3. Dancing a Heritage in Horjul: Contemporary Social Dance Practices and Heritage Discourse

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This chapter explores how a local folk dance ensemble in Horjul navigates the challenge of representing its dance heritage on stage, when hindered by a lack of prior research and documentation. Whereas the ensemble focuses on artistic reinterpretations of folk dance, public events like *veselicas* reflect vibrant, socially embedded dance traditions. This duality underscores the evolving interplay between tradition and modernity. The study highlights how past and contemporary ethnochoreological research co-creates dance heritage discourses, emphasising its role in defining and sustaining dance community identity.

Keywords: Slovenia, ethnochoreology, folklore group, traditional dance, social dance, *veselica*

Introduction

> "They safeguard the cultural heritage of various other Slovenian regions, as Horjul itself does not have its own authentic dances" (Jurjevanje 1999, 23).[1]

This statement was included in the presentation of a folk dance ensemble from Horjul in the programme booklet of one of the biggest and certainly oldest folk dance festivals in Slovenia (cf. Pisk and Kunej 2024), where this folk dance ensemble was one of the participants in 1999. The above opinion, most likely authored by the then artistic leader or a competent member of the folk dance ensemble, reflects the broader public perception of Horjul and similar areas where ethnochoreological and ethnomusicological research has yet to be carried out and published. Since the dances from their locality have not been recorded, researched and discussed in scholarly/dance research, these dances are not 'authorised' by the researchers. The dances' existence and knowledge about them is not publicly available, nor are they published in dance collections. Consequently, they do not serve as a basis for re-interpretations in modernity.

Therefore folk dance ensembles in such places do not represent "their own" folk dances, but rather the dance heritage of other places and regions in Slovenia.

Furthermore, the quote demonstrates that their heritage discourse also employs terminology (e.g. "authentic") that academic researchers utilise with greater circumspection and restraint. However, a quarter of a century later, at a time when the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU is collaborating with the local community as part of the *Dance-ICH* project, this opinion is also slowly changing with respect to Horjul.[2]

What prompted the ensemble members to write the above statement? It seems almost impossible for a community in Central Europe, not to be able to draw upon a local dance tradition that they can represent in a folk dance ensemble today. Cultural anthropologists and related scholars consider tradition to be a dynamic process, continually shaped by current social,

[1] "*Ohranjajo kulturno dediščino različnih slovenskih pokrajin, saj Horjul nima svojih izvirnih plesov*" (Jurjevanje 1999, 23).

[2] Our project cooperation is limited to the municipality of Horjul, which occupies the upper part of the valley along the Horjulščica watercourse, a small area in central Slovenia. Basic geographical and demographic data of the area are presented later in this text.

political, and cultural contexts, rather than a static relic of the past (Anttonen 2005). This perspective serves as the starting point for the following discussion which explores how and why such an opinion arose and the reasons for its adoption by ensemble members.

How is it that in the present era, in order to avoid the adjectives "folk" and "traditional", it appears preferable to add the seemingly more neutral term "heritage" next to the word "dance", and thus to address all dance practices that are engaged with the past as "dance heritage"? It should, however, also be pointed out that heritage can be perceived as a reflexive tradition and as a selective interpretation of the past (Lowenthal 1985). Heritage is thus more intimately connected to present needs and future aspirations than to any immutable past (Lowenthal 1985; Harrison et al. 2020). The process of heritagisation, that is, the transformation of particular pasts into recognised "heritage" inherently involves selection, privileging certain traditions while marginalising or erasing others (Harrison 2013; Macdonald 2013). If this is the case, then Horjul did have and still has a dance tradition, but it was not until the twenty-first century that the local community came to recognise this and initiated a discourse on the heritage of their own dance practices.

The aim of this chapter then is to analyse how a heritage discourse is/was created and co-created within a local community with the help of researchers both in the past and today. The research in this chapter is based on the specific case of a selected area, Horjul and the surrounding area, focusing on the tradition of dance and related musical practices.

Between Dance Practices and Heritage Discourse

Today, the term "cultural heritage" has become an integral part of the ethnochoreological and even everyday vocabulary of folk dance. Until the 1980s, however, this term was hardly ever used in Slovenia, neither in professional nor everyday vocabulary. As ethnologist Rajko Muršič considers: "For the younger generations this is certainly incomprehensible, while the older generations have actually forgotten how it was once possible to talk about monuments and traditions without using the word heritage" (Muršič 2018, 16).

Heritage is now understood as a process of meaning-making, which occurs in the process of identification, definition and management as well as in the process of display. It is "a subjective political negotiation of identity,

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place and memory", a negotiation of cultural and social values "that help us make sense of the present, our identities and our sense of physical and social space" (Smith 2012, 39). Through the negotiation and designation of heritage, through representation and new life, traditions are thus given new value. According to Regina Bendix, what distinguishes heritage from other forms of engaging with the past is its very "ability to mask the complexity of history and politics" (2000, 18). Folklorists, including ethnochoreologists in the Slovenian research milieu, have applied their knowledge to identify, categorise and make expert judgements on folklore phenomena that have become part of contemporary heritage discourses (e.g. Pisk 2023 in Slovenia; e.g. Hafstein 2018 at the global level), but also to question their future uses.

To date, the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (eRNSD 2024) includes three units that are directly related to dance heritage. All of these dance-related entries have local folk dance ensembles listed as heritage bearers. The entries pertain to the dance traditions of two peripheral areas (the "Sotiš" and "Šamarjanka" units in the north-eastern part of Slovenia and the "Easter dances and games in Metlika" in the southern part of Slovenia), where pioneering Slovenian ethnochoreological research was carried out prior to the Second World War. At that time, the dance was also undergoing folklorisation (for more details, see Kunej 2017). At the formal bureaucratic level in Slovenia, dance heritage is closely interwoven with the formal local folk dance ensembles and less with the informal local dance communities. This may be attributed to the unfortunate translation of "performative arts" into Slovenian as *uprizoritvene umetnosti* (Muršič 2018, 30). In Slovenian, this term is typically associated with staging – that is, the recreation of a dramatic text through theatrical means or the execution of a prearranged public event – rather than with *doing* or *embodied action* in general. In other words, within the Slovenian context, performative arts are more closely linked to re-presentation on the stage than to participation in an event. And on stage, the performance of folk dances remains largely the domain of organised folk dance ensembles.

Many participatory dance practices in local communities, rooted in tradition and perceived as contemporary social dance events, have not (yet) found a place in the national register. This, I hope, gives the reader a new understanding of the introductory quote and raises the question of which (and whose) dances are being performed by the folk dance ensemble in Horjul.

Folklore Activities in Horjul

The municipality of Horjul, with approximately 3,000 inhabitants, is located in central Slovenia, 20 km west of the capital, Ljubljana. The present-day municipality of Horjul, established in 1998, covers 33 square kilometres and is among Slovenia's smallest municipalities in terms of area and population. The municipality comprises nine settlements: Horjul, Koreno, Lesno Brdo, Ljubgojna, Podolnica, Samotorica, Vrzdenec, Zaklanec, and Žažar. In Horjul, the largest, there is a primary school with about 330 pupils aged six to fifteen and a dislocated unit of the Vrhnika Music School with about thirty-five pupils of the same age. In addition to other societies and associations (e.g. volunteer fire departments, senior citizens' society, societies related to sports and other leisure activities), the municipality of Horjul has a single cultural-artistic society *Prosvetno društvo Horjul* (the Horjul Educational Society) with various sections (e.g. theatre, choir, folk dance ensemble, majorette and twirling group). For the purposes of this paper, my focus will be on the folk dance ensemble *Folklorna skupina Klas.* Although *folklorna skupina* literally translates to "folklore group", I prefer the term folk dance ensemble in English, as it better conveys the idea of a troupe that re-creates folk dances and artistically stages them, focusing on stylised performance rather than on the direct presentation of local dance tradition.

The activities of the ensemble are part of what is known as folklore activities (*folklorna dejavnost*). This is a term that today in Slovenia is strongly associated with the pursuits of various societies in which folk dance ensembles operate independently or as one of the sections. Folklore activities are directed by a state institution, the Republic of Slovenia Public Fund for Cultural Activities (Javni sklad Republike Slovenije za kulturne dejavnosti, hereinafter JSKD), which implements cultural policy in this field. The JSKD is an organised cultural, educational, advisory and mediation institution for various amateur cultural and artistic activities. Through its work, the JSKD aims to develop and strengthen the main areas of amateur cultural artistic creation, which, in addition to other activities, such as choral music, instrumental music, visual arts, literature and theatre, also includes so-called folklore activities. According to JSKD's website, folklore activities are "a field of amateur activity related to interpreting and recreating dance, music and other traditions" (JSKD n.d.b). In reality, folklore activities are pursuits associated with folk dance ensembles in Slovenia that "recreate dance, singing, music and other spiritual heritage, while through

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costumes and instruments they also engage with the sphere of material culture" (JSKD n.d.a). Recently, however, folklore activities have been also associated with purely musical groups that recreate music heritage (vocal and instrumental). Folklore activities are characterised by amateurism, leisure and volunteering, and yet it is noticeable that there is a clear drive to produce artistic products that are as good as possible; when it comes to folk dance ensembles, the product is a stage performance, as part of which they primarily recreate dance heritage.[3]

The beginnings of folklore activities in the Horjul Valley date back to 1962 (Kogovšek 2008), when a folk dance ensemble was founded at a local primary school in Horjul. With occasional short interruptions and various adaptations required by the primary school curriculum, the children's folk dance ensemble at Horjul Primary School has been in existence ever since. At present, the ensemble operates as part of a compulsory elective called "Folk Dance", which can be chosen by pupils in the last three years of primary school, that is by pupils aged twelve to fifteen.

It was on the initiative of the folk dance ensemble at the primary school that an adult ensemble was founded in the autumn of 1978 as part of a local cultural-artistic society – Horjul Educational Society (*Prosvetno društvo Horjul*). The adult folk dance ensemble, which was later named Klas Folk Dance Ensemble (*Folklorna skupina Klas*) has been operating as a section within the society ever since.

In terms of repertoire, much like the children's ensemble, the adult ensemble extended its focus beyond the local area. Its performances included dances from various regions of Slovenia, as well as from the borderlands inhabited by Slovenians. These performances were accompanied by corresponding costumes, which play a crucial role in the staged representation of traditional dance. It is important to emphasise that what are today regarded as traditional dances are, in many cases, those that underwent processes of documentation and revival during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Theresa Jill Buckland notes in the case of English morris dancing, these were dances that had been "designated by the collectors as authentic folk practices worthy of being recorded for revival" (2006, 199).

[3] Among others, the statutory task of the JSKD is also "to preserve, nurture and develop living folk culture as part of the cultural heritage" (*za ohranitev, negovanje in razvoj žive ljudske kulture kot dela kulturne dediščine*, ZJSKD: Article 4), but their approach is not based on a bottom-up approach and a high level of sensitivity to heritage communities. Instead, it is completely focused on ensuring qualitative growth in artistic expression.

A programme for presentation of the Horjul ensemble in 2017 notes: "There has, however, always been a void when it came to presenting the area they were from" (PD Horjul 2017). This challenge, which is indeed a perplexing situation, was successfully tackled with the help of an expert in traditional clothing. They created costumes based on old photographs from the early twentieth century found in Horjul and the neighbouring villages. Although the visual aspect of their local-heritage-based stage performance is no longer an obstacle, the ensemble is still at a loss about what to present on stage when it comes to local dance elements in the choreography. The material that would make it easier for the ensemble's artistic leader and choreographer to interpret the dance heritage on stage is very scarce and insufficient. This is especially true as the existing published dance collections do not include records of traditional dances from the Horjul area, and ethnochoreological research focusing on the past has not yet been carried out in this area.

The Klas Folk Dance Ensemble is currently recognised as one of Slovenia's most successful folk dance ensembles. Over the past decade, it has consistently reached the highest ranks in national folklore selections and has repeatedly achieved distinguished results at the national competition of adult folk dance ensembles in Slovenia. Despite its strong anchoring in the local community and its prominent role in contemporary dance culture, the ensemble does not represent a direct continuation of the local folk dance tradition, nor does it stage inherited local dances. It has never been categorised as an "original folk dance ensemble" (Kunej 2020, 18–19) – a term analogous to what Lynn D. Maners describes as a "village folklore ensemble" (2002, 81), which primarily reconstructs and recreates the dance heritage specific to its local setting.

The Klas ensemble has consistently been classified as a so-called "re-creative" ensemble, as its performances are based on dance knowledge acquired indirectly – primarily through the work of researchers of dance traditions – rather than through direct transmission from tradition bearers *in situ*. Knowledge of folk dances has been obtained through various published sources (initially books on folk dances, later also instructional videos on DVDs), participation in seminars designed for folk ensemble members and their artistic leaders, and through the exchange of ideas and experiences with other folk ensembles or their individual members. The dancers' and artistic leaders' personal familiarity with the local dance traditions of their own communities has never served as a direct source

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for the ensemble's stage interpretations. In the words of the Norwegian researcher Egil Bakka, the members of the Horjul folk dance ensemble could be defined as "users of selected national material" and not as its "heirs" (Bakka 2002, 62). Accordingly, their repertoire consists of choreographed stage presentations representing various regions of Slovenia, accompanied by appropriately matched costumes that contribute to the overall aesthetic and geographical framing of each performance.

On the thirtieth anniversary of its establishment (2008), the folk dance ensemble danced for the first time in costumes reflecting the heritage of Horjul and the surrounding area. Since then, this costumed stage appearance has been the one aspect that most reflects the environment in which the ensemble is active. In part, the ensemble has solved the quandary about what to present in these costumes by the fact that their performances either incorporate several elements of folk theatre (Vrtovec Beno 2023) or, in in terms of choreography and music, refer to the sources of a wider regional area. It should be emphasised, however, that their performances do not aim at reconstruction but are artistic in character, representing creative expressions grounded in the choreographer's and music arranger's concepts. In these instances, strict reliance on exact dance sources is unnecessary.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that since its inception, the folk dance ensemble has consistently been guided by an artistic leader, who is typically responsible for choreography and consequently, exerts the greatest influence on the ensemble's stage presentations. As a result, decisions concerning performance content, stylistic choices, and the overall artistic direction of the ensemble rest primarily with the artistic leader, rather than emerging from the dancers themselves. While the artistic leader holds primary responsibility for all aspects of the ensemble's operation, their creative and organisational decisions are inevitably constrained by limited human and financial resources, as the ensemble functions as an amateur, leisure-time activity for local residents.

To date, the ensemble has had nine artistic leaders; notably, during the first two decades of its existence, these individuals were drawn from the local community. With the exception of the founder, all early artistic leaders were originally members of the ensemble – initially dancers who later assumed leadership roles. In more recent years, however, the position of artistic leader has been entrusted to hired external experts, who undertake the role in their spare time for a token financial reward. These individuals

Figure 1. *Stage performance of the folk dance ensemble* Folklorna skupina Klas *in Horjul*. Photo: Rebeka Kunej, November 2024.

are neither native to the Horjul area nor residents of the local community. Regardless of this, each artistic leader always has to strike a balance between her/his ethnological, choreological, musicological knowledge and artistic ambitions on the one hand, and on the other hand, real-life factors – such as the number of members in the ensemble, their skills, the expectations of the cultural society's management and available funds. Even if, however, the artistic leader's aspiration was to make sure that the ensemble's programme is based on local music and dance traditions, they had very limited possibilities to achieve this for two reasons. Firstly, the folk dances and the associated dance tunes that the folk dance ensemble was supposed to interpret on stage no longer exist among the local community today. And secondly, the ethnochoreological material that could serve as a basis for the folk dance ensemble's stage re-presentations is almost non-existent. To paraphrase the opening quote of the paper: folk dancing, the "original" kind, no longer exists in Horjul.

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Past Research on Music and Dance in Horjul

In the twentieth century, ethnochoreological researchers gave the Horjul area a wide berth. This finding is based on an examination of the collection of folk dance records kept by the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU in Ljubljana, which contains records of folk dances from the field in the second half of the twentieth century. Most of this research was carried out in rural areas of various parts of Slovenia. This is a manuscript collection of records, mostly Kinetography Laban scores.[4]

A study of this dance collection has revealed that, among the more than one thousand dance records in the database, there are none from the Municipality of Horjul. The locality is not, in fact, an exception; research into the dance traditions of all the neighbouring municipalities was similarly neglected. Horjul can be described as just another "grey zone" on the map of Slovenian folk dances.

In accordance with Slovenian ethnological research traditions, ethnochoreological research is more focused on the past than on contemporary practices (e.g. Ramovš 1992; Kunej 2012; Simetinger 2024). It is precisely because of the focus on the past and a paucity of researchers that the research tradition has not always been able to do everything to which it aspired and has focused only on certain areas or topics that individual researchers within the research field considered to be important and in need of research. In the beginning, research attention was directed at finding those elements that confirmed the "authenticity" of Slovenian dance practice and the nation's identity (e.g. Marolt 1954). Later, however, research was often based on the premise of salvage ethnochoreology, to paraphrase the term "salvage ethnology", which is "concerned solely with the preservation of heritage items" (Kockel et al. 2020, 2), in this case – folk dances.

The Horjul Valley is too far from the periphery of those areas settled by the Slovenian population that was of particular interest to past ethnochoreological researchers (especially ethnochoreological research conducted among the Slovenians living in Italy, Austria and Hungary). It is also too close to Slovenia's capital, since Ljubljana was the centre from where dance culture innovations spread to rural areas and from where the researchers of dance came. It should also be noted that the collection con-

[4] Originally, this was a paper-based archival collection, which was digitised in 2020. Since 2025, it has been also been accessible in digital form in the repository Arzenal, a ZRC SAZU virtual repository of national heritage. (Zbirka zapisov slovenskih ljudskih plesov 2025).

tains no materials relating to the dances that are recorded in Ljubljana or other Slovenian cities. Leading twentieth-century Slovenian ethnochoreologist Ramovš explains the focus on dance research in rural areas: "part of the reason is the fact that until recently the majority of the Slovenian population was rural, and another reason was the one-sided orientation of the researchers of dance traditions" (1992, 7). Despite the criticism voiced by younger researchers in the field, this approach still partly exists. Instead, younger researchers have often redirected their research into other fields, e.g. dance-historical anthropology, contemporary dance studies and critical heritage studies. However, even in the context of such research, dance culture in Horjul has yet to become the focus of interest.

A similar situation can be observed with regard to ethnomusicological research in the Horjul area. Although ethnomusicologists have not conducted any extensive fieldwork in this region, the sound archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU do contain a limited number of recordings from the area, specifically from the settlements of Horjul, Samotorica, and Vrzdenec. In addition, several recordings from villages in nearby municipalities, such as Podlipa, Smrečje, and Šentjošt, are also preserved in the archives. The existing documentary material includes examples of instrumental folk music (such as bellringing, solo performances on the diatonic accordion, and the playing of a small musical group) as well as vocal traditions (including solo and multipart singing, and songs associated with rhythmic children's games). These recordings stem from individual, one-off research visits rather than from any sustained or systematic investigation of the area's music and dance traditions. Most of the recordings were made from the 1970s onward, meaning that only a small number are suitable for applied use. Thus, only a few could be utilised by the Horjul folk dance ensemble in its activities, primarily due to the lack of dance-related content. Moreover, given that the primary focus of folk dance ensembles in Slovenia lies in the presentation of traditional folk dance, these individual sound-recordings have not served as a foundation for interpreting dance heritage within such an ensemble.

Therefore, the question of research methodology and orientation, as well as the selective geographical and thematic focus, is crucial to understanding the nature of the documentary materials preserved at the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU. The case of Horjul highlights the need for more holistic and strategically targeted research in under-documented areas, which would enrich the discourse and interpretation of dance herit-

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age in such "grey zones," and contribute more broadly to the understanding and safeguarding of Slovenian intangible cultural heritage, particularly in the domain of dance heritage.

Dance in the Horjul Valley in the Twenty-First Century

As part of the *Dance-ICH* project, the focus was not only on the dance heritage of Horjul on a discursive and practical-applied level, but also on studying contemporary dance practices in the Horjul Valley. This approach laid the groundwork for more comprehensive ethnochoreological research that may be undertaken in the future. As part of the project, attention was devoted to public dance events taking place in the local community at the present day. Rather than on dance itself (dance as a subject), the research was focused on dance events (dance as a process) where dancing is the central element, and not, however, the only one.

Dance events can generally be categorised into two types: public and private. Regardless of the setting, dancing takes place within a (dance) community that is either publicly accessible or privately constituted. As a social activity, dancing plays a role in shaping these communities. In public dance events, the presence of a researcher typically has little or no impact on how participants engage in dancing. In private contexts, however, the situation is markedly different. Private dance communities are considerably more difficult for outside ethnochoreologists to access without disrupting the setting. The presence of a researcher, whether perceived consciously or unconsciously, often elicits a response that alters the dynamics of the event, making it distinct from similar situations that unfold without external observation.

According to ethnologist Owe Ronström's definition, a dance event constitutes an interactional unit perceived as something extraordinary – an occurrence that stands out from the flow of everyday life and is bounded in both time and space. "It is a type of encounter to which people have come for special reasons, with certain anticipations, and the event is structured in accordance with its visual, cognitive and kinetic focus, the dancing and the music-making" (1989, 23). Ronström further emphasises that not every event involving dance qualifies as a dance event; this classification depends on the central focus of the gathering – whether it is dancing or another activity. In genuine dance events, all activities are organised around

the dancing and the music. When dance is merely peripheral and the intersubjective centre of perception lies elsewhere, such occasions cannot be considered dance events in the strict sense.

Prior to an examination of "real" dance events, it is pertinent to provide an overview of the role of dance in the private domain. Conversations with the inhabitants of the Horjul Valley have revealed that certain private social gatherings include dancing, though it is not typically the central activity or shared perceptual focus of these events. To begin with, it is important to emphasise the role of dancing at wedding celebrations. While weddings have become less frequent in the twenty-first century compared with earlier periods – and the associated festivities have also reportedly diminished – those that do occur often include dancing, typically accompanied by live music. In fact, the availability of a preferred venue and music band frequently influences the scheduling of the wedding itself. Within the wedding context, dancing serves not only as entertainment but also as a ritualised component of the celebration, evident in elements such as the newlyweds' first dance or the solo dances performed by key guests. The extent to which these practices reflect continuity with tradition, however, is a more complex question that lies beyond the scope of this discussion.

Another type of private occasion where dancing plays a significant, albeit secondary, role is the celebration of milestone birthdays. The extent to which live music is included in these events largely depends on the preferences and resources of the celebrants and initiators of such social occasions. While live music continues to be an important element of such gatherings, it is not always chosen; increasingly, recorded music is used at private dance parties in the Horjul Valley, reflecting broader trends observed elsewhere in the globalised world. Additionally, spontaneous social gatherings in private settings may also feature dancing. Due to the informal and often intimate nature of these occasions, however, the use of participant observation as a research methodology becomes particularly challenging and is of limited applicability for dance researchers.

In Horjul, dancing also occupies a place within the public sphere. On the one hand, it features in various events and stage performances organised by nursery and primary schools, as well as at other public events within the local community. In these contexts, the performers are typically preschool children, primary school pupils, or members of the local folk dance ensemble. However, such staged performances may not always be perceived by participants – or by the audience – as dancing in the tradition-

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al or expressive sense. Rather, they may be understood as assigned performances or even as obligatory tasks, particularly when dance is embedded within educational contexts. This raises the question: is it truly dancing, or is it a form of structured classroom activity? It is important to recognise that these practices take place within institutional frameworks, where the primary focus often lies not on dancing itself, but on broader pedagogical or ceremonial objectives.

In Horjul, an important part of public dancing is the so-called *veselice* (plural form of *veselica*), village festival. For a rural community, *veselica* – that is, a music and dance party usually organised by the local volunteer firefighters' association – is a one-day social event par excellence. The festival is public, attracts large numbers, and is usually an annual event. It is a typical form of social outlet in the countryside or non-urban areas, where half of Slovenia's total population lives. *Veselicas* are an important part of Horjul's dance culture and social events and meet Ronström's definition of a dance event. These are social events where dancing is the central, but not the only, focus of the event (for a more detailed explanation of the characteristics of *veselicas* in this area, see Kunej 2014). Owe Ronström states that "it seems not only possible to think of dances where dance is of limited interest to some of the participants, but also dance evenings without anybody dancing at all" (Ronström 1989, 21) and the same is true of the *veselicas* in Horjul and the surrounding area – even for non-dancers, a *veselica* is still a dance event.

According to the mid-2022 statistics, the Municipality of Horjul had a population of approximately 3,000 and a land area of 33,000 square kilometres (Občina Horjul 2024). In 2024, the municipality hosted seven *veselicas,* which took place in six different villages within the municipality. They were organised by five volunteer fire departments (VFDs), more specifically six VFD units, with the largest department holding a dance event in Horjul and another one in Koreno, an off-site VFD unit, which covers the hillier northern area. Another *veselica* was organised by the Horjul Horse Riding Society.

From early summer to early autumn, these open-air dance events followed a fairly standard schedule. In part, individual *veselicas* in the local villages are organised on specific "traditional" dates, reflecting the practices of bygone days, when *veselicas* were organised by the village boys on the feast day of the patron saint of the village church. This continuity illustrates how contemporary dance events remain embedded in patterns shaped by religious and communal calendars of the past. However, over

Figure 2. *Dance event* veselica *in Horjul*. Photo: Rebeka Kunej, July 2024.

the past five decades, these dates have been adapted to the changing habits within society. An obvious adaptation is that most of the *veselicas* take place in early and late summer as opposed to midsummer, when most people are on holiday and away. The annual lull is noticeable between 20 July and 15 August, which coincides with the mandated collective summer holidays in the major local factories and tradesman's workshops. Of course, on an annual basis, the organisers of individual *veselicas* need to coordinate the dates informally, as they do not want any *veselicas* to take place on the same day or risk too many of them taking place in a very short span of time.

In summer 2024, a total of seven *veselicas* was organised in the municipality. As in the previous few years, the 2024 season started in the village of Zaklanec (1 June) and continued the following Sunday (9 June) in the neighbouring village of Podolnica, less than 1.5 km away, where the *veselica* was preceded by a ceremony held to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the village's volunteer fire department. The June round of these dance events came to an end with a *veselica* in Vrzdenec (22 June). Before the summer break, a *veselica* was held in Horjul (13 July), the municipality's largest settlement. In August, after the peak summer holiday season, there was only one *veselica*, in the village of Žažar (10 August). As usual, the first days of September and the back-to-school time were

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marked by the Horjul *veselica*, organised by the local horse-riding society (1 September). At the end of the open-air dance event season, a *veselica* was organised for the second year in a row in the village of Koreno on the ridge overlooking Horjul. Out of the nine villages within the municipality, only three villages, with a population ranging from 66 to 153 inhabitants,[5] do not organise *veselicas*.

A *veselica* is a dance event characterised by live music, which is usually performed by folk-pop ensembles hired and paid by the *veselica* organisers. The selection strategies, however, vary, i.e. sometimes the organisers choose popular, established ensembles and at other times they opt for less-known local ensembles. At five of the seven *veselicas* mentioned above, dance music was played by two folk-pop ensembles whose members are mainly from the Horjul Valley. The currently most popular local ensemble, Ansambel Škof, played at three *veselicas*, while the younger – and therefore less established and experienced – ensemble Horjulski Kvintet performed all of the music for dancing at one *veselica* and was an opening act for Alpski Kvintet, a more established ensemble well-known all over Slovenia, at another. With regard to this, it is important to point out that the music performed is part of contemporary popular culture. *Veselicas* are typically associated with folk-pop music, which is characterised by the accordion being one of the instruments used to perform it. For this reason, many people regard this musical genre as a kind of extension of traditional folk music into popular music. However, folk-pop music is often not the only kind of music played at *veselicas*. In the later hours, the musicians change instruments (to, for example, drums, electric guitar, synthesizer) and start playing pop music. Often, they alternate sets of folk-pop music with sets of other kinds of popular music, with a break in between. From the perspective of dance practice, a *veselica* serves as a venue where polkas and waltzes are performed alongside other popular social dances, with the foxtrot being the most frequent addition.

Despite the presence of contemporary music at these events, *veselicas* are perceived by participants as part of local tradition. Their annual recurrence plays a significant role in shaping dance culture in the countryside. As dance events, *veselicas* demonstrate sustainability not by preserving his-

[5] Koreno, with 111 inhabitants, is one of the smaller villages in this area. However, the bond that links the villagers from the villages of Koreno and Samotorica on the ridge above the valley, also contributes to the fact, at least in part, that the Koreno *veselica* is organised and attended by the inhabitants of both villages.

torical musical and dance practices unchanged, but by adapting to contemporary contexts – including the aesthetic preferences and needs of the local dance community, as well as the logistical and social capacities of the local environment. A key characteristic of a dance event is its character as "an ongoing construction, a creation in the present, where the past is used as a part of the foundation, as resources, knowledge, competence, situational assets, and where the future is used as anticipations, presuppositions, assumptions about what is going to happen" (Ronström 1989, 27). A *veselica* embodies this concept fully. It represents a vibrant and enduring dance tradition which, while grounded in past practices, is continuously reinterpreted and lived by today's participants. For them, it constitutes a contemporary experience – a dynamic expression of dance in the present moment.

Conclusion

A comparison of the purpose of dancing in folk dance ensembles and at village *veselicas* reveals that, although the individuals involved may overlap, the motivations and functions of dance in these two contexts differ significantly. Various scholars have proposed different typologies to explain why people dance (cf. Royce 2002; Shay 1971). For the purposes of this discussion, the framework offered by Andriy Nahachewsky is of particular relevance. He identifies four broad categories of dance: ritual dance, recreational/social dance, art dance, and ethnic/national dance (2012, 14). Within this framework, the *veselica* exemplifies social dance. Its historically ritual function has largely disappeared, and within the discourse of local participants, its ethnic significance is no longer strongly emphasised. In contrast, dance within folk dance ensembles is primarily understood as a cultivation of ethnic or national identity within the artistic domain, situated at the intersection of ethnic/national dance and art dance. Nonetheless, both *veselicas* and the activities of the local folk dance ensemble contribute meaningfully to the cultural landscape of the Horjul Valley. Each, in its own modalitiy, plays a role in shaping local dance culture, and together they can be understood as integral components of the broader domain of dance traditions recognised as intangible cultural heritage, and can ultimately be positioned within Nahachewsky's broader category of ethnic dance.

In Horjul, however, the two dance traditions – the *veselicas*, which have a longer historical presence, and the folk dance ensemble, which repre-

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sents a more recent development – differ notably in their temporal orientation. *Veselicas* are focused exclusively on the present moment; the experience of dance is immediate and embedded in the current social context. In contrast, the practice of the folk dance ensemble entails an active engagement with the past, involving processes of selection, stylisation, and staged representation rooted in historical reflection. Nahachewsky (2012, 24) describes this distinction through the concepts of "vival" and "reflective" dance. Vival dance refers to forms in which participants are fully immersed in the present flow of experience while dancing, without conscious engagement with historical or cultural narratives. Reflective dance, on the other hand, involves an awareness of and intentional relationship with the past. In this sense, *veselicas* exemplify vival dance, while folk dance ensemble performances correspond to the reflective mode.

Dance – dancing – always entails an engagement with the present. Certain forms of dance, however, such as those performed by folk dance ensembles, also involve a deliberate engagement with the past. As Nahachewsky notes, this reflective dimension "is therefore better conceived as an overlay or addition onto the basic dance experience in the present" (2012, 26). This reflective layer is one of the key reasons why the dancing of folk dance ensembles is commonly regarded as part of dance heritage, whereas contemporary social dance practices, such as *veselicas*, are not perceived in the same way within local communities. Local inhabitants do not describe the *veselica* as "our heritage", but rather as "our tradition" or "custom", while in the case of folk dance ensembles, heritage discourse predominates. The sustainability and ongoing vitality of *veselicas* are not dependent on heritage frameworks; rather, they endure as vibrant, living dance events, drawing large numbers of participants. At present, they do not require the designation of heritage in order to ensure their existence.

Paradoxically, this chapter may itself contribute to the future recognition and valuation of dance events such as the *veselica* as part of the Horjul Valley's dance heritage – not only among heritage professionals, but also among the practitioners of this contemporary dance form rooted in tradition. Through their research, both historically and today, ethnochoreologists have played an active role in co-shaping and co-creating contemporary discourses on dance heritage, whether we like it or not. Each engagement with past or present dance practices, each act of research and documentation, inevitably adds new material to ongoing heritage narratives in the future. The extent to which these discourses, however, be-

come authoritative or remain open and critical depends on the individual researcher's approach and reflexivity. Ultimately, it is the local (heritage) communities themselves – those who dance – who must be placed at the forefront of defining and shaping the discourses surrounding their own dance heritage.

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