(IM)POSSIBILITY OF DOING ETHNOMUSICOLOGY BEYOND URBAN/ RURAL DICHOTOMY

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Abstract: The dichotomy between urban and rural culture was accentuated and partially constructed by early European ethnographic disciplines. Though the critical discourse and paradigmatic changes brought the clear divisions between those two cultures into question, perception of the urban/rural dichotomy still persists in daily discourse and can be frequently encountered in discourses about music. The case study focusing on popular music bands and gig players from the town of Križevci in Croatia shows some of the mechanisms of maintaining this perception. Special attention in the analysis of those mechanisms is given to two musicians, local epitomes of "urban" and "rural". The analysis of the local meaning of dichotomy brings attention to differences in music venues, repertoire, style, instrumentation, and virtuosity; aspects of education and social status of musicians. The results of the ethnographic fieldwork show that the local usage of urban/rural dichotomy can express specific issues of class distinction among local musicians, but also struggles of identity formation of a small post-socialist town in the course of loss of its economic and political power.

Key words: Urban; rural; Križevci; Croatian ethnomusicology.

Introduction

The traditional research focus in early European ethnology and its disciplinary predecessors was primarily to rural areas because "for the discoverers of folk culture, 'the folk' were the peasants" who in the late 19^{th} century formed "eighty to ninety percent of population of the whole of Europe" (Burke, 1991, 37). The dichotomy between the urban and the rural was deeply inscribed into the beginnings of Croatian ethnology as well. Its founder Antun Radić, in his *Osnova za sabiranje i proučavanje građe o narodnom životu* (The basis for collecting and studying material about folk life), divided Croatian society into what he considered to be two distinctive cultures: culture of the noble, town dwellers (*gospoda*) and of the folk, village dwellers (*narod*). He described the differences in sharp cultural and class contrasts to explain the need for establishing a scholarly discipline which would focus on the latter, "on that bigger part of the folk (*narod*) who (...) live in villages, work with their hands, who usually don't wear French suits, who have no, or almost no schooling" (Radić, 1897, 536). The

culture of the urban¹, as he understood it then, was contaminated by foreign and cosmopolitan influences and hence not of the primary interest for ethnologists, whereas the rural culture, that of the "folk", was considered to be still pure from outside influences and a legitimate "source of national identity", which was the main research subject in this type of "romanticist national (Croatian) ethnology" (Čapo and Gulin Zrnić, 2013, 8). Interestingly, the earliest Croatian (ethno) musicologist, Franjo Kuhač, who was also under the influence of romanticist national ideologies, and much earlier than Radić, in 19th century, considered popular songs from both towns and villages to be equally important and a valid basis for the creation of national style in music, because "national music would be more diverse and rich if it relied on all elements (...) contained in not just village (pučke), but also town (varoške) songs" (Marošević, 1989, 109). But then, he was only a predecessor of ethnomusicology as a scientific discipline. His 20th century descendants were influenced by Croatian ethnologists and followed their paradigms of turning to village as to the cradle of national culture. This phase of Croatian ethnomusicology where "only examples of older, mainly village, vocal musical tradition were sought for and noted down in the field", led the discipline "more towards 'archaistic' rather than 'realistic' science" (Marošević, 1995, 40). Later paradigm shift in ethnographic disciplines, which happened roughly in the 1970s, tried to step away from this archaistic methodology and static or essentialist understanding of (national) culture, and set course towards "critical science about contemporary society and culture" (Čapo and Gulin Zrnić, 2013, 13). The focus on everyday life and culture established urban sites as equally legitimate research fields for ethnologists, and this shift of focus in the traditional subject of ethnographic research influenced ethnomusicology as well. Jerko Bezić set one of the earlier examples of the need and possibility of ethnomusicology to tackle music phenomena in urban culture (Bezić, 1977). There might not be numerous examples of Croatian ethnomusicological research in urban settings in the late 20th century, but development and paradigm shift in ethnographic disciplines led ethnomusicologists to recognize the cultural dynamism of Croatian rural areas as well. Far from the idealist perception of Antun Radić, who understood village as a relatively static "authentic representative and carrier of national ethos" (Čapo and Gulin Zrnić, 2013, 11), rural areas have also been recognized as culturally dynamic arenas of different and contesting identities,²

¹ In Čapo and Gulin Zrnić's book (2013), the word *gospoda* is translated as "aristocrats". The Croatian original word *gospoda* means neither urban nor aristocratic in literal translation, but it is in Radić's writing a very clear opposition to rural, village folk, and is referred to people dwelling in urban surroundings.

² There were also earlier researchers who recognized the heterogeneity and social stratification within the pre-industrial European rural population. For example, ethnomusicologist Zoltan Kodály was, according to Burke, one of the first researchers who warned that "one should not think about folk culture as a uniform, homogeneous whole" (after Burke, 1991, 37).

where "concrete people" can "in more or less specific ways relate towards the conventions of the community" (Ceribašić, 1994, 231). In the meantime, some of the ethnomusicologists of younger generation, such as Irena Miholić (2007), recognized that the insistence on rural and older traditions as the only subjects worth of research, led to the omission of many existing musical practices, such as the repertoires of local bands that play non-traditional and electric instruments. As Miholić points out, "through the influence of the media and the music industry, the musical life of individual local communities started to change at an accelerated pace" (Miholić, 2007 p. 41), but even those traditions influenced by global trends can still function as carriers of identity symbols, which "inhabitants (...) regard as 'their own'" (Miholić, 2007, 29). Because of the ever-increasing information flow through the mass media, and easier communication, it is not surprising that the instruments, styles and repertoires travelled from towns to villages and vice versa. The social complexities of modern and postmodern era occasionally result in constructions of multi-local identities, such as the "ruralurban identity" defined by "complex social relationships that develop from the fluid movement back and forth between the village and the city" (Stone, 2008, 154). However, regardless of the changing dynamics of cultural exchange between towns and villages, the perception of difference between the urban and the rural still persists in everyday discourse nowadays. In fact, it seems to be very often articulated in discourses about contemporary popular music, where it can assume different narratives. As shown in Catherine Baker's study (2011), the narratives on urban/rural dichotomy in Croatian popular music can vary anywhere from nationalistic distinctions between Croatian and Serbian (pp. 63-66), specific qualitative and class differences between genres, like in opposition between *tamburica* and rock (p. 94), or it can relate to negative perceptions of domination of pop-folk, which "spreads all over the city, penetrating its social space from the periphery, suburbs or villages which do not belong to the 'urban' in its narrower sense" (Baker, 2011, 235). Although the distinction between the urban and the rural in today's popular music can relate to many conflicting cultural and political symbols, I have attempted to analyse this perception in a local context through a case study in the town of Križevci in Croatia.

Cultural and class distinctions in music-making in Križevci, Croatia

The town of Križevci belongs to the central Croatia and is located in vicinity of the country's capital, Zagreb (60 kilometres). Considering its population of about 11.000 inhabitants, and the fact that it is not an administrative capital of its region (*Koprivničko-križevačka županija*), it can hardly compete for a title of an urban centre. But, the town's urban character and significance is frequently accentuated through arguments of its tradition and historic importance, resembling cultural

politics of other towns and cities where through "prying into the city's past in order to create tourist attraction" (Kelemen and Škrbić Alempijević, 2012, 279), history has been "used [as] representational strategy of the city" (Kelemen and Škrbić Alempijević, 2012, 395). Since Križevci was once the administrative and military centre of the whole region, the loss of this role and the subsequent change in local centres' power-relations, still appears as one of the town's biggest frustrations.³



Figure 1. Map of Koprivnica-Križevci County (Križevci Tourist Office, s.a).

I have been conducting music ethnography in this town (which is, incidentally, also my home town) and its surroundings as part of the research for my PhD thesis since 2014. This research is at the moment focusing on local bands and musicians, gig players in both town and village surroundings. Accentuating the difference between the rural in music (*selski muzičar, selski bendovi*) and the urban (*gradski muzičari/glazbenici, gradski bendovi*) is still very much in local usage in the everyday language. In comparison to Radić's sharply and simply defined dichotomy, the question of a distinction between the urban and the rural is much more complex here, but what seems to aid its continuation are more class distinctions than the actual place of birth or dwelling. By urban, aside from explicitly cosmopolitan signs such as songs in English language, there seems

³ See, for example, an invitation to a public debate organised by the town's Historic society in 2013 titled Why Križevci didn't become the County capital (Zašto Križevci nisu postali županijsko središte). (Klub kulture, 2013).

to be a perception of distinction in style, choice of instruments, level of music education and production quality. Music perceived as rural would be not just in Croatian, but also using local dialect, use subtly different choices of styles and instruments as well as lower levels of education and production quality. Since I have started my research with a generation of musicians born in the 1940s who began their musical activities in the early 1960s, I've traced the barrier between the urban and the rural music and musicians as a continual occurrence from those times to the present. The "quintessentially urban" bands in the 1960s and 1970s were schlager and rock bands which played in youth hall dances and later in the newly-built town hotel. The unwritten rules of class division between the town and village dwellers persisted in accessibility of music venues. Youth hall and town hotel were strictly urban sites for decades in a sense that only selected urban bands were invited to play there, but there were also restrictions for the audience, such as the one that men were obligated to wear a tie in the hotel events. In fact, one band, Marete, dominated the town dances and events for more than twenty years and this band continues to be a mark of the town's identity for a couple of generations of local people. There were other bands as well which existed simultaneously, but their gigs were mostly in the periphery, and their repertoire was less based on a schlager and rock tradition, more on a pop-folk style. Those rural bands, unlike the urban ones, used the accordion instead of the electric keyboard more often, whereas the urban ones broadened their instrumentation to include wind instruments such as the saxophone and the trumpet. The distinction was also maintained through the educational aspects. All of the members of the long-lived Marete, for example, attended local music school, which is today still one of the most important cultural institutions in town, but is at the same time more accessible to the town children than the ones traveling from the surrounding villages. Educational aspect thus continues to dominate the reception of the difference between the rural and urban in music today.

As for the venues of performance, the restrictions on the subject of who performs in the centre or the periphery, reduced after the 1980. Bands from that and the subsequent decades have played gigs in both town and the surrounding area, combining styles and repertoires - which could be considered a combination of the urban and the rural. But even in such bands more subtle class distinctions, still relying on education, performance quality, band setup and slight stylistic reservations,⁴ are being maintained and participate in the perception of "*selski*" or "*gradski*" band. However, since the venues, instruments and repertoires became less exclusive, the distinction between urban and rural is today equally maintained by accentuating individual pedigrees of musicians.

⁴ A common discursive distinction from an urban band would be that they would never play "real" *narodnjaci* (pop folk).

"The town musician and the country musician"⁵ – Comparative analysis of two songs by two local musicians

I will attempt to illustrate how these differences can be heard in music. Ten years ago, local Križevci radio station, with financial support from the local government, published a music album with songs of local artists which thematize Križevci, or are otherwise locally identifiable.⁶ The first two songs were by two popular musicians who however hold a very different social status both in music sphere and in everyday life. Although they both are from the town, one is being perceived as a more rural and the other as an urban musician.

The first of the two musicians, nick-named Pierre,⁷ played keyboard in a gigoriented band for most of his life. He is a self-taught musician and, although he and most of his band colleagues are from the town, their gigs were mostly based in surrounding villages, for weddings and celebrations. The awareness of the hierarchy of the local musicians, and his own place held in that hierarchy was evident in the interview I lead with him. While comparing himself with other, more prominent musicians, he said he knew "how much [he] didn't know", and that calling himself a musician was for him "too strong of a word", he would be more of a "village entertainer" (selski zabavljač). (Pierre, 2016) However, this "village entertainer", seeing a need for more locally-oriented songs, which people from Križevci region could identify with, ventured in his first creative attempt fifteen years ago and composed a song which thematizes Križevci. He explained: "It was Križevci's 750th anniversary, we were playing abroad and (...) we were ashamed, you play all over Germany and have no song from your own region. So, now I wanted to give to my town, in the most banal, naive, honest way, for my band to play, to take a step further." (Pierre, 2016)

Although not even his band-mates took his attempt seriously, he insisted on rehearsing and recording this song in a local studio. In his own explanation, his reputation as a self-taught musician made it difficult to establish himself as an author even within his own band: "They couldn't endure the fact that I, as the band's weakest musician, composed something, that's ego for you." (Pierre, 2016)

The song eventually became one of the most popular and well-known local songs, even though the production of its recording was done with difficulties and very limited resources. Pierre wasn't able to convince his whole band to

⁵ In one of Aesop's popular fables, two cousin mice, a "town mouse" and a "country mouse", who grew up in different surroundings, visit each other as adults upon which they realise how their surroundings shaped diverse perceptions of the world and their own lives.

⁶ Križevci u pjesmi i glazbi, ca. 2008.

⁷ Both of the local musicians will, for the purposes of this article, remain anonymous. The recordings of the interviews are stored in the private archive of the author.

record the song, but could only get their cooperation as individuals. Unlike a common practice in some other popular music bands where "the first band song will emerge out of an initial jam", and where "playing loosely and spontaneously (...) can be part of the composition process" (Bayton, 1988, 211), in case of Pierre's song, he was the only author of the lyrics, music and the arrangements who instructed each of his colleagues what to play and they finally recorded their parts individually and separately.

Shortly after this song was made, it could be said that it provoked other creative music forces to write new songs or record previously existing ones. An example of one such newly composed and recorded song was by a local *tamburica* player, music school teacher and conductor of music school tamburica orchestra, nicknamed Štef. In opposition to Pierre's music reputation, as a "village entertainer", Štef was a well-established and respected local musician whom many generations of his former pupils referred to as "maestro". Štef's song was much more carefully planned and realised. He turned to a local poet for the lyrics and performed it and recorded with cooperation of some prominent town musicians: a respected rock guitarist, a piano student who studied in Graz, town museum's director featured as harmonica soloist, and the town choir sang in one of the live performances. All of these musicians and symbols of the town's urban culture were easily accessible to him and willing to participate in the project. Surprisingly, the resulting song (through first impression) is not that much different from Pierre's song. They are both verse-chorus songs in ³/₄ measures, in major tonality with instrumental intro, using very similar tempo and male lead voices. But, differences are more subtly accentuated. Štef's song has much more skilful and elaborate chord progressions and transitions, made possible not just through his own knowledge but also with a help from the piano student, and Štef's son who was at the time a student at the local music high school. Štef's daughter, who studied to become an opera singer, sang the supporting vocal line. Whereas the melody of Pierre's song's refrain is deliberately very simple, narrow-ranged and symmetrical, in order to encourage listeners to sing along, Štef's refrain is more elaborate, using broader range with high pitches and chromatic tones, which would, in author's own words, discourage someone from "singing it along while drinking a wine spritzer [gemišt] in a vineyard house [klet], because it is difficult" (Štef, 2016). Other characteristics, such as a kitschy, but also very virtuosic electric guitar solo, exceeding capabilities of Pierre's band guitarist, or insertion of church bells and organs into the song's arrangement, were all part of deliberate design indicating a skilful song by high-profile town musicians. Concluding our conversation about the song, Štef stated: "we wanted an urban [gradsku] song, and that's what we've accomplished" (Štef, 2016).



Figure 2. The first four bars of Pierre's song's chorus.



Figure 3. The first four bars of Štef's song's chorus.

Urban/rural dichotomy in local music context

Although the initiators and producers of the CD were careful to include many different musicians and composers and to give a full and diverse picture of local musical creativity, the analysis of the two songs, which appear as number one and two tracks, show how in fact the CD helped in establishing difference between the rural i.e. lower class and urban i.e. higher class musicians. In Štef's song, the marks of belonging to the town culture were multiply accentuated: the author's education, social connections and the level of respect from the community were evident in more subtle lyrics made in cooperation with a town poet, in more complex chord progression, the usage of mouth harmonica growing from the chanson tradition, through the quality of production, and through the participation of town musical identity symbols: choir, piano⁸, and the locallyfamous rock guitarist. Pierre's song was weaker in production, and its motifs were much more straight-forward: it is a song meant to be sung and danced to, made to fulfil a need in the market and with much poorer accessible resources at hand. It features a relatively banal text in its structure and rhyme, simple instrumentation, very basic chord progressions, and also a lack of cooperation from other musician (even the ones from his own band), all of which tells a much cruder story of the level of respect towards the author. By placing both of these examples one after another, the listeners can confirm their perceptions and prejudices about the cultural differences between these two groups of local musicians.

⁸ Another local musician, Zdravko Širola, moved from a village to the town as a child in the 1950s and he remembered the importance of piano lessons for the social status of town dwellers at the time. He explained that soon after moving, his parents enrolled him to music school where he learned to play piano because the instrument was considered a symbol of "noble" town culture and all of his school mates learned to play piano as well. He perceived the instrument and the lessons as a stark contrast to his earlier village musical experiences.

Since Križevci has a long and established tradition of music education, for many urban musicians, education has been an important symbol of cultural capital, which helped in building their respect and reputation. This is not surprising since Pierre Bourdieu's studies have already shown that those cultural aspects, already more accessible to the higher social classes (like arts and education), at the same time function as a legitimization of "better" taste for those classes and that "the dominant definition of the legitimate way of appropriating culture and work of art (...) favours those who had early access to legitimate culture (...)" (Bourdieu, 2011, 6). It is still worth considering how this specific educational aspect influenced its particular local context. Although the first traces of musical education in Križevci date back to the 19th century (Vukobratović, 2008, 111), the town's public music school, which has been continuously active until this day, started to work in 1945. Its curriculum corresponded with the "new Yugoslav 'cultural prototype'", which "was a mirror image of the bourgeois high culture with its emphasis on refinement, sophistication and civility in all venues of life" (Mišina, 2013, 30). Paradoxically as it may seem, the early music education programmes in socialist Yugoslavia, with its emphasis on piano and violin as main instruments, favoured the canons of elite bourgeois culture, because "the culture of new Yugoslavia equalled civility, and civility equalled high cultural sophistication of a decidedly Western urban disposition" (Mišina, 2013, 30) and also "because communist ideology associated rural culture with backwardness" (Bogojeva, 2005, 70). The local Križevci distinctions between the urban and rural musicians would seem to reflect these socialist-era perceptions, and they might have influenced the musicians from the second half of the 20th century, although the notion of rural backwardness and urban progressiveness is certainly a much older concept than the Yugoslavian cultural politics. But apparently, regardless of the establishment of nominally egalitarian society, class divisions among the musicians in socialist Yugoslavia were still clear and obvious, as other studies have shown. Ana Hofman's research on Yugoslavian kafana singers showed "that stance on the part of colleagues coming from those more 'artistic' and 'elite' genres confirmed the marginalized position of the kafana singers in public discourses, which involved a specific notion of social class" (Hofman, 2010, 153). In this case, the social class was likewise connected to belonging to urban or rural milieu since "despite the official attempts to present all performers as equal estrada workers, the urban-rural division remained as a strong demarcation line between them, where the ones coming from urban elite treated the ones from a rural background with disrespect" (Hofman, 2010, 153).

To return to the local context, Križevci musicians' maintaining of opposition between the rural and the urban has to be observed in connection with the specific local struggle of building and maintaining local identity. The insistence in maintaining this opposition, coming primarily from the urban musicians, can

be in part understood as hostility to changes and unwillingness to enable equal opportunities to musicians who are from rural areas. But we should also take into consideration that the town, because of its size and position in Zagreb's vicinity, already has some type of "rural-urban identity". The historical and social changes which marginalised the town's economic and political significance contributed to what the historian Neven Budak termed "town's growing provincialisation" (Budak, 1993, 44).⁹ So, the metaphor of the "rural" and its negative usage might not necessarily mean hostility towards people from villages, but also a critique towards contemporary (cultural) politics at the local level as well as aspects of struggle of maintaining the town's urban cultural identity.¹⁰ Since identities are dynamic, "relational and conjunctural" constructs, built "vis-a-vis others" (Cohen, 1993, 131), the notion of rural can be understood as the antipode to the projections of town's identity ideal. Subtle musical differences as signs of identity are likewise construed and perceived in opposition to others, so in Sara Cohen's study, "an authentic 'Liverpool Sound', for example, is constructed in terms of a series of oppositions (technological/acoustic, synthesised/raw, contrived/authentic) in which Liverpool is principally opposed to Manchester" (Cohen, 1993, 132). In Križevci case, the locally-identifiable sound ideal would be constructed in opposition to (any) "rural" sound quality that can be distinguishable through nuances like the ones described in the case study above. All of these arguments do not however annul the fact that there is an obvious occurrence of discrimination between the local musicians, where the once labelled as negatively rural are not just the ones coming from villages, but also those with lower educational and unfavourable social background. In our interview, commenting his position in the local cultural hierarchy and music market, Pierre stated the following:

"When there was no money, there was Pierre, and when they [the local government] needed something for money, Pierre was never called! When there was something for some high guests, then [Štef's] song was being played, because mine wasn't good enough, but they disregard ... the other one *is* better, the arrangement is lovely, but whenever they hear my [song], people carry it in their ear." (Pierre, 2016)

⁹ Since Budak is using this term in reference to the loss of economic power, it is valuable to note that Križevci have been frequently mentioned as a town which after the fall of socialism lost its industry and capability of employment for its citizens. Most recently (Gazdek, 2015), studies have shown that it is also a town with the highest percentage of citizens with a blocked bank account.

¹⁰ Among other things, negative usage of "rural" can in a local context be used as a critique towards the local government ruling party, *Croatian Peasants' Party* (Hrvatska seljačka stranka). (Crni Petar, 2009)

Conclusion

Although the clearly contrasted urban/rural dichotomies recognized (and partially constructed) by early European ethnographic disciplines would today be hard to prove without critical distance, the complex traces of this dichotomy still persist nowadays in everyday-life through various forms of class division. In a local Croatian context in the town of Križevci shown in this article, dichotomy was maintained in popular music genres through nuances in style, instrumentation, and production, but also in respect to education and social background of individual musicians. Regardless of the place of birth or dwelling, the musicians without formal music education, who self-thought learned an instrument and started playing in order of fulfil a necessary role in a community and as a means of earning money, would be perceived as more rural, belonging to the village culture. The ones perceived as the urban would be musicians who gained at least partial musical education, who played in more exclusive venues, and held a higher level of recognition and respect from the community. The distinction also entailed value judgement where rural was perceived as mostly negative, or of lower value in contrast to positive, higher value urban music and musicians. These contrasts do not only show a certain level of class division or even

discrimination among local musicians, but are also deeply connected with a struggle of building and maintaining cultural identity of a small town in central Croatia in post-socialist context, balancing between the urban and the rural.

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