

## *Croatian Intangible Cultural Heritage on UNESCO Lists*

VALETTA (MALTA), GABROVO (BULGARIA), CANBERRA (AUSTRALIA),  
ZAGREB (CROATIA), NICOSIA (CYPRUS), 2023

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage by the General Assembly of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Ethnographic Museum has successfully implemented the project *Croatian Intangible Cultural Heritage on UNESCO Lists*, whose goal was to redesign and upgrade its longest-running and most visited contemporary touring exhibition and realise a series of guest appearances and collaborations that have in the meantime been delayed due to the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

The exhibition was created in 2011 upon the initiative of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, it was organised and implemented by the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb and it was realised thanks to the results of many years of work of a number of experts who, in co-operation with local communities and holders of traditional knowledge and skills, have successfully nominated twenty-one cultural phenomena from the territory of the Republic of Croatia since 2009 to one of the three UNESCO International World Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The exhibition concept was provided by the museum advisor of the Ethnographic Museum Iris Biškupić Bašić, PhD, and the visual design was by Nikolina Jelavić Mitrović. The exhibition had two variant forms – the so-called “large” exhibition of freestanding assembly elements with prominent museum objects and integrated sound reproduction systems and the so-called “B1” version, a reduced exhibition intended for shorter and logistically more demanding guest appearances consisting of posters measuring 70 × 100 cm (standard B1 format). The exhibition has achieved great success through guest appearances in a total of 42 locations in thirteen countries (Croatia, Hungary, Austria, Slovakia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, France, Lithuania, Poland, Australia, Canada, China and Turkmenistan). After the last guest appearance in the Nova Gradiška City Museum in 2021, due to significant damage, the exhibition was decommissioned and due to the pandemic, its renovation and upgrading was postponed until further notice.

In 2023, the project of redesigning and upgrading the exhibition was launched under the leadership of Matija Dronjić, a senior curator of the Ethnographic Museum and a permanent member of the team in charge of its guest appearances. Based on the original concept of Iris Biškupić Bašić, PhD, according to which the phenomena were exhibited separately according



Figure 1. Exhibition display at Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta, Malta. Photo: Matija Dronjić

to the principle of “one cultural good – one panel”, the exhibition was redesigned, which was successfully carried out by the team of the company URBANEX d.o.o. led by the designer Ana Katuriđ. In order to provide a sustainable response to the logistical and financial challenges brought by guest appearances abroad, often of relatively short duration (between two and three weeks), it was imperative to create an exhibition without objects and multimedia systems whose upgrade will be easy and with minimal costs as the Republic of Croatia enters new goods on one of the three UNESCO lists. URBANEX has produced two exhibition versions. One is already tried and tested “B1 format”, intended for printing on self-adhesive foil (for immediate transport in flight luggage), printing on composite boards and printing on cardboard. In addition, a “canvas” version was designed, i.e. an exhibition intended for printing on canvases or tarpaulins of large dimensions, intended primarily for open air guest appearances and in high ceiling gallery halls. In 2023, several prototypes were produced and based on the experience in staging, some changes were made to the design. Both versions have variant forms in Croatian and in English, and although they are primarily made using white typography elements on a dominantly black background, they can be converted into a negative form (black typography elements on a white background) with just a few mouse clicks in order to adapt them to the potentially dark walls of the visited galleries without additional visual design costs.

The redesigned exhibition does not deviate from the earlier affirmative approach and its overall goal is to promote Croatian intangible cultural heritage both in the country and abroad. Each



Figure 2. Visitors to the exhibition at Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta, Malta. Photo: Matija Dronjić

phenomenon is presented on a separate panel, which contains a selection from contemporary photographs (up to ten), a text with basic information about a particular phenomenon, a bullet of the domain of the intangible cultural property, a list on which it is located with the indicated year of registration and a possible remark in the case of goods that are registered as multinational nominations. In order to compensate for the lack of multimedia devices, a QR code with a direct link to the nomination film is highlighted on each panel on the official “open-access” YouTube channel for UNESCO, which the visitors access directly, using their own smart device. In addition to the current twenty-one phenomenon (i.e. panel), a universal poster of the exhibition, an introductory panel and an imprint have been provided. In other words, the exhibition consists of 24 panels/canvases at the moment of writing of this presentation and will grow according to the number of new successful nominations in the years to come.

The project was realised in partnership with the National Folk Dance Ensemble of Croatia LADO. Krunoslav Šokac, artistic director of the LADO Ensemble, was the person behind the musical background that accompanies the exhibition, and during joint guest appearances, LADO soloists were involved in the opening of the exhibition, while LADO conductors and multi-instrumentalists held lectures and presentations linked with the phenomena of intangible cultural heritage concerning music. The project was implemented with the funds provided by the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia and the City of Zagreb, and we are particularly pleased with the fact that more than 120 external associates joined the call



Figure 3. Exhibition space as a part of the Regional Open Air Ethnographic Museum ambiental complex – ETAR. Gabrovo, Bulgaria. Photo: Matija Dronjić

for co-operation: from local and regional government units, public institutions in culture and science, tourist boards, sports federations, associations, culture and arts societies, heritage professionals, amateur photographers, enthusiasts and professionals, as well as heirs.

In order to realise the previously arranged guest appearances, postponed due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, at the end of 2022, old collaborations were revived. The renewed exhibition *Croatian Intangible Cultural Heritage on UNESCO Lists*, i.e. its “B1” version, premiered through a guest appearance in Malta as a part of the Feast of San Gırgor, organised by the Maltese Ministry for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government. The exhibition was set up at the attractive location of the Spazju Kreattiv, Malta’s Centre for Creativity, in the hall of the restored Fortress of the Knights of the Order of St. John in the centre of Valletta. It was possible to see it from 12th to 19th April 2023. The second guest appearance was in the Bulgarian Gabrovo, organised by the regional Open-Air Ethnographic Museum – ETAR, where the exhibition was set up from 31st August to 31st December 2023, and was opened as a part of the program of the *18th International Fair of Traditional Crafts*, a heritage event of national importance that was last held in 2019 due to the pandemic. The following guest appearance was on 11th September in the auditorium of the Kambri Cultural Centre, located within the Australian National University in Canberra. The visit was organised in co-operation with the Embassy of the Republic of Croatia



Figure 4. Exhibition display at ETAR. Gabrovo, Bulgaria. Photo: Matija Dronjić

in Australia and the exhibition was open until 27th September 2023. The “canvas” version was premiered at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb as part of the *Living Heritage Days* event, with which the Museum joined the national initiative to mark the *European Heritage Day 2023*. The exhibition opened on 3rd October 2023 and due to the interest of the audience, its planned closure was moved from 19th November to the beginning of March 2024. Finally, during the writing of this text, preparations for the realisation of a guest appearance in Cyprus in co-operation with the Costas & Rita Severis Foundation are being completed. Although the exhibition was supposed to be open during the summer months, due to technical issues, the guest appearance in the CVAR Museum in Nicosia (Nicosia Centre of Visual Arts & Research) will be held from 6th to 20th December 2023.

In addition to the exhibition, a number of accompanying events, lectures (Zagreb, Malta), round table discussions (Zagreb, Gabrovo) and professional meetings (Malta, Bulgaria) were held and at the end of the year, as a part of the regular activities of the Ethnographic Museum, the exhibition website will be redesigned in accordance with the new visual identity, where guest appearances will be documented in the future. Finally, in the first months of 2024, the site will be rounded off with a new e-catalogue of the exhibition, a bilingual interactive publication available in EPUB and PDF format.



Figure 5. Exhibition display at the Kambri Cultural Centre. Canberra, Australia.  
Photo: Matija Dronjić



Figure 6. LADO ensemble performing at the Kambri Cultural Centre. Canberra, Australia.  
Photo: Matija Dronjić