

an ending, yet full of perseverance and resilience.” Even with a seemingly neutral topic, Horn could not help but draw a provocative conclusion: she mentioned that Holocaust novels “often tell of non-Jewish rescuers who risk or sacrifice their own lives to save Jews. Interestingly, the “righteous non-Jews” officially recognized by the Israeli National Memorial to the Victims of the Holocaust and the Yad Vashem research centre for their efforts in saving Jews from the Holocaust number less than thirty thousand out of nearly three hundred million inhabitants of Europe at that time, which is 0.001 percent. Even if we assume that the official recognition is tens of thousands of times underestimated, these individuals would still constitute basically a rounding error.”

Dara Horn’s insightful opinions deserve much more space than the journal allows the reviewer. Equally compelling are the chapters on founding legends, such as the extensive article about the little-known rescuer Varian Fry and the reactions of the people he saved, which includes sharp self-criticism. The title *Dead Jews, Who Have Become a Blockbuster* will undoubtedly pique interest in the reasons for the criticism of the generally acclaimed exhibition “Auschwitz: Not long ago, not far away”. Reflections on current anti-Semitic attacks in the USA and other unmentioned essays also deserve attention. Despite the somewhat constrained brevity of this text, I believe that at least some readers will find interest in this review and will give the book by Dara Horn the attention it deserves. They certainly won’t regret it. A careful reading of her often provocative opinions provides ample motivation to ponder (not only in connection with the described Jewish phenomena) whether even in “their” cases, it is sometimes true that everything is different...

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ZUZANA BEŇUŠKOVÁ, VERONIKA KOTRADYOVÁ:
Podpoľanie (Regionálna materiálna kultúra: východiská
pre súčasnú prax 1)
[Podpoľanie (Regional Material Culture: The Basis
for Contemporary Practice 1)]
Bratislava: SPEKTRUM STU and IESA SAS, 2023, 80 p.

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The regional publication *Podpoľanie* authored by two professors, ethnologist Zuzana Beňušková and designer Veronika Kotradyová (Beňušková, Kotradyová, 2023), represents the first and boldly pioneering publication output of the interdisciplinary project IDENTITA SK (Identity

Slovakia), which has been gaining momentum for several years.¹ This publication offers a fresh perspective on Slovakia's material culture, highlighting the "authorisation" of its regional specifics for both contemporary and future design use and new applications in this area. Upon first glance, the reader might ask: What challenges can the interconnection of design and material culture in its regional reflections present in this publication?

The research on Podpoľanie was designed in alignment with the overarching focus of the IDENTITA SK project. The study encompasses various aspects, including *nature and traditional agriculture; architecture and construction; crafts, design, and employment; catering and traditional cuisine; and culture*, which are meticulously documented and described to capture the origins of this unique central Slovak region. The exploration of these topics forms the main framework for the core text, which is divided into the following chapters: *Historical Context; People and the Environment; and, The Sources of Sustainability of Traditional Culture and Landscape*. The latter chapter, representing the primary focus of the publication, underscores the research's emphasis on the "living" manifestations of the region's material culture.

An essential parameter of any research is its territorial or spatial embeddedness. While the project itself, aware of the instability of the regional organisation, can be criticised in some cases (current and retrospective) for the insufficient cultural and regional division of Slovakia (emphasis on historical regions and, for example, in the region of Dolné Považie, overlap with its geographical definition *Between the Carpathians and the Váh River*) – despite the existing, relatively solid theoretical and source base of Slovak ethnologists on Slovakia's cultural regionalisation (Mojmír Benža,² Ján Podolák,³ Adam Pranda,⁴ Soňa Švecová⁵), the publication addresses this aspect with precision and appropriateness (at the expected level of cities and municipalities). This is undoubtedly due also thanks to the long-term work of co-author Zuzana Beňušková, who is dedicated to the cultural regionalisation of Slovakia (Beňušková et al., 2005).

The selection of the Podpoľanie region was both a double-edged sword and a significant challenge. On one hand, the region of Central Slovakia has been extensively documented over the years, providing the authors with a wealth of resources. On the other hand, this extensive documentation places them in a professionally challenging situation, requiring a careful assessment of the existing literature and the application of relevant heuristics. This challenge is further compounded, as the publication itself notes, by the fact that "*several very specific cultural manifestations of Podpoľanie have become symbols of Slovakia*" (Beňušková, Kotradyová, 2023: 7).

I acknowledge that the authors, in their efforts to identify the cultural identity of the Podpoľanie region, considered both narrower and broader concepts of the territorial definitions of regions. After all, such an approach is necessary, as seen in the neighbouring region of Horehronie. Although I do not fully agree with the inclusion of municipalities in the Starohorské vrchy area within the "wider Podpoľanie" concept – due to the mining context of these municipalities and their connection to the city of Banská Bystrica, in contrast to the

1 Official website of the IDENTITA SK project: <https://www.projektidentita.sk/> (accessed June 2, 2024).

2 Benža, M. (2011). Regionalizácia Slovenska. *Kontexty kultúry a turizmu*, 2, 13–19.

3 Podolák, J. (1957). Etnografické oblasti na území Slovenska ako podklad k monografiám o ľudovom staviteľstve. *Slovenský národopis*, 5(5), 529–537.

4 Pranda, A. (1966). K otázke vzniku oblastí ľudovej kultúry na Slovensku. *Slovenský národopis*, 14(4), 511–562.

5 Švecová, S. (1988). Etnografické skupiny na Slovensku. *Národopisné informácie*, 2, 7–102.

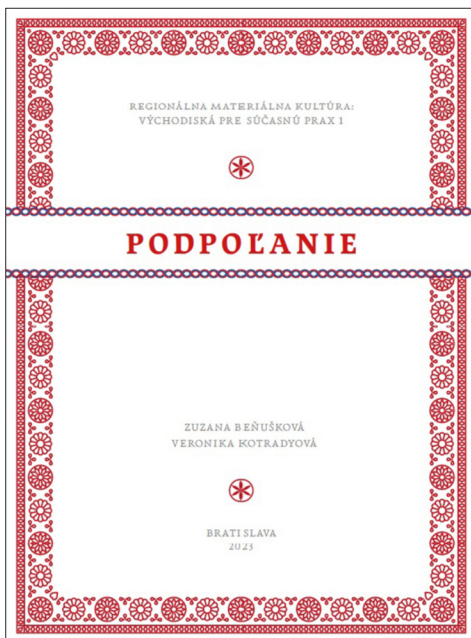
agricultural traditions of Podpoľanie municipalities since the Wallachian colonisation – I appreciate the consideration of interregional contacts between Podpoľanie and neighbouring cultural regions. The controversial question remains the extent to which it is possible to discuss common features of a homogeneous region versus the products of mutual influence between neighbouring regions, such as the use of lace in Staré Hory in traditional Podpoľanie clothing.

The publication, which closely resembles a monograph, provides a concise yet comprehensive examination of various aspects of the region, including demography, historical heritage, cultural context, natural conditions, and social aspects of people's lives and their specifics. With a focus on architecture and urbanism – particularly in the urban environments of Detva and Hriňová – as well as agriculture and industry, the publication offers thorough evaluations. Separate and adequate attention is given to scattered settlements on the Podpoľanie hillsides and to regional uniqueness, such as the terraced fields of Hriňová (which resisted managed soil collectivisation during the socialist period) and folk carved wooden crosses.

The publication exemplifies an active research approach, engaging various regional stakeholders including local farmers, craftsmen, vendors and advocates of folk art, as well as active citizens and their associations. It also acknowledges the contemporary relevance of regional gastronomy, which, along with dialect as a linguistic-geographical phenomenon, emerges as crucial for forming new regional identities or reinforcing longstanding ones.

The authors prudently highlight the semantic distinction between “*detviansky*” (referring to Detva origin) and “*podpoľiansky*” (referring to Podpoľanie origin), addressing the semantic challenges and aligning with current approaches outlined in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. They also recognise locally represented protected geographical indications. Leveraging regional resources, the research considers the existence of smaller, purpose-built associations of local governments such as the Podpoľanie Local Action Group, the Northern Podpoľanie Microregion, and the Regional Tourism Organisation of Tourist Novohrad and Podpoľanie.

The IDENTITA SK project marks the beginning of several publications poised to offer a contemporary portrayal of the vitality, strength, and significance of cultural self-determination in Slovakia's regions, focusing primarily on specific (mostly material) elements. A notable discrepancy arises when comparing the project's declaration of 19 regions or regional areas on its official website with the introduction in the publication *Podpoľanie*. Here, it is revealed that short-term field research conducted during the 2018–2019 period covered “only” eight regions and part of a ninth (Gemer, Hont, Horehronie, Liptov, Orava, Podpoľanie, Šariš, Záhorie, northern Zemplín – which in terms of nomenclature, it is more appropriate to refer to it as Horný Zemplín).



In addition to its practical paperback format, the publication is readily accessible online through the Slovak Academy of Sciences' website, with a functional link also available on the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences' website. The core text of the publication is appropriately complemented by a wealth of accompanying photo documentation, strategically integrated into relevant sections of the text.

In conclusion, this publication successfully achieves the authors' objective of defining the identity of the Podpoľanie cultural region through vibrant and enduring expressions of its material culture. I recommend last year's debut project, *Podpoľanie*, to both professionals and the general public as a valuable contribution to documenting the cultural realities of Slovakia's regions.

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