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The Slovenian Singing Society – a Symbol of National and Cultural Identity

Abstract

This contribution discusses the activities and importance of the Slovenian Singing Society, founded in Ptuj in 1884. During the twenty years of its existence, the Society proved to be of national and cultural significance, laying the foundations for the establishing of the Association of Slovenian Choirs, set up in 1903 in Ljubljana.

Keywords

Slovenian Singing Society, Ptuj, National Reading Society, national identity, cultural identity

It was not until 1860, when reading societies were founded, that Slovenian choral singing was spurred into activity. Social events known as “béseda”, which were organised by reading societies and contained educational or entertainment programs, broke new ground in the development of group singing in Slovenian Styria, as elsewhere. The foundation of the *Slovenian Singing Society* in 1884, with its headquarters in Ptuj, provided even firmer foundations for the progress of national music culture, as well as for the consolidation of national identity. This was of great importance in this area, as there were a large number of German nationals. The ideas and aspirations for the foundation of the singing society were developed at national assemblies where singing played an important role; the actual realisation of these ideas, however, came about through the efforts of committee members and singers from the Ptuj reading society.

The Ptuj group modelled themselves on the reading societies previously formed in Ljubljana, Maribor and Celje. Therefore, in the invitation for the establishing of the foundation they stated that the society will strive for “spiritual exaltation, language edification and the accomplishment of the Slovenian nation”.¹ In the Society’s book of regulations, it was emphasized that the society does not pursue political aims.² However,

¹ *Zgodovinski arhiv Ptuj* (hereinafter ZAP). Fund *Muzejsko društvo* (hereinafter MD). Box 28. Folder MD-II-1/1. Čitalnica, leto 1863. The invitation (printed in Slovenian and German).

² ZAP. Fund MD (see note 1). *Pravila Narodne čitalnice v Ptujju* (manuscript). Dated July 23, 1863.

it soon became clear that cultural and political developments were closely interlinked with the society's development. The latter is evident in the names that appeared among the founding members, some of whom not only became active members of the Ptuj reading society³ but were also, above all, the most patriotic of intellectuals and activists for the rights of the Slovenian nation.

Furthermore, some of them even seemed to be of German descent. This was true of Mihael Herman († 1883), for example, who was a member of the provincial council of Styria and a member of Parliament, and the first initiator and convener of the Ptuj Reading Society founding committee.⁴ Herman quickly mastered the Slovenian language and became an eager promulgator of the political and cultural program of Styrian Slovenians. He soon proved himself a faithful activist, striving in the provincial assembly for equality for all nations within the state and emphasising that "German born, he arrived amidst Slovenians, became acquainted with this fair and enthusiastic folk", and continued: [...] "I became a Slovenian with all my heart and soul."⁵ At the first committee meeting of the Ptuj National Reading Society, which began on June 1, 1864, Avgust Čuček, a notary clerk, was elected president, while Herman took up the duties of vice president. Herman was elected president of the Society between 1867 and 1868⁶ and, as he was an eager promulgator of Slovenian political aspirations, he was shortly afterwards transferred by decree to Weiz in Austria⁷.

The initial idea of unifying the choirs organized within reading societies into a central pan-Slovenian organization can be traced to a time of national tension in Ptuj, between 1860 and 1882, as members of the Ptuj society were the most enthusiastic among the initiators of this plan. Ptuj was a town of predominantly German orientation

³ There were several articles published on activities of the Society, among which the most important are: Ivan Strelec. *Zgodovinske črtice o »Narodni čitalnici v Ptuj« povodom njene petindvajsetletnice*. Založba »Narodne čitalnice«. Ptuj 1889; Fran Jurtela. *Spomini mojega življenja*. Ptuj, Jan. 25, 1922. Manuscript kept in ZAP. Fond MD-38; Josip Komljanec. Ob proslavi petdesetletnice Narodne čitalnice v Ptuj. *Ptujski list*, 7. 9. 1919; Fran Alič. Nekdanja čitalnica in stari Narodni dom v Ptuj. *Ptujski zbornik II*. Ptuj 1962; Ljubica Šuligoj. Ptujska čitalnica in njen Narodni dom. *Celjski zbornik 1997*. On the hundredth anniversary of Narodni dom, Celje 1997, pp. 115–134.

⁴ Compare to: Strelec. *Zgodovinske črtice o »Narodni čitalnici v Ptuj« povodom njene petindvajsetletnice* (see note 3), p. 1.

⁵ Compare to: *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Landtages im Herzogthume Steiermark 186*, pp. 93, 116; V. Vrbnjak. *Ibid.*

⁶ Strelec. *Zgodovinske črtice o »Narodni čitalnici v Ptuj« povodom njene petindvajsetletnice* (see note 3), pp. 4, 12.

⁷ L. Šuligoj. Ptujska čitalnica in njen Narodni dom (see note 3), p. 116.

and was considered the most important German stronghold in South Styria. On the other hand, the surrounding countryside was for the most part Slovenian. After 1860, the intensification of political and cultural-educational life resulted in active cooperation in the parliamentary elections. During that period, the Slovenians fought to appoint Slovenians into offices, courts of law and schools. On the municipal level, among those who first called attention to the language problem were teachers, a nationally conscious clergy and town councillors.⁸

The information on the activities of individual societies reveals a great deal about the national composition of Ptuj. Some of the societies were founded before and some after the Law of Societies and Assemblies was introduced in 1867. The National Reading Society was the most active in supporting Slovenian national aspirations: its most important goal being to initiate and consolidate the national identity of the working class, middle class and intellectuals.⁹ In the early years of the society's existence, there were a number of members who were of German nationality, and the most prominent citizens of the town, led by the mayor, even attended the opening ceremonies. The most relevant information about the situation at the time relates to the Germans founding their own society, named Kasino (founded in 1867) and organising a Slovenian language circle within it.¹⁰ Later on, that very society provided a base for the anti-Slovenian movement and became a meeting place for the wealthiest town residents. Similar societies which also existed were the following: *Männergesangverein*, *Turnverein*, *Musikverein*, *Fortschriftverein*, *Schulverein* and some others that were active after 1870.

National disputes intensified from 1879 onwards, with Slovenian demands to abolish the German language in schools. The situation was similar during the following years, when Slovenian capital was united in a savings bank, which among other things also had an important role in supporting Slovenian societies. Above all, it supported the

⁸ The issue of national circumstances in Ptuj in the second half of the 19th century was discussed by: Vasilij Melik. *Volitve na Slovenskem*. Ljubljana 1965; Id. Ptujski deželni in državni poslanci. *Mestni statut 1376*. Gradivo in razprave, zv. 1. ZAP Ptuj 1996; Ljubica Šuligoj. Sprehod skozi zgodovino ptujske gimnazije od ustanovitve do danes. *Izvestje Gimnazije Dušana Kvedra v Ptuju 1869–1969*. Ptuj 1969; Id. Ptujška čitalnica in njen Narodni dom (see note 3); Nataša Kolar. Narodnostne razmere na Ptuju med letoma 1860 in 1882. *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* (hereinafter ČZN). *Oaze slovenstva, Narodni domovi na Ptuju, v Celju in Mariboru*. v. 73 (2002). No. 1, pp. 29–35.

⁹ Komljanec. Ob proslavi petdesetletnice Narodne čitalnice v Ptuju (see note 3), p. 2.

¹⁰ Šuligoj. Ptujška čitalnica in njen Narodni dom (see note 3). P. 119; Blagoje Jevremov. Vpliv občinske politike na delovanje društev v Ptuju pred prvo svetovno vojno. *Ptujski zbornik IV*, p.224

reading society and National Hall (founded in 1882), which played a decisive role in the consolidation of national self-confidence in Ptuj as well as in the wider area of Slovenian Styria. Larger Slovenian cities were not as successful in this regard, seeing as Ljubljana got its National Hall in 1896 and Celje in the following year, while Maribor National Hall was completed in 1899 and the one in Trieste as late as 1904.

As part of their efforts to achieve a Slovenian cultural and political program, the Ptuj National Reading Society put mass choral singing, with both domestic and visiting choirs, in the program of the opening ceremony which took place on September 5. The program comprised of mostly patriotic songs (Davorin Jenko, *Naprej zastava slav*, Gregor Rihar, *Savica*, Benjamin Ipavec, *Budnica*, Janez Miklošič, *Slovenska dežela* and *Hej Sloveni*). On that occasion, high Mass was sung in Slovenian in the town church for the first time. A number of important guests were invited to attend the opening ceremony and it was at this event that one of them, Davorin Trstenjak, a former Ptuj curate, suggested a slogan for the newly founded society: “Jaro in možno”, namely - “zealous and powerful” - which provoked much enthusiasm among the residents of Ptuj.¹¹

In the following years, the reading society prepared more than one hundred events, most of which were of a national character and included a performance of the society's choir.¹² Choral singing made further progress after 1880, when Tomaž Romih, a teacher and stage director of the performances organized within the society, and later headmaster of a public school in Krško, introduced regular choir rehearsals in cooperation with choirmaster Anton Weixler.¹³ Tomaž Romih was a musical enthusiast aware of the universal importance of singing, and hence he strived for an improvement in the quality of performing as well. Thanks to his efforts, in 1884, a singing society of pan-Slovenian importance was founded in Ptuj. The most frequently performed songs were A. Hajdrih, *Na boj*, G. Ipavec, *Jadransko morje*; A. Hajdrih, *V sladkih sanjah*; F. Vogel, *Cigani*; B. Ipavec, *Domovina*; D. Jenko, *Što čutiš*; A. Foerster, *V tih noči*, A. Hajdrih, an arrangement of the folk song *Petelinčkova ženitev* and G. Ipavec, *Kdo je mar?*. The choir regularly performed at important celebrations and at national gatherings organized in

¹¹ ZAP. Fond MD. Box 28. Folder MD-II 1/1. Načrt Besede 5. septembra 1864. Vabilo; Strelec. *Zgodovinske črtice o »Narodni čitalnici v Ptuji« povodom njene petindvajsetletnice* (see note 3), pp. 5–9.

¹² Id. *Zgodovinske črtice o »Narodni čitalnici v Ptuji« povodom njene petindvajsetletnice* (see note 3), p. 19.

¹³ Ibid.

honour of great Slovenians such as Stanko Vraz, Štefan Modrinjak,¹⁴ France Prešeren and Valentin Vodnik. The choir's successful performances resulted in the founding of a special section within the reading society in 1883 that was intended to promote singing. The so-called singing sector with active and supporting members¹⁵ was the last decisive step towards the founding of the *Slovenian Singing Society*.

The choir of the reading society evolved rapidly, with more and more new singers joining and with the performances, which seemed to be valid celebrations of singing and national identity, receiving excellent reviews. Because of this, the committee members expanded their aspirations. The decision to found the society of pan-Slovenian significance was reached at a great national celebration prepared in honour of Fran Miklošič (1813-1891), one of the greatest Slavists of the 19th century. The celebration was held in Ljutomer on September 2, 1883; following the established pattern, its program contained joint and single choir performances.¹⁶ On this occasion, they began to realize the idea of uniting the reading society's choirs into a larger and high-quality singing corpus that would function as a central organization.¹⁷ In Ljutomer, numerous leading members of various societies and reading societies had already established a foundation committee made up of members from Ptuj, as they were recognised as the main initiators of this plan. The society intended to unite the singers from all the Slovenian provinces in order to consolidate and stimulate the national consciousness with patriotic songs. The society was registered under the name »*Slovensko pevsko društvo s sedežem v Ptuji*« and confirmed on February 21, 1884 in Graz¹⁸, which was reported in a letter from the founding committee written in April 1884.¹⁹ The sources describing the

¹⁴ D.Hasl. *Zgodovina glasbene šole v Ptuju*. Ptuj 1959, pp. 4.

¹⁵ Strelec. *Zgodovinske črtice o »Narodni čitalnici v Ptuji« povodom njene petindvajsetletnice* (see note 3), p. 19.

¹⁶ ZAP. Fond MD. Box 28. Folder MD-II-1/1. Vabilo k slavnosti sedemdesetletnice dr. Franja viteza Miklošiča, 15. 8.1883. The program contained the compositions for a brass band and choral works: *Molitev*, D. Jenko, *Jadransko morje*, A. Hajdrih and *Mili kraj*, A. Nedved. During the lunch the following compositions were performed: *Zvezna* (A. Nedved), *Na moru* (D. Jenko), *Slava Slovincem* (A. Foerster), *Svrčanje* (V. Klaič) in *Vojaška* (B. Ipavec), while at the evening marrying they also sang: *Što čutiš* (D. Jenko), an old Czech folk song, *Savska* (B. Ipavca) and *Slovan* (Vašak).

¹⁷ Strelec. *Zgodovinske črtice o »Narodni čitalnici v Ptuji« povodom njene petindvajsetletnice* (see note 3), p. 16; Hasl. *Zgodovina glasbene šole v Ptuju*. Ptuj 1959, p. 4.

¹⁸ ZAP. Fond Glasbena šola (hereinafter GŠ). Box 1. Folder Slovensko pevsko društvo v Ptuju. Official paper for the year 1886.

¹⁹ ZAP. Fond GŠ. Box 1. Folder: Slovensko pevsko društvo v Ptuju, spis za leto 1884. Official paper dated April 1884.

society's performances confirm that its members originated from a number of locations in the wider Styria area (as far as Krško and Celje), down to the Savinja valley, Lower Carniola, Inner Carniola and even to the coastal province of Primorje, as far as Devin. Large annual concerts were held in Ptuj, Maribor, Celje, Šoštanj, Slovenj Gradec, Brežice, Krško and in Ruše. In the following years, a special stamp was placed on the society's official letters that included the inscription "*Slovenian Singing Society*" and the image of a stylised lyre.

The society organized large-scale concerts, authentic singing demonstrations with a political background, which indicated the regional and pan-Slovenian significance of the society. Between 1884 and 1906, the association was one of the most important Slovenian societies with explicit national objectives. The performances organized by the society grew into mass meetings with a patriotic program, subsequently exceeding their local significance. The number of performing singers increased continuously, reaching in excess of 250. In the beginning, male choirs prevailed over mixed, though shortly the proportions changed in favour of the latter. The concert program as a rule contained choral singing and orchestral performances by military or civic bands engaged for the occasion, whereas some compositions were performed by choirs accompanied by a brass orchestra. The *Slovenian Singing Society* with its headquarters in Ptuj laid the foundations for the establishing of the great Slovenian singing organisation - the *Association of Slovenian Singing Societies* established in 1903 in Ljubljana under the auspices of the local *Philharmonic Society*.

According to the set regulations, the society convened at annual general meetings in order to elect a new committee. Every year, the organizers made an effort to arrange the meetings in different towns, usually in the town where one of the respective choirs originated from. The annual meetings included a whole-day music program of a mass character; the convention was organized in the National Halls, which symbolised the Slovenian national consciousness. Most of the guests arrived in the morning by train and were welcomed by a brass band, after which they walked towards the meeting place in a procession, carrying banners and other national symbols. For Slovenians, such events were as significant as national festivals, since these gatherings presented the opportunity to publicly express the claims of Slovenian culture and politics in Austro-Hungary. The

general meeting was usually held in the morning, while after lunch there was a singing rehearsal and according to the schedule, there was an afternoon concert with singing and instrumental music. The concert was presented by the host who bid the guests welcome, then followed a speech delivered by an official speaker carefully chosen among key politicians and/or eminent public figures from the cultural area. The evening was concluded with a party and singing, along with a brass band playing.

The annual general meetings stirred up problems with the predominantly German local and provincial authorities. There was often friction during the solemn processions: unrest broke out amongst the German nationals, usually provoked by both sides. The quarrels sometimes led to tussles that required an intervention by the gendarmerie.²⁰ The complicated situation became even worse with media agitation (the Graz newspapers to be exact), which was an attempt on the part of the Germans to prevent Slovenian singing demonstrations. The Slovenian side responded to such hostile and humiliating journalism. The manuscript of a newspaper article penned by an anonymous author has been preserved, part of it reading as follows (in free translation): "*O sancta simplicita, I wonder why this agitation was not started when the gipsy band performed in Kazina hall (in Maribor, author's remark). These gentlemen are so ingenuous that they would rather allow a foreigner to perform than a Slovenian [...] one cannot talk with such people. There is something we have to say to those who like singing despite national agitation: come to the concert! Not a hair on your head will be harmed. However, if you prefer not to come, it is your duty to allow Slovenians to perform as you allowed that gipsy band; thus Slovenians - your fellows countrymen and brothers with whom you are connected and have to coexist - will be given justice and peace.*"²¹ On August 6, 1893, Slovenians carried out the event as planned.²²

The public competitions for new compositions held by the *Slovenian Singing Society* are among the most important records attesting to the desire to improve the national culture of music. Due to these competitions, Slovenian composers were motivated to compose new works that were performed at the singing demonstrations and

²⁰ ZAP. Fond GŠ. Box 1. Year 1890. The letter: Vom Stadtrathe Marburg, signed »Z 12023«. Dated August 8, 1890.

²¹ ZAP. Fond GŠ. Box. 1. Folder Slovensko pevsko društvo v Ptujju. Year 1893.

²² The Society did not keep special protocol books, only single sheets were preserved from 1890 onwards.

moreover, such public competitions set new criteria as regards concert programs, which gradually evolved from patriotic to artistic. In 1893, the committee made a decision to invite the most important composers of the time to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the society, such as Benjamin Ipavic, Dr. Gustav Ipavic, Hrabroslav Volarič, Anton Nedved, Anton Foerster, Feliks Stegnar, and Stanko Pirnat.²³ The invitations and programs that have been preserved provide information about the repertoire and development of choral singing in the areas of Ptuj, Maribor and Celje, where the majority of associate members came from. Furthermore, it is clear that the wider Slovenian area benefited from the developments in Styria. Along with patriotic songs, brass bands performed a repertoire from European music literature, such as arrangements of fragments from operas and operettas (G. Rossini, *Semiramide*; V. E. Nessler, *Der Trompeter von Säkkingen*; J. Strauss, *Der Zigeunerbaron*), as well as the works of less known composers. *Der Trompeter von Säkkingen* by Nessler, written in 1884, and an operetta by Strauss, written in the following year, was performed in Ptuj as early as 1886, which indicates that the concert program was up to date. This was not the case, however, with choral performances, at least not in the early years of the society's existence. The choir mostly performed patriotic songs for male choirs (such as D. Jenko, *Naprej zastava slave*; A. Nedved, *Moj dom*), mixed choirs (for example G. Ipavec, *Pod lipo* and *Slovenska dežela*) and arrangements for mixed choirs with brass band accompaniment (such as A. Foerster, *Ave Marija* from the operetta *Gorenjski slavček*), and the cantata by B. Ipavec »*Kdo je mar?*« for large male choirs with orchestral accompaniment, which was very popular at the time.²⁴ It is clear that the society strived to prepare a patriotic as well as varied, modern and artistic program. When important concerts were prepared, the society organised the publicity and the events were announced in all the important newspapers such as *Slovenski narod*, *Slovenec*, *Slovenski list*, *Domovina*, *Novice*, *Slovenski gospodar*, *Edinost*, *Soča*, *Naša Sloga*, *Popotnik*, *Dolenjske novice*, *Učitelj*, *Tovariš*, *Primorski list* and *Obzor*, and in the newspapers with a more liberal editorial policy that supported

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ ZAP. Fond MD. Box. 28. folderMD-II-1/1. The invitation and program of the concert organized by the Slovenian singing society. Dated August 1, 1886.

Slovenian aspirations, such as *Agramer Tagblatt* in Zagreb and *Südsteierische Post* in Graz.²⁵

The Slovenian Singing Society proved successful in organizing several events which had a positive influence on the smaller local events hosted by individual reading societies, which made an effort to implement repertoires similar to those of the large national assemblies. In this way, the ideas of the association were successfully passed on to smaller towns and the countryside.²⁶

From 1889, several choirmasters, many of them otherwise employed as teachers or bandmasters, conducted the singing section of the Ptuj Reading Society and the choir association that evolved from it. All the choirmasters were musically educated, which indicates that the Society endeavoured to attract competent choirmasters that would ensure high quality performances and artistic standards. In general, the Society chose its choirmasters irrespective of nationality; first-rate qualifications and musical education were of greater importance! On September 1, 1883, immediately before the Slovenian singing society was founded, the reading society engaged Josip (Johann) Steinberger, formerly the bandmaster of a brass band within the German society *Musikverein*. Although Steinberger was of German descent, he found working for the reading society a great professional challenge. The committee members expected Steinberger to meet their high standards and by October of the same year, he had already founded a music school within the reading society, where he gave instrument and singing lessons to the Society members' children. Founding the music school, he probably took as an example the successful *Musikverein's* music school attended mostly by children of German nationality. Steinberger ran the school until September 1886, when he moved to Vienna.²⁷ For managing the music school, the Society paid him only 10 florins, so it seems that among other things, his decision to leave was also due to being paid poorly. Steinberger remained choirmaster for one year, and then Stanko Pirnat, a Slovenian who worked without remuneration, took over the position. In 1885, Franc Gross is mentioned in the same position and in October 1886 Anton Jiřka took over the singing rehearsals and

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ ZAP. Fond MD. Box. 28. Folder Čitalnica v Ptujju 1880–1890, Ormoška čitalnica: Vabilo k svečanosti, dated July 8, 1888.

²⁷ Strelec. *Zgodovinske črtice o »Narodni čitalnici v Ptujju« povodom njene petindvajsetletnice* (see note 3), p. 19.

music school. Jiřka managed the music school until July 1887 when it ceased to exist. The first Slovenian music school was inactive for a long period due to financial difficulties and a lack of qualified personnel; nevertheless, at a certain point it was a rival to Musikverein's music school, founded in 1878. In the years 1887/88, the choirmaster was Franc Copf, while a year later Dragotin Zupančič, a private tutor, took over,²⁸ remaining in this position for more than 20 years. However, we should add that the financial situation of the Slovenian societies was less favourable in comparison with the German societies, as German nationals owned prosperous enterprises, banks and other institutions which influenced the level of financial support granted to German cultural and political societies. The *Männergesangvereine* societies in Maribor, Celje and Ptuj were some of the most important German singing societies in terms of their political and cultural influence and their effort to consolidate the German mentality and culture in present-day Slovenia from the 1870s to World War I. Both Slovenian and German singing societies propagated their own music culture in order to achieve their respective political aims.

At the turn of the century, national tensions intensified and culminated in the so-called “September events”, which occurred in September 1908 when the Slovenians organised a large national gathering in order to assert that the land they live in is Slovenian and that Germans have no right to restrict the cultural and political freedom of the Slovenian people.²⁹ The *Slovenian Singing Society* continued to try to accomplish its aims but the political environment had changed, which subsequently affected cultural development in Slovenia and the activities of the society. As the 20th century began, the large-scale assemblies organized by the society still had the character of the national movement but the status of the pan-Slovenian society changed in 1903. Between the founding of the *Slovenian Singing Society* and the beginning of the new century, there were numerous similar societies founded throughout Slovenia. Some of them were named “*Slovenian singing society*” as well, but in this case, the name denoted only the national identity of their members, not their significance as a central Slovenian society. Even

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ An example of a more recent source: Ljubica Šuligoj. Ptuj – »nemška trdnjava« na slovenskem Štajerskem. *Septembrski dogodki 1908* (collection). Zgodovinsko društvo Ptuj 1998, pp. 10–18.

though the societies pursued different aims, a remarkable idea about the foundation of a new central singing union was presented within the *Philharmonic Society* in Ljubljana, the central and most important musical institution from 1872 onwards. The aforementioned idea was realized in the founding of the *Association of Slovenian Singing Societies*, with its headquarters in Ljubljana. The person who deserves most of the credit for its realization was Matej Hubad, at the time one of the most charismatic personalities of musical life in Slovenian territory. On July 19, 1903, the assembly of the *Association of Slovenian Singing Societies* approved the book of regulations, which contained the following directives: “*the purpose is merely artistic: uniting all the existing and newly founded, exclusively singing and apolitical Slovenian societies that among other things cherish Slavic singing in Carniola, Carinthia and the Primorska maritime province, and in Graz, Vienna and Prague. A) for the rapture of singing Slovenian folk songs and art songs and for the exaltation of patriotic awareness, B) for concordant and reciprocal proceedings in order to achieve this purpose.*”³⁰ The new association had primarily patriotic aims, similar to those of the first *Slovenian Singing Society*, based in Ptuj, approved in 1884. The only difference between the former society and the *Association of Slovenian Singing Societies* appeared to be in the music circumstances of the time. When the association was founded, a higher quality of choral singing was demanded; consequently, the book of regulations included the notion of stimulating the singing of artistic songs, which was more feasible than 20 years before.

In the following years, the *Slovenian Singing Society* lost its formal function as a union of singing societies, although it continued to pursue some of its basic aims. The political and cultural circumstances and a financial crisis brought about by anti-Slovenian agitation on the German side forced the society into decline until in the end it was transformed into a local society. To conclude, in more than twenty years of existence, the *Slovenian Singing Society* achieved and even exceeded its aims. It is therefore considered to be one of the most important elements of the cultural movement at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

Translated by Asja Radonjić

³⁰ ZAP. Fond MD. Box 13. Slovensko pevsko društvo. Pravila Zveze slovenskih pevskih društev.

Summary

The article discusses the activities and significance of the Slovenian Singing Society, which was founded in 1884 in Ptuj within the local reading society, and its influence on the consolidation of the national and cultural identity of Slovenians at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. The society was organized as an association of numerous choirs. It was established to organize smaller and larger scale concerts and singing performances at church mass, in order to promote and consolidate national consciousness and improve the quality of the Slovenian singing culture. An emphasis is placed upon the national frictions between German and Slovenian nationals which intensified in the discussed period and influenced the political and cultural developments on Slovenian territory. The headquarters of the society was part of the Ptuj Reading Society, which had a patriotic leadership and high-quality choir. The society expressed its regional and pan-Slovenian significance through grand annual concerts of a patriotic nature. These events always included a large body of people so they actually seemed to be national gatherings. Towards the end of the 19th century, the concert programs included many newly commissioned artistic compositions; it is clear that the society also promoted musical production. The Slovenian Singing Society achieved and even exceeded its aims, and thus it is considered to be one of the most important elements of the cultural movement at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Among other things, the society laid the foundations for the establishing of the *Association of Slovenian Singing Societies*, a significant Slovenian singing organization founded in 1903 in Ljubljana.