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DOI: 10.35765/pk.2024.4502.32

The Role of Stakeholder Communication in Cultural Heritage Projects: the Case of the Wit Stwosz Altar

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to explore how stakeholder communication was carried out during realization of one of the most important cultural heritage projects in Europe: “Comprehensive research and conservation work on the altar of Wit Stwosz, 1489,” carried out in St Mary’s Basilica in Kraków. The church, located in the Historic Centre of Kraków, celebrating the 800th anniversary of the founding of the parish in the years 2022–2026, was introduced on the first List of the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1978. The project reported in this paper started in October 2015 and was completed in February 2021, but it was launched in 2011–2012 with the establishment of the committee to evaluate the state of the altar, and the complete inventory in 2013 using 3D laser scanning. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in conservation activities from March till June 2020, the project was completed on time and with the scope scheduled. The research demonstrated that one of the key success factors was a properly designed and implemented communication strategy, addressing information needs of all the relevant stakeholders. Besides, the success resulted from the proper engagement and shared responsibility of internal stakeholders in communication processes with key external actors.

KEYWORDS: St Mary’s Basilica in Kraków, Wit Stwosz altar, stakeholder communication, cultural heritage, project management, tangible assets

Suggested citation: Raś, D., Woźniak, M. & Prusak, A. (2024). The Role of Stakeholder Communication in Cultural Heritage Projects: the Case of the Wit Stwosz Altar. © ⓘ *Perspectives on Culture*, 2(45), pp. 447–471. DOI: 10.35765/pk.2024.4502.32

Submitted: 22.12.2022

Accepted: 22.08.2023

STRESZCZENIE

Znaczenie komunikacji z interesariuszami w projektach o charakterze konserwatorskim: studium przypadku ołtarza Wita Stwosza w bazylice Mariackiej w Krakowie

Celem artykułu jest analiza przebiegu komunikacji z interesariuszami podczas trwania jednego z najważniejszych projektów dziedzictwa kulturowego w Europie: „Kompleksowe prace badawcze i konserwatorskie ołtarza Wita Stwosza, 1489” realizowanego w bazylice Mariackiej w Krakowie. Znajdujący się w historycznym centrum Krakowa kościół, obchodzący w latach 2022–2026 jubileusz 800-lecia powstania parafii, został wpisany na pierwszą listę światowego dziedzictwa kulturowego i przyrodniczego UNESCO w 1978 r. Opisywany projekt był realizowany od października 2015 do lutego 2021, choć rozpoczęto go w latach 2011–2012 wraz z powołaniem komisji do oceny stanu ołtarza oraz jego pełną inwentaryzacją w 2013 r. za pomocą skaningu laserowego 3D. Pomimo przerwy spowodowanej pandemią COVID-19 w działaniach konserwatorskich od marca do czerwca 2020 r. projekt został zrealizowany terminowo i zgodnie z założonym zakresem. Badania wykazały, że jednym z głównych czynników sukcesu była odpowiednio zaprojektowana i wdrożona komunikacja, odpowiadająca potrzebom informacyjnym wszystkich najważniejszych interesariuszy przedmiotowego projektu. Ponadto, sukces wynikał także z właściwego zaangażowania i podziału odpowiedzialności interesariuszy wewnętrznych w procesy komunikacji z kluczowymi interesariuszami zewnętrznymi.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: bazylika Mariacka w Krakowie, ołtarz Wita Stwosza, komunikacja z interesariuszami, dziedzictwo kulturowe, zarządzanie projektem

Introduction

The present paper reports on one of the most meaningful cultural heritage projects in Europe in the last decade: a large-scale conservation of the Wit Stwosz altar in St. Mary's Basilica in Kraków, carried out in the years 2015–2021. More specifically, the study focuses on one of the salient aspects of this endeavor, which is communication with stakeholders.

The Wit Stwosz altar (also referred to as the Grand Altar, or St Mary's Altar) is well known worldwide by its central scene – the icon of Dormition of the Virgin Mary. It is considered the largest Gothic altar in the world. Its history has been presented in numerous books, tourist guides and brochures. An example of such a brochure comes from before conservation in the 19th century. As it states, “Income from the sale is intended

for the renovation of the St. Mary's Church in Krakow" (Pagaczewski, 1927).

To summarize this long and fascinating story briefly, the altar was created as a winged pentaptych by Wit Stwosch between 1477 and 1489. It is an altarpiece measuring 13 meters high and 11 meters wide, consisting of a central panel with two pairs of side wings, one pair of movable inner wings and one pair of fixed outer wings. Both pairs of wings are decorated with bas-reliefs. The altar was carved of three types of wood. The main structure is made of hard oak, the background is made of lighter but equally strong larch, and the figures are carved in soft and flexible linden wood. The whole altarpiece was painted and gilded (Pencakowski, 2021).

Over the years, the piece underwent numerous conservation and restoration projects. The earliest evidence of such work is provided in a document dated 1533. An extensive conservation took place in the years 1866–1869 and included restructuration of the architectural pinnacles of the finial and removing the overpainting from the initial polychromy and gilding (Ślesiński, 1967). The next major conservation work was performed between 1932 and 1934 and aimed at unveiling the original polychromy, preserving the sculptural forms, and correcting the work from the previous century (Walczy, 1983). The most recent conservation (prior to the current project) took place in the years 1946–1950 and aimed mainly at identification and repairing the damage caused after the altar was seized by the Germans during World War II (Słonecki, 1949; Walczy, 1992; Waltoś, 2015; Wolska, 2019). Two minor adjustments were made subsequently in 1986 and in 1999, aiming mainly at structural preservation (Walczy, 2012).

The project described in this study started in October 2015 and was completed in February 2021, but it was launched much earlier, in 2011–2012, by St. Mary's Basilica and *Spoleczny Komitet Odnowy Zabytków Krakowa* (further in English: Social Committee for the Restoration of Kraków's Historic Sites and Monuments). They co-established the committee to evaluate the state of the altar. It resulted in the conclusion that the altarpiece is stable, but in danger of damage escalation in certain areas. It was an incentive for the launch of extensive research and conservation work. In 2013, *Międzynaczelniany Instytut Konserwacji i Restauracji Dzieł Sztuki* (further in English: Interacademic Institute of Conservation and Restoration of Art) undertook a complete inventory of the altar using 3D laser scanning. At that time, research was also carried out on contamination and dust monitoring, which resulted in installation of permanent microclimate monitors (Adamowicz, 2021).

The six-year conservation of the Wit Stwosch altar was undoubtedly one of the well-known cultural heritage projects in Poland and beyond, reported broadly in the media and attracting the attention of numerous

stakeholders. All conservation works were carried out inside St. Mary's Basilica, in the area behind the altar, on special platforms and in rooms directly adjacent to them. This made it possible to maintain stable micro-climate conditions, as the dismantled elements of the altarpiece remained in the close vicinity to their original display. A special construction was built covering the front part of the retable. It enabled the simultaneous exhibition and work on the sculptures. It was carried out so as not to disturb the liturgy. Throughout the entire period, the church remained open to the faithful for prayer and to visitors for sightseeing (except for September and October 2018). Thus, apart from the complexity of the endeavor resulting from technical issues inherent in the conservation processes (which are not the subject of this study), communication with relevant stakeholders constituted a substantial part of management of this historically meaningful project. The aim of this paper is to explore and demonstrate how stakeholder communication processes were planned and conducted during the conservation project. Accordingly, this study provides practical implications of how to address a major problem in such cultural heritage projects, which is a long-term inaccessibility of historical assets being an important attraction to visitors.

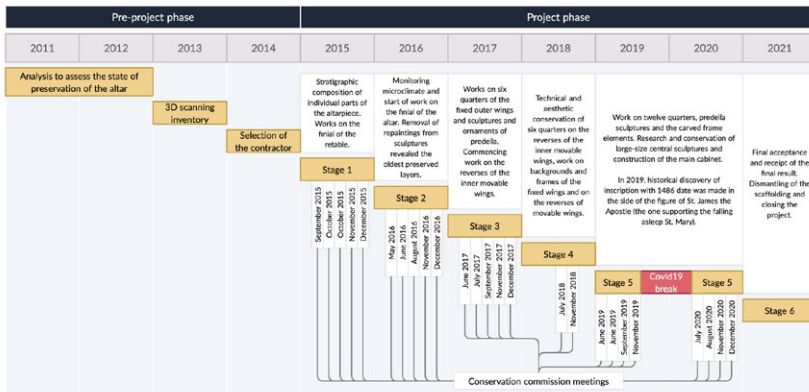
Description of the project

Before the analysis of practices related to stakeholder communication, it is essential to provide a brief description of the project, its objectives, structure, and the scope of work. This description was prepared based on evaluation of relevant documents retrieved from the Administration Office of St. Mary's Basilica and from the Project Manager. The official title of the project was "Comprehensive research and conservation work on the altar of Wit Stwosz, 1489," and its main goal was to carry out comprehensive prevention, research, and conservation of one of the most important and valuable monuments of the European cultural heritage of the Middle Ages. Based on archival materials and numerous discussions, the conservators attempted to restore the arrangement of the altar from before its major renovation in the 19th century. The detailed report of this conservation (1866–1869) was provided by the Supervision of the St. Mary's Church and then published by the local newspaper *Czas* (1867, 1868, 1870).

Although the current project was officially launched in October 2015, the preparation started in 2011, when the interdisciplinary conservation team of highly qualified specialists, coordinated by St. Mary's Basilica and Social Committee for the Restoration of Kraków's Historic Sites and Monuments, was formed to assess the state of preservation of the altar.

The team consisted of scientists and specialists in the field of research, protection, and conservation of historical monuments, with skills and expertise in wood preservation. Several preliminary analyzes and diagnoses, preceding the conservation activities, were carried out in the years 2011–2012. They included, i.a., physical and chemical research, art history analysis, mycological and dendrochronological research. The report summarized the condition of the altar as “stable” but “at risk” with constantly expanding areas of destruction. In 2013, full inventory of the altar was conducted with the use of 3D laser scanning. It resulted in a bulk of measurement documentation such as orthoplanes, photoorthoplanes and drawings. In 2014, St. Mary’s Basilica announced a three-stage competition to select a contractor who would carry out further research and conservation works. The contractor, namely Interacademic Institute of Conservation and Restoration of Art, was selected in August 2015. The project consisted of several well-planned stages carried out according to the Gantt-based schedule presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Stages of the project. Source: own study.



Stage 1 (October–December 2015) began from determining the stratigraphic composition of individual parts of the altarpiece and their correlation with its history and previous conservation activities. In that year, conservation involved solely the works on the finial of the retable, named “Coronation of Mary.” Technical conservation of the finial’s sculptures and woodcarving elements was also made. During Stage 2 (January–December 2016), the contractor conducted monitoring of the microclimate and started to work on the finial of the altar. Removal of re-paintings from its sculptures revealed the oldest preserved polychrome layers on the robes, linings, and bases.

Stage 3 (January-December 2017) consisted of research and conservation activities on six quarters of the fixed outer wings of the altar (namely: "Meeting Joachim and Anna," "The Birth of Mary," "The presentation of Mary in the temple," "Descent into Limbo," "The three Maries at the Tomb," "Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene as a gardener"), as well as sculptures and ornaments of predella. Certain work was also carried out on the frame of the fixed wings. In addition, the team commenced with the work on the reverses of the movable inner wings, first disassembling and examining the quarters of the movable left inner wing (displaying the following scenes: "The presentation of Jesus in the temple," "Twelve-year-old Jesus' teaching in the temple," and "The capture of Christ"). The scope of Stage 4 (January-December 2018) consisted in the complete technical and aesthetic conservation of six quarters on the reverses of the movable inner wings (scenes: "The presentation of Jesus in the temple," "Twelve-year-old Jesus' teaching in the temple," "The capture of Christ," "Crucifixion," "The Descent from the cross," and "Jesus is laid in the tomb"), as well as work on the backgrounds and frames of fixed wings and on the reverses of movable wings. The conservation of the predella sculptures was continued. In that year, the contractor started a reconnaissance of the structure of the main cabinet, mainly of its wood-carved elements.

The beginning of Stage 5 (January 2019–December 2020) took place in the middle of January, after a one-month break. The work was resumed from the previous year and involved twelve quarters, predella sculptures and the carved frame elements. The scope of work in 2019 included research and conservation work on large-size central sculptures and construction of the main cabinet. Thus, it started with setting up a specially adapted scaffolding structure in the presbytery, enabling the creation of workstations in the vicinity of the largest sculptural elements, which were impossible to place on the platforms behind the altar. At the same time, figures of the central part of the altar were exposed on these constructions. The selected bas-reliefs of the altar quarters were exhibited in the lower part of the structure in daily exposure. Much of the work at this stage was carried out under tough pandemic conditions, so it started in the second half of January 2019 and continued until the beginning of March 2020. Then, from March 2020 till June 2020 all the activity was entirely stopped due to Covid-19 quarantine.

This stage was of particular importance due to historical discovery which took place in 2019. During the removal of repainting on the central figure of St. James the Apostle (the one supporting the Mother of God falling asleep), on the side edge of his robe a tiny, two-centimeter-long inscription saying "1486" was discovered. It indicates that the sculpture was already finished by that time. This date precedes the officially known consecration

of the altar by three years and had not been known to researchers of medieval art until that discovery. The character of the numbers – with a specific “4” – is typical of the Gothic period. This coincides with technological construction of the sculpture, and there was no doubt about its authenticity. Moreover, it is a unique inscription since the altar does not have the signature of Wit Stwos, nor his personal graphic sign (*gmerk* in Polish), used by medieval artists and craftsmen to mark their works. So far, there has been no information about the existence of any primary signature, from the time of the creation of the altar, until this historical discovery.

Finally, Stage 6 (January 2021 – February 2021) consisted of the acceptance and receipt of the result and closing the project. In January 2021, the whole scaffolding was dismantled, while in February the whole altar was officially presented to the public. Despite the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the project was finished on time, without delays.

The Gantt-based schedule presented in Figure 1 also shows the dates of the conservation commission meetings, which took place twenty-five times during the realization of the project. These meetings aimed at summarizing the results achieved so far, progress control, inspection, and confirmation of the correctness of the work performed. These meetings were always convened upon the request of St. Mary’s Basilica. Their participants included: i) the Prelate of the Basilica; ii) the contractor – Interacademic Institute of Conservation and Restoration of Art; iii) sponsors, including Social Committee for the Restoration of Kraków’s Historic Sites and Monuments, *Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego* (further in English: Ministry of Culture and National Heritage), *Gmina Miejska Kraków* (further in English: Municipality of Kraków); iv) control entities, consisting of *Wydział Rewaloryzacji Zabytków Krakowa i Dziedzictwa Narodowego Małopolskiego Urzędu Wojewódzkiego* (further in English: Department of Revalorization of Krakow’s Monuments and National Heritage of the Małopolskie Voivodship Office), as well as *Wojewódzki Urząd Ochrony Zabytków w Krakowie* (further in English: Voivodship Office for the Protection of Kraków’s Monuments); v) a representative of the Administration Office of the St. Mary’s Basilica; and vi) the Chief Conservator and Director of the Archive, who played the role of supervision inspector of the conservation commission. Selected media representatives were also invited to some of the meetings. All of them were important stakeholders, whose roles, responsibilities, and interactions are described and analyzed in the following section of this paper. The authors realize, however, that the above description of the project does not reflect the complexity of research and conservation carried out on over 200 linden figures, nor does it show numerous problems solved, changes made and risks mitigated. All these issues shall be the subject of other publications.

Research method on identifying and analyzing stakeholders

Stakeholder analysis and communication were planned and performed using tools adopted from the commonly accepted standards, guidelines and methods of project management, such as IPMA (2015) and PMI (2021). Both standards as well as numerous researchers associate project success with satisfaction of the project stakeholders (McElroy & Mills, 2014; Assudani & Kloppenborg, 2010; de Oliveira & Rabechini, 2018; Davis, 2016; Takagi & Varajao, 2019).

In project management, stakeholders are defined as “individuals, groups or organizations participating in, affecting, being affected by, or interested in the execution or the result of the project. (...) This may include sponsors, clients and users, suppliers/subcontractors, alliances, partners or other projects, programmes or portfolios” (IPMA, 2015). Managing stakeholders is the process described as “communicating and working with stakeholders to meet their needs and expectations” (PMI, 2021). Thus, communication with stakeholders is one of the fundamental tasks, critical in achieving the success of projects (Alsulaimi & Abdullah, 2020). Proper measures and tools engaged in communication with stakeholders are crucial in minimizing conflicts with stakeholders, who often have the ability to exert enormous impacts on the project results (Assudani & Kloppenborg, 2010). Moreover, communication practices and routines affect, to a substantial extent, their engagement and trust in the project (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Project management practices in cultural heritage projects, let alone stakeholder communication, are rarely exposed in the literature. Some authors acknowledged that the complexity of cultural heritage conservation results in the necessity of adopting a holistic approach and cross-disciplinary research (Hirszenberger et al., 2019). Consequently, this type of project involves many diverse stakeholders, often representing conflicting interests. The process of communication in such a specific environment constitutes a significant research gap, which is addressed by the present study.

Each communication strategy should be preceded by a thorough analysis of different individuals and entities related to the project. In the literature, there are at least twenty different methods and techniques of analyzing stakeholders (Clayton, 2014). For example, they can be categorized based on their power and interest in the project (Gudlaugsson, 2020), or power, urgency and legitimacy (Savage et al., 1991). Yet the most often used classification is whether a stakeholder is located inside or outside the project's organization, that is internal and external stakeholders. However, the criterion of physical location of the stakeholder premises has little practical

meaning. For example, contractors are usually viewed as external stakeholders, while some organizations engage them to work for and within the organization as if they were internal stakeholders (Mazur & Pisarski, 2015). Opposite to internal stakeholders, external ones are those who have no official or contractual link to the project's organization but may influence or may be influenced by the project (Winch, 2004). External stakeholders reflect a very broad category, consisting of, i.a., regulatory agencies, investors, local communities, customers, competitors, associations, suppliers, educational institutions, and many others. Although most sources analyze media (represented by journalists) as one of the external stakeholders, some researchers argue that they constitute an additional, separate group (Koehler & Raithel, 2018). The latter believe that media stakeholders are opinion leaders and mediators, who can significantly influence the behaviors of others, and are capable of controlling the information flow among a variety of actors (Vogler et al., 2016).

Such a distinction has far-reaching consequences for communication strategies. Internal stakeholder communication is understood as interactions and relationships at all levels within an organization (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Although it is perceived as crucial, because it affects proper engagement of the employees, managing external stakeholders is much more challenging (Lehtinen & Aaltonen, 2020). Moreover, as it is seen as primarily the project manager's responsibility, some scholars note that it should rather be a joint effort of all internal stakeholders (i.a., representatives of an organization, project manager, contractor, employees, etc.). Yet the literature is mostly silent on how different internal stakeholders handle (or should handle) relationships with external actors (Olander & Landin, 2005). This is another research gap addressed in the present study.

Finally, analyzing communication practices in the project requires defining what exactly is understood by stakeholder communication. Communication has a variety of meanings. For instance, it is described as the act of processing or exchanging information and knowledge between individuals and groups, aiming to generate action or provide common understanding (e.g.: Faraj et al., 2011; Mayfield, 2014). Accordingly, there are numerous ways of categorizing information needs, sources, and processes, to name but a few examples. For the purpose of this study, we apply the classification proposed by Van de Ven *et al.* (1976) and tested by Turkulainen et al. (2016) in the context of stakeholder communication during different phases of an organizational project. This theory divides communication practices into three modes: impersonal, personal and group mode (Van de Ven et al., 1976). The impersonal mode refers to a routine in which messages are transferred using pre-established and specified plans, formalized procedures and standardized systems, and require minimum verbal communication. The typical

examples of impersonal communications include project plans and procedures, descriptions of roles in the project, emails, social media, newsletters, etc. The personal mode treats stakeholders as mechanisms of communication, and therefore is perceived as the most effective (Brown et al., 2007). This mode consists of face-to-face meetings, phone calls and personal messaging on the phone or via social media. The group mode aims at bringing together a group of individuals, mainly through scheduled and unscheduled meetings, events and teamwork (Adler, 1995). Special attention should be paid to the role of social media (i.a., Facebook, X), as they comprise various modes of communication. For example, they represent impersonal mode if used simply for distribution of information, while they exhibit personal or group mode when people use them for discussions (Hudson & Hudson, 2013; Waters et al., 2009).

Due to the lack of theories on managing stakeholder communication in conservation projects, this research started without precise hypotheses or assumptions. In addition, the initial version of stakeholder analysis was conducted for the needs of the project before it started, and it was supplemented later with additional information for the needs of the current paper. Consequently, the study reported here is based on an approach known as theory elaboration, being one of the modes of case research. In this approach, empirical data illustrates an existing general conceptual or theoretical framework, considering contextual peculiarities (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). The main research objective is to explore how stakeholder communication was carried out during realization of one of the most important cultural heritage projects in Europe. This objective was realized through modeling the complexity of communication processes between internal and external stakeholders. The subsequent research questions are as follows: What are individual roles and responsibilities of internal stakeholders with respect to the communication with external stakeholders? How do they differ in terms of communication modes – personal, impersonal or group mode? By posing these questions we address the observation made by Olander and Landin (2005), who noticed that there are very few studies on how different internal stakeholders deal with various external ones, since communication with stakeholders is mainly the project manager's responsibility.

The relevant data was collected using documentary analysis (formal reports of conservation) and supplemented with face-to-face interviews with key employees (internal stakeholders) directly engaged in the project management and communication, such as the Basilica's Administration Office, Social Media Communication Specialist, Project Manager, and the Chief Conservator. The main limitation of such an approach was perhaps the subjectivity of their judgments, therefore they were compared in terms of consistency.

Thus, the collected data has qualitative character and was explored using qualitative techniques, such as content analysis of documents and interviews. Key stakeholders were categorized as two major groups: internal and external actors, according to the aforementioned definitions (e.g. Mazur & Pisarski, 2015). Their roles and responsibilities in the project are specified in Table 1.

Table 1. Roles and responsibilities of key project stakeholders

Category	Stakeholder	Role and responsibility
Internal	Prelate of St Mary's Basilica	Formal representative of St Mary's Basilica. Decision power as regards all the activities related to the project, including selection and employment of the contractor, signing documents, supervising teamwork, etc. The conservation commission meetings were convened at the Prelate's request.
Internal	Administration Office	Administrative support to the Prelate and other departments of St Mary's Basilica. In the project, responsible for dealing with all administration and financial issues.
Internal	Chief of Administration Office	Reports directly to the Prelate. Support and permanent participant of conservation commission meetings (Secretary of the commission).
Internal	Parish Council	A supportive and advisory body consisting of the Chief of Administration Office, Specialist in Social Communication, Chief of Tourist Office, selected priests and parishioners employed by the Basilica.
Internal	Member of the Interacademic Institute of Conservation	Project Manager, supervising all research and conservation activities, decision power as regards employment of the team members - conservators and researchers, as well as external experts. Responsible also for presentation of the results to sponsors and control entities, as well as for preparation of the relevant conservation documentation and annual reports. The final report (consisting of nine volumes of descriptive documents, research reports and drawings) was transferred to St Mary's Basilica upon completion of the project.
Internal	The Interacademic Institute of Conservation	Contractor, selected as a result of three-stage competition, responsible for realization of all research and conservation work. Consisted of a team of twelve conservators employed on a permanent basis for the duration of the project, and other researchers.
Internal	Chief Conservator and Director of the Archive	Supervision over the Archives and Collections Department, as well as supervision inspector over the conservation activities during the project. Reports directly to the Prelate. Permanent participants of conservation commission meetings, responsible for suggesting the terms of these meetings.

Internal	The Archives and Collections Department	Searching and sharing the archive documentation and reports regarding the previous conservation projects carried out on the Wit Stwosz altar. Reports directly to the Chief Conservator.
Internal	Tourist Office	Direct interaction with visitors and tour guides. Providing information about the difficulties in visiting the Basilica and the Wit Stwosz altar.
Internal	Social Media Communication Specialist	The Basilica's employee responsible for social media and communication. In the project, responsible for providing first-hand information to other stakeholders, especially to the media.
Internal	Priests of St Mary's Basilica	Direct interaction with parishioners and visitors.
Internal	St Mary's Basilica's Service	Direct interaction with parishioners and visitors.
Internal	External experts and advisors	Involved in the project on an irregular and temporary basis, dependent upon the needs and problems arising from the ongoing work. They consisted of a number of Polish and foreign scientists and other specialists with different backgrounds and expertise. They were recommended by the contractor. Polish experts were those involved more closely in the research work (i.a., some of them responsible for physical and chemical research), while foreign experts (i.a., from Germany, Italy, Belgium or Great Britain) were mainly engaged as ad-hoc consultants.
External	Social Committee for the Restoration of Kraków's Historic Sites and Monuments	Sponsor of the project, its representatives were permanent participants of conservation commission meetings.
External	Ministry of Culture and National Heritage	Sponsor of the project.
External	Municipality of Kraków	Sponsor of the project, its representatives were permanent participants of conservation commission meetings.
External	Małopolskie Voivodship Office – Department of Revalorization of Krakow's Monuments and National Heritage	Public authorities involved in such projects by law. Control entity responsible for St. Mary's Basilica, institutional supervision over the project activities and the project results.

External	Voivodship Office for the Protection of Krakow's Monuments	Public authorities involved in such projects by law. Control entity responsible for St. Mary's Basilica, institutional supervision over the project activities and the project results.
External	Metropolitan Curia in Kraków	Representatives of the Curia participated in the selection of the contractor and were present at the initial conservation commissions meetings.
External	Visitors (tourists)	The largest group of external stakeholders. They expected to have unlimited access to the Wit Stwosz altar, as one of the key tourist attractions in Poland. Their role in the project was merely an acceptance that periodic and comprehensive renovation of the altar is necessary to preserve its condition, followed by tolerance of the associated impediments such as limited access to the object.
External	Tour guides	The limited access to the altar did not allow presenting the visitors its whole beauty. Yet this group believed that following the conservation, the altar would attract even more visitors. Their role in the project was transferring the positive message about the project and its historical value.
External	Parishioners and faithful	An important issue for this group was the possibility to pray and participate in liturgy at least on Sundays and holidays. Although the main work was carried out right behind the altarpiece, it did not interfere with prayers and liturgy, and the Basilica was open for almost the entire restoration period.
External	Educational institutions	Schools and universities expressed much interest in the project. For example, school and university teachers willingly brought their students to look at the altar's figures up-close. The catechists applied for the possibility of conducting religion classes in front of the altar.
External	Media	Journalists from local and national TV, newspapers, internet portals, etc. Communication with the general public. Numerous times they applied to the Basilica for the possibility of photographing or filming the altar during its conservation. A lot of coverage appeared following the announcement of the discovery of date "1486" on the side of St James the Apostle.

Source: own study.

It is noteworthy that the above list could be longer if other groups of stakeholders were considered, such as regulators, suppliers, competitors (for instance, other tourist attractions in Kraków), and many more.

However, in the current analysis, thirteen internal stakeholders and ten external ones were identified as key to the project communication processes.

Communication between internal and external stakeholders

Both documentary analysis and interviews with the relevant stakeholders reveal the complexity of information channels between internal and external actors. It is visible in Table 2, exposing which modes (impersonal, personal or group) and practices of communication were used with respect to the key external stakeholders, and which internal stakeholder was responsible for their implementation.

Table 2. Communication modes with external stakeholders

External stakeholder	Communication mode	Communication practices	Internal stakeholders responsible for communication
Sponsors: Social Committee for the Restoration of Kraków's Historic Sites and Monuments, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Municipality of Kraków	Impersonal (I)	Information in social media	Social Media Communication Specialist
	Personal (P)	Occasional phone calls Occasional face-to-face informal and formal meetings Invitations to see up close the conservation works at the altar Email information about the progress of the project	Prelate of the St Mary's Basilica Chief of Administration Office Chief Conservator and Director of the Archive
	Group (G)	Presentation of the results during conservation commission meetings	Prelate of the St Mary's Basilica Project Manager Chief of Administration Office Chief Conservator and Director of the Archive

Control entities: Małopolskie Voivodship Office – Department of Revalorization of Krakow’s Monuments and National Heritage, Voivodship Office for the Protection of Krakow’s Monuments, Metropolitan Curia in Kraków	Impersonal (I)	Information in social media	Social Media Communication Specialist Chief of Administration Office
	Personal (P)	Occasional phone calls Occasional face-to-face informal and formal meetings Invitations to see up close the conservation works at the altar Email information about the progress of the project Official letters	Prelate of the St Mary’s Basilica Chief of Administration Office Chief Conservator and Director of the Archive
	Group (G)	Presentation of the results during conservation commission meetings	Prelate of the St Mary’s Basilica Project Manager Chief of Administration Office Chief Conservator and Director of the Archive
Visitors (tourists)	Impersonal (I)	Information in social media - daily description of work. Internet announcements at Basilica’s website in a dedicated tab. TV transmissions dedicated to the project. Information board in the tourist service office. TV screen in the presbytery with ongoing reports from restoration works.	Social Media Communication Specialist Tourist Office
	Personal (P)	N/A.	N/A.
	Group (G)	Presentation of the altar to the organized groups of visitors.	Tourist Office

Tour guides	Impersonal (I)	E-mailing list created for this group to regularly inform them about the current state of the project and related difficulties in tourist traffic, invitation to meetings and presentations. Information in social media - daily description of work. Information board in the tourist service office.	Tourist Office Social Media Communication Specialist
	Personal (P)	N/A.	N/A.
	Group (G)	Invitations for all Krakow tour guides to an organizational meeting once a year, with lectures and presentations of conservation plans and the results of the so far activities.	Tourist Office
Parishioners and faithful	Impersonal (I)	Parish announcements placed in display cases inside the church and online on the Basilica's website. Information in social media - daily description of work. TV transmissions dedicated to the project.	Social Media Communication Specialist Priests
	Personal (P)	N/A.	N/A.
	Group (G)	N/A.	N/A.

Educational institutions	Impersonal (I)	Information in social media - daily description of work.	Social Media Communication Specialist
	Personal (P)	N/A.	N/A.
	Group (G)	Lectures for students in front of the Grand Altar. Competition. The action called “An hour with the Wit Stwosz Altar” addressed to primary and high schools in Lesser Poland. It was preceded by special invitations sent to the school principals.	School teachers and university lecturers applied for a possibility to observe the altar’s conservation directly to the Archives and Collections Department. Tourist Office responsible for the action “An hour with the WIt Stwosz Altar”.
Media	Impersonal (I)	Information in social media - daily description of work.	Social Media Communication Specialist
	Personal (P)	Occasional telephone contact with selected journalists. Information on the progress of the project.	Social Media Communication Specialist
	Group (G)	Presentation of the results during conservation commission meetings. Invitations to celebration of the reopening of the renovated altar.	Social Media Communication Specialist Prelate of the St Mary’s Basilica Project Manager Chief Conservator and Director of the Archive

Source: own study.

For the purpose of planning communication strategy, several external institutions described in the previous section (see: Table 1) were grouped into Sponsors and Control entities. The same communication practices were applied within these groups, and they included occasional phone calls to selected representatives, informal and formal meetings, and personal invitations to watch the conservation activities from the scaffolding up-close. They also received regular emails with information about the progress and invitations for conservation commission meetings, during which more detailed information was provided. In addition, the Sponsors’

logotypes were placed on the reports, as well as on a board hanging on the scaffolding, alongside the information that they co-financed the project. Several internal stakeholders were engaged in communication with Sponsors and Control entities. For example, the Prelate of St Mary's Basilica and the Chief Administrator were issuing the invitations, while the Project Manager and the Chief Conservator and Director of the Archive were responsible for presentation of the progress and results during the meetings.

Visitors (tourists) represented the largest group of stakeholders and were therefore very important to the St Mary's Basilica. As they were expected to suffer from the limited accessibility of one of the most significant tourist attractions in Poland, a number of activities were planned to compensate for this inconvenience. First of all, relevant announcements were published on the Basilica's website, informing on the restrictions and any difficulties in tourist traffic during the conservation. The ongoing messages were placed in the website tab titled "Visiting the Basilica." Example of such an announcement:

Due to the intensive conservation works and research of the main stage of St Mary's altar planned this year, we would like to inform those interested that it will not be possible to enter the Basilica for tourists in September and October. During this time, we continue to invite our guests from Poland and abroad to visit Hejnalica [taller tower of St Mary's Basilica].

All the internet messages and notices about the current state of the project were prepared and provided by the Social Media Communication Specialist of the Basilica, and they were addressed to all the external stakeholders (all of them had an equal access to this information). Secondly, the messages about the conservation and resulting difficulties for the visitors were regularly displayed inside the Basilica's Tourists Office on a dedicated information board. The employees of the Tourist Office were directly engaged in face-to-face conversations with the visitors, who came to ask them about the accessibility of St Mary's Basilica and the main altar. Occasionally, they also questioned other employees, such as church service members. Despite the personal nature of this interaction, it is hard to categorize such practices as personal mode of communication as defined by Van de Ven *et al.* (1976). It is because they were not aimed to address a particular visitor, but in most cases, they were anonymous to the information providers. What deserves attention is the content of messages distributed by the Tourist Office (whether in written or verbal form). It clearly specified which part of the Altar was accessible to the visitors, and how it was changing depending on the state of the conservation. Moreover, in the

presbytery a TV screen was installed, on which a presentation on the current work on the altar was played in a loop, so the visitors could observe the conservation process on an ongoing basis. Such communication activities allowed creating mutual understanding and convinced the visitors that they participated in an important, historic event.

Just like the visitors, tour guides were also important for the project. The inaccessibility of the Altar due to the conservation might have resulted in the loss of at least part of their income. Thus, several communication efforts were dedicated to mitigating this problem. Specifically, the Tourist Office was responsible for informing them about the current state of the project (as in case of the visitors). In addition, a special e-mailing list for Krakow tour guides was created, by which they were informed, on a regular basis, about the progress in conservation works and related difficulties in tourist traffic. They were also invited to the special meetings, organized with the purpose of presenting the conservation plans for the upcoming year and the results of the activities carried out up to that point. Some of these meetings were combined with short presentations about the Wit Stwosz altar and the necessity of its thorough conservation occasionally. They passed this information on to the visitors.

As regards the parishioners, faithful and prayer groups, they were regularly informed about the project on social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), as well as through the website and parish weekly announcements. The information was updated on a day-to-day basis and contained, i.a., a description of quarters of the altarpiece subjected to conservation, illustrated by the related videos. Every Sunday, parish announcements were placed in display cases inside the church as well as online, at the Basilica's website. Example of such announcements were as follows:

We are happy to announce that we have completed conservation work on the altar by Wit Stwosz, while cleaning activities are still underway: assembly of figures and disassembly of scaffolding. The altar can be admired in all its splendor at the beginning of February.

We are happy to announce that conservation and research works on the altar of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Wit Stwosz have been completed. The altar can now be admired in full splendor.

Importantly, reduced access to the Wit Stwosz altar did not eliminate the possibility of participating in the Holy Mass. In the presbytery, a special platform with a substitute altar was placed to enable celebration right in front of the Wit Stwosz altar. Upon the completion of the project, local TV (TVP3 Kraków) broadcasted (in August 2021) a Holy Mass with thanksgiving celebration and reconsecration of the Wit Stwosz altar.

Communication with educational institutions, such as primary schools, high schools and universities (mainly from Małopolska region), was usually initiated by schoolteachers and academic lecturers, who applied to the Archives and Collections Department of St Mary's Basilica for a possibility to observe the altar's conservation. The Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, under the patronage of the Basilica, organized a competition for students of secondary art schools to create an art inspired by the Wit Stwosz altar. Besides, nearly 3,5 thousand students from 90 schools of the Małopolska region got acquainted with the renovated altar in the period from September to October 2022, within the action called "An hour with the Wit Stwosz altar." It was organized mainly by the Tourist Office and launched with the presentation of the altar during a special meeting dedicated for school principals.

The press releases about the progress of conservation were sent to the media on a regular basis. Selected journalists were also receiving invitations to conservation commission meetings, and they were also invited to the finale of the project – a Holy Mass with thanksgiving celebration for its successful completion.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to analyze how stakeholder communication processes were planned and conducted during one of the major conservation projects in Poland, involving an important cultural heritage asset: the Wit Stwosz altar in St Mary's Basilica in Kraków. The whole project was carried out in accordance with well-established project management standards. The analysis revealed differences in the use of communication strategies between internal and external stakeholders, as well as in how the internal stakeholders shared responsibility for communication with various groups of external actors. The communication patterns were the same in different phases of the project, therefore this aspect was not considered in the analysis. It is worthy to note that the role of the Project Manager, who should take responsibility for all communication activities, was limited to sponsors, control entities and the media. The remaining actors communicated with different internal stakeholders, who shared responsibility in this respect. A Social Media Communication Specialist was involved in communication with literally all external stakeholders via social media and announcements on the Basilica's website. Despite the break in conservation activities from March till June 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the project was completed on time and with the scope scheduled. Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors contributing to this success were properly designed and

implemented communication strategies, considering information needs of all the relevant stakeholders. Besides, the ultimate success resulted from the proper engagement and shared responsibility of internal stakeholders in communication processes with the external actors.

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