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**Creating a Representation:**

***The Singing to the Accompaniment of the Gusle as a Nomination to the UNESCO  
Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage***

Master's thesis

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Tartu, 2021

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## Acknowledgements

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the following people, without whom I would not have completed this research and made it through my master's degree!

Firstly, I would like to thank people I have met during my fieldwork, who taught me a lot about the tradition of gusle playing and system for heritage safeguarding in Serbia. Without hospitality, (tasty domestic cherry cakes and juices) and kindness of the tradition bearers who unconditionally shared their knowledge and their intimate relations with the tradition's intangibilities, this thesis would not have been possible.

Also, I appreciate the Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage and Ethnographic museum's efforts to welcome me into their working environment and, more importantly, for sharing their experiences working with UNESCO policies. Besides giving me access to the documentation necessary for my research, they helped me initiate contacts with the practising community and eased my way into the field.

I am grateful to the University of Tartu for the opportunity to learn and grow in an inspiring international academic environment. Stepping into the unknown field of folkloristics and heritage studies wouldn't be so enjoyable and enriching without dedicated professors and colleagues.

Special thanks to my supervisor Kristin Kuutma for her guidance through research and writing. Her work inspires me, and I feel lucky that I get to learn from her and get her help finding my way through the "jungle" of data and confusion. But more importantly, I want to thank her for the understanding and patience she provided, in times I found challenging and disruptive of my aims at finishing my thesis.

I wish to express gratefulness to my dear mother. She, with much pride, supported my studies in Estonia. She cheered every step I took in my studies abroad plans and listened to my research with great curiosity. Her sudden loss brought overwhelming grief, but memories of her loving and resilient personality moved me forward in developing this thesis. My dear uncle enhanced this journey with lots of care, love, and good humour, as much as difficult times were. And, let me not forget my friends for being nothing less than amazing!

## Introduction

This thesis is an inquiry into how the representation of the tradition is being created and negotiated between different actors involved in the nomination process to the UNESCO Representative List. By listing vernacular practices to the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) heritage lists, traditional knowledge enters a public realm and operates according to the heritage discourse rules. A tradition that is in the focus of this thesis is *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle*, a practice of performing predominantly epic songs in the form of decasyllable on a single string maple wooden instrument. It was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2018, nominated by Serbia who is a State Party to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (also known as the 2003 Convention). The process of acclaiming heritage as of value for the Humanity entails lasting preparations that include many actors on both national and international scale. Therefore, this thesis will attempt to show how *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* came together as a nomination. To respond to the assignment, I have studied the representation creation on multiple levels: the institutional and guslar community levels in Serbia. I have tackled on the social and political processes that shape epics' performance due to the nomination. Data interpreted in this thesis might explain the relationships between tradition and religion, tradition and language and how that conveys into representations of national identity markers. The rhetoric and symbols employed reveal tensions in the fluidity of cultural identity in post-Yugoslav space defined by new nation-state borders.

The nomination file is a result of the synergetic work of different actors involved. The dispersed fieldwork gave me insight into challenges that the nomination process contained and how both institutional and community level understand its significance. However, my fieldwork involved only Serbia's circle of representatives:

- The Union of Guslars of Serbia on behalf of the community;
- The Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia, a governmental body who handled the nomination process and negotiations with UNESCO;
- Academics specialised in the tradition.

Different levels of agency in the process of nomination tell of the hierarchical orders and the distribution of power and the actor's intentions and effects they produce. Cultural meanings are constructed and re-constructed through symbols, words, and images that represent certain ideas. Thus, looking at various ways in which nomination came together shows some aspects of the Serbian culture related to the practice of performing on the gusle, and likewise UNESCO nomination itself.

Although the practice occurs in several Balkan states consisting of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and, internationally unrecognised State, Kosovo the Nomination file, yet open for them to join the nomination, was submitted only by Serbia. By looking at the structures of agents included in the nomination process, I wanted to understand how the shared aspect responds with the situation "on the ground ". However, the dispersed territorial presence of the tradition and its embeddedness in cultural identification contradicts national identification. Territories in which Serbian tradition bearers are actively nurturing the practice are Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, which results in fluid and contested cultural identities manifested in representation. The tension in representation that strongly resonated during the fieldwork was the fluidity of identity conditioned with immigration and reshaping of Balkans' geopolitical space. Many active Serbian guslars trespass Serbia's borders and agency of Union of Serbian guslars groups them around social events and competitive programs, representing guslars as a homogeneous group.

The journey of researching and writing this thesis has been deeply personal and self-reflective. I had to stumble on my preconceptions, entangle myself from stereotypical beliefs, locate them, and try to understand where they come from and "unthink" things I am sure I know to avoid rushed conclusions or judgements. Thinking about the subject of research has been complicated. It meant that, if I am going to understand how one group of people coming from the same state as myself, identify and represent their identity, then I will have to understand what are symbolic spots that are meaningful when I go through the process of identification. In self-reflection, I revisited memories of events that show to have importance and impact on the research process and learning of the identification, identity representations and shared heritage.

In 2016, I participated in two weeks of intensive training in Dynamic Heritage Interpretation. I worked in a team with other cultural heritage students and young professionals on an interpretation plan proposal for the City Museum in Shkodra, Albania. The training gathered young adults from across Balkans; from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, North-Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia. The organiser of the training was the Albanian office of Swedish organisation Cultural Heritage without Borders. The organisation's primary mission is to promote and educate cultural heritage as a social development resource and assess cultural heritage's democratisation. Through their projects, CHwB engages different agents in heritage preservation and strengthens the role of heritage as a means for restoring peace in communities affected by social and political conflicts. Due to ongoing tensions between Serbian and Albanian populations over Kosovo's disputed territory, I encountered worries for my safety by many people who knew about my plans of going to Albania. For me, worries were unnecessary and even a bit silly. As the training had multi-national participants, organisers created working groups that diversified nationalities. However, due to language similarities, Slavic origin participants, including me, were organically grouped and spent most of our free time together.

I found myself getting closer to people with interesting life stories, and some of them touched me deeply. There were participants whose life stories were shaped by the war's terrifying events in Bosnia during the 90s. Despite complicated histories, we passed our free time bonding over shared popular culture: music, films, and sense of humour which is often sharp, sarcastic, and somewhat offensive. Those encounters resulted in some very dear and lasting friendships. However, during one such moment of exchanging jokes about Balkan stereotypes, Albanian participant from Shkodra seemed to take specific offence towards another participant and me from Serbia. The relaxing and funny evening turned into an uncomfortable confrontation in which local participant blamed me, and another Serbian participant for the war events in Kosovo in the 90s. In the aftermath of the event, the relationship with the person normalised. However, the conflictual situation happened, and the feeling of unease, confusion and, strangely, guilt followed me in the coming days. Aware of the intricacy of the war topic and the emotional approach it can take, I also understood that there was no rational reason to feel the way I did as I didn't do any harm to anyone. Although

I find my identity more layered than just where I come from, in this situation, it equated to Serbia and its politics. I thought it's unjust that generations that were only a few years old or not yet born when these political conflicts arose take any blame and get identified with it. But more importantly, I wondered how these generations might bridge the past and build relationships despite conflictual history. Thus, this event resonated strongly and led me on a journey of understanding how and why these things happen.

Before going to Shkodra I knew it has a beautiful landscape surrounding the Bojana river, and I thought that besides excellent learning opportunity, it would be nice to spend summer before my Bachelor's graduation in Art History there. I knew about the city's multi-religious character, but I was stunned when I saw Mosque, Catholic monastery, and Orthodox church next to each other in the main square. Ottoman architecture always intrigued me and seeing some of the examples in the city enchanted me. That kind of architectural diversity is dispersed in my birth city Belgrade, Serbia, where multi-religious aspect is not that apparent. The surrounding was familiar; I could read the architectural and cultural codes, but yet so different and distant.

A visit to the Rozafa Castle was particularly interesting. I remember seeing the white stone sculpture of a woman with beautiful face lines and long hair built into the stone with only the right part of her body free and exposed in one of the fortress entrances. With her free hand, she is holding a baby while breastfeeding it. The tour guide told us a legend about the construction of the fortress. Three brothers were struggling with building the castle, and the only way for them to do it was to sacrifice one of their wives. The wife of the youngest brother, a recent mother, was built into the wall to hold the fortress' foundations, while part of her body remained unbuilt. The legend sounded familiar. In elementary school, I learned about it in the epic song *The Building of Skadar* from the pre-Kosovo song cycle collected, systematised and published by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić. It struck me to find that in slightly different details this was the same story. Despite language differences, it was unravelling this cognition of shared oral history. Later on, I found out that there are many other examples, and that this particular ballad is a song of origin discussed by many acclaimed folklorists. (Dundes 1995) However, my fascination didn't stem from discovering the song's origins. In Shkodra, I could recognise cultural codes and familiar stories, which was only due to a shared

past and language similarities. Before the modern nation-states, the vast Balkan territory formed firstly the Byzantine and then the Ottoman Empire. I had taken for granted this aspect of cultural similarity, but it struck me in Shkodra and got me on a path of researching and writing this thesis.

I grew up with my mother and grandmother in a family structure resembling matriarchy. Although the generational gap between us sometimes brought disagreements and opposing views in our daily lives, our relationships taught me respect for elderly experiences and care about their nostalgic memories. Both my mother and grandmother used to tell many stories about their past experiences. They gave a glimpse of their inner life, allowed me to travel mentally through the times past, and made me feel closer to them, my ancestors, and the people who mattered to them. Although I haven't experienced most of the past events myself, they are shaped into scattered images in my memory as an animated collage of their stories, family photos, and possibly the visual culture I grew up with. As mental images, these stories stand for our family history representations, set in specific moments in time.

Due to generations of mixed ethnic and religious marriages, their stories reveal tensions in consolidating family origins' coherent narrative. Together with their nostalgic sentiments for their Yugoslav identity, in content, stories reflected mixed ethnic origins: Serbian, Danube Swabian, Corinthian Slovenian and Austrian, and nurturing memories of our ancestors aimed at passing on some values. Tension also manifests in adaptation and secularisation of several religious traditions that entailed eclectic compositions of different rituals, cuisines and language customs. Although my family members have collectively curated the narrative, I internalised it and contributed to the representation making. This narrative reflected my family's sense of identity. Following the stories, photographs and family objects act as memorabilia of certain events of importance and add materiality to the story. Stories show how narratives are constitutive of identity representations. Ethnicity, religion, class, national belonging, and historical experience occur in my family genesis' narrative. Scattered into bits and fractions of memories, it constitutes a comprehensive story revealing multiple identifications. Listening to these stories, I internalised it as my own identity that is in many ways contested.

There is an abundance of literature exploring the tradition of performing songs on the single string instrument the gusle. The subject is well researched and attracts folklorists, social and political anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, art historians and communities themselves. The study that inquires the tradition of gusle playing as a communication process from ethnomusicology perspective offers a significant contribution to understanding the social changes and modernisation that affect Serbian guslars' practice. (Lajić–Mihajlović 2014) The role of guslar in the paradigm of the Serbian culture is recognised. Timotijević (2004) gives an art historical perspective on the guslar representation in the representative art production from the earliest examples until the mid-20th century. The significant aspect of this study, although not explicit, is that Yugoslavia's Socialist regime interrupts the genesis of tradition representations in monumental arts. Additionally, newer studies aim to confirm the existence of heroic guslar biographies but also humanising the representation by showing aspects of the repertoire and personality that do not deem representative. (Đorđević-Bjelić 2017)

The recent literature that draws on the shared aspect of epic songs in the Balkans attempts decontextualising paradigms in which traditional knowledge and folklore collections interrelate to nation-states' formation. Rigels Halili (2016), in his comparative analysis of Serbian and Albanian epics' role in nation-building, brings forward the problem of ownership conditioned by the era of widespread literacy and systematisations of folklore in the service of the nation. Another issue concerning epics' role in establishing folklore studies in the nation's service are examined in the book *Epics and politics* where Pavlović (2014) looks at Serbian and Montenegrin 19th-century versions of epics and traces politicisation elements in songs mapping political elites' influences on the song collecting and publishing. Ivan Čolović, in his essay *All that gusle* (Čolović 2008) studies the political history of gusle through the symbolism entailed in its decoration and brings forward its relation to the political myth of the genesis of Serbia. He elaborates on the Kosovo myth in his book *Politics of symbol* (Čolović 2000). This research contributes to the study of gusle tradition from the perspective of critical heritage studies, giving insight into the scaled representation in heritage discourse. It draws on the theoretical conceptualisations of representation and its politics, and contemplates on how material culture shapes identity

representations while applying the method of multi-sited ethnography and autoethnography, as it unravels in Chapter 1.

My fieldwork took place during the summer of 2019. As part of it, I have had a series of meetings with gusle community members – guslars, representatives of the Union of Guslars, gusle makers and tradition enthusiasts, with whom I have conducted interviews. Chapter 2 presents an analysis of the interview data, online research, and writings by the gusle community members. Semi-structured interviewing gave a more natural flow to the conversation and appeared more insightful. It gave me the opportunity to focus on the aspects that seemed to be more meaningful for my interlocutors. The standard procedure of doing an interview didn't seem right in some of the encounters, and I have engaged in more natural communication, although with interview questions in mind. Also, the more spontaneous form of conversation appealed more to my conversational skills. Communication channels such as website and Facebook groups gave me insight into information circulation within and outside the community. Even though the summer is not a season when guslars perform publicly, I had a chance to attend two public events in Belgrade involving guslar's performance. On June 28th, 2019, I attended the concert celebrating Vidovdan, a religious and national holiday, and in January 2020 I witnessed a protest against the Montenegrin government and their subsequent repression of the religious rights of the Serbian population. The institutional level analysis addressed in Chapter 3, is based on the four weeks long internship at the Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia, where I carried out participant observation during my internship. This institution is the governmental body responsible for the administrative preparation of intangible heritage nominations on the national and international levels. There I was getting introduced to how the system of ICH (intangible cultural heritage) operates in Serbia. My participant observation included also research on the documentation concurrent with the nomination procedure.

Chapter 4 places three different exhibitions in the centre of analysis of symbols constituting the representation narrative and involves results from intentional and unintentional fieldwork. In the weeks before my departure to Estonia in August 2018, I had found out about the exhibition "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia" in the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade from a newspaper article, recommended by a family friend. In the last

days of the exhibition in the blazing day of late August, I was the only visitor in the small gallery space where it took place. As I was in a rush and didn't have much time for the visit, I had to focus on aspects that would give me the general idea about the exhibition's concept, documented the rest with my phone and got myself a catalogue for acquiring more details later. I found out about the other two exhibitions in the course of my fieldwork in the summer of 2019. I first met the gusle maker, whose house and workshop I had a chance to visit, during my internship in the museum together with the acclaimed guslar and female guslar who came specially for that occasion from Valjevo. During that meeting, we negotiated the next one to take place in his home. The owner of the Museum of Gusle in Gnjilice, Raška was introduced to me rather spontaneously when I happened to witness a phone call between him and a museum worker. In that case, I became invited as a guest to the museum complex in the making.

# CHAPTER1: Theoretical and Methodological Framework

## 1.1 Contextualisation

The Republic of Serbia is a country in southeast Europe with its capital seated in Belgrade. Its population numbered approximately 7 million in 2019.<sup>1</sup> The official language is Serbian written in Cyrillic letters, although Latin letter is prevalent too. The majority of the population is of the Christian Orthodox faith, while there are also significantly smaller Catholic, Muslim, Judaism and Protestant religious communities.<sup>2</sup> Since 2012, Serbia is in the European Union's accession process, conditioned by Serbia's recognition of its autonomous province Kosovo as an independent state. Serbia's recent history mark the turbulent events of wars and demonstrations that followed the ideological transitions from socialist to the democratic political system, particularly marked by Slobodan Milošević's aggressive nationalist politics in the period of the 90s. Strengthening the national ideologies in Yugoslav states resulted in wars involving Serbia as aggressor, Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo, which determined the reshaping of Yugoslavia's geopolitical space. The last, Kosovo war, ended with NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999, which led to temporary normalisation of relations. Overthrowing Milošević's government in the violent demonstrations in 2000 started an era promising democratic values, states economic development and prosperity. However, Serbia's social and economic stability challenge inconsistent internal politics and in the recent past Montenegrin declarations of independence in 2006, and much-disputed declaration by Kosovo in 2008. In the attempt to achieve a sense of ontological stability, Serbia's government is putting an effort in establishing collective identity narrative "of biographical continuity and fend off anxieties stemming from the prospect of a divided and fractured self." (Ejdus 2020: 30)

Therefore, on a macro-level, Serbian agency in the processes of nation-branding in recent years engages in gigantic architectural projects, monument erecting to historical and

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<sup>1</sup> For the population statistics see: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-US/vesti/20200701-procenjen-broj-stanovnika-2019/?s=1801>. (Accessed December 7, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> About religious communities in Serbia visit: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\\_in\\_Serbia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Serbia). (Accessed December 7, 2020)

spiritual leaders, language revitalisation campaigns and different cultural productions such as nationally broadcasted television programs, historically themed series, folkloric design commercial blocks and cultural campaigns promoting Serbian cultural, sport and scientific contributions to the history of the world. Within this corpus of nation-branding and cultural production, cultural heritage plays a vital role in placing Serbian culture in a discourse of the world's cultures. The Tourism Organization of Serbia is an official platform for strategically promoting Serbian historical and cultural identity and natural resources as tourism goods. (About the Tourism Organisation of Serbia) Official webpage and social media accounts are mediums that shape the image of Serbia as an attractive destination. Its free brochure "Adventures of the Spirit: Cultural heritage of Serbia" dedicates a chapter to the UNESCO tangible and intangible heritage. Placing Serbia in the global cultural space, the chapter "We are the World" maps the World Heritage List monuments and sites, Memory of the World Register and the 2003 Convention Representative List. The designated Serbian intangible heritage is represented in the form of photographs and short descriptions.

Visual depictions of representative intangible heritage are vivid and telling of the essentials of those traditions. However, despite their dynamic appearance, they actually manifest their staging. The photographs seem to essentialise the Kolo dance and family patron celebration Slava by emphasising their most important aspects. People captured in the images wear folk costumes and in settings simulating an imaginary past. At the same time, the tradition of *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* is represented only by the musical instrument. The description of the practice brings closer to the reader its essence and invites the reader to visualise the act of playing the instrument depicted. It says: "With the help of a bow and a single string, skilled guslars sang about numerous events from national history. Singing with a gusle is a symbol of national memory and a means of preserving identity that has survived for centuries." This definition emphasizes affordances of the tradition: the identity preservation, symbol of the national memory. (Figure 1)

Historically, the tradition of gusle playing became recognisably popular in the 19th century thanks to the initiative of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić to collect folklore. He was a reformer of the Serbian language, a collector of vernacular expressions and eventually the founder of Serbian folkloristics. The cultural significance that his figure entails in

contemporary culture is still prevailing. Karadžić's efforts in collecting and publishing epic songs and his collaborations with Jacob Grimm, Leopold von Ranke and Ludwig August Frankl reflect the influence of German Romanticism and the intellectual trends of nation-building with the concurrent significant role of epic songs. This collection represents the canonical work of traditional Serbian poetry.

The idea of guslar as a figure of national importance for the Serbian population developed in the intellectual circles of Karadžić. He was interested in the individualised person, guslar's personality, dedicating short biographies of his associates in published song collections. In his Leipzig edition of epics published in 1823, he included a sketch of people listening to a guslar's performance. (Timotijević, 2004: 257–262) This image later developed into the representation of a national singer, a Serbian Homer who unites people with song. (Eg. Photo 1) Consequently, one of Vuk's close associates, guslar Filip Višnjić became a symbolic figure of a blind poet in Serbian collective consciousness, a tradition bearer responsible for the preservation of Serbian identity. Many monuments erected to guslar Filip Višnjić, a blind man with silver hair and long moustache keeps reemerging in the visual culture as a symbolic figure uniting and educating the Serbian demos in its attempts to persist and achieve freedom.

Particularly after the representational inscription of the tradition of singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle on the UNESCO list, the figure of guslar has started to inspire and to attract public attention in monumental art in Serbia. In December 2019, the "city of gusle" Vrbas, its local government and an active gusle community erected a monument to the Serbian gusle.<sup>3</sup> Another example of a guslar figure in monumental art in contemporary Serbia happened in November 2020 at the Kalemegdan fortress in Belgrade.<sup>4</sup> A memorial dedicated to Karađorđe by acclaimed artist Paško Vučetić erected in 1913 as dynastic propaganda of Karađorđević Royal family in establishing its authority in the eve of the First World War. Besides representing Karađorđe, the originator of the dynastic line and leader of

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<sup>3</sup>News about the monument erecting: <https://rs.n1info.com/kultura/a556101-spomenik-srpskim-guslama-otkriven-u-vrbasu/>. (Accessed November 7, 2020)

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://rs.n1info.com/kultura/a671013-spomenik-slepom-guslaru-posle-vise-od-100-godina-ponovo-na-kalemegdanu/>. (Accessed November 20, 2020)

Serbian uprising against the Ottoman rule in 1804, this monumental sculptural group included other figures. One of them depicted the blind guslar with the musical instrument hanging on his back, walking up the stone monument base uplifting the military leader. (Borožan, 2012) The original monument was destroyed in the First World War during the Austro–Hungarian occupation of Belgrade. However, guslar as the only remained sculpture as an individual monument stands today on a location of the original sculpture whole.

## **1.2 Representation**

In large, my understanding of representation stems from my Bachelor's training in Art History. During the studies, I gravitated towards the art production from the Late Renaissance to Modern period. Nonetheless, I anchored my interest in the art movements and visual culture of the late 18th and 19th century, with an emphasis on the Serbian art and architecture. However, significant influence on my methodological development had studying the Serbian art and visual culture in the discourse of the Balkan heritage, art in the service of the national idea and learning Erwin Panofsky's iconology method in the analysis of the Principality of Serbia's religious art. Thus, my understanding of symbols, themes and concepts defining Serbia visual culture stems from a previous educational background.

In early stages of my BA studies, I remember the excitement of encountering the emblem books or manuals and learning of the intriguing emblematic structure and influence it had on the profane and sacred art development inspired me greatly. The emblem consists of the motto or the title, image and the text explaining or appointing the composition's meaning. Thus, I remember the enthusiasm when writing some of my early schoolwork analysis of the national visual culture of the 19th century: searching the digitised old newspaper illustrations, textual examples – books, articles or poems on the given topic, exploring the meaning of depictions with the emblematic structures in mind. However, familiarising myself with Erwin Panofsky's method expanded my knowledge of representation and equipped me for in-depth analysis of art and visual culture. His method, in short, reduces to three modes of interpretation. Firstly, mapping of formal elements takes place, then their general meaning identifies with themes and concepts, and together they are

contextualised with the spirit of the time and place of their emerging. (Panofsky 1972 [1939]: 3-33)

Developing on that knowledge, in this thesis I approached the concept of representation "as a source of social knowledge – a more open system, connected in more intimate ways with social practices and questions of power." (Hall 1997: 42) Representation in the UNESCO framework, as understood in this work, is the discursive agency of the knowledge production that arises from negotiations of valuable cultural variables between different actors. Cultural meanings are constructed and re-constructed through symbols, words, and images representing certain ideas and conveying the body of knowledge. In her study, Kristin Kuutma shows how these representation negotiations on multiple levels of agency inside of the UNESCO apparatus start to disseminate stereotypical images of ICH through its system of lists, and eventually the conceptual and social field becomes transformed (Kuutma 2019a: 79). As the production of representation entails procedurally changeable power relations, it is as an open-ended knowledge system. Therefore, I approach the data in this thesis as temporal but constitutive of an ability to represent the notion created.

Some aspects of the Serbian culture related to the performance while playing the gusle, and likewise in the UNESCO nomination stand out as representational moments that I have observed. Moments of representation happened in interactions with my research associates, their online presence, and agency in publishing and creating content relating to the tradition and nomination itself. Those are:

- School of gusle
- Private homes
- Exhibitions
- Center's office/Ethnographic museum
- Commemoration of the events
- Nomination video

In these literal, situational moments guslar, gusle instrument, costumes, narratives stand out. They materialise ideas and mark moments of importance that stand as valuable cultural variables in representation making. As Kuutma emphasises about the multi-level analysis, "the issue of representativeness appears problematic" when identifying "the scope of cultural

element and who is the subject represented" (Kuutma 2019b: 164). Visual, textual and oral expressions in their repetitive occurrence to some extent define the scope of representation – what is traditional, who are tradition bearers, their identity identifications and collective experience. Thus, I looked at how visual and narrated ideas come together into a representation that tells of the religious, geographic and historical experiences reflecting, as thesis shows, tradition's discursive knowledge. Items represented operate through symbols telling of what *playing the gusle*, *gusle the instrument*, the emerging hierarchy, the established office mean in contexts in which symbols set.

### **1.2.1 Politics of Representation**

Defined by Bose and Gordon in their blog post (2019) as "the contested space between the subject, the representation of the subject and self-representation", politics of representation is a slippery concept. Representation in the Foucauldian sense, entailing the knowledge creation in power relations presupposes agency of different actors. In this thesis, I explored how the representation of the tradition of *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* is created and negotiated between different actors involved in the institutional and community level in Serbia. In her model of "the dynamic triangle", Regina Bendix shows that cultural heritage "is lodged in a field of tension generated by the agency and interests of actors in society, politics and economics." However, case-dependent, the agency of actors of "three loci" is changeable but inevitably intertwined in the process of heritage making. (Bendix 2009: 259-260) Therefore, as the process of nomination involved a number of actors, it supposes that consolidating everyone's interests, ambitions and expectations were delicate. Thus, a study of the hierarchical orders and power relations between actors involved in the heritage making brings forward the need for a sensitive approach to the task.

In this thesis, I looked at the agency of actors on multiple levels, how they group, define and what are their interests. The official guidelines and prescriptive documents published by UNESCO seem to imagine a harmonious collaboration between its agents, but on the ground, the situation is usually different. Nominations bring different expectations and formulations in the file do not always reflect the actual state of affairs. As mentioned above in an argument brought up by Kuutma (2019b: 164), the representational problem does not occur only when identifying the boundaries of the represented element, but also with the

subjects represented. In this thesis, I have managed to map agents and somewhat define hierarchical structures in which power operates. Although the structure in which institutional agents operate seemed evident, the defining of the community concerned brought challenges. Although the gusle community groups into a logical administrative system, they are not a homogenous entity. The researcher's position is also delicate in analysing the act of doing representation as it brings forward "the self" and "the gaze", opening thus up a discussion about ethical notions implemented in such research. (See Chapter 1.5)

### **1.3 Material culture, representation and identities**

In 2017, as part of the internship at the Belgrade City Museum's Residence of Princess Ljubica, showing its permanent exhibition of 19<sup>th</sup> century Belgrade interiors, I have developed an interactive tour-guide about mirrors, targeting the high-school student audience. Preparation for the guide was a learning process in which I came closer to the materiality of the objects and what it tells of its social function. In the context of exhibition, and drawing on the study of Ana Stolić (2006), mirrors as object of a private sphere act in the service of the owner's representation. Their materiality, e.g. materials they are made of, technique used for reflecting surface making, style, were signifiers of the social status and wealth of its owner. Materiality of objects is somewhat present in this text, in their formal shape and what they mean, however, it is not in the focus. Hurdley (2006), emphasises the importance of stories that object owners share about them, revealing bits about themselves. Stories that objects entail add value and in the context of exhibiting spaces create meaning. Taking all that into consideration I have integrated these aspects into the larger system of representation when looking at the exhibitions that are in the centre of analysis in Chapter 4.

Artefacts' exhibiting in a context of exhibition or museum is an act of representation making. Specific objects are collected, selected and represented by the exposition maker to represent, show and teach. In order to analyse the three different exhibitions for my thesis, I looked at what objects were presented and in what way. These three exhibitions have been studied together because the particular visual experience resonated quite strongly with other observations I made during my fieldwork. I have found it interesting that in all three cases the gusle is utilized as a symbol to bring ideas closer to the viewer. Depending on other

symbols and settings in which they stage, the gusle together with other objects acquires different meanings. According to Henrietta Lidchi (1997: 189), exhibiting happens in the discourse and is a result of it. There is a “hierarchy of value” (Ibid.:190) by which exhibiting occurs. Emphasizing what is representative, these “valuable” objects point at the bits of narrative that plays out in the meaning-making. These exhibitions show that the gusle operating as a symbol in different contexts underpins different systems of knowledge. The analysis draws on how symbol acts in the representation, reflecting opposing and overlapping discursive practices revealing the tensions of Authorized Heritage Discourse –AHD.

#### **1.4 Multi-sited Ethnography**

Constructivist nature of the heritage presupposes scales and levels in which meaning making happens. As Lähdesmäki, Zhu and Thomas write, “certain layers of heritage meanings are activated in certain discourses, policies and practices at different scales”. (Lähdesmäki, Zhu and Thomas 2019: 3) Thus, addressing these levels need multi-angle approach of observing. The method that I have adopted to address these crucial questions is firstly introduced by George E. Marcus in his short article *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography* published in 1995. This method challenges conventional ethnography in a way that shifts the understanding of the “world system”. Marcus expands the understanding of this macro-scale system, “theoretically constituted holistic frame that gives context to the contemporary study of peoples or local subjects closely observed by ethnographers” as being partial and “integral to and embedded in discontinuous multi-sited objects of study.” (Marcus 1995: 97)

His method is often misinterpreted as geographically dispersed field. Although it can presuppose geographical remoteness, however, “the essence of multi-sited research is to follow people, connections, associations, and relationships across space. (Falzon 2009: 2) In this research, I have applied Marcus’ method in a way that juxtaposes different kinds of data collected on multiple levels of heritage making agency. I was moving across the localized space confined in the territoriality of Serbia. However, I looked at different scales in the attempt to understand “the top” and “the bottom” of the heritage system by assessing different kinds of data: interviews, fieldnotes, documentation, gifts, visual experiences, relationships.

## 1.5 Autoethnography

Autoethnography, as a methodological choice developed organically, conditioned by the theoretical framework of representation in my research. The concept and its politics brought forward the relation to the gazing subject that requires careful self-reflexivity. I questioned my position within the whole process within this study: why and how am I engaging with the representation and how am I consolidating expectations of desired results with my fieldwork results. It made me investigate my relations with other research associates and reflect on the ethical issues involved in research. This research process has been a learning experience of how one should "come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience." (Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015: 1) I questioned my own relation to the Serbian culture I belong to and tried to understand my own emotional reaction to it. In analysing my ethical stance in various directions, and how I myself relate to my research, I understood this whole experience better and acquired a deeper understanding of the field. Therefore, research and writing was a learning process.

My approach to the autoethnographic inquiry, as I mentioned earlier, developed organically and remained subconscious in the early stages of my research. When assessing preparations for my interviews, I made several sets of questions intended for different actors in the field. However, I was prepared for the spontaneity of field encounters and understood that situations and settings would change the course of my fieldwork plans. I can't say my inquiring process was interactive interviewing, but I was open to experience what my interlocutors wanted to say and show. Being open to the experience added value to my fieldwork and learning process; however, navigating through the abundance of the data afterwards was challenging. Openness to that level of involvement also stems from awareness about my less engaged position towards the practice, and that I do not understand everything relating to the tradition. As much as I was open to the experience, there were moments in which I wasn't comfortable in my researcher's position. These situations of challenging encounters created aversion towards some data and avoidance of its analysis. The time

distance offered a new perspective when I realized that in the actual meeting situation I shunned away from sharing my views with my interviewee out of fear that a conflicting discussion may change our relationship. That led me to focusing on writing about the encounters that I had enjoyed.

According to Bochner, autoethnography is "a non-alienating practice, one in which I (as a researcher) do not need to suppress my own subjectivity, where I can become more attuned to the subjectively felt experiences of others, where I am free to reflect on the consequences of my work, not only for others but also for myself, and where all parts of myself—emotional, spiritual, intellectual, embodied, and moral—can be voiced and integrated in my work" (Bochner 2013: 53). Reflecting on the possibilities of autoethnography gave me also comfort in knowing that emotional processes are integral to the research. In my approach to the topic, I was often led and guided by emotions, resulting in taking the critical stance and sometimes dwelled upon rushed conclusions. Therefore, I often revisited my thinking process and tried to understand where my emotional reaction and anxieties come from—possibly stemming from my contested identity and mixed feelings about national belonging. Through my research experience, I learned to appreciate different viewpoints, and in an attempt to stay unbiased, I faced the impossibility of that task. "The visibility of researcher's self, strong reflexivity, relational engagement, personal vulnerability, and open-ended rejection of finality and closure" became the valuable stance in my research. (Anderson and Glass-Coff, 2013:58)

## **CHAPTER 2: Guslar community representation: history, belonging and faith**

### **2.1 Organization of guslars in Serbia**

In the early stages of my fieldwork, I attempted making initial contact with guslars, and the first impression implied a structured organisation of tradition practitioners that follows specific rules of conduct. The official web page of the Union of Serbian Guslars, where I first looked for information, showed that guslars' network has spokespersons representing them. The website was created in 2012, motivated by the inscription of the tradition to the National Register. (See Chapter 3.2) Web page aims at describing and guiding the interested audience through the agency of guslars. It gives elementary information about the Union's functioning, and it serves as an archive, storing necessary documentation regarding Union's regulations, publications and poetry. Despite available contact details on the webpage, my initial reach outs didn't resonate with much interest. However, in one of the first phone calls I made, my interlocutor informed me about and approved access to Facebook groups of the Union and Association of Guslars in Belgrade. These groups unite guslars, members of these organisations, and broader audience interested in happenings relating to the community. There I noticed that the community is very active in communication.

Virtual community shares information about gusle performances and intriguing findings of the tradition or history; discussing contemporary political topics of importance for the community, posting commemorative and appreciative posts of guslars, historical figures, recent figures, and events of importance. Even though virtual space showed that it is a place of lively and active conversation, my post in which I wanted to get informed about gusle performances that I could visit in Belgrade, did not find much attention. I succeeded to establish a meaningful contact with guslars after one trusted source forwarded a communication about an event happening at the Ethnographic museum in Belgrade. Even then, phone numbers of possible interviewees were carefully selected because "there are all kinds of profiles [of guslars]". (Informant B) These interactions show that the community follows specific relational rules tacked down to hierarchical orders. Spokespersons act as representatives, and the order is better understood when looked at the community's structure.

Guslars are gathered around the The Union of Guslars of Serbia that subsidizes to organisations and associations, giving the community a regulated structure. The Union was formed in 1994 and is an umbrella organisation that gathers three sub-organisations of guslars in the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Montenegro. (See Figure 2) "The Organization of Guslars of Serbia", "The Organization Dušan's kingdom" in Montenegro, and "The Organization of Guslars of the Republic of Srpska" in Bosnia and Herzegovina gather numerous local associations of Serbian guslars. Associations also act worldwide, being located in Canada and France. The Union transcends the borders of Serbia and unites guslars whose ethnic identification is Serbian. It is said in the introduction that the tradition prevails in several Balkan countries. As it is not in the scope of this research, I do not know how guslars who do not consider themselves Serbian in these countries organize themselves, and whether they do. However, the organisational structure did endure changes due to geopolitical changes in the Balkans. Established in the turbulent wartime of the 90s, that proceeded with the reshaping of the post-Yugoslav space, The Union of Serbian Guslars was affected by these events several times. It went through name changes and adjustments to the legal revisions conditioned by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's transition to the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003 and, later, in 2006, the Montenegrin declaration of independence. (About the Union of Guslars of Serbia) As my interviewee informed me (Informant D, 2019), after 2006, Serbian and Montenegrin guslars departed into two organisational systems, separating their administration, and excluding each other from competitions.

The Union aims at representing guslars as a homogenous group with an identity marked by specific national and religious symbols. The structure of the organisational units speaks of the regulations ruled by the hierarchical order. Therefore, each of the Organisations has a president and a steering committee representing and deciding on important matters. Members make and vote decisions in the steering committee's meeting concerning the events affecting guslars, such as organising festivals and competitions, selecting the jury, granting the title of *Narodni guslar* [Folk guslar], and public presence. Based on the meeting reports of The Organization of Guslars in Serbia from 2011-12 available on the Union's official webpage, meetings include discussions about the improvement of the practising tradition and

status of guslar in society, as was a case with the nominations to the National Register of the intangible cultural heritage of Serbia and UNESCO Representative List.

Local associations in Serbia, as the smallest administrative units in the gusle organisational system, number 41. They are named after a person of cultural significance for guslars that it gathers, or, rarely, by its members' place of origins. Naming serves to commemorate historical figures originating from the city where the association locates and as a way of identification. Persons or locations that associations entail in their name symbolically mark belonging and reveal its members' contested identities. Besides being administrative units with a president as a spokesperson who handles competition requirements and organising performances, associations also strengthen community ties through social gatherings: celebratory events, discussions, and gusle playing. The same way it took me to make meaningful contacts with tradition bearers, the access to the association grants through personal connections. Besides guslars, poets, gusle makers, and individuals fond of the tradition get access. Participation in guslar activities is voluntary, but the annual individual membership fee is mandatory. Together with donations, fees are directed for festivals and competitions and handled by the Union. The membership seems to have a role in controlling access to the group as it grants an individual a right to represent the association through public performances on the local, national, and regional levels. The more success members of the association have in competitions, the more credibility and respect they get in the gusle circles. Therefore, the motivation for participation seems to steam from competitiveness and success in competitions.

### **2.1.1 Competitions of the Union of Serbian guslars**

As pointed out earlier, the competitions have a significant role in evaluating the status within the tradition bearers' circle. In my interactions with guslars, I found out that appearance at these annual events is of considerable significance, and excellent performances are remembered and retold, and achievements proudly emphasised. Serbian guslars represent their skill and talent in both national and regional competitions, organised into two categories: under and older than 18. Of great significance is the regional competition or the Union competition where Serbian guslars from all three Organisations compete. Since the republic competition results decide who is competing at the Union one, it proposes strict

rules. Associations register their competitors for the national competition audition, which takes only 40 guslars to the semi-final. Best 10 to 15 ranked guslars from the finals are eligible for the Union competition. Not only that that the best participants get cups and diplomas, but competitions entail special recognition. Guslar, a winner of the Union competition or has participated five times in it, is honoured by *Narodni guslar* [folk guslar] title. (Competition Propositions 2011) The title brings pride and responsibility for becoming a representative person of the guslar community and the tradition.

Although competitions may seem like a way of endangering the essence of the tradition, they encourage participation. Moreover, competitions have developed mechanisms for tradition preservation. Propositions of the competition (Ibid: Article 59) stress performance qualities that determine competitors' success concerning the stage appearance, musical component, narration and oral expression, and repertoire. Guslar's stage behaviour must show authentic folk costume, coherent language expression, and engaging storytelling that communicates the song's message to the audience. Additionally, repertoire choice nurtures the traditional forms of epics decasyllable verse as well as 19th-century canonical epic collections by Vuk Karadžić and Petar Petrović Njegoš. Newer epic production is only allowed if it does not narrate contemporary political events. However, canonical works are valued more in the grading system of the competition. Systematic preservation of the craft instils value and appreciation of the traditional to prevent commercialisation tendencies in guslar circles.

## **2.2 Transmission of the traditional knowledge: values, history and religion**

Transmission of traditional knowledge is administered in both informal and formal ways. The tradition passes on within the family, but modern lifestyles and urban development urged institutionalised educational units. Gusle teaching is introduced in State's music schools in cities Belgrade and Kraljevo within ethnomusicology departments, as well as in private schools run by guslars across Serbia. Visit to the private school of Gusle in Belgrade allowed me to understand the teaching environment better. As much as the school teaches traditional skills, it instils specific values by teaching history and religion. Young guslars are learning how to practise the craft of gusle playing, hold themselves in public and responsibly

represent the tradition. Also, the student-teacher dynamics reveal traditional roles that pay respect to the generational gap. The school has a membership card and imposes an oath for new members to nurture certain values dignified of the guslar. (Photo 8)

Zaklinjem se časnim krstom i precima vrlim svojim guslama ću čast čuvati  
dokle živim i postojim! Tako mi Bog pomogao!

[I swear with the Christian cross and my brave ancestors that with Gusle I  
will protect (their) dignity while I am still alive and exist! Let God help  
me!]

The oath implies a lifelong obligation to nurturing the patrimonial values instilled in faith and honourable behaviour. Representative guslar behaviour, as understood from interactions with my interlocutors, should follow certain ethical principles. Epic songs depict the virtuous and heroic people and narrating their deeds through gusle playing brings responsibility to its performers. One of my interviewees emphasised the importance of looking up to the acts of our ancestors:

Moramo oslušnuti što su to naši stari radili. Mogao je Karađorđe, mogao je Lazar kazati „’oću krunu, ’oću Kosovom ja da upravljam, evo ti ostali dio Srbije“. Sigurno bi mu Murat bi mu dao. Ali nije! Mogao je i moj đed da kaže i pet njegovijeh brata: “Srpska vojska otstupa. Ma oni otstupaju, šta ću ja na Mojkovcu“. Ne, svi su dokopali ko pušku, ko motiku, ko je šta imao.

[We have to look up to what our ancestors did. Karađorđe could have [asked for the crown]; [Tzar] Lazar could have said that for the rule over Kosovo he gives up the rest of Serbia. Murat would surely give him. But he didn't! My grandfather and five of his brothers could have said: "Serbian army is retreating. They are retreating, why would I go to Mojkovac [battle]". No, they grabbed a raffle, a stick, whatever they had.] (Informant C, 2019)

Values that the citation suggests are selflessness, loyalty, and sacrifice for the freedom of the people. Above mentioned Karađorđe and Prince Lazar Hrbeljanović sacrificed their lives for a more significant cause and widely celebrated in guslar circles. Đorđe Petrović - Karađorđe, commanded and fought in the First Uprising against Ottomans that begun series of events that led to, at that time, Serbian Principality's independence in the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Despite the courage it took him to stand against an enemy, 'his own people' took his life. Thus, his death teaches the virtues of loyalty. In medieval Serbian history, Prince Lazar, ruler of powerful Moravian Serbia, risked his own life for the salvation of Kosovo's territory in the face of predestined loss in the battle against Ottomans. This deed, not only that celebrates his honour but also gave him sainthood. By placing historical figures and his family members in the narrative, interviewee familiarises with historical figures and relates to them as ancestors. Guslars pay respect to ancestors not only by performing epics that preserve a memory of the Serbian collective past but through their acts too. Although epic songs relate to the actual battles for freedom in history, [knightly deed doesn't need weapons to be proven, but taking action instead]. (Informant C, 2019) In contemporary culture, fierce fighting translates to teaching about freedom by carrying out patriotic deeds that sustain the national culture.

The book *Gusle naše svete* [Our sacred Gusle] published in 2017, by respected guslar holding the title of *Narodni guslar*, represents the Codex of Serbian Guslars and explains what taking action can mean. The Codex has 28 articles that suggest behavioural principles deemed representative for a guslar. Guslar as culture representative and bearer of the tradition is supposed to fulfil his role with respectful communication, lawful morals and humanitarian acts. Guslar should perform with an adjusted repertoire for the cultural events of the State's significance, as well as religious events celebrated by the Serbian Orthodox church or significant anniversaries of historical battles by the Ministry of Defence of Serbia. Repertoire for public performances suggests works of "scientific, cultural and historical significance" such as collections of Karadžić and Njegoš or later songs of Radovan Bećirović Trebješki, 20th-century poet and Matija Bećković, a contemporary poet and academic. (Jeknić 2017: 7-10) Students of the gusle school that I have met during the school visit, briefly informed me about his performances in the gusle nights or in front of the church, to invite donations for

the church bell. However, it seems that the more influential the event, the more representative guslar plays. The idea is the same - to nurture patriotic and religious values.

### **2.3 Historical experience and religious representation**

Gusle is an instrument present in the Balkan region, and in Serbia, it has a long history of cultural importance. My data shows that the instrument of gusle transcends its materiality and for its practitioners carries much meaning. The instrument stands as a symbol that embodies the historical and religious experience of the Serbian population. Songs, language, visual depictions worth preserving the memory of, point at the moments of importance relating to the past events. To show this encompassing character of gusle instrument, internalising all these complex ideas, my interlocutor expressed:

Gusle su apolitične, one samo govore istinu. I zato su gusle naša istorija, naša azbuka, naša religija, naša tradicija, naša kultura, naš krst. Sve to je razlog zašto mnogi imaju problema sa guslama I govore loše o njima.

[Gusle are apolitical; they just tell the truth. And that's why gusle is our history, our alphabet, our religion, our tradition, our culture, our cross. Being all of that is why many had problems with gusle and spoke badly about it.] (Informant C, 2019)

These facets of gusle importance: history, language, religion and culture are enacted through depictions of a cross, religious buildings, saints, historical figures, in the form of portraits, icons, and instrument decoration in both private and public sphere.

The people and topography emerging from the visuality, textuality and orality of the fieldwork take a special place in individual and collective guslar identity representation. It was showed earlier (Chapter 2.2) how guslars learn more about the characters they sing about, finding moral guidance in their actions. Likewise, they celebrate people and places in history that render the aspiration of freedom in collective memory. An attempt to find meaning in these past events and link them into a coherent story of one's belonging marks guslars' identities. Most of the community members that I have interacted with are migrants from the Dinaric area in Balkans, Montenegro or Old Herzegovina, and gusle playing is ingrained in their family stories and encounters with epics and the instrument in their

childhood. Tradition is, therefore, very intimately linking bearers with their origins and constitutes their identities. Geopolitical changes, reshaping of border, and migrations shook up an individual's identity and identification, bringing a strong sense of patriotic emotions and collective responsibility.

Religious signification has an essential part in guslar's representation. Private devotional tendencies are translated into the public sphere reflecting ideas of collective religious signification. Manifested through both visual and spoken language, Serbian Orthodoxy internalises into guslar's representation of the identity's enactment. Religious symbols occur in the interpersonal interaction, both private and public, through greetings and sayings. At the public events that I visited and which included guslar's performances, stage performers establish the interaction with the audience through greeting *Pomoz' Bog* [Help me God] on which they responded *Bog ti pomog'o* [God will help you] marking the belonging to the same speech community. Also, my fieldwork's visual observation marks places in history that are underlying moments of importance for the Serbian State's genesis simultaneously with the Serbian Orthodox Church. I have encountered one saying in almost all interactions with guslars and belongs to public representation repertoire also showing at the front webpage of the Union of Serbian guslars. A saying *Manastiri i krivo gudalo to je našu veru sačuvalo* [Monasteries and wry bow, that is what have preserved our faith] tells of the interrelatedness of the tradition and religion. To the tradition of gusle performing is assigned a significant role, together with monasteries, it protects religious beliefs. The saying brings forward the past time of medieval power of Serbian Kingdom when Serbian Orthodox Church was established and, during the reign of the Nemanjić dynasty, people's leaders were building churches and monasteries until Kingdom's fall, marked with the loss of Kosovo battle in 1389. Therefore, stories about history and religion function as elements and constituents of Serbian guslars' cultural and national identity.

## 2.4 Celebrating the nomination: public representation, costumes and instruments

In 2005, the Institute for Literature and Arts seated in Belgrade prepared Serbian epic poetry's nomination file for the inscription cycle of the UNESCO program Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, program that preceded the 2003 Convention. It consisted of canonical epic songs, but among were also songs of newer production that do not follow UNESCO's ethical code. More recent pieces in rhymed verse included in the collection celebrated Serbian leaders in 90s wars in Bosnia and convicts of the International Criminal Tribunal. It got rejected for the UNESCO program, and the community of guslars in Serbia took the blame for the unrepresentative material and faced disappointment. (Informant A, 2019) Therefore, at the beginning of the previous subchapter, my interlocutor expressed many meanings that gusle instrument entails. He stressed the apolitical aspect of the gusle and told how the encompassing significance of gusle provokes in "us" (meaning Serbians) different and often adverse reactions. He wanted to express multi-level importance that makes the tradition last and brings about its practitioners in defying their sense of self. Also, informant B told me about the immense popularity that gusle's practice got in the 90s, bringing wanted and unwanted attention. Commercialisation and nationalism threatened the representation of the tradition. Due to its historical interrelatedness with the national sentiment, gusle was politically instrumentalised in war propagandas. But, luckily, as he recalls, most of the unrepresentative repertoire vanishes and "if it were good it would stay". (Informant B, 2019) My observation is that the unrepresentative aspect still operates in the private sphere of gusle circles, and Union's and competition regulations direct the public realm. Also, it seems that the rejection gave motivation to the community for the new attempt.

In this chapter, it is emphasised that there are norms for representing the tradition that guslars follow when appearing in public. Depending on the particular event where the guslar performs, the repertoire rendered will adjust accordingly. Also, the public presentation complements with the folk costume and gusle instrument. Serbian guslars celebrated the tradition's listing to the UNESCO's Representative List with an official event on the 25th December 2018. (Photo 2) I didn't visit the event, but the video is available on Youtube (*Milan Jovanović, "Pevanje uz gusle"*), and it gives insight into the structure of the event and

its features and performativities.<sup>5</sup> The event happened in the Small Hall of the Kolarac Endowment in Belgrade. Kolarac is one of the most representative cultural and educational institutions in Belgrade of historical significance. As an endowment of the wealthy merchant Ilija Milosavljević, Kolarac locates in the historical centre of Belgrade. The People's University building, Kolarac, consists of teaching properties, lecture amphitheatric hall and a big concert hall. The Union of Serbian guslars organised the event in the lecture hall and proceeded in a highly formal manner, with the audience of representatives responsible for compiling the nomination, government officials, priest and interested public, predominantly male. The Celebration reflects the aesthetic preferences and beliefs of the community. Emphasis was on the role of gusle in shaping the cultural and especially national identity. The choices made in the selection of the decorum speak of personal representations in the public's service. In guslar's representation, I have observed ways in which personal signification communicates beliefs and values.

Guslars that were performing at the event, competition winners, were wearing elements of traditional costumes. They were sitting next to the speaker podium, and the rostrum was dividing the scene and the audience. Costumes are an eclectic combination of contemporary and traditional clothes. (Photo 3, 4) Youngest among them sitting on the rostrum's right dressed up in a white shirt with floral motives having a vest – *jelek* over it. On his head, he is wearing *šajkača*, the nationalised cap and a part of traditional wearing from central Serbia. As well, around his waist, he is wearing a belt known as *pojas*. His clothes closely resemble those of Šumadija District. Next to him and the last guslar in a row are wearing white shirts and vests – *jelek* that resemble those of the Montenegrin and Herzegovinian traditional costumes. However, guslar in the middle and guslar on his right seem to have chosen more historical representations of the tradition. Guslar in the middle wears *jelek* similar to the ones depicted in visual representations of Montenegrin intellectual and episcope Petar I Petrović Njegoš. Likewise, guslar on the right wore *dolama* with golden *širiti* typical for Serbian leaders in Uprisings against Ottoman rule. (Vasić 1958: 27-28)

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<sup>5</sup> Part of this analysis was developed from a final essay written for the University of Tartu MA programme course Theoretical Conceptualisations of Folklore and Cultural Heritage II.

Moreover, his costume considerably resembles the one of Đorđe Petrović Karađorđe, leader mentioned earlier of the First Serbian Uprising. (Stradner 2019: 4-5)

Guslars' garments seem to refer to Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro's territories, territories in which Serbian bearers are actively nurturing the tradition. Since the Union of Serbian guslars organises the event, the symbolics of the choice of costume may lay in the fact that it is an umbrella organisation for local associations of guslars in these countries. Besides, the emphasis was on the costumes of the two historical figures, Njegoš and Karađorđe, who had a significant role in Serbia's principality's political and cultural rising at the beginning of the 19th century. Petar Petrović Njegoš was a Montenegrin intellectual and episcope, widely celebrated in guslar circles and his songs are part of guslars' representative repertoire. In the event's context, stressing the above-mentioned historical figures may signify ties among Serbian and Montenegrin people. In his literary work, Njegoš celebrated these ties and successes of Serbian heroes in fights against a shared enemy - Ottomans. His well-known piece *The Mountain Wreath*, not only that supported Karadžić's language reform and is written in Serbian Cyrillic but dedicated to Karađorđe. Due to these long lasting cultural and political ties between kin-states, sometimes it is difficult to draw a line between cultural identities.

It is worthwhile to take a closer look at the decorations of the instruments of the performers. The gusle is a one-string maple wooden instrument played by a bow with which the strings are rubbed. Its body consists of resonator box, half-oval covered with goat leather on one side and a neck with the sculptural ending. The horsehair or nowadays more common synthetic strings connect the two ends of the bow. The decoration is usually richest at the neck ending and included at the neck or the resonator box's back. Gusle decorations include symbols referring to valuable historical events and portraits of actors involved in them and the neck head often ends with a sculpture of a chamois head or eagle. Unfortunately, due to the video's quality, it wasn't possible to identify all the decorative elements and represented historical figures, only Saint Sava, Nemanjić Dynasty prince whose dedication to the Orthodoxy and enlightenment brought him sainthood. (Photo 5) However, they are representative examples entailing monumental decorations at the head of instruments: eagle and eagle killing the dragon. The rostrum was decorated with a gusle hanging in the

centerpiece facing the audience. Head of the instrument usually decorated with an eagle or chamois head, has a sculpture of Saint George killing the dragon. In Eastern Christian iconography, Saint George symbolises the victory of faith over the evil spirits, and his cult is widely celebrated in Serbia on 6th May, the celebration also known as *Durdevdan*. It was a curious moment when I recognised that same instrument in the household of the gusle maker and found out about the multiple awards playing it has brought. (Photo 13)

## **CHAPTER 3: *Singing to the Accompaniment of the Gusle* Nomination File Representation on the Institutional Level**

### **3.1. Internship at the Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in Serbia**

The Centre is a body within the governmental system for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, later in the text referred to as ICH. The body locates in the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade. It holds responsibility for identifying and documenting intangible heritage on Serbia's territory and research and promotion of traditional knowledge. The Centre plays a central role in the established safeguarding network about which the next sub-chapter elaborates. Its principal activities imply managing nomination processes for the national and international heritage lists of traditional practices and communication on all system levels following the 2003 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding of ICH. (2003 Convention) The office capacities are small, numbering four employees, and at the time of my internship, it had reduced activities. The practice of doing internships as a mutually beneficial experience, for the intern and host institution, is not a common practice in Serbian cultural institutions, and it was for the Centre a novelty. Therefore, it took time to negotiate the terms of my internship. Although the training's initial plan was to create social media content, the Museum's ongoing systematisation and digitisation of the visual material database changed my office engagement. Therefore, my responsibilities were developing on the spot and were a result of the joint initiative. As defined in the contract, my involvement was:

- **1st week:** Getting acquainted with the legal framework regulating the safeguarding of intangible heritage (laws and regulations) and professional bodies operating within Serbia's ICH system.
- **2nd week:** Introduction to making nomination files for the National Register and the UNESCO Representative List of ICH.
- **3rd week:** Hands-on experience working with guslars, the traditional bearers of singing to the accompaniment of gusle, one of the elements inscribed by the Republic of Serbia on the UNESCO Representative List of ICH.

- **4th week:** Work on updating the edition of the UNESCO Operational Directives in the Serbian language.

Placed within the Ethnographic Museum, the Center collaborates with colleagues from other departments, particularly with the Commission for inscription in the National ICH Register, another body within the system involved in the safeguarding programme at the Museum. However, I was mostly interacting with employees of the Centre with whom I shared an office. Mainly, it was with the head of the office, my internship instructor, and the Museum's documentation centre employee responsible for maintaining the gusle collection. Questions and discussions about my tasks took place outside of the office room in a more private and quiet setting of the Museum, in the reception room or on the terrace. To introduce me to Serbia's ICH safeguarding mechanism, I was first working with the website's content, the text of the Convention, and publications and presentation about the Centre's work. Gradually, I got access to the National Register - the representative traditions' and heritage of urgent safeguarding repository on the national level, and documentation following UNESCO's Representative List nominations. The Center holds documentation archive consisting of meeting reports, annual plans, fieldwork reports, and visual material, of which I didn't get the overview. However, reports concerning UNESCO nominations were included in nomination folders of the National Register. The translation of the Convention's Operational Directives version, dating from 2012, drew my attention and I also looked at the documents available at the office's website. Since the instructor didn't define my tasks, I offered to help to translate and update the file, which was a task I tried to work on whenever I had time on my hands.

To get acquainted with the National Register, I first had to understand the nomination process, and bureaucratic aspect that formulating a nomination file implies. Information on the website just gave a glimpse of the elements inscribed, consisting of short descriptions, who suggested nomination, and when the inscription happened. However, before accessing the file repository, the internship instructor advised me to look at the National Register inscription form, which will make the nomination procedure comprehensive. I assessed the form as if I am the one to nominate something. (See Figure 4) For better understanding, I turned to the instructions provided by UNESCO for filling in the ICH-02 form for inscribing

heritage to the Representative List. (UNESCO 2016) Based on these guidelines it seems that National Registry inscription form follows the ICH-02 form with some adjustments.

The nomination form mandates identifying the element, defining its characteristics, assessing the element's condition, and proposing safeguarding measures. Appended to the nomination file should be the consents of practising communities and visual representations - videos and photographs of the tradition. Despite the word limit emphasised in the form, when looking at the Register's examples, I have noticed the examples where descriptions exceed the given limit. Unlike UNESCO's administration, the document provides freedom concerning the word limit. The flexibility provided by the Center's form allows describing the element and showing its importance from a more holistic perspective. At the time of the internship, my understanding of heritage discourse was still shaping. I found the use of the standardised UNESCO terminology in the form somewhat confusing at times. Therefore, mention of the ICH domain or concepts safeguarding and sustainability in the form may be less comprehensive to the non-professional viewer without additional explanation. In the conversation with my internship instructor, I pointed out at places for possible confusion. My internship instructor then informed me that Serbia's ICH safeguarding system provides trained bodies, Regional Coordinators, to assist interested parties with questions as such and other bureaucratic matters. As much as the assisting body's presence is a practical choice, the necessity for assistance in clarification enables a hierarchical system.

### **3.2. Network for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Republic of Serbia**

Grasping all the actors on the institutional level and understanding their roles in the safeguarding system was processual. Therefore, when just stepping into the field, my research was more intuitive than thoroughly thought-through. Sorting out and analysing my data showed me the vast scope of it. To make the system more structured and understandable, I looked up the regulations available on the Centre's main webpage again and studied them thoroughly, compared them with my notes and gathered documentation.

Ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010, initiated adjustments in the legal regulations and shaped the heritage discourse in the Republic of Serbia. It took two years to develop the Network for safeguarding ICH on the National level per the international agreement. (2003 Convention: Chapter III) The Network is a system of governmental and institutional bodies responsible for the operational aspect of the Convention. (Figure 3) The system is supposed to ensure "the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage." (2003 Convention: Article 2) Therefore, each of the bodies holds a responsibility that, through synergetic work, allows the Network to work and bring forward requirements for ICH safeguarding. The system aims at providing conditions for communication on all levels, bridging the gap between institutions and communities, and enabling a bottom-up approach to safeguarding. However, the system's operational directives show that there is a hierarchy by which they operate.

Bodies placed within the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade are The Centre of Intangible Cultural Heritage and The Commission for inscription in the National ICH Register. The Centre holds the central role in coordinating the system as it mediates between all system levels. Besides maintaining communication and collaboration on all levels, promotion, documentation, education, and research of ICH concept, strengthening capacities through projects and educational events, its primary responsibility is to care over the National Register. However, inscriptions to the National Register get discussed by the Commission. Members of the Commission are mainly employees of the museum and museum collaborators. Therefore, supervision over the Commission's work has the Ethnographic Museum Director deciding on its members. (Ethnographic museum in Belgrade 2019) It consists of the museum professionals and academics: mainly ethnologists, ethnomusicologists, and ethnolinguists, who evaluate upcoming nominations and suggest improvement of the inscription forms. Regional Coordinators are museum workers with ethnographic professional vocation whose role is to identify traditions and establish communication with communities and local actors in Vojvodina, Belgrade, Central Serbia, Western Serbia, Eastern Serbia, Southern Serbia, and Kosovo and Metohija.

The National Committee, a body within the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Serbia, is responsible for developing safeguarding strategy on the national level and suggesting legal adjustments for its application. Moreover, its vital role is to adapt inscriptions to the National Register and adaptations and proposals of nomination files for the UNESCO Lists. As the operational directives of the Committee suggest it, the governmental body should meet minimum once a year and to consist of 10 members from the Ministry, research institutes, universities, cultural institutions, Serbian Orthodox Church, institutions of minorities, and media. (Ministry of Culture and Information 2012a: Article 11) However, in the committee members' current setup decided in 2016, only academics and museum workers hold a membership with humanities and science expertise.

As a symbolical focal point of the system, the National Register follows the rules and regulations that dictate the inscription criteria. Rule book issued by the department for cultural heritage within the Ministry of Culture and Media in 2012 defines ICH domains that make it eligible for inscription. (Ministry of Culture and Information 2012b) The organisational idea behind the listing of heritage aimed at copying the list division made by UNESCO to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. However, due to the inadequate legal regulations the National Register of ICH unites representative heritage and heritage that urgently needs safeguarding. (Fieldnotes) The rule book also suggests lists of inscription proposals for the UNESCO's lists. The domains into which ICH is categorised by the National Register differ slightly from those indicated by the UNESCO's Operational Directives. (For UNESCO ICH domains see Chapter 4) The list categories are:

- List of knowledge
- List of heritage bearers
- List of celebrations and customs
- List of oral traditions
- List of performing arts

In addition, the categories by which traditions are sorted remains somewhat unclear, both on the Center's website and in the Center office's repository. The traditions are marked by numbers and distinguished from the UNESCO nominations by the folder case's look.

The establishment of the safeguarding system brings along some methodological and ethical issues that are contextual and specific. Negotiating representative heritage within the Museum's framework shows the tension between the Ethnographic Museum's knowledge tradition and the ICH concept. The Centre for ICH initially located in the Ministry of Culture and Media. However, due to the expertise readily available at the Ethnographic Museum, it was transferred there in connection with the formation of the National Register in 2012. (Fieldnotes) The rationale is that the ICH concept imposes measures for safeguarding that the museum's methodology can easily accommodate. Thus, in its promotional texts that represent the institution, the Centre has incorporated the 2007 ICOM museum definition<sup>6</sup> where the linkages between ICH and museum work are explained. (Filipović 2019) ICOM museum description stresses the safeguarding of ICH as one of its domains. However, based on my fieldwork observations, there seems to be some antagonism as the Museum reflects contradicting views. The Museum has developed a methodology for preserving and representing material heritage, whereas ICH implies the concept of "living heritage". The two concepts are opposing each other, but the tension seem to reflect adjustments to the new cultural paradigm.

The introduction of the idea of "living heritage" opposes to static representations of the past. Despite the role of the museum in storing and documenting heritage, a common complaint in the Museum was that the ICH system imposes too many administrative tasks and diminishes the ethnographic work's creative potential. I have also encountered a disagreement with the ICH concept as it allows ethical manipulations. One of the personal conversations about the nomination process museum employee said: "Of course I was helping my colleagues, but I didn't want to get involved myself as UNESCO is a political platform." (Fieldnotes) The Museum's work reflects the strong disciplinary focus of the academic tradition. However, understanding the concept of ICH and practices of safeguarding requires a holistic view that only a multidisciplinary approach may satisfy. Although there is tension in methods, it appears that both institutions mutually influence each

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<sup>6</sup> The definition of a museum offered in the Statutes of ICOM in 2007: "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment" (2007 ICOM Statutes)

other. The Museum is adopting the concept of "living heritage" into its methodology. It includes the interpretation of ICH through new creative media and community participation in its exhibitions. The Center also implements the Museum's administrative aspect with its knowledge capacities and ethnographic ethical notions.

### **3.3. Inscription of *Singing to the Accompaniment of the Gusle* to the National Register**

The *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* was enlisted by the National Register in 2012. The inscription happened in the initial stages of the Network for ICH safeguarding. The national nomination of the gusle tradition shows how the establishment of the UNESCO system is processual and that the safeguarding system's formation required its agents' training. Education about the ICH concept was necessary to allow the bottom-up approach, to define roles within the system, and to engage relevant communities in the process of safeguarding. Therefore, the Regional Coordinators' and researchers' position 'in the field' was significant in the initial stages for promoting the concept.

It was an ethnomusicologist, a researcher of the musical and communicative aspect of the gusle playing who initiated the nomination of the singing to the accompaniment of the gusle. In the interview that I conducted it was stated that the position of the ethnomusicologist had been a complicated one. (Informant A, 2019) In the beginning, the researcher was not familiar with the relevant administrative system and had to rely on the information and consultation usually provided by institutions like the Centre for ICH. The task was not easy, as the researcher had to acquire knowledge, compile the file and present the new concept and engage with the community. Thus, the system for safeguarding relied on the researcher's friendly contacts. Unlike the ICH system's official higher administrative level, researchers usually communicate directly with practitioners, and thus encounter immediate reactions, especially the negative ones. Keeping the trust between researchers and practitioners is always a challenge, and the format of the nomination challenged it. The nomination showed that the limiting size of the form gives space to conflictual situations. Unlike research that offers space for contextualisation, formulations in the file are specific and limiting. Limitations as such and adjustments to the particular discourse restrict the holistic approach to traditions. Thus, part of the dissatisfaction expressed concerned the naming of the element.

At the same time, more agitated complaints by the practitioners were directed to the questions regarding the ownership of the practice.

On the one hand, the language used for compiling the form has to be respectful to the essence of the traditions, but also comprehensive and inclusive of a larger audience. Instead of the vernacular verbal noun *guslanje*, which precisely describes an action of performing a song on the gusle instrument, the researcher used the verb ‘singing’. (Informant C, 2019) As per my informant, the verb singing doesn't represent the essence of the tradition. *Guslanje* as a performance narrates a story in a vocal expression accompanying the melodic component of the instrument. However, the expression is not singing, and due to the instrument's limited harmonic properties, it is not music *per se*. Thus, singing implies a particular meaning to the tradition that affects its representation. Usage of the translatable and comprehensive term ‘singing’ is determined by the attempt to promote the tradition's inclusiveness, one of the prerequisites of the 2003 Convention. Also, the vernacular term indicates the linkages to the Serbian practising communities. However, to my knowledge, the formulation *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* also linguistically corresponds to the Serbian-Latin-German translation of *guslanje* offered by Vuk Karadžić in his second edition Serbian dictionary.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, negotiation of heritage in the course of the nomination process opened the question of ownership within the community. In filling in the form, the researcher had to select some of the associations and individuals and ask for their consent for tradition's inscription. The ethnomusicologist represented the Ethnographic department of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Science. Asked to provide permissions were Vrbas town in Vojvodina, Serbia, and several guslars from gusle association Vuk Mandušić, also from the Vrbas. Since not all the associations were visible in the form, it raised doubts about ownership over tradition and the researcher was confronted about it. Thus, the conflict showed that practising communities need a better understanding of the Convention. In one of the association's Facebook group I found that in October and November 2015, a series of lectures was organised by the Union of Serbian Guslars under the Ministry of Culture's patronage to inform the practitioners about the heritage discourse. Series of five lectures under the title „Singing to the accompaniment of gusle - transmission of heritage“ were given by the team

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<sup>7</sup> *Гуслање*, n. das Geigen, cantus fidium. (Stefanović Karadžić, Vuk 1852: 108)

who later prepared international nomination. These took place in the Parish home of Saint Sava Temple in Belgrade. Topics of lectures concerned: responsibilities of the heritage bearers in the transmission of heritage; similarities, and differences of the traditional and contemporary practice of performing epics; what is traditional in the modern guslar's repertoire; what aspects of the tradition are safeguarded as ICH, how and why, and what is the role of the Union of Guslars of Serbia in the safeguarding. After associations got familiar with national nomination benefits such as media presence and funding for projects, interest in proceeding with an international nomination grew.

### **3.4 Inscription of *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* to the UNESCO Representative List**

Singing to the accompaniment gusle was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in November 2018, the nomination being submitted by Serbia. However, performing epics on a single string instrument is common to several Balkan states: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, and internationally unrecognised state of Kosovo. The National Committee for the Intangible Cultural Heritage initiative came from both bottom-up and top-down, on behalf of the Union of Serbian guslars and the Minister of Culture and Media Vladan Vukosavljević. (Ministry of Culture and Information 2016) On the one hand, community addressed the letter of appeal to several governmental and institutional bodies, the Minister of Culture; Minister of International Affairs; Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia to UNESCO; Advisor of the Minister of Culture in the sector for cultural heritage; General Secretary of the Commission for collaboration with UNESCO; President of The National Committee for the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and to the President of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Science. (Drašković 2016: 3) On the other, the Minister of Culture submitted a recommendation to the National Committee for the Intangible Cultural Heritage to proceed with the nomination of gusle playing to the UNESCO.

In a letter to the bodies mentioned above, the Union of Serbian Guslars stated reasons for the initiative. Appeal urged for the nomination process due to tradition's endangerment of possible appropriation. Competitiveness, as a characteristic of the community, translated

into a regional race over cultural rights. Although the element is undoubtedly one of Serbia's most representative ones, rumours that some neighbouring countries will submit it first shook the community. Guslars were informed about the Albanian plans to nominate their epic tradition as Representative heritage. Oculus news, where the article was published, is an online news platform addressing Albanians in the Diaspora about local, Balkan, European, and global events. (Albanian epos of heroes at UNESCO) Information on the webpage is very unclear, but it informs that Albania and Kosovo prepare joint initiative for the UNESCO of the Albanian epics performed on *lahuta*. This vernacular term stands for gusle in Albanian. Concluding thoughts of the short article raise questions of neighbouring countries agreeing to this or sabotaging the process. Therefore, for Serbian guslars, they needed to be the first to nominate the tradition. They believed that the possibility of joining the nomination, later on, is more "theoretical" and could have a negative impact on the practising community.

Introduced to my research interests, the Centre employees were pointing at their experience with a shared heritage. The reshaping of the Balkan geopolitical space throughout history makes contemporary Serbia a cohabitate of different cultures with distinguishing customs and traditions present in some neighbouring states. Therefore, thinking about shared heritage is not a novelty for ethnographers of the ICH Network. In starting years of the Network, there were mentions of the joint nomination of the folk-religious celebration *Durđevdan* or *Hidrellez* together with Turkey, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Romania, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia. (Fieldnotes) However, the Serbian initiative didn't realise, as I was informed, due to administrative problems. In 2017, the nomination got jointly submitted by Turkey and North Macedonia without mention of any other practising communities outside of these territories. (UNESCO 2017) The shared heritage problem in which nomination files do not respect all practising communities emerged during my fieldwork as a methodological issue for the Center's employees. An example of that is the *Traditional Singing of Ojkanje* that Croatia had nominated to the List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. The nomination file identifies communities of practice as:

Croats of Roman Catholic faith, even though there are some villages where the population is mixed and where Croats are in the majority, or villages populated exclusively by the Orthodox population.

Irrespective of the national or confessional background of the inhabitants, Ojkanje singing, is a joint tradition of the people inhabiting these regions [in Dalmatia]. (UNESCO 2016: 4)

Although the file of Ojkanje mentions the practising Orthodox population, an ethnic identification is not made specific in this formulation. As per my informants, that complicates the process of joining the nomination.

Due to the aspect of tradition that exceeds the Serbian borders, a team who prepared the nomination of gusle playing was careful in their formulations. However, despite their efforts, it drew much attention in the regional media due to its shared aspect. The news about the nomination resulted in accusations of cultural appropriation and "stealing" the tradition in Montenegro<sup>8</sup> and Albania<sup>9</sup>. Hence, it was important for Center's employees to proudly emphasise the history of the regularity of submitted nomination files that never faced complaints during the nomination process. Aware of the ethical notions following the nomination processes in sensitive subject matters of the shared heritage, the team who prepared the nomination was attentive to nuances in formulations to avoid exclusion and make joint initiatives possible. The geographical and ethnic-confessional dispersity define as following:

Singing to the accompaniment of the gusle is an element of the living cultural practice of a significant number of local communities in Serbia whose members identify themselves ethnically as Serbs, Montenegrins, Bosniacs, Albanians, and confessionally as Orthodox Christians and Muslims.

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<sup>8</sup> Article *Serbia reaches for the Cultural Heritage of Montenegro* available at: <https://m.cdm.me/english/serbia-is-reaching-for-the-cultural-heritage-of-montenegro/>. (Accessed December 19, 2018)

<sup>9</sup> Albanian media reaction to the nomination decision *Serbia registers lahuta as its heritage in UNESCO, Albania reacts* available at: <https://www.koha.net/kulture/132764/serbia-regjistron-ne-unesco-lahuten-si-trashegimi-te-saj-reagon-shqiperia/>. (Accessed October 10, 2019).

The current geocultural distribution of singing to the accompaniment of the gusle is, among other things, a result of mass and individual migrations. In this way, singing to the gusle's accompaniment became part of the culture of many communities in multinational, multiethnic, and multicultural environments of modern Serbia. (UNESCO 2018: 2)

The nomination got accepted at the 13th Intergovernmental Committee meeting of the 2003 Convention in Mauritius. Preceding the adoption of the official decision by the Intergovernmental Committee, an extramural meeting convened on the Albanian Member State's initiative and the other Member States sharing the tradition: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro. (Fieldnotes) Meeting details were not disclosed to me, but the initiative stemmed from the wish to check the nomination's modalities. I was told that, following the submission procedure guidelines, the Serbian delegation representative stressed again the possibility to join the nomination.

Based on the video recording of the 13th Intergovernmental Committee meeting, the diplomatic intervention seemed resolved peacefully. When the Committee decision was pronounced by the Chairperson of the meeting, the representative of the Albanian delegation took the floor on behalf of the Convention member states mentioned above and congratulated Serbia as well as showed interest in a joint nomination in the future. (Video recording of the 13<sup>th</sup> Intergovernmental Committee meeting) During the nomination file compiling, currently resigned Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia to UNESCO Darko Tanasković advised going for the shared nomination as it has diplomatic value. In the National Committee for the Intangible Cultural Heritage meeting in October 2016, committee members and the Ministry of Culture representative discussed the joint nomination. However, the Special Adviser of the Minister of Culture, Zoran Hamović, stressed the tradition's embeddedness in Serbian identity. Due to that, Serbia should be the holder of the nomination allowing others to join later. (Ministarstvo kulture i informisanja 2016) To my knowledge, the Center had taken the initiative and approached some of the neighbouring countries with whom they had previous collaboration. However, there were no results because these neighbours and colleagues were still working on capacity building and inventory formation. As Center's employees

informed me, Bosnian and Montenegrin ICH Networks were in development, and they had not started with their national inventory of traditions, which would have delayed the Serbian nomination significantly.

## **CHAPTER 4: Symbols and symbolism of the gusle in the creation of narratives**

### **4.1 Gusle maker's living room**

Private flat in a shared house in Belgrade's outskirts in Zemun Polje, where I went for the interview, gave me a unique insight into gusle maker's living space. Our meeting took place in a smaller and intimate two-room apartment in the living room, which is in this sub-chapter's focus. Being the most extensive and central room of the flat, it is also the household's most representative. Along with furniture, personal objects, books, photographs, and portraits, an impressive number of gusle instruments decorate the surroundings. From the flat entrance, visitors must pass along the hallway by the bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom to get to the "cabinet of gusle curiosities". (Photo 6) The door opening to the narrow veranda connects the room to the backyard, where a pathway leads to the garage space transformed into the gusle-making workshop. The living room has a unique role in a private home that bridges the private with the public sphere. As a space for mundane activities and leisure time, one of its functions is to be a space for guest reception, and often, the stateliest, it displays and represents its owner. (Stolić, 2006) The living room where the interview took place forms concurrently the exposition space, and through the objects displayed and by following the sequence of me noticing them, I manage to read the representation that the gusle maker appears to render.

At first, the pastel colour walls, the unmatching pieces of furniture, the dim light, and dozens of objects of all sizes and shapes scattered around the room give the impression of an unorganized, hectic living space. However, on a closer look the seemingly messy surrounding starts to make sense. Many details and specificities in the living room tell of the living habits, taste preferences, moments, and places of importance to the host. The room responds to its everyday use as a private living and guest reception space, but the owner also shared that he partially needs to move his gusle workshop in wintertime due to weather conditions. (Informant E, 2019) As I had not expected to find such a gusle collection displayed in the setting before the visit, my observations focused on their arrangement and possible meanings. Although the gusle belongs to the long tradition of instrument display in representative spaces

of private homes, in order to demonstrate respect towards the traditional art and epic poetry, in the gusle maker's house the number of instruments emphasises their importance. (Murko 1951: 334 as cited by Čolović 2008: 135) The instrument's significance is manifested by their display on each wall and reducing the room's capacity and utility.

Closer attention to the setting reveals the order and careful arrangement of objects into meaningful units. The first thing that drew my attention when entering the room was a pile on the ground of different items exposed in front of the glass table: gusle instruments, wooden and leather parts of unfinished gusle instrument, a box with *frula* and *dvojnica* instruments<sup>10</sup>, the portrait of Saint Sava in a painting style that aims at resembling fresco technique, cutting tool, measure tool, glues and newspaper sheets. (Photo 7) The rest of the room decoration shows the aesthetical endeavours of the host. It reveals three layers of representational objects: personal achievements -diplomas and cups, gusle instruments-self-made and acquired, and paintings- portraits of saints and figures from Serbian history. The most insightful moments of the visit were gusle pieces that are richest in their decoration and publicly acknowledged with competitions' awards. Excluded from the living room exposition to a more intimate setting of the bedroom, I got introduced to them during the conducted interview. Aesthetics performed in the decoration expresses aspiration towards the tradition, religion, and history through a specific type of objects and symbols. Similar decoration consisted of a gusle hanging on the wall, portraits of saints, icons, diplomas, and cups of achievements decorate the classroom in the private School of gusle. (Photo 9, 10) Repetitiveness in visual experience speaks of the consensus in taste among the gusle community. Although the owner's choices influenced the living room's decoration, the arrangement of popular symbols together with the exposition of personal achievements tells of the owner's attempt to position himself within the tradition discourse.

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<sup>10</sup> *Frula* and *dvojnica* are end-blown aerophone folk instruments made of wood. While *frula* has one air pipe with usually six holes, *dvojnica* has two. Originally these instruments were played by shepherds, but their present-day use is widespread in Serbia. More about it at: <http://www.nkns.rs/en/popis-nkns/pipe-playing-practice-frulashka-praksa>

Each of the representational layers previously mentioned symbolizes specific ideas and ideals that together convey a meaning. Through objects displayed, the owner is enacting his own identity as gusle tradition bearer and *frula* player, as well as his ethnic-confessional identification. As the instrument making happens in the living room, the pile of objects on the ground that shows items used in the instrument's production seems to represent the owner's engagement in gusle making. Putting self-made gusle on display and achievements as confirmations of his success, the owner is stressing his contribution to the tradition of singing to the accompaniment of the gusle. Additionally, his ethnic identification's duality manifests in the presence of photographs in Montenegrin costume and objects that stand for "Serbianness" in his living room, such as the Serbian coat of arms, an ethnographic item of a Serbian traditional shoe *opanak*, and portraits of figures from Serbian history. (Photo 11) Interviewee's endeavours to preserve traditional culture captured in photographs of himself during stage performances in traditional hybrid costume. I had recognized the dress in pictures as the gusle-maker presented himself in it when we previously met in the Ethnographic Museum. During that event, he performed this multilayered identity through gusle and *frula* performance in upper parts of the costume, woollen *pojas*, and vest combined with modern pieces of clothes like a white shirt, black pants, and elegant black shoes. However, his costume's peculiarity is in the upper part of the outfit consisting of Herzegovinian representative vest and jewellery, a silver medallion depicting the Virgin Mary Hodegetria and the golden cross. (Photo 12) The distinctiveness of the costume speaks not only of the creativity of the man but also of contested identity. Such a costume manifests the complexity of his ethnic-confessional identity, which became apparent only during the interview when he introduced me to his origins and family ties to the gusle tradition. He originates from Montenegro but identifies as Serbian and preserves the gusle as family heritage through his craft and collection as do his other relatives who are gusle players. In concurrence with the migratory trends in Yugoslavia, he had moved to Belgrade due to military and job duties in 1974.

The fact that this display was meant only for a private view becomes apparent in the intimate details of the personal representation. The most representative gusle instruments were hidden in my host's bedroom on the wall arrangement that evokes Marianism sensibility. Three gusles hang on the wall between two icons of the Virgin Mary, and two of

them hold award certificates that confirm their value. (Photo 13) Gusles differ in style and selection of motives depicting the former Yugoslav president Tito, Saint George, Miloš Obilić and a replica of the Kosovo Maiden by painter Uroš Predić. Not only that, instruments show the craft skill of their makers, but depicted symbols carrying meanings and personal attachments. As Hurdley points out, objects displayed in a family home and narratives their owner share "are also telling stories about themselves, as moral beings with histories and beliefs, who are both socialized and individuated." (Hurdley 2006: 729) Telling me about representative pieces of gusle, the interviewee reveals that their value is not only in the aesthetical sense and craft virtuosity but also in the social relations they evoke. When he showed me the Kosovo Maiden, the gusle maker's attachment towards this instrument became apparent in his hesitation to give it market value: "and they [home visitors] tell me to sell it. But how could I do that!?" (Informant E). Also, the gusle depicting Miloš Obilić had not just been earning awards but it had been dedicated to his son. As my host explained, symbols of sabres and horses symbolize the knight's strength in battles against the Ottoman enemy, while the massive eagle figure represents freedom. The monumentality of the instrument transmits the patrimonial values to his son through duplication of symbols.

#### **4.2 The Museum of Gusle in Gnjilice, Raška**

The Museum of gusle is a private museum that was opened to the public in 2017 in the remote village of Gnjilice, near Raška town in the mountain region of southwest Serbia. The exhibition's format aims to represent the collection of the single-stringed musical instrument that accompanies the Singing of epics. It is part of a museum complex representing the 18th-century Serbian peasant life in a broader Ethno-tourism complex with accommodation facilities still in the making. The Museum is one of the three objects that have finished, together with *vajat*<sup>11</sup> and *bačija*<sup>12</sup>. The owner of the complex, Serbian expat in Italy, is building it on his ancestors' property, representing himself as an endower and creating a concept that merges family history and Serbian traditions. (Photo 14) Although the

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<sup>11</sup> *Vajat* is a small house in the countryside household designed for newlyweds. (Matić 1959: 42)

<sup>12</sup> *Bačija* refers to the summer settlements in rural mountain areas for cattle grazing. In the ethno-touristic complex in Gnjilice village, it is a building in which cattleman produces and stores dairy products. (Ibid.: 349)

owner's place of origin does not nurture gusle playing, he inclines towards the tradition. He maintains ties to gusle by listening and writing songs, but also he keeps the social relations with the gusle community as a founder of the gusle association in Raška. The exhibition in the Museum of gusle presents his collection of gusle musical instruments, Serbian folk costumes, military uniforms, reproductions of paintings of Serbian historical figures, carpets, and other objects that resemble a traditional Serbian interior. However, the Museum is awaiting the help of the Ethnographic museum professionals regarding object documentation. The presence at its opening of prominent ethnomusicologists and folklorists whose research focus is gusle tradition and ethnographers from the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade speaks of the potential that the Museum has to accommodate different audiences. (Video recording of the opening of the first museum of Gusle in Serbia) The official pages of the complex exist on online channels, Facebook, and Youtube. The local community of Raška town is familiar with the endeavours of the owner and may find information about the project on the municipality's official web page about cultural-historical heritage. (Homeland house of Arsović family) Due to the complex's unfinished infrastructure and inaccessible roads, the Museum is not fully open to visits and awaits to become part of touristic offers.

The exhibition is set up in a building replacing the old barn of the family farm, where the owner grew up. It is a simple two-story building with a solid lower space that holds a wooden upper structure in which exhibition sets. As the Museum's owner lives for decades in Italy, a project is a place of memory. It aims to commemorate his ancestors' experience, valorizing peasant life values about which testify big family tree poster in the lower structure of the Museum. (Photo 15) Moreover, the Museum aims at commemorating the death of his father that occurred in the former barn. To reconstruct the barn, manifest the owner's efforts to recreate the authentic farm building and incorporate it into the imagined cultural-touristic complex. The host told me about his ambition to create an authentic environment when guided by his ancestral and his personal experience. Through buildings pictured in the complex, he wishes to show different aspects of peasant life. As the first building finished, the Museum of gusle seems to be the focal point of this representation that brings the past to the present and connects ancestors and descendants.

Entering the exhibition space requires passing through a gable roof terrace that gives a beautiful view of the surrounding fields and mountains. The inscription dedicated to Jesus Christ and the Serbian flag hanging enrich the terrace's front. (Photo 14) The wooden plate listing Serbian words for the male family line back to 12 generations, ending with a white eagle, the symbol entailed in the Serbian coat of arms marks the terrace's door frame. (Photo 16) Already at the entrance one may notice importance messages communicated to the visitor - patriarchal values, faith, and national belonging.

In the interior the visitor to the Museum finds an exhibition that communicates a wholesome concept. The creation of the space was guided by the principle that gives the aesthetic experience of the Serbian ethno-space. (Photo 17, 18) The moments of importance in the exhibition have been indicated in the tour guide by its curator. However, the order of things was apparent only after I revisited the sound and video material of my fieldwork, so that the background story and images were in sync. Therefore, each of the objects marks the moment in the narrative and contributes to the experience. As the entering space announced, gusle instruments, folk costumes of Central Serbia, books, and journals about gusle, ethnographic objects such as cradles and tapestry, and military uniforms represent the idea of belonging. Taking the highest and central spot of the space, the coat of arms of the Museum seems to invite the viewer to the exhibition's focal area – the white wall with gusle instruments. (Photo 19) Being part of the coat of arms gusle takes an essential place in the exhibition narrative. Designed on request by the curator, the coat of arms shows double-headed eagle embracing gusle and cradle, crowned by the Serbian traditional folk cap *šajkača*. The heraldic creation represents the identity markers to show the complex idea of the nation's continuation.

The gusle tradition, represented through instruments, images, and textual material and ethnographic objects, reveals different layers of meaning merging into the narrative about the tradition. Dispersed around the exhibition space are painting reproductions depicting the Death of Karađorđe, Serbs gathered around guslar, Petar Petrović Njegoš, Vuk Karadžić, Filip Višnjić, nationalized figure of blind guslar and Nikola Tesla, scientist. Together with citation boards that extract thoughts on the tradition by prominent Serbian and foreign intellectuals, it emphasizes the point in history that celebrated gusle in the national idea's

service. (Photo 20, 21, 22) Represented figures and events shaped the formation of modern Serbia throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Although guslar's public representation and cultural identification through costume selection is diversified, the exhibition shows only Serbian wear. Military costumes represent the World Wars' historical periods, indicating that objects do not follow the chronological order. Therefore, military wear manifests freedom and the continuation of Serbian battling for independence throughout time. On the one hand, the heroic historical figures represented demonstrate their particular importance in the process of forming the Serbian state. On the other, engagement in wars throughout centuries brought many victims. And an emphasis on cradles shows that transmission of historical and cultural knowledge needs new generations. The exposition of emic and etic publications about gusle shows the significance of the tradition for the contemporary culture. (Photo 23) Placing the book of his own, *Stazama predaka* [Ancestral paths], about his roots, the owner positioned himself within the created narrative. In the context of this exhibition, the tradition of singing to the accompaniment of the gusle stands out as a pillar of national belonging. It preserves the cultural memory bridging the past and the present.

The gusle display demonstrates the owner's collection that emerged gradually as the idea about the Museum was developing. They were acquired for the Museum or given as a gift. However, family gusle didn't make it through time and is not part of the exhibition. The collection shows fascinating examples of instruments depicting figures of historical importance or simple religious and floral elements. Gusle that drew my attention was gusle with Njegoš and Vuk's portraits, gusle with the cross, and monumental gusle portraying rulers and saints of the medieval dynasty Nemanjić. (Photo 24, 25) The selection of portrayed figures and their cultural and religious agency in shaping the national identity reflect the owner's curation of history. Together they represent the pantheon of Serbian heroes, and their positioning in the Museum of gusle speaks of the symbolical aspect of the museum location. The region of Raška carries a significant meaning in national cultural and political memory as the one-time powerful seat of the Nemanjić dynasty. In the mountain landscape of Kopaonik and Golija, surrounding the Museum are located many monasteries that testify to the Serbian political position in the Byzantine Empire and to the continuous preservation of particular religious practices. This gusle collection shows how decorative symbols on this instrument link the national history to the tradition and shape Serbian identity.

### **4.3 Exhibition "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia"**

Exhibition "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia" introduces the public to the ICH concept through elements inscribed in the National register and UNESCO's Representative List. The organizer of the exhibition was the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade. It presented one of its departments' work - the Centre for Intangible Heritage, responsible for implementing the 2003 Convention principles in Serbia. The exhibition was available to the Belgrade public during July and August in 2018 in the Ethnographic Museum's gallery space in Belgrade, after its debut in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The curators of this exhibition informed the general public about it through national, regional, and local broadcasting and newspapers across the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The exposition's multi-lingual character tells the intention of the curator to address the domestic and foreign public. The printed catalogue and the exhibition itself are presented in 3 languages, in Serbian and in two of the official languages used in UNESCO, English and French.

Massive architectural forms of the concrete museum facade translate to the confined, multi-story marble interior upon entering the building's main entrance. On the ground floor, the visitors can find to their left the temporary exhibition space where the Museum hosted its exhibition, and to their right the stairs leading to the permanent expositions. Opening exhibition panels in earthy shades on the hallway walls invite visitors to the bright gallery space. In contrast to the building's solid architectural forms, its high ceiling and glass openings towards the gallery's street-side give the impression of light and comfortable space. However, hanging panels blocked the outside and natural light, bringing thus the panels in focus instead. Just a few ethnographic objects, but numerous textual panels, and documentary photographs were telling the curator's intention to make information accessible to a broader audience and, in terms of production, transferable. Panel arrangement dictates clockwise movement through the exhibition, firstly introducing the National Register's elements and, in the end, the Representative List inscriptions.

The curator's main aim was to present the concept of ICH in Serbia through the National Register, and the choice of the guiding principle for exhibition conceptualization was the 2003 Convention itself. The selection of visual material, photos, maps, ethnographic

objects, and textual content tells three levels of the Convention agency: temporality, spatiality, and contemporaneity. At the time when I visited the exhibition, 37 elements were presented to the public. In the later edition of the exhibition prepared for the view in October and November 2019 in the Cultural Centre of Serbia in Paris, France, the number of elements had grown to 46. (The ICH of Serbia in the Serbian Cultural Center in Paris) The exhibition will be updated as new elements get inscribed to the lists. The Belgrade public was introduced to Slava and Kolo as representative heritage recognized by UNESCO and displayed in Paris, to which *the Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* was added after its nomination in December 2018. The dynamics of the National Register and Representative List inscriptions appear to reflect the ICH concept that suggests safeguarding "living heritage" and the exhibition adapts in consequence. Accordingly, the National Register is divided into 5 vernacular categories:

- oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- performing arts;
- social practices, rituals, and festive events;
- knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- traditional craftsmanship,

Those have been suggested by Article 2, paragraph 2 of the 2003 Convention. (2003 UNESCO) The elements on display have also been thus grouped and represented on a panel showing the map of the Republic of Serbia. (Photo 26) Although the Convention's language attempts to avoid compartmentalization of the traditions into territorial units, on the ground, spatiality has a vital role in defining social, economic, and political relations. (Bortolotto 2016)

Furthermore, each section presents a textual panel, photos, and museum object in a glass display case. Unlike the Ethnographic Museum that stages objects into different settings and categories, intending to represent the ways of the past life, the ICH exhibition's conceptualization is not as illustrative. The strongly text-based and minimalistic approach to the display avoids staging the tradition and delivers the aspect of the contemporaneity to the viewer. The "living heritage" of the Convention suggests organically developing traditions

and active participation of communities as the most effective measure of safeguarding. (2003 UNESCO) Therefore, to bring this aspect closer to the viewer, documentary photographs dominated the exhibition's visual presentation. Contradictory to this ICH aspect, the exhibition route ends with the section dedicated to the elements inscribed on the Representative List. The List, as suggested by the exhibition, is the main goal.

The textual representation presented by the section "Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH" informs visitors about the different practices present on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. It took the central part in the exposition; it hangs right in front of the viewer upon entering the gallery space. In turn, the gusle instrument, the photograph of a staged guslar performance surrounded by kids in costumes from Herzegovina and the instrument in the display case represent the main focus of this section. (Photo 27, 28) During my internship at the Museum, I visited the depot where the gusle collection is stored, and where I could marvel at the aesthetically and thematically complex and captivating examples of the instrument. Although the Museum has a vast collection of gusle from different historical periods, the exhibited gusle are contemporary and crafted by the gusle maker introduced at the beginning of the chapter. The resonator body of the instrument faced the visitors only by its front. Unavailable to the visitor's eye is the back depiction of the architectural object whose religious purpose is indicated by the cross rounded by bay leaves that symbolizes eternal glory. (Photo 29) Depicted on the back is an old chapel of Saint Petar of Cetinje in Lovćen mountain in Montenegro, a memorial in which remains of the Montenegrin Prince-bishop, 19th-century intellectual Petar II Petrović Njegoš rested.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the visitor's gaze is drawn to the chamois head sculptural neck ending and a portrait of Vuk Karadžić in the medallion at its bottom. On both sides of the gusle neck are citations *Krv je ljudska rana naopaka* [Human blood is dangerous nourishment] from Mountain Wreath and *Čas i bruka živjeće dovjeka* [Honor and shame live forever] both assigned to Njegoš. Inscriptions are in Serbian Cyrillic letters. (Photo 30, 31)

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<sup>13</sup>The chapel was built in 1845 but got damaged in WWI by the Austro-Hungarian military forces. A monumental project by architect and sculptor Ivan Meštrović replaced the Rotonda architectural object. About the history of the Mausoleum: (Žunjić 2013).

The Gusle instrument in the exhibition context stands as a symbol of the section's complex idea that it represents. It becomes a symbol of the oral tradition, oral expression, and language illustrated by the visual depictions employed in its decorative parts. The sculptural decoration of the chamois head at the neck's end belongs to the pagan visual repertoire that translates otherworldly creatures' chthonic beliefs for the present viewer. (Čolović 2008: 136) Portrait of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić depicts him with the *fes* cap and long moustache. In Serbian visual culture, Vuk's depictions symbolize a person whose embodiment represents the national culture and language's epitome. (Dobrašinović 1975) Karadžić's agency during the 19th century on the language reform and folklore collecting gave the foundations to the Serbian cultural identity. With the aim of broader literacy, he standardized folk language and adjusted Cyrillic letters to the Serbian population's spoken language. The citations promote universal values of heroism, peacefulness, and honorableness, but together with the depiction at the back, they aim to glorify the work of Njegoš. His intellectual agency and literary production supported Karadžić's language reform. The craftsman of the gusle instrument explains the symbolical presence of Vuk Karadžić and Njegoš in its decorative parts as an ode to their legacy. In the exhibition context, the continuity of language preservation expressed through symbols reflects one of the cultural development goals, the revitalization of the Serbian Cyrillic letter. (Strategija razvoja kulture 2020: 72-73)

## Conclusion

This multi-level inquiry has taken a closer look at the process of creating a representation of a particular tradition in Serbia. The tradition of *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* has been nominated and inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This thesis shows the agency in heritage making of the actors involved in the process. This agency is defined by and operates in the framework that follow the guidelines of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which have been adopted by Serbia that has ratified the Convention. It is confined in its territoriality, also in a specific timeframe. The representatives of the community of practice and the representatives instrumental on the institutional level - experts and governmental officials have been actively collaborating in the initial stages of the representation making. Therefore, the data collected for this thesis actually demonstrate the expectations connected with such nomination while pointing at aspects of representation that are contested and conflicting with the textual counterpart. In the attempt to see how formulations in the UNESCO nomination act as textual representations and assess the situation in the field, in this thesis, my analysis of the data presented reflect tensions of heritage negotiations, uneven power relations and how discursive systems of knowledge overlap and to what degree they contradict one another.

As shown in the theoretical part of this thesis, a representation may act as an open-ended knowledge-making system. The conceptualisation of culture on a discursive practice that UNESCO suggests implies representational changes. Therefore, textual representations in nomination files act more as idealised and desired models. As representation depends on many actors, the process of negotiation puts forward their expectations of desired results. UNESCO offers a framework that, ideally, in a synchronised system of developed legislative system and even power relations act as a catalyst for change. When understood through Foucauldian discourse analysis, it is evident that representation is not a stable category but an open-ended system. The nomination of *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* attests to this fluidity of category when the tradition "on the ground" shows attempts to consolidate different discursive systems of knowledge. On the one hand, concept of "living heritage" instructed from above teaches community of Guslars reevaluation of the tradition through

naming of the tradition, series of lectures and bureaucratic processes. On the other, and it is maybe too risky to say, the community itself, in its organisational form and identity expressions operates in a specific "tradition" discourse. In its representational manifestations of the relationships between tradition and religion, tradition and language, shown in this thesis, community of Guslars shape the tradition discourse. Heritage bearers manifest strong national and religious identifications that appear to contradict the textual representation of the nomination. However, as much as this representation can be defined and confined textually, power relations are processual and changeable in accordance with social change. Further observations and fieldwork analysis of the latter processes might tell more about the direction of such change.

Hierarchical orders depicted in the data analysis of the thesis demonstrate uneven power relations. Nonetheless, power doesn't have to be seen as harmful, as long as it engenders (more) even power distribution. In my analysis, I have put much more effort into understanding how uneven power relations affect communities. However, the organisational structure of the institutional level shows that upper structures of the system, as well as lower ones, manifest uneven power distribution. The representatives instrumental on the institutional level in the attempt to consolidate the expectations of many actors involved face challenges. Methodological adjustments of institutions to the new concept, as it is the case with the Ethnographic museum in Belgrade, show that occurring tensions are adjustments to the new cultural paradigm. Regarding the power relations between the upper and lower structures of the system, it seems that the nomination of Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle supports discursive institutional practices and governmental polity. On a macro level, the tradition is consolidated with ongoing nation-branding tendencies in Serbia and through touristic representations, exhibitions, monumental art attests in its economical, identity and linguistic reforms and reformulations.

The community of guslars is represented and defined by the Union of Serbian Guslars. Embeddedness of the tradition in the national and religious identification of its practitioners makes it an instrument of power and has a potential of putting the community in a vulnerable position. Past negative experiences of the community as an object of political instrumentalization generate fear of reoccurrence and put forward expectations. Emphasis on

apolitical characteristic of the tradition encountered during the fieldwork, reflect these instrumentalization induced anxieties. “Unrepresentative” aspect of the tradition that entails politically sensitive recent histories generates fear that also sets grounds for the tradition essentializations and defining of what is traditional in the tradition. Strong national and religious identifications among tradition practitioners and competitiveness as tradition’s regulatory system bring forward questions of ownership and possibility of future openness to the shared aspect of the nomination. Another question that this characteristic brings about is to what degree institutional power has a power to regulate possible tensions as such.

The *Singing to the accompaniment of the Gusle* could be studied further from the aspect of creating a representation may be in two directions. The topic is rich in context and meanings and can possibly inspire research in representation making that transcends Serbian territory. Also, it could be analysed how contested narratives of national identity and belonging relating to the tradition of epic singing get consolidated in the multi-national UNESCO nomination. On the other hand, development on the semiotic approach to the study of representation may offer interesting results in critical heritage studies in relation to the identity formation and processes of identification. Importance of the studies as such lays in its applied potential and contribution to the studies of heritage discourse. Studies of representation and its development in the UNESCO framework may give insight of how created systems of knowledge do contribute to the social changes imagined by the organization.

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## **Estonian Résumé**

### **Representatsiooni loomine: gusli saatel laulmise esitamine UNESCO vaimse kultuuripärandi nominendiks**

Käesolevas lõputöös uuritakse, kuidas UNESCO inimkonna vaimse kultuuripärandi esindusnimekirja nominatsiooniprotsessis erinevate osapoolte osalusel luuakse traditsiooni representatsiooni. Kohalike praktikate UNESCO kultuuripärandi nimekirja lisamisel sisenevad traditsioonilised teadmised avalikku sfääri ja toimivad kultuuripärandi diskursuse reeglite järgi. Lõputöö fookuses on 2018. aasta detsembris nimekirja lisatud Gusle saatel laulmise traditsioon. Selle tava kohaselt esitatakse valdavalt kümnesilbiliste värsiridadega eepilisi laule ühekeelise vahtrapuust instrumendi saatel.

Kuigi Gusle mängimise tava on levinud mitmes Balkani riigis, sealhulgas Horvaatias, Bosnias, Hertsegoviinas, Montenegros, Albaanias ning samuti rahvusvaheliselt tunnustamata Kosovos, esitas vaid Serbia Member State partei nominatsiooni taotluse. Kultuuripärandi kui inimkonna väärtuse tunnustamise protsessiga kaasnevad ettevalmistused, milles osalevad mitmed osapooled riiklikul ja rahvusvahelisel tasandil. Välitööd erinevates asukohtades võimaldasid mõista nominatsiooniprotsessiga kaasnevaid väljakutseid ning kuidas asutused ja gusle kogukond seda protsessi tõlgendavad. Erinev esindatus nominatsiooniprotsessis toob esile võimu jaotumise hierarhiates ning osapoolte kavatsused ja nende mõju. Esindajate struktuuride vaatlemine nominatsiooniprotsessis võimaldas mul ka mõista, kuidas jagatud aspekt suhestus situatsiooniga kohapeal.

Käesolevas uurimuses uuritakse gusle traditsiooni kriitiliste pärandiuuringute vaatevinklist ning antakse ülevaate representatsiooni analüüsist kultuuripärandi diskursuses. Uurimus tugineb representatsiooni teoreetilistele kontseptualisatsioonidele ja selle poliitilistele aspektidele ning sellele, kuidas materiaalne kultuur kujundab identiteetide representatsioone, mida hinnatakse mitmetasandilisuse ja autoetnograafia meetodiliste lähenemisviiside abil. Ma olen uurinud representatsiooni loomist erinevatel tasanditel viies läbi intervjuusid ning osalusvaatlust, uurides dokumentatsioone, toetudes oma visuaalsetele kogemustele ning loodud suhetele Serbia erinevate esindajatega:

- Serbia Guslari Liit kogukonna nimel;
- Serbia Vaimse Kultuuripärandi Keskus, valitsuse asutus, mis vastutas nominatsiooniprotsessi ning UNESCO-ga läbirääkimiste eest;
- Akadeemik, kes on spetsialiseerunud sellele traditsioonile

Olen käsitlenud sotsiaalseid ja poliitilisi protsesse, mis kujundavad eepose esitust tänu nominatsioonile, Selles lõputöös tõlgendatud andmed selgitavad traditsiooni ja religiooni ning traditsiooni ja keele suhteid ning seda, kuidas see kandub edasi rahvuslike identiteedimarkerite representatsioonidesse. Retoorika ja kasutatud sümbolid paljastavad pingeid kultuurilise identiteedi voolavuses, mis on tingitud Balkani riikide geopoliitilise ruumi siserändest ja ümberkujundamisest. Traditsiooni hajutatud territoriaalne kohalolek ja selle kinnistumine kultuurilisse identifitseerimisse on aga vastuolus rahvusliku identiteediga. Mitmetasandiline traditsiooni representatsiooni loomise uurimine demonstreerib loomingu protsessuaalsust.

## ANNEX 1. List of Photographs



Photo 1: Jovanović, Anastas. Between 1848–1860. “Serbs around gusle player.” (Wikimedia Source)

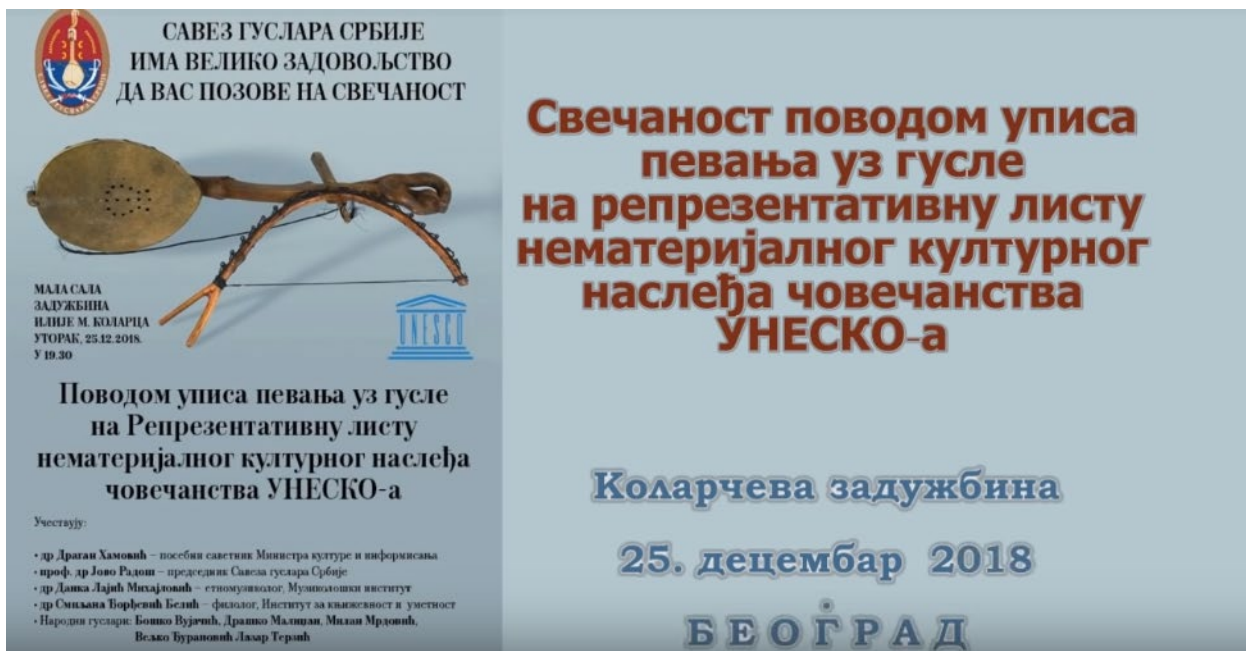


Photo 2: Singing to the accompaniment of gusle celebration video – screenshot. “The event’s announcement poster.” 2019.



Photo 3: Singing to the accompaniment of gusle celebration video – screenshot. “Saint George gusle hanging at the rostrum’s fore, in front of guslars.” 2019.



Photo 4: Singing to the accompaniment of gusle celebration video – screenshot. “Guslar’s traditional costumes.” 2019.



Photo 5: Singing to the accompaniment of gusle celebration video – screenshot. “Saint George neck’s end sculpture and Saint Sava portrait at the performer’s instrument neck.” 2019.



Photo 6: Stradner, Katarina. "Gusle maker's living room." 2019.



Photo 7: Stradner, Katarina. "Gusle maker's living room – pile on the ground showing different objects." 2019.

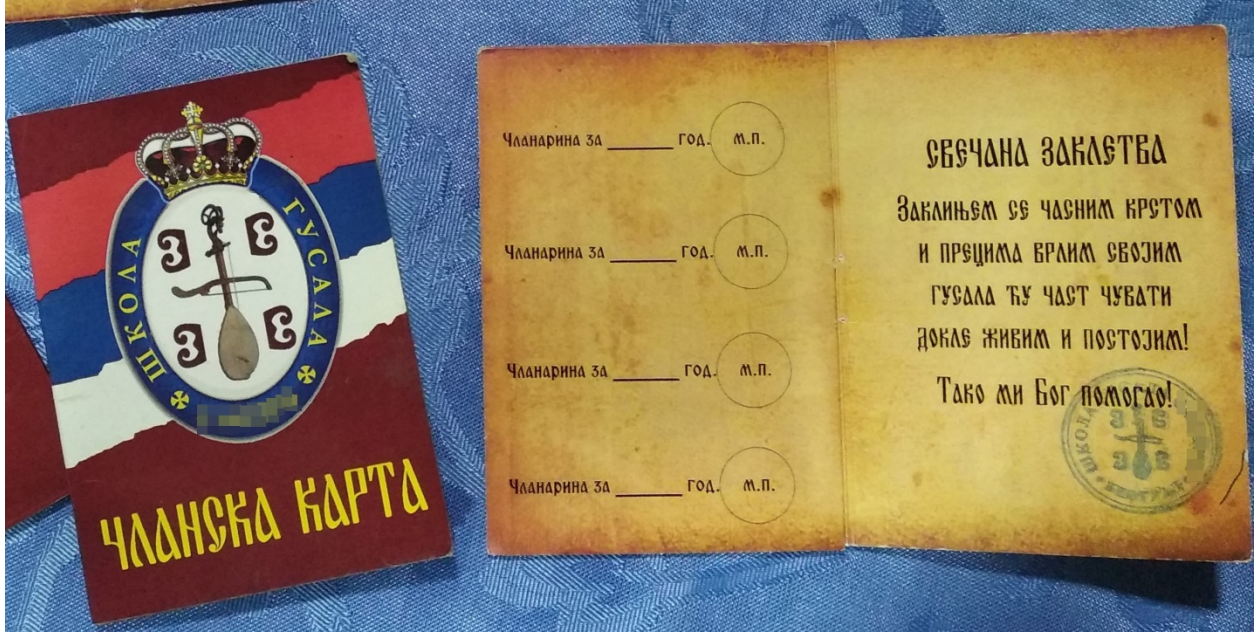


Photo 8: Stradner, Katarina. “Private gusle school’s membership card: at the front is the school’s coat of arms on the background in Serbian flag’s colours, and at the back of the inside shows an oath for its members.” 2019.



Photo 9: Stradner, Katarina. "Private school of gusle in Belgrade interior." 2019.



Photo 10: Stradner, Katarina. "Private school of gusle in Belgrade interior." 2019.



Photo 11: Stradner, Katarina. “Gusle maker’s living room – wall with Serbian coat of arms at the top, icons, Serbian ethnographic objects, portraits of gusle maker in Montenegrin folk and eclectic costume.” 2019.



Photo 12: Stradner, Katarina. "Gusle maker's eclectic costume." 2019.



Photo 13: Stradner, Katarina. "Gusle maker's bedroom – representative gusle depicting Yugoslav president Tito, Miloš Obilić, Saint George hang on the wall with competition diploma recognitions and Kosovo Maiden gusle are on the bed." 2019.



Photo 14: Stradner, Katarina. "Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška." 2019.



Photo 15: Stradner, Katarina. "Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška – family tree."  
2019.





Photo 17: Stradner, Katarina. "Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška - interior." 2019.



Photo 18: Stradner, Katarina. "Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška - interior." 2019.



Photo 19: Stradner, Katarina. “Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška – central wall with the museums coat of arms at the top and Njegoš and Karadžić gusle hanged bellow it.”

2019.



Photo 20: Stradner, Katarina. "Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška - interior." 2019.



Photo 21: Stradner, Katarina. “Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška – panel with citations about gusle by Mihailo Pupin, Adam Mickiewicz, Niccolò Tommaseo, Ivo Andrić, and exhibition’s author.” 2019.



Photo 22: Stradner, Katarina. “Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška – panel with citations about gusle by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, Petar Petrović Njegoš, Jacob Grimm, Nikola Tesla, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.” 2019.



Photo 23: Stradner, Katarina. “Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška – Several numbers of the Gusle magazine published by the Union of Serbian guslars.” 2019.



Photo 24: Stradner, Katarina. "Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška – front of the Nemanjić Dynasty gusle." 2019.



Photo 25: Stradner, Katarina. "Museum of gusle in Gnjilice village, Raška – back of the Nemanjić Dynasty gusle." 2019.



Photo 26: Stradner, Katarina. “Exhibition *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia* – elements of the National Register of the ICH listed on the panel background showing the map of the Republic of Serbia.” 2019.



Photo 27: Stradner, Katarina. “Exhibition *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia – Textual panel of the exhibition section Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH.*” 2019.



Photo 28: Stradner, Katarina. "Exhibition *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia – Gusle* instrument representing the exhibition section *Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH.*" 2019.



Photo 29: Stradner, Katarina. “Exhibition *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia – Back of the gusle instrument representing the exhibition section Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH.*” 2019.



Photo 30: Stradner, Katarina. “Exhibition *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia – Side of the gusle instrument representing the exhibition section Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH.*” 2019.



Photo 31: Stradner, Katarina. "Exhibition *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia – Side of the gusle instrument representing the exhibition section *Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH.*" 2019.*

## ANNEX 2: List of Figures



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Photograph on the cover page: Kadinjača Memorial Park, XX century



Gradac Monastery, 13<sup>th</sup> century,  
fresco detail



## UNESCO IN SERBIA

# We are the World

Do you want to see the world? Then you should visit small towns and participate in local customs. It can be done that way! You will find a part of what makes up the cultural identity of all of humankind in Serbia – at family celebrations, archaeological sites, picturesque landscapes and museum shelves.

### WORLD HERITAGE LIST



[www.serbia.travel](http://www.serbia.travel)



### 1 Studenica Monastery, Kraljevo, 12<sup>th</sup> century

Endowment of the founder of the Serbian medieval dynasty. The fortified walls of the monastery surround four churches.

### 2 Stari Ras (Old Ras) and Sopoćani, Novi Pazar, 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century

The Sopoćani and Đurđevi Stupovi (Tracts of Saint George) monasteries, Peter's Church and the remains of the Ras and Gradina fortresses are authentic testimonies of the oldest forms of artistic expression of the Serbian people, in architecture and painting.



**3 Medieval monuments in Kosovo and Metohija, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century**

Dečani Monastery, the Patriarchate of Peć, Gračanica Monastery and the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviš reflect the peak of the Byzantine-Romanesque culture, with a unique style of fresco painting.

\*\*Kosovo e Metohija sono attualmente sotto l'amministrazione dell'UNMIK, secondo quanto previsto dalla Risoluzione 1244 del Consiglio di sicurezza delle Nazioni Unite.



**4 Archaeological site Felix Romuliana, Zaječar, 4<sup>th</sup> century**

Imperial residence surrounded by strong ramparts, with imperial palace and temple, decorated with mosaics, frescoes and sculptures.

**5 Medieval tombstones (stećci), Bajina Bašta and Prijepolje, 12<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> century**

Medieval tombstones are a testament to the origins of a European people in the central Balkans and to the spiritual life of our ancestors. Listed together with stećci in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia.



33



**6 Nikola Tesla's Archive, 1856-1943.**  
Nikola Tesla Museum – Belgrade

**7 Miroslav's Gospel, around 1180**  
National Museum in Belgrade

One of the most beautiful handwritten books with miniatures of exceptional beauty that are the result of a merging of the styles of the East and the West.

**8 The Austro-Hungarian government's declaration of war in a telegram sent to the government of Serbia in 1914**  
Archives of Serbia – Belgrade

The telegram that marked the beginning of the First World War was sent from Vienna on 28 July 1914.





**REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF  
THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL  
HERITAGE OF HUMANITY**

**10 Kolo**

A traditional folk dance in which dancers hold hands, forming a circle. Get into the circle, engage in a conversation on the move, lead the dance and let the dance lead you – get in the kolo!



**9 Slava**

A celebration of an Orthodox Serbs' family patron saints' day. Slava is celebrated by the family and the family's friends, respecting traditional customs.

**11 Singing to the accompaniment of the gusle**

With the help of a bow and a single string, skilled guslars sang about numerous events from national history. Singing with a gusle is a symbol of national memory and a means of preserving identity that has survived for centuries.



Figure 1: National tourism organisation of Serbia. Front page, table of content and *UNESCO in Serbia: We are the World* in Adventures of the Spirit: The Cultural Heritage of Serbia. 2019.

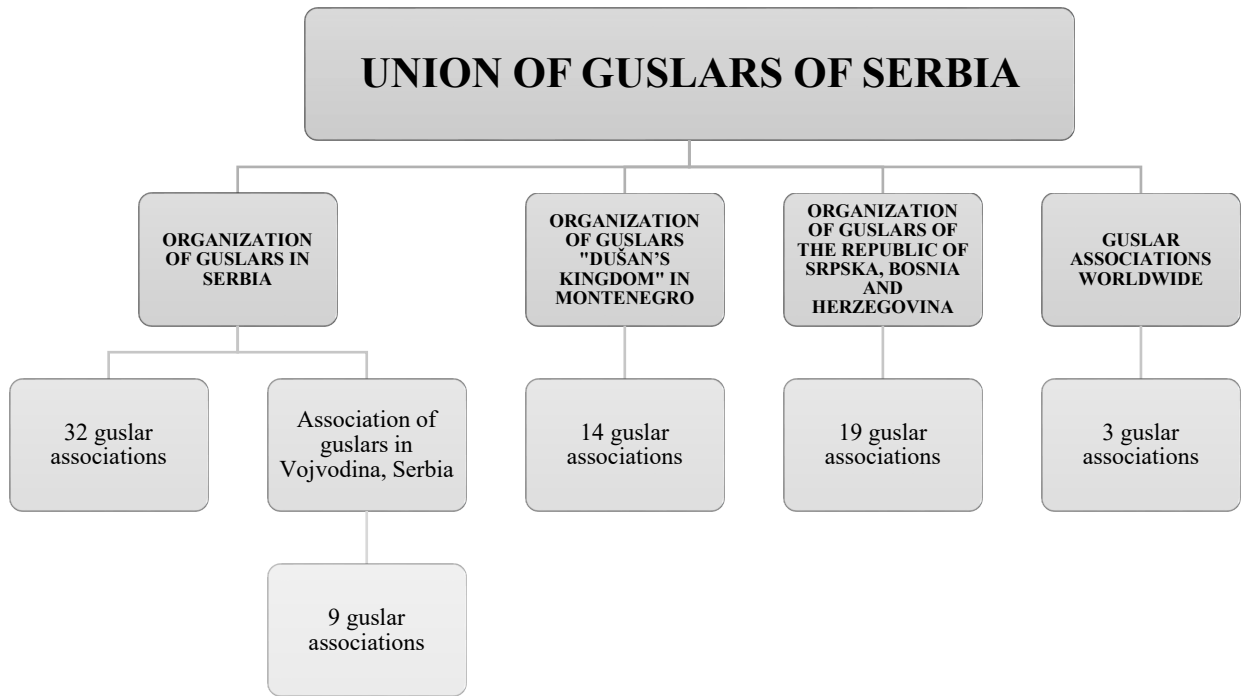


Figure 2: Organizational structure of Serbian guslars

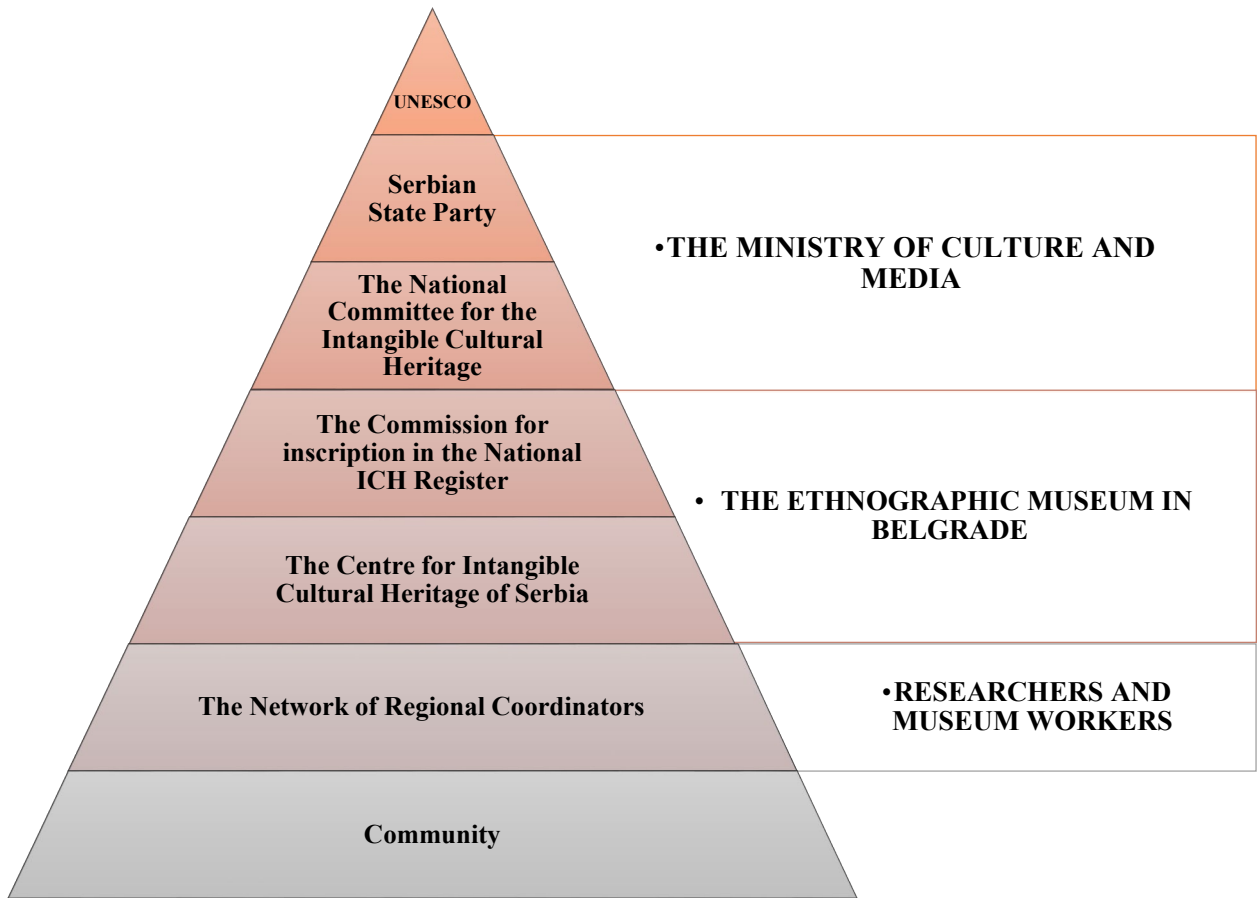


Figure 3: The organizational structure of the ICH Network in Serbia

Application of the Convention on the Protection of the Intangible  
cultural heritage (ICH) at the national level

IMP(?) 5.6 Inventorying

Page 175

FORM FOR IDENTIFICATION OF ICH ELEMENTS, THROUGH ELABORATION OF ONE OR MORE  
INVENTORY.<sup>1</sup>

Identification of the ICH element

1.1. Name of the ICH element used by the community to which it refers.

1.2. Short informative name of the ICH element (including indication of the ICH domain)

1.3. Community (communities) to which the ICH element refers.

1.4. Physical locality (s) / frequency of distribution of ICH element.

1.5. Short description of the ICH element (recommended not longer than 200 words).

<sup>1</sup> This form has been adapted from the UNESCO website: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc> State Parties are free to draw up their own inscriptions forms and inventories; this form is just a suggestion. States are encouraged to adapt it to their needs as they wish. Note that inventory entries only serve to identify and define, not to describe ICH elements in detail. Therefore, answers to questions 1-5 should not exceed 1000 words.

2.Characteristics of the ICH element
2.1.Performer (s) / exacutor (s) directly involved in the performing and maintenaning of the ICH element (state name, age, gender, education, profession, etc.)
2.2.Other members of the community who are not directly involved, but who contribute to the maintenance of the ICN element or facilitate the performance or transmission (eg. stage or costume preparation, training, monitoring)
2.3.Language (s) or dialect (s) used
2.4. Material elements (such as instruments, special clothing or space (s), ritual objects) (if any) associated with the performance or transmission of the ICH element
2.5.Other intangible elements (if any) that are related to the transmission or performing of the specified ICH element
2.6.Restrictions in access to the ICH element or its aspects
2.7. Ways of transmission to other members of the community
2.8.Relevant organizations (community organizations, NGOs, others) (if any)
3. State of the ICH element: sustainability
3.1.Factors endangering (if any) the survival of the ICH within the relevant community or more

3.2. Factors that jeopardize (if any) the transmission of ICH within the relevant community (s)
3.3. Factors that jeopardize access to material elements and resources (if any) related to the ICH element
3.4. Sustainability of other intangible elements of heritage (if any) related to the ICH element
3.5. Active protection or other measures that exist (if any) in relation to any of these risk factors, which enable the execution and transmission of the ICH element in the future
3.6. Plan for the active protection measures
4. Consent of the bearers of the tradition
4.1. A statement from the relevant community (s) and their involvement in the data collection
4.2. Restrictions, if any, on the use or access to the collected data
4.3. Person in charge of data (or more of them): name and status or affiliation to the organization
4.4. Date (s) and place (s) of data collection
5. References related to the ICH element (if any)
5.1. Literature (if any)

5.2. Audio-visual materials, recorded material, etc. in archives, museums and private collections (if any)
5.3. Documentary material and objects in archives, museums and private collections (if any)
6. Data inventorying
6.1. Person (s) who made the data entry
6.2. Proof of permission from the relevant community (s) for a) inventorying of the element, and b) for information included in the inventory
6.3. Date of data entry in the inventory

Figure 4: English translation of the Center for ICH's element inscription form for the National Register in Serbia

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