

## **SERBIAN FOLK DRESS – IDENTITY MATRIX OF FUTURE TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Starting from theoretical observations on research problems based on studies of the value orientations of young people, future teachers and educators, as well as a critical reading of studies on national identity and its significance in times of globalism vs. anti-globalism, the research problem is defined: do future teachers and educators recognize Serbian folk dress? In a descriptive study, using a questionnaire technique on a sample of 184 students from the Pedagogical Faculty in Užice, the following were examined: (1) success in identifying Serbian folk dress without geographical prediction; (2) success in identifying Serbian folk dress with indicated geographical origin; (3) existence of statistically significant differences in the success of students' assessments (tasks 1 and 2) based on study direction, year of study, academic performance, and attendance of folklore sections. The findings showed that future teachers and educators do not have sufficient knowledge about Serbian folk dress and find it difficult to identify it extensively. The significance of the research should be interpreted in the context of understanding the potential strength of faculties in training teachers and educators to nurture national identity at both the primary and secondary levels.

### **Key words**

*education, intangible cultural heritage, national identity, teacher training faculties, youth orientation.*

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## Introduction

The idea of globalization undoubtedly changes reality in all aspects of human activity (technology, economy, communications, education...), but it also alters value systems and cultural orientation (Bojović, 2017; Cohen & Kennedy, 2000; Čičkarić, 2011; Held, 2003; Korenčić & Šajković, 2002; Petrovska & Miljković, 2024; Tramošljanin, 2010; Vukadinović, 2012), self-awareness of both individuals and groups. The greater the difference between the body of universal, externally imposed values and glocalized and individual values, the more delicate and traumatic their encounter becomes for both individuals and nations, and for society as a whole. Such changes, occurring in a relatively short period, often cause tension, confusion, “crises” in value systems, which subsequently lead to chaos. In the conditions of disarray of specific values to which they belong, both educational and national values suffer consequences. In such conditions, a clear value hierarchy is not evident. In order to find value “reference points” (Hoblaj, 2005), young people create their own value system, which represents a value orientation or its indication, which is socially expected, and often inherently implies a multi-layered identity, but also has a confused identity character. Research on the value orientations of teachers in central and western Serbia (Bojović et al., 2022) shows that respondents emphasize family values, an honest and responsible relationship with oneself and others, as well as the preservation of an open mind, self-control, and positive professional ambitions. National values are at the bottom of the value orientation list. The matrix of personal value aspirations of teachers may over time become an exemplar of norms, ideals, beliefs, and life principles for their future students.

Given that both instrumental and terminal values are variable (Rokeach, 1973), that their positioning changes according to current social, political, and economic influences, and that they are interdependent, they ultimately determine the character of professional actions, including those of teachers and educators (Romstein & Staković, 2017; Alas & Edwards, 2013). It is clear that they can be influenced externally in accordance with national aspirations.

As early as the 19th century, it became clear that schools have the function of transmitting and affirming national narratives and feelings (Smit, 1991), and that, in this sense, they have an irreplaceable role, as national identity is the existential core of statehood. This is not just about educational discourse, the adoption of facts and generalizations about identity, but also about upbringing, where schools take on an important role in forming an emotional relationship with the self, collectivism, and the nation. Ideological commitments are largely embedded in current educational policies at both formal and substantive levels, further determining the relationship of the student as an individual, and thus the future society, with its own national identity, as well as with globalization and glocalization.

In the process of creating entities without political, economic, cultural, educational, and national borders, questions arise that reexamine the construction and co-construction of national and European identity (Vasiljević, 2015; Čičak & Žuškić, 2013; Kamenov, Jelić, Huić, Franceško, Mihić, 2006; Mihić, 2009), through education (Vasiljević, 2023; Tormey, 2006). Therefore, numerous studies focus on examining the contents of educational resources. It has been shown that curricula bearing the mark of patriotic education develop a sense of pride and respect for state and national interests, which are placed above personal ones (Barrett & Davis, 2008; Pöllmann, 2008; Rapoport, 2009). On the other hand, critical education integrated into educational content builds a critical attitude towards national past and present, emphasizing universal democratic values over national and personal ones (Rapoport, 2009; Tartakovsky, 2011). Analysis of our textbooks showed a predominance of a critical attitude towards national content; national content is minimally represented, without a pronounced patriotic attitude towards taught material; dissonance was noted in the treatment and dimensioning of national concepts, without clearly defined dynamics, a systemic approach, or development (Vasiljević et al., 2021a; Vasiljević et al., 2021b; Vasiljević et al., 2022; Vasiljević 2023; Sudzilovski et al., 2023). Primary school students show interest in traditional culture (Aksić, 2023), and “due to the high aesthetic and ethical values, folk tradition must have a priority place in the contemporary educational system of Serbia” (Pavlović & Cicović Sarajlić, 2013: 277). They need to be offered new ways of presenting folk tradition, aligned with the needs of the “alpha” generation (born after 2010), building identity through visual enhancement of concepts with diverse representative examples (Pavlović & Cicović Sarajlić, 2014: 144). The extent to which this will be achieved depends on the readiness and competence of future teachers and educators.

However, these future teachers and educators are also in secondary schools. Research shows that their knowledge of intangible cultural heritage is at a very low level. Based on UNESCO recommendations for educating young people on the importance of cultural heritage, a 2019 study was conducted on the knowledge and preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The sample consisted of young people from Serbia and the diaspora (66), including members of cultural-artistic societies (Zrenjanin, Užice, Niš, Kraljevo), ballet schools (Novi Sad), and the third generation of Serbian students in Paris, Vienna, and Calgary. The analysis of the results showed that young people’s knowledge of intangible cultural heritage is at a low level, but they wish to learn more about folk traditions (Antonijević, Rašić, Banić, 2020), which was expected given their interest.

Serbian folk dress, as an exemplar of national identity, is a significant intangible cultural heritage whose “reading” contributes to a better understanding of geopolitical relations throughout history in the region, demographics, population migrations, and cultural influences. It indicates different functions and meanings: protection, origin, status, gender, age, religious affiliation, ceremonial function, aesthetic, and artistic value; it speaks about geographical affiliation, available resources, climatic features of the inhabited area, work orientations (herders,

artisans...), level of technological culture, knowledge, skills, experience, creativity, and specifics (Tomić, 2014; Vasilijević & Sudzilovski, 2024; Vujačić, 2014), the diversity, richness of folk dress (Bjeladinović, 2011), and readiness for other cultural influences. Folk dress, as such, becomes an important pedagogical resource and potential at different levels of education, including the academic discourse.

Understanding the specificity, diversity, and richness of folk dress indicates awareness of the importance of identity features and “simultaneously broadens the discourse of critically-constructive consideration of collective self in the current moment” (Vasilijević & Sudzilovski, 2024). The very term folk dress refers to the traditional attire of the people, mostly from rural communities, costumes (Rihtman, 1976: 114) from the second half of the 19th and 20th centuries (Bjeladinović 1980: 75). Known as “ruho”, “ruvo”, or “roba”, traditional clothing originated in the community and was originally for the needs of the community. Made in home industries from natural materials, it is a sign of the creative potential and skills of its creators. Hence, it has exceptional artistic and aesthetic value. This “regular clothing” (Bušić, 2014: 57) refers to both everyday and festive attire, various clothing combinations, projecting function, purpose, meaning, and symbolism. It is simultaneously a reflection of complex historical, political, cultural, socio-economic, natural-geographical, and climatic influences but also an unavoidable personal identity symbol (Bjeladinović, 1980: 81); it reflects both personal and collective identity (affiliation with smaller or larger communities, social milieus, classes, confessions, regions, ethnicities, and nations).

Over time, the traditional way of dressing gradually faded with the departure from traditional rural communities of an agrarian-pastoral type and a change in lifestyle. At the beginning of the 19th century in Serbia, rural attire coexisted with Turkish-oriental clothing. Serbian bourgeois attire emerged around 50 years later, thanks to new economic conditions and a more open influence from other cultures, with the dynamics and character of these changes differing in terms of time, space, and class discourse (Jovanović, 1980: 109). As a result of the influence of urban culture, as well as industrial prosperity at the end of the 19th and during the 20th century, traditional clothing began to be made from new industrial-type materials. This is particularly evident in Vojvodina, where, from the late 19th century, traditional clothing was mostly made by craftsmen or in village tailoring shops using industrial materials, adapting to the needs of the community (Radisavljević, 2022). This type of traditional attire is also called the “new layer” (Bušić, 2014: 57). Traditional clothing of rural and even some urban populations had an internal demonstrative appearance function until the 19th century, when, thanks to the development of tourism and the formation of national states, it acquired external significance – directed towards the observer (Bauzinger, 2002). The abandonment of traditional clothing coincides with the emergence of the national costume. Unlike traditional clothing, the costume is mostly unchanging, has a recognizable shape, and is often standardized based on museum examples or “the formation of recognizable variations of the costume inspired by the traditional attire that is still in

use” (Radisavljević, 2022: 107; Radisavljević, 2009: 160). Throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries, Serbian folk attire has mostly been stylized into national costumes, often losing authenticity. These are usually created by elites (higher social classes) in an attempt to “bring rural groups closer by wearing an idealized costume” (Radisavljević, 2022). The costume becomes a representation, an identity marker at various events of state, confessional, or family significance, with the main function of highlighting the identity of the respective community (Skov & Riegels Melchior, 2008). However, even in this form, it carries identity messages about belonging, ancestry, the attire of ancestors, their craftsmanship, the specificity of clothing production (rural product), cultural heritage, and potential, but on the other hand, it also acts as a “trigger” for national feelings, an emotional and connotative relationship with identity. Only in this context should the contemporary use of folk costumes in different situations (folkloric performances, events) and private contexts (wearing in certain life events, e.g., christenings, weddings, funerals), as well as its various functions (identity-related, artistic, political, entertainment, tourism) be “observed, valorized, and interpreted” (Bušić, 2014: 171).

Therefore, folklore societies play an important role in promoting Serbian folk tradition, cultural heritage as a whole, and in shaping young generations towards identity self-awareness. They largely take responsibility for standardizing the national costume and its varieties (Rihtman Auguštin, 1979). Standardization of the national costume is a particular challenge not only in Serbia but also in the countries of the region where Serbian populations have lived or still live, as it requires ethnic, national, cultural, confessional, social, and regional consensus. Complex and turbulent socio-political and historical processes have influenced the variability of administrative borders, which, consequently, have not fundamentally separated folk tradition and culture. However, formally they have. Often, without consulting experts, political, media, and educational actors in the countries of the region irresponsibly determine the identity matrix of young people, who most often do not see the roots of their tradition beyond the administrative borders of their own country. This was a key reason for us to choose this research topic. Determining and typologically classifying folk costumes based on the ethnic structure and origin of the population, as well as the principle of belonging to cultural-geographical regions (Bjeladinović, 1980; Jovanović, 1979) is crucial for understanding the scope and reach of the term Serbian folk attire. Considering this, we can conclude that the term (Serbian) folk attire is complex, layered, developed, and multifaceted, closely linked with the overarching concept of identity. For its function in the educational discourse to be substantial, rather than formal or decorative, the education system at all levels needs to provide an answer to the question of how to build this term on cognitive, emotional, and conative plans. In this context, future teachers and educators have an irreplaceable role. Therefore, their perception of elements of national identity is of vital importance for shaping correct ideas and concepts at an early age.

At the General Conference of UNESCO (2003), the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted, which, among other things, establishes the need to raise young people's awareness of the preservation and nurturing of intangible cultural heritage, as they are a key integrating factor in the relationship between the past, present, and future. The Convention stresses that "each State Party is required to take appropriate measures to ensure the recognition, respect, and evaluation of intangible cultural heritage in society, particularly through educational, informational, and awareness-raising programs aimed at the public, especially young people" (UNESCO, 2003, Article 14). One of the goals also relates to the professional training of young people and the possibility of employment in the domain of intangible cultural heritage protection. Although the convention primarily does not refer to educational workers, we see the potential of faculties for the education of future teachers in developing awareness of preserving and nurturing intangible cultural heritage and national identity, in accordance with the national strategy of the Republic of Serbia (Strategy for the Development of Culture of the Republic of Serbia from 2020 to 2029). However, the projected and current educational reality today, two decades after the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, is in significant disarray, which largely aligns with critics' assessments of this project (Hameršak, 2016; Hameršak & Pleše, 2013). The question remains open whether the goals are declarative or substantive and whether key actors have properly utilized their potential. National identity is not indestructible, it is especially sensitive to irresponsible and reckless reforms (of higher education), as well as to the "relativization of the character of knowledge recommended for adoption" (Petrović, 2019: 143). There is an opinion that today's university is in crisis, as content is now available anywhere, with questionable validity and status, and because of the crisis of national identity and a lack of historical knowledge about existence (Petrović, 2019); that Bologna reforms have subordinated education to the labor market, requiring strict rationalization and a harsher orientation, separating education at the academic level from the process of upbringing, the world of culture, and humanistic values; they point to the lack of content essential for the development of individual and collective identities. In this sense, future reforms of the university should be planned, with faculties of social sciences and humanities, and especially faculties for the education of teachers and educators, who are in a somewhat more favorable position, needing to reform their study programs in terms of content (Bazić & Anđelković, 2011).

### **Approach to the research problem**

The starting platform for defining the research problem was based on opposing theoretical and research standpoints regarding the impact of globalization on national identity. Some authors emphasize the negative effects of globalization, arguing that it undermines national identity while promoting cosmopolitanism (Vasiljević, 2015); others believe that globalization strengthens national sentiments

(Sakač, Štrangarić, Marković, 2017), or that multiple identities can be formed with situational adaptability (Čičak & Žuškić, 2013; Kamenov et al., 2006; Stoica, 2016). Therefore, considering that national sentiments among young people, future teachers, and educators are ranked low on the list of value orientations, and that the curricular contents of the first and second cycles of primary education are not sufficiently reinforced with an emotional relationship toward the nation, and given the children's need to study these topics, it becomes clear that the program concepts of teacher and educator education faculties, compared to earlier programs, lack content of national significance. Additionally, the identity matrix of (future) teachers and educators in Serbia often exhibits multiple identities, most frequently a confused dual identity (Bojović et al., 2015; Bojović et al., 2022). Thus, we have chosen to investigate this topic.

For schools to adequately respond to the challenges of modern times, it is necessary to examine the current situation, problems, and challenges they face based on the national strategy.

In this regard, examining future teachers and educators will provide an answer to the research question: How does the future teaching staff of Serbia, who will implement educational policies in the future, perceive national identity through their knowledge of Serbian national costumes? In this way, indirect answers will be given regarding how well young people know the diverse cultural heritage, its spread, richness, and multilayered nature of identity markers, their origins, meanings, symbolism, and importance.

The obtained answers will serve as a starting point for considering the challenges and possibilities for the protection and nurturing of national and cultural identity (Cvetković, 2002; Dimitrijević, 2013; Köroğlu & Elban, 2020) on a broader educational scale.

Serbian national costumes are recognized as an exemplar of national identity and have been used to define the research problem: Do future teachers and educators recognize Serbian national costumes, or do they identify them at a declarative, formal, or essential, substantive level?

Based on the research objective, which is to examine whether young future teachers and educators perceive (recognize) Serbian national costumes in the context of identity self-awareness, the research tasks were defined as follows: (1) examine the success of identifying Serbian national costumes without geographical prediction; (2) examine the success of identifying Serbian national costumes with designated geographical origin; (3) establish statistically significant differences in the views of future teachers and educators (tasks 1 and 2) based on independent variables (study program, year of study, student performance, and attendance of folklore sections).

The transversal research was conducted on a stratified, intentional, and representative sample of 184 students. The population consists of students from the Pedagogical Faculty in Užice in the 2023/24 academic year.

*Table 1. Sample structure  
(N = 184)*

Independent Variables	Modalities	(f)	(%)
Year of study	First	66	35.90
	Second	43	23.40
	Third	31	16.80
	Fourth	44	23.90
Study program	Teacher	73	39.70
	Preschool Educator	111	60.30
Academic performance	Below average	48	26.10
	Average	81	44
	Above average	55	29.90
Member of Cultural and Artistic Society (KUD)	Yes	9	4.90
	No	173	95.10

The research was conducted using the survey technique. The questionnaire was supplemented with visual representations of Serbian national costumes from the region, as well as national costumes from some European countries. The students were presented with 49 photographs (each photograph included a pair of male and female national costumes).

Of these, 43 photographs depicted Serbian national costumes, with 21 from the territory of Serbia (Western Serbia, Eastern Serbia, Southern Serbia, Southeastern Serbia, Central Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Metohija – three from each region) and 22 from the territories of the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Croatia, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Srpska, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Montenegro<sup>1</sup>.

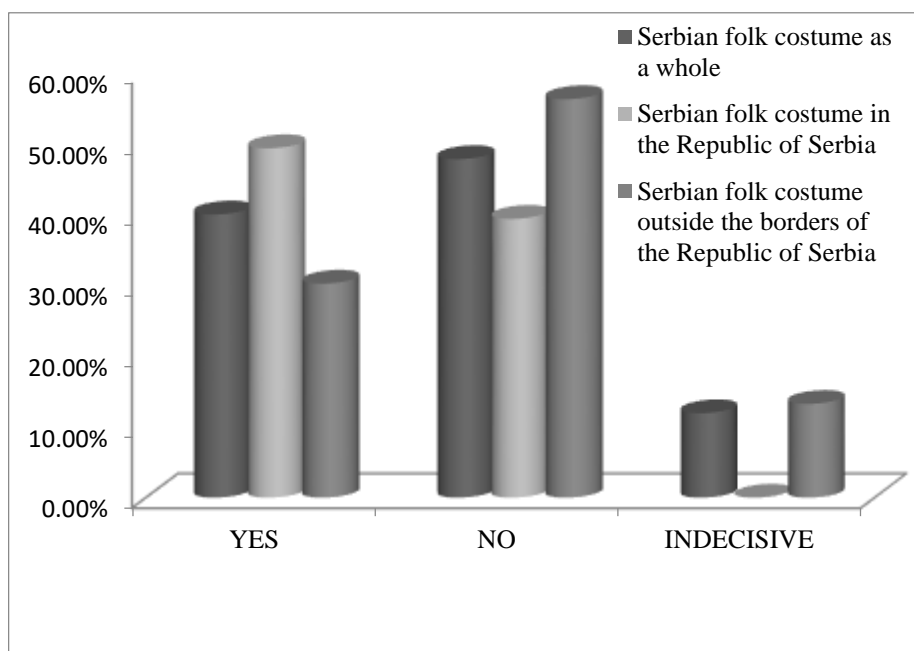
Statistical data processing and verification of the statistical significance of the findings were performed using the SPSS software package, applying the Mann-Whitney U-test and one-way univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA).

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<sup>1</sup> The selection and classification of the chosen geographical areas are aligned with the representations of Serbian traditional clothing in the book *Traditional Costumes of Serbs* (Terzić, 2021); the selection of photographs within the designated geographical area is random and unintentional.

## Interpretation of research results

*Success of Identifying Serbian National Costumes Without Geopolitical Prediction.* Looking at the data as a whole, two-fifths, or 40.11%, of the displayed content related to Serbian national costumes<sup>2</sup> were correctly identified by the students, future teachers, and educators. Slightly less than half, or 47.90%, were negatively determined, while 11.99% were undecided on the issue.



*Chart 1. Success of identifying Serbian folk costumes without geoprediction*

Future Teachers and Educators manage to correctly identify only about half, or 49.43%, of the Serbian National Costumes (SNC) from the territory of the Republic of Serbia displayed in the photographs. Nearly two-fifths of the respondents, or 39.49%, believe that the displayed national costume does not belong to the

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<sup>2</sup> In the interpretation, the abbreviation STC (Serbian Traditional Costume) will be used for the phrase 'Serbian traditional costume'.

Serbian cultural heritage, while about one-tenth remain undecided (11.08%). When it comes to SNC from outside the borders of the Republic of Serbia, only one-third (30.37%) of the students are able to identify them correctly.

More than half believe the displayed costume does not belong to Serbian cultural heritage, and just above one-tenth remain undecided on this issue (13.30%).

Further analysis showed that students most successfully identify SNC from the Republic of Serbia, particularly from Eastern Serbia (72.46%), followed by Southern Serbia (70.29%), Central Serbia (59.78%), Western Serbia (54.34%), and Southeastern Serbia (51.81%). Only one-fifth of the students recognize SNC from Kosovo and Metohija (19.02%) and Vojvodina (18.12%). The highest percentage of negative answers came from SNCs from the territory of Vojvodina (72.28%) and Kosovo and Metohija (70.65%), while the lowest percentage was recorded for Eastern Serbia (17.94%). The highest percentage of undecided answers was noted for SNCs from Southeastern Serbia (14.31%).

More concerning results are obtained when analyzing responses related to the former Yugoslavia territories. In this regard, the best identification rate was for the Republic of North Macedonia (38.31%), followed by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (34.46%), the Republic of Croatia (30.98%), and the Republic of Slovenia (28.81%).

At the bottom are the Republic of Srpska (26.01%) and Montenegro (22.83%). Negative answers dominated when identifying SNCs from Montenegro (70.65%), followed by the Republic of Srpska (58.38%), the Republic of Slovenia (58.15%), the Republic of Croatia (54.78%), the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (52.17%), and finally, the Republic of North Macedonia (51.36%). The highest percentage of uncertainty was recorded in the category of SNCs from the Republic of Srpska (15.61%).

Differences in the students' success in identifying SNCs based on their enrolled study program and membership in folklore societies (KUD) were examined using the Mann-Whitney U-test, with the calculated medians.

*Table 2. Study program and the success of recognizing Serbian traditional costume*

Variable	Group	F	Middle Rank	Md	U	Z	P
Serbian national costume	Teachers	73	91.73	85	3995	-.160	.873
	Preschool Educator	111	93.01	86			

The data (Table 2) shows that *no statistically significant difference* was found in the success of identifying SNCs in the observed images by students based on the study program they enrolled in ( $p = .873$ ), which is also confirmed by the similar values of the calculated mean ranks and medians.

*Table 3. Membership in a cultural and artistic society (KUD) and the success of recognizing Serbian traditional costume*

Variable	Group	F	Middle Rank	Md	U	Z	p
Serbian national costume	KUD Member	9	64.89	80	539	-1.596	.111
	non-KUD Member	175	93.92	86			

Analysis of differences in the success of identifying SNCs based on students' membership in folklore ensembles (KUD) revealed no statistically significant difference ( $p = .111$ ), despite the fact that, according to the calculated mean ranks and medians, students who were not members of KUDs were slightly more successful in their assessments (Table 3).

These results can be explained for several reasons. On one hand, there is an imbalance in the sample categories based on KUD membership, as there are only 9 students who are KUD members, compared to 175 students who are not.

On the other hand, being a KUD member does not necessarily imply additional knowledge about the appearance of SNCs if the focus is solely on choreography and performance activities.

In other words, if there has been no in-depth preparation regarding the importance, origin, meaning, and geographical or national affiliation of the national costumes worn during public performances, then membership in a KUD does not automatically lead to better identification skills.

The fact that only 9 out of 184 students have experience in KUDs is concerning when it comes to their attitude toward national tradition. Differences in the success of SNC identification by students based on the year of study were examined using one-way univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA).

This suggests that KUD membership does not strongly correlate with better identification of national costumes, possibly due to the focus on performance rather than deeper cultural knowledge.

It also points out the potential lack of emphasis on teaching about the importance and cultural context of Serbian folk costumes in university programs.

*Table 4. Enrolled year of study and the success of recognizing Serbian traditional costume*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
Within Group	113.903	3	37.968	.267	.849
Between Group	25590.700	180	142.171		
Total	25704.603	183			

No statistically significant difference was found in the results among the four groups of students based on the year of study regarding their success in recognizing SNCs in the observed images:  $F(3.180) = .267$ ,  $p = .849$  (Table 4). Students from different years of study do not differ in terms of categorizing the offered images.

This result suggests that the year of study does not influence students' ability to identify the national costumes, which could point to a general gap in the curriculum or education regarding the significance and recognition of national heritage across all levels of study. This could be a point of focus for educational reforms or the development of specialized courses on national culture.

*Table 5. Academic performance during studies and the success of recognizing Serbian traditional costume*

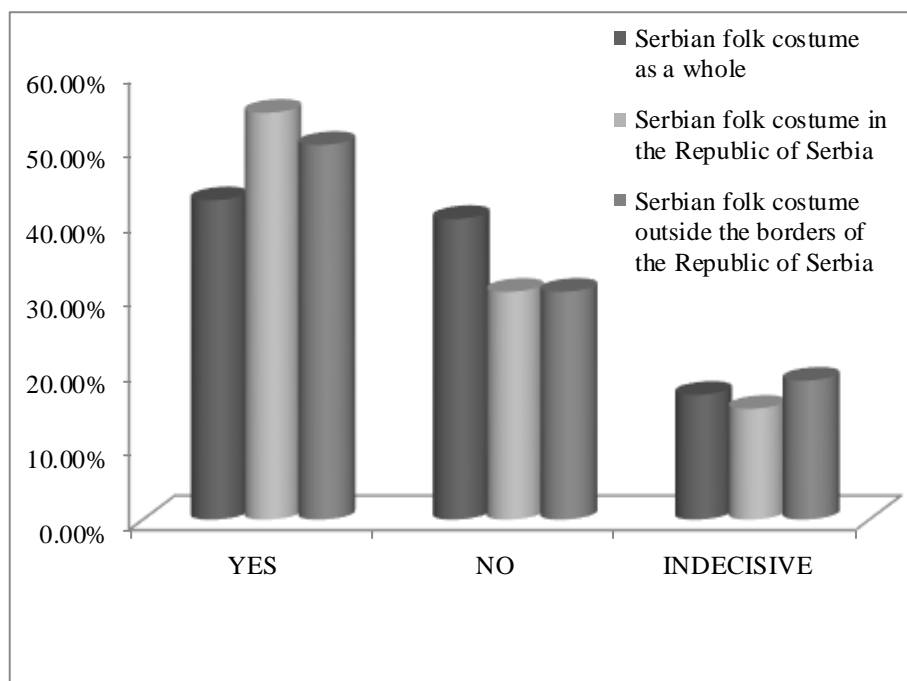
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
Within Group	21.483	2	10.741	.076	.927
Between Group	25683.121	181	141.896		
Total	25704.603	183			

The data (Table 5) show that no statistically significant difference was found in the results of three groups of students based on their academic performance (below average, average, and above average) in their success in recognizing Serbian national costumes:  $F(2.183) = .276$ ,  $p = .927$ .

Within the first research task, it can be concluded that the independent variables of the research were statistically insignificant.

More precisely, the students, future teachers, and educators do not differ in the identification of national costumes regardless of their status (study program, year of study, academic performance, membership in KUD), and their assessments are solely based on uniform prior knowledge derived from the educational capacities of the school system as a whole.

*Success in identifying Serbian national costumes with specified geographical origin.* Revisiting the sampled photographs of male and female national costumes with geographical origin annotations, after analyzing the responses, yielded interesting results.



*Graph 2. Success of identifying Serbian folk costumes with specified geographical origin – perception of students*

Viewed as a whole, just over two-fifths (42.87%) successfully identify the national costumes. The increase in correct responses is minor (2.76%).

In comparison to the previous survey, two-fifths (40.37%) of respondents take a negative stance on this question, which is approximately one-tenth less than the initial finding (49.67%). The change in responses occurred in the undecided category, where instead of the previous 11.99%, 16.75% are now undecided.

Identification of the national costumes is nearly inversely proportional when comparing the results related to the Republic of Serbia and the countries of the region. Just above half of the students (54.63%) manage to recognize the national

costume from the Republic of Serbia with the geographic origin label, one-third (30.59%) believes the national costume belongs to another nation or national minority, and about one-tenth are undecided (14.87%).

On the other hand, half of the students (50.30%) believe that the national costume from outside the Republic of Serbia is not national. Just over one-third of respondents (30.59%) successfully identify the national costume, while nearly one-fifth are undecided (18.65%).

The success rate of identifying national costumes from the Republic of Serbia is similar to the previous findings when it comes to ranking positions. The geographical label did not significantly affect the success of the assessment. The rank of geographical areas is also similar: Eastern Serbia (71.92%), Southern Serbia (65.94%) are at the top of the list. Western (54.53%) and Central Serbia (53.80%) have swapped positions, while Southeastern Serbia remains in fifth place (48.55%).

At the bottom of the list are still Vojvodina (42.57%) and Kosovo and Metohija (36.23%), although their positions have been swapped. However, further comparative analysis showed that the positive shift in success when identifying national costumes with geographical origin, compared to the previous research, is only noticeable in the section of responses regarding photographs with toponyms from Vojvodina (+24.45%), Kosovo and Metohija (+17.21%), and slightly Western Serbia (+.19%). Interestingly, for the remaining areas, a negative correction in responses was observed, ranging from 5.98% to .19%.

*Table 6. Comparative Overview of the Success in Identifying Serbian National Costumes from the Territory of the Republic of Serbia without and With Geoprediction*

Geographical Region of the Republic of Serbia	Successful Identification of Serbian National Costume without Geoprediction		Successful Identification of Serbian National Costume with Geoprediction		Difference %
	f	%	f	%	
	Western Serbia	301	54.34	301	
Central Serbia	330	59.78	346	53.80	-5.98
Eastern Serbia	400	72.46	397	71.92	-.54
Southeastern Serbia	286	51.81	268	48.55	-3.26
Southern Serbia	388	70.29	364	65.94	-4.35
Vojvodina	100	18.12	235	42.57	+24.45
Kosovo and Metohija	105	19.02	200	36.23	+17.21

Negative correction of responses can be linked to students' confusion regarding insufficient knowledge of national geography or incorrect assumptions based on coexistence with national minorities in the Republic of Serbia.

When considered individually, students most successfully assess the national costume from Boljevac (Eastern Serbia), followed by Jasenica (a Šumadija-type costume from Central Serbia), and Pčinja (Southern Serbia), with the national costume from the Užice region (Western Serbia) following.

The visual feature closely related to the assumed national identity code is the dominant criterion for initial identification. The assumption is that students form their concept of the national costume based on individual visual features (green šajkača, brown fur hats, and woolen men's attire, red ribbons on the sleeves of women's shirts, Šumadija-type women's attire...).

The introduction of toponyms directed students' answers towards the presumed potential cultural influence of national minorities in the marked geographical area, leading to confusion.

For example, the national costumes from Pčinja and Boljevac, when accompanied by geographical labels, were incorrectly identified. It remains questionable whether students know where these locations are; or if the provided toponyms were a helpful or hindering factor in their assessment. Thus, this represents an unfounded self-awareness of identity that is susceptible to external influences.

*Table 7. Comparative Overview of Successful Identification of Serbian National Costume with and without Geoprediction*

Geographical Region Outside the Borders of the Republic of Serbia	Successful Identification of Serbian National Costume without Geoprediction		Successful Identification of Serbian National Costume with Geoprediction		Difference %
	f	%	f	%	
Slovenia	53	28.81	65	35.33	+6.52
Croatia	285	30.98	288	31.30	+3.2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	317	34.46	291	31.63	-2.83
Montenegro	335	26.01	352	27.33	+1.32
North Macedonia	84	22.83	119	32.34	+9.51
Serbia	141	38.31	65	35.33	-2.98

The new identification of the Serbian national costume (SNC) outside the borders of Serbia, with the label of origin, has significantly changed compared to the initial findings. The only national costume from North Macedonia retained the first

position—students most successfully recognized the SNC from this region compared to the others. Slovenia, which previously held the fourth position, moved up to second place thanks to a positive shift in the success rate of responses: +6.52% (Bela Krajina). The assumption is that students associate this toponym with Serbia.

Following is Montenegro, which moved from the last rank to third (+9.51%). The most significant shift occurred in the category of photographs marked with toponyms from Montenegro (Cetinje, Piva). The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina shows a negative trend (-2.83%) and dropped from the second position to fourth. Croatia (+.32%) occupies the fifth place, and Republika Srpska (+.32%) ranks last.

The obtained results are ambivalent. It was noted that toponyms that resemble those from Serbia, such as Bukovica, Slatina (Croatia), Teslić, Mrkonjić Grad, Janj, Vrbjani (Republika Srpska), Bela Krajina (Slovenia), influenced the success of the responses. In addition, the growing positive identification was achieved in responses relating to identifying SNCs from Piva, Cetinje (Montenegro), Skopje region (North Macedonia), Trebinje (Republika Srpska), Lika (Croatia), and Drvar (Federation of BiH). Toponyms such as Bosansko Grahovo, Glamoč, Duvno (Federation of BiH), Pakrac, Kordun (Croatia), Kriva Palanka (North Macedonia), Sarajevo Field, Imljani (Republika Srpska) did not serve as good guides for successful identification.

The results suggest selective and insufficient knowledge of regional geography and national history.

Data on differences in students' success in identifying elements of Serbian folk costumes based on toponyms, depending on their enrolled study program and membership in folklore ensembles (KUD), were tested using the Mann-Whitney U-test and calculated medians.

*Table 8. Study Program and Success in Recognizing Serbian National Costume*

Variable	Group	F	Middle Rank	Md	U	Z	P
Serbian national costume	Teachers	73	89.21	83	3811.500	.679	.497
	Preschool	111	94.66	85			
	Educators						

No statistically significant difference was found in the success of identifying elements of the Serbian national costume (SNC) based on toponyms by students depending on the academic study program they enrolled in ( $p = .497$ ), as indicated by the approximate values of the calculated mean ranks and medians (Table 8).

*Table 9. Membership in a Cultural and Artistic Society (KUD) and Success in Recognizing Serbian National Costume*

Variable	Group	F	Middle Rank	Md	U	Z	P
Serbian national costume	KUD Member	9	60.94	77	503.500	-1.823	.068
	non-KUD Member	175	94.12	85			

An analysis of differences in students' assessments of success in recognizing traditional dance patterns (SNN) based on toponyms, depending on their membership in a cultural and artistic society (KUD), showed that there is no statistically significant difference ( $p = .068$ ) between the assessments of students with and without folk dance experience (Table 9).

Differences in students' success in recognizing traditional dance patterns based on toponyms, depending on their year of study enrollment and academic performance, were examined using a one-way univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA).

*Table 10. Year of Study Enrolled and Success in Recognizing Serbian National Costume*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
Within Group	134.353	3	44.784	.165	.920
Between Group	48953.364	180	271.963		
Total	49087.717	183			

The data (Table 10) show that no statistically significant difference was found in the results of the four groups of students, based on their year of study enrollment, in their success in recognizing traditional dance patterns (SNN) using toponyms:  $F(3,183) = .165$ ,  $p = .920$ .

*Table 11. Academic Performance During Studies and Success in Recognizing Serbian National Costume*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
Within Group	295.196	2	147.598	.548	.579
Between Group	48792.521	181	269.572		
Total	49087.717	183			

According to the data presented in Table 11, no statistically significant difference was found in the results of three groups of students based on their academic success during studies (below average, average, and above average) in their ability to recognize traditional national costumes (SNN) based on toponyms:  $F(2,183) = .548$ ,  $p = .579$ .

The data on the success in recognizing SNN with the aid of geoprediction, in relation to the independent research variables, fully correspond to the conclusions drawn within the framework of the first research task.

Therefore, the independent variables of the study did not influence the success of identifying SNN with an indication of geographical origin.

## Conclusion

Understanding the past serves as a guide for interpreting the present and projecting the future. In this context, teachers and preschool educators play a key role, while Serbian national costume represents an important educational resource for a multilayered view of the life and work of our ancestors in different life circumstances and historical contexts.

The national folk costume is a desirable thematic resource for a project-based thematic approach to teaching at all levels, including higher education. It is a source of knowledge and a teaching tool suitable for the correlation and integration of content (across all teaching methods and pedagogical methodologies). It serves as a good example of a methodological approach known as “historical pictures”, which emotionally and experientially demonstrates both the educational and pedagogical value of a sampled moment from the past.

The answer to the question of whether future teachers and preschool educators are familiar with Serbian national costume is not affirmative: students have insufficient knowledge of the national costumes associated with the territory of the Republic of Serbia, and even less of Serbian folk costumes from the territories of the former SFRY.

It has been shown that the identification of this important national cultural feature and heritage is often based on distorted perceptions rather than actual knowledge. Students also show insufficient familiarity with regional geography and national history, which would serve as a premise for the successful selection of correct answers.

The most common criteria for classification and identification are visual elements or, frequently, incorrectly assumed national toponyms. Relying on experiential predictions based on limited textbook knowledge (Vasiljević et al., 2021a; Vasiljević et al., 2021b; Vasiljević et al., 2022), which primarily depict the

Šumadija-type folk costume as the exemplar of Serbian national costume, students build their classifications according to this impoverished school experience.

Since the level of recognition demonstrated falls into the lowest category of knowledge, it is not possible to discuss the presence of higher-order knowledge categories among students of the Faculty of Education (such as understanding, functional knowledge, or creative knowledge).

Therefore, future teachers and preschool educators cannot be expected to adequately present Serbian national costume to younger generations in their pedagogical practice. For them, the costume holds only decorative value in this context, leading to the conclusion that among the students surveyed, national identity is present in a declarative but not a substantive sense.

This opens up broad space for further research. It is necessary to answer questions such as:

Do young, future teachers and preschool educators understand the importance of knowing Serbian national costume?

Do they want to learn more about the diversity, richness, origin, and meanings of this cultural heritage?

Are national narratives included in the goals and objectives of educational faculties?

To what extent are national contents from the fields of geography, history, music education, art education, and the Serbian language represented in the curricula of teacher and preschool education faculties, as well as other related teacher education faculties?

How do university professors perceive the topic of national identity?

Previous research has shown that national values are at the bottom of the value orientation list among future teachers and preschool educators (Bojović et al., 2015). However, these values are variable in nature (Rokeach, 1974), meaning they can be consciously, systematically, and deliberately influenced. Since national values also determine the nature of professional engagement (Romstein & Staković, 2017; Alas & Edwards, 2013), it is clear that faculties for teacher and preschool educator education play a crucial and irreplaceable role in this process.

In that context, appropriate measures should be taken to strengthen desirable and socially acceptable national narratives, while respecting other national identities. The cultivation, development, construction, and co-construction of national identity – with mutual respect for cultural differences and specificities – should be an imperative of contemporary educational reality. The attitude toward “the self” must not exclude respect for and understanding of other and different national and cultural identities (Božilović & Petković, 2015; Vasiljević & Sudzilovski, 2017).

In this sense, it is necessary to precisely plan and structure the curricula of faculties for teacher and preschool educator education. Considering the dynamics, scope, reach, and development of national concepts in the cognitive–affective–conative discourse, both in mandatory and elective courses, it is necessary to internalize the objectives of the current national strategy (Vasiljević, 2023).

Only then can the idea of faculties of national importance be affirmed and their strength and potential in the future be discussed – since educational professionals largely determine the acceptance, cultivation, and understanding of identity markers among children and youth, especially in the context of complex value changes in society.

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