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Moba tradition / Mowing on Rajac Mountain



The interview with Mrs. Danica Pavlović, conducted by Jelena Bjegović in a café in Belgrade. December 2021.

Danica Pavlović is 65 years old. By education, she is an economy technician. Danica is now retired. She worked at National Bank of Serbia, as a controller of intranational transactions in the Department of Foreign Finances. She lives in Belgrade, but her origins are in Ljig, small town cca. 100 km southwest from Belgrade.

Jelena Bjegović (JB): We met today to talk about moba custom and the festivity “Mowing on Rajac Mountain”. What do moba custom and the festivity “Mowing on Rajac Mountain” personally mean to you?

Danica Pavlović (DP): Back then when I was a little girl growing up in the village Kadine Luke, where my mother’s family is from, calling for moba was a call for all generations, young and old, to be together and get a job done. The whole village worked as one. Everyone was driven so the work is done. In our community mowing was the most frequent cause for calling moba especially during the summer. Festivity “Mowing on Rajac mountain” directly draws from the tradition. Like in the old days, for half of the century from the first festivity, every year call around St. Peter’s Day [July 12th] people are called for mowing. Whole community is keen to make festivity successful, so the “Mowing” is a moba in its own right. For me personally, it means affirmation of solidarity and the community, helping each other out to overcome difficulties and contribute to the prosperity of the village.

JB: What have you learned and what experiences do you have as participant of “Mowing on Rajac Mountain”?

DP: From experiences of participating moba and in organization of “Mowing on Rajac Mountain” festivity I learned to be solidary with people in need and the community. I developed deep sense of the belonging to the community. I also learned about social roles. You know the saying: “who mows and

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who carries water". It is known who is didija [host of the mowing], who are water carriers, who prepares lunch and who brings it to the mowers, etc. Yet, we are still together with a common goal.

I learned a lot about handicrafts: knitting, embroidery, weaving. I also learned a bit about blacksmith's trade. I learned a lot about traditional gastronomy – making pies, donuts, kaymak, rakija, etc. My cooking skills have improved. You know that I make delicious pies and donuts! For my cooking and baking skills I can credit "Mowing on Rajac Mountain".

Each year festivity ends with performances of traditional singing and music groups. I perfected myself in dancing our traditional kolo and I also learned some songs.

You are engaged in ecology, so I want to tell you that thanks to participating festivity "Mowing on Rajac Mountain" I also learned something about ecology as well. If meadows aren't mowed, they'd become weeded, filled with darnel, which would jeopardize some other species of flora and fauna. That reflects on biodiversity. "Mowing on Rajac Mountain" hence contributes maintaining biodiversity. Because of the "Mowing" there are no weeded meadows!

DP: Moba is important because it promotes solidarity and social cohesion. Everyone in the community puts effort so the community prospers. I'm talking about all generations, young and old, everyone according to his or her abilities makes personal contribution. Don't make me talk about girls and lads, who can meet and get to know each other! [laughs]

JB: According to your opinion why are moba and "Mowing on Rajac Mountain" important for Ljig municipality, which organizes the festivity and the community?

DP: When we talk about Ljig municipality, I remind you it was and still is small municipality just outside Belgrade, on the very important traffic communication leading towards Western Serbia, Montenegro, and Adriatic Sea. Festivity "Mowing on Rajac Mountain" encouraged people in Ljig community to think more about their customs and culture, to realize that major component of their identity is affinity for solidarity and aspirations to overcome difficulties together. Also, Ljig become known as municipality that attracts mowers and tourists from all over Balkans. And beyond. You know that "Mowing on Rajac mountain" gathers mowers from all over the region. Everyone brings something that shows, tells something about the essence of moba and mowing. It is so wonderful to see colourful embroideries on white shirts that mowers wear, each being traditional costumes in their communities. As hosts, we offer what we have, our customs, we share our beliefs and values, our traditions. Let me tell you, it is not so different from others. We are a bit, but it does not stop us to find quite easily something in common.

JB: According to your opinion and experiences, how is "Mowing on Rajac Mountain" related to other expressions of living culture in Serbia?

DP: Beside moba, "Mowing" also cherishes two important social practices: prelo and poselo. Prelo is a practice in which women and girls get together to work on their handicrafts. On the day prior to "Mowing", in the afternoon, women in the community get together to work and to present completed handicrafts. After prelo, everyone gets together on poselo. Poselo is traditional practice of getting

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together to socialize. Women, men, girls, and lads are together competing who will sing better, who will tell a better joke, who will win the social games. It all holds the spirit of old times when prelo and poselo were almost the only way for informal interactions of all villagers.

Living the intangible culture
Vranje music

The interview with Mrs. Ivana Tasić Mitić was conducted by Vladimir Kolarić in February 2022 via Zoom



Ivana Tasić Mitić is 40 years old. She was born in Vranje and still lives in this city. By education, she is a doctor of the methodology of classroom teaching, while by profession she is a professor of the methodology of teaching Serbian language and literature. Also, Ivana is a renowned interpreter of Vranje city songs. I talked with Ivana about Vranje music, an element of the living cultural treasure of Serbia.

Vladimir Kolarić (VK): How would you describe your relationship with Vranje Music?

Ivana Tasić Mitić (ITM): I was born in Vranje, and I still live in this beautiful city. I come from a family in which Vranje's musical heritage has been nurtured and preserved from oblivion for a long time. I have been interpreting the Vranje city song both independently and as a vocal soloist of the ethno group “Izvor” (“The Water Spring” or “The Source”) for more than 25 years.

VK: What does Vranje music, an element of the living cultural treasure of Serbia, mean to you personally?

ITM: I perceive Vranje's musical heritage as a reflection of the identity of the people of the Vranje region, their mentality, customs, folk costume, language, and everything that, in a cultural sense, shapes the inhabitants of this region in the far south of Serbia.

VK: What knowledge and experiences did you gain by practicing the Vranje City Song as a part of Vranje's musical heritage?

BMI: By practicing the Vranje musical heritage, I gained valuable knowledge about the way of life and living conditions of the people of Vranje at the end of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century. I got to know many authentic personalities who lived in Vranje at that time, and whose life stories inspired songs. I learned about significant events that took

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place in my city and our region. In a word, I learned a lot about the sensibility and mentality of the inhabitants of the Vranje area.

VK: In your opinion, why is music, and especially city songs, important for Vranje?

ITM: Broadly speaking, Vranje music is part of the living cultural wealth of Serbia. Observed narrowly, specific musical expressions developed in Vranje, and especially the Vranje city song, preserve the tradition and culture of Vranje, the language, and customs of the people from Vranje and the Vranje region. This specific musical expression reflects a deep sensibility and temperament of the people who live and have lived in this area, preserves the language and customs in their original form, speaks of authentic personalities and events, depicts the spirit of an environment... For that reason, it is necessary to make a great effort to preserve this living cultural treasure for generations to come.

VK: Is Vranje music connected with other practices of the intangible culture in Serbia? If so, in what ways?

ITM: I would say that the Vranje musical heritage is most closely connected with the intangible heritage of Kosovo and Metohija. This is mostly reflected in the musical expression (rhythm and melody) and the topics it deals with. I assume that the geographical connection and almost identical historical circumstances contributed to that the most.

VK: If you think that Vranje's musical heritage is important for other communities in Serbia, briefly explain why.

ITM: Vranje's musical heritage is undoubtedly important for other communities in Serbia. In order to understand the tradition and culture of a nation, it is necessary to know all its elements, and Vranje music is an indispensable element of the culture of the Serbian people. Although Vranje is known throughout Serbia for its musical heritage, I think that it is not present in other Serbian areas to the extent that it should be. That is why it is necessary to make efforts to promote it and get it closer to the members of other communities in Serbia.

VK: In your opinion, in what ways can the awareness of our fellow citizens be raised about the importance of Vranje's musical heritage?

ITM: The role of the media is crucial, especially radio and television, where adequate shows dedicated to Vranje's musical heritage and audio and video recordings of Vranje's songs would contribute to the popularization of this living cultural treasure. Also, a significant contribution could be provided by organizing festivals and similar events, where the Vranje musical heritage would be presented.

Living the Intangible Culture

Licitar craft

The interview with Aleksandra Jakovljević was conducted by Gordana Đurađević Prvanov in early March 2022 in the National Museum Pančevo



Aleksandra Jakovljević is 63 years old. She was born in Pančevo and she still lives there. She holds a degree in Ethnology and Anthropology and works as a curator at the National Museum Pančevo.

Gordana Đurađević Prvanov (GDjP): **Alexandra, today we met to talk about the licitar craft. You have studied this craft as curator in charge of ethnological collection at the National Museum Pančevo. However, I want to ask you what does this craft means to you personally?**

Aleksandra Jakovljević (AJ): As a curator of the National Museum Pančevo in charge of the ethnological collection of the museum I am also engaged in identification and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, living cultural treasure of Banat region in Vojvodina province. Among living cultural treasures that I studied special place in my heart holds the licider craft, craft that produces honey cookies. Its origins date back to the Middle Ages and even today it represents the so-called "living heritage". Earlier, there were dances during the winter with performances and a lottery every Saturday, where young people used to gather and exchange gifts in the form of licider cookies of various shapes. At the market, parents used to buy licider cookies for their children as toys, which they would later eat. The craft was considered profitable because the earnings were good enough for a husband and wife practicing this craft, to at least provide for their household and put their children through school. Licider craftsmen were bakers who mastered baking honey cookies decorated with colorful patterns, small mirrors, and appropriate pictures. Cookies are shaped like hearts, houses, slippers, purses, horses, scissors, flintlocks, guns. At village fairs, festivals and dances, cookies are given by parents to children, grandparents to their grandchildren, lads to girls... The old and the young alike love them and there are so many occasions to give someone for example Licider heart!

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For me, the licider craft is an example that culture has no boundaries. Germans, who call these cookies *Lebkuchen* or *Lebzelter*, brought the craft in Vojvodina Province. Then, it was spread to other parts of Serbia so that communities, groups, and individuals throughout Serbia today recognize it as part of their cultural heritage.

When I see these honey cookies on the fair stalls, in shapes of houses and hearts and in other forms, fairy tales and stories come to life before my eyes. Perhaps rather than any other, the story about Hansel and Gretel who were written down by the Grimm Brothers. I imagine the witch's hut just like a gingerbread house made by licider craftsmen.

GDjP: What kinds of knowledge and skills does the licider craft convey?

AJ: The craft of licitar has been passed down from generation to generation in Serbia for centuries, even today. That is what makes it a “living” heritage. Communities and groups recreate it depending on the environment, their interactions with nature and history, giving them a sense of identity and continuity, i.e. duration. At the same time, one should keep in mind their connection with other trades, especially beekeeping, cake making, and waxing. Bakers who mastered skills to make quality honey cookies had a special, higher, status. At one point, in the 19th century, the wax craft and the licider craft merged. The craftsmen who mastered this knowledge and skills made candles in the winter, while in the summer, during the fair seasons, they were making licider cookies. The use of candles has decreased with the electrification of the country. Licider cookies on the other hand, have remained dear delicacies that convey various messages in their diversity. Messages of love.

GDjP: Why, in your opinion, is the Licitar craft important for the communities in Banat and Serbia?

AJ: Knowledge about the recipe and skills of making cookies is passed from generation to generation. Since 17th century, when Germans brought the craft in Vojvodina province, it was considered lucrative, especially in conjunction with the beekeeping and wax craft. Although craft recessed in late 20th century, nowadays it is again recognized as prosperous. It is characteristic of the Serbian population in our country, although other ethnic communities in Serbia are also engaged in this craft, but in smaller numbers. Women and men are equally involved in this craft. The folk tradition of making these honey cookies in villages is mainly preserved by women organizations. Lately, younger generations increasingly recognize licider craft to make a living. In Banat itself, today the centers of the Licider craft are Dolovo, Kikinda, and Zrenjanin, and in other parts of Vojvodina, Novi Sad (Bačka) and Ruma (Srem) stand out. The craft is also present in other parts of Serbia.

Licider cookies used to be placed primarily at dances and fairs. Today, liciders offer their cookies at various events - fairs, village, church panagyr, celebrations, gatherings for Christmas and New Year. Along with the quality popularization of the craft, the willingness to explain elements of crafts and symbols of various forms of honey cookies with residents and tourists, liciders' cookies have become very popular both as sweets and as souvenirs. In that way, profit is provided for both craftsmen and the social community. At the same time, the characteristic of these craftsmen is great mobility - they reach their market traveling all over Serbia, and sometimes beyond the country's borders. Throughout the year, licider cookies can be purchased at, for example, the Cultural Center of Belgrade. Museum “Old village” in Sirogojno, and tourist centers such as Mokra Gora, etc.

Šabac Fair

The interview with Aleksandra Jovanović was conducted by Suzana Lazarević, in February 2022 at the National Museum in Šabac.



Aleksandra Jovanović is 50 years old. She was born and lives in Šabac. She graduated in ethnology and anthropology. Aleksandra works at the National Museum of Šabac as a museum advisor.

Suzana Lazarević (SL): As an ethnologist and curator in National Museum Šabac you are professionally engaged in safeguarding of our living heritage and the *Šabac Fair* certainly is representative of our city's living culture. What *Šabac Fair* means to you personally?

Aleksandra Jovanović (A. J.): When you mentioned mine professional engagement, I'd like to say that the *Šabac Fair* was a theme of my paper for achieving curator certificate. Later, while preparing National Museum of Šabac's permanent exhibition, we decided to include *Šabac Fair* as representative of our city's living heritage so anyone who cannot visit the fair have the knowledge and impression of how it is in Šabac in late September.

For me personally, in the first place, *Šabac Fair* is the memory of childhood and some carefree and better times when the fair was eagerly awaited. Being proud to be from Šabac, because *Šabac Fair* is an inseparable part of us, people from Šabac. *Šabac Fair* is not just carousels, tents, music, hot roast... It is An Institution!

Going to the *Šabac Fair* means being ready for crowds, noise, dust, barbecue smoke, people pushing each other, bargaining, having comfortable shoes on your feet and being ready to walk for a long time. Also, you are counting on the fact that you can buy some goods cheaper than in shops, some products of craftsmen who come from other parts of Serbia: liciders, Zlatibor knitwear, some antiques, or wooden items, like mixing spoons or cutting boards that are of better quality than similar products in stores.

S. L.: What is the significance and specificity of the *Šabac Fair*?

A. J.: *Šabac Fair* is one of the oldest local events that has lasted for centuries. The fair in the vicinity of Šabac was first mentioned in the 14th century. In mid-19th century two fairs were being held - one on St. George's Day [May 6th] and others about St. Demetrius [November 8th]. Starting at the beginning of the 20th century, a fair for the day of the Nativity of the Theotokos was introduced [September 21st], which has lasted to the present day.

The *Šabac Fair* on the day of the Nativity of the Theotokos has all the elements that other fairs in Serbia, or in nearby Bosnia have. Many merchants, craftsmen, owners of cafes

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and amusement parks and a large number of people from Šabac, surrounding villages, but also tourists from other cities in Serbia and our people who live and work abroad, gather here for business and entertainment. Maybe I should also point out a large number of tents that present “important” names of popular folk music.

I think that the world-wide funfair of humor and satire – “Čivijada” (“Jokesters of Šabac”) being held right before the fair, and their close interconnectedness is one of the specific characteristics of the *Šabac Fair*. “Čivijada” gave *Šabac Fair* another cultural layer that other fairs in Serbia lack. Certainly, the duration of the fair is one specificity. I mentioned its continuity over the centuries, which is one segment of durability. Its current duration, seven to 10 days, certainly is another specificity in comparison to fairs in other towns and cities that last one, two or three days.

S. L. : Why is the fair important for the city of Šabac and for its community?

A. J.: The fair is a manifestation that the people of Šabac recognize and that everyone is happy to practice and, in that way, contribute to the forwarding of their own cultural heritage to future generations. The decades-long holding of the *Šabac Fair* helps maintain and respect a cultural tradition and gives us, the people of Šabac, the task of continuing the cultural continuity by preserving the already existing cultural values. Each new generation has the task to satisfy and understand the need to preserve cultural diversity, which is the basis for the involvement of every local community in modern world trends. It should be borne in mind that each new generation, consciously or not, introduces some novelties to the *Šabac Fair*.

Many people from Šabac go to the fair out of the habit, for the sake of sightseeing, to buy something, children and young people go to have some fun. Since a large number of people from Šabac celebrate the day of the Nativity of the Theotokos, relatives, and friends from villages and other cities come to visit them. Then, they also use the opportunity to visit the *Šabac Fair*. During the days of the fair, Šabac is visited by a large number of people from all over Serbia (merchants and tourists) in the first place because of the fair, but also for the events around the city that precede it – “Čivijada”, “Čivija Carnival”... During those days, the city has a festive atmosphere and the “Čivija spirit”. Šabac is more present in the media during those days than usually. Through the media presentation of the city and the events that are held in those days, the cultural and historical values of Šabac are promoted.

S. L. : Is the Šabac Fair connected with other practices of intangible culture in Serbia? If so, in what ways?

A. J.: At the Šabac Fair, craftsmen like licider-makers, potters, copers, candy-makers, etc. place their products, and some of them make them at the fair while selling their goods. In the conversation with them, they point out that the biggest sales of their products are at the fairs, and that they have the best earnings at the *Šabac Fair*. At the same time, sellers from other parts of Serbia come here, so the *Šabac Fair* also nurtures living practices of connecting, communicating, contracting jobs, exchanging experiences and products among craftsmen and merchants.

Cultural and artistic societies gather within the “Čivijada”, especially the “Čivija Circle Dance” also represents the “Kolo - Circle Dance” which is registered on the UNESCO representative list of living cultural treasure of mankind.

Everyone, young or old, eagerly awaits the fair every year, for their own reasons. Last year, in 2021, unfortunately due to Covid, the Fair was not held, but I hope that this year it will shine again in its full glory. I invite the participants in the project “Living Intangible Culture” from other countries to come to the *Šabac Fair*! I invite them to come and to have some fun!

Beekeeping

The interview with Marko Vukotić was conducted by Maja Todorović, on March 5, 2022 via Zoom



Marko Vukotić was born in Užice, where he still lives today. He is 38 years old and is a traffic technician by education. He works as a football coach and owns a private catering company.

Maja Todorović (MT): **Marko, you don't make a living from beekeeping, but you practice beekeeping. How come?**

Marko Vukotić (MV): For me, beekeeping is a family tradition that I want to nurture and preserve. My grandfather, Boriša Vukotić, was one of the most famous beekeepers in the Zlatibor district [western Serbia, prim. MT]. Because of him, the elders from Užice knew me as well - "You are the grandson of Boriša the beekeeper?" My grandfather passed on his love for bees, his knowledge, and skills in beekeeping to us, younger ones. I am the third-generation beekeeper in the Vukotić family. Now I have an apiary stationed in the village of Drežnik, near Užice.

From my grandfather, I learned how to approach bees, how to take care of them, how to make honey, how to produce other bee products such as royal jelly or how to extract honeycombs. I also learned a lot about vegetation, bee grazing, and the role that bees play in pollinating plants and preserving biodiversity. My grandfather also taught me about the healing properties of honey and other bee products.

MT: In your opinion, why is beekeeping important for the Zlatibor region?

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MV: For the Zlatibor region beekeeping is important from the aspect of encouraging the production of typical products of our district. In this way, conditions are created for the beekeeping craft to become a source of basic or additional income for members of the local community. It is important that we have the Association of Beekeepers of Užice, which connects all us beekeepers from this area. The Association is very active and motivates people to engage in beekeeping.

MT: To the best of your knowledge, how is beekeeping related to other expressions of living cultural treasure?

MV: Beekeepers have their own customs about encouraging the swarming of bees. There were customs in which ritual songs were sung and some rituals were performed for the swarming of bees in the spring and summer, but that is rare in our country now. Regarding other forms of living cultural treasure, I think that beekeeping is primarily related to traditional crafts, especially carpentry and waxing. Carpentry because making baskets requires specific carpentry skills. Waxing because candles and everything else that is made of wax is made thanks to beekeepers. In my opinion, the most important thing is that engaging in beekeeping means knowing the healing properties of beekeeping products in the past and today. Apart from the fact that honey and bee products, especially royal jelly, are still used today in making creams and elixirs, it is important to mention apitherapy. These are techniques of using honey and bee products in treatment that have been developed for centuries and represent a special type of traditional medicine.

MT: In your opinion, how important is beekeeping for other communities in Serbia?

MV: You have beekeepers all over Serbia. The richness of our nature, its diversity, enables the production of quality honey and other quality bee products. The need to move bee colonies to pasture, which does not have to be only in, for example, the Zlatibor district, but also in other parts, of Serbia. Beekeepers' fairs gather beekeepers from all over Serbia to exchange knowledge and experiences, but also to offer "hospitality" for the bees to have a variety of pastures.

The richness and diversity of nature and vegetation make honey and bee products from Serbia recognizable for their quality even beyond our country. This is evidenced by the demand for our products abroad. Export opportunities certainly represent an encouragement for the further development of beekeeping in our country.

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