

THE WEDDING OF GALICNIK - MACEDONIAN TRADITION WITH WORLDWIDE PRESENTATION ON YOUTUBE

Sandra Kraguevska*

State Music and Ballet Education Center "Ilija Nikolovski-Luj"

Skopje, North Macedonia

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3266-1087>

Email: sandra.kraguevska@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

Galicnik is a mountain village located in the Municipality of Mavrovo and Rostuše and one of the oldest ones in this region "Lower Reka" ("Mijačija"). It is distinguished by its beautiful natural landscapes, authentic architecture and rich cultural heritage. A recognizable mark of the folklore in Galicnik is the wedding ceremony, which took place in the summer, usually during the village's celebration of St. Peter's Day in July. At this central annual event, the people welcomed their migrant workers and newlyweds got married. At one time, there were up to 50 weddings in one day, which contained several unique customs specific to this ethnographic region. Since 1963, due to the emigration of the village, the wedding ceremony has grown into a cultural and touristic manifestation, in order to maintain the tradition and attract thousands of domestic and foreign guests to this event. The wedding is supported by the president of the country and several sponsors, but this fusion of tradition and tourism is also sustainable through its media representation. This paper will focus on the Internet, which is a modern and most used medium that offers unlimited and massive promotion of materials to millions of worldwide users. The Galicnik wedding on the Internet is represented through many published articles, but the video recordings will be the subject of interest in this research. On the most popular Internet platform YouTube were registered more than 200 videos from this tradition, with various content and different time periods and all of them will be presented through a detailed analysis. On this way will be pointed out the function of YouTube as a promoter and educator of the Macedonian cultural heritage, which is of great importance in today's society when people massively rely on digital technologies.

Keywords: Galicnik; wedding; Galicnik wedding; Internet; YouTube; video

1. INTRODUCTION

The village of Galicnik is located in the western part of the Republic of North Macedonia in the region called "Mijacki", "Rekanski" or just "Reka". The Radika River flows through this region and according to its course, the area is divided into "Gorna Reka", "Dolna Reka", "Golema Reka" and "Mala Reka", where were located 23 Mijak villages on the western and southwestern slopes of mountain Bistra. (Buzharovski 2021, 27). Galicnik is one of the oldest villages in this region, located in "Mala Reka" and the knowledge of its creation date from the end of 10th and the beginning of 11th century. The village is located at an

altitude of 1200 to 1500 meters, with an amphitheater setting and surrounded by lush nature and amazing landscapes. These geographical features contributed to the Mijaks in Galicnik engaging in animal husbandry and later migrant work, when the women stayed in the village and took full care of the home and family.

The Galicnik people were talented in painting, architecture and were known by their great contribution to the cultural development of the country. The Mijaks, unlike other neighbor villages, were practicing authentic and unique customs and also had their own flag that was used during military operations, family celebrations and wedding ceremonies. (Buzharovski 2021, 28-29)

The most authentic and richest feature of Galicnik folklore were the wedding customs which were active once a year, on the day of the Orthodox holiday of the Saints Peter and Paul – *Petrovden* around July 12th and less often on the feast of the Holy Mother of God on August 28th. This period of the year was practically the only opportunity for the young people to get married because the grooms returned back in the village from the migrant work. That's why in one day were held up to 50 weddings with the music from the drums and zurnas. The weddings lasted almost one week fulfilled with unique customs, many ritual songs and dances marked with high symbolism from religious and pagan origin.

In 1950s the village was getting empty of its active population and at one point the weddings stopped. This was the reason why few enthusiasts gathered in Galicnik and decided to reshape the wedding into a show somewhere in 1958, but the official year accepted for the Galicnik wedding as a cultural manifestation was 1963. All the customs were gathered in two days and were presented by established scenario. The village began to revive, but due to the asphaltting of the road that is leading to Galicnik, the manifestation was paused until 1973, right after the second edition. After finishing the road, the guests could safely arrive to the village again and continued to follow the manifestation, which was representing the local customs by “artificial” weddings, because the newlyweds were not married in church and all people involved were extras and actors. From 1991, the weddings became real again by exchanging the vows in church in front of the priests. Two other breaks stopped this manifestation in 2001, due to the military conflict in the country and in 2020 because of the global pandemic. After these delays, the manifestation continues to happen every July and is visited by more and more domestic and foreign tourists.

The pre-wedding customs of the Galicnik wedding practiced in the past, included the matchmakers, who had a task to find out about unmarried girls and bring together the future couples. The preparations include decorating and placing the flag on the balcony of the house, where the three gun shots mark the beginning of the wedding. It continues with welcoming of the musicians, performance of Mother-in-law's, the Bride's and “Teshkoto” traditional dances and the walk of the bride to three fountains with crowd walking with burning torches. The wedding happens on Sunday with the pagan ritual “inviting the deceased”, inviting the best man, shaving the groom in front of the people, going to the bride's home, the happening of the wedding ceremony in the church, visiting the fountain again and finishing with dancing.

The Macedonian traditional dances included in the wedding originate from the Mijak region and some of them were performed either by only women or only men. The Bride's traditional dance is a typical one with ritual content, where the bride is the dance leader dancing for the first time at the wedding. The dance shows the grace and dignity of the Macedonian women, while the male dance “Teshkoto” is one of the most recognizable Macedonian dances that evokes deep emotions through the choreological movements that represents the difficult life of migrant workers, the injustices inflicted on the Macedonians throughout the centuries and their aspirations for freedom. Thanks to the standardization and

reconstruction of these wedding customs, the folklore in Galicnik continues to exist in the modern life and be protected from various influences and modifications.

This long-standing and significant tradition with its massive presentation as a stage spectacle has grown into a touristic attraction and Macedonian brand that massively spreads the Macedonian culture and identity. The Galicnik wedding festival was declared as “The most successful touristic event for 2017” by the Macedonian Tourism Support Agency and “One of the most traditional wedding festivals in Europe worth visiting” by New York Times and National Geographic in 2018. This is a clear example how the combination of the national traditions and its touristic representation directly affects the economy development, protection of the cultural heritage and ensuring sustainability of these two extremely important categories. The Galicnik wedding is a central event in the summer period, but has become active during the whole year through the internet space, that provides retention of interest and activation of some passivated segments. This was the reason for setting up the research field on the Internet and the obtained results are representing the presence of the wedding from a different angle in this different virtual environment.

2. Obtained results

The digitalization process has grown into one of the most current terms in modern society through numerous projects and strategies that are directly aimed at massive participation of computers in all spheres of life. The digital principle of work simplifies the set goals, helps in more precise and successful realization and such experiences have inevitably stimulated new ideas and possibilities for research work in virtual space. This collecting and processing data process could not be imagined before, when physical conditions and limitations directly affected the research results. Thanks to the numerous applications for direct communication with people, the researcher can provide the necessary information in quicker and more simple way, especially when the research is connected to places facing mass evictions, such as the case of the village Galicnik. That’s why the local community of the village became present online and uses the benefits of digitalization to coordinate its obligations in terms of protecting the village and maintaining the contacts with evicted people, who visit their birthplace during the summer.

A large number of professional literature and digitized archive materials are available on various online encyclopedias, TV channels, online newspapers, portals, social networks and various platforms. Today’s researchers of traditional culture have quick access to all these materials in electronic form, which are constantly multiplying and can be seen and saved in own devices without financial compensation. (Malinov 2024, 25-26) This form of transmission of the Macedonian folklore is in continuity with the tradition, regardless of the changes that are currently happening in the musical culture. (Dimitrijevski 2024, 85) The audio and video materials are especially important for the folklore and the Internet platform YouTube is the place where large number of diverse traditional examples can be found. Part of them are the registered 280 videos and 33 copies from the Galicnik wedding available by October 30, 2024. The copies represent identical materials uploaded by other sources which were saved in a separate YouTube playlist. All videos were processed according to several parameters in the virtual space in terms of content, video titles and descriptions, duration, upload activity and audience interaction. The Macedonian language is the most common language in the videos, while 10 of them are in foreign languages (English, Serbian, Russian, German and Chinese).

2.1 Categories

According to the video content, the materials can be divided into 7 categories that contain exact numbers of videos: videos which contain only photographs, documentary movies, promotional videos, live-streamings, excerpts of press conferences, TV reportages and excerpts of the manifestation.

The 2 videos that are showing photographs from the Galicnik wedding offer visual display to all photograph lovers who can follow the important moments that were captured with background music from Macedonian folk songs. The first registered video shows the wedding from 2011 through 26 photos, and the second video contains 12 photos that are part of the photo archive of the Macedonian journalist Kiro Kiproski, who captured not only the wedding, but also the Galicnik families and scenes from their daily lives.

The documentaries have a particular importance to researchers and curious seekers of history and tradition because these materials offer a comprehensive view and analysis of the facts. Still, it has to be mentioned about the presence of some documentary movies that contain subjective views and statements from foreign researchers and journalists and this situation indicates the need of careful monitoring the video content and higher awareness and education. On YouTube have been published 6 reliable documentaries: "Galicnik wedding" (1955), "People and customs - Mijaks" (1979 - in Serbian), "I carry Galicnik in my heart" (1986), "St. Peter's Day in Galicnik" (1999 - in English), "Macedonian wedding - Galician wedding" and a documentary video from 2004. Although there are few available videos of this kind, they offer many important information about the Mijak origin, the symbolism of the Mijak flag, their secret language, the production process of domestic products, the trades they engaged in, the emigration process and ethnic vitality of these people.

The promotional videos represent short video campaign for promotion of the event and they mark the country as an attractive tourist destination. These 5 videos were produced by the local community Galicnik and were announcing the annual event for 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2017. The promotional video for 2012 is presented in black and white with a voiceover in the background announcing information about the tradition with inserts from previous weddings. The videos for 2013 and 2014 have been made by same concept, while the ones for 2015 and 2017 does not contain wedding inserts and the terrain is located on the road to Galicnik and its environment, in aim to point out the natural beauties and the newlyweds.

Particularly interesting and useful are the live streamings of the wedding by the local community of Galicnik, which happened 10 times during 4 years. This live broadcasting began in 2018 with and continued in 2021, 2023 and 2024. On Friday, before the wedding begins, in Galicnik is organized concert with pop and folk performers that were also streamed in 2021 and 2023. The greatest interest by the audience is recorded on July 18, 2021 - Sunday, when the newlyweds get married. On this day more than 8000 people virtually joined the wedding as active followers in the event and this large number of online visitors is a result of their interest and the year 2021 itself, when the whole world switched to the Internet because of the global pandemic.

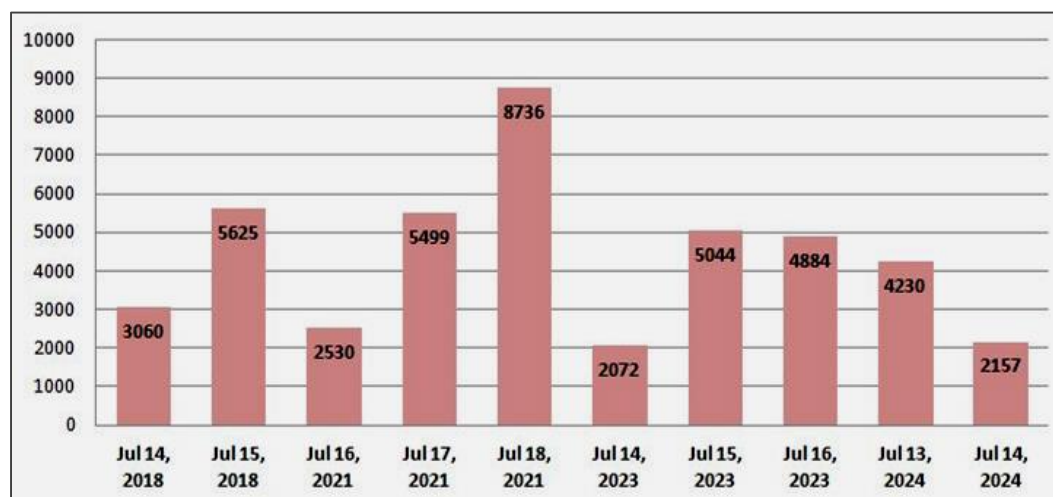


Figure 1: Live streaming videos and feedback

The streamings highlight the importance of YouTube in capturing the event for all people who were not able to follow the wedding in live. Since the best results in 2021, the number of online visitors has decreased and that is not changing the fact that the live streaming captured by drones are a great opportunity for all lovers of the wedding to see different locations in the village and follow the movement of the crowd, which is much more difficult in live.

The press conferences of the manifestation are held before its beginning and they represent a public announcement of the chosen bride and groom and all the annual necessary instructions and news. The newlyweds and representatives from the local community, the Government and the general sponsor Brewery Skopje give statements that are later completed by the music of the drums and zurnas, which are in charge of the musical part of the wedding. There are 29 published excerpts from the press conferences from 2014 to 2024 that helps tracking the official announcements during this decade.

The Galicnik wedding customs and rituals are regularly in the focus of attention of television houses and numerous journalists, who make live report from the event, interview participants and visitors, record the ceremony and produce various types of public materials. Total 75 videos from the television medium can be found for the time period 2008-2024. These materials are a product of the great commitment of the TV media in recording the tradition, bringing it closer to all generations and increasing higher education and attendance to the event.

The remaining 154 published videos contain clips from the wedding which either cover only the first wedding day (Saturday), the second one (Sunday) or certain customs and dances recorded in the period from 1953 to 2024.

2.2 Video titles and descriptions

The titles of the videos include some of the important data about the recorded wedding, usually as the dates and the names of the newlyweds and customs. It has to be noted the difference in the number of edition of the manifestation in some titles and descriptions, which is a result of the different way of counting that for some, starts from 1963 with the manifestation establishment or the others, who calculate from 1973 then was resumed. The descriptions published in the field under the videos often have a key role in determining the time period of recording the videos. Unfortunately 60 videos from the total registered number has no data specified in the description field by the upload sources, that directs the users to

review the full content in order to detect the necessary conclusion on a much slower way. All the other videos contain same information as the titles, plus short descriptions about the tradition and in this context, the promotional videos were notices as the only videos with complete published data.

2.3 Video duration

The total duration of all videos is 73 hours, which means 3 days non-stop audio and video presentation of the Macedonian traditional music, songs, dances, customs, rituals, traditional clothes, food and many more. The longest video lasts 5 hours, 7 minutes and 10 seconds, the shortest with 9 seconds and the average duration of all materials is 14 minutes and 49 seconds. Also an analysis of the average video's time duration by categories has been made: videos with photographs - 3 minutes, documentary movies - 20 minutes, promotional videos - 1 minute, live streaming - 3,5 hours, press conferences - 2 minutes, TV reportages - 8 minutes and the excerpts of the manifestation - 7 minutes.

2.4 Upload activity

The uploading of the materials on YouTube by the sources started in 2006 and continues until today. The highest number of published videos in one year is recorded in 2024, while the weakest activity in terms of uploading videos was registered in 2007 and 2020, with only 6 published videos per year. From 2021 till now is recorded publication growth, which gives hope that this trend will continue through publishing more video materials with significant content.

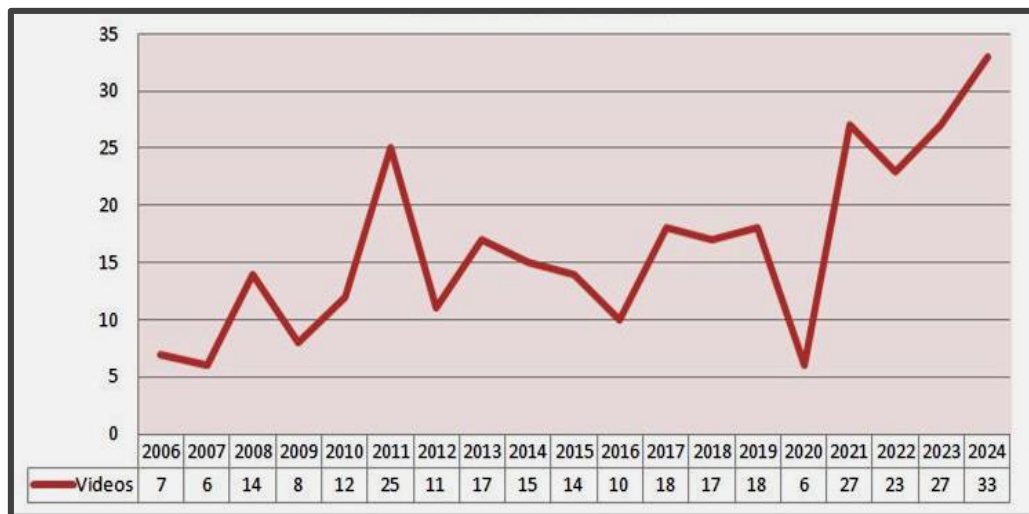


Figure 2: Upload frequency by year

The videos are posted by 117 YouTube channels and were divided into 4 categories: TV channels, organization and sponsors, other production and journal agencies and private channels. The TV channels: Sitel, 24, Alfa, Telma, Kanal 5, HD TV Mega, Kiss & Menada, , Prva, Nova and Ultra TV were posting many videos and less from the local community of Galicnik, its president Aleksandar Kostik, the main sponsor, the Macedonian Government and the President of the country Stevo Pendarovski. From the other production and journal agencies were registered: Ohrid News, Al Jazeera Balkan, Sloboden Pecat, Express MK, Bulevar info, Glas na Amerika, TRT Balkan, TRT World, Makfax, MKR, Vecer press, Discover Macedonia, Moonlight Production, Production DaTo, United Macedonia Diaspora,

Vidi Vaka and Amazing World. The largest number of YouTube channels were the private ones who shared their private archives, enriched the platform with the beauties of Macedonian tradition and contributed to boosting its popularity.

2.5 Informants

The informants have a key role in any research process for providing the most reliable information about the history of customs and ways of their practice by specific ethnic group. In the video materials are shown 155 informants who speak about the wedding preparations, their impressions, reveal new and unknown information for their family traditions. According to their role in the event, the informants were grouped into 6 categories: organization and sponsor representatives, representatives from the top of the country, experts, newlyweds, wedding participants and visitors.

From the wedding organization are interviewed the two presidents, Mitre Azhievski and Aleksandar Kostik and also two employees from the main sponsor. Their official statements offer a comprehensive picture of the entire event, starting from the selection of the newlyweds, the two-day agenda, preparations for the wedding and results of its final realization which includes more than 250 people - technical team, members of the folklore ensembles, participants and extras. They speak about the large number of tourists that often exceeds their expectations and interest from the travel agencies by bringing tourists on their own. They use the interviews to give instructions to the journalists for early accreditation and also to the visitors, who have to respect the house rules and the movement agenda. They inform about the other events in the village during the "Galicnik cultural summer", the need of warm clothes and the situation about the limited accommodation facilities. As most important statement is the main criteria for registering the interested couples that must not be over 35 years of age and not to have a previous marriage. Preference is given to those couples who at least one of the applicants has a Galicnik origin and his family actively contributes to the life of the village. This is not mandatory and weddings have been already taken with newlyweds who hadn't roots and connections with the village and were introduced to the tradition and the customs by the organizers before the wedding. The main sponsor is supporting the Galicnik wedding for half a century since its beginnings and its employees highlight the common values of both organizations in terms of caring for tradition and bringing the people together at cultural events.

The Galicnik wedding is regularly visited by representatives from the top of the country and were published statements from 8 people: the Presidents Gjorge Ivanov, Stevo Pendarovski and Gordana Siljanovska Davkova; the Minister of culture Elizabeta Kancheska Milevska, Irena Stefoska, Bisera Kostadinovska Stojchevska and Zoran Ljutkov and one representative from the Government. The statements emphasize the importance of preservation of the Macedonian folklore, its massive promotion, bringing it closer to the young generations, the possibilities of revitalization the rural areas and developing alternative tourism through this type of manifestations. The wedding is under the auspices of the President of the country and it's regularly present in the annual programs of the Ministry of Culture with financial support and projects for restoration.

The first expert is the priest Stojko Ristovski - an employee of the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Skopje, who explains the essence of the custom called "inviting the dead". He states that nothing ends with the grave because the spirits know everything that is happening in the present and are joyful to watch the wedding. The custom shows respect for the loved ones and sharing the happiness of that special day. The ethnochoreologist Bojan Petkovski gave a great contribution with his professional statement by descriptions for the

bridal costume and also mentioned the importance of the social networks in bringing sustainability of the tradition.

Great attention is drawn to the interviews with the newlyweds and their personal experiences and the characters of the Galicnik people. On YouTube are posted 33 newlyweds from 1996 till 2024. Usually one of these partners has Galicnik origin and actively participated in the wedding, while the other partner has the task to learn the prescribed scenario for the wedding days. In the videos are mentioned the bridal costumes that are more than 100 years old and request supreme mastery of making, that include natural materials, many decorations, several clothing elements and special storage for maximum protection against damages. Since the wedding includes riding on horses, most of the newlyweds have this experience for the first time, that evokes great excitement, pride and unforgettable memories. Some of the couples also concluded their civil marriage in Galicnik and were previously directly involved in organizing, coordinating and directing the wedding for other couples.

The published 46 participants have different roles and explain their own experience in contributing the survival of this manifestation for many years in a row. They also have the desire and hope that one day they will have a Galicnik wedding too, with the other adult participants and the youngest ones, who are dressed in traditional clothes and learn their roots from an earliest age.

In the videos are showed 62 visitors from Germany, Great Britain, Belgium, Serbia, Bulgaria, Australia, USA, Poland and Russia and all of them were delighted by the beauty of the village, uniqueness of the customs, the dance “Teshkoto”, the folklore ensemble “Tanec” and the colorful and impressive traditional costumes. Some of them mention a similar type of manifestation in their countries, but emphasize that the Galicnik wedding is something unique that they haven’t seen anywhere else before. Those who visited the village for the first time were amazed by the authenticity of Macedonian folklore and the protection of the wedding. There are also Macedonian visitors who live abroad and used the manifestation as an opportunity to visit their family houses and bring their children to the village. The informants mention that the media played a key role in making the decision to visit the village through its numerous announcements.

2.6 Audience interaction

Thanks to the options on the YouTube platform is possible to register and monitor the activity of the audience. The users positively reacted to this tradition through many views, likes and comments on the videos. Some sources restricted the option for commenting on 30 videos, which is 1/9 of whole found materials. The most liked video is named “The village of Galicnik, traditional Galicnik wedding, Mavrovo and Rostuse” with 513 likes. In this video is shown the village, its wedding and the municipality Mavrovo and Rostuse where Galicnik is located. The highest views reached the video “Galicnik wedding - Teskoto 2013” with 62.427 views and highest number of 90 comments on the video “Galicnik once dubbed Europe’s most traditional wedding festival”.

CONCLUSION

Advances in technology have predicted significant changes in the field of recording and researching the folklore and have opened up faster ways for education to the new generations. The new virtual research fields that were opened will directly help the other folklore traditions that need to be revitalized and protected. The constantly available and reliable data on the Internet gives a real inspiration and greater motive for more frequent

involvement of the researchers, who, through their computers can contribute to analyzing different segments of the cultural heritage. The popularity of the internet platform YouTube is widely known because it's free for use and offers numerous and various available materials and options. Sharing the examples of the national traditions, as the Galicnik wedding, remind us of the moral values of people and we need to keep them alive as soon as possible, especially in today's modern life marked with completely different people's behavior that is oriented towards some other influences and practices. YouTube helps in gaining a truly comprehensive knowledge for anyone who is not informed about the Mijaks and their wedding customs. The wedding participants in the videos confirm the practical and useful application of the platform in the process of successful learning the scenario and customs and also in attracting the interest in visiting the event and keeping the ethno-tourism active. The purpose of this research is to highlight the usage of digital technology for good and the fact that this platform affects the sustainability of this tradition is actually a main theme and essence of many conferences and debates.

REFERENCES

1. Aleksandar. Dimitrijevi, “Between the traditional and the contemporary: the transformation of the repertoire of Macedonian wedding customs”, *Macedonian folklore* LI, 77-78 (2020): 165-174, <https://doi.org/10.55302/MF2077-78>.
2. Aleksandar. Dimitrijevi, “The media presentation of Macedonian musical folklore”, *Macedonian folklore* LV, 85 (2024): 81-86, <https://doi.org/10.55302/MF2485>.
3. Damjan. Buzharovski, “Flag of All the Mijaks and the Mijaks family flags”, *Macedonian Herald*, 17 (2021): 26-46, <https://doi.org/10.47763/mher2117026b>.
4. Eda. Starova Tahir, “The local community is online: transforming traditional forms of self-government in the digital age”, *Macedonian folklore* LIV, 84 (2023): 249-259, <https://doi.org/10.55302/MF2384>.
5. Gorancho. Angelov, “Folk musical instruments in the function of ethnotourism - with a special reference to the zurna and the drum”, *Ethnologist*, 16 (2014): 206-215.
6. Gordana, Vrencoska. 2020. *Macedonian visual identity, the design as an opportunity for the evolution of traditions from the visual cultural heritage*. Skopje: Ars Lamina.
7. Ivan. Kotev, “The informant, the challenges and opportunities of the collector then and now”, *Macedonian folklore* LV, 85 (2024): 115-125, <https://doi.org/10.55302/MF2485>.
8. Kiril, Todevski and Blazhe. Palchevski. 2013. *Tanec - promoter of a folklore-choreography school with a national sign*. Skopje, Directorate of Culture and Arts.
9. Suzana. Miceva, “The medium - transmission and a folklore archive”, *Macedonian folklore* LV, 85 (2024), 107-114, <https://doi.org/10.55302/MF2485>.
10. Suzana. V. Spasovska, “Digitization as an auxiliary tool for scientific research of folklore materials”, *Macedonian folklore* LV, 85 (2024): 59-70, <https://doi.org/10.55302/MF2485>.
11. Tosho. Chochoroski, “The folklore as touristic animation”, *Macedonian folklore* LIII, 82 (2022), 101-111, <https://doi.org/10.55302/MF2282>.
12. Zorancho. Malinov, “Internet challenges as a Scientific Tool in Traditional Culture Research”, *Macedonian folklore* LV, 85 (2024): 25-37, <https://doi.org/10.55302/MF2485>.