

From Unicorns to Lipizzan Horses. Romanian Folklore Studies on the Way to the Implementation of the UNESCO 2003 Convention

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As a country officially engaged in the intangible cultural heritage (hereafter ICH) inventorying and other safeguarding mechanisms of the UNESCO 2003 Convention, Romania provides an example of how folklorists strive to transcend the traditional rules of their discipline and to adapt their methodology and overview to supporting the implementation of the Convention. Starting from the recent Romanian contribution to the multinational file for inscribing the “Lipizzan horse breeding traditions” on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, this paper highlights the counterbalancing influences encountered during this process. Given the distance between this ICH element and the topoi that stand in the mainstream of Romanian folklore studies, the author will provide arguments for considering horse husbandry as a worthy example of living heritage in Romania, ensuring visibility to this tradition in a context dominated by the definition of folklore as an artistic or expressive phenomenon that is being (re)presented as ICH and less by folklife and aesthetic social and cultural manifestations. Using other examples of Romanian living heritage less visible at the level of scholarly and policy initiatives, the author pleads for a middle ground between traditional folklore studies and the theory and current practices of documenting living heritage. The topic may thus contribute to greater efforts to break the old rules of the discipline, turning experts’ eyes from mythological horses to real ones.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, UNESCO 2003 Convention, Lipizzan horse breeding tradition, Romanian folklore studies, folklore archive

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Motto

„Here sits the Unicorn; / Head in a collar cased, / Like a girdle laced/ Round
a maiden's waist, / Broidered and buckled wide, / Carelessly tied. / He could slip his
head / From the jewelled noose / So lightly tied — / If he tried...”

(*The Unicorn in Captivity* by Anne Morrow Lindbergh)

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM WAS A HORSE

On the 20th of January 2006, Romania became the 30th country to ratify UNESCO's *Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* adopted in 2003 (hereafter ICHC), thus allowing this instrument to enter into force (Smeets, 2006: 1). As was the case with all the states-parties of the ICHC, which sought to translate “the fabric of intangible cultural heritage” into legal expressions (Cornu, Vaivade, 2020: 3), Romania drafted a Law of Intangible Cultural Heritage (accepted in 2008) and established an independent expert body (of 13 scholars) working under the Ministry of Culture. In 2019, after seven successful inscriptions on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the newly appointed members of the National Commission for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage received an invitation from Slovenia to participate at the drafting of a multinational file dealing with the tradition of breeding Lipizzan horses. As I knew already from my colleagues that have been working under the National Commission in the previous mandate, this invitation stayed on the Ministry of Culture's desk for about two years, pushed afar by various functionaries, but also by the majority of my colleagues. I was not surprised, and it was clear to me why the “Horse” file was not considered worthy of attention. None of my colleagues (who were mainly folklore scholars, museum workers and ethnomusicologists) saw this “Horse” file as fitting into their portfolio. Moreover, it seemed exotic and misplaced only by comparing it with the other seven “Romanian” inscribed elements, which are a ritual dance, a type of a decorative pottery, a folk song, a folk dance, a carpet handicraft, etc. So perhaps even the Ministry of Culture did not perceive the proposed topic as having the potential to “stir up national pride”¹ and become an asset of “cultural diplomacy”, as it was the case of other countries heritage systems.² Volunteering to take up the drafting of the “Horse” file (and then being appointed by the National Commission for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage as the coordinator of the file) thus looked like a bold statement, contrary to my own professional limitations and expectations,³ so it literally meant going through

1 The interpretation of the ICHC as a matter of international pride by representatives of member-states is observed by K. Kuutma within the Intergovernmental Committee meetings of the ICHC: “During following Committee meetings, any concern voiced regarding our decisions simply mirrored international representation of national pride. Thus, the evaluation cycles resulted in conceptualizing ICH further in the process of making it operational and in defining managerial agendas and the process of selection of exemplary phenomena henceforth comes to embody the dominant image of ICH” (Kuutma, 2019: 73).

2 “France's idea of heritage was primarily based on its uniqueness and excellence, not at all on typicality or representativeness” (Tornatore, 2012: 353).

3 As a “concrete actor” involved in the intangible cultural heritage apparatus, my intention is to offer here a very personal perspective of the process of selection and inclusion implied by this particular situation,

grassroot apprenticeship in the well-delineated world of the Romanian Lipizzan horses and the people passionately associated with them as owners, experts, stable personnel, veterinarians or horse aficionados, discovering that: “as with any culture, aspects of an equestrian culture provide meaning, are important for social identity, and can be resilient to change” (Birke, Thompson, 2017).

The Lipizzan as a modern horse breed was “created” in 1580, in Lipizza – a locality in the south of the Habsburg Empire (today, Lipica in Slovenia) – and has been developed in the political and geographical area of the former Habsburg Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (i.e. in the territories of today’s Austria, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as parts of the territories of today’s Italy, Romania, and Serbia). This is a European horse breed, one of the most famous of its kind in the central-eastern parts of the continent, and its preservation for such a long time-period proves implicitly the transmission of specific breeding knowledge, practices and techniques. The breeding of Lipizzan horses is strictly based upon the documentation of pedigree records, which can be traced back to the second half of the 18th century. The specialized documents and the oral tradition of the community of bearers prove that Lipizzan horse husbandry is a continuous phenomenon, and it has created a culture specific to these communities where the Lipizzan breed was preserved and promoted. In the last 100 years in Romania, the Lipizzan horses have a distinctive place in the national hippic inventory and within the communities of private horse breeders, and it plays a strategic role – the role of a “cultural” horse breed – within the state stud farm system.

According to historical documents, near the beginning of the modern era, on the territory inhabited by Romanians, purebred horses were owned only by local aristocrats, which used them for saddling, warfare, carriage, and especially to highlight their power, rank and political allegiances. In time, the breed horses also started to be owned by the lower social classes for equine-based labour, which is a phenomenon also characteristic to Croatian Lipizzan horses (Španiček, 2019: 214–215), and currently they are under transition from “work horse to sport horse” (Hedenborg, White, 2013). Despite the lesser role given to work horses, these animals’ prestige gained due to their century-connection with the aristocracy, and military-based horsemanship did not fully disappear from the collective consciousness, especially given “the extent to which our culture, especially in the domains of language, literature, visual and performative arts, is informed by the centuries of interaction between humans and horses” (Ropa, 2019: 1). The elegant and imposing demeanour of breed horses, their endurance, intelligence and devotion to their owners – qualities also pointed out by fairy-tales (see the Arne-Thompson-Uther typology – especially ATU 530-533 types: “Animals as helpers” – Arne-Thompson, 1961, 188–192; see the flying horses that are magic helpers in Slavic fairy-tales: Haase, 2008: 880) or Romanian folk beliefs, according to which horses are

in response to Tauschek’s claim for transparency: “Ethnographic research on heritage as a practice, policy and concept thus has to consider concrete actors and their options and paths of action. Who, for example, represents governmental authority in the context of national heritage policies? Who are individual or institutional actors that deal with heritage issues in the context of national bureaucracies? From which perspective do they argue? What is their professional background? How does their often quite personal understanding of heritage influence professional definitions? What are the bureaucratic and political contexts that shape these dimensions?” (Tauschek, 2012: 197)

magic agency (Coman, 1996: 50) and apotropaic symbols (Taloş, 2001: 28) – are resettled within the folk ideas and worldview (Dundes, 1971: 93–95) through the horse’s presentation as companion for displaying the skills and courage of young men in calendrical and family rituals; in folktales and folk ballads, the horse is represented as a protagonist of supernatural powers and a mediator between the sky and the earth (Muşlea, 1924: 68–69), as is the case with other ancient or/and folk mythological systems as they were described especially within fairy-tales (Aarne-Thompson, 1961: 188–192; Bârlea, 2014: 113–121).

Before I started to work on the Lipizzan file, my only equine reference was analyzing archive documents on masked winter merrymaking, also involving horse masking, that were characterized by traditional ethnology as “relics of earlier pagan rituals” (for various references, see Repciuc, 2018). Harry Senn, an American folklorist interested in Romanian folklore, believes that “the interval between Christmas and Easter has historically been the time of roaming spirits of animals and the dead, when masking ritual was believed to capture and make available the power of these spirits”. Ritual masquerade of horse-like men similar to hobby-horse dancers are connected by Senn with the “larger mythological cosmology and context of [Romanian] folk traditions in which werewolves and vampires find a more natural place” (Senn, 1982: 214). A noticeable orientation towards fantasy and magic is at the center of all zoomorphic folk representations, not only in Romania but also in other countries. The more acceptable equine reference in the content of Romania’s ICH Inventory is the culturally transfigured men-horses displayed in the Căluş ritual – the first Romanian nomination on the Representative List (an element inscribed in 2005 on the former Masterpieces List and further incorporated on the Representative List). The etymological connection between *Căluş* and *cal* (Rom. “horse”) was explained and supported by Romanian ethnologists (Vuia, 1975: 111). The Căluş ritual was originally a healing dance performed at Whitsunday, but it received international fame in the more artistic shape of a dance (Kligman, 1981). Though originally a healing magic tradition within the community where it was practiced, the Căluş was sent to represent Romania at the inaugural International Dance Festival that took place in London in 1935.⁴ The success on the international stage of the ritual performers turned them overnight into “artistic” dancers after they returned back home and allowed the Romanian public to realize the importance of their folk culture after it became a “masterpiece” of the humanity, as is the case with other national ICH, that is appreciated more by insiders after being praised and even appropriated by outsiders (Scafidi, 2005: 28–29). This is also the case of *El condor passa* song, in which the Bolivian state engaged in defending national ICH due to a foreign misappropriation (Hafstein, 2007).

The equine reference in the hermeneutic of Căluş dancers was offered by the Romanian historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, who explained that their ritual and social success was also determined by their ability to create the impression of flying in the air, which he believed represented both the galloping of a horse and the dancing of

4 The first edition of the renown International Folk Dance Festival was organized at Cecil Sharp House in London, by English Folk Dance and Song Society that played an important part in the British folklore revival of the time. Douglas Kennedy, the director of this society, was “enthralled by the liveliness of European ‘peasant’ dances” (Walkowitz, 2010: 177), some of them being the Romanian ones.

fairies (Eliade, 1975: 161). It is not my scope to encourage an invented connection between the Căluș and the Lipizzan, but it is striking that the Lipizzan horses did not manage to inspire a folk mythology in Romania and remained impressive only at the level of real horses and small communities of experts and passionate riders, even though there are some international authors of popular mythologies that directly connected the Lipizzan and the mythic Pegasus, arguing that the Lipizzan is “the living legend of the Greeks and Romans” (Hausman, Hausman, 2003: 166).

Even with the rich presence of horses in folk art and ritual (Semuc, 2019), Romanians did not reframe them as a national heritage icon, as did the Poles (Kozak, 2017), so “folklore” horses as cultural and anthropomorphized constructs are going to be far more iconic than any real ones. On the other hand, the Lipizzan horse breeding tradition lacks a series of key features that would enable them to acquire the status of a highly appreciated ICH. First, it lacks the attributes of an “ancient” tradition, and secondly – it represents a “hybrid” heritage category, given the fact that “purity” in ethnic and formal terms is desired within the heritage engineering agenda (Kuutma, 2012: 26). On the contrary, judged from the point of view of a generic preference, the Lipizzan breed was born in a foreign place and, after arriving on Romanian lands, oscillated between urban and rural, elites and non-elites. However, according to Chiara Bortolotto, “the UNESCO definitions and understanding of the ICH content [are] to be taken in terms of time (an evolving process) and usage (not just for aesthetic contemplation), and from considering cultural expressions not as ‘objects’ that could be stored in an archive or a museum, but as social processes” (Bortolotto, 2007: 21), and in this respect the Lipizzan horse breeding tradition follows more closely the ICH paradigm as delineated by ICHC than the “folklore” horses. From the beginning of my work with the community of Lipizzan horse experts and owners, I realized that I was not in a position of expertise in the classic understanding of the academic infrastructure as it was probably current in the work done before by my colleagues in the National Commission, but in that of a more modest role of mediator between the grassroots communities and the cultural bureaucracy. Moreover, I was not facilitating the canonization of a heritage item with roots in the archive, but trying to create from scratch the cultural discourse to describe a mostly social and biological phenomenon whose existence was parallel with the ethnological discourse in which I was until then involved.

THE AESTHETIC AND THE ARCHIVAL

Even though unregistered by folk ballads, the Lipizzan horses display great physical beauty by the standards of actual horses, and they show the attribute of “spectacular” that was also constitutive of folk products in the contest of cultural diplomacy implied by the intricate processes of selecting and inscribing national ICH into the UNESCO Representative List, as explained above. As critical observers of the Representative List system noticed, unresolved problems come from how the various meanings of the adjective “representative” in the name of this UNESCO instrument are grasped by each state party. Though intended to signify “typical” or “average”, when inscribing their culture on “the List”, countries see their elements in terms of excellence and exceptionality. These semantic tensions are well described by Hamar and Voľanská: “Another question

is which elements should be included on the Representative List. These might be representative elements with extraordinary value. Shall a state nominate for the world list elements that are valuable ‘for us’ and for the local community, or elements that are more attractive, exotic and unique in international context from the international perspective and as such they have a better chance to be successfully inscribed?” (Hamar, Vofanská, 2015: 42).

From its inception in 2008, the Romanian patrimonial regime has been built upon the already strong tradition of folklore studies functioning as the main academic background of ICH safeguarding management in the country. How folklore was and is an impactful prerequisite of ICHC implementation at the national level was observed and discussed by Kristin Kuutma, for example, who offered a comprehensive analytical discussion on how to “understand the transformation from (documenting) folklore to the rise of the intangible”, and in order to do that she positioned herself “between scholarship, society, and the polity” (Kuutma, 2016: 42). For former socialist European countries, academic folklore’s connection with society and polity carries a complicated ideological load, that might still inform today’s decisions on what is “representative” and what constitutes the middle ground between ICH expertise or folklore studies’ “academic capital” (Mengel, 2015: 293) and concrete lives of communities and groups where heritage is created and recreated.

There are two essential features of the Romanian folklore studies’ capital that could be traced to the decision-making process of ICH policy that I will briefly name the “artistic” and the “archival”, and I will explain below their direct involvement in the ICH apparatus.

The emphasis on the Romanian folk culture’s artistic qualities is due to the connection of the discipline with the Romantic Age, that advertised the highly expressive culture of the nation, but even more to the later instrumentalization of the field by Communist propaganda (Karnoouh, 1982: 95–100). In Romania, the insistence on folklore as a form of national “art” started officially, when the Institute of Folklore in Bucharest was created (1949). Due to the Stalinist political regime of that time, only musicologists were recruited, while Soviet-type ethnography imposed “the idea that folklore is by excellence art and especially musical art” (Hedeşan, 2008: 24). A similar type of cultural engineering was noticed in the case of neighboring Communist state Bulgaria, where “folklore represented a collection of objects and performances which held aesthetic value as ‘Bulgarian culture’” (Kanef, 2004: 141). When the “aesthetic” is thus grounded in a certain ethnic culture it could play the role of an “exotic” and “attractive” item ready to be thrown onto the competitive cultural global market, implicit in the UNESCO Representative List system. A totally different system that puts at the top of the implicit ranking of topics and elements to be inscribed on the Representative List is offered by France. A French ICH expert, Chérif Khaznadar, complains that in the first years of inscriptions, France privileged elements that are part of the “savoir-faire” and the “material culture”, rather than those that are the heart of the “living heritage” – the oral folklore, the folk music, the festival (Khaznadar, 2011: 22).

The name of the field itself – folklore – became lastingly connected with “spiritual culture” or “oral culture” and making it therefore, in the understanding of Romanian ICH expertise, an appropriate synonym for the newly arrived ICH. Consequently, “ethnography” as a more concrete description of folk culture in other national ethnologies

across Eastern Europe⁵ was entrusted to study the “material culture” that better respected the historical-material method of Soviet inspiration. At the beginnings of professional Romanian ethnology in the first decades of the last century, an important methodological and theoretical contribution was provided by a few human geographers. One of the most relevant, George Vâlsan, tried to plead for a more scientific understanding of folk culture that was supposed to be offered by ethnography. Vâlsan believed that folklore studies proved to be too drawn to idealizing the “nation” and became a “science of texts”, as opposed to ethnography – a more objective science of “close observation in the middle of nature, in the peasant’s house, in his daily life” (Vâlsan, 1927/2001: 7).

Folklore studies’ inheritance of the “textual” dimension is pervasive in the Romanian academic field not only in a philological sense (the tendency to study the “literary” and “musical” expressions of folk production), but also as an inclination to textualize living folk culture. This is what Ingrid Slavec Gradišnik calls “explanatory ethnographies” (2010: 124), indicating this type of narrative collection through which Slovenian amateur folklorists were salvaging the treasure of disappearing folk culture in the late 19th century. The next phase of salvaging was storing the texts as proper folklore documents, and this phase signifies the birth of the folklore archive, which for some commentators means a mere “warehousing rather than the evolution of living culture” (Scafidi, 2005: X).

The role played by folklore archives in the process of implementing the ICHC is manifest in the designing of the national inventories as requested by the Article 12 of the Convention as well as in the selection and then description of the historical background of an ICH element meant to be proposed for inscription on the Representative List.⁶ As Kristin Kuutma concludes while assessing the impact of folklore studies in the former socialist European republics’ heritage systems, “folklore continued to denote music, dance, costume, crafts, and festivals, while poetic and narrative repertoires tacitly drew upon the vast collections housed in archives and museums” (Kuutma, 2016: 51). In the case of Romania, the folklore archive as a powerful source of data seems to have been a relevant category of the “authorized heritage discourse”, described by Laurajane Smith as “reliant on the power/knowledge claims of technical and aesthetic experts, and institutionalized in state cultural agencies and amenity societies” (Smith, 2006: 11). The role of experts in managing the ICH safeguarding was clearly mentioned at the Second Extraordinary Session of the Intergovernmental Committee (in Sofia, Bulgaria, 18–22 Feb. 2008), which was “an important shift from the original text of the Convention, which did not really speak about expert participation in the implementation of the Convention” (Lixinski, 2011: 85).

5 “Ethnology in Slovakia was mostly called ‘ethnography’ until the early 1990s. At present, ‘ethnography’ is usually understood as an ethnological research method, i.e. a description of empirical data from fieldwork. Ethnography in Slovakia in the 20th century was defined as a historical scientific discipline which researched the folk and its material, spiritual and social culture signed as folk culture.” (Kiliánová, 2017: 71). A similar specialized divide between “ethnography” and “ethnology” became common among Romanian scholars (Vulcănescu, 1979: 110–111), but it is still constantly challenged by the idea that “ethnography” only deals with the “material” aspects of folk culture.

6 See the descriptive files for elements inscribed on the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Romania: <https://patrimoni.ro/patrimoniui-material/inventarul-elementelor-vii-de-patrimoniui-cultural-imaterial>.

The fact “folklore archives romantically seen as foundations of nations” (Bendix, 2015: 150) contributed implicitly to their way towards being “foundations” of ICH policy and consequently to compiling attractive labels of the nation for the global cultural market. An understanding of the ways in which the archive modelled the targets of ICH policy in Romania should start with a close reading of the Law no. 26/2008 while comparing it with the text of the ICHC. The Romanian law for ICH introduces, besides the ICH definition that closely paraphrases the ICHC, the concept of “traditional cultural expressions” that are “expressions of human creativity” with an obvious insistence on the expressive side of folk culture (verbal and musical folklore, customs, rituals, and also “technical creativity” – such as traditional handicrafts). In the chapter where there is a description of what these “traditional cultural expressions” might be (Chapter II, Art. 6), the text emphasized that “they are the result of a creative activity of a human community enjoying coherent cultural characteristics that allow it to be differentiated from other human communities”; this mention alone is based on the assumption that folklore is able to campaign for ethnic and cultural distinctiveness on an international level.

It is easily noticeable that the Romanian ICH law was more inspired by the *Recommendations on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore* in 1989 by UNESCO, than by the ICHC, though it was issued in 2008. It insists on salvaging and storing tangible “proofs” of ICH and devotes two articles to the roles of folklore archives (Art. 19 and Art. 20). When we compare these two articles with the Art. C from the *Recommendations* (entitled “Conservation of Folklore”), which is the article that encourages Member States to establish national archives where folklore is to be stored and also made available to communities, we immediately realize that the Romanian text is totally directed towards portraying folklore archives as institutions of academic research.⁷ Moreover, there is no reference here on the dissemination of the archival information to the concerned public, such as the *Recommendations*: “Art. C (g) provide means for making security and working copies of all folklore materials, and copies for regional institutions, thus securing the cultural community an access to the materials”, and also “Art. D. (b) guarantee the right of access of various cultural communities to their own folklore by supporting their work in the fields of documentation, archiving, research, etc., as well as in the practice of traditions”.

Another strain of the discipline’s tradition born under communist regime and the system of “government-sponsored folklore” (Silverman, 1983: 55) that is still very much affecting the closed system of Romanian ICH and its strong dependency on the archive architecture is the task that Romanian ethnologists assumed in order to comply with the desire of the communist propaganda and in line with the extensive, encyclopedic projects of the discipline also developed by other national ethnologies. In the 1970s, the Institute of Folklore in Bucharest started extensive fieldwork designed to gather the necessary data for a national ethnographic atlas. As Otilia Hedeşan notices, this type of fieldwork was not in line with a research strategy that would allow ethnologists to grasp the dynamics of local identities, “but the kind of fieldwork implied was rather different: the well-defined themes (household, occupations and traditional crafts, customs, the

7 See more on the history of Romanian folklore archives and the current status and initiatives of the national folklore archive in Ispas, 1998–1999, 2016, 2021.

calendar's cycle and mythical representations) were covered by long lists of very technical items whose presence or absence had to be checked in a number of selected villages. This very 'technical' process oriented the discussions mainly on ethnographical topics and has drastically reduced the usual interviews and free conversations with the local peasants" (Hedeşan, 2008: 35). Exploring the ways of life of the Romanian countryside turned thus into a long inventory of texts ordered geographically. Textualization (turning living culture into a text by scholarly means) as heritagization was recently pointed out by a domestic ethnologist working closely in the Romanian UNESCO-ICH apparatus, and considered a strategy by which communities could acknowledge and promote their cultural identities (Fruntelată, 2020: 123).

It is also true that the fervent exhaustive collecting of national folklore and storing this "genuine" heritage in national archives of folklore was also meant to counteract the brutal intrusion of the communist propaganda into the discipline. Folklorists were aware that the staged artistic folklore promoted by the state had only a very pale connection with grassroot culture living in the village, so this realization inspired a protectionist attitude towards storing for a later time, "for the drawer". It seems that this long-lasting trend of accumulating knowledge for a later publication became a *status quo* of the discipline and transformed the archive into an ivory tower and an elitist institution. After the fall of communism, and in line with UNESCO's projects to release instruments meant to protect and encourage the safeguarding of the living heritage, a more innovative part of the Romanian expert body expressed concerns that the archive-oriented domestic ethnology should strive more to (re)discover the contemporary strain of traditional life (Ştiucă, [2002] 2009: 563). More recently, a Romanian scholar who worked intensely in the Ministry of Culture's office for ICH released her PhD research on the implementation of the ICHC in Romania. Balotescu's critique of the system in place is rather generic: she highlights the lack of appropriateness of drafting nomination files for the Representative List given the low efficiency of safeguarding ICH at the community level: "There is a total lack of information campaigns with communities, and the scholars engage in fieldwork only guided by their own professional deontology" (Balotescu, 2018: 88). Through interviews with important members of the national commission for ICH, Balotescu allows the reader to acknowledge the fact there were folklore experts in the country who took decisions on what elements to be proposed on the Representative List or the fact the representative communities or areas where these elements were active were also selected by experts who worked at the national folklore archive. Thus, archive contents and different actors in the vast "hierarchies of expertise" (Kuutma, 2019: 79) inspired the choices made in the contemporary management of living heritage (Balotescu, 2018: 99).

CHASING ENCLOSED UNICORNS

Balotescu shows therefore a very disquieting reality – that of the gap between cultural bureaucracy and the archive folklorists on the one hand, and the actual communities of practice. A similar situation is suggested for the French national structure which manages ICH-related works: "The action of the *Mission ethnologie* is limited to the field of culture, which means that ICH is still strongly dependant on the universalistic

doctrine of culture in France. Furthermore, this connection with the notion of culture does not allow any cooperation with the fields of local development or tourism, which deeply concerns the local actors. In this context, where only the national institutions are involved in the implementation of the UNESCO convention, no proper relations with local actors and 'tradition bearers' have been built up yet" (Fournier, 2012: 332). The democratization of the ICH inventorying and other safeguarding moving away from a top-down approach is nevertheless still a desired project, as in some states "lip-service is paid to the idea of community 'involvement' and may, for example, just involve 'consultations' with selected community representatives" (Blake, 2019: 28). In order to explain the metacultural process enabled by inscribing on the UNESCO Representative List against the spirit of the convention, or in the national inventories, the Bulgarian anthropologist Mila Santova uses the metaphor of the "image in the mirror," stressing the gap between the cultural reality experienced by ICH bearers and practitioners and the one created by intangible cultural typologies and inventorying systems: "The image of the heritage in the mirror is accurate but deceitful at the same time. It is part copy, shadow...of the reality, some reality, reality as it was and as it will turn out to be" (Santova, 2014: 53).

Romanian ethnology is today on the path of transformation, attaining the status of a more "anthropologized" discipline, in a process of internal critical reflection that began earlier in some other Eastern European ethnologies, but the canon equating "national" with "folklore" and "ancient" is still a powerful reference point for most academic work in the field. Studying everyday life instead of "customs", a development that was noticed in Croatian ethnology, for example, since the 1980s (Čapo, Gulin Zrnić, 2017: 235), is, in Romanian ethnology, still not the rule, but the exception. After all, the goal should not be for the ethnology as a discipline to borrow the worldview and methods of anthropology or other social science that is more self-critical and more popular in the mainstream of social sciences. Moreover, it is to regain its own path, and become as independent as possible, freed from the past alliances and services paid to other systems of thought and action.

Recently, Marc Jacobs pleaded for the emergence of a hybrid institution that would deal with safeguarding ICH and include desirable features from all the existing ones; such a future „hybrid institution” would be better adapted to the diversity of ICH in the world today (Jacobs, 2020: 270). In the case of Romania, finding a middle ground in the ICH national apparatus between *top* – the higher level of cultural bureaucracy – and *bottom* – the grassroots communities – means reshaping the mission of the academic institutions who are used to chasing various mythological “unicorns” and are not willing to find a place in their drawers for the real horses. As an offspring of academic ethnology that was appointed by the State to play a crucial role in implementing the ICHC, Romanian ICH policy bears the traces of the archival framework that is quintessential to academic folklore. It is therefore logical that the Romanian ICH legislation followed closely the well-established concepts and scholarly objects of domestic ethnology, and the concept of “folklore” as a cultural product or as a matter of research was barely changed when turned into “ICH”. National folklore archive thus took over a taken-for-granted function of generating the “authorized heritage discourse” and it is thanks to the archive that the national intangible cultural heritage is constructed or identified, legitimized, authorized, and promoted globally.

Acting as the custodian of the heritage “archetypes” and setting up expectations and standards, the “archive” cannot however act also as the administrator of the communities it studies, so then it leaves this intricate task to the state that needs at its turn to find and build specific measures and the networks to interact and safeguard the heritage of communities identified by archival custodians. This limitation of the ICH-apparatus is reinforced by the lack of a working expertise in public folklore in Romania. It is obvious that Romanian ICH expertise would benefit from the dialogism that was and is actively practiced for example by public folklorists in the USA. Public folklore could be a valuable tool for ICH scholars and experts to use in their endeavor of leaving their professional ivory towers and the ministry’s offices, as explained by Robert Baron: “Heritage scholars have not yet, in most cases, satisfactorily articulated their multiple roles as scholars, advisors and researchers through critical reflexivity and a praxis addressing issues expressed in their critical scholarship through engagement in ICH programmes. US public folklore dialogism points to how ICH scholars, professionals and heritage authorities can integrate their multiple roles to foster community involvement that is empowering and represents a community’s perspectives. Public folklore has developed practices to renew and validate traditions while enabling the voices of community members to be shared more widely. Innovative public folklore approaches for sharing authority could be productively replicated in ICH programmes elsewhere, with acknowledgement of the power asymmetries that inevitably persist.” (Baron, 2016: 599). In the case of the ICH expertise, public folklore could embody the “hybrid” condition that Marc Jacobs was envisaging for institutions.

In his *Book of Imaginary Beings*, Borges portrays the unicorn using the ideas of Pliny as a hybrid animal (a combination of a real horse, a stag, and an elephant) and also mentions that ancient people believed that it is impossible to capture the unicorn alive (Borges, 1957: 146). With the imagination stirred up by this mythological horse, chasers and hunters would even prefer to kill the desired prey only to be able to look at its beauty. It is indeed a sad story that would require lovers of living unicorns to give up their passion and be content instead to admire real horses, even though their beauty was not sung by the world’s poets. At the end of the story, it is the human’s decision to free the myth so that life can take its place. After all, it is not too late or counterintuitive to consider Arnold van Gennep’s professional commandment on how folklorists should be more like biologists than like historians, and thus dive into the environment of studied animals, instead of closing themselves into study of the past. Without planning on reviving Van Gennep’s *biological method* (1924: 33), looking for culture in the biological world of the horses guided me to realizing how many unicorns we chase in the cultural world.

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