

Reconstruction and restoration of traditional costumes within the scope of the Ministry of Culture Project *Reconstruction and Restoration of Traditional Cultural Heritage in the Cvelferija Area, Županjska Posavina*

AN EXAMPLE OF APPLIED ETHNOLOGY – INITIAL CONDITION, RESULTS, PROSPECTS

- The article reviews and explains the professional framework of the Project *Reconstruction and Restoration of Traditional Cultural Heritage in the Cvelferija Area, Županjska Posavina*, with special reference to traditional national costumes and textile handicrafts. Bearing in mind professional guidelines and the use of valuable museum and other material of cultural&historical significance as models for reconstruction, and the so far observed positive developments in the field, it may be expected that local folklore societies and dedicated individuals will endeavour, in the future, to produce and present high quality traditional costumes.

Key words: traditional national costume, reconstruction of traditional national costume, Cvelferija, Županjska Posavina

INTRODUCTION

Along with immobile and mobile cultural goods, the floods which struck parts of Županjska Posavina also damaged and destroyed many privately and publicly owned

traditional national costume items.¹ Following up on the measures taken by the Government of the Republic of Croatia – the Law on the Post-Disaster Rehabilitation and Recovery of Vukovar-Srijem County (*Official Gazette*, 77, 2014), and the Decision on the Programme of Post-Disaster Rehabilitation and Recovery of Vukovar-Srijem County – Restoration of Cultural Goods and Cultural Infrastructure, and the Restoration of Cultural Activities (*Official Gazette*, 82, 2014),² in December 2014 the Ministry of Culture launched the *Reconstruction and Restoration of Traditional Cultural Heritage in the Cvelferija Area, Županjska Posavina* Project. Its objective was the revive – after the provision of basic living conditions – cultural life within the scope of national identity expression primarily in the flood-affected villages and then throughout *Cvelferija*.³ Along with the acquisition of musical instruments (solo and orchestra tamburas), the plan of project implementation included the reconstruction of more than sixty representative ensembles of various variants of traditional garments to be donated to the local folklore societies. Along with the dedicated staff of the Ministry of Culture – the Direction for Culture and Art Development and its the Music Department responsible for amateur art and culture activities – at different levels of implementation the project involved a considerable number of individuals (from ethnologists, folklore experts and restorers/& reconstructors to craftsmen and the local population) and institutions (the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, the National Costume Rental and Production Workshop and the Community of Culture&Art Activities of Vukovar-Srijem County).

This work is based on the technical study prepared in the Ministry of Culture for the requirements of the Project in late 2014; it also served as the background for the presentation of *The Heritage and Natural Disasters. Floods in Croatia in 2014 – Consequences and Prospects*, at the scientific and technical meeting of the Croatian Ethnological Society (25-26 May 2015).⁴

THE PROJECT – IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND STAKEHOLDERS

As indicated in the introduction, because of its extensive scope and specific features of various implementation stages, the *Reconstruction and Restoration of Traditional*

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- 1 Today the term „national costume“ refers equally to older and more recent garments worn by the rural population in the last quarter of the 19th century and generally up to the mid-20th century. With specific variants of type and style this included “everyday” (older) clothing, occasional festive (recent) clothing and, finally, dress combinations of varied significance and symbolism applied since the second half of the 20th century for folklore&art and tourist purposes and/or in the media” (Bušić 2014: 168-169). Hereinafter I shall mainly use the syntagm “traditional garments”. For more information on the etymology and use of the term “national costume” see Kristić (2002/2003), Muraj (2006), Kale (2008).
 - 2 The Programme of Post-Disaster Rehabilitation and Recovery of Vukovar-Srijem County – Restoration of Cultural Goods and Cultural Infrastructure, and the Restoration of Cultural Activities (*Official Gazette*, 82, 2014) refers to: immobile cultural goods (churches and the like), mobile cultural goods (holdings of the *Stjepan Gruber* Regional Museum in Županja) and traditional cultural heritage (clothing, housing, economic activities).
 - 3 *Cvelferija* – popular name for eight villages in Županjska Posavina; described in greater detail in the chapter on *Županjska Posavina – Physical and Historical Scope*.
 - 4 The presentation *An Example of Applied Technology - Initial Condition, Results, Prospects* introduced the project and the scope of local culture and art creativity, and explained their significance in the context of the confirmation and statement of regional identity. In his follow-up, *The Project as an Incentive for the Revival of Traditional Textile Handicrafts in Cvelferija* Josip Forjan presented the stages of project implementation in the field and the results of practical work on national costume reconstruction with particular reference to the revival of traditional textile handicrafts in Cvelferija.

*Cultural Heritage in Cvelferija, Županjska Posavina*⁵ Project involved a substantial number of collaborators. The Ministry of Culture supervised the professional, technical and financial implementation of the programme and the work of all the stakeholders participating in its execution, whereas ZAKUD (Community of Culture&Art Activities of Vukovar-Srijem County), was responsible as project leader for the coordination of technical implementation. The chief coordinator of the professional programming implementation related to national costume was Katarina Bušić, Senior Curator of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, Head of the Collection of Eastern Croatian National Costumes; the chief coordinator on the ground was Josip Forjan, head of the National Costume Rental and Production Workshop. In order to provide for continuous communication with the stakeholders on the ground, the project collaborators included Karolina Tomić Žaper, head of the *Posavac* Cultural and Performing Society (*KUD*) of Vrbanja and Ivan Zlatunić, costume designer of the *KUD Kristal Sladorana* of Županja – both familiar with regional folklore traditions.

Since the Ministry of Culture and the engaged professional staff requested that parts of traditional garments should be produced as much as feasible on the ground, in the villages affected by the flood and surrounding localities, due mention should be made of the high involvement of the local community, and especially of individuals familiar with the required traditional textile skills, primarily various embroidery (satin stitch and satin stitch on counted threads).⁶ The production of the attendant footwear types, upper clothing and caps was entrusted – because of the specific features involved – to local and other craftsmen.

The Project deadline was set in 2015, and the presentation of results in the following year. The final initiative involves the presentation of the Project and the implementation of all the set objectives through exhibitions, traditional costume shows, publications, and lectures and theme-focused workshops on the ground, intended to help the ultimate users, local folklore societies, in their future work and presentation of regional folklore traditions.

ARGUMENTATION OF TRADITIONAL COSTUME RECONSTRUCTION AND REVIVAL

ŽUPANJSKA POSAVINA – PHYSICAL AND HISTORICAL SCOPE

Županjska Posavina occupies the southern and southeastern part of Vukovar-Srijem County. In the south it borders on the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosanska

5 According to the basic document of the Ministry of Culture – the technical implementation plan - the project included the following stages: 1. Damage report – planning of measures and rehabilitation activities; 2. Ethnological explorations; 3. Project documentation – work methodology; 4. Garment reconstruction in line with museum originals – production; 5. Acquisition - production of traditional instruments; 6 Interim reports – final report; 7. Public presentation.

6 Unfortunately, throughout Cvelferija there is only one woman weaver, but because the large quantity of required thin cloth she was not willing to assume the responsibility for the work. Therefore, the weaving of thin, clean, unpatterned cloth, *misir*, and decorative tatting (*čunčanje*, an old technique now forgotten in Cvelferija), was entrusted to weaver Ana Božinović of Bapska.

Posavina) and in the east on Serbia (Vojvodina, Srijem). The current settlements, grouped in several municipalities, mainly gravitate toward Županja, Vinkovci and, partly, Slavonski Brod. The dominant ethnic group are autochthonous Croats, *Šokci*, who still, especially elderly people, speak the old *štokavian/ikavian* dialect. Other ethnic groups include Bosniaks in Gunja and Slovaks in Soljani.

Microregionally, most of the Županjska Posavina settlements are divided into two territorial and historical units – *Elferija* and *Cvelferija*. The name *Cvelferija* is still in use and highlighted in expressing the regional identity of the local population, whereas the name *Elferija* has almost been forgotten. The division and the names date from the times of the Croatian Military Frontier. It bordered on the Ottoman Empire and was under the authority of the Seventh Brod Infantry Regiment subdivided into several small military administration units, companies (*kompanija*, *kumpanija*). After a major restructuring in 1807, Županja became the headquarters of the 11th Company (11 = German *elf*, hence *Elferija*), and the village of Drenovci the headquarters of the 12th Company (12 = German *zwölf*, hence *Cvelferija*). Županja, Bošnjaci and Štitar belonged to *Elferija*, and Drenovci, Đurići, Gunja, Posavski Podgajci, Račinovci, Rajevo Selo, Soljani and Vrbanja to *Cvelferija*. Even after this restructuring of the Frontier the village of Strošinci remained under the authority of the Petrovaradin Regiment. When the borders of the Yugoslav federal republics were defined after World War Two (1945 to 1947), the village was included in the Socialist Republic of Croatia and is considered to be part of the region under consideration.

In the last quarter of the 19th century Županjska Posavina underwent many changes. The Military Frontier, the specific administrative-military-defensive territory of the Habsburg (Austro-Hungarian) Empire, which included the region for more than 150 years, was abolished in 1873.⁷ Eight more years had to elapse until its final integration into *Banska Hrvatska* (autonomous part of Croatia). The same period saw the enhanced disintegration of rural family cooperatives, hitherto particularly supported by the military administration, which were the foundation of economic and social life. The dissolution of the cooperatives was followed by the disappearance of traditional rural life. The social stratification of the population was enhanced by immigrants, mainly craftsmen and merchants, from various parts of the Monarchy, and a great number of initially seasonal forestry workers from the mountainous parts of Croatia. The vast forestry resources, formerly under *Krajina* administration, became the property of forestry associations and government forestry agencies. The quantity and quality of timber attracted foreign entrepreneurs, mainly Englishmen, Frenchmen and Hungarians, who developed the wood and timber industry in Županjska Posavina. The

7 After more than one hundred and fifty years of Ottoman rule in Slavonia, the Treaty of Karlowitz (signed by the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire) in 1699 created the conditions for the final arrangement of the area, and the Imperial Chamber and the Imperial War Council divided Slavonia into the civil part, *Paorija*, also called *Provincijal*, and the Military Frontier proper bordering on the Ottoman Empire. After the mid-18th century the Frontier was administered by military administration bodies, regiments. They consisted of smaller units, companies (*kompanija*, *kumpanija*). In the organisation of life and work in the Military Frontier (*Vojna Krajina*) the military authorities implemented for almost two hundred years a number of economic, educational, health and military measures crucial for the development of the area, leaving a deep trace in the mentality and living habits of the local inhabitants who still, in presenting their regional identity, highlight the Frontier past and the role of "Europe's defenders from the Turkish yoke".

foreign immigrants also brought along many European novelties, e.g., contemporary European *haute couture* and new sports. The local male population earned a living by hauling logs from the forests to navigable waterways or railway depots. They earned, and memories of that still live in the area, quite a few gold coins, *ducats*, and many autochthonous families soon became rich. The sudden improvement of the economic circumstances of the local families was also reflected in the many ducats adorning the garments of marriageable girls and young married women. According to Josip Lovretić, “gold and ducats flowed from here into the Krajina” (1990: 121).

All these changes throughout Županjska Posavina, and especially in *Cvelferija*, brought about many changes in traditional culture. One of the most conspicuous ones referred to traditional clothing, i.e., to its early disappearance from daily use and acceptance of modern, middle-class dress, and materials and cuts from “Vienna and Budapest”, already in the last quarter of the 19th century. This was especially the case among the female population. For many narrators this is a “loss of identity”.

THE TRADITIONAL COSTUMES OF CVELFERIJA – CONDITION, PRESENTATION, PROSPECTS

In current considerations of the traditional garments of *Cvelferija* the term is meant to mean the fairly uniform type of festive national costumes (basic white garments, black silk upper garments, goldwork embroidery applied with a satin stitch or over cardboard (or tracing paper) and designed traditionally between the turn of the 19th century and used up to the mid-20th century. Extensive material evidence, photographs and memories have been preserved about these garments, which differed from the former simple costumes (*starovirsko ruho*) in terms of appearance, cut, material and ornaments (Forjan 2003: 25).

With the exception of some details, the folk costumes of *Cvelferija* are distinguished by materials, cut, ornamentation and use which are identical, in terms of style and type, with the traditional rural clothing in the so-called Srijemska Šokadija and in the Šokci villages in eastern Srijem (Serbia). In these regions the daily use of old, traditional garb was abandoned very early on, while later, fairly uniform clothing, was used throughout the 20th century exclusively on the occasion of major church festivities or for folklore shows.

The cultural and performing societies (*KUDs*) in *Cvelferija* mainly appear at folklore and similar events in Slavonia and Srijem such as *Šokačko sijelo*, *Vinkovačke jeseni*, *Đakovački vezovi*, *Raspjevana Cvelferija*, *Kičeni Srijem* and others. At such events the villages of *Cvelferija* are recognised precisely by the mentioned folk costumes with gold embroidery considered to be the most representative and most attractive. In a way this costume type is one of the salient features of the identity of *Cvelferija*. The daily, more rustic forms of clothing are present on stage only during performances illustrating daily chores or, less frequently, in appearances by women’s singing groups.

As regards generally the dress of folklore societies/groups in the region, criticism has mostly been levelled for years at sloppy appearance, untidy girls' hairdo and women's headgear, and neglected details. Thus, women rarely put on the required greater number of underskirts which actually represent the basis for the proper appearance and arrangement of the skirts proper. Similarly, the top skirt was not arranged in proper, perpendicular folds. Girls often arranged their hair in a so-called fishbone fashion, and women appeared in poorly set headgear or, even worse, without it. Along with traditional forms, modern footwear could also be seen sometimes on the stage. Such a situation was due to the early dropping of traditional costumes, inadequate commitment of some members of the cultural and performing societies, inadequate awareness of the need to complete the costumes and wear them in a tidy and the proper way, and to the lack of continuous, constructive technical criticism and advice focused on the garments or on combinations of all the mentioned elements.

The need to produce new parts of costumes grew at an even increasing rate in the nineteen-twenties throughout Croatia, *Cvelferija* included, within the scope of a specific cultural movement focused on the revival and reconstruction of national costumes as symbols of regional and/or national identity. This regarded in particular the younger members of folklore groups. Many failed, inadequate solutions were observed in the period: unsuitable linen and manufactured fabrics, embroideries arranged in inappropriate places, unusual ornaments, *mustre* (patterns), copied from manufactured fabrics, or old, but considerable enlarged motifs, inappropriate use of plastic sequins (*šljokice*) of various forms; in many cases this began to border on kitsch and resemble a general, stylised "Slavonian costume". The impression of bad taste was also enhanced by strikingly yellow, low quality gold-coloured synthetic thread, used in large quantities by weavers, being financially more accessible. Cheaper, manufactured synthetic fabrics were also used to make upper garments, aprons and neck shawls. On the other hand, there were also some successful reconstructions of complete costume ensembles, or parts thereof, of both traditional working and festive garments, and clothing of more recent date, developed under the influence of urban fashion after the late 19th century. This has been successfully presented to the public on several occasions.⁸

The research of traditional *Cvelferija* costumes dates back to 2004 and 2005 (researched by Bušić and Forjan), but it was not focused on garment revival and reconstruction but

8 This regards especially the successful costume reconstruction carried out by *KUD Posavac* of Vrbanja in the nineteen-eighties, based on several preserved, old original festive dress items. Since very thin cotton thread was no longer available for weaving fine, thin linen, they produced a patterned weave by warping (*na pantlike*). Manufactured black silk unpatterned fabric was used to produce upper clothing items (aprons and neck scarves) because the old, expensive silk was no longer available on the market. The fact that original cuts were fully taken over in the production of new clothing items is to be commended in particular. Among the ornamentation techniques, they mainly used the typical local eyelet whitework, goldwork over paper (for head scarves and belts), and satin stitch goldwork (aprons, neck scarves, bags). Due attention was also paid to proper combination and completion of basic and additional clothing items. Thanks to all this, the Vrbanja society can boast today relative identifiability with regard to the typological and stylistic features of the costumes, and proper arrangement of old motifs on specific items. The former white satin stitch whitework, appreciated as a particularly attractive, difficult and slow ornamentation technique, was not included in the reconstruction.

on completing the then available but very scant knowledge (or on prevailing over stereotypes) on the costumes in the area between the late 19th century and today.⁹

The research results were presented by a catalogue and exhibition “*Najljepše si selo Cvelferije*” [The Most Attractive Village of *Cvelferija*], which presented the national costumes of *Cvelferija*/Županjska Posavina as exemplified by the costumes of the village of Vrbanja (authored by Bušić and Forjan). It was staged in the Vukovar Town Museum in January and February 2006 within the scope of the *Heritage and Reconstruction Cycle*. The exhibition included several variants of old women’s and men’s old costumes, and garments of later date, including festive and daily wear. It also presented specimens of traditional embroidery – the old satin stitch whitework, eyelet whitework, goldwork over paper and satin stitched, and various types of lace. Other exhibits of traditional textile handwork were also on display: bags and decorative coverlets (*ponjvice*), bearing witness to the high skill applied in the home production of fabrics, and artistic sensibility in terms of colour and ornamentation.¹⁰

After the exhibition, the National Costume Rental and Production Workshop, relying on research results and collected material, began to acquire and extensively reconstruct traditional costume items. My subsequent research and general personal professional interest were additionally formed and focused by my heading the Collection of Eastern Croatian National Costumes (since 2012).

MINISTRY OF CULTURE PROJECT – RECONSTRUCTION AND REVIVAL OF TRADITIONAL COSTUMES

The plan of the reconstruction and revival of national costumes initially covered three flood-struck villages and their cultural and performing societies: Gunja, Rajevo Selo and Račinovci (24 costume ensembles). As funding increased, the project focused on the revival of cultural life throughout the region of *Cvelferija*. It was decided that other places would also get two costume ensembles each – one men’s and one women’s ensemble. The donation of LADO, the Croatian Folk Dance and Song Ensemble, to the *Sava* cultural and performing society of Rajevo Selo, was also included in the project by agreement with the Ministry of Culture. Of the other minority communities, the

9 Data on rural life in Županjska Posavina, including traditional wear, are relatively rare in older references. The oldest descriptions can be found in Lovretić’s monograph *Otok – Folk Life and Customs*, where he also describes, along with all the details about traditional living in this village near Vinkovci, in several short notes, the costumes in other villages in Eastern Slavonia and parts of Srijem, including *Posavina*. One needs to remember that Lovretić described the neighbouring villages on the basis of the narrations of his fellow villagers and some general observations. Therefore, certain information presented here need to be regarded with a dose of critical caution. Janja Juzbašić, ethnologist of the *Stjepan Gruber* Regional Mueum in Zupanja, studies the inherited culture of Županjska Posavina. A considerable contribution to throwing light on the historical and ethnographic conditions in *Cvelferija* has been provided in the works of Ivica Ćosić Bukvin, an amateur historian enamoured with regional heritage. However, there is as yet no integral review of traditional garments in the eastern part of Županjska Posavina. Moreover, this region is mentioned just in passing in the published two monographs on Croatian national costumes, or has been totally omitted (whether in the text or in pictures). Therefore, the study of traditional wear in Vrbanja has become necessary in order to fill in the gaps in the current knowledge on costume type and style. The place and scope of study were also determined by my emotional links with the region and with the native village of my mother where I spent many days in my childhood (with my grandparents).

10 More in Bušić (2006).

project included the Bosniak *KUDs Behar* and *Ljiljan* of Gunja, and the Slovak *KUD Andrija Pehar* (former *KUD of Slovačka Matica*, the Slovak Cultural Society) of Soljani.

The number of costume ensembles and variants of women's traditional wear intended for production were determined on the basis of a professional ethnological study with regard the planned funding, assessment of damage suffered by specific places in the 2014 floods, the number of inhabitants and members of folklore groups, and the current value/cost of national costume production and ornamentation.

Plans involved the production/reconstruction of representative items/ensembles of traditional garments of older and recent date, with all the appropriate dress elements developed since the end of the 19th century, which have remained during the 20th century and to date the symbols of regional and national identity of the local population. The reconstruction and revival were carried out in line with criteria of authenticity, which implies true replicas of the original models, primarily from the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb (Collection of Eastern Croatian National Costumes), the National Costume Rental and Production Workshop in Zagreb, and preserved and accessible private collections in the region. The selected original material derives from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The traditional costumes of *Cvelferija*, in spite of their being relatively under-represented with respect to costumes from other areas represented in the Collection of Eastern Croatian National Costumes in the holdings of the Ethnographic Museum, make up the most coherent whole and are the oldest preserved items. Thus, the Museum holds an old skirt (*skuta*) from Vrbanja, ornamented with raised cross stitch whitework (first exhibited at the 1891 jubilee Economic&Forestry Exhibition in Zagreb), several traditional wear ensembles ornamented with blue raised cross stitches, two women's shirts with long sleeves made of two pieces of linen joined with needlepoint whitework, several skirts of more recent date ornamented with goldwork, several so-called Swabian blouses ornamented with white or golden thread satin stitches, some aprons, a back shawl and festive old-type head scarves (*kukuljice*, hoods) and recent triangular scarves.¹¹

Reconstruction plans envisioned more than sixty traditional wear ensembles; most of these have already been completed. Several different garment combinations of specific type and style were also included along with various combinations of upper clothing (neck scarves, aprons, coats and the like) in line with the following previously established specifications:

Men's festive costume

- summer,
- winter.

¹¹ According to current knowledge, the only preserved traditional costume ensemble preserved in the region of *Cvelferija*, in Gunja (blouse and skirt with raised cross stitch blue ornaments), was purchased for the Museum in 2012. At the same time the National Costume Rental and Production Workshop purchased the so-called *mišane skute* (mixed skirts), embroidered with the same technique with blue and red cotton thread, and proceeded to reconstruct the attendant blouse (*oplećak*) after the item in the Ethnographic Museum.

Women's festive costume:

- traditional costume – *vezenka* (with cotton embroidery);
- costumes imitating town wear – skirt and blouse (*rekla*);
- recent costumes ornamented throughout with goldwork;
- costumes partly ornamented with goldwork;
- costumes ornamented with whitework (eyelet stitch, needlepoint);
- ornamented with coloured embroidery.

Such a demanding and extensive project presented a major challenge, but for me it was also a source of pleasure because it gave me the opportunity to apply my professional knowledge and “incorporate” it in a specific way into the cultural values of my native region. The reconstruction of older wear is a major professional intervention and, based on research, it is justified not only by recent conditions on the ground but also by the fact that it places the *Cvelferija* folklore groups – hitherto absent in contemporary trends in Croatian folklore creativity – at the same level with other parts of Croatia (e.g., Srijem, the Karlovac region, parts of the Dalmatian hinterland) where cultural and performing societies and dedicated individuals have been busy with high quality revival of textile handiwork, and the revival and reconstruction of traditional wear of different style and type from different periods (last quarter of the 19th century and the 20th century). The development of this endeavour has shown that it was advisable to give the local population technical guidelines, to assess in a positive fashion their ideas and specific actions carried out so far, and to remain at their disposal in the future.

CONCLUSION

During the second half of the 20th century, and especially after the nineteen-nineties, new national costumes of the same type were produced for folklore purposes in *Cvelferija* without relying on traditional garments, original old models and the attendant production techniques and ornamentation. Because of this, the specific variety of type and style of local costumes was lost over time.

The objectives of the described Project, prompted by the consequences of flooding by the Sava river in 2014, included the revival of traditional costumes in places affected by the flood and the promotion of the awareness of the need for the proper reconstruction and revival of national garments (materials, techniques, ornamentation, completion of parts of clothing, etc.). Hopefully the public presentation and the planned lectures on the maintenance and stage application of national costumes will provide a useful professional guideline for the further making and revival of costume throughout the region.

Finally, while this paper was being prepared for the printer, the Project was in its final stage. Within the scope of its promotion it was agreed with the Department for folk and traditional shows of Croatian TV to produce a documentary (production is already

under way) on Project implementation, while the LADO Ensemble is preparing a short stage presentation of the folklore traditions of *Cvelferija*.

It can already be claimed that the additional field research and cooperation with local stakeholders on the ground resulted not only in deepening the professional knowledge about the changes of traditional garments and the expression of national identity in *Cvelferija*, but also provided new worthy contributors in the revival of traditional textile handicrafts (specific techniques) and visible progress in the perception, making and presentation of national costumes. Along this line we can expect that folklore societies and dedicated individuals will continue to produce high quality traditional regional costumes and care for their presentation.

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