

**INSTRUMENT AS A SYMBOL OF NATIONAL IDENTITY:  
FUJARA AMONG SLOVAKS IN SERBIA**

**Introduction**

In the focus of this research there is a traditional wind wooden instrument the *fujara*,<sup>1</sup> which represents one of the elements of Slovak national identity. In 2005 it was entered as a Slovak national instrument into the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This work was created based on my own field research among the members of Slovak national minority in Serbia during 2018<sup>2</sup>. It deals with the presence and role of the *fujara* in the life of Slovak national minority in Serbia. I tried to unriddle when and how it appeared in this part of Slovak diaspora, if there were any local characteristics of playing this instrument and what they were, if there were any local instrument makers, whether it appeared within concert activities, etc.

Slovaks in Serbia are part of Slovak European diaspora. There were several waves of migration, starting from the mid-18th century, in which Slovaks populated the territory of today's northern part of Serbia, Vojvodina, which was then situated within southern Hungary (Crnjanski, 2007: 620). They brought their own culture and customs to the Vojvodina plain and successfully adjusted to the new life conditions (Bosić, 1970: 32). The 2011 census of population shows that there are 52.750 members of the Slovak national minority in Serbia (Census, 2012). The 2011 census of population shows that there are 52.750 members of the Slovak national minority in Serbia. Cultural life of Slovaks in Serbia is very rich and versatile, especially within the spheres of musical and artistic folklore creative work.<sup>3</sup> Certain elements of culture in time became symbols of ethnic identity, like the *fujara*, which represents a visual and audible characteristic of the Slovak ethnos (Bromley, 1983: 127-128; Barth, 1969).

***Fujara*: basic characteristics of the instrument**

The *fujara* was formed among a community of shepherds in central Slovakia in the Podpoľanie area. Traditionally, it is commonly made from elder tree, but some other kinds of wood can also be used (ash tree, maple, walnut, cherry, and sometimes acacia) (Kovač, 2016: 27). This instrument consists of two basic parts: the main body of the flute and a smaller air pipe (fig. 1).

<sup>1</sup> This paper is the result of Project no. 177027: *Multiethnicity, Multiculturalism, migrations – contemporary process*, by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

<sup>2</sup> I owe special thanks to my colleague Marjan Pavlov, an ethnologist and associate at the Vojvodina Slovak Cultural Institute in Novi Sad, for his help with the research and the collecting of the necessary information, who is also a great lover of the *fujara* and a player of this instrument. Many thanks to all the interlocutors, especially to the *fujara* players Mihal Struhar, a retired music teacher from Bački Petrovac, and Branislav Kovač, a physics teacher and instrument maker from Bačka Palanka.

<sup>3</sup> See also on the immigration of Slovaks and some of the characteristics of their cultural and religious life in: Blagojević, 2015: 40-46.

The main pipe is longwise punctured and open at the lower end. In the lower third of the instrument there are three crosscut tactual holes used for playing. On the upper part there is a mouthpiece with a circular hole on the side. The tube of the smaller part is two or three times thinner than the main pipe with cork plugs on both sides (Kovač, 2016: 25). The basic tone of the instrument depends on the length of the main pipe. The usual tuning of the *fujara* is G-major, where the length of the instrument is about 1.72 m, then there is the A-major *fujara* about 1.53 m long and the least common is the F-major *fujara* which is over 1.92 m long (Kovač, 2016: 28). The *fujara* is ornamented in different ways. Mostly it is decorated with folklore motives which are also usually embroidered on folk costumes, i.e. stylised flowers or symmetrical geometric figures.

Because of its dimensions, the *fujara* is held in a specific way and played only in a standing position. The *fujara* has specific musical acoustic features (Kovač, 2016: 31). During the research, all interlocutors pointed out that the most important thing while playing is the breathing technique and the control of the strength of blowing since the height of tone depends on the intensity of blowing.

The *fujara* is traditionally a solo instrument. In the past, shepherds used to express their moods and emotions by playing this instrument (Kovač, 2016: 25). One of the characteristics of the *fujara* is that it is almost exclusively a „male“ instrument, even today women rarely play it. Songs played on it can be just instrumental, but there are also those with rhymes where the song consists of alternating singing and playing. Shepherds sometimes used the *fujara* to communicate from one remote pasture to the other and as a signal for danger.

### ***Fujara* with Serbian Slovaks**

As we know so far, Slovaks did not bring the *fujara* with them when they populated the Vojvodina plain more than two hundred years ago. This research showed that the *fujara* expanded among the Slovaks in Serbia during the second half of the 20th century, for the most part under the influence of folklore festivals, primarily in Slovakia, but also due to the activities of Slovak cultural artistic societies in Serbia.

There is lively communication between Slovaks from Serbia and Slovakia. From the second half of the 20th century until today, additionally to individual contacts, mutual connections have also been intensified on an institutionalised level. Among other things, this is achieved through participating in folklore festivals and the activities of cultural artistic societies. That is to say, during the second half of the 20th century representatives of Slovak national minority from Serbia went individually or within cultural artistic societies to various folklore festivals in the land of their ancestors.<sup>4</sup> For the members of Slovak folklore ensembles from Serbia (which was a part of former Yugoslavia at the time) taking part in this and similar festivals in Slovakia was an opportunity to hear the *fujara* and make contact with the performers. Most ensembles and a great number of individual Slovaks from Serbia brought back a *fujara* as a souvenir with them in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, ensembles from Slovakia came to Serbia and brought *fujaras* as presents. According to the data from the Vojvodina Slovak Cultural Institute, during the second half of the 20th century

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<sup>4</sup> The Folklore Festival in Detva in the region of Podpol'anie in Slovakia stands out for its importance. This international festival of traditional folk culture has been held since 1966. See more about the Folklore Festival in Detva: <http://www.etnofolk.eu/en/event/folklorne-slavnosti-pod-polanou-v-detve-%E2%80%93-folklore-festival-detva>.

in Serbia in 34 villages where Slovaks lived cultural life developed within Slovak cultural artistic societies. In the last fifteen years or so the number of these societies reduced to about 20, primarily due to the migration of population from villages to towns. In most cases the instrument would end up on a wall of a cultural artistic society or a private living room as a decoration, and in the function of an ethnic identity symbol at the same time. However, some people played the *fujara*, mostly at family gatherings. Thus, as Marjan Pavlov, the interlocutor in the research said: „In early 1980s my uncle went skiing to Slovakia and brought a *fujara* to Kisač. I remember him playing in the garden under the linden tree at family gatherings. All of us in the family were into folklore, so we liked it very much.“

In early 2000s a couple of individuals tried to play and teach others. Mihal Struhar, a music teacher from Bački Petrovac, singles out because of his contribution. He organised a students' orchestra in high school where he worked in which all interested students who played an instrument (violin, guitar, accordion, percussions, etc.) could take part. Since the teacher loved traditional Slovak music, he included the *fujara* into the orchestra. With this he introduced something new since they try to keep the *fujara* a solo instrument in Slovakia. After he had retired, Struhar continued to lead the school orchestra with even greater enthusiasm, teaching children how to play the *fujara* at the same time. To this purpose he obtained a metre long children's *fujaras*. In addition to his pedagogic activities, Struhar plays the *fujara* as a soloist at concerts and festivals, for example, within the Slovak Folk Festivals programme in Bački Petrovac, which is traditionally organised every year at the beginning of August.

With Serbian Slovaks the *fujara* also found its use in the theatre music. A Slovak theatre in Bački Petrovac got a *fujara* as a gift. The instrument hung on the wall as a decoration for years, until in 2011 it was used in a play *Tip top biotop*, which was written by Karol Horak and directed by Ljuboslav Majer (<http://www.vhv.rs/tip-top-biotop/>).

Slovak cultural artistic society Pavel Jozef Šafarik (shortened: Šafarik) operating in Novi Sad contributed a lot to the expansion of the *fujara* among Serbian Slovaks (<http://www.safarik.org.rs/>). Milan Hviždiak, a choreographer, brought the *fujara* to this society in early 1970s.

Since 2013 this society has organised seminars on the *fujara* five years in a row with lecturers from Slovakia and with the financial help of the Slovak Diaspora Chancellery. The response was quite well each time. The participants are usually Serbian Slovaks, members of different cultural artistic societies. The lecturers brought *fujaras* to seminars, which in most cases they made by themselves. Prices went from 400 to 800 euros. However, most participants already had their own instrument, a souvenir they did not know how to play, hence the motivation to come to the seminar. It is interesting that these seminars attract a certain number of physicists who are interested not only in music but also in the making of the sound on this instrument from a scientific point of view. As for the sex structure, almost all of them were men, only at the 2017 seminar there was one woman (fig. 2).

The seminar lasts several days. At the end, a concert is organised where the trainees dressed in traditional Slovak folk costumes show what they have learnt (fig. 3).

As we have already mentioned, the first *fujaras* came from Slovakia. In time, some people in Serbia also started to make this instrument. They were not necessarily professional instrument makers, but primarily the *fujara* lovers. This research has shown that there are also some physicists who make the *fujara*. They are interested in playing the instrument but also in the way the sound is made on it. Janko Mravik, a physicist from Bačka Palanka, wanted to attend the seminar at the Šafarik society so he made a *fujara* from plastic pipes, which has the identical sound as the wooden one (fig. 4).

A carpenter who could play the *fujara* found the construction scheme on the Internet and made one out of curiosity. He brought it to Marjan Pavlov at the Slovak Institute to check if it was working and it played flawlessly.

Branislav Kovač, born in Bačka Palanka, managed to consolidate more than one of his interests in the *fujara*. Being a long-standing member of the Šafarik cultural artistic society, he is also a musician, a physicist and an instrument maker. He dedicated his graduate thesis to the *fujara* from the aspect of physics.<sup>5</sup>

During the research I found out that festivals had a significant role in both the expanding and bringing of the *fujara* from the homeland to the Slovak diaspora, and in the development of the use of this instrument. During the 1960s and 1970s the media also had a great influence, especially the television. Today, the greatest influence is made by the Internet where one can find numerous audio and video recordings with lessons how to make and play the instrument.

A story I recorded from the ethnologist Marjan Pavlov speaks in favour of the claim that festivals influenced the development of *fujara* playing. In the 1970s, at the festival in Detva, a director came with an idea to make something spectacular and show the *fujara* in a new light. Although the *fujara* is a solo instrument, the director brought to the stage all 20 *fujara* players who participated in the festival. They needed to make „something“ that would attract the attention of television viewers. First, they tried to play together at the same time but it did not sound very well. Then, at the director's suggestion, each one of them made their own introduction to the song. Since the festival, each song played on the *fujara* starts with this blowing, which is called *rozfug* in the Slovak language. Therefore, stage performances, festivals and the media were the factors that made more than one *fujaras* sound polyphonic at the same time.

In the last few decades this instrument has become very popular with the Slovaks in Serbia. The *fujara* can be heard on the repertoire of some ensembles and cultural artistic societies. It is sometimes heard at festivals although it is not considered a traditional instrument of the Slovaks from Serbia. During the research I came across the information that Slovaks in Serbia cherish musical and dance folklore from different parts of Slovakia. This does not always meet the approval of the Slovaks from homeland who try to „separate“ the folklore heritage of different regions and often criticize Slovak diaspora from Serbia who tend to „mix“ all these. The answer of Serbian Slovaks is that they cherish cultural heritage of their ancestors who immigrated from different parts of Slovakia. However, since the *fujara* playing in Serbia did not start until the second half of the 20th century, it was not considered traditional enough to be included in festival programmes. Even though, since 2013 the *fujara* can be heard in the introduction of the new hymn of the biggest Slovak festival Tancuj, mancuje (audio ex. 1). Some experts expressed their disapproval but since the audience liked the new melody, the new hymn remained. The *fujara* is considered a symbol of Slovak ethnic identity by the audience.

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<sup>5</sup> Branislav Kovač was born in 1982 in Bačka Palanka. He finished primary and secondary school in his hometown and then the Faculty of Sciences in Novi Sad, physics major. While in Novi Sad he becomes an active member of the Slovak cultural artistic society *Pavel Jozef Šafarik* where he starts to learn how to play the *fujara*. Besides playing the *fujara*, he actively deals with wood processing, repairing and making musical instruments.

### ***Fujara* and polyphonic music**

From the second half of the 20th century until today there has been an increase in musical genres which include the *fujara*. Apart from traditional songs, some other melodies can also be played on this instrument (video ex. 1). Thus the course participants at the Šafarik society had the opportunity to learn how to play *Ode to Joy*, *Ave Maria*, *Amazing Grace*, etc. One of the things that makes it difficult to include the traditional *fujara* made from elder tree in a band is that the intonation changes because the saliva moistens the instrument while playing. This is the reason why they use *fujaras* made of compilable parts when played with other instruments. In this way the pipe can be extended or shortened in order to get the wanted intonation/tune. Mihal Struhar puts a plastic pipe on the lower end of the traditional *fujara* pipe which helps him tune. We have already mentioned that this teacher included the *fujara* in the youth orchestra.

The *fujara* can be heard in polyphonic compositions within different music genres. It is especially present within World Music and out of Slovakia borders. The Slovak band *Fujara Electrix* combines one or two *fujaras* in fusion with the keyboards and electronic music (video ex. 2). In ethno world fusion music the *fujara* served as an inspiration in creating variants of this instrument, e.g. within the *Nadishana trio* they have an instrument called the *futujara* (video ex. 3).<sup>6</sup> It is interesting that in the 1970s there was a Danish jazz rock fusion band called *Fujara* who, however, did not include this instrument in their play.<sup>7</sup> There are some polyphonic compositions for the *fujara* in combination with the flute, the double bass and other instruments (video ex. 4).

### **Conclusion**

Originating from Slovakia, the *fujara* found a fertile ground among members of Slovak national minority in the Vojvodina plain. Its expansion and acceptance by the Serbian Slovaks were influenced by their love for the land of their ancestors and their interest in cultural heritage. Apart from the individual initiatives in the process of accepting the *fujara*, an important role on the institutional level was played by cultural artistic societies, festivals and the financial help from Slovakia. The Internet and other kinds of the media have an important role in the affirmation of the *fujara*.

Although the *fujara* is primarily used in traditional music, as a live instrument, due to its qualities, the colour of the sound and its looks, it has been a source of inspiration for artists. From the end of the 20th century until today it has found a place in polyphonic music, in ensembles of different genre affiliation (artistic, World Music, electronic, etc). Scene performances contributed largely to this. It will be interesting to follow its further development and its role in the life of Slovaks in Serbia and also within polyphonic music.

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<sup>6</sup> *Nadishana Trio*, music band made by three musicians: Nadishana - futujara, Armin Metz - 6-string bass, Steve Shehan – percussion. Nadishana is a multi-instrumentalist, composer and sound designer from Siberia, who creates his own approach to world fusion music. Since 2005 he lives in Berlin where he works at several projects. <http://nadishana.com/index.php/en/bio>

<sup>7</sup> *Fujara* is band from Køge (Denmark) founded in 1970 playing mostly rock affected by hippie sub-culture with social and political lyrics. All lyrics are in Danish. Ole Knudsen (vocals, guitar), Poul Chr. Nielsen (saxophone, trumpet, flute), Jørn Nørredal (trumpet, harmonica, trombone), John Olsen (drums), Jesper Christiansen (bass, vocals), Jan Andersen (guitar, vocals). In 1973 they published the album called *Fujara*. <https://johnkatsmc5.blogspot.com/2017/03/fujara-fujara-1973-danish-prog-jazz-rock.html>

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SKC Pavel Jozef Šafarik. <http://www.safarik.org.rs/>

Tip Top Biotop. <http://www.vhv.rs/tip-top-biotop/>

### Audio example

1. Hymn of the biggest Slovak festival in Serbia *Tancuj, mancuji*.

### Video examples

1. Marco Trochelmann. Contemporary *Fujara* music. *Fujara Ensemble Works*, No. 1 *Nelejte, nelejte*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Udk2Q8JBhk>
2. The Slovak band *Fujara Electrix*, Fontana Fest. Bardejov, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1--T5EuSosc>
3. *Nadishana trio*. *Overtone Story*. Nadishana - futujara, Armin Metz - 6-string bass, Steve Shehan – percussion. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN-EMexF7Ok>
4. *Fujara* and double-bass improvisation, *Sequence 2*. Zeger Vandenbussche – double-bass, Winne Clement – fujar. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYKmIN4YfRM>

**სურათი 1.** ფუიარას შემსრულებლები ნოვო სადის (სერბეთი) სლოვაკური კულტურულ-შემოქმედებითი საზოგადოებიდან *Pavel Jozef Šafarik*. 2013 წლის ნოემბერი. წყარო: ვოევოდინას სლოვაკური კულტურის ინსტიტუტის ფოტოარქივი.

**Figure 1.** *Fujara* players in Slovak cultural artistic society *Pavel Jozef Šafarik* in Novi Sad (Serbia) in November 2013. Source: Vojvodina Slovak Cultural Institute photo archive.



**სურათი 2.** ფუიარას ქალი შემსრულებლები სლოვაკური კულტურულ-შემოქმედებითი საზოგადოების *Pavel Jozef Šafariki* მიერ ორგანიზებულ სემინარზე. 2017 წ. წყარო: ვოევოდინას სლოვაკური კულტურის ინსტიტუტის ფოტოარქივი.

**Figure 2.** Woman plays *fujara* in seminar organized by Slovak cultural artistic society *Pavel Jozef Šafarik* in 2017. Source: Vojvodina Slovak Cultural Institute photo archive.





**სურათი 3.** ფუიარას სემინარის მონაწილეების კონცერტი. სლოვაკური კულტურულ-შემოქმედებითი საზოგადოება *Pavel Jozef Šafarik*, ნოვი სადი, 2013. წყარო: ვოევოდინას სლოვაკური კულტურის ინსტიტუტის ფოტოარქივი.

**Figure 3.** Concert by the *fujara* seminar trainees, Slovak cultural artistic society *Pavel Jozef Šafarik*, Novi Sad 2013. Source: Vojvodina Slovak Cultural Institute photo archive.



**სურათი 4.** ჯანკო მრავიკი, ფიზიკოსი ბაჩკა პალანკადან, უკრავს პლასტიკურ ფუიარაზე სლოვაკური კულტურულ-შემოქმედებითი საზოგადოების *Pavel Jozef Šafarik*, სემინარზე ნოვი სადიში. წყარო: ვოევოდინას სლოვაკური კულტურის ინსტიტუტის ფოტოარქივი.

**Figure 4.** Janko Mravik, a physicist from Bačka Palanka, playing plastic fujara at the seminar organized by the Slovak cultural artistic society *Pavel Jozef Šafarik* in Novi Sad. Source: Vojvodina Slovak Cultural Institute photo archive.



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