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The Folk Tradition and its Transformation in the Context of Social Influences and Contributions by Individuals

(Using the Slovácko ‘Verbuňk’ Male Recruitment Dance as an Example)

2005 saw the approval of the Czech Republic’s nomination of the Slovácko ‘*Verbuňk*’ dance for inclusion in UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It may be characterised as an improvisational male dance, improvised individually, which contains jumping figures. It may be interpreted by a large number of dancers simultaneously, but may also be a solo dance. Geographically, it comes from the Slovácko ethnographic region in south-eastern Moravia. In the second half of the 20th century, it was known particularly among folklore ensembles and at natural events, and its performance was significantly tied to the folk revival movement. Although the name of the dance—the *Verbuňk*—suggests a relationship with forced army recruitment in the 18th century (*verbování* comes from the German term for recruitment: *Werbung*), the significant period for the development of the dance extends even further back. The dance strongly reflected intellectual interests in folk culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the folk revival movement that was based upon it. Key figures in both amateur and professional dancing had a major influence on the dance’s development. (It started as a male dance characterized by rhythmical movement of the legs, the so-called *cifrování* or ‘decoration’ of the dance, developing into a strong individual dance with a vocal prelude, dance figures and accelerating tempo.)

Key words: tradition, folklore, dance, Verbuňk, folk revival.

Фолклорна традиција и њена трансформација у контексту друштвених утицаја и доприноса појединаца (на примеру мушког регрутског плеса „вербуњк“ из Моравске Словачке)

Године 2015. одобрена је номинација Чешке Републике за укључивање плеса „вербуњк“ из Моравске Словачке у репрезентативну листу људског нематеријалног културног наслеђа UNESCO-а. Он се може окарактерисати као импровизациони мушки плес, са индивидуалним импровизацијама, који садржи фигуре скакања. Може се изводити са великим бројем плесача истовремено, али и као соло плес. Географски, он потиче из етнографске регије Моравска Словачка, на југоистоку Моравске. У другој половини 20. века био је познат посебно међу фолклорним ансамблима и на догађајима у природи, а његово извођење у значајној је вези са покретом за

ревитализацију фолклора. Иако име овог плеса – *вербуњк* – сугерише везу са регрутацијом у 18. веку (*verbování* потиче од немачког термина за регрутацију, *Werbung*), значајан период његовог развоја датира чак и раније. Плес снажно одликова интересовање интелектуалаца за народну културу на крају 19. и почетку 20. века и покрет за ревитализацију фолклора који је уследио. Кључне фигуре како у аматерском, тако и у професионалном плесу имале су главни утицај на његов развој. (Плес је започео као мушка игра коју карактеришу ритмични покрети ногу, тзв. *цифровани* или „декорације“, а развио се у снажан индивидуални плес са вокалном увертиром, плесним фигурама и убравајућим темпом.)

Кључне речи: традиција, фолклор, плес, вербуњк, ревитализација фолклора.

In 2005, the Czech Republic's nomination of the Slovácko ‘Verbuňk’, a male dance, for entry in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was granted in Paris. The recognition capped years of effort by ethnologists and active dancers who sought preservation of the dance at the turn of the 21st century, and also heightened public awareness of the cultural heritage.¹ In the second half of the 20th century, this male dance practised in the Slovácko region in south-eastern Moravia was known especially in folk ensembles and was performed on stage for the enjoyment of people interested in folk culture. Researchers also encountered the dance in the field at events that included dancing. But because of its complexity, the *Verbuňk* was often interpreted exclusively by gifted bearers could encounter it also during natural dancing occasions. However, because of the complexity of the dance, it was frequently interpreted only by excellent bearers and, to a significant extent, skill in dance went hand-in-hand with the folk revival movement. Because folklore traditions were rapidly receding, this was a natural situation and one which was true of other folk culture phenomena as well.

The *Verbuňk* may be characterised as an improvisational male dance, improvised individually, which contains jumping figures. It can be interpreted by a large number of dancers simultaneously, but may also be a solo dance. It is unique for its vocal prelude and the increasing tempo of subsequent dance moves over time.

Ethnographic studies from the late 19th and early 20th century make reference to the Slovácko ethnographic region, where the *Verbuňk* is practised, as Moravské Slovensko. The name “Slovácko” did not become widespread until the interwar period (Drápala – Pavlicová 2014, 174).² The region’s boundaries started to come into a sharper focus in the late 19th century owing to researchers with an interest in preserving folk culture. A monograph entitled *Moravské Slovensko* (1918–1922), edited by Lubor Niederle (1865–1944), was a kind of ‘codification’ of the

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² Even from a contemporary standpoint, the ethnographic division of Moravia is highly interesting, because it not only reflects the inclusion of what would otherwise be independent units of folk culture into particular geographic areas, it also traces developments from a time when folk traditions had lost their status as a visible feature of everyday life but continued nevertheless to be a significant cultural presence.

region. It presented the geographical area in thematic chapters featuring tangible and intangible folk culture.³

The monograph grew out of a folklore research concept first proposed in the 1890s. The ground was laid for the monograph's publication by the *Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition*, which took place in Prague in 1895 and represented a true milestone for interest among Czechs in their folk culture. While there was an overall focus on the various expressions of Czech national culture in literature, music, art, etc., the lavishly conceived exhibition particularly highlighted folk culture phenomena. Along with the individual displays, 'live events' took were held that saw the inhabitants of individual regions present the music, dance, and customs of their folklore. Documents surviving from the time of the exhibition note that both living and reconstructed dances and customs were performed and reenacted.⁴ The *Verbuňk* was also mentioned, as may be seen in a publication entitled *Slavnosti a obyčeje lidové z Moravy na Národopisné výstavě československé v Praze 1895*. The description of a traditional wedding from Velká nad Veličkou reads: 'Musicians play the 'Verbuňk' at a leisurely tempo. Wedding guests enjoy themselves, move and make verbal exclamations.' In a section that describes the procession to the wedding dinner and the tradition of placing a hat on the bride's head, we read the following: 'Musicians play the 'Verbuňk' at a leisurely tempo [...] Young men, exuberant, make vocal exclamations and from time to time, shoot a pistol' (*Slavnosti a obyčeje lidové z Moravy* 1895, 37, 39). Nothing points to the dance as an exceptional folk cultural phenomenon, but more than a hundred years later, it was officially recommended as something that should be safeguarded for future generations as an important part of the intangible cultural heritage. To understand why, we must go back to beginnings.

Treatises on Czech folk culture and the first collections of folk verbal art and songs appeared with varying frequency throughout the 19th century. Notions that emerged from Romanticism and a national awareness of the ethnicities residing in countries that were home to more than a single nation became, with minor differences from place to place, general throughout Europe. The territory then occupied by Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia was no exception. The philosophy of Romanticism, stressing as it did the ideal cultural 'purity' of the rural population, made the first contributions to the developing discipline of ethnology. Information on the life

³ Slovácko is an extensive ethnographic region divided into several subregions (Dolňácko, Hornácko, Podluží, Moravské Kopanice, Hanácké Slovácko). These are then further differentiated based upon characteristic elements of folk culture. One such key element that differentiated individual subregions was traditional folk costume. The basic systematization, which is still used to this day, was published in the monograph noted above, *Moravské Slovensko*. In addition to folk costume, elements of music and dance played important roles.

⁴A typical example is the 'Královničky', a ceremonial dance of young girls reconstructed from latent repertoire of elderly respondents for the occasion of the *Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition*.

of villagers from various topographical areas attracted rising notice of folk culture from academicians, and in the 1880s was used to form their earliest institutions: the first associations and museums (Křížová – Pavlicová – Válka 2015). During that era, the Czech emancipation movement was gaining strength, motivating the already noted *Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition*, which was purely Czech with no mention of the German ethnicity. In the course of preparing for the exhibition, more was learned about individual ethnographic regions and the culture of their inhabitants. The exhibition, four years in the making, had been preceded by small-scale regional exhibitions. These, too, featured—in addition to music—groups that presented folk customs, songs, and dances. Exhibition programs were prepared by local teachers, priests, and early ethnographers. Performances at these regional exhibitions, and later at the major exhibition in Prague, thus provided substantial motivation to reinforce the continuity of folk traditions or even revive them. This “exhibition” movement gained significance as well because of accompanying thoughts about the importance of folk culture to national culture and the presentation of folk traditions outside their original environment.

The genesis of the *Verbuňk* in the Slovácko region is tied to the traditional dance style, which was part of an older category of dance called the ‘rotating dance’. In the 19th century, however, this type of dance, characteristic of many European regions, got buried under newer dance forms. By the late 19th century, the ‘rotating dance’ was no longer present in the territory then occupied by Bohemia but was still a fully-fledged part of the dance repertoire in rural areas of Moravia and Silesia (Jelínková 1960). In the systematic classification of dance folklore, the ‘rotating dance’ was given its name for its basic dance move: the turning of the dancing couple as they whirl around their axis.⁵ In individual regions and local areas, the main differences between dances were in terms of their steps and character; when it came to structure, they had features in common. They incorporated the male vocal prelude, the whirling couple, and individual dance moves by both the male and female dancers. The individual sequences of the rotating dance followed no fixed sequence and left significant room for improvisation. What is key is that the individual males interpreting these dances always included steps, stomps, and little jumps, the so-called ‘*cifrování*’, a term which refers to the decoration of the dance with these individual moves, and these are the basis of the *Verbuňk*. In some locations, ‘*cifrování*’ gave the dance the local name.⁶

But the *Verbuňk* was not the only male dance recorded in the Slovácko region. In addition to the *Odzemek* in the Hornácko region, the *Hošije*, a dance performed at feast festivals, is found even today in another Slovácko subregion: Podluží. It features boys standing in a semicircle during the opening ceremony for the feast festivities who rhythmically jump, always with one dancer in the foreground as a soloist. A variant of this dance bearing a ceremonial function, named *Do skoku*,

⁵ Currently, ‘rotating dances’ are referred to as ‘dances with free internal ties’. The term emphasizes not the whirling of the couple, but rather the improvisational character of the dance.

⁶ Locally, names like *grebčení*, *čardášování* and others were used to refer to this type of male dance.

was recorded in the Hornácko region as well. The dance was also described in the documents noted above related to the *Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition*:

‘Dancing around the maypole. The ‘do skoku’ dance. The musicians sit in a somewhat elevated location, while young men form a semicircle and face them. The musicians start playing a tune to suit the dance. A young man steps out of the semicircle, sings a song, the musicians pick it up and start to play it [...] Now the young man claps several times and jumps several times in rhythm with the sung song; the other young men clap exactly in the rhythm of the soloist’s jumping and the music. This is repeated several times.’ (Slavnosti a obyčje lidové z Moravy 1895, 44–45)

The character of male dances—*skoky*—performed in south-eastern and eastern Moravia is similar. Some dances include a limited number of specific songs or melodies (e.g., *Odzemek* in the Valašsko region). By contrast, the *Verbuňk* is tied to a large number of songs. Knowledge that the genesis of the *Verbuňk* was tied primarily to traditional male dances is based on data collected by researchers at various locations within the Slovácko region. For instance, in the early 20th century, the *Danaj* rotating dance from the Strážnice area was preceded by an improvised male dance, one of those which has taken the name *cifrování*, featuring right-leg-over-left-leg as well as forward and backward jumps (Holý 1993, 16). Vladimír Úlehla (1888–1947), a researcher who had begun studying folk music when he was still in secondary school, noted that one singer and dancer born in 1866 used to go to the local palace to “*cifrovat panstvu*” meaning to show off his dance to the nobles. (Úlehla 1949, 791–792). In Podluží subregion in the early 20th century, male dances were fairly straightforward: the dancers jumped from one leg to another and otherwise eschewed special dance moves (*cifry*) (Holý 1993, 17).

The ethnochoreology specialist and leading researcher in the area of folk dancing in Moravia in the late 20th century, Zdenka Jelínková (1920–2005), who contributed greatly to the establishment of ethnochoreology as a distinct subdiscipline, undertook a fundamental study of the *Verbuňk* (Pavlicová 2012). She distinguished the following key attributes of the *Verbuňk*: the dance form (vocal prelude and the dance itself), tempo (progressing from the slow singing of the song to the rapid closure of the dance) and improvisational choreography (large jumps and small, squats, kneeling, stomping, etc.), either in place or moving away from the dancer’s position (Jelínková 1993, 8). She dated the roots of the dance to an era of widespread recruitment for the army, hence its semantic relation to *verbování*⁷, the Czech word for recruitment. The form of recruitment for the Habsburg Monarchy army to which it refers, which made use of “song, music, dance, and drink” was used starting in the 18th century (Skraková 2006, 56). According to local reports, particularly from Hungarian regions, in the late 18th century the dance was similar

⁷ The term ‘verbování’ (from the German ‘werben’), designates recruitment by designated persons. Such recruitment was based either on contracts or, against the recruits’ will, i.e., by force. Often, men were made drunk first and then recruited.

to local male dances (Skraková 2006, 56, 60). It must be said, though, that although the name *Verbuňk* for the male dance, recorded in the Slovácko region and other locations, supports the hypothesized ‘military’ origin of the dance, no other supporting documentation exists. (Fukač, Vysloužil, Toncrová, 1997: 989) Direct ties between *verbování*, i.e., recruiting for the army and the Slovácko region *Verbuňk* have not been proven, although the opinion is frequently stereotypically adopted in the literature.

No references to *Verbuňk* are indicated even in the two largest song collections in Moravia, which originated in the 19th century – *Moravské národní písně s nápěvy do textu vřaděnými* (1853–1859) by František Sušil (1804–1868) and *Národní písně moravské v nově nasbírané* (1899–1901) by František Bartoš (1837–1906) A rare song that refers to *Verbuňk* is listed in the so-called *Gubernatorial collection* dated 1819, which probably originated in the surroundings of Kyjov in the Slovácko region (Jelínková 1994, 10). Musically, the *Verbuňk* is particularly tied to so-called New Hungarian songs. The Hungarian style is used for more recent songs characterized, among other elements, by brief, dotted rhythmic forms (Vysloužil 1997, 633). The term was introduced into ethnomusicology by Hungarian researchers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, who presumed these songs originated within the Hungarian ethnic community and spread from there across Europe, including south and south-eastern Moravia (Vysloužil 1997, 633). These songs of the late 18th century were originally tied to the dance music of urbanites and later spread to rural areas, where their features merged with those of the local music repertoires (Skraková 50, 51). They continue to be a powerful influence on the music and dance repertoire of some regions of contemporary Slovakia, as testified to by, e.g., the occurrence of *Czardas* (Skraková 2006, 70–71). None of the extensive collections of songs gathered in 19th-century Moravia recorded any reference to the *Verbuňk*, nor indeed any song written in the Hungarian style. But these songs are found in later song collections that demonstrate ties to the folk revival movement, including an edition by Jan Poláček called *Slovácké písničky* (1936–1960).⁸

Going back to the time of the *Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition* and the movement that preceded it, we need to point out another social stream, which included the presentation of Moravian Slovak folklore. This consisted in student associations that began to form in Prague with various levels of intensity starting in the 1860s. They included Blaník (founded 1861), Radhošť (founded 1864), Moravská beseda (founded 1873), and Detvan (founded 1882) (Vinkler 1988). Initially, their activities tended to be ‘academic’, aimed at the social role of folklore and folk culture as such (e.g., lectures, the interpretation of folk songs accompanied on the

⁸ Verbuňk songs are also included, e.g., in the *Písničky modloslužebníků* (1906) songbook, which presents the repertoire of a Brno circle that supported Czech culture: ‘...a company of young intelligent men who, after dinner, discussed local events, followed all artistic, political, and other movements, and sang beautifully.’ (Schnirch 1906)

piano) (Vinkler 1988). Later, folk dances from the Slovácko region were performed, and people sang together. People's recollections of Franta Úprka (1868–1929)⁹, a sculptor who came to Prague from the Slovácko region in the early 1890s, are enlightening:

‘After singing came dancing. He himself sang a suitable tune [...] Úprka usually danced solo with the entire hall looking at him [...] he sang new, unknown songs and started to dance the most beautiful ‘Odzemek’ dance anyone has ever seen.’

In 1896, the ‘Slovácký krúžek’ was established in Prague and based its work on the student groups. It served as the base for meetings between Slovácko students and Prague intellectuals with Moravian roots, as well as with artists who admired folk traditions (Vinkler 1988, 40). This platform was open not only to Moravian Slovaks, but to Hungarian Slovaks as well, who supported the so-called Czech and Slovak intercommunity. Among the Slovak figures active in these associations was the composer Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský (1881–1958). From the literature we learn that as an accompanist, he

‘was affected by czardas melodies and the knowledge of accompaniment practised by Romany music group leaders. It took some time before the boys got used to his accompaniment’ (Vinkler 1988, 44).

In 1903, a ‘Slovak Night’ was organized in Prague under the auspices of the ‘Akademický odbor československé jednoty’, an organization which brought together Moravian students and particularly those from the Slovácko region (Krist 1970, 28). The program for the event—which was so well received in Prague that an encore performance had to be scheduled—indicates that the *Odzemek* enjoyed great attention (Krist 1970, 28–29). Two groups from traditional rural environment were invited: the Slovácko region’s *Trnova muzika*, from Velká nad Veličkou, and Slovakia’s *Balážova kapela*, from Myjava. The latter included the band leader Samko Dudík (1880–1967), who would later achieve wide renown and who influenced many groups in the budding Moravian folk revival movement (Vinkler 1988, 42).

These examples show how close the relationship was between Czech and Slovak intellectuals, who shared knowledge of their respective folk traditions. The ‘krúžky’—the folk groups—and the activities of their members became, in a particular, studied way, the bearers of Slovácko folklore. (A branch of the Slovácký krúžek was established in Brno in 1908, and others sprang up one-by-one in rural areas). Many of these phenomena were transferred back to the rural environment, where the natural function of folk culture was now receding into the past.

‘And so, during the holidays of 1910, under the influence of these Prague streams, we started a Slovácký krúžek in Strážnice’,

wrote Vladimír Úlehla in his work entitled *Živá píseň*.

⁹ Franta Úprka, an academic sculptor, was the brother of the important painter Joža Úprka (1861–1940); their family came from Kněždub nearby Strážnice.

‘A new person started helping out with dancing [...] a great singer and dancer from the Brno folk group [...] he also taught the young to dance the Hornácko, Podluží and Slovakia [...]’ (Úlehla 1949, 181, 184)

It is no surprise then, that this publication also includes a note on an event in Strážnice organized by the selfsame *Slovácký krúžek* in 1940:

‘Janoškova stará máti plakala [name of a song] and it was as if lightning struck the group. The entire orchestra resounded with a syncopated [rhythm] ... the boys were as if on fire. The music and dance coursed through them [...], clapping, they kept the rhythm, while others jumped in the semicircle and danced with their arms above their heads in a continuous escape from the ground.’ (Úlehla 1949, 92)

This is a description of the *Verbuňk* of Strážnice, already similar to the current version. This version is tied to the folk revival movement and influences absorbed over the preceding decades, but its bearers do not contradict the culture they were formerly part of. The dance is about merging the various layers of the tradition out of which they grew.

In seeking out records of the *Verbuňk* in performance, one finds clear evidence that the dance was performed more and more frequently as the 20th century drew on. By the 1940s, for example, the *Verbuňk* was regularly included on the program of *Slovácký krúžek*, along with other male dances from the Slovácko region: the *Podšable*, related to ‘Fašank’ (Mardi Gras) in the border region between Moravia and Slovakia, and the *Hošije* from the Podluží region (Krist 1970, 115–117).

The spread of the dance and its inclusion in public performances is also attributable to the notice and admiration that the folk culture of the Slovácko region enjoyed in a wide range of social circles and among artists. Interest on the part of the artistic community was already being felt by the late 19th century and was still thriving fifty years later. In her memoirs, the choreographer Jiřina Mlíková recalls her experience of folklore festival in Strážnice in 1946, the first year of the festival that has been in existence ever since:

‘In prewar, wartime, and postwar ballet in regular Czech theatres, there were few male dancers and even fewer who fit the iconoclastic male character. Then, all of a sudden here in Strážnice, a male dance full of power and energy unexpectedly unfolded in front of my eyes. It was colourful and interesting for the variety presented by the various regions that met there and for the unique improvisations of the individual dancers. They danced slowly with suspense and at breathtaking tempos with astounding dynamics that I couldn’t even follow! The suggestive expression of the Slovácko Verbuňk dancers—as if they were strangely immersed in themselves, the slow inner charge bursting into rapid step variations and moves—enthralled me [...] The dif-

ficult turns on one leg, crouching down, swinging jumps, and rapid, agile, jabbing little steps. They sentences in dance, not just simple repetitions of a single move. The dancing men looked neither at the 'audience' nor at each other. Rather, each was in his own inner soul.' (Mlíková 2004, 7)

The first Strážnice festival took place July 5-7, 1946 as a nationwide folklore festival to present the "customs, folklore and variety" of the individual ethnographic regions of Czechoslovakia at that time (*Československo v tanci a zpěvu* 1947, 2). At this very first festival in 1946, there was a competition in the *Verbuňk*.

In 1948 in Prague, the Czechoslovak Ensemble of National Song and Dance was established, renamed the Czechoslovak State Ensemble of Song and Dance in 1952. During the initial phase of the group, able dancers 'from the field' joined, i.e., dancers with no formal dance training. The ensemble was to

'build upon the traditions of traditional musical and dance folk art and modify them for performance on the stage' (Muchka – Hynková 1997, 146).

Many folk traditions were moulded in this way into highly stylised choreographies. The *Verbuňk* was among them, and the ensemble rendition placed emphasis on excellent dancing technique and composition (Mlíková 2004, 25).

Because it was a male dance thought to have originated as part of a military recruitment drive, the folk revival movement attributed various elements of symbolism to the *Verbuňk*. In the 1950s, when pressure from the reigning Communist ideology and an emphasis on Soviet examples of how folk culture should be utilized were most acutely felt, a description of the *Verbuňk* was included in a collection of dances for practise in military ensembles (Kos – Struska 1953).

As the *Verbuňk* was performed on stage during the development of the folk revival movement in the 20th century, the issue of dancer personality and influence on the form of the dance came into the foreground. The *Verbuňk* contests at Strážnice festivals underlined the solo form of the dance and thereby the role played by significant bearers in the process of tradition. This was aided by ethnochoreology studies that attempted to collect almost extinct folklore material in rural sections of Moravia by contacting significant witnesses and dancers. The *Verbuňk* was becoming the dominant male dance in the Slovácko region. Here a continuous tradition of male dance was perceptible, its form developing in close synch with the folk revival movement and with performance criteria at professional levels. Even amateur folk ensembles focused on the technical precision of their members and the artistic demands placed on the stage choreography grew. In studying the *Verbuňk*, the porous nature of the divide between the stage and the real-world environment becomes clearly visible. Significant bearers of the dance played a key role in the process.

The Strážnice folklore festival, which over time has gained international stature, in many respects predetermined the development of the folk revival movement in Czechoslovakia, as well as setting the course for the *Verbuňk*. This is because the festival program was set in place and overseen by a group of dramatists.

In 1986, the *Verbuňk* contest which had taken place in the early years of the festival was resurrected. New rules were prepared for participants, along with a new contest code. This competition began the spread and development of the dance in individual regions, eventually serving as the basis for recommending the dance's inclusion in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The Strážnice contest became a model, often unattainable, for many dancers, whose numbers have increased over the ensuing thirty years to the unprecedented levels of today. At its basis, of course, was the folk revival movement. Its presence has been felt in Moravia on two levels: there are stage presentations of more or less stylised folklore with a greater or lesser number of original compositions; and there are activities related to local cultural and calendar traditions. The inclusion of the dance in the UNESCO list has also brought certain obligations for the Czech Republic to 'supervise' this folk cultural expression (e.g., seminars, preliminary regional contests, etc.). However, as is evident from what has been written here, development of the Slovácko *Verbuňk* cannot simply be divided into 'before and after' entry in the UNESCO list. Development of the tradition has not taken place only 'in situ', but has gone hand in hand with general social development.

The *Verbuňk* was formed by its bearers, who also acquiesced to change from outside. The rules of the Strážnice contest were intended not only for the performance of song and dance, but to keep to the regional style of the *Verbuňk*, or the clothes of dances that must not resemble a dance costume (Soutěž o nejlepšího tanečníka slováckého verbuňku 1994, 91). The contest jury comprises former *Verbuňk* dancers, ethnomusicologists, and ethnologists, as well as former winners of the contest. The audience awards an 'Audience Prize'.

In the early 1990s, it was presumed that the contest, with its intricate rules, would provide the definitive version of the *Verbuňk*, but that never took place. A whole range of elements came into use that today are considered common and natural. For instance, Dušan Holý, an ethnologist, indicated that

'sometimes during recruitment, a dancer—having finished the slow portion of the dance—returned to stand among the singers and continue the song. But this should not become a generally misused cliché that interrupts the natural gradation of the dance' (O regionálních stylech 1994, 27).

We see this today with all *Verbuňk* contestants, including boys trained in folk ensembles. Thus the words of another ethnologist, Karel Pavlišťík, come true. He was instrumental in reestablishing the Strážnice contest and says that the personal contribution of a valued *Verbuňk* dancer is usually naturally included in the (sub) regional style and is accepted.¹⁰ (O regionálních stylech 1994, 27)

¹⁰ In addition to 'cifry' (unique moves), new elements that are now commonly accepted include songs. Even songs originally in other styles are being modified into Novouhersky form to fit the Verbunk. Their authorship is either anonymous or kept low-profile.

But not all innovations are accepted without reservation by the *Verbuňk* community. For example, there is resistance to the spread of the *Verbuňk* outside the Slovácko region (the most recent evidence of its spread comes from the Brno region). Another example may be the inclusion of women in the *Verbuňk* (while the men dance, women form a rotating circle in the background). Regular *Verbuňk* dancers who do not take part in the institutionalisation of the dance, for example as part of the Strážnice contest, are mostly forgiving:

‘In the past, when people came in tired from the field, they didn’t jump high and dance on stage. Everything develops, it’s as simple as that. We have better materials, better shoes, better dance spaces. So I don’t see any reason why dances, too, should not continue to develop. And this is true as well for the girls’ rotating along with the *Verbuňk*.’¹¹ (Hacarová 2014, 22).

Contemporary bearers understand the *Verbuňk* as a dance that is open to their creative abilities, a space for their self-expression. They see the tradition of the folk revival movement as natural and approach it in a way similar to what would have been done in the original environment:

‘I started with the *Verbuňk* as a child in a children’s folk ensemble [...] At the Strážnice contest, I used see several great recruiters [...] who competed in the late 1990s. I can’t say I have a role model, though. I took something from each of them and then interpreted the *Verbuňk* in my own way.’¹² (Habartová 2010, 91)

The folk tradition presents a stimulating area for research in contemporary ethnology. It includes historical studies and snapshots taken from various points within social life. The context thus clarified many times changes stereotypical notions that took root in folk cultural research at a time when folk culture was the basic subject of ethnography and an expression of everyday life of people. The *Verbuňk* is not an archaic dance. It is one of the very few live dances today to be tied to the folk dance tradition of the past at the same time it helps to continue that tradition. It is part of the regional identity of the Slovácko region and, for its bearers, a strong expression of their personal and social identity. It is this very connection which is key in the creation of cultural heritage values and their transmission.

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¹¹ Testimony of a respondent, DOB: 1955.

¹² Testimony of a respondent, DOB: 1983.

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The dancer of Verbuňk (International Folklore Festival Strážnice). Photo by Tomáš Hájek, 2010 (The Archive of National Institute of Folk Culture)



Verbuňk as a group dance (International Folklore Festival Strážnice). Photo by Tomáš Hájek, 2009 (The Archive of National Institute of Folk Culture)



The dancer of Verbuňk (International Folklore Festival Strážnice). Photo by Tomáš Hájek, 2013 (The Archive of National Institute of Folk Culture)



The child dancer of Verbuňk (International Folklore Festival Strážnice). Photo by David Rájecký, 2013 (The Archive of National Institute of Folk Culture)

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