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## The Relation of Music Archiving and Intangible Cultural Heritage in Serbia<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Speaking from an ethnomusicological standpoint, this paper elaborates on the use of recorded sound and audio-visual material for the purpose of documenting particular musical elements in Serbia, according to the concept of UNESCO intangible cultural heritage. There is a difference between contemporary field recordings for archival purposes, according to the ICH concept, and the employment of already recorded historical legacy. Through the example of music elements from Serbian national register of ICH, this paper will raise the questions of ethnomusicological politics of field recording and digitization of archived historical recordings, as well as analyze the politics of heritage management. Based on ethnomusicological and archival experience, the aim of this paper is to offer a model of application of sound archive for the future, which can effectively contribute to the concept of intangible cultural heritage in Serbia.

### KEYWORDS

Ethnomusicology

Sound archive

Intangible cultural heritage

Serbia

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## **Introduction — Ethnomusicology in Serbia**

This paper deals with music archiving and intangible cultural heritage in Serbia from an ethnomusicological perspective. Ethnomusicology in Serbia has had a rich history, rooted in music folklore studies. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the urge for preservation of rural music forms, threatened by extinction, resulted in many collections of music scores, which were later supplemented with sound recordings, all for the sake of preservation, inspiration of composers, and scientific analysis.<sup>2</sup> Today there are various carriers based on that research tradition — wax plates, wire reels, reel tapes, cassettes — many of them are stored at the Institute of Musicology SASA, which is the repository for the most important documentary music recordings in Serbia<sup>3</sup>. The main content related to this approach is rural folk music of presumably ancient origins, so there are recordings of vocal and/or instrumental performances, mostly associated with local rituals. The digital age (from 21<sup>st</sup> century, political changes in the country, and increased following of professional literature in English) coincided with a strong anthropological turn in Serbian ethnomusicology, when the context of performance came into focus of the researchers. At this time, analogue recordings were digitized, and digital-born recordings — on mini-discs and SD cards proliferated. In Serbia, this approach, which treats music as and in culture, is characterized by the presence of numerous interviews as well as an increase in the number of video recordings of music and dance. In recent years, precisely from 2010, and to a larger extent from 2012, onward, UNESCO's concept of intangible cultural heritage has been strongly affecting Serbian ethnomusicology (cf. Dumnić, 2014; Zakić, 2015; Jovanović & Lajić Mihajlović, 2018), so the idea is to present how this development has influenced local music archiving (mostly audio). This paper's ethnomusicological perspective is important because in Serbia there is no specialized music archive, so music archiving in Serbia is closely connected to institutions where ethnomusicologists work — from recording, over to digitizing, archiving, cataloguing, to publishing.

## **Intangible Cultural Heritage in Relation to Serbian Music**

Public institutions, whose archival work is analyzed, are: the Institute of Musicology of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and the Faculty of Music of the University of Arts (one is a research and the other, an educational institution, both very highly ranked in the country and important in Southeastern Europe). Questionnaires were also administered to referent ethnomusicologists (both affiliated at the Faculty) from non-government organizations which

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<sup>2</sup> More about the history of ethnomusicology in Serbia in: Golemović & Rakočević, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> More in: Dumnić, 2010.

provided huge professional support for the inscriptions of ICH to national lists, such as the Serbian Ethnomusicological Society (SED), and Center for Research and Safeguarding of Traditional Dances of Serbia (CIOTIS). The author had correspondence with an ethnologist from the Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage, who has been one of the most involved professionals in implementation of this UNESCO concept since its beginning in Serbia.<sup>4</sup> All of them are based in Belgrade since music archiving, ethnomusicological scene, and ICH management are, for the most part, concentrated in the capital.<sup>5</sup>

As it is known, according to the 2003 Convention, intangible cultural heritage includes: “the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. ICH, which is sometimes called living cultural heritage, and is manifested inter alia in the following domains: oral traditions and language, performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. Transmitted from generation to generation, and constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, as interaction with nature, and their history, ICH provides people with a sense of identity and continuity. It also promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity” (UNESCO, 2003: Article 2). So far, in Serbia, the strategy for safeguarding these practices in Serbia is based on this:

“UNESCO strategically focuses on the strengthening of capacities of various stakeholders for safeguarding ICH at the national level and effective use of opportunities and mechanisms of international cooperation, as defined in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH, in order to promote mutual understanding of circumstances and challenges associated with policies for the safeguarding of ICH in the region, such as: national inventory policies, the process of revitalization of ICH, management of sustainable cultural tourism, the role and involvement of local communities, the transnational dimension of ICH, training and capacity building” (NKNS, 2015a).

In Serbia, ICH was ratified as a platform in 2010 (more about ICH in Serbia in: Lukić Krstanović, Radojičić, 2015). The elements related to music are: singing accompanied by *gusle*

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<sup>4</sup> For helpful answers about particular issues related to my topic I am grateful to: Dr. Danka Lajić Mihajlović (Institute for Musicology SASA and National Committee for ICH, associate at inscription of *singing to the accompaniment of gusle* to UNESCO list of representative ICH), Dr. Selena Rakočević (Faculty of Music and CIOTIS, associate at inscription of *kolo, traditional folk dance* to UNESCO list of representative ICH), Saša Srećković (Ethnographic Museum and Center for ICH, coordinator for international cooperation and education), Dr. Mirjana Zakić (Faculty of Music and SED, initiator of numerous inscriptions to national list of ICH).

<sup>5</sup> There are other institutions which also have the material about music which later on was declared as ICH (e.g. Serbian Broadcasting Corporation, Museum of Vojvodina) and some private collections, but they are not dominantly dealing with ethnomusicology and/or ICH.

(Serbian: *певање уз гусле*), *grocktica* singing (Serbian: *грокталица*), clamor singing (Serbian: *певање из вика*), *kolo* dance (Serbian: *коло*), *rumenka kolo* dance (Serbian: *руменка*), bagpipe playing (Serbian: *свирање на гајдама*), pipe-playing practice (Serbian: *фрулашка пракса*), *kaval* playing (Serbian: *свирање на кавалу*), *ojkača* singing (Serbian: *ојкача*), urban songs from Vranje (Serbian: *врањска градска песма*), *lazarica* processions from Sirinićka župa (Serbian: *лазарице у Сиринићкој жупи*), singing along a bee swarm (Serbian: *певање уз ројење пчела*) (NKNS, 2015b). Inscribed into the UNESCO representative list are *kolo* and singing accompanied by *gusle* (UNESCO, 2017; UNESCO, 2018). Up to now, 'living practices' are imperative in the ICH policy in Serbia. The only thing about audio-visual documenting, which is officially important, is the video which supports UNESCO nomination, but because it is an object of particular production standards (in terms of video and sound quality, duration, direction etc.) and not viewed as designated for archival preservation, it is not problematized here.

Serbian administrative system related to the ICH (managed by the National Committee, the National Board, and the Center for ICH) is not oriented toward conservation and does not have particular requirements for music archiving — there is no strategy of audio and video field recording, gathering and use of historical records, archiving and publishing related to the ICH (of course, there are principles of audio and video recording and archiving of music practices adhered to by particular individuals and institutions — some of them are already proclaimed as ICH). Also, there are no technical standards when it comes to the quality of the medium of audio or video recording, its condition, duration, recording approach, and resolution. The reason for this condition may be the aforementioned imperative of 'living practices' for current ICH management in Serbia.

### **Influence the ICH Concept on Music Archiving**

The aspects of ethnomusicological documentation of music related to the concept of intangible cultural heritage that we consider here are: field recording, archiving in the narrow sense — saving and cataloguing, digitization and availability. First of all, it must be said that the concept of ICH becomes very important in Serbian ethnomusicology, probably because it opened the opportunity for global promotion of national musical heritage — it influenced (but not radically changed) the terminology, research objectives and methodology, but also caused the rethinking of earlier research and audio collections. Several ethnomusicologists have conducted extremely important long-term research about particular elements, and there is new research about concrete ICH themes (e.g. Lajić Mihajlović, 2014; Ranković, 2013;

Ranković, Zakić, 2014; Zakić, 2010; Zakić, 2014). The opinion of the author is that in Serbia, this also provoked the return toward a folkloristic approach, in the sense that it puts an emphasis on musical structures and intensive repeated fieldwork with local community, and slightly shifts the focus from topics which were concerned with small-scale fieldwork, archival work, ethnomusicological problems typical for discourses of anthropology and cultural studies. In a way, it is perceived as a matter of personal and professional contribution to the national heritage on the national and international level. Of course, this approach has significant, even tangible results. Despite dealing with material traces, ICH may be based on the idea that there are cultural artifacts which are more valuable than others and that, as pure and unique examples, can be lost. There are significant contributions, which may upgrade professional approaches that support contemporary performances and the transmissions of knowledge among living communities, even when the ICH concept is also criticized — mostly because of its potential for commercial exploitation and isolationist adoption of particular forms.<sup>6</sup> In the general public, there are attempts of nationalistic instrumentalization of the Serbian ICH, but this does not reflect on archival practices. There are no results of combining ICH concept with music tourism in Serbia, but archiving itself is distanced from commodification, so there is no need here for this important debate in ICH field. What may be a real consequence of inefficacy in audio-visual archiving is the risk of reinventing the ICH element, so material evidence about particular heritage need to be available to experts and public.

Field recording is currently the most important audio and video documenting aspect of ethnomusicological work related to the ICH. In technical aspects, it means recording with a digital recorder (usually Zoom) in WAV format and with various cameras in JPG, MTS, MP4 formats of photo and video (the author does not have data about resolutions from all the recordings and there is no single standard used in Serbia, but it may be advised to harmonize approaches with standards in IASA TC-04, 2009 and IASA TC-06, 2018). Field recordings are conducted in various settings — from 'authentic' to stage performances, and interviews are recorded as well. This means that there are not only recordings of particular ICH elements, but also data about its context. The topics that are examined in the field are often chosen according to the ICH concept. Also, when it comes to documenting particular ICH elements, there are methodological approaches which imply: repeated fieldwork in the same areas (because of validation of representation or following the risk of endangerment), questions related to the ICH development, even gathering of written statements from local communities

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<sup>6</sup> From very rich theoretical literature about ICH see: Smith, Akagawa, 2009; Lowthorp, 2013.

and interlocutors about safeguarding, but also recordings of safeguarding processes. The approaches to the elements of the ICH in need for urgent safeguarding and representative ICH are generally the same when it comes to ethnomusicological field recordings, but urgent safeguarding pays more attention in terms of frequency of professional monitoring of safeguarding (Mirjana Zakić, Personal e-mail communication, 15 September 2019). Also, ethnomusicological field recordings with archival purposes generally use the same approach to the elements on national and on UNESCO list.

There are no so much novelties related to ethnomusicological methodology of fieldwork,— there are recordings of particular music pieces, entire performances and events, interviews on the topic of the research problem at hand, which may be concerned with, e.g. variants of songs, gender roles, migrations etc. (it is not conducted only with the oldest musicians and about the oldest music as the most valuable). Of course, approaches to fieldwork are different in terms of vocal and instrumental practices, but there are no special approaches to particular ICH elements. What has changed is that special attention is paid if some element is endangered — so there is a need for very detailed and reconstructive examination; or representative — there is an imperative to promote it, to educate the local community and wider audience about it with concerts, and to inspire the process of guided tradition by ethnomusicological workshops. What is called here “guided tradition process” is one of the most important aspects of ethnomusicological fieldwork, and it relies on the principles of applied ethnomusicology.<sup>7</sup>

All major projects dealing with registered ICH research in the field are state-funded through particular projects, but it is often heard that the amounts are usually not enough; and numerous projects do not even get funding— some because of low quality, some because of limited amount available from the Ministry, some because they do not have obligatory administrative support (of Museum). On the other side, some projects, which are dealing with ‘precious’ forms of traditional and national practices/arts are funded, although they are not (yet) inscribed as ICH. Also, projects, which are supported are projects about live presentation and education — festivals and workshops. But when it comes to archiving and dissemination of audio and video material about the ICH, usually there is no financial support (except if it is part of the above-mentioned events).

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<sup>7</sup> More about the complete system of sustainability of music as ICH from the perspective of applied ethnomusicology in: Schippers, 2015).

Archiving in a narrow sense (i.e. saving and cataloguing) is currently of secondary importance for the ICH in Serbia, but of course, there are efforts of particular institutions to save recorded materials about folk music in Serbia (and of Serbs outside the borders). Results for audio recorded music are so far available for the Institute of Musicology SASA (but other mentioned institutions have archives as well), and its mission is in accordance with IASA ethical standards and strategies (IASA TC-03, 2005), such as: its sound archive has tasks such as acquisition, documentation, access and preservation; it has sound and accompanying written information; it preserves carriers and contents; it advocates digitization without modifications; it is open for international cooperation. The Institute was officially directly involved in the inscriptions of *gusle*, *gajde*, *frula* on the national ICH list and of *gusle* on the UNESCO ICH list, so there are numerous historical recordings of these folk instruments (and sometimes accompanying singing, especially in the case of *gusle*). It also contains the recordings of other inscribed elements, such as urban song of Vranje, *kolo*, *groktalica*, *kaval*, but also recordings, which are in progress of inscription into the national list — the Serbian church chants. These recordings have been digitized by 2014, from wax plates, wire reels, and open reel tapes, in 44.1 kHz and 16 Bit resolution, in WAV format. Some of them — especially Vranje urban songs — are descriptively catalogued: there is data about each field recording (date, place, researcher, performer, title, note about genre) and digital copy (who digitized and catalogued the recording, technical notes, place of copy); unfortunately, there is still no coded metadata schema. Original carriers are saved in optimal conditions, and an additional two copies of the digital material are provided on external hard-discs. The Institute, with its sound archive, has important role in local applied ethnomusicology.<sup>8</sup> When speaking about the Institute's recordings of the ICH, interviewed researchers pay special attention to saving of the material, so ethnomusicologists usually have at least two copies of the (most important) material on external hard-discs (or other memory devices). When it comes to cataloguing, there is no unified data about the recordings, especially when it comes to digital-born files — the main purpose of written data (often in digital form) about field recordings is to be useful for research, so there are regularly notes about the date, place, title, instrument or genre, and performer(s). What is common for current archives is that there are no special approaches or notes related to the ICH.

The digitization of various forms of cultural heritage is the only aspect for which guidelines are provided by the Ministry of Culture and Media, but even those are still not mandatory. The

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<sup>8</sup> More about the role of archives in applied ethnomusicology in: Lundberg, 2015.

recommended standard is: gramophone records (shellac, vinyl, lacquer discs, recorded on 78, 45, 33.3 rpm, regardless of content), reel tapes (from 1/4 to 2 inch, in speeds from 9.5 to 78 cm/s and others) and audio compact cassettes, should be 24 bit depth and 96 kHz sample rate in stereo WAV and/or FLAC format; and the guidelines for the copy are: 16 bit and 44 kHz, stereo, 128 kbps, WMA/MP3/AAC or OGG. The purpose of these guidelines is to set some standards and to enable the Ministry to choose which digitization projects it will support. Because this document is from September 2017 and in the form of instructions, it was not relevant for previously digitized items and there are no detailed mandatory standards and descriptions in Serbian based on the concept of IASA technical publications as referent literature (precisely IASA TC-05, 2014). All recordings submitted to the Center for the ICH as a part of documentation of a particular element on the national list, are digital.

Special attention should be devoted to the 'availability' of archived heritage — of historical recordings and of recently recorded audio and/or video musical material. It is important, to whom it is available — to researchers, management, local communities, performers, educators; but also how (i.e. in which form and under which conditions). First of all, it is easily accessible if it is digital and searchable — the first is not case with all historical recordings, while the second varies — usually, whole performances can be distributed and observed, and in the most cases there is some data about integral content. However, there are recordings, which are not catalogued (and none of the recordings have ICH-related catalogue comments, although their relevance increases) and that makes usage difficult. Dissemination of recordings is still conditioned by the policy of every particular holder. When it comes to the purposes of use, research is the main one. There is an increasing number of scholarly papers, which are dealing with the ICH audio and/or video recordings (e.g. Lajić Mihajlović 2016; Rakočević 2016). ICH management is not specially interested in this type of documentation, but it appreciates its existence. Performers who are interested in re-performing, and local communities involved in a particular ICH element, are welcomed by ethnomusicologists to access the material they recorded.

Ethnomusicologists, among them ones interested in the ICH, are using archived folk music materials for research, presentation, and education about musical practices viewed as ICH. All the consulted experts (as well as the author) claim that historical recordings from the archives can contribute to the revitalization (i.e. strengthening) and sustainability of ICH elements. What must be specially mentioned is the use of historical recordings, with the first claim being that they need to be published in order to be available to all interested individuals



— not only researchers, performers, and educators, but local communities as well, because they gladly use the publications and not documentary archives for rising awareness about the ICH.

The publication process from the ethnomusicological point of view implies the selection of recordings, critical-analytical introduction and comments, data, and illustrations about the performances (and of course, satisfactory sound quality). Research questions of the publication may be phenomena related to ICH concept, so there is an emphasis on the importance of safeguarding, explained by the efforts not only to capture particular moments of the ICH's existence, but to inspire performances in the future and expand hitherto available knowledge. What is suggested is that 'living tradition' can not be restricted by using historical recordings — it can be enhanced, meaning that performers and local communities may be educated to revitalize and sustain particular music and/or dance practices, which were previously researched and audio and/or video documented by ethnomusicologists, who can also provide information about whole adequate context, as well as guide the process of historically informed oral tradition; and for that purpose published archival recordings are the most convenient solution.

It is also worth mentioning that there is no education as such about conducting music ICH research, its implementation, and audio-video archiving. On the other hand, students are gaining knowledge about fieldwork and audio-video recording through experiences consisted of assisting their professors, but also about phenomena that are nowadays related to the ICH concept. Of course, professors use archived recordings in education very often, but the archives of faculties are not available for students and researchers non-affiliated with those institutions (neither to local communities and performers interested in the recorded ICH).

### **Concluding Remarks**

This paper aimed to elaborate that audio-visual archives are places for diverse ICH research and preservation, with great potential for safeguarding, which needs to be adjusted to particular music and dance elements — in other words, that the ICH concept and music archiving should be interwoven. What should be of great professional importance is in domain of applied ethnomusicology — how to make the best from the field recording process, in terms of preservation of the ICH and of agency of living practitioners, how to contribute to sustainability of music practices, and finally the goal of giving back to the community whose heritage is audio/video recorded in the field recordings, with some basic instructions to cherish it properly. Also, it may be concluded that management structures of the ICH should

pay much more attention to making and using audio and video archives, i.e. that the industry around the ICH in Serbia must become more historically inclusive (not only ethnographic in methodology and museological in results). In technical terms, the above-mentioned standards of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives should be followed. What is relevant for ethnomusicology dealing with musical heritage and preservation of recorded sound, is to develop policies and methods which combine these approaches. This strategy should support field recordings, as well as publication of recordings, in order to make the ICH sustainable and to help local communities save their respect and knowledge about their own heritage. This would ideally be a combination of fieldwork and usage of historical recordings for information. Special attention should be devoted to archiving the digital-born recordings about the ICH and one way to promote it, may be to give recordings to the performers. Awareness about the importance of (research) archives and historical recordings must be increased, and on the other hand, archives need to preserve the continuity of the ICH not only in the ethnomusicological academic community, but also outside of it.

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