

Lipizzan Horse Breeding Traditions as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

From the foundation of the stud farm in Lipica in 1580, the breeding of Lipizzan horses spread through geographical areas of today's Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. For more than 450 years and within the changing political systems, the element still unites bearers, practitioners and communities from eight countries. They are the first caretakers, not only of the horses and related values, based on a trustful bond between human and horse, but also of a shared cultural heritage.

The Lipizzan horse is characterised by longevity, excellent stamina, good and strong character, learning ability and athletic capabilities. Years to decades of training and knowledge transfer are necessary to obtain the skills and knowledge of a Lipizzan horse breeder. Up until today, this well-known horse breed forms an intrinsic part of rituals, festive events and equestrian sports, and plays a special role in the everyday cultural and social life of communities in rural areas, near stud farms and private breeders.

Living heritage unites eight countries in Europe

The wide range of cultural and social practices, knowledge and skills, oral traditions, festive events and equestrian sports linked to the breeding of Lipizzan horses, has prompted Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia to nominate *Lipizzan horse breeding traditions* for inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The Lipizzan horses have played a symbolic role for these countries over centuries and continue to represent various communities until today. The horses form an integral part of local celebrations and festivities like traditional weddings, carnival processions, autumn parades, folklore events, horse breeding displays, the tradition of driving the horses down from the Alpine pastures in early autumn, and the blessing of horses on different occasions. They are used iconically on various items or artefacts like coins, bank notes, escutcheons, labels, postage stamps, and play an important role in representational and ceremonial events. Their symbolic value is further conveyed through oral histories, as well as through folk songs, and testifies of a close emotional connection between practitioners and horses. The element also plays a role in the life of the larger community concerned, e.g. in hippotherapy, sports (riding, carriage driving) and performances inspired by the Classical Horsemanship of the Spanish Riding School.

The joint nomination of these eight European countries highlights a shared heritage that unites communities and states at the local, national and international level. It underlines that the 2003 Convention encourages the joint safeguarding of intangible elements across linguistic and national borders, thereby promoting dialogue and understanding. The inscription on UNESCO's Representative List will strengthen the cooperation and networking of all stakeholders involved in the safeguarding of the element.

The preparation of the nomination brought together representatives of the state stud farms and private breeders, intangible heritage professionals, cultural experts and researchers, as well as local communities. The process was coordinated by the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia.

The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage will evaluate the file during its 16th session in December 2021.