environment by maintaining spatial governance, shape and foster national awareness and sense of belonging, build citizenship, advance the cultural growth of the local population, and cultivate and develop the local identity. Therefore, the voivodeship strategy defines social, economic, spatial, and cultural strategic goals.

Voivodeship strategies span three main areas: (1) economy and society, (2) climate and environment, and (3) sustainable development. The strategy includes actions aimed at improving regional competitiveness, supporting tourism, introducing integrated and sustainable transport, and increasing digitalisation, among others. It also provides specific activities to aid families, healthcare, safety, sports and recreation, protection of cultural heritage, cultural participation, and education.

The years 1999–2021 saw an intensified production of strategic documents in Poland. Małopolskie Voivodeship developed according to four strategic frameworks at that time. The Voivodeship Regional Assembly adopted the Development Strategy for Małopolskie Voivodeship for 2000–2006 on 28 August 2000 [32]. It provided foundations for planning and programming sustainable development policy until 2006. The Development Strategy for Małopolskie Voivodeship for 2007–2013 was adopted in late 2006 [33]. The Development Strategy for Małopolskie Voivodeship for 2011–2020 took into account requests, demands, and recommendations following a public debate on key regional issues in 2020 [2]. The currently valid document is the Voivodeship Development Strategy 'Lesser Poland 2030', which is an update to the Development Strategy for Małopolskie Voivodeship for 2011–2020 [34]. All of these documents offer copious analyses of the socioeconomic, natural, and cultural potential.

Diversified and unique historical and cultural heritage is a strength of Małopolskie Voivodeship. The strategy [34] enumerates listed heritage, including six historical complexes on the UNESCO World Heritage List, eleven objects with historic monument status, and six objects on the list of intangible cultural heritage. The voivodeship register of listed objects kept by the Voivodeship Heritage Conservator includes about 48,000 entries, and the voivodeship register of heritage sites has over 5000 items [34]. Apart from Kraków, which is the capital of the voivodeship, large numbers of listed objects are found in the Nowotarski, Nowosądecki, and Gorlicki Districts. The character of the natural environment

in the voivodeship naturally led to the establishment of many tourist trails. Cultural trails are the most popular among them: the Lesser Poland Wooden Architecture Route, the Trail of the Eagles' Nests, and the Lesser Poland UNESCO Route [12]. Moreover, Małopolskie Voivodeship still has interesting and practised traditions. The Polish register of intangible heritage includes the tradition of elaborate nativity scenes and the Lajkonik parade, the making and playing the Podhale bagpipes, the bobbin lace from Kraków, toy-making traditions in the Żywiec and Sucha Beskidzka region, and Kumoterki sleigh racing.

Strategy [34] lists such challenges regarding saving cultural heritage from destruction and oblivion as the conversion and modernisation of at-risk objects, stimulating the activity of creators and culture organisers, and fostering the brand of Małopolskie Voivodeship as a region with a strong cultural identity [12]. It also emphasizes the need for building inter-regional collaboration within the voivodeship regarding supra-local tourism products, for example.

Strategy [34] devotes significant attention to traditional varieties of plants used by manufacturers of organic and traditional food. Also, the special cultural value of local varieties of home-grown vegetable, fruit, decorative, spice, or healing plants is highlighted there. The document further lists such protective actions as the preservation of regional endogenic assets in the Lesser Poland Crop Gene Bank, which secures the gene data of plants that are part of the historical agricultural heritage of the region. The potential of food heritage is considered as well. The Lesser Poland Food Heritage network was established in 2014 as part of the European Regional Culinary Heritage Network. The strategy makes note of delicacies from Małopolskie Voivodeship on the List of Traditional Products and products registered as Protected Designations of Origin, Protected Geographical Indications, and Traditional Specialities Guaranteed. Moreover, it devotes a lot of space to mountainous areas found mostly in the southern part of Małopolskie Voivodeship. They offer relatively significant biodiversity and unique landscape qualities. These features are reflected in a whole collection of traditional and regional products from local ingredients [12].

Strategic documents appreciate the untapped potential of vanishing cultural heritage, the components of which are often local and can be investigated only through in-depth interviews with the leaders of local communities. It often happens that these components are known only to individuals, which puts them at risk of loss (destruction) or oblivion if they are not recorded and ensured stewardship from the next generations. Therefore, any innovative approach to future development strategies should heed grassroots initiatives, which are in the position to reach unique and vanishing components of cultural heritage. Note that such avant-garde programmes regarding the role of cultural heritage in development strategies should consider digital cultural heritage as well.

3.2. Digital Cultural Heritage in Development Strategies

Digital cultural heritage, in a sense, emerged from technological development. The latter affects changes in consumer behaviour, market fluctuations, and cultural transformations connected with how people communicate, establish relationships, or form communities [35,36]. Sustainable socioeconomic development in its broadest meaning should be founded on civilizational achievements and historical knowledge rather than reject them. This is consistent with the notion of harmonious, sustainable development through evolution instead of revolution. Digital cultural heritage should have a chance to appear in regional development strategies just as such 'classical forms of cultural heritage' as religious objects, dishes, handicrafts, and folk traditions and customs [34]. Like tangible and intangible heritage, digital heritage also has museums and devotees who collect, restore, and promote exhibits' hardware and software. Enthusiastic collectors have been expanding their personal collections of digital artefacts for years, preserving significant quantities of resources that would probably otherwise be destroyed [37–39]. Many such aficionados belong to grassroots groups and communities focusing on the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. Hence, strategic documents should cover digital cultural heritage as well.

Rural digital cultural heritage has been investigated in Poland for several years as a less-known part of heritage. One of its embodiments is the online promotion of agritourism and rural tourism. Rural digital cultural assets are digital artefacts created in rural areas and characteristic of them. This means that Polish rural areas are not only consumers of new technical solutions but also creative users of ICT and makers of unique digital artefacts [40]. In line with this innovative approach, digital cultural heritage should be present in regional development strategies to a greater extent than just a mention. It should be accompanied by specific calculations and lists of commercial operators and institutions that preserve cultural heritage [41]. Such organisations in Małopolskie Voivodeship include the Kraków Electronics Museum, Kraków Arcade Museum, and Kraków Pinball Museum.

4. Materials and Methods

Sample Profile and Sampling

The survey is part of the research project 'Inclusion of Vanishing Cultural Heritage in an Innovative Rural Development Strategy' (acronym: RuralStrateg). The study involved a representative sample of adult residents of rural areas in Małopolskie Voivodeship. The sampling frame was a list of telephone numbers in the voivodeship. The voivodeship is located in southern Poland and has a characteristic topography, natural environment, and culture. The total number of randomly selected telephone numbers was 3200 with a 12% return rate. The sample was stratified by districts (mid-subdivision units). We held 400 interviews in total. The survey was completed in August 2022.

The survey was a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) with a random sample of 400 respondents ($n = 400$), which is above the minimum random sample size estimated at 386 questionnaires, at a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$ and a confidence level $p = 0.95$.

Computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) is a type of declarative survey in which the interviewer follows a script over the telephone. The 'call-centre' technology introduces automated processes to the interview, and the interviewer can type responses directly into a computer system. This method is most often employed for quantitative market research and public opinion polling. The CATI method was chosen because it can target a specific group, which could prove difficult with online surveys, mailed pen-and-paper interviews, or in-person interviews. These considerations are particularly true for extensive areas with scattered populations, such as rural areas [42]. Advantages of CATI include relatively low costs of research (compared to other direct methods), comparatively short duration, availability of results in a data cloud, and easy access to processing software. Some of its downsides are that the interviewer cannot use materials such as multimedia, and the interview time is limited. Moreover, some respondents can be uncomfortable with the interviewer. Direct contact with the interviewer can raise doubts regarding complete anonymity.

The questionnaire consisted of 34 questions in three thematic sections: I. Migration, depopulation, rural soft and economic infrastructure in Małopolskie Voivodeship; II. stability of local cultural traditions across generations and links between the cultivation of cultural traditions and preservation of the local identity; III. economic entrepreneurship, social capital, and social trust. We completed several study visits to take photographs of cultural heritage in selected places. These were places that were home to regional cultural heritage and its less-known components.

The research employs the microhistory approach [43]. The results of the survey and field studies in small areas are presented in a broader context of sustainable socioeconomic development investigated in the societal, economic, environmental, and cultural domains. The analysis of sources is founded on the so-called 'singularization of history', which is an alternative to grand historical narratives [44]. This approach involves analysing details and nuances related to events and studying objects and looking for their specific significance in and of themselves rather than in broader contexts. It prefers a smaller research scale, which helps observe and extract some unique values of cultural heritage as if focused with a lens instead of being lost in a quantitative approach.

The sample is dominated by women (55%), with men amounting for 45%. The largest age group consisted of people aged 26–45 (42%). In terms of educational background, 44% of the respondents completed secondary school education, 39% were university graduates, and 13% had a vocational background. Over half of the respondents were from the working population (57%), while every fifth person was retired or a pensioner (Appendix A). They usually had lived in the investigated locality since birth (Appendix B).

5. Results

The most common components of vanishing cultural heritage are shrines on trees (Figure 1), old barns (69%), wells (55%), and old root cellars (40%). The respondents pointed out scarecrows and watermills to a lesser extent (Table 1).

Figure 1. An example of a wayside tree box-type shrine. Location: Ciężkowice (Małopolskie Voivodeship, Tarnowski District). Photograph by Karol Król.

Table 1. Vanishing components of tangible cultural heritage as seen by the respondents.

Tangible Cultural Heritage Components		Count	Percentage (%)
	Shrines hung on trees	285	71.3
	Old barns	276	69.0
	Wells	218	54.5
	Old root cellars	160	40.0
Are there vanishing tangible cultural heritage components in your municipality, such as	Scarecrows	138	34.5
	Watermills	45	11.3
	I don't know	36	9.0
	Windmills	20	5.0
	Other	17	4.3
	Total	400	100.0

The respondents' observations may be largely due to industrialisation, modernisation, and technology change. The dynamic development of infrastructures, such as water and drainage systems, and sociocultural changes, such as the secularisation of the public—although rather slow in rural Małopolskie Voivodeship [45]—have led to the discontinuation of the tradition of hanging shrines on trees or installing scarecrows [46]. Also, water and drainage systems in Małopolskie Voivodeship were improved in 2022 under the subtask 'Support for projects to create, improve, or expand all types of small infrastructure, including renewable energy and energy efficiency projects' under the Rural Development Programme for 2014–2020. As a consequence of these and previous projects and climate change, which have reduced water resources in Małopolskie Voivodeship [47–49], wells near houses have been turned into garden 'decorations' or been demolished. Traditionally

built wells are vanishing from the rural landscape, because they are no longer functional or are treated solely pragmatically in light of the Building Code.

The respondents also talked about heritage sites in their surroundings. These were rare responses and usually concerned individual objects, such as an Orthodox church, manor, outdoor museum, pillar or brickwork shrines (Figure 2), handcar railway, granaries, castle ruins, old houses and buildings, and a sundial. The respondents most often pointed out specific places, buildings, structures, or objects that they believed to be worthy of restoration, conservation protection, and preservation for future generations. As a consequence, their contributions may provide insight into the local heritage that is yet to be noticed and remains at risk of destruction or oblivion.

Figure 2. Examples of wayside shrines. Left to right: brick pillar shrine, lantern type (column); recessed shrine in the form of a grotto. Inside: figure of Mary. Location: Ciężkowice (Małopolskie Voivodeship, Tarnowski District). Photograph by Karol Król.

The research shows that traditional social interactions are still practised (Table 2). Over 70% of the respondents declared 'conversations at the fence' and long talks with neighbours (64%); help with field, garden, household, or repair work (51%); spending time together on benches in front of the house (40%); and going to church together (37%). The impact of digital media on the ways people communicate and perceive cultural heritage can be slightly reduced in rural areas [50,51]. Digital technologies are seen as a way to streamline agricultural and processing business and organisation management, develop rural areas in terms of innovation, and improve agribusiness competition and food security [52]. On the other hand, Kundius and Pecuh [53] demonstrated the impact of digital technologies on the preservation and sustainable development of cultural heritage and the significance of older generations in the effort.

Table 2. Practised traditional forms of social interactions.

Forms of Social Interactions		Count	Percentage (%)
	Conversations at the fence	280	70.0
	Longer talks with neighbours	256	64.0
	Help in the garden, around the house, etc.	202	50.5
Are traditional forms of social interactions practised in your municipality?	Spending time together on benches in front of the house	161	40.3
	Going to church together	147	36.8
	I don't know	59	14.8
	Other	11	2.8
	Total	400	100.0

Although the respondents most often mentioned typical direct interactions, some of them brought up more sophisticated forms of (neighbour) relationship-building involving

folk culture, traditions, and customs, such as harvest festivals, Maytime hymn singing, regional chamber meetings, or potato-lifting. Still, these contributions were rare, which may be indicative of folk cultural events vanishing from the local collective consciousness. The precondition of any traditions staying functional is that they are cultivated. Marginal anachronisms or relics of traditions remembered by cultural carriers are replaced by newly assimilated artefacts, ideas, and experiences that undermine the past ones. This is how traditions die, making room for others, for dynamics and innovativeness are primary features of tradition [54]. Tradition means something different today than for those who lived centuries ago. In the past, tradition included customs and rituals handed down from generation to generation. Now, tradition is that which is worth cultivating. According to literature, tradition has become a conscious resource that is used freely and shaped purposefully [55].

An overwhelming majority of rural residents confirmed that they cultivated religious rituals (92%) with fewer of them admitting participating in folk artistic activities (60%). Half of the respondents acknowledged former Slavic rituals (Table 3), such as Dziady (pagan rituals to honour ancestors), Marzanna (a straw figure representing winter drowned in early spring), Noc Kupały (Kupala Night, Midsummer, Mittsommerfest) although they are most often taught in kindergartens as part of past folklore.

Table 3. Cultivated rituals and customs.

Rituals, Customs, Folklore Art		Count	Percentage (%)
	Religious rituals (Easter, Christmas)	369	92.3
	Folklore	241	60.3
Are traditional rituals and customs cultivated in your municipality?	Old Slavic rituals	204	51.0
	Language (dialect)	174	43.5
	I don't know	11	2.8
	None of the above	8	2.0
	Total	400	100.0

Half of the respondents (about 51%) confirmed that they ate regional products from time to time. On the other hand, a relatively large group of 26% declared not eating such products. The list of foods eaten in rural Małopolskie Voivodeship is extensive. It is dominated by cheese, dairy products (quark, oscypek, bunc, korboc, żentyca, milk), honey, potato dishes (moskol), wheat dishes, noodle and dumpling-like dishes (such as dumplings with plum, podpłomyk, gałuszka, łojoki–a specialty from Skała, kulasy–rye flour in water), homemade deli meats, homemade bread and cake, alcohols (meads, wine, śliwowica, moonshine, liqueurs), bean dishes (fizoł, beans with plum, Zakliczyn beans), carp, trout, sups, primarily with cabbage and sourdough (kapuśniarka, żurek, kwaśnica), and groats. The responses were dominated by potatoes, flour, milk, and cabbage–a traditional diet of the poor countryside of the past–rather than meat.

The respondents confirmed that traditional professions were still practised in Małopolskie Voivodeship and that artisan products were available. The most common were beekeeping, sculpture, carpentry, lacemaking and embroidery, smithery, pottery, plaiting, weaving, and musical instrument production (Table 4).

The respondents mentioned less-known or less-common professions, such as shoemaking and tailoring, carpentry, stove-making, cheese-making, decoupage, bouquet-making, wreath-making, felt-making, tanning, glass and custom painting, cabinetmaking, carpentry, paper craft, beekeeping, crochet, wicker production, winemaking, honey production, sheep pasturage, and production of folk toys.

Table 4. Occurrence of traditional occupations and handicraft.

Traditional Occupations and Handicraft		Count	Percentage (%)
Are there traditional professions or handicraft in your municipality?	Beekeeping	139	34.8
	Sculpture	131	32.8
	Carpentry	108	27.0
	Lacemaking and embroidery	107	26.8
	Folk costumes	78	19.5
	Smithery	56	14.0
	Pottery	38	9.5
	Other (shoemaking, carpentry, felt production, tanning, painting, wicker production, etc.)	35	8.8
	Plaiting	29	7.2
	Weaving	23	5.8
	Musical instrument production	16	4.0
	I don't know	131	32.8
	Total	400	100.0

Ninety percent of the respondents believed that their municipalities made effort to promote food traditions. They most often referred to farmers' wives' associations as independent social and professional organisations in rural areas that promote food traditions. According to the respondents, local food was also promoted at annual fairs, folk festivities (78%), contests (42%), and trade fairs (Table 5).

Table 5. Initiatives to promote food traditions.

Type of Initiative to Promote Food Traditions	Count	Percentage (%)
Farmers' wives' association	337	93.4
Annual fairs, folk festivities	283	78.4
Contests	152	42.1
Trade fairs	146	40.4
Exhibitions	91	25.2
Other	19	5.3
I don't know	4	1.1
Total	361	100.0

They also listed the following initiatives that promoted food traditions: ziemniaczyska (potato lifting, potato festival, in Old Polish: a field with potatoes), bigosówka (also, as a dish, a mix of sauerkraut and cooked cabbage), zabużańskie dziedziny, agricultural trade fairs, harvest festivals, local celebrations (such as plum, garlic, beans, berry, and fruit picking days), and picnics. Moreover, 30% of the respondents declared there was a restaurant with regional products in their municipality.

Twenty-seven percent of the population believed that there were local animal breeds in their municipality (Table 6). They most often meant cows (57%), geese (24%), and pigs (22%). According to 62% of the respondents, traditional food processing methods could still be found in their municipalities. Over half of the participants (55%) noticed herb cultivation and use in the municipality. As many as 81% of them believed that vanishing cultural heritage components, such as traditional products, handicrafts, traditional crops, rituals, etc., should be included in municipal promotional activities.

Table 6. Occurrence of native farm animal breeds.

Questions to the Respondents		Count	Percentage (%)
Are there native breeds of farm animals in your municipality?	Yes	107	26.8
	No	172	43.0
	I don't know, hard to say	121	30.3
	Total	400	100.0
What breeds are they?	Other (sheep, Green-legged Partridge, horses)	67	62.6
	Cows (such as Polish Red)	61	57.0
	Geese (Kartuska, Suwalska, Podkarpacka)	26	24.3
	Native pig breeds (Puławska, Złotnicka)	23	21.5
	I don't know	3	2.8
	Total	107	100.0

Vanishing cultural heritage components should be included in tourism (73%), education (69%), and catering (3%). At the same time, the vast majority of the respondents believed that their municipality was attractive for tourists (89%) with 85% confident theirs were more attractive than others. A high percentage perceived their municipality as a place instilling a sense of security and an attractive place to work in (81% each). The smallest share believed the municipality was highly entrepreneurial and attractive for investors (27%). The fact that over one-third of the respondents (37%) did not participate in the public life of their locality may pose a difficulty.

6. Discussion

6.1. Threats to Global Cultural Heritage

Truscott [56] argued that local communities often failed to appreciate the importance of preserving regional cultural heritage. They could perceive their cultural heritage as an archaic obstacle to access to 'modern society' and prosperity. It is, therefore, vital to establish a system that appreciates and respects minority cultures and encourages local communities to save their cultural treasures from oblivion or destruction. Roy and Kalidindi [57] believed that rapid growth in urbanisation, mass tourism, insufficient funds, absence of conservation know-how, and a poor heritage management system led to ineffective protection of cultural heritage [58]. Other unfavourable factors contributing to the vanishing or destruction of cultural heritage include the black market of art and illegal trade in natural heritage, the limited contribution of local communities to the protection of cultural assets, cultural degradation, poor support from central- and local-government institutions, and poor coordination among stakeholders [59]. Other critical issues in heritage protection include claims of representatives of native local communities concerning the ownership of and access to tangible culture, removal of heritage objects, relocation schemes, and the redevelopment of urban areas [60,61].

The gradual vanishing of cultural heritage is accompanied by violent political incidents leading to the irrevocable loss of unique cultural assets. Components of tangible culture have been at risk during wars, colonisation, international conflicts, civil wars, and from governments, protesters, or rebels all over the world [62]. Such heritage as historic buildings and monuments; religious sites like synagogues, mosques, temples, monasteries, or churches; and collection sites, such as museums, art galleries, and libraries, that represent collective narratives, stories, and memories of people have become prone to destruction [63]. Over 13,000 cultural heritage assets were recorded as being destroyed in the Middle East, particularly Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya [64]. Many world heritage objects were vandalized or completely destroyed. Among them was world heritage in Syria: the Ancient City of Damascus, the Ancient City of Bosra, the Site of Palmyra (ancient

temples, tombs, and antiques more than 2000 years old), the Ancient City of Aleppo, Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din, and ancient villages of northern Syria or Dead Cities were destroyed or partially damaged during the military conflict between ISIS (also known as IS, ISIL, Da'esh, or the Islamic State) and government forces [65]. Thousands of archaeological and cultural sites (including heritage from the Bronze Age, Iron Age, ancient Greece, Rome, the Byzantine Empire, and Islam) in Syria fell victim to fighting or war [66]. As noted by Wollentz [67], Balkan conflicts wreaked havoc on cultural heritage by destroying such sites as the Medieval Stari Most bridge or the bombed old town in Dubrovnik, one of the first sites listed as world heritage by UNESCO. The most exquisite African cultural site Timbuktu (Mali) famous for its world-class heritage mausoleums and mosques of unique cultural, historic, and spiritual value, was put at risk of destruction [68].

6.2. Is Cultural Heritage Actually Vanishing?

Being an important part of the functioning of rural areas, cultural identity, together with cultural spaces in cities and suburbs, can be preserved and promoted through an effort to protect cultural heritage [69]. Research confirmed the significant contribution of cultural and environmental heritage to economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability in rural areas, indicating culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development [70]. Cultural tourism could drive growth in rural areas offering both economic and sociocultural benefits. These conditions may be significant for environmental protection, land use and management, and spatial management [71]. Moreover, the tourism industry shapes socioeconomic relationships in various ways and to diverse extents. It can alleviate the impact of rural depopulation, for example [72]. Tourists visit rural areas in search of cultural heritage, nature, and unparalleled rural ambience and local traditions. Food heritage, wine tourism, agritourism, ethnographic cultural heritage, and natural heritage are also gaining in popularity [73–78]. These sectors contribute to the economy and supplement rural income [79]. This stimulates the rural economic structure to some degree and activates the population. Nevertheless, even though cultural heritage tourism is beneficial, it does not improve service quality or infrastructure directly.

The growth of cities and suburbs has a great impact on the preservation of cultural heritage and landscape in rural and suburban areas, which are often under strong development pressure because of their attractive location [80]. Structural transformations in rural space cause irreversible changes. Preservation and protection of cultural heritage components, also those related to the spatial structure of the land, may alleviate the adverse impact of development pressure [69].

Cultural heritage contributes to regional identity, stimulates local development, and determines societal integrity through its significance for local sustainable development. Research shows that source materials on rural cultural heritage are dispersed among various institutions and need to be complemented with interviews with residents [81]. Local databases are successfully employed to promote rural areas, cities, and towns, but are yet to be appreciated on the regional and national levels. The dispersion of databases and diverse forms of (unconsolidated) data presentation can hinder data use on the strategic level, where consolidated summaries that provide an overview of a subject are provided.

Cultural identity consists of multiple components [82,83]. They have both a cultural value and commercial potential [19]. Not so long ago, the dominant trend was the disappearance of the traditional rural and mountainous landscape, signs of folklore, and traditional and local products, which were at some point even referred to as limited goods [18]. The need for the preservation and promotio of landscape enclaves, customs, unique breeds of animals and varieties of plants, and food made in line with traditional ways was emphasized, for both the future and today's generations. Meanwhile, the research shows that local communities, associations of local tradition, history, and culture enthusiasts and lovers were very active in collaboration with local governments, although unnoticed by researchers. Many local initiatives successfully recorded minute historical details of even

the smallest localities in Małopolskie Voivodeship, for example, SAGA Grybów or The Online Encyclopaedia of Ciężkowice (Internetowa Encyklopedia Ciężkowic).

6.3. Local Communities and Cultural Heritage Protection

The risk of losing some components of cultural heritage is sometimes underestimated or even disregarded due to natural and human factors [84]. The cataloguing of cultural heritage should identify threats to individual heritage objects. With this background, stakeholders can draw protection or revitalisation plans. When it is impossible to conserve assets due to economic or human factors, digitalisation is considered an alternative method for securing cultural heritage. According to Koiki-Owoyele, et al. [85], heritage digitalisation involves taking photographs or scanning an artefact in order to save it to computer storage. The dissemination of digital copies of heritage on websites and in social media combined with search optimisation helps reach a larger audience. Digitalisation preserves data on cultural heritage in case of acts of God, such as natural disasters. It also secures the availability of resources for researchers and posterity [86].

Field research and reviews of the literature and online resources demonstrated that the histories of local communities have been documented relatively well and commemorated both in situ and in a digital format. Many places in Małopolskie Voivodeship have thriving cultural and promotion centres and associations of local communities and history enthusiasts. Their efforts have a significant impact on sustainable development policy while respecting cultural heritage, traditions, history, and natural heritage, taking local socioeconomic circumstances into account. One example of such activities is the Community Archive of Grybów (Społeczne Archiwum Grybowa) by the Saga Grybów association (https://www.saga-grybow.com, accessed on 1 December 2022). The association draws on observations of residents and analysis of the history of the town, according to which "There is Grybów of today and Grybów of the past, Grybów from up close and Grybów from afar, Grybów that is seen and Grybów that is remembered. There is Grybów in the minds and hearts of people in various parts of the world". The association maintains a digital archive with digital copies of pictures, scanned images with captions and comments, and sometimes even interviews. Materials published in the digital archive are often sourced from archive queries, but they are usually contributed by residents and lovers of Grybów. The resulting SAGA Community Archive of Grybów is both public as a result of the selfless effort of many and social, functioning within the framework of social media. Not only does SAGA present sources, it also tells stories. It follows the historiographic approach known as microhistory: recording small communities, their customs, relationships, problems, and individual experiences in order to save their ephemeral substance from oblivion [44]. Another example of online effort is The Online Encyclopaedia of Ciążkowice presented as a compendium of knowledge about the town and municipality (https://ciezkowice.pl/pl/312/0/encyklopedia-ciezkowic.html, accessed on 1 December 2022).

Ciążkowice is a town in the Tarnowski District of Małopolskie Voivodeship. The encyclopaedia is special, because it collects information about the history, environmental qualities, tourist attractions, heritage sites, and most of all, former residents, their times, and culture. The Online Encyclopaedia of Ciężkowice was inaugurated with the exhibition 'Ciężkowice Retro' with photographs of pre-war Ciężkowice (Figure 3). Then, pupils from the municipality set about editing entries and collecting historical inputs for the encyclopaedia, encouraging all residents to contribute to the living Encyclopaedia of Ciężkowice.

Cultural heritage may bring to mind something grand and spectacular, the magnitude of temples and sacral buildings, the splendour of royal chambers and the bulk of defensive walls, and collections of works of art, culture, or industry. But cultural heritage includes also stories known only to the local community and cultivated by residents and enthusiasts. The above examples demonstrate that the best cultural heritage preservation, protection, and promotion emerge from a synergy of local grassroots efforts, NGOs, academic and research institutions, and local governments.
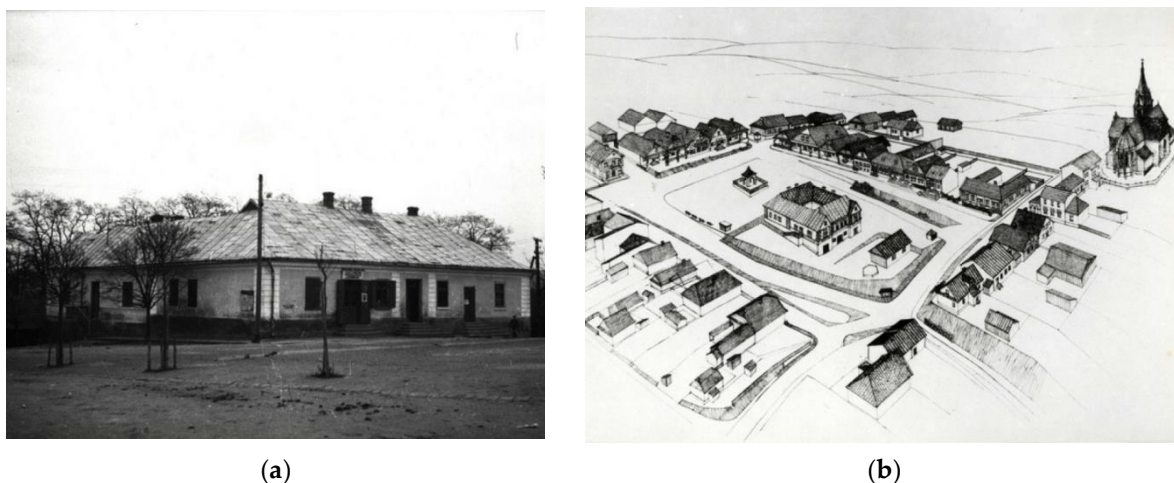
Figure 3. Southesast view of the town hall in Ciężkowice, 1947. Photograph by J. Dutkiewicz (**a**). Axonometric drawing of the core of the town by H. Kamiński as seen in 1965 (**b**). Source: own study based on [87].

Global academic centres also appreciate the opportunity to access information on local components of cultural heritage. A good example here is the Interactive Cultural Heritage Platform, Małopolskie Voivodeship module created under the 'Inclusion of Vanishing Cultural Heritage in an Innovative Rural Development Strategy' research project by the University of Agriculture in Kraków (http://ruralstrateg.eu, accessed on 12 December 2022). This tool is intended to facilitate the drafting of socioeconomic development strategies by providing expert content, including how-tos, guides, and scientific and popular science publications and aggregating, presenting, and promoting tangible and intangible heritage, including food and natural heritage. What is more, the RuralStrateg cultural heritage platform has a survey module with a questionnaire to report cultural heritage components. It makes the RuralStrateg platform a two-way communication tool.

7. Conclusions

The current collective mind of people in Małopolskie Voivodeship is dominated by the 'classical' perception of cultural heritage as almost exclusively tangible or intangible assets, for example, wayside shrines, religious buildings, folk costumes and customs, food, and handicraft. It is a well-identified and recorded domain of cultural heritage appreciated in development strategies. However, these documents consider mostly formalised and institutional data. Therefore, it is worth considering an innovative approach to strategies where the grassroots effort to preserve cultural heritage is given more space despite its absence in the media where it could reach a broader audience. Moreover, a survey, literature review, and study of strategic documents demonstrated that digital cultural heritage was absent in the responses and strategic documents even though it is found in rural Małopolskie Voivodeship as rustic cyberfolklore, for example [41]. It is a research gap worth investigating.

This paper investigated the following research questions: (1) Is rural cultural heritage in Poland vanishing? (2) What is the impact of cultural heritage components on the rural social space? (3) How can cultural heritage be included in rural development strategies? The literature review and survey demonstrated that cultural heritage is vanishing, which is only natural in the time of globalising culture. Nevertheless, many components of tangible and intangible culture remain as a trace of local history as indicated by the respondents. In Małopolskie Voivodeship, these shreds of history are recorded on a satisfactory scale both by relevant institutions (libraries, digital libraries, museums, and others) and NGOs. Still, this does not mean that everything possible has been done. The maintenance of cultural heritage is a continuous process, requiring effort in cultural education in order to reinforce

the identity of small homelands and the modern promotion of culture also through various types of tourism.

The literature review and research yield several conclusions regarding the impact of cultural heritage on the rural social space. Social sciences define space as a mixture of components resulting from relationships between individuals and the place they live in or pursue their commercial activities. The cultural and social context, that is the awareness of the space, meanings, symbols, values, and norms, is just as important. The value of social bonds, as such, should be emphasized, as their strength depends to a large extent on the local identity created on the canvass of shared history and culture. All these factors make up the social space.

The last research question concerned the inclusion of cultural heritage in rural development strategies. For local cultural heritage protection and promotion initiatives to be effectively included in voivodeship- or national-level development strategies, institutional and non-institutional support is necessary in addition to consolidated qualitative and quantitative reports on the scale of phenomena, such as their frequency, number of initiatives, or as full as possible impact range for the entire area relevant to the strategy. Voivodeship and national strategic documents include consolidated and aggregated results of quantitative and qualitative statistical research on the entire area covered by the document and all its subdivisions. Therefore, they most often contain data collected through obligatory statistical reporting. Statistical data are accompanied by text and often spatial information. Data dispersion hinders the acquisition of a complete dataset for the entire voivodeship. Such compilations rarely appreciate individual, unique initiatives to protect cultural heritage, so it is at the municipal and district levels that some local phenomena and activities have a chance to be recorded in strategic documentation.

Practical Implications and Future Research

Rural initiatives to protect and promote cultural heritage are most often undertaken by middle-aged people, hence the question of whether they will be continued by future generations with similar dynamics of commemorating and promoting the cultural heritage of the past. This is a question of generation replacement. It seems that the problem is not the lack of sources or insufficient knowledge about cultural heritage, which is currently relatively well identified and described. The attitude of future generations and their approach to preserved cultural heritage are unknown. One of the greatest problems of 'preserving the living cultural heritage' today is the vanishing of traditional professions and crafts, customs, cultural landscapes and buildings, recipes, varieties of plants, and species of animals. It may prove difficult to maintain collections and spread historical knowledge in the future. Some institutions report problems with maintaining assets even today, for example, museums of the history of computerisation (digital cultural heritage). Hence, the problem is at least two-fold: it involves culture (beliefs as to what should be handed down to future generations, disinterest in history, etc.) and materials (for example, lack of spare parts). Therefore, it may be a problem to maintain a continued exposition of cultural heritage due to financial reasons and cultural and attitude changes. Consequently, the 'vanishing of cultural heritage' is continuous in nature, and it is not enough to document and preserve it 'here and now'. The prevention of cultural heritage vanishing should then be strategic and planned for the long term.

Appendix A. Population Structure

Profile of the Respondents		Count	Percentage (%)
Sex	Female	221	55
	Male	179	45
	Total	400	100
Age	18–25 years	28	7.0
	26–45 years	167	41.7
	46–60 years	126	31.5
	61 years and more	79	19.8
	Total	400	100.0
Education	Primary	5	1.2
	Vocational	53	13.2
	Secondary	176	44.0
	Higher	155	38.8
	Declined to answer	11	2.8
	Total	400	100.0
Economic activity status *	Student	2	0.5
	Farmer	15	3.8
	Businessperson	43	10.8
	Employed	226	56.5
	Unemployed	10	2.5
	Retired, pensioner	85	21.3
	Other	25	6.3
	Declined to answer	8	2.0
	Total	414 **	100.0

* Multi-select multiple-choice question. ** Some respondents provided both their education and current employment status, such as secondary education and retired.

Appendix B. Inhabitation Statistics

Attribute		Count	Percentage (%)
How long have you been living in your locality?	Since birth	178	44.5
	More than 30 years	69	17.2
	16–29 years	61	15.3
	6–15 years	62	15.5
	Less than 5 years	30	7.5
	Total	400	100.0
District	Bocheński	16	4.0
	Brzeski	8	2.0
	Chrzanowski	11	2.8
	Dąbrowski	6	1.5
	Gorlicki	28	7.0
	Krakowski	59	14.8
	Limanowski	15	3.8
	Miechowski	9	2.3
	Myślenicki	39	9.8
	Nowosądecki	29	7.2
	Nowotarski	27	6.8
	Refused	10	2.5
	Olkuski	25	6.3
	Oświęcimski	11	2.8
	Proszowicki	7	1.8
	Suski	22	5.5
	Tarnowski	24	6.0
	Tatrzański	7	1.8
	Wadowicki	17	4.3
	Wielicki	30	7.5
	Total	400	100.0

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