

## **STEPPING OUT OF THEIR OWN SPACE: A JOURNEY TO CONTEMPORARY ETHNOCULTURAL TRADITIONS**

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Ethnological research in relation to the presentation of folk traditions and their use has seen a very significant expansion in recent decades. During this time, the field of ethnology itself has developed beyond its older ethnographic focus and often even romantic ideas. These are still sometimes popular with the general public, so neo-romanticism is a part of the presentation of folk culture even today, however, ethnology examines its subject from various possible perspectives and without prejudice. It is important to remember that most of the considerations that we often generalize are based on knowledge of the traditional folk culture in the European environment. Although for a number of reasons the various parts of Europe have developed in a unique way, the common features of historical development cannot be overlooked.

At the end of the 18th century, the philosophical ideologies of educated Europe began to perceive rural culture and its traditional manifestations, bound between customary law and Christianity, as a source of emerging national cultures. Most studies and professional works, both domestic and international, agree that this is one of the main reasons why folk culture was discovered, recognized, maintained, revived or “invented” during the 19<sup>th</sup> and subsequently the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The “discovery” of folk culture opened a path that has not been straight-forward, thus the journey is far from over. At its beginning, however, there must have been a stepping outside of one’s own natural space.

Every first step is difficult for a variety of reasons. For example, humanistic writer and traveler Oldřich Prefát of Vlkanov (1523-1565) could in his work *Journey from Prague to Venice and from there by sea to Palestine* (made between 1546-1547) describe his own journey from one place to another (Prefát of Vlkanov 2014:

22-23). However, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, an educated and wealthy burgher could definitely take such a step more freely than people from other social classes.

As historian Pavel Himl writes: “The geographical space in which the individual moved in the early modern period also seems to have been a social space, a space in which property relations, powers, dependencies and subordinations were materialized by coats of arms, boundary stones, boundaries and sometimes a kind of ‘boards’. This, however, did not apply only to lands, municipalities, regions or estates. There were probably less visible forms to us, in which this also applied to the boundaries of homesteads and lands, including the male and female space within one household. In addition to the boundaries visible at first glance to foreigners or later ‘outside’ observers, there were also boundaries perceivable only when they were crossed” (Himl 2007: 59). The author inadvertently gives a very concise description of space, which has always been somehow bounded by individuals, be it physically or mentally. At the time which Himl describes (i.e. namely the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century), it was a generally valid regulation in the lands of the Habsburg monarchy that a traveler was obliged to show a *pasbrýf* or permit (Himl 2007: 61). Efforts to prevent wanderings were not too great at first, but the restrictions gradually became stricter, especially with regard to beggars, thieves and the Roma people. In 1738, for example, Caspar Hadinger was interrogated in the Třeboň region. He came from Kurovice in Moravia and also served for some time in what today is Waidhofen, Austria. In southern Bohemia, he made a living also by playing bagpipes, in his own words: “because due to my physical inadequacy, I can’t make a living in another way and people liked to see me wherever I came” (Himl 2007: 59).

A century after these words were uttered, the social changes that led to the free movement of the population (Josephinian reforms completed by the abolition of patrimonies)<sup>1</sup> were already more widely

1. In 1781, the use of fines and corporal punishment on serfs was abolished along with lords’ control over serfs’ marriage, freedom of movement, and choice of occupation. In 1848, serfdom was abolished altogether.

reflected in the daily life of the villagers and in their life experiences. In 1904, the collector of folk songs and dances Čeněk Holas captured the story of a folk musician from southern Bohemia born in the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to make money, he went to German-speaking areas and described in his memoirs not only how and where he traveled, but also what songs, dances and dialects of local people he had learned in foreign countries (Holas 1939: 6-8).

Leaving one's own space to travel increasingly brought knowledge that contributed to more intense contemplation about other cultures and mentalities. Cultural anthropology uses the term the revitalization movement, which includes various social and religious movements evoked in connection to contact with different cultures, acculturation, and cultural disintegration (Soukup 2013: 77). Based on these theoretical starting points, ethnologist Roman Doušek tried to analyze the genesis and social context of folklorism in the Moravian countryside at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: "It was not only the contact of two cultures that was necessary for the emergence of Nativist movements, but especially the subsequent crisis, which was often – but not always – its result. It is generally known that the ideological frameworks based on the contact of the modern world with the traditional world and the Czechs with the Germans, which gave rise to those crises in society, used folklorism as a specific symbolic system. The question therefore remains whether the Moravian countryside was also affected by the crisis at this time, a crisis which would result from the above contact with the urban environment and in which this relationship could resonate, a crisis that could escalate the antagonism of urban and rural areas and stand behind the rise of ideas and movements that would tend to use the symbolism of traditional folk culture for their own needs in the villages." (Doušek 2016: 204)

The American researcher Wendy Reich had a similar approach in the early 1970s, only a different perspective. She analyzed the role of folklore in revitalization movements, although in her research, she focused only on narrative folklore, or verbal expression. In her article "The Uses of Folklore in Revitalization Movements" (Reich 1971), she worked with the premise that in periods of rapid social

change, folklore helps the members of society to adapt – especially its structure, a formula based on repetition and spreading among members of society (Reich 1971: 234). In these movements, folklore is often used to reinforce new ideas. As a modern example, the author mentions the publication and collection of folk songs about oppression under the Manchurian Dynasty in Communist China (Reich 1971: 241). After all, “new art” in the 1950s in the Czech environment fits into this pattern, having used forms of traditional folk songs to spread socialist ideology.

The countryside, the center of interest of ethnographic scholars, changed only gradually, even though various information about changes in its social and cultural structure can already be found in the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and especially in its latter half). “The development of the definition of the countryside over time must be approached from an ontological and epistemological point of view. From an ontological point of view, this definition must respect the development and state of the rural area itself. The nature of social relations, which until the Industrial Revolution formed a relatively stable and unchanging rural microworld, began to change significantly from then,” writes geographer Vladan Hruška in his study about the conceptualization of rural space. The above-mentioned ethnologist Doušek bases his theory on the findings of historical demography and connects the rural crisis in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with depopulation. Society entered the urbanization phase and people began leaving the countryside: “The population crisis along with the crisis of values and national identity had an effect on the inhabitants. This strong migration flow outlined and emphasized the structural relationship between the village and the city. The country was searching for a solution to this situation, but only those rural communities that maintained a certain number of inhabitants, despite their decrease, found strength. In this context, the demographic map of Moravia offers an interesting insight – in the said period, it depicts the ability to maintain population growth in some regions despite the generally strong migration from the countryside: in addition to the Slovácko region, there is also

the Haná region and to some extent Moravian Wallachia. It is in these three regions where the greatest use of the potential of the symbolism of folklore in Moravia can be found” (Doušek 2016). According to Doušek, this symbolism could be understood in a variety of meanings – a symbol of Czechness, a symbol of tradition, and a symbol of rural pride (ibid.: 210).

Dialectologist Karel Klusák (1886-1976), a native of Velká nad Veličkou in the Hornácko region, exemplifies how this worked. He touches on the transformation of folk clothing in his region after the First World War. Men were no longer wearing the traditional headwear or they were replacing it with urban hats until local students started deliberately buying the older variants to suit the folk costume (Klusák 1950: 158).

However, when interpreting such testimonies, the approach of specific researchers or those interested in folk culture must also be taken into account. They created an image based not only on their knowledge and experience, but also on their feelings and emotions. Many of them did not want to step out of the safe space that their imagination had created. The above-mentioned interest-provoking Hornácko is a striking example. This “vanishing world” was, for example, also motivation for researcher Vladimír Úlehla (1888-1947) for the preparation of the project Velká Study Association at the end of the 1920s. He expressed his views on the protection of folklore several times, namely in his work *Living Song*.<sup>2</sup>

If the First World War was the first major turning point for the transformation of traditional folk culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the Czech and Moravian countryside, the Second World War and subsequent changes associated with industrialization and population movement brought about even more drastic changes

2. “In the years 1905-1912, when circles began to form in the Slovácko region, no one could have imagined that it could become an official activity one day. At the same time, no one doubted the obviousness of the task of saving the old fruits of folk culture and not allowing them to be replaced by worthless bits from foreign sources. At that time, the purely impersonal and emotionally impartial attitude towards our folk treasures had not yet manifested itself among our artists, art and literary critics, and sociologists. This did not happen until the First Republic [...]” (Úlehla 1949: 178)

(Hruška 2014: 582). The rural area lost its determining function in the existence of folk traditions. Scholars were adapting the already mentioned theories of the second existence of folklore from the German academic environment, and the field of folklorism was becoming clearly defined, both practically and theoretically. It was at this point that another space with a very specific development began to emerge. Its focus lied mainly in musical and dance performances drawing on folk tradition, often interlinked with customary tradition, all this being “cultivated” by a wide variety of folklore ensembles and groups.

“In the 1950s, the world saw the emergence, growth and development of a new dance genre – the choreographic work of a professional state folk dance ensemble,” writes Anthony Shay, a dance historian and theorist at the University of California, in his 1999 study “Parallel Traditions: State Folk Dance Ensembles and Folk Dance in ‘The Field’”. He maintains that this phenomenon influenced professional, semi-professional and amateur folk dance ensembles, with the exception of some Western European countries and Japan, most commonly in countries under Soviet influence after World War II<sup>3</sup> (Shay 1999: p. 30). In addition to this dance genre, he recognizes another one: dance “in the field”. In his definition, it is a wide range of various stage presentations, many of which are influenced by the above-mentioned professional ensembles. He characterizes this phenomenon as a “parallel tradition” – which can be “authentic” elements from the choreography of professional ensembles, as well as various degrees of stylization found in “traditional” performances (Shay 1999: 31). He speaks of a completely new genre with its own characteristics, not just a different approach to working with folk traditions. Although this study deals only with dance, all that has been said applies to music as well. It also underwent various stages of stylization and creative development, often pioneered by professional ensembles, with a distinctive musical genre emerging in the end.

3. One of the major Soviet role models, The Moiseyev Dance Company, was founded in 1937, but gained its main influence only in the post-war years.

Anthony Shay describes the typical folk dancer today as someone born in the city who learned the repertoire at school or dance studio from a teacher, his “native” dance form mostly being classical ballet or other types of dance (Shay 1999: 32). The situation was similar in the Czech environment around the time when the Czechoslovak State Ensemble of Songs and Dances was established in 1948. Some dancers were accepted for audition from amateur folk ensembles, but dramaturgically the state ensemble was aiming at large stage spectacles and consisted mainly of trained dancers and musicians under the artistic guidance of professional musicians and choreographers. Later, the repertoire originally based only on folklore was enhanced by contemporary dance and choreography for works of classical music.<sup>4</sup> Shay’s definition and the impact of the activities of professional bodies on the mentioned “terrain” suggest that it is no longer a space of living traditions, but of their “second” existence.

A team of researchers of the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences is working on a publication focusing on the Czech folklore movement (i.e. the work of folk ensembles) in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Czech lands. The publication will not be purely historiographical; the highlight will be the testimonies of witnesses from the oldest living generations.<sup>5</sup> The socialist cultural model literally “drove” many people into ensemble work, also because of the lack of other possibilities of self-realization, and led them to learn about the legacy of folk culture. Although it is a paradox, this space, officially protected by the state ideology of the time, often gave rise to original works in the area of folklore. In addition to artists, folklore ensembles became a platform for many experts – folklorists. However, until the early 1990s, the scholarly environment often met their contribution in this sphere with contempt.

In the USA and Canada, for example, the situation was different. The term ‘public folklore’, including the activities of folklorists in the public sphere, began to appear in the 1980s’; it gradually began

4. Compare e.g. Muchka – Hynkova 1997.

5. Grant project GA17-26672S *The Weight and Weightlessness of Folklore: The Folklore Movement in the Second Half of the 20th Century in the Czech Lands.*

to replace the previously used term ‘applied folklore’, which was criticized for the researchers’ one-way orientation in relation to the field. ‘Public folklore’, on the other hand, is perceived as an area where field actors engage in a dialogue with experts. Specific outputs in this sphere are similar to the Czech context – performances, festivals, workshops, films, videos, etc. The contrast between the limited possibilities of the work of experts in the academic environment and those who can disseminate knowledge through the media is also perceptible here (Baron 2019: 164-165). Nevertheless, it can be concluded (in the words of Robert Baron, a specialist in this area) that their folkloristic knowledge, perspectives and concepts are social practices, creating a heritage that is presented outside of the traditional cultural context (Baron 2019: 165).

Today, cultural heritage, or intangible cultural heritage, is a category that covers the area of tradition and its transmission in new contexts and conditions. Intangible cultural heritage is a concept associated with the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of 2003. In relation to ethnology, Petr Janeček described it thus: “In addition to a significant institutional and political strengthening of the discipline, there were other obvious benefits in the adoption of the concept of intangible cultural heritage. Although it was an applied and consensual term, which arose only in part from expert discussion, its adoption solved a number of problems brought about by the previous key terms of the field, especially (traditional) folk culture, folklore or tradition, burdened with many complicated and often conflicting meanings.” (Janeček 2015: 275)

In ethnology, the new concept took over relatively quickly as a certain modernization of previous branch concepts, when, in addition to the product (artifact or text), the process, practices and personality of the individual began to be emphasized (Janeček 2015: 275). Several social, psychological and economic aspects are also linked to cultural heritage – from personal, local or regional identity to tourism or commerce. In particular, access to cultural heritage as a commodity is a sensitive point in this sphere. “The concept of ‘ethical marketing’ is an oxymoron,” writes Patricia Atkinson Wells in her study “Public Folklore in the Twenty-First Century: New

Challenges for the Discipline” (Wells 2006). However, she also adds that there must be a debate – although her arguments and starting points remain in the context of folklore, in her work she has to deal with areas such as public administration, economic development, rural development, art management or tourism (Wells 2006: 6).

In today’s society, there are countless manifestations that are either based on folk culture, touch on it or just evoke the idea of folk traditions. An example is the widespread adaptation of the “bonnet wedding ceremony” at current weddings in Slovakia. In terms of the content of cultural heritage, there is a direct reference to the ceremonial tradition of folk culture – the wedding was undoubtedly one of its most important moments. However, the ceremony is used without its original ritual function and mostly even for entertainment or commercial purposes, which clearly have nothing to do with the cultural heritage and its protection (see Dvoekonko 2017).

These and other manifestations, which we see around us today in connection with the folklore movement, but also in connection to, for example, the artistic environment or the business sphere, belong to ethnocultural traditions in a broad sense. We perceive the term ethnocultural tradition as an umbrella term for tradition in relation to culture and ethnicity, which is reflected in everyday life – it can be a continuous, intermittent or completely new tradition (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 2008: 53).

Revisiting the beginning of this reflection, it becomes evident that stepping out of one’s own space today no longer means simply leaving a geographical or otherwise limited space, which in the past determined natural being. In the globalized or otherwise broadly characterized world today, we usually cross the space defined by us. It is a space defined by profession, achieved social position, mutual relations, or personal cultural affiliation. There is often no connection with folk culture. Yet through ethnocultural tradition, many people are stepping towards it – this is actually stepping out in the opposite direction than it was at the beginning of this journey. We no longer venture into the unknown, crossing the borders that limit us, but instead, return to the source that we had left, either actively or passively, as actors, spectators or listeners.

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## Summary

The living space of humans has always been determined by various borders, whether they are objective or subjective. In the history of especially European societies, geographical borders as combined with social order were the rule. Crossing these borders was principal for learning new cultures and mentalities. The more the horizons were opened and brought back new perceptions and understanding, the more the systems of traditional culture were weakened in the original environment, especially in rural areas. Traditional cultural manifestations were affected and transformed under the influence of mass culture; in the 19th and 20th centuries, they were also being "discovered, learnt, maintained, resurrected and even 'imagined'". Society evolved in opposite direction: various approaches to people's cultures and their folk traditions have been reflected in concepts such as the second existence of folk culture, folklorism, public culture, intangible cultural heritage and ethnocultural traditions. Each of these represents a different and specific view on folk traditions today, on their use and protection, on the conditions of studying the field and its tendencies of development.

**Key words:** Folk culture; neoromanticism; second existence of folk culture; folklorism; public culture; intangible cultural heritage; ethnocultural traditions.