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Research Article

Traditional Lodër (Daulle) making in the Balkans musical culture: The case of master Mamut Ramadani

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Abstract

Traditional musical instrument-making practices constitute an important component of the shared musical heritage of Albanian communities in Kosovo and North Macedonia. Among these traditions, the lodër (daulle) holds a significant place in wedding ceremonies, traditional ensembles, and communal celebrations, reflecting cultural continuities across regional boundaries. This article presents an ethnomusicological and ethno-organological case study of Mamut Ramadani, one of the few active makers of the traditional lodër (standard Albanian: daulle) in the Polog Region of North Macedonia. Rather than treating the craftsman only as a biographical subject, the study examines the interrelationship between material selection, workshop knowledge, construction techniques, acoustic outcome, ritual and social use, and the contemporary challenges of intergenerational transmission. The research is based on field observation in Ramadani's workshop in Preljubishte, an in-depth interview with the craftsman, conversations with performers, documentation of dimensions and materials, and analysis of local terminology and performance contexts. The findings show that the lodër is not merely a percussion instrument but a complex cultural object in which craftsmanship, sound, ritual practice, and local memory converge. Walnut wood, natural skins, the shaping and finishing of the wooden shell, hoop construction, rope tensioning, and the treatment of the bearing edge all contribute to the instrument's timbre, projection, stability, and performance character. Ramadani's knowledge emerged within a broader family and community environment of curle and lodër musicians, but developed into an independent workshop practice built through listening, observation, repetition, discipline, and long-term experience. The article also addresses the weakening of apprenticeship, the spread of industrially produced instruments and synthetic membranes, and the need for more systematic institutional support. It proposes a master–apprentice model, process-based digital documentation, public demonstrations, technical documentation, and local recognition of the workshop as measures for safeguarding a living craft tradition. The case demonstrates that the safeguarding of a traditional instrument requires the preservation not only of the object itself, but also of the knowledge, terminology, techniques, performance settings, and community relationships that keep the craft alive.

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Introduction

Traditional musical instruments are not merely objects that produce sound. In ethnomusicology, the musical instrument can be approached both as a sound-producing medium and as a tool for making music (Bose, 2019, p. 91). At the same time, instruments materialize experience, craft memory, local aesthetics, and social function. They embody

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forms of knowledge that are seldom codified in manuals: how wood is selected and seasoned, how suitable skin is recognized, how a membrane is tensioned, how the wooden shell is expected to "breathe," how the first strike is evaluated, and how a maker knows that an instrument is ready for a wedding, a dance, or another communal performance context. Such knowledge is transmitted primarily through direct practice—through the eye, the ear, and the hand—and constitutes what traditional communities recognize as mastery.

In the Polog Region, particularly among Albanians in and around Tetovo, the lodër plays an important role in wedding, festive, ritual, and public musical life. The local form lodër (plural lodra) is also part of the wider Albanian lexicon: the Fjalor i Madh i Gjuhës Shqipe records lodër in the sense of daulle and lists tupan as an older synonym of daulle/lodër (Academy of Sciences of Albania, 2026). Historical field research in Kosovo likewise documents daulle among Albanian musicians and notes lodër and tupan as alternative designations (Trærup, 1996–1997, pp. 33, 46). In this article, lodër is therefore used as the principal emic term for Ramadani's local Albanian context, while daulle is given as the standard Albanian equivalent; tupan, tapan, topan, davul, and related forms are retained only where comparative regional terminology requires them. The instrument marks the gathering of people, stimulates movement, carries the metric foundation of dance, and often provides the first acoustic signal that a communal event has begun. Its sound therefore functions as more than rhythm: it acts as a call, a marker, a spatial organizer, and a collective impulse.

The traditional musical cultures of Kosovo and North Macedonia share significant historical and cultural connections, particularly among Albanian communities. The lodër (daulle) represents one of the important elements of this shared musical heritage, maintaining its role in wedding ceremonies, traditional dances, and communal celebrations across both regions. Ethnomusicological fieldwork conducted in Kosovo documents the use of the daulle, also known as lodër or tupan, in Albanian musical practices (Trærup, 1996–1997, pp. 33, 46). These terminological and functional similarities provide an important cultural context for examining the craftsmanship of Mamut Ramadani in Tetovo. His instrument-making practices can therefore be understood not only as a local tradition of the Polog Region but also as part of the broader Albanian musical heritage shared by Kosovo and North Macedonia.

Contemporary conditions, however, place this practice in a vulnerable position. Industrially produced instruments, synthetic membranes, changes in wedding music, amplified performance settings, declining interest among younger people in long-term apprenticeship, and limited institutional support for traditional crafts all reduce the space available for handmade production. Similar tensions between inherited practice, new materials, and changing market expectations can be observed across Balkan instrument-making traditions. In this context, Mamut Ramadani's workshop is a rare living craft environment in which techniques of construction, repair, tuning, and aesthetic finishing continue to be practiced.

The aim of this study is therefore to analyze Ramadani's work not merely as an individual biography but as a case study through which the broader relationship among craft, material, sound, ritual use, and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage can be understood. Six questions guide the study: How was Ramadani's craft biography formed? Which materials and techniques determine the construction of the *lodër*? How do materials affect the acoustic result? What functions does the instrument perform in the Polog Region? How is the craft transmitted? And what measures could support its sustainable continuation?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework combines three interrelated perspectives: ethnomusicological, ethno-organological, and heritage-oriented. The ethnomusicological perspective treats the instrument not only as a sounding object but as part of a broader cultural and social practice, understood in relation to community, context, and function in living musical life (Merriam, 1964, pp. viii, 47–48). In this sense, the lodër is analyzed as part of a social process in which sound gathers people, directs action, marks transitions, and creates shared time.

A detailed comparative description of the construction, tensioning, and performance practice of the related Balkan tapan is also available in the Macedonian context (Chausidis, 2008, pp. 209–210).

The heritage-oriented perspective extends safeguarding beyond the physical object to include knowledge, skills, bearers, and the cultural contexts in which practices are transmitted and renewed (UNESCO, 2003). From this

viewpoint, preserving the material form of an instrument is insufficient if the skills required to make, tune, play, and understand it disappear. A lodër displayed in a museum may constitute important material evidence, but the craft survives fully only when makers can still construct it, musicians continue to use it, and communities recognize its sound and cultural role.

Within this framework, Mamut Ramadani is approached as a bearer of knowledge and his workshop as a site where material culture and living practice intersect. The study therefore follows the instrument along its entire trajectory: from wood to sound, from workshop to wedding, and from master to potential successor.

Method

This study uses a qualitative, field-based, descriptive-analytical methodology. The principal material was collected during fieldwork in Mamut Ramadani's workshop in the village of Preljubishte, Municipality of Jegunovce, approximately fifteen kilometers from Tetovo and close to the village of Shemshovo. The fieldwork documented the workshop environment, basic tools, materials, stages of construction, membrane-tensioning methods, local terminology, and the maker's personal testimony.

The research combines a semi-structured interview with the craft bearer, observation of the working environment, recording of technical dimensions, description of materials, documentation of repertoire and ritual use, and contextual analysis of the situations in which the instrument is performed. This approach is consistent with methods used in earlier ethno-organological studies of Albanian instrument-making workshops (Ramadani, 2019a, pp. 29–41; Ramadani, 2025, pp. 55–66). Particular attention was given to the internal logic of the craftsman's practice: how he evaluates materials, quality, sound, errors, workshop "secrets," and the future of the craft.

The collected data are not treated as isolated technical facts but as elements of a broader ethnomusicological picture. Measurements, for example, are relevant not merely as numbers but as indicators of workshop standards; the story concerning walnut wood cut from a cemetery is interpreted not as a literal acoustic explanation but as evidence that material origin may carry moral and symbolic weight in local craft consciousness; and the shortage of apprentices is treated as a symptom of a broader crisis in craft transmission.

Cultural-Historical Context and Terminology

Historically, double-headed cylindrical drums occur across a wide cultural area extending through Southeastern Europe and Asia Minor. In the broader Balkan literature, instruments conventionally identified as frame drum, kaval, tapan, and zurna have been discussed in relation to long-standing Eastern and Ottoman-Turkish influences on traditional musical practice (Zakić, 2007, pp. 37–70; Pettan, 2010, p. 52). Tammer's observation that the kaval functioned as both a musical instrument and a shepherd's tool underscores the organic relationship between an instrument and the lifeworld of its users (Tammer, 1998). In the same sense, the lodër in Ramadani's practice does not exist as an isolated object but as a living element of the ritual, sonic, and social environment of the Polog Region.

Terminological variation is itself part of this cultural history. Albanian lexicography records lodër and daulle for the double-headed drum, while tupan is also documented as an Albanian synonym; related regional forms include tapan, topan, and Turkish davul (Academy of Sciences of Albania, 2026). Trærup's Kosovo fieldwork is particularly instructive: in an Albanian wedding context she records the musicians' own designation daulle, notes lodër and tupan as alternative names, and uses surla for the accompanying shawm (Trærup, 1996–1997, pp. 33, 46). Ramadani's local speech in Polog uses lodër/lodra for the drum and curle for the double-reed shawm; curle is an Albanian variant corresponding to standard Albanian surle. Accordingly, the present study privileges lodër and curle when describing the local practice, while retaining other forms only for comparison with published regional literature (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025). This approach preserves emic terminology without implying that any one Albanian term is geographically exclusive.

In the traditional *curle–lodër* ensemble, the *lodër* has a central rhythmic and ceremonial function. A common ensemble may consist of two *curle* players and two *lodër* players, while larger groups may include four of each. The

ensemble generates not only considerable acoustic power but also a strong spatial presence. The *curle* carries the melodic line, whereas the *lodër* establishes the metric, bodily, and ceremonial foundation of performance.

Historically, instruments of this type have also functioned as signals, calls, ritual markers, and musical media. Field testimony records several uses of the lodër: as an alarm signal, a call to gather, a marker for iftar and suhoor during Ramadan, a central element of wedding and festive ensembles, and a rhythmic foundation in urban folk ensembles (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025). Thus, the instrument operates between the practical and the symbolic: it informs, summons, organizes, excites, and celebrates.

Biographical and Musical Profile of Mamut Ramadani

Mamut Ramadani was born in Tetovo on 1 October 1969 into a family with a strong musical tradition. His father, Ajet Ramadani, was a well-known *curle* player, and his grandfather Destan was active in the same musical practice. As a child, Mamut listened to his grandfather's ensemble, which included Dili Aliti, Ajet Ramadani, Demir Ramadani, and Xhemil Ramadani. After his grandfather's death, the musical environment continued through his father's ensemble, whose members included Ajet Ramadani, Ibrahim Beadini, Shaip Ibishi, Xhemil Ramadani, and Xheladin Xh. ("Xhema").

Ramadani grew up in the Teqe neighborhood of Tetovo, where, according to his testimony, the sound of curle and lodra could be heard throughout the year. His musical education therefore began before any formal instruction: through listening, presence, movement within wedding and festive settings, and direct familiarity with sound as part of everyday culture. By the age of ten he was already taking part in weddings, an activity he continues today with an ensemble that includes Mamut Ramadani, Jusuf Bajrami, Driton Ramadani, Idajet Ramadani, Hamza Bajrami, Omer Bajrami, and Ensar Ramadani (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).



Figure 1. Animal skins drying after initial preparation, ready for selection according to thickness and elasticity. Author's archive, 10 October 2025

He began learning the craft of lodër construction and repair at the age of fourteen under master Shaip Ibishi, with whom he worked as an apprentice. During the early years he mainly mounted skins, because the wooden shells were purchased ready-made from the carpenter brothers Bilal and Nureman from the village of Slatino. By the age of fifteen he had begun to work independently, although he still used pre-made shells. Around the age of forty-five he developed a more fully equipped workshop in which he could produce lodra from start to finish, except for the skins, which he purchases already prepared (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).

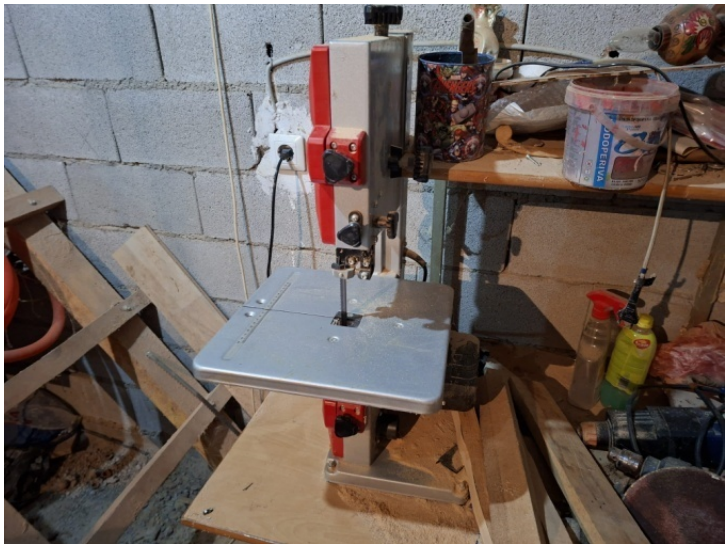


Figure 2. Band saw used for the initial cutting of walnut boards to the basic dimensions required for the wooden shell. Author's archive, 10 October 2025

This trajectory reveals a gradual transformation from a musically immersed child to an apprentice, from apprentice to independent worker, and from independent worker to a master with comprehensive workshop competence. Ramadani summarizes the craft in three conditions: "to love it, to know it, and to work hard." The formulation is significant because it defines craftsmanship not merely as technique but as an ethic of work.

The Workshop as a Site of Knowledge

Although Mamut Ramadani lives in Tetovo, his workshop is located in Preljubishte, Municipality of Jegunovce. The workshop is more than a place where an instrument is assembled: it concentrates tools, materials, memory, and accumulated experience. It functions as a small ethno-organological laboratory in which wood is evaluated, measured, thinned, shaped, treated, tied, tensioned, and finally tested through sound.

Materials are obtained through a network of local and regional suppliers. Wood is generally purchased from local sawmills, especially the "Alpina World" company in Preljubishte. Walnut is the preferred wood for the shell, with beech used only occasionally. Skins are obtained in Kumanovo from the brothers Dojchin and Momchilo; in his youth, Ramadani also purchased skins from Abduraman Veliu–Tabak in Tetovo. Goat or kid skin is used most often, while sheepskin is used only rarely because of its thinner structure. Synthetic membranes are obtained from Istanbul (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).



Figure 3. Wood-thinning/planing machine used to achieve an even thickness of the wooden strip before shell forming. Author's archive, 10 October 2025

This supply system shows that traditional instrument making depends on a network of relations among sawmills, tanners, artisans, musicians, and markets. The craft is not enclosed within the hands of a single individual; it relies on an

economy of materials, trust, and specialist knowledge. The quality of the finished instrument begins long before final assembly—with the selection of wood and with confidence that the chosen skin is suited to its intended function.

Instrument Construction: From Wood Selection to Final Tensioning

According to Mamut Ramadani, as much as two years may pass between cutting walnut wood and the final construction process, depending on how long the wood takes to dry completely. This is an important observation because it shows that time itself is part of the technology. A good *lodër* cannot be produced by accelerating the preparation of the material; it depends on respecting the natural seasoning of the wood.

Once the wood has been cut into boards of appropriate size, it is passed through a machine for thinning and smoothing. Typical dimensions of the board used for the shell are approximately 190 cm in length, 42–43 cm in width, and 0.7 cm in thickness. The shell is usually fastened with screws and only rarely with nails. The hoops placed on both sides measure approximately 180 cm × 1.5 cm × 0.7 cm and are generally made of walnut, although hazel was also used in the past (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).



Figure 4. Formation of the wooden shell by bending and fixing the wood into a cylindrical body. Author's archive, 10 October 2025

The two membranes are connected and tensioned by approximately 25 meters of rope. The rope is not merely a fastening element; it is a mechanism for controlling membrane tension and therefore sound. Its lacing pattern also creates a characteristic visual structure with both practical and aesthetic functions. Ramadani attaches the shoulder strap to the shell with hooks rather than rivets, allowing greater flexibility in use.

The heavier bass beater is usually made of beech and measures approximately 40–45 cm in length and about 2 cm in thickness. The thin stick used on the opposite head is approximately 45 cm long and around 0.2 cm thick. Local performance practice differentiates the two sounding sides of the instrument: the heavier, deeper side carries the fundamental pulse, while the lighter, sharper side provides articulation and rhythmic ornamentation (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).



Figure 5. Wooden shells placed on racks for drying and stabilization before further assembly. Author's archive, 10 October 2025

For Ramadani, a crucial "secret" of a high-quality *lodër* lies in the bearing edge of the wooden shell, where the skin rests. The inner part of this edge must be perfectly smoothed. If it is poorly finished, the skin does not seat properly, vibration becomes uneven, and the attack loses clarity. This detail illustrates the difference between mere technical assembly and mastery: an apparently invisible feature becomes audible in the final result.



Figure 6. The inner bearing edge of the wooden shell—the surface on which the skin rests and a crucial factor in the clarity of the sound. Author's archive, 10 October 2025

The wooden shell is treated with oil only on the exterior, never on the interior. Membrane tension is regulated through the rope and, when necessary, through heat. Sound is therefore not a fixed product but the outcome of continuous adjustment among material, temperature, humidity, and the hand of the maker. Ramadani regards spring and autumn as the most favorable seasons for construction because temperature and humidity are more suitable. If the wood is already fully seasoned and prepared, final assembly can be completed in a single day. The average finished instrument weighs approximately 3 kg (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).

Acoustic Significance of Materials

In traditional instrument making, material is not acoustically neutral. An analysis of the *lodër* must therefore consider local material logic in addition to general organological classification. Walnut, goat or kid skin, shell thickness, hoop construction, the length and elasticity of the rope, and even the way the shoulder strap is attached all affect the sonic result. These choices are both acoustic and cultural: they shape resonance, perceived weight of sound, vibration decay, clarity of attack, and a locally recognizable timbral profile.

Natural skin produces a sound whose character changes with humidity, cold, heat, and tension. Synthetic membranes, by contrast, provide greater stability. According to Ramadani and local performance preferences, however, they may be perceived as lacking some of the timbral depth associated with natural skin. The choice between natural and synthetic membrane is therefore not only practical but also aesthetic (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).



Figure 7. Wooden hoops for the two sides of the instrument; their evenness enables uniform tensioning. Author's archive, 10 October 2025.

The relationship between the two heads is especially significant. The deeper side generates the fundamental bodily pulse, whereas the thinner, sharper side adds rhythmic vitality and articulation. When the two are properly balanced, the *lodër* does not merely accompany the dance: it helps lead it. The instrument is therefore not a passive support for melody but an active organizer of movement.



Figure 8. Rope lacing and symmetrical circumferential tensioning of the two sides of the lodër. Author's archive, 10 October 2025.

An anecdote from Ramadani's apprenticeship illustrates the symbolic dimension of material choice. He recalls that several lodra made in Shaip Ibishi's workshop from walnut purchased from a man in a distant village failed to produce a satisfactory sound. After repeated attempts to change skins, hoops, rope, and fastenings, the craftsmen concluded that the problem lay in the wooden shells. They later learned that the trees had been cut from a cemetery yard. Without treating the story as a literal acoustic explanation, it reveals how, within traditional craft consciousness, material may possess a biography, a moral shadow, and symbolic memory. In this view, sound is not understood solely as the result of

physical vibration but also as connected to the perceived "purity" of a material's origin (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).

Ritual, Social, and Musical Functions

In the Polog Region, the lodër is inseparable from wedding practice, from the local performance form known as nibet, and from a broad repertoire of dances. In local usage, nibet denotes a structured sequence or suite of tunes performed by curle–lodër ensembles in a prescribed order. The lodër gives this form much of its cumulative energy: it sustains tension, organizes musical time, and marks ritual transition (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).



Figure 9. Final test of the completed instrument: checking membrane tension and acoustic response. Author's archive, 10 October 2025

Within the traditional performance environment, the lodër and tarabuka have historically been associated predominantly with male performers, although the tarabuka is used less frequently and the lodër is strongly linked to curle ensembles (Ramadani, 2019b, p. 197). The dance repertoire associated with the instrument is diverse. In the lowland villages of the Polog Region, dances such as Hasan Aga, Shota, and Vallja e Kumanovës are mentioned, whereas in villages along the foothills of the Šar Mountains one encounters Vallja e kallanxhojve, Vallja e Memetit, Vallja e kuajve ("Dance of the Horses"), Vallja e nuses ("Bride's Dance"), Vallja e grishjes ("Dance of the Wedding Invitation"), Vallja e krushqve, Vallja e dhëndrit ("Groom's Dance"), and others. The term grishje refers to the traditional act of inviting relatives and members of the community to a wedding, while kallanxhoj denotes tinsmiths, craftsmen engaged in tinning metal vessels. The term krushq refers specifically to the groom's relatives and friends who go together to fetch the bride; for this reason, the Albanian title Vallja e krushqve is retained rather than reduced to a looser English equivalent. These dances are not merely musical forms; they are social situations in which kinship roles, age, gender, honor, celebration, and collective participation become visible (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).

Alongside the traditional *curle* ensemble, the *lodër* is also used in urban folk ensembles together with clarinet, violin, accordion, guitar, and other instruments. In such contexts, the instrument adapts to new ensemble configurations while retaining its central role in maintaining the metric framework and stabilizing movement. This capacity makes it simultaneously traditional and adaptive.

The *lodër*'s social function is also evident in the fact that its sound is often heard before the event itself is seen. It announces a wedding, marks a gathering, calls a neighborhood or village into shared attention, and transforms private celebration into a public occurrence. Historically, its acoustic role was even broader: it could serve as an alarm, a call to assemble, a marker within the religious-ritual calendar, and a means of collective notification. In this sense, the *lodër* can be understood as an acoustic medium of public life.

Mamut Ramadani as a Bearer of Heritage

Mamut Ramadani's role extends beyond the making of instruments. He is simultaneously a performer, repairer, repertoire specialist, heir to a family musical line, and transmitter of local terminology. His practice brings together two functions: the practical competence of the maker and the mnemonic function of the witness.

His work demonstrates that craft knowledge is embodied. The hand must know how much pressure to apply, the ear must judge whether a skin is suitable, the eye must determine whether a hoop sits correctly, and experience must predict whether the instrument will withstand intensive wedding use. Such knowledge cannot be fully replaced by machinery or by a factory-made product.

This is particularly important at a time when few young people are willing to commit to lengthy apprenticeship. Ramadani notes that it is difficult to find young people prepared to devote themselves to the craft. The most realistic line of continuity currently remains within the family: his sons Driton and Idajet, and his grandson Ensar, Driton's son, are identified as potential successors. This is encouraging, but it also reveals how narrowly the future of the craft is presently anchored (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).

Workshop Economy and Contemporary Challenges

The economic dimension of the craft is essential to understanding its sustainability. According to field data, an ordinary lodër from Ramadani's workshop costs approximately €400–500, while a skin together with mounting costs around €100. In a year he may sell up to fifteen lodra, while the number of skins sold or mounted can reach approximately eighty (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).

These figures show that the craft remains economically active, but does not operate as mass production. It depends on individual musicians, commissions, repairs, seasonal demand, and wedding cycles. Demand is strongest during periods with more weddings, concerts, festivals, and traditional events. The economic stability of the workshop is therefore closely tied to the vitality of the musical tradition itself.

The main challenges are several. First, factory-made instruments and synthetic membranes provide faster and sometimes cheaper alternatives. Second, field observations indicate that changes in contemporary wedding and stage practice, together with the wider use of amplification, are gradually affecting the presence and role of traditional acoustic instruments. Third, younger people are rarely prepared to undertake a long apprenticeship. Fourth, institutional mechanisms for supporting such masters remain underdeveloped (M. Ramadani, personal interview, 10 October 2025).

These challenges do not mean that the craft is inevitably disappearing, but they show that its continuation cannot be left to chance. A deliberate strategy is needed to connect craftspeople, musicians, museums, universities, festivals, local authorities, and cultural institutions.

Safeguarding the Craft and Future Prospects

Safeguarding lodër-making should be understood as a living process rather than merely an archival task. In the spirit of UNESCO's 2003 Convention, safeguarding involves not only identification and documentation, but also the transmission of knowledge, skills, and meanings, together with the creation of conditions in which the practice can continue within the community (UNESCO, 2003).

A first measure would be the establishment of a structured master–apprentice model. Such a model is particularly important because mastery develops through extended practical learning and direct correction by the knowledge bearer. A program lasting six to twelve months could include clearly defined stages: material recognition, wood preparation, construction of the wooden shell, hoop fitting, rope lacing, skin mounting, tensioning, tuning, and final sound testing. Each apprentice should participate in the complete construction of at least two instruments.

A second measure would be the creation of a digital archive. Such an archive should contain photographs, video recordings, sound examples, technical sketches, local terms, interviews, a biography of the master, descriptions of tools, and data on repertoire. The archive should not be closed, but made accessible to researchers, students, museums, ensembles, and cultural institutions, subject to appropriate ethical and community agreements.

A third measure would be public demonstrations in museums, schools, universities, and festivals. The master should be presented not only as a producer but as a bearer of knowledge. Demonstrations of construction and tuning can have substantial educational value, particularly for young musicians and students of ethnomusicology, ethnochoreology, music pedagogy, organology, and cultural heritage.

A fourth measure would be the preparation of documentation for local or national recognition of the practice as intangible cultural heritage. Such a dossier should include the practice itself, the bearer, historical background, techniques, uses, risks, safeguarding measures, and community consent. In this way, Ramadani's workshop could be recognized not merely as a private economic activity but as part of the cultural memory and living musical heritage of the region.

Conclusion

The case of Mamut Ramadani demonstrates that the traditional *lodër* cannot be understood only as a musical instrument. It is simultaneously a craft product, an acoustic organism, a ritual sign, a social call, and a bearer of local memory. Its construction combines wood, skin, rope, and metal fittings, but also time, experience, listening, family tradition, and cultural responsibility.

Ramadani is a rare example of a master who understands both the performance function of the instrument and its material logic. He knows how a *lodër* should sound because he has heard it since childhood, played it in wedding and festive contexts, repaired it, and built it with his own hands. This dual competence makes his knowledge especially valuable for ethnomusicological, organological, and cultural analysis.

The study confirms the central acoustic importance of materials and construction. Walnut, natural skin, a carefully finished bearing edge, rope tensioning, and heat-assisted adjustment together produce a sonic profile that cannot be reduced to industrial standardization. Local distinctiveness is located precisely in these small and often invisible details.

Under contemporary conditions, the greatest challenge is not merely to preserve a single instrument but to sustain the entire system that keeps it alive: the master, the workshop, materials, performers, weddings, dances, repertoire, terminology, and the community that recognizes the sound. Safeguarding must therefore be active, institutionally supported, and directed toward intergenerational transmission. An archive is important, but it is not sufficient. Living safeguarding begins when a new generation touches the skin, tensions the rope, and hears the first strike of an instrument it has learned to make.

Biodata of Author



Dr. Bekim Ramadani was born in 1970 in the village of Orashje near Tetovo. He completed his primary and secondary education in his hometown. In 2001, he graduated from the Faculty of Music at the State University of Tetova. He earned his Master's degree in Musicology in Tirana in 2006 and completed his PhD in Ethnomusicology in Skopje in 2018. He works as a lecturer at the Faculty of Music, University of Tetova, where he teaches subjects related to folk music and music informatics. For over two decades, he has also served as a music teacher at the "Kiril Pejçinoviq" Gymnasium in Tetovo, where he successfully led the school choir. As an active member and artistic leader of the folklore ensemble "Xheladin Zeqiri" in Tetovo, as well as co-founder of the group "Margaritarët," he has contributed to the promotion and preservation of Albanian folk music both locally and internationally. His research focuses on the documentation, transcription, and analysis of Albanian traditional music, as well as the cultural role of music in contemporary society. He has presented at numerous academic conferences and published essays in scientific and cultural journals. He is the author, co-author, or translator of over 20 books in the fields of ethnomusicology, traditional music, and music education, contributing significantly to the preservation and transmission of Albanian musical folklore. **E-mail:** b_ramadani@yahoo.com **ORCID:** 0009-0007-6108-1851 **Affiliation:** Faculty of Music, University of Tetova, Tetovo, North Macedonia.

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