

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

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!