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Folklore Festivals in Moravia in the Light of Social Development

Abstract: The contribution *Folklore Festivals in Moravia in the Light of Social Development* deals with the interest in folk culture, or rather folklore expressions and their presentation at ethnographic festivities and folklore festivals. It pays attention to the first impulses for these activities, the struggles of individuals and institutions and especially the social connections of the mentioned cultural stream. As to the territory, the study of this development focuses on Moravia where since the late-19th century the living folk culture blended with the efforts to safeguard it, and where currently ethno-cultural traditions develop, which many cases have their roots in the legacy of folk culture.

Keywords: folklore, Moravia

When searching for the beginning of folklore festivals in Moravia, we have to come back to a spectacular cultural and historical event held in Prague in 1895 – the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition. It took place at time when similar exhibitions in America and Europe, including the world ones, became an opportunity to present the achievements of modern society as well as the expansion of science, technology, and culture. The Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition, which followed the General Global Jubilee Exhibition held in Prague in 1891, emphasized especially the national consciousness and policy. At that time, the Czech lands were a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, similarly to other ethnic groups within this multinational country, they fought for their own identity. And what is more, the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition concept, which focused on the pan-Slavic idea (as reflected in its title), substantiated this process. The final conception of the Exhibition was concentrated on three main lines: ethnographic group; cultural and historical group covering the whole nation; modern group. (Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition 1895, p. 18). Although the Exhibition included culture of the whole Czech nation, it was folk culture that became the most important part of the project.

Although the mentioned event (it was held from May 15 to October 23, 1895) was outlined as an exhibition, it also included accompanying programme that approximated the form of future folklore festivals. Apart from the fact that the organizers “live casted” some exhibition rooms to increase the attractiveness (e.g. in Slovakian and Wallachian pubs a folk music band performed daily), the folk festivities running for the duration of the Exhibition enjoyed a great interest. Between 15 and 21 August, there was held a Moravian festival that we understand as an augury of the folklore movement development in Moravia. In order to organize such a festival, it was necessary to choose the materials, to train the performances, to invite the participants. In Moravia, it was Leoš Janáček (1854–1928) who – as a leading person – arranged the programme of the Moravian Day, together with his co-operators Lucie Bakešová (1853–1935) and Martin Zeman (1854–1919) (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 1995:

32). The world-renowned composer Leoš Janáček was also an important collector of folk songs and an admirer of folk culture. During the preparations for the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition, he became a member of the Ethnographic musical department for Moravia, which was founded for the purpose to encourage the Moravian phenomenon in this event. The matter was not easy. Prior to the Exhibition, regional exhibitions and ethnographic congresses were organized, which focused on collecting exhibits. The interest in collecting folk-culture artefacts as well as folk traditions, especially in the form of tangible culture (folk costumes, embroideries, folk architecture. – started as early as in the 1870s and 1880s. Interest in folk songs and related activities were even older (they related to European Romanticism and ideas of mythological school but practical experience with the presentation of folklore expressions was very limited. Even though the so-called popular celebrations (Volksfest) were well-known, these were rather exceptions (Laudová 1991: 14–16; Pavlicová 2007: 16–17). In 1791, 1792 and 1836 celebrations were held in the Czech lands for new coronations; sporadic reports about folk music and dance performances at noble courts have survived (e.g. when Empress Maria Theresa visited Olomouc in 1748). In these cases, the focus was on the representation of serfs or on the entertainment of nobility. The correspondence between Leoš Janáček, Lucie Bakešová and Martin Zeman, reveals the complications of the preparation and dramaturgy of the Moravian Day, which actually lasted three days. There were to perform common villagers who were burdened with their daily concerns. The festival took place at the time of harvest, so many selected dancers or musicians had to leave for home. There was a shortage of money to renew folk garments and many other problems occurred, as Martin Zeman wrote to Leoš Janáček: *“When I negotiate with a maidservant or a groom, the farmer’s wife is thinking: why cannot our daughter or son go there? If I take a young married man from his wife, she does not want to let him go, and when I choose young women, the men wish to follow them...”* (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 1995: 34). The authors also tussled with putting the chosen programme on the stage. It became evident for the first time that it is necessary for those performing to adapt themselves to the rules of the stage and to show folklore expressions in a brief and “less” raw interpretation to the audience. Leoš Janáček himself encountered such negative experience before. In 1892, he organized a concert with folk musicians from the ethnographic area of Hornácko (one of distinctive ethnographic regions in South-East Moravia) in Brno and it was not well received by the city audience. In the Lidové noviny newspaper, Janáček – not by chance – wrote in 1894: *“I am afraid that even at the Prague exhibition, a gesture of refusal would afflict the performances of the folk musicians and singers – excepting the dancers – if they were not pleasing to the largest possible extent to the ear of much more varied education of the audience.”* (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 1995: 32). Janáček’s experience with the above concert caused his consideration to alter the conception of the programme at the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition. Instead of featuring style and skills, it was aimed at what is the strongest feature of folk interpreters – truthfulness and internal sense of their expressions. Simultaneously, however, he put a question to himself whether even that truthfulness will have an effect on the audience (Krist 1970: 22). However, the performance of the Moravian group at the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition was met with a good response, and Martin Zeman was even awarded a diploma and bronze medal for rehearsing the songs, dances, and customs. (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 1995: 36).

The Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition not only augured the beginning of ethnography as a scientific discipline and encouraged the foundation of a central ethnographic museum and the development of the folklore movement in particular regions. However, it also commenced a movement that began to be characterized as the “folklore movement” in the 20th century and the ethnographic festivities and folklore festivals became its significant symbol. As early as during the preparations of the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition,

such a “touch” of the folklore movement occurred with some activities. For example, Františka Xavera Běhálková (1853–1907), who was working in the ethnographic area of Haná in Central Moravia, formed an ensemble whose members were town “gentlemen and ladies” and travelled with them to perform in the environs. As Ludmila Mátlová-Uhrová (1908–1978), another collector of folk songs and dances in that region wrote several decades later, she met the traces of “Miss Xavera” everywhere. (Pavlicová 1993: 12).

After the end of the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition, ethnographic activities dampened naturally in the countryside, but not in strata of intellectuals. Here there were still felt the struggles to capture the expressions of folk culture and to present them and – in many cases – to safeguard them. Significant at that time was the activity of so-called “circles”, which can be understood as the beginning of future folklore ensembles. From the town environment (the first “circles” were founded in Prague and Brno in the 1890s to associate students who came from the country to study in the town), this interest moved to the countryside (Krist 1970: 27–38). Circles presented their repertoire brought by students from different regions of Moravia; stress was put on aesthetical function of folklore expressions; thanks to the work of these circles, many town intellectuals expressed their interest in folklore. (Krist 1970: 35). Alongside the folk culture, the importance of its prestige grew in a very distinctive way. The developing activity of clubs and associations (for example Sokol or Orel in the Czech environment, concentrated mainly on physical education) especially in its cultural part began to take the folk traditions as their basis. Demonstrations of selected customs, dances, or staged programmes became an important part of official events and festivals with a strong national sense. Let us mention for example Sokol festival in Uherské Hradiště in 1911, which was accompanied by a rich programme with participants from neighbouring villages. A festival on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Sokol took place in Uherské Hradiště in 1922 as well and a varied ethnographic programme was shown there again (Pavlicová 2007: 104–106).

The above activities also became a magnet for people who visited the Moravian Year Festival in Brno in 1914. Its interesting historical adventures were fully explained only in the 1890s. The Moravian Year was prepared by Sokol sports clubs, and a plethora of documents about rehearsals and programmes of particular groups have survived in archives. Although the then reports spoke about the successful course of the Moravian Year, they did not mention that the ethnographic programme, which should take place after the sports exercises, had not been held at all. The reason for that was the assassination of Franz Ferdinand d’Este, heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in Sarajevo and the subsequent cancellation of the event. An alternative date fourteen days later was foiled by weather. Only an accidental report found many decades later and the following research showed that the prepared ethnographic festival had not in fact been performed (Holý – Ševčík – Pavlicová: 1993). Nonetheless, the handwriting of the documents connected to the preparation of the event matched those accompanying the programme for the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition. It became obvious that the ways to present folklore material began to be codified, and a certain stereotype of dramaturgy and presentation of folklore began to evolve. From traditional culture, customs and rituals, such as wedding, ride of the kings, maypole erection, or well-established dance and music programmes from particular ethnographic areas or places were selected. Only the researches in the second half of the 20th century showed that it was the repeated presentation of certain folk culture expressions, to which the particular locations were invited, that caused these expressions to have survived in the country. Moreover, local inhabitants identified themselves with these expressions as with valued cultural expressions. This can be illustrated by a strong example of the ride of the kings in the region of Slovácko, which was also performed at the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition and then at many festivals and events in the period of the First Republic

and after the World War II. Although many other expressions of folk culture lost their function in the everyday life, and we can encounter them solely as expressions of folklorism, the ride of the kings cannot be so simply ranked among them. Even here, several functions have changed their content and without the care and organization from outside, this originally Whitsuntide tradition would hardly survive as a tradition, yet the development of this ritual was different. It became a symbol of the locations where it has been safeguarded so far, and its one-hundred-year long development in the period of the evolving folklore movement led it to be placed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Without its presentation at festivals or ethnographic festivities, it must have developed in a different direction (Pavlicová 2011, 2013).

With the formation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, a new phase for the folklore movement and festivities dawned. The strengthened representative function of folk culture alongside the tradition in place since the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition found their expression in regional ethnographic festivities as well as in cultural and political activities.

Ethnographic festivities, such as Slovácko Year in Kyjov (1921) or Wallachian Year in Rožnov pod Radhoštěm (1925), were festivals that continued the aims of the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition and were to stabilize the regional identity. Even today, such festivities (e.g. Haná Year in Přerov in 1923 and 1928 or Silesian Year in Jablunkov in 1923) must be perceived as a basis for understanding the regional peculiarity, which was followed throughout the 20th century. On the contrary, Ethnographic Days in Brno in 1925 belong to a completely different type of such activities. Having been initiated by the ethnographer František Kretz, they were held on June 28 and 29, 1925. The Provincial Association of Foreigners for Moravia and Silesia became the major organizer. This Association promoted folk culture even before the World War I but with the formation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, new circumstances required to make the new state known abroad (Večerková 1997: 208). According to the resources, groups from Moravia and Silesia arrived in Brno with altogether 4 000 participants and the festival was of a very official nature. At the opening ceremony, major scientists and high-ranking politicians took part, even a telegram was sent to President T. G. Masaryk and there a resolution was approved that was aimed at increasing the state participation in the safeguarding of folk culture (Večerková 1997: 208). Even then, the programme of the festival was similar to what we could observe at future folklore festivals: a parade through the town, performances at a sports stadium and assessment of individual performances (there were 44 programme numbers whereby 18 were awarded a prize). At the same time, a congress of experts in ethnography was held (Večerková 1997: 208). The event was recorded as a documentary, which today is very valuable material for anyone who wishes to become acquainted especially with folk dance expressions and folk dress from the 1920s.

The period between the world wars, i.e. the period of the First Republic, was a very significant historical era within the development of Czechoslovakia. It became evident in the field of culture that also included public educational activities, which were either carried out by active individuals or systematically controlled. As early as in 1905, the Culture Enlightenment Union was established, which was followed by the Masaryk Institute for Adult Education (Jírový 2005: 83–97). In common life, some expressions of traditional folk culture were slowly disappearing, which was all the more reason to safeguard them. The educational work together with the use of folk culture by different clubs and, of course, with the interest of experts who studied traditional folk culture and collected its expressions, created a very strong cultural stream in the Czech environment. It is interesting that apart from all the mishaps with folk culture understanding since the second half of the 19th century, when the first more concentrated interest in it appeared, rather romanticizing or aesthetic views survived. Many socially-oriented researchers were fully aware of the fact that the life in the

country (in which the intellectuals were mostly interested, even if the culture of artisans and workers was gradually studied as well) was not optimal, that there were many problems including poverty, alcoholism and illiteracy. Yet the created picture of folk culture in the country involved an aesthetic ideal that found expression in the presentation of folk culture to the public (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 2011). Although some critical voices resounded, let us remember, for example, the contribution written by the cultural historian Čeněk and titled *Against Ethnographic “Years”* (1929) and his statement that “ethnography can exist without an entrance fee, beer and sausages”; this did not influence the general tendency to “cultivate” ethnographic festivities and folklore festivals very much. Moreover, the activities of many educated individuals who promoted and supported folk culture and understood it as national wealth were very strong in some regions, leaving a remarkable trace until now.

The period after World War II was a significant watershed for the folklore movement. It is necessary to add that the military occupation and the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia did not bring many opportunities for the work with the legacy of folk culture. In Moravia, Ethnographic Moravia was active. It was an officially registered association that continued the pre-war ethnographic movement in the Slovácko region, but its collaboration with Nazi-authorities weakened its activity. After the war, its leaders were brought to justice (Mezihorák 1997). Many activities ran secretly and on a private basis, such as rehearsals of folk dances and songs.

The post-war period brought a new political situation; nevertheless, free development of the society was stopped, especially after 1948. This brought about a paradoxical situation for folk culture and its legacy. The folklore movement greatly expanded, with the creation of new ensembles and groups, which in many cases took part in field collecting of folklore, often in cooperation with official expert institutions. Simultaneously, at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, the Czech (at that time the Czechoslovak) culture was indoctrinated by the ideological model imported from the then Soviet Union. The suppression of cultural elites in the society was to be substituted by a “new” art; it was folk culture that was to become the basis for this. The period of the strongest ideological pressure led to the so-called “new output”, when formal forms of folklore were injected with “new content”. “Folk” songs about tractors, members of agricultural cooperatives and workers etc., of course, did not survive in the repertoire of folk ensembles for a long time. However, up today, they have been a reminder of one of many abuses of folk culture, as we can observe them in totalitarian regimes at different times and in different parts of the world. The most exalted period of ideological pressure on the folklore movement terminated in the mid-1950s; this period is termed the so-called “burden of folklore”. It cannot be obscured, however, that this attitude left its mark upon the following praiseworthy work of many important personalities whom we rank today among the distinctive researchers, choreographers and musicians (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 2013). Similarly, this period went down in the history of the biggest folklore festivals in Moravia (and in the Czech Republic in general), which was founded in 1946. Up to now, it has remained a “laboratory” for work with folklore and legacy of folk culture (Tomeš 1966). In the festival’s history, one can follow development of the after-war folklore movement in the Czech (and Czechoslovak) environment, both in the presentation on the stage and in the attitude of experts. Reconciliation with the “burden of folklore” began to bring back the work with original folklore materials, as well as educational activities in the 1960s.

Since its beginnings, the folklore movement, as mentioned above, has never developed by itself, from inside, but in close collaboration with expert circles— both the artistic and the scientific ones. When German researchers introduced the term *folklorism* into the professional life, i.e. folklore or folk culture in its secondary existence or so-called “second-hand”

folklore, they did not hide the fact this was a term that featured negative phenomena deforming the original folk culture (Luther 2005: 12). If we look at this realm with today's eyes and free from prejudice, we can see that without the presentation of folklore, apart from all the negative peripetias, the traditional folk culture would hardly survive as a legacy for coming generations.

Impulses for the folklore movement and folklorism are variable today (Jančář – Krist 2007). Fortunately, the ideology is not a deciding aspect anymore; however, other dangerous trends are coming, especially commercialization and tourism. At the same time, on the other side of the spectrum in the present globalized world, there are situated other aspects: searching for one's own identity, enjoying leisure time activities, returning to one's roots. These are also the reasons, why ethnology does not focus just on a detectable second existence of folk culture with typical features, but also on expressions that are a source of inspiration for folk culture or that continue it freely. Today we speak about ethno-cultural traditions, which include not only folklore festivals and their programmes showing the original folklore expressions, but also their high stylization and artistic presentation. Simultaneously, this covers also activities that we can understand – from a larger point of view – as an opposition to mass culture - in the relation to the memory of place, history and culture (Pavlicová – Uhlíková 2008: 53). Folklore festivals and festivities fulfil many functions today, and for this reason, their content is manifold: staged folklore presentation with artistic aims, self-realisation in dance or song contests, places for getting-together. Not only with friends, but also with culture and ethnic groups (Pavlicová 2005). At the folklore festival in Strážnice, we can find the profile of all stratum that our essay writes about, including the relation to official cultural and political realm as well as the actual worldwide theme – the protection of cultural heritage. The dozens of local festivities and festivals which take place in many places in Moravia today (different in their range or content, but their quantity amounts to several tens), take on mainly the functions of strengthening the local identity, searching for a festivity in the everyday life of local inhabitants. They help keep the domestic folk tradition, and they guide new generations to understand it in a positive way. Regardless of the many different opinions, folklore festivals and festivities occupy an important place in the contemporary society because they constitute a counterbalance to passive consumerism, and offer values for an active life. For ethnology, they are an ever-changing theme to study, even with the awareness that many ethnologists use their knowledge to take part in forming them. Although applied ethnology helps to create the festival environment, the internal mechanisms already work independently. This is the point that should be of interest for contemporary ethnology as a science of culture and society.

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