

The background is a deep navy blue. It features several abstract elements: a large orange triangle in the top left with a white line drawing of a dancer; a pink diamond in the top center with a white line drawing of a group of dancers; a pink arch in the middle left; a blue arch in the bottom left; a pink square in the bottom center with a white line drawing of a group of dancers; a large orange circle in the bottom right with a white line drawing of a group of dancers; and a small pink rectangle in the bottom center with a white line drawing of a group of dancers. The title is centered in white, bold, sans-serif font.

Sustaining Traditional Dance as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Edited by Rebeka Kunej
and Theresa Jill Buckland





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Ljubljana, 2025



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Introduction

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Sustaining Traditional Dance as Intangible Cultural Heritage is dedicated to the multifaceted exploration of dance within the paradigm of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). At its core, the volume foregrounds practices that do not merely assign a declarative position to traditional dance within communities, but actively sustain its performance, transmission, and embodied significance. Beyond theoretical discourse, this book emphasises the lived, practised, and experienced dimensions of dance heritage. The essential premise is that dance, as an intangible cultural heritage, inherently exists through embodiment. It is not solely a symbolic or representational form, but a dynamic, corporeal practice – one that lives in the bodies of dancers and the social contexts they inhabit. Understanding dance in this way requires us to go beyond treating it as a static product of the past, and instead to engage with it as a living, evolving practice embedded in the present. This is the only way to build the resilience that will ensure its future sustainability.

The succession of numerous UNESCO international conventions on heritage since 1972 – along with various regional and national instruments – has contributed to a growing global awareness of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Over the past half century, we have witnessed a shift in emphasis from monuments and material artefacts to the living, performative dimensions of culture. The adoption and ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 (UNESCO 2003) marked a pivotal moment: for the first time, heritage status was extended to cultural practices and forms of knowledge deeply rooted in embodiment and sensory experience. As Regina Bendix (2021) notes, this shift has significantly benefitted cultural practices that engage the body and the senses in profound ways. What, after all, is dance if not the embodiment of knowledge, memory, and skill – passed down within dance communities through experiential learning rather than textual transmission. Within the context of dance, the experience is inherently multisensory, encompassing tactile, auditory, visual, and olfactory senses, and most importantly, involving tacit knowledge and kinaesthetic perception.

Intangible cultural heritage is part of our identities. Safeguarding intangible heritage is challenging because it depends on knowledge, memory and skills that must be passed down through generations. This process of transmission is increasingly threatened by the pressures of contemporary life and the dynamics of modernity, which continuously reshape the contexts in which intangible heritage exists and is practised. If intangible

cultural heritage is only registered, documented, and inscribed in official inventories, it risks becoming merely a record of the past – a static memory, a testament to what once was. Intangible cultural heritage, including dance, remains truly alive only when it is actively practised and performed. However, with continued practice inevitably comes change. Safeguarding dance heritage does not imply preserving it in a fixed or fossilised form, but rather honouring ancestral traditions while recognising and accommodating the evolving needs, interpretations, and contexts of contemporary bearers. It requires an ongoing, respectful dialogue between the past and the present to live in the future.

A temporal shift in heritage discourse reveals that intangible cultural heritage is increasingly portrayed as a resource for tackling the environmental, economic, and social concerns of our times, even if the UNESCO paradigm can still be seen as an “authorized heritage discourse” (Smith 2006). From the conventional model of conservation of relics of the past, today the UNESCO paradigm builds on the concept of safeguarding, where heritage is no longer regarded as something to be preserved, but rather reconceptualised as a project for the future.

Social anthropologist Chiara Bortolotto (2025) emphasises a critical turn in heritage discourse toward sustainable development, referring to this evolution as “the sustainabilisation” of intangible cultural heritage. This conceptual shift holds the potential to address broader societal concerns and anxieties of the contemporary era. Bortolotto asserts that “it is no longer about us protecting heritage but about heritage protecting us” (2025, 2) although her analysis primarily situates intangible heritage within the context of environmental challenges. Within the *Dance-ICH* project, we maintain that dance can likewise contribute to sustainable development. As a collective activity rooted in proximity and human warmth, dance embodies social cohesion and equity, and – through its physical and social dimensions – contributes to individual and community well-being.

The project *Dance as Intangible Cultural Heritage: New Models of Facilitating Participatory Dance Events (Dance-ICH)*¹ places particular emphasis on fostering inclusive and participatory dance practices as a means of engaging communities and sustaining intangible cultural heritage. Launched in 2022 and running until 2025, the project brought together nine partners

¹ Additional details about the project are available on the project’s official website: <https://www.dancingas-livingheritage.eu/>.

from six European countries to explore and promote the role of dance as intangible cultural heritage: the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance (Sff) and the Museums of Southern Trøndelag (MiST) from Norway, the Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage in Flanders (CEMPER) from Belgium, the School of Physical Education and Sport Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA-SPESS) and the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens (HFRC-AA) from Greece, the Hungarian Open Air Museum (SKANZEN) from Hungary, the ASTRA Museum from Romania, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM) and the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) from Slovenia.

The *Dance-ICH* project was committed to developing approaches for facilitating participatory dance events, with the goal of strengthening connections between local dance heritage communities, museums, heritage institutions, research and academic institutions, and the broader public. Through co-creative processes, the project aimed to establish sustainable models for safeguarding dance heritage, ensuring their ongoing transmission and relevance in contemporary society.

Among outcomes, the project facilitated knowledge exchange among researchers, academics, cultural brokers and facilitators, curators and museum professionals, and dance practitioners. It included the preparation of exhibitions in which the exhibition venues – mostly museums – were transformed into dynamic arenas for dance. A key aim was also to engage and collaborate with local dance communities through case studies, in order to co-create strategies for raising awareness, ensuring respect for, and safeguarding their dance heritage.

The *Dance-ICH* project carried out multiple case studies across the partner countries, each focusing on particular dance practices and community dynamics. These studies informed both the participatory dance events and the project exhibition *Dance – Europe's Living Heritage in Motion*, which was displayed in five countries across various venues.

This monograph, as one of the *Dance-ICH* project's culminating outcomes, brings together diverse scholarly contributions that explore various dimensions of the safeguarding, interpretation, and transmission of dance as intangible cultural heritage. The chapters illuminate the multifaceted processes involved in preserving, performing, transmitting, and theorising dance heritage across a range of cultural and institutional contexts. As a result of the *Dance-ICH* project, the contributions inevitably fo-

cus on selected European contexts. The editors remain aware of the volume's inherent Eurocentric perspective and the institutionalised nature of heritage discourse shaped by the involvement of specific authors and institutions. We hope, nonetheless, that this specific collection of essays will stimulate further studies on dance as intangible cultural heritage and its sustainability which arise from differing geographies and organisations.

Egil Bakka and Georgiana Gore open this volume by interrogating the conceptual framework of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003) through an analysis of its terminology through a dance-specific lens. They argue that more precise distinctions – particularly between “intervention” and “facilitation” – can enhance safeguarding strategies, especially when applied to the unique challenges posed by dance heritage. Illustrating and situating their argument through personal experiences in Norway and Benin-City, Nigeria, they conclude with brief reflections on how the work within the International Choreomundus Masters' programme related to the terminology proposed in this chapter.

The relationship between dance as intangible cultural heritage and academia is further pursued in the subsequent chapter by **Zoi N. Margari and Maria I. Koutsouba**. Focusing on the specific situation in Greece, they explore the evolving role of university-trained dance teachers as cultural mediators who bridge academic knowledge with heritage practice. Drawing on legislative and ethnographic analysis, the authors reveal how traditional dance has been institutionalised and reshaped within national heritage discourses under the influence of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. Following the wide definition of heritage communities in the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, better known as the Faro Convention (Council of Europe 2005), they identify one important academic community which continues to be pivotal in the co-shaping of sustainable dance heritage practices within and beyond Greece.

Rebeka Kunej's chapter shifts the focus to an examination of the interplay between staged folk dance ensemble performances and socially embedded dance practices as observed at the festivals known as *veselicas* in Horjul, Slovenia. She highlights the ways in which local dance identities are constructed and negotiated as heritage representation in the absence of systematic historical documentation. Whether performed on stage or within social settings, traditional dance, in her analysis, embodies a living dialogue between artistic interpretation and communal identity. This notion

of cultural identity and its sustainability at the local level is further considered by **Dóra Pál-Kovács** who offers a detailed case study of the wedding ritual *Sárközi lakodalom* as an emblematic expression of complex heritage systems in Hungary. Through an exploration of wedding traditions that encompass traditional dance and other heritage elements, she considers how this popular local event, based on mid-twentieth century iterations, represents and sustains cultural identity in the contemporary context. Moving to a national level in Hungary, **Anna Janku** provides an overview of the Hungarian *táncház* movement, tracing its development from a grassroots initiative to an internationally recognised model for the transmission of folk dance. Her contribution highlights the multiplicity of meanings that the term *táncház* has acquired – encompassing method, institution, and community – and its evolution as a living cultural heritage phenomenon. Her chapter is followed by **Drago Kunej**'s focused study on the significant integral role in Slovenia of music and musicians in sustaining dance heritage and ensuring its continuity. Drawing on his personal experiences as a musician within this milieu and on case studies that bring the issue of reinterpretation to the fore, he argues that the interrelationship between dance and music, particularly within participatory communities, is both central to both scholarly understanding and practical safeguarding efforts. Personal involvement is also reflected in **Siri Mæland**'s presentation of three detailed case studies from Norway that illustrate shifting models of dance heritage dissemination within archival and educational contexts. Offering an insider perspective, she examines how renewal, ownership and methodological shifts shape the safeguarding of traditional dance in Norway. By analysing projects such as *Dansespor* and *Bygda Dansar*, she reflects on the ideological underpinnings and methodological tensions involved in balancing accessibility, pedagogy, and community involvement.

The next chapters are related to museological perspectives on safeguarding dance as intangible cultural heritage. Belgian heritage workers **Debora Plouy** and **Mieke Witkamp** discuss the application of sustainability assessment tools to social dance practices, adapting existing models to evaluate the viability of living heritage. Based at CEMPER (Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage) in Flanders, they argue for a safeguarding approach that empowers heritage communities to retain control over transmission while benefiting from institutional support and facilitation. This emphasis upon community agency when working with institutions is also underscored by **Tone Erlien Myrvold** whose subsequent chapter

introduces the concept of “events of practice exhibitions”, as developed within the *Dancing Museums* project in Norway and further pursued within the *Dance-ICH* project. She outlines four curatorial strategies that employ community-based participation to activate dance heritage within museum contexts, thereby reshaping audience engagement with intangible heritage and enhancing its relevance as a living, experiential practice. **Silvestru Petac** addresses the ethnographic museum’s role in safeguarding Romanian traditional dance, proposing a theoretical distinction applicable to the Romanian situation between “traditional dance” and “dance of the ethnographical type”. He critiques theatrically performative approaches to heritage and advocates for a more reflexive, participatory museological paradigm that reconciles safeguarding with community engagement. The role of the ethnographic museum in safeguarding traditional performance as intangible cultural heritage is also discussed by **Anja Jerin and Adela Pukl**. They reflect upon the manner in which the Slovene Ethnographic Museum engages with music and dance heritage through the dual lenses of the UNESCO safeguarding paradigm and museological practice. They discuss the institutional challenges and opportunities involved in translating systemic frameworks into curatorial work, with a focus on customs, community, and performative practices. This thematic section is concluded with a further discussion from the perspective of practical museum experience. **Raluca Ioana Andrei and Simona Maria Malearov** present a case study of Romania’s ASTRA Museum, demonstrating how digital tools, educational programmes, and community collaboration are employed to safeguard traditional dance. Their analysis emphasises the importance of maintaining the ritual and social significance of dance, rather than reducing it to static stage representations.

Together, these contributions enhance our understanding of the diverse ways in which dance continues to exist as intangible cultural heritage within communities, cultural institutions, and in the context of UNESCO’s global policy frameworks and beyond. We hope that this volume will encourage readers to reflect on the challenges faced by various stakeholders in sustaining dance heritage – both today and for future generations. In offering what we and the authors believe are valuable insights into how dance heritage is approached, safeguarded, and interpreted across Europe, we hope that the volume may serve as a case study of broader processes and tensions within the field of intangible cultural heritage.

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Safeguarding Dance Heritage: Interventionism versus Facilitation?

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This chapter examines the terminology of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage from a dance-specific perspective. Focusing on dance as a distinct phenomenon, it identifies challenges differing from those in safeguarding music, craftsmanship, or social practices. By analysing the Convention's terminology and safeguarding measures, it proposes refined distinctions relevant to dance heritage. Drawing on professional experience and academic initiatives, including the international master's programme Choreomundus, it argues that these insights may have broader applicability.

Keywords: ICH, dance, safeguarding, terminology, intervention, facilitation

Introduction

This chapter revisits the text of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage¹ (Bakka 2015; Bakka and Karoblis 2021; Erlien and Bakka 2017; Gore and Bakka 2009; Gore and Grau 2014). We depart from an analysis of terms used in the Convention text and in some supporting documents. After a brief general review of terms, we focus on the terms for what safeguarding can be and how those are used. One aim is to examine them from a dance perspective. While most general discussions on the Convention cover the whole broad range of intangible cultural heritage (hereafter ICH) domains (Blake and Lixinski 2020; Waelde et al. 2018; Smith and Akagawa 2009; Bortolotto and Skounti 2024), a few larger domain-specific discussions also exist (Petkovski 2021; Molina et al. 2021). We believe that these latter approaches become increasingly important for practical work, enabling more precise and narrow distinctions and a deeper understanding. Domains of crafts or music face different challenges to those in the domain of dance. The core of this chapter is a discussion of five pairs of contrasting terms, which we propose in order to achieve sharper distinctions and a deeper understanding of mechanisms and strategies underlying the safeguarding of dance. The most overarching of these pairs is that of intervention and facilitation, which forms the focus of our discussion. We then present examples from our personal experiences of practising and safeguarding dance as ICH in order to contextualise the issues under consideration. As summary, we refer briefly to our collaboratively founded Erasmus Mundus masters programme, Choremundus – International Master in Dance Knowledge, Practice and Heritage, in which we maintain that intervention and facilitation in safeguarding dance as ICH have been realised.

¹ For this chapter the authors have quoted from the 2022 version of the Convention, access to which may be found in the References. The current 2024 version may be found on the following webpage: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>.

The Terms Used in the Text of the Convention

This chapter takes a systematic approach to discussing the words and terms used in the ICH Convention text. We will categorise them, analyse their function, and explore how they contribute to the overall understanding. We have extracted from the Convention text all words related to the management of the ICH but have not included terms about the organisational framework, as these are beyond the scope of our discussion. To categorise terms, we have organised them into seven clusters: Documents, Actions, Types of heritage, Kind of groups, Relations, Global Context, and Results.

1. *Documents*: Conventions refer to international agreements of a certain status and function; other kinds of agreements within the UNESCO system are Recommendations and Resolutions. The ICH Convention also refers to different kinds of other documents, such as educational programmes or material organised into dynamic databases, such as inventories, which are tools in the work of safeguarding and, therefore, close to the cluster of Actions.
2. *Actions* constitute a cluster referring to measures that the Convention recommends or proposes to be taken.
3. *Types of heritage* include the domains or main fields of ICH, different modes of expression such as practices or representations, outdated terms such as folklore and masterpieces, and terms for heritage covered by other Conventions.
4. *Kinds of groups* list groups that the Convention proposes should undertake action of some kind.
5. *Relations*: The actions recommended by the Convention are often specified or narrowed down. They are required to be done “as a response to”, “with a sense of”, “in interaction with”, “with the participation” of, and so on. The phenomena to which the action should be connected are, for instance, environment, history, nature or human rights. They are in other words limited by legal, moral or political constraints.
6. *Global context* lists aspects of the global situation that the Convention takes into consideration and favours or fears.
7. *Results* are a cluster, listing what the Convention hopes can come from its work regarding an improved world.

This survey might be condensed as follows. The Convention situates itself as a document recommending actions by certain kinds of groups to benefit certain kinds of heritage. It specifies and narrows down the actions by requiring them to be seen in relationship to their environment. It situates itself and its role in the global context and indicates how it aims towards an improved world.

In the following, we will mainly classify and group terms for action. In the process, we will discuss the terms transmission and education, which are central to the Convention's recommendations for safeguarding, and we will ask which groups can or are meant to undertake the various kinds of actions that the Convention proposes. The Convention is an agreement between state parties to support certain kinds of practices. How are the actions, expected from each state party, divided between the state party's political level, the experts of the field and the practitioners who are evaluated as candidates to produce nominations to lists?

The Who, What and How

The main elements of the ICH Convention might be explained with respect to the following:

1. Who are its stakeholders, and what roles do they have? These include the practitioners, the community members of the ICH communities, NGO members, experts, and state representatives.
2. What items or elements does the Convention aim to safeguard? Those are systematised in the list of domains and defined in Article II.
3. How is the main action of the Convention, the safeguarding, meant to be undertaken?

Our chapter concentrates on the third question about safeguarding, even if it necessarily touches upon issues related to who and what as well. We will, therefore, begin with the cluster we have called Actions and present a table that shows the frequency of some Action terms in the four most significant documents used by those who implement the Convention: the Convention text; the Operational Directives; the Aide-Mémoire; and the Nomination Form for the Representative List.

The Frequency of Terms

We know, of course, that mere frequency and distribution will not result in a simple mirroring of each term's importance. Many technical, linguistic, and coincidental aspects of word usage interfere with such mirroring. Some words, for instance, will often be repeated in the text because they occur in names or in titles. Constructions such as “formal” and “non-formal education” do not allow a search for “formal education”, and so on. In order to include relevant derivations of terms, we have searched by only parts of the word and marked the unused part by brackets e.g. “identifi(cation)”; or we have searched using only one of the words of expressions, as for instance “(build) awareness”, checking that the hit refers to the same basic idea. As example, we, searched for the word “respect” and counted “respecting”, but not “respectively”.

The table (see Figure 1) shows how often an expression or its derivatives were found in the documents. The numbers will mirror the difference in word count in each document, so we have added the word count for each. It is the order of words as they come out on the table that might suggest their significance. The table is sorted according to the column “Total”, but there is a difference in the order of words between the columns. As we are neither statisticians nor textual analysts, we employ the numbers to sort and support our discussion and as an illustration and visualisation. Since the Convention text does not change, unlike the other documents, the results hint at the terminology that remains in comparison with the practice of the 2020s. For example, “revitalisation” is rare in more recent texts or there is a tendency to use the term “sustainability” more than “viability”.

Text	Convention text	Nomination form	Aide-Memoire	Operational directives	Total
Word count	5 007	1 179	21 202	18 867	
Safeguarding	44	4	172	156	376
(ensure) respect	10	2	43	36	91
sustain(ability/able)	2	3	29	45	79
(build) awareness	5	2	19	31	57
financial	4	0	0	23	27
research	4	6	6	32	48
legal (measures)	2	1	0	10	13
administrative	1	0	0	15	16
documentation	4	0	11	6	21
technical (studies)/(measures)	3	0	0	4	7
transmission	2	1	33	12	48
(ensure) recogn(ition)	8	1	0	47	56
scientific (studies)/(measures)	3	0	0	19	22
management	3	0	0	11	14
identifi(cation)	3	2	9	4	18
(measures ensuring) viability	1	0	19	12	32
(research) methodologies	1	0	0	17	18
economic	2	1	4	10	17
protection	6	0	3	10	19
enhance(ment)	2	0	2	11	15
protection (education)	2	0	2	10	14
artistic (studies)/(measures)	1	0	0	2	3
create (heritage)	3	0	0	11	14
promotion	2	0	4	6	12
transmit (heritage)	3	0	0	23	26
maintain (heritage)	1	0	0	8	9
involve (in ICH management)	1	0	0	9	10
production	1	0	0	6	7
formal (education)	3	0	2	12	17
maintain (heritage)	1	0	0	6	7
capacity-building (activities)	0	0	1	0	1
express(ing ICH)	6	0	1	17	24
preservation	1	0	2	2	5
revitalization	2	0	2	0	4

Figure 1. *Expressions and their derivatives.*

Terms for safeguarding measures

The Convention text gives a condensed but still broad and open definition of terms for safeguarding measures, pointing to those measures usually undertaken mainly by experts outside the practitioners' communities. We could ask, does the Convention effectively propose safeguarding only as being the measures taken by the state party, its institutions, experts, and NGOs? One might argue that the Convention is an agreement between states and lists what each state could and should do. That may be a rationale for not mentioning the most straightforward and ideal kind of safeguarding: the practitioners continuing their practice. This is not something the state, its institutions, and experts can do or demand from others. The Convention offers the following definition.

'Safeguarding' means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of intangible cultural heritage, including identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, and transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage. (UNESCO 2003)

Let us examine the terms used in the text above. The expression "ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage" includes a long series of measures identified by nouns. The words "identification, documentation, research" point to the expert's work mainly for inventory-making and refer to the most obvious benefits of inventories. This is just what professionally staffed archives for traditional dance have done, since at least the 1950s. Hungary's Traditional Dance Archive of the Institute for Musicology RCH, HUN-REN, for example, has a long and complex history. Hungarian experts were already filming traditional dances in the late 1920s. The dance researchers György Martin and Ernő Pesovár were active in the 1950s at The Institute of Folk Art (from 1956 Institute for Folk Education) (Felföldi 2024; Dóka et al. 2016). The Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance was established in 1973 to support safeguarding of traditional dance and music, while the English Folk Dance and Song Society had already been established at the beginning of the 1930s.

The terms "preservation and protection" have mostly been used for objects, monuments and sites and could be understood as referring to the ma-

terial aspects of many ICH elements. If ICH is the making and playing of a musical instrument, some of the instruments played need to be preserved, a task most often taken on by museums. Dance on the other hand does not require so many material objects to serve its practice, even if there are in some cases special costuming. In traditional communities in Europe, there were dress codes depending on the importance and solemnity of the event, and people danced in the clothes they wore for the event. Therefore, clothes speak more about the event and customs of dress than about dance. In the contexts of ritual dance worldwide, special costumes are worn which identify key players/participants with masks and other paraphernalia as additional elements. These also have been the purview of ethnographic museums and even of the more theatrically oriented Dansmuseet in Stockholm. Dance costumes have developed and gained increasing importance with the rise of presentational dancing, which has required the visual effect of identically dressed groups or of identification of a character playing a theatrical role. Specialist museums such as the short-lived Theatre Museum in London and the French Centre National du Costume et de la Scène (CNCS) in Moulins were established to house and promote these.

The term “promotion” seems to have many references, be it a promotion for sale or for building fame or esteem. The term “enhancement” (of the ICH) is less clear to decipher. It may also refer to rendering an element more attractive, but we fear that it may be taken to echo the conception of traditional culture as something that requires improvement.

The final terms are “transmission” and “revitali[s]ation”. In the case of the former, the definition distinguishes formal and non-formal education, while no such distinction exists for revitalisation. Regarding the latter, a sharper and more appropriate distinction could have been drawn between a practice intentionally moved from one group of practitioners and from one context of practice to another for the purpose of safeguarding. There is an essential difference between transmission or revitalisation as something happening 1) in a community where the practice has been rooted and continued through its own strength and 2) as the transposition of the ICH element to a new location and into the hands of new practitioners unrelated to those from whom it was moved for the specific aim of safeguarding. We will return to this issue in a discussion of a pair of new contrasting terms which we propose: stationary and relocated. Relocated safeguarding is often done for the sake of creating a national repertoire as compared to local ones.

Application of Terms in the Other Main Documents

The practical application of the terms discussed above may be studied in other central texts regarding the work with the Convention. We will examine three of them in brief and highlight points that we find significant.

Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention

The introduction states: “The Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage are periodically revised to reflect the resolutions of the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention.” It is a tool which the legislative organ of the Convention revises when rules and procedures for the implementation of the Convention are changed. Therefore, the Directives will show how some terms in the Convention text are not or are barely mentioned, how some become more important and how new terms are adopted. For the purpose of this chapter, this changing focus is crucial.

The Aide-Mémoire

This document systematises and makes available the decisions made by General Assemblies. The most recent version at time of writing mirrors the decisions of the fifth session of the General Assembly in June 2014 and the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in November 2014. One particularly interesting element is that which sets out to purify the language in the nominations. Point 14 in the first section “General Observations” in the Aide-Mémoire has the title “Inappropriate Vocabulary” and includes the following statement. Most recently in 2014, the Subsidiary Body explained that

expressions such as ‘authenticity’, ‘pure’, ‘true’, ‘unique’, ‘original’, ‘essence’ ‘masterpieces’ found in the nominations are not compatible with the spirit of the Convention and should be avoided. [...] On the other hand, States are encouraged to carefully use concepts and terminology that may lead to multiple interpretations, such as ‘ritual’ vs ‘festival’, ‘popular culture’ vs ‘folklore’, and so on. (UNESCO 2015, 10)

The Nomination Form for the Representative List

The nomination form, in one of the main questions in section B, asks for the “Name of the communities, groups or individuals concerned”. This is a reference to the practitioners. Given this formulation, the form stresses that practitioners do not function independently but as members of communities and groups, from whom the nomination is supposed to emanate, even though such a nomination must be accepted by the national bodies in charge of safeguarding. If the point is to name a community or a group of practitioners, what is the difference between practitioners being many or just one individual? In question C 1.2, the practitioners are explicitly identified in the question, “Who are the bearers and practitioners of the element?” It is also interesting to note that the latest version of the nomination form at time of writing does not ask to which domain(s) the element nominated belongs. The domains, however, are an essential part of Article 2 Definitions, a core point of the Convention. We find a possible explanation for this omission in the above Aide-Mémoire point 19 with the title “Check Boxes”.

With regard to the check-boxes in several sections of the ICH-02 form (domains and the safeguarding measures of communities and of States), the Subsidiary Body concluded that they “may have created as many opportunities for confusion or contradiction as they offered possibilities for greater clarity”. (UNESCO 2015, 12)

We suggest that another reason could be that many countries are shifting focus from endangered traditional expressions of small local communities towards more prestigious, popular and homogenised, indeed often national expressions. The latter are often not adapted to the idea of domains or to the systematised set of safeguarding measures. From a longer-term perspective, it is worth noting that the main intention of the early work with the Convention was to help folklore “expressions”. With the above-mentioned development, such “expressions”, which we would now call practices, face even less chance of being supported, particularly in industrialised countries.

At the same time, a new set of checkboxes to prove that ICH contributes to sustainable development has been added to the form and constitutes Section 2. These boxes are “Food security”, “Health care”, “Quality educa-

tion”, “Gender equality”, “Inclusive economic development”, “Environmental sustainability including climate change”, “Peace and social cohesion”, and “Others (please specify)” (UNESCO 2024, 3). This is no doubt a follow-up to the United Nations 2015 General Assembly resolution on sustainable development “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”² as well as increasing concern over the impact on ICH of war, genocide and other atrocities committed during armed conflict.³

Four Pairs of Contrasting Terms

The ICH Convention has been designed to be all-inclusive and to cover the diversity of ICH, from performative practices to the skills and knowledge required to build material artefacts, such as musical instruments, stone walls or boats. It is, therefore, understandable that the terms used in the Convention text are broad and may, in many cases, hide differences in the safeguarding processes rather than bring attention to them. In the following, we discuss significant terms from a dance perspective. We examine two contrasting pairs used in the Convention text first, and then propose three new ones that we think could be helpful in discussions on dance heritage.

Transmission and Revitalisation

Transmission is an overarching and frequently used term for a safeguarding action, as indicated both in our table above and in the Aide-Mémoire. It could be seen as contrasting with the term revitalisation, which is rarely mentioned except in the check-lists. Indeed, it is not clear if any such contrast is intended in the Convention text.

We may define transmission as a concept for continuing a practice in a community where the practice has been rooted and maintained through its own strength. Revitalisation would then refer to an ICH element that has fallen out of use for some years and that the community then begins to re-enact. More typically, it might refer to the shift of the ICH element to new locations and to practitioners unrelated to the people from whom it was moved. Filip Petkovski provides an example from North Macedonia:

² For access to the original resolution and further information on this see United Nations 2015.

³ See, for example, Nafziger's 2020 contribution on the relation between cultural heritage protection and cultural genocide within an international legal framework.

“Once these dances (documented in a folklore archive) ceased to exist as living cultural practice, they were revived in order to be included in stage repertoire” (Petkovski 2021, 173). In this instance of establishing and teaching national repertoires, it would be a question of revitalisation, and the ongoing local practices would be referred to as transmission. Judging by the Aide-Mémoire, the transmission concept does not clearly distinguish between transmission among traditional practitioners and a case of transmission being taken over by others. In certain situations, it may seem that the latter is considered disqualifying for an ICH.

Formal and Non-Formal Education

The Convention uses formal and non-formal education as a pair of contrasting terms to distinguish between two different kinds of transmission. This distinction first appears in the Convention itself in Article 2.3 on Definitions (UNESCO 2022, 6) and a whole section of the Operational Directives is devoted to “Formal and non-formal education measures” (UNESCO 2022, 64–65). However, no precise definition is given of each, but formal education is explicitly programmatic taking place in institutions of varying kinds (educational, associative and so on) while the non-formal clearly occurs in other contexts even if systematised, as may be gleaned from a later section on “Quality education” (UNESCO 2022, 85). The former section provides thirteen examples of how both kinds of education might be undertaken with only one explicitly mentioning the non-formal. As indicated earlier, the Convention only mentions revitalisation once, also in Article 2.3, as a kind of afterthought without any qualifying comments. Therefore, the definition of safeguarding does not explicitly use the two kinds of education for revitalisation but could have done so. Formal transmission would typically be a systematic interaction between teacher(s) and student(s) or apprentice(s). Non-formal transmission would mean a learner picks up knowledge and skills through regular participation in a community and its practices. Such processes can include situations in which a more or less experienced practitioner helps or assists a learner. The difference would be that formal learning is systemically recurring, and the relationship between a teacher and a learner is clearly defined. An apprenticeship, therefore, could also be seen as a formal transmission. The formal transmission is more typically based in schools, institutions and organisations, and often, it can target broader groups than the members of a practising community. Non-formal

learning, that is, learning through participating in a practice, often without any explanation or advice from experienced practitioners, may be qualified more generally as experiential learning (Bergsteiner, Avery and Neumann 2010).

We quote the most comprehensive discussion of the topic from the Aide-Mémoire:

64. A topic that has repeatedly attracted the attention of the Subsidiary Body is that of the transmission of intangible cultural heritage, and particularly how the processes of transmission may have changed over time. For instance, in 2012 it observed that several nominations ‘raised important questions about transmission, including several cases in which a formal transmission system appears to have largely or entirely supplanted a prior system of non-formal transmission. For some members of the Body, the absence of functioning transmission within households and families or within other community-based contexts in which the element was traditionally passed on gave rise to concern about the real viability of the element. Others responded that the formalization and even the institutionalization of transmission is often part of the evolution of intangible cultural heritage and of its constant recreation, and the existence of formal and institutional transmission should be seen as a positive factor, even if it was often accompanied by an attenuation or even disappearance of the non-formal modes of transmission’. In 2014, the Subsidiary Body also remarked ‘the existence of customary practices governing access to the element that are mentioned in connection with criterion R.4 but are not mentioned when describing the element in connection with criterion R.1. In this regard, States are encouraged to maintain coherence in the information included throughout the nomination’. (UNESCO 2015, 28)

65. Formalized systems of transmission are not necessarily a recent development, as the Body noted: in some cases, ‘the practice and transmission of the element were situated within highly organized institutions or undertaken by professionals. Alongside informal modes of transmission there also exist hi-

ghly formalized modes'. In such contexts, the Body called particular attention to the risk of 'excessive professionalization, sometimes with international competitions and huge funding, [that] made it difficult to identify the community concerned or feel confident that they were the agents and beneficiaries of the inscription process'. (UNESCO 2015, 28–29)

Stationary and Relocated ICH

The contrasting pairs of terms discussed above are, as already indicated, more or less explicitly presented as such in the Convention text. In the following, we propose some distinctions that would be helpful for understanding the safeguarding of dance ICH. As previously mentioned, we may distinguish between stationary and relocated items, the former not meaning fixed or unchanging but quite simply located in one community. The question of relocating heritage has been discussed, with reference to the moving of historical buildings (Gregory 2008):

1. A stationary practice remains with the same community members who have actively used it for a long time. It can also spread to new practitioners without it being part of safeguarding interventions and then become “stationary” in larger areas.
2. A relocated practice occurs when an ICH item is taken to other people and places in the name of safeguarding.

A typical example of the stationary is the traditional dancing in a community that remains there and is not actively exported. Such dances may be diffused from place to place as new fashions, without being moved as a safeguarding measure. This is true for popular dances, and recipients do not pay attention to where they come from nor to any “original” version. A typical example of relocated practices is dances collected, documented and distributed to people not connected to the practitioners from whom they were collected. This is the case for many European folk dance revivals (Stavělová and Buckland, 2018). In this context, dance teachers also actively relocate dances and bring new dances as fashionable activities to new places and new people, but hardly with the intention of safeguarding (Fiskvik 2024).

The latter case is characteristic of large parts of the various European folk dance revivals of the twentieth century as noted above. Some of the

early collectors included Yngvar Heikel and Anni Collan in Finland, Klara Semb in Norway, Cecil Sharp in England, and Raimond Zoder in Austria. They were idealists of urban origin who went to the countryside to collect folk dances. They published the dances in manuals for revival folk dance groups, and the dances became national folk dance repertoires. In Central and Eastern European countries, the revival movements worked more through staging than through the revival of social dancing, and a kind of national repertoire, to some degree, could be seen in national professional folk dance ensembles.

The first case can be seen in communities that continued their practice and often became famous as strongholds of tradition. Examples from Western Europe include the Danish community Sønderho and Fanø (Grüner-Nielsen 1920), communities in Swedish Finland such Vörå or Jeppo (Biskop 2024), the Faroe Islands (Thuren 1908), Norwegian Røros (Okstad 2002), and Slovenian Val de Resia (Dunin 2015), and several communities of French Brittany (Guilcher 1963). Large parts of rural Central and Eastern Europe retained traditional dance practices much longer, which we would designate as stationary ICH.

The difference between stationary and relocated dances is not absolutely clear-cut, and dances shift from one status to the other. In the work with safeguarding dances, however, there is an important and often clear difference between the two processes.

Local versus National Dance Repertoires

A local dance repertoire mainly refers to stationary practices. Such local practices contrast with the strategy of safeguarding dance by creating repertoires designed to be used throughout a nation. Discussions have taken place on this issue regarding ICH in general and in the French context by Laurent-Sébastien Fournier (2013, 327).

The creation of national folk dance repertoires was, and still is, often used as a tool in nation-building. If the whole population of a country, or at least those doing folk dancing, may meet in a shared dance repertoire specific to that nation, national cohesion may be strengthened through collective practice. One strategy for achieving a national repertoire has been producing manuals and teaching from them. This was the strategy in, for instance, the Nordic countries throughout most of the twentieth century. Another would be to select dances to be taught for annual national compe-

titions, such as in Zimbabwe or Cameroon. In this way, all a nation's ethnic groups have an opportunity to highlight their dances through teaching and performance in the national competition.

The relationships between local and national safeguarding are complex. In some cases, national safeguarding would support and promote local safeguarding as being of particular importance. In other instances, dances undergoing national safeguarding may overshadow and replace the local ones. Nonetheless, their relations are complex and different from country to country and between different cases in the same country. In some cases, a dance went out of use in its community of origin and has been retained only as part of a national repertoire. In other cases, a dance has remained only in its community of origin, and, in the last instance, a dance may be used in both contexts. Additionally, new dances or dance genres have been created, inspired by an often blurred or idealised past to help nation-building. Examples are the Norwegian song dance (Semb 1985), the Israeli folk dance (Kadman 1952; Gibert 2007) and the Catalanian Sardanas (Perez 1994).

Intervention versus Facilitation

The core idea behind the ICH Convention is to assist practitioners in continuing a practice that is important to them. Since it is an agreement between state parties, the states take the ultimate responsibility, first of all, to fund the Convention and the actions proposed. For most of the other tasks, the states call upon experts, NGOs and other stakeholders engaged in ICH. The practitioners are seen as recipients of help rather than as active agents in the work proposed by the Convention. This may be a logical consequence of the perspective from which the Convention's agency is formulated: being an international agreement between states about their duties. Nonetheless, it seems paradoxical that while it is the practitioners' continued actions that are required, they are hardly mentioned as independent agents in the Convention text. We would propose that the distinction between intervention and facilitation might increase our understanding of the importance of local communities' roles in safeguarding and give them greater focus in the process.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the most basic meaning of the verb "to facilitate" is to make something easier, whereas "to intervene"

is to take part in something so as to prevent or alter a result or a course of events. They are not a usual pair of oppositions, but we believe that they can be useful in the analysis of the cluster of Actions. Which of the Actions proposed belong to the one or to the other? Neither of these terms, however, can be found in the Aide-Mémoire about safeguarding measures.

Safeguarding plans very often stress the writing of books and production of films to be used in formal education. The aim may be to relocate an item from a stationary existence in a small community into a regional or national school system, to bring in experts to teach the practice or to establish organisations to support the item on a national level. These are heavy interventions, often fully in the hands of external experts, but perhaps, particularly in the short run, efficient to raise awareness and popularity of an element.

A facilitation approach, by contrast, might be when experts support and encourage the local community to maintain occasions for practice, negotiating with schools to let the children of a heritage community have time off to participate in such a practice rather than bringing it into the schools and the hands of teachers or external experts. Local authorities could find ways of subsidising events, for example, with free, suitable venues, and support for food and refreshments. They could write and talk laudably about the practice and the practitioner. In this way, external people, organisations and institutions could avoid interfering in the practice, yet still provide support to the practitioners and their activities. Such facilitation may not bring quick and easily noticeable results, but it might be more sustainable in the long run rather than heavy external intervention.

A practice primarily depends upon the skill and knowledge of its bearers. The intangible cannot be kept for posterity in the same way as tangible heritage elements. Objects can be cared for and kept in museums so as not to deteriorate. Intangible elements can only be preserved thus when they have been converted into tangible documentation, be it written descriptions, notations or recordings. This is very different from keeping a practice ongoing, and stressing the latter strategy is the most radical reorientation that the ICH Convention brought to the management of heritage.

Examples

In the following, we describe some of our own experiences with heritage and safeguarding. These demonstrate how the concepts discussed in the chapter may play out in concrete cases. Underpinning Egil's examples is the fact that popular culture among the rural population was a resource to safeguard and it provided a basis for the huge movement of the folk dance revival. The movement was typically carried by voluntary amateur experts not only in his home country of Norway, but in most other European nations. The movements were highly diverse in political affiliation, in the ways in which they handled the relationship between the participatory and the presentational, and in how the traditional, rural material was dealt with in the name of safeguarding. Georgiana's examples stem from her time abroad in Nigeria, during which time traditional heritage was still abundant, although also inscribed in the nation-building processes. We then briefly describe how we met, related to and engaged with the idea of safeguarding.

The European Folk Dance Revival Movement and Sauda, Norway

Egil grew up immediately after World War II⁴ in the rural parts of the community, Sauda, which had been heavily industrialised some twenty years earlier. A liberal youth club affiliated with a national organisation working for nation-building and the "emancipation"⁵ of rural youth was established there in 1909. It gave room for the revival of folk dancing, which was well established in 1958 when Egil enrolled. The club promoted a national dance repertoire used at the club's parties and performed on Norway's Constitution Day on the 17th of May and for tourists at the local hotel in the summer. The folk dance instructor, who came from another part of Norway, had, typically for many such instructors, no knowledge of traditional dancing in the actual community in which he worked. He taught dances from the national folk dance manual. Egil wrote about the youth club's history in his special assignment at the end of high school (Bakka and Eiesland 1964).

⁴ World War II, for most European nations, began in 1939 and ended in 1945. For Norway, however, the beginning was in 1940.

⁵ The term emancipation here refers to rural youth becoming educated and demanding the same rights for their culture as those granted to the country's élites.

While interviewing elderly members, he found traces of a forgotten local traditional dance and started questioning the relationship between national and local dance repertoires. This caused him to start documenting traditional local dances that were not part of the national repertoire due to their complexity and variability.

The Norwegian national repertoire was established mainly through the efforts of Klara Semb, a woman from the capital city. She travelled the countryside to teach the song dance to liberal youth clubs and, at the same time, collected suitable traditional dances (Sælid 1964). The song dance was a partly invented tradition, based on steps and principles from the chain dance in the Faroese Islands but adapted to Norwegian songs and dancing. It was the ideological wish to reconnect to Norway's glorious medieval past and erase the influences of four hundred years of Danish rule that made the song dance so important. Another kind of dance, mainly of contradance type, was collected in the countryside. They had to be simple and easy to teach rather than representative of local traditional dancing to fit in the clubs. This was the purpose of Semb's manual, first published in 1922 (Semb 1922). In this manner, Norway had a folk dance revival movement dominated by a national repertoire and youth clubs. In addition, there was a smaller branch established by traditional folk musicians to promote the complex and locally diverse music. Dance was included here, and the work mostly happened through competitions (Mæland 1973, Ranheim 1998). Norway has one item on the Representative list where dance is at the core – Practice of Traditional Music and Dance in Setesdal (UNESCO 2019). Setesdal is a small valley in Southern Norway, a stronghold of traditional expressions, and the nomination is clearly an example of stationary local safeguarding, very different from folk dancing in Sauda.⁶

The Christmas Tree Party

When Egil was a child, his mother would take him and his brother to Christmas Tree Parties during the festive period, which lasted from the first to the thirteenth or even the twentieth day of Christmas. What follows is a description of the conventional Norwegian party.

⁶ Egil has described the difference in attitudes of heirs and users, a distinction which has not, however, been discussed above (Bakka 1994).



Figure 2. A Christmas tree party for employees and their families at the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance, Trondheim, 1994. Photo: Sff.

Christmas parties are held during Christmas or in the New Year. The third day is in many places a day for traditional Christmas tree parties, a custom which became widespread around the beginning of the twentieth century. In the early days, the teachers were often in charge in collaboration with the villagers and the schoolhouses were frequently used as a venue.

Common features of a traditional Christmas tree party are the serving of coffee and soft drinks, Christmas biscuits and pastries, further games or competitions, walking around the Christmas tree and singing Christmas carols, and a visit from *nissen* (a local version of Santa Claus), who distributes goodie bags to the children.

When Egil settled down in Trondheim and had children, the family would go to Christmas Tree parties arranged by the club for the local rural youth, and which were held by and for members with children or grandchildren. Sometimes, the family went to a party arranged by the university for staff members. The Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance also arranged a party one year when many staff members had children of suitable age, and for a few years, when many friends had grandchildren of suitable age, he arranged a private party. Most of these parties gave pos-

itive experiences for children as well as for grown-ups, attracting some thirty to eighty participants. The parties would be held in rooms which could easily accommodate seating with tables along the wall and sufficient space for a Christmas tree and concentric circles, allowing most of those present to participate.

Egil's family also attended a few Christmas tree parties arranged by the suburban school in Trondheim, Tonstad Skole, where his children went in 1980. The school had some four hundred and fifty to five hundred pupils, but those parties did not work well primarily because too many people turned up compared to the size of hall available. There were all too few seats and tables, so the people needed to stand. There was little space for the circles around the Christmas tree, and few parents participated in the singing and walking around the tree. Instead, they remained standing around the room talking to each other, creating a noise that totally overwhelmed the singing of the children and teachers. The feeling of togetherness was lost; the parents hardly knew each other and did not feel comfortable participating. This example shows the vulnerability of informal customs where in this case, numbers of participants, space and social cohesion were critical factors. It seems that facilitating the work to keep these parties running would only require simple measures of supporting and promoting them as important.

Facilitating the Safeguarding of Nigerian Edo Ritual in the 1980s⁷

In January 1980, Georgiana arrived in Benin City, Nigeria, to take up a position as researcher-lecturer in the Department of Creative Arts at the University of Benin in order to establish a dance section. This was three months after the return to short-lived civilian rule and democracy after a military regime lasting thirteen years. More importantly, for this example, it was nineteen months after Akenzua II, Oba of Benin, the Edo monarch, had died and ten months after his eldest son Oba Erediauwa had been enthroned after an elaborate series of succession rites (Nevadomsky 1983/1984; 1993). His father had been a moderniser encouraging his people to obtain Western education, changing the traditional costumes of chiefs to

⁷ In the following sections on Georgiana's experiences in Nigeria diacritics have not been used in Edo, Yoruba or other African language words.



Figure 3. Chiefs dancing at Igue Festival, Benin City, 1980s. Photo: © Georgiana Gore.

make them more dignified and so on. Oba Erediauwa, his name translated as “I have come to settle my people” or more loosely as “he who has come to put things in order” was what one might call a cultural conservationist. He not only upheld but consciously revitalised the palace ritual traditions amongst which the grand festival held over the Christmas period, Igue. So, it was in December 1980 that Georgiana first witnessed, Emobo, one of the seven public ritual events comprising Igue.

The main aim of Emobo is to ward off the remaining evil spirits from the land after the central rite of Igu’Oba while also commemorating the defeat of a neighbouring rival by a former king. This is the only ritual during Igue when the Oba leaves the palace grounds to enact the requisite propitiatory activities in front of a tree shrine by the main palace entrance. To this end, accompanied by his chief priest the Isekhure, he performed, to the rhythms of the Ogbelaka royal drummers, a “spiritual” dance while beating an ivory gong. This first experience of Igue was to lead to progressively more intense fieldwork during which Georgiana documented the other six events over the following nine years until December 1989 (Wierre-Gore 1998) prior to her departure in January 1990. During her stay in Benin City, she was informed through hearsay that discussions were held each year

not only to determine the exact date of Igue and its rituals following the lunar calendar, but also to determine the order of events – Emobo, for example, was not always performed at the same point in the ritual cycle – and other aspects of festival. Moreover, rehearsals were also held, the details of which were not revealed.

Georgiana returned, in 2013, to tracking Igue online both during Oba Erediauwa's time and under the reign of the new monarch, his son, Oba Ewuare II, as well as in the Irish diaspora where it had taken root since at least 2008. She only discovered in 2024 that no non-Edo is permitted to be in the presence of the Oba during Igue and, therefore, to assist in any capacity in the festival. But more importantly, since Erediauwa's demise and no doubt that of many of the chiefs performing at Igue during her stay, Igue appears to have changed, becoming a more popular festival and perhaps losing some of the traditional details, though it may only be that they are no longer shown online to a heterogeneous non-native public. Safeguarding of Edo culture and values certainly was and, according to online reference still is, at the heart of Igue's annual festival. While the term safeguarding was not explicitly used, Oba Erediauwa, his chiefs and the other participants by "doing Igue" annually were engaging in a process of facilitation thus ensuring the festival's sustainability. For the Oba and his close associates this was indeed part of palace policy supported by Benin's Traditional Council. For others, it was part of customary practice related to Edo identity. Revitalisation of some aspects of Igue, already performed by his father, was related to the highly formal monarchical and presentational aspects of the festival, requiring attention to detail, although it was also a popular participatory event for many.

Dance Teaching in Nigeria as Interventionist Safeguarding

During the ten years mentioned above during which Georgiana established a dance section in the University of Benin, she contributed to developing an undergraduate curriculum in Theatre Arts by designing the dance courses therein. These courses included practical classes in dance and choreography as well as those more theoretical such as Dance and Society. The final year Dissertation was produced by all students whether they were majoring in Theatre Arts, Music, Film or Dance. Practical classes were taken by all students in their first years of the programme and they had to participate in

the annual departmental performance given publicly at the end of the year. This could be a dance performance or theatre including dance and music.

When she arrived, the head of Theatre Arts, who had established what later became a department, was a North American. The general curriculum as with others in the country was based on Euro-American ideas so there was, for example, a first-year course taken by all in the History of Theatre, which needless to say was Western theatre. Plays studied were nonetheless those of the best Nigerians including the elder Hubert Ogunde, the 1986 Nobel prize winner Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and the younger Femi Osofisan, who for two years was the head of department, as well as other Africans such as the Kenyan Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and South Africa's Athol Fugard. In practical dance classes, Georgiana opted to train students in two orientations. Although she had no experience in her native English folk dancing being an enlightened amateur post-modern choreographer with a training in physical theatre and what today qualify as somatic techniques, the focus of her dance classes with all first or second year students was on traditional Nigerian dancing. She identified the most skilled representative of a specific tradition, mostly Southern Nigerian, who became the "teacher" under Georgiana's attentive guidance. On the other hand, in the final year dance/choreography classes for those specialising in the subject, she used the eclectic array of techniques learnt over years but especially Don Oscar Becque's work⁸ adding much improvisation. Working without music and doing floorwork were totally anathema but she persevered at least in the first years. For their solo or group practical assignments, students chose either to present a traditional dance or a choreography based on popular dance, mostly break dancing seen on television or video.

From the outset in her own choreographic ventures over the ten years, Georgiana derived inspiration from her reflections on and experiences in Benin City in which tradition and modernity intersected. She thus combined traditional dancing with the more contemporary, sometimes delving into local myths and cosmology. Safeguarding or rather preservation was certainly present in her approach through the emphasis on transmitting traditional dancing. However, it is evident that the context and methods

⁸ Georgiana studied in the USA with Don Oscar Becque, a pioneer in the dance world who had for a year been Director of the Federal Dance Theater Project. He had developed what he called in the 1970s "the work" designed to be a movement training for all dance techniques. It was based on his work with Mabel Elsworth Todd of *The Thinking Body* (1972) fame and drew upon Feldenkrais, Alexander and Release (Ideokinesis) techniques as well as Laban's movement ideas. See Gore 2014.

by which this was done were interventionist, even if through the work on dissertations in which students undertook fieldwork in a location and on a dance of their choice usually related to their own heritage, some degree of facilitation was present.

Conclusion: the Choreomundus Venture

Rather than conclude by summarising the contents of this chapter, we wish to examine briefly how the international master's programme which we co-founded with other colleagues, has contributed to some of the actions of safeguarding that we have addressed as we propose that it combines aspects of interventionism and facilitation in a unique way.



Figure 4.
*Choreomundus students
enjoy a bal breton, Maison
des Cultures du Monde,
Vitré, October 2023.*
Photo: © Egil Bakka.

Georgiana and Egil met during the 1990s in the symposia of the International Council for Traditional Music and Dance Study Group on Ethnochoreology with many other colleagues from ethnochoreology and the anthropology of dance. A series of bi-annual seminars for young and then new ethnochoreologists starting in Hungary, continuing in Britain and France, then came to Norway and remained there for nearly ten years as a series of Erasmus Intensive Programmes, funded by the European Commission. At most they brought together some twenty teachers and sixty master's and PhD students from Europe. Four teachers from these courses, their host, Egil Bakka, Norway, Georgiana Gore, France, Andrée Grau, UK, and László Felföldi, Hungary, with their universities, then formed a consortium and managed to obtain in 2011 co-funding for the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master (EMJM) programme Choreomundus – International Master in Dance Knowledge, Practice and Heritage (Gore, Grau and Koutsouba, 2016: 184–188).⁹ The programme has education of dance scholars with specific competence in ICH as one of its main pillars. After having admitted thirteen cohorts with some two hundred students from eighty countries, there would be good reason to reflect on how the programme has situated itself in relation to work with safeguarding but it would be beyond the scope of this chapter.

We will, however, briefly comment on how the work within Choreomundus relates to the terminology we have proposed. Some students have become experts in specialist institutions working to safeguard ICH or even specialist institutions for dance heritage. Others engage in facilitating dance and other forms of ICH in communities within their home countries or in diasporic communities abroad – some approaches being more interventionist depending on the local context. During the programme, we hope that, by discussing and analysing the terms of the Convention in general, seen more particularly from a dance perspective, this may secure knowledgeable and reflective experts. Even if the programme has and had teachers who conducted research on most continents of the world, the teaching is necessarily based on European perspectives. This may be regarded as a case of intervention, whereas enabling students to learn about theories and perspectives originating in other parts of the world might be viewed as facilitation. Students are, nonetheless, encouraged to analyse and write about dances from any part of the world more especially in the Disserta-

⁹ See choreomundus.org

tion fieldwork and modules. We consider this feature of the programme to be an element of facilitation. Viewed from the perspective of decolonisation, an aim would be to enable all parts of the world to develop theory and perspectives in relation to their own countries and regions. A vital question then is if and how European-based education for students from other parts of the world can achieve a balance between, on the one hand, teaching foreign students about European perspectives and, on the other, facilitating the possibility for students to access and engage with theory and perspectives from elsewhere, and more particularly from the countries and regions where they were raised.

We hope that through this investigation of the terminology employed in the text of the 2003 Convention and the discussion and examples related to our proposed alternative pairings of terms - especially that of intervention and facilitation - we may spark debate on how best the safeguarding of dance as ICH may be best characterised and effected.

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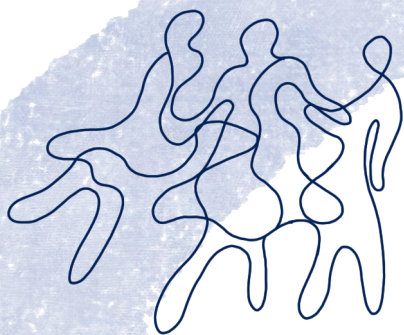
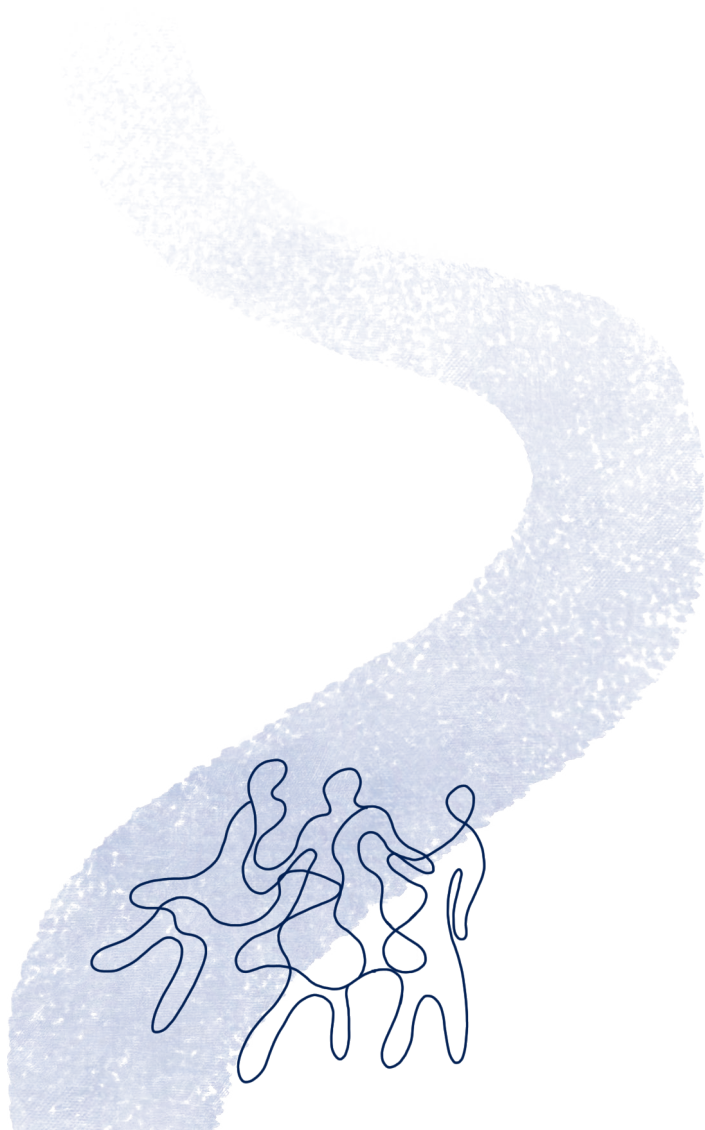
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Legislation, Education and Ethnography: Dance Academics as Catalysts of Sustainable Heritage Practices in Greece

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This study examines the impact of the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Greece's approach to safeguarding cultural heritage, focusing on traditional dance. By analysing legislative frameworks and ethnographic data, the authors explore the transition of dance from local communal dance to national heritage. The authors highlight the pivotal role of academics and university-educated dance teachers, as core heritage community that promotes sustainable heritage practices for dance and dancing safeguarding.

Keywords: Greek traditional dance, 2003 UNESCO Convention, dance teachers, dance academics, heritage management, dance heritage community

* Editors' note: authors' preferred version of abstract and chapter.

Introduction

Anchored within the transformative framework of the 2003 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (hereafter UNESCO) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003), this chapter examines Greek traditional dance at the intersections of legislative frameworks, ethnographic research and educational strategies. It situates dance as both a living cultural practice and a contested site of identity negotiation, considering its journey from local communal expression to a symbol of national heritage.

The aims of this investigation are twofold: to discuss the role of university-educated dance teachers as cultural intermediaries and pivotal agents within this heritage ecosystem, and to explore the broader implications of institutional structures in shaping sustainable cultural policies.

Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in Greece: From Material to Embodied Practices

The safeguarding of cultural heritage has been central to Greece's cultural strategy since the struggle for national independence (1821) and the state's formation. Law 10/1834, a pioneering legislative act in Europe, established the framework for protecting antiquities as collective patrimony. This law underscored the connection between Greece's diachronic cultural identity and the modern nation-state, institutionalising cultural heritage as a national priority. Over time, the initial material-focused orientation expanded, reflecting societal and academic transformations, to embrace intangible elements such as oral traditions and dance (Margari 2008, 2016a–b).

The foundation of the Ministry of Culture in 1971 marked the formal centralisation of cultural governance, though earlier legislation, including Laws 2646/1899, 5351/1932, and 3028/2002, signalled evolving approaches to heritage management. Law 3028/2002, in particular, redefined cultural heritage to encompass intangible elements (myths, customs, oral traditions, music, and skills), aligning national policies with global paradigms (Margari 2016a–b). This legislative evolution was informed by academic advancements, elevating traditional and folk culture within cultural strategy frameworks (Margari 2008).

International developments, such as the 2003 UNESCO Convention, further catalysed Greece's shift towards anthropocentric cultural policies (Margari 2008). The country's albeit limited participation in earlier global initiatives underscored its commitment to safeguarding intangible cultural expressions. This trajectory highlights the state's transition from preserving static artifacts to celebrating living traditions, synthesising historical imperatives and contemporary cultural narratives (Margari 2024, forthcoming).

In this evolving context, Greece ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention in 2006, fundamentally reshaping the perception and management of cultural expressions. The Convention prompted a reevaluation of national policy frameworks, emphasising the safeguarding of intangible elements (Margari 2016a–b). Actions to align with its provisions included revising operational frameworks, creating a National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage, and initiating nominations for UNESCO's international lists, such as the Representative List and the Urgent Safeguarding List as well as for the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices¹ (Margari 2008, 2024, forthcoming).

A decade after ratifying the 2003 UNESCO Convention, Greece achieved a significant milestone in 2016 with the inscription of a performative customary ritual, the Pontic “Momoeria” of the Twelve Days of Christmas (UNESCO 2016), on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.² This marked the first music and dance event to be recognised as universal cultural heritage, demonstrating a transformative shift in Greece's approach to safeguarding and promoting intangible traditions (Margari 2021, 2024).

At the same time though, the competitive environment triggered by the 2003 UNESCO Convention's implementation, introduced tensions. Communities often vie for the “exclusive nomination” of their cultural expressions, leading to selective national policies that marginalise certain groups or practices. This competitive dynamic underscored the challenges of balancing inclusivity and identity preservation in cultural heritage governance (Margari 2008). Thus, within this complex landscape, the role of experts – folklorists, anthropologists, and administrative scientists – has proved

¹ See: UNESCO 2003: 7 and Law 3521/2006, “Ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, *Government Gazette* 275/A, 22 December 2006: 3037–3043.

² For detailed information on the nomination processes and their impact on local heritage communities, see: Margari 2016b, 240–250; 2021, 599–646.

critical (Margari 2016a–b) primarily because these specialists assist communities in navigating through all the intricate bureaucratic processes, while advocating for recognition of their cultural practices as “intangible heritage of Hellenism” (Margari 2024).

Dance traditions, in particular, have emerged as critical sites of negotiation between heritage communities and public administration (see, for example, Koutsouba 2015; Margari 2008, 2016b). Dance instructors play a dual role for they actively transmit experiential dance knowledge as well as contribute to the nomination, management, and promotion of these local dance practices. (Margari 2021, 2024). Analysis of registrations in the Greek National Inventory and in UNESCO’s International Lists revealed and confirmed the profound influence of dance instructors on the nomination processes and subsequent management of intangible heritage elements. Ethnographic data also revealed these instructors to be a fundamental link in the interaction between communities, groups, and individuals and executive authorities (Margari 2021, forthcoming). Their contributions extend beyond the procedural, embedding themselves deeply in the sociocultural fabric that underpins heritage preservation. By navigating the complexities of community practices and institutional frameworks, they construct intricate social regulatory networks. These networks serve as conduits for cultural policy formulation, strategic planning, and the orchestration of executive actions, demonstrating the instructors’ unparalleled capacity to integrate localised cultural practices into broader heritage discourses (Margari 2024).

In order to advance this line of inquiry, our analysis incorporated both theoretical and methodological considerations aligned with the interdisciplinary nature of heritage studies. Specifically, we drew upon ethnographic methods grounded in long-term participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of dance transmission within both local and supra-local contexts. This approach allowed us to capture the lived experiences of instructors and participants alike while situating these experiences within the broader institutional and policy frameworks that shape intangible cultural heritage. Moreover, the study was informed by comparative perspectives drawn from established scholarship on heritage communities and intangible cultural heritage management (Council of Europe 2005; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015; Kuutma 2019). By combining these theoretical and empirical strands, we sought to bridge the gap between the everyday realities of dance transmission and the formal mechanisms of safeguarding established by

UNESCO and national authorities. Such an integrative approach is crucial for understanding how dance teachers operate simultaneously as cultural practitioners, mediators, and policy actors within Greece's evolving heritage ecosystem. In our discussion that follows, the notion of heritage community as defined in the Faro Convention of 2005 is of especial relevance. According to this convention, issued in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, a heritage community is formed of "people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations". Furthermore, we also draw on and adapt the concept of "communities of practice" coined by the educational and social theorists Etienne Wenger-Trayner, Beverly Wenger-Trayner, Phil Reid, and Claude Bruderlein (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015, 2023; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) to emphasise the experiential and social aspects of learning between a group of people in a shared domain over time – here, of course, that domain is Greek traditional dancing. We seek to highlight the significance of communities of practice in shaping the conditions under which dance is understood and approached as intangible cultural heritage in Greece, while also revealing the pivotal role of dance teachers in this process. We employ the Communities of Practice (CoP) framework to shed light on its vital contribution to the safeguarding and intergenerational transmission of intangible heritage. In the context of Greek traditional dance, the value of CoPs extends far beyond technical refinement or skill enhancement; they provide the enduring social structure, shared domain, and collective identity that enable the practice to thrive and remain meaningful. Given the central role of dance teachers, within these communities of practice, the inclusion of this concept in our analysis is not only relevant, but also essential.

Our research intention was to delve into the challenges that today's dance instructors face when acting as supporters of heritage communities, as allies of communities of practice and as facilitators between social partners (public administration and others). We selected to focus on the only certified teachers of Greek traditional dance who, according to current legislation, possess both pedagogical competence and scientific training, namely the graduates of the Departments of Physical Education and Sport Science (Margari 2021, forthcoming). Consequently, we focused on this group of dance teachers to investigate whether and to what extent the existing institutional structures can meet emerging needs through provi-

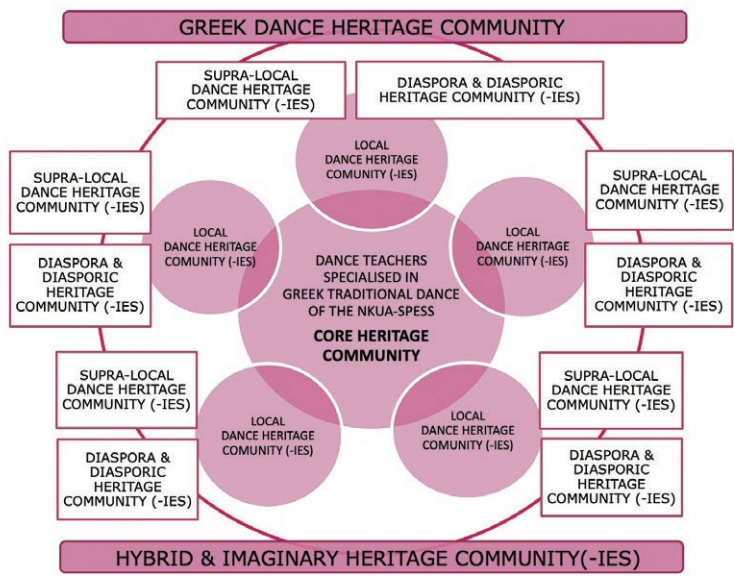


Figure 1. Dance heritage communities as approached in the framework of the Greek Dance-ICH project case study, exploring the pivotal role of dance teachers and academics.

sion of the necessary information and skills. In conducting research for the *Dance-ICH* project, we selected as our starting point the oldest research and academic institutions in Greece to be focused on ethnographic, educational and academic research and on archiving Greek traditional dance collections: specifically, the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (hereafter NKUA)-School/Department of Physical Education and Sport Science (hereafter S/DPESS). The dance teachers trained in the latter institution have specialised in Greek traditional dance and, we argue here, forge an important vibrant heritage entity connecting with and linking to many other dance practitioner and heritage communities in Greece. Indeed, we consider this group to constitute a “core heritage community” that interweaves with numerous others, in local, supra-local, diaspora/ic, hybrid as well as imaginary/imagined social contexts/environments.

While teaching, in all the aforementioned contexts/environments, its members support intergenerational dialogue, safeguarding and transmission of Greek traditional dance as living heritage across diverse contexts.

Figure 1 (previous page) provides a visual representation of the multi-layered relationships among the various social formations/communities that are interconnected through the activities of our core heritage community. This diagram helps clarify the broader ecosystem within which the core heritage community operates and the diverse types of engagement it maintains.

Greek Traditional Dance as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Throughout the country, Greek traditional dance (Koutsouba 2020, 293–294) penetrates many diverse sectors be they social, economic, touristic, cultural, artistic, political, educational, or academic. Traditional dancing continues to be an integral, vivid part of life in Greece both in rural and in urban settings, manifest in various forms across participatory and presentational contexts; it contributes to economy through, for instance, innumerable dance clubs and associations; it functions as a touristic attraction and a form of entertainment; it is present in dance artistic creation as a dance genre *per se* and in communication with other Greek dance genres, as well as in political arenas serving either the respective national government or individual political parties; it is institutionalised in formal, non-formal and informal education; it has been recognised as a university subject since 1982, subsequently attracting research interest; and last but not least, it is institutionalised as a form of intangible cultural heritage (hereafter as ICH) following implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006. Thus, Greek traditional dance has many layers associated with people's dancing in various aspects of their lives.

Given our focus on ethnography, knowledge and academics, it is essential here to mention that, since 1909, in the sector of formal education (primary, secondary and tertiary), Greek traditional dance has been – and still is – taught as part of physical education. Moreover, for more than forty years now, Greek traditional dance has been recognised as a university subject in all Schools and Departments of Physical Education and Sport Science and its development as an autonomous subject at this level has been closely tied to the development of physical education as a discrete university discipline (Koutsouba 2021b, 2023).

The elevation of Greek traditional dance to the status of a university subject in 1982 signals the academic study of (Greek traditional) dance

through full programmes offered in the S/DPESS. This constitution is associated with:

1. the adoption of dance and Greek traditional dance as a subject at the university;
2. the establishment of Greek traditional dance as a Major at the university;
3. the development of new undergraduate courses (e.g. dance ethnography, ethnochoreology, dance history, dance notation, dance morphology and many others);
4. the first university positions on (Greek traditional) dance in Greece;³
5. the first PhDs in Greece on Greek traditional dance,⁴ the establishment of the first master⁵ and PhD programmes (2004) as well as postdoctoral research (2019) including dance in Greece;
6. extensive research, archives, publications, books and translation of books on dance and Greek traditional dance;⁶
7. collaboration with European research and academic projects such as the *Dance-ICH* project and Choreomundus-Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Dance and Movement as Practical Knowledge and Heritage (acronym Choreomundus).

Importantly, at the same time, Greek traditional dance maintained its performative nature, since dance practice comprises a key part of the curriculum as well as an ongoing artistic presentation. Last but not least, although there are Departments of Performing Arts and Fine Arts in Greece, which embrace experiential and procedural knowledge in their study,

³ Other newly emerging attempts either do not exist anymore or focus on other aspects of dance and/or do not offer a full programme in dance (see more in Koutsouba 2021b). Elias Demas elected Lecturer in 1992, Vasiliki Tyrovola as Special Teaching Staff in 1990 and Lecturer in 1998, and Magda Zografou as a Lecturer in 1991.

⁴ See, for example, Demas (1989); Zografou (1989); Tyrovola (1994). Two further PhDs were completed abroad: Loutzaki (1989) and Koutsouba (1997).

⁵ The master programme named initially “Laographia – Anthropology of Dance” and renamed to “Dance Studies” from 2015–2016 onwards. For the use of the term Laographia in English see Koutsouba 1997, 18–22.

⁶ The first five were published in the late 1980s–early 1990s by Athens University Press. These are: *Ethnochoreology* (Zografou and Tyrovola 1987), *Greek Dance* (Tyrovola 1988), *Theoretical Aspects of Greek Traditional Dance* (Zografou 1988), *Introduction to Greek Folk Dance-Greek Folk Dance Place* (Zografou 1991) and *Academic Notes for Dance Ethnography* (Zografou 1992). For the rest see Koutsouba 1997, 2010.

there is no similar comparable discrete Department of Dance in the country (see Koutsouba 2021b).

Dance and Greek traditional dance are now part of the curriculum in all four Schools and five Departments of Physical Education and Sport Science in universities all over Greece.⁷ The focus of this chapter, however, is on the S/DPESS of NKUA because, in terms of dance genres and courses taught together, as well as the number of academic staff, it has the longest and widest presence.

In this institution, dance and particularly Greek traditional dance hold an important position at both under- and postgraduate levels. The undergraduate programme includes courses on creative dance, improvisation, dances of the world, dance therapy and Greek traditional dance, as well as two majors, i.e. “Choreology: Greek Traditional Dance” and “Orchestiki”. The emphasis, however, is and has been on Greek traditional dance. During undergraduate studies one compulsory and one elective course are offered for all students, as well as a major for those wishing to specialise. As part of pursuing Dance as a major, undergraduates must complete a thesis, most of which (some 500 in 2025) constitute ethnographies on Greek traditional dance (Outsi-Demetriadi et al. 2015).

Since 2004, “Dance Studies” (previously known as “Laographia-Anthropology of Dance”) has constituted a pathway in the two-year research-oriented master’s programme “Physical Education and Sport Science”. This has resulted in many dance ethnographies on Greek traditional dance. In addition, dance can be studied during the three-year doctoral programme during which, from 2014 (when the first master students completed the programme) to the present day, fifteen PhD theses, mainly on dance ethnography of Greek traditional dance, have been completed. A two-year programme of postdoctoral research is also offered during which, since 2019, two of the three researchers have also conducted dance ethnographies of Greek traditional dance. Finally, the seven-months continuous professional development (CPD) and lifelong learning (LLL) course on Greek traditional dance, on offer from 2019, has trained around eighty Physical Education trainers within a span of three years.

There are at least two reasons to explain why the majority of student research, both undergraduate and postgraduate, produced at this univer-

⁷ These are at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the Democritus University of Thrace, and the University of Thessaly.

sity is centred on ethnographic studies of Greek traditional dance. First, the educational training of the original members of academic staff was orientated towards the human and social sciences, embracing, in particular, the methodology of ethnography. And second, most of the students come from the periphery of the country, the majority of these bringing their own dance knowledge of Greek traditional dance. Even if this is not the case with every student, it is most unlikely that they lack any experience of Greek traditional dance as a living expression (see for instance Koutsouba 2020, 2021a). Consequently, the students often opt to research their own communities/geographical areas where there has been little dance research undertaken.

As a result, a large amount of ethnographic data on Greek traditional dance has been gathered over the years, particularly after the establishment of the master's and PhD programmes, a situation which is still ongoing. These ethnographies, as well as contact with students from all over Greece, have resulted in a deeper and substantive knowledge of Greek traditional dance.

This cultural knowledge has then been transferred to the dance class, first of all within the university environment. It is also diffused via the graduates in schools, local government bodies, dance clubs and associations, dance and theatre schools, cultural centres, and other professional and educational contexts in Greece and abroad. Furthermore, many graduates return to their communities/geographical areas where they empower and/or even revive dance and dancing. This traditional dance knowledge is also disseminated through the NKUA's Centre of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning. Furthermore, it is circulated in the Dancing Group of Greek Traditional Dance to all the students of the S/DPESS of NKUA, as this is a dancing group open to all the students and graduates of the S/DPESS of NKUA. The Group gives performances in cultural events and on other occasions of an academic nature (S/DPESS, NKUA, other Universities) as well as in broader contexts (e.g. municipalities, peripheries and others).

In conclusion, the S/DPESS of NKUA – and its predecessors – constitutes an academic institution that for decades has placed a special and strong emphasis on Greek traditional dance. Its long and deep experience of the study, research, archiving, teaching and presentation of dance related practices as “living traditions” (Torp 1990), has doubtless contributed to the establishment of a robust framework for the identification, collection, conservation, preservation, dissemination and international cooperation

of Greek traditional dance as a living cultural heritage practice. Moreover, its activities have shaped and ameliorated the roles of dance researcher, dance archivist, dance teacher, dance artistic director, choreographer or/and dancer as facilitators of dance heritage communities in many and different ways. A principal outcome through their graduates' strategic influence would appear to have been the promotion of Greek traditional dance as living ICH. But, is this in actual fact the case?

The Academic Specialist of Greek Traditional Dance: A Multi-faceted Role

Our research findings suggest that the NKUA-S/DPESS-trained dance teachers who have specialised in Greek traditional dance may be considered, as both a core heritage community and as a supra-local heritage community. This particular core heritage community is composed of over 2,500 members whose knowledge and expertise, although cultivated in S/DPESS, NKUA in the region of Attica, have been disseminated and sustained across Greece and abroad.

Beginning in 1983/1984 and until the present day, its staff, students and graduates have formed the largest scientifically qualified community in Greece, which has now expanded within the country and abroad. Moreover, this core heritage community mediates between local, supra-local, diaspora, diasporic, and hybrid dance heritage communities as well as in communities of practice. Thus, in the new environment, as formed after the 2003 UNESCO Convention, its members faced new challenges as they were asked to play a decisive role in the sustainability and resilience of traditional dance and dance practices in Greece. More specifically, through multiple roles (dance ethnographers, researchers, archivists, teachers, artistic directors, cultural brokers-managers, etc.), members of this heritage community contribute to the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission as well as to the revitalisation of various aspects of Greek traditional dance. They therefore act as catalysts of dance as living ICH in Greece.

Consequently, our main focus in this academic study, based on qualitative research findings, was to highlight, document and analyse their contemporary and future challenges and needs. In this way, the members of this core heritage community operating also as a supra-local one would

acquire a more effective response to the new demanding environment; an environment that reflects the novel sociocultural context, which appears to be shaped by the practices of the heritagisation of folk culture. In particular, we examined their challenges and needs as revealed when they interact, as a core heritage community, with multiple other heritage communities in local, supra-local, diaspora/ic and hybrid social contexts/environments (see Figure 1).

In the context of the *Dance-ICH* project, we collaborated closely with the members of this core heritage community to plan and implement research projects, actions and practices. These fostered the knowledge, skills and attitudes of this community so as to promote dance as living ICH in the modern environment, be that academic, social-cultural, educational, artistic, economic or political. Within this framework, particular emphasis was placed on applied, multi-sited ethnographic research and its interconnections with the practice of public ethnography. The focus was to deepen our understanding of the synergy between these domains, specifically examining the role of these core heritage community members in sustaining and fostering the resilience of dance and dance practices as living heritage.

The research revealed that the core heritage community members played a catalytic role in the reception and comprehension of dance and dancing as well as their associated practices. Through their teaching and public presentation of dance, they highlighted its dynamic nature and cultural significance. We noted, however, that gaps existed in the management of dance and dance-making as cultural heritage, particularly within the framework of UNESCO's 2003 Convention. This was primarily due to the fact that, while these core heritage community members were invited to act as facilitators and cultural managers in supporting local, supra-local, diaspora, diasporic and hybrid heritage communities with which they engaged, they often lacked the essential skills and resources required to meet the demands of state cultural administration. From this perspective, we initially focused on enhancing the capacities of these core heritage community members through targeted training sessions. Subsequently, we monitored the outcomes, providing comprehensive support across all facets of re-contextualising dance and dance practices as living cultural heritage.

By concentrating on performing dance practices – spanning storytelling, research, archiving, education and performance – and engaging in case studies with specific dance communities that interact with this core heritage community, we observed substantial reinforcement across all di-



Figure 2. 'Participatory dance event' Dance - ICH, Greek Traditional Dance Hall, School of Physical Education and Sport Science of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 9 May 2025. Photo: Maria I. Koutsouba.

mensions. For specific dance communities as well as the core heritage one, which were closely intra- and interrelated, we emphasised the documentation, promotion, and dissemination of ethnographic data, ensuring their integration into contemporary dance environments, whether educational, performative, archival or/and research-based. Awareness-raising initiatives and workshops were conducted, activating social agents and fostering a range of actions aimed at safeguarding and promoting Greek traditional dance and its practices as living heritage for the Greek community at large and as a national intangible heritage element of Hellenism.

Additionally, in this framework emphasis was also laid on illuminating and defining the new roles of dance researcher, dance archivist, dance teacher, dance artistic director, choreographer and dancer, who were called upon to act as facilitators for all kinds of dance practitioner groups and dance heritage communities. As research findings underlined, through these new roles, the members of all the above-mentioned dance heritage communities were enabled to become more involved with their cultural dance heritage. Thus, they were able to cope with dance and dance practices effectively as living ICH of the twenty-first century, connecting present, past and future.



Figure 3. Dance-ICH workshop, Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens. Academy of Athens East Hall, Athens, 15 December 2023. Photo: Zoi N. Margari.

The framework of the *Dance-ICH* project stimulated us to work closely with this core heritage community, implementing new theoretical and laboratory courses (notably, Cultural Heritage: Institutional Environment and Heritage Policies, Cultural Management, Cultural Heritage Tourism and the like) alongside the old courses (such as Ethnochoreology, Dance Notation, Greek Traditional Dance Morphology, Greek Traditional Dance Didactics) but now approached through the lens of cultural heritage management and study. Thus, as suggested by the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (2018) dance as living cultural capital and “as a resource to be safeguarded, enhanced, and promoted by encouraging synergies with contemporary creation” was approached in new terms in the Greek academic environment, focusing on communities and bottom-up approaches to ensure its sustainability and resilience.

Conclusion

As our starting point in this research, we focused on academics and scholars and their role in safeguarding Greek traditional dance. Specifically, we examined dance teachers from the NKUA-S/DPESS who specialise in Greek traditional dance, considering them to be a core heritage community. Our study explored their pivotal role and influence within the cultural landscape of the twenty-first century. Recognising the importance of adopting new participatory approaches to cultural management, we concluded that, with appropriate support, these specialist scholars can serve as activators for the resilience and sustainability of dance heritage.

Through the design and implementation of targeted actions, such as the *Dance-ICH* project, and with people and dance heritage communities at their heart, it appears feasible to stimulate access and engagement, and to promote audience development, focusing on local, diaspora, diasporic, and supra-local heritage communities, elders, young people and children, as well as on marginalised individuals. Above all, this study has underlined the significant and long-term impact of academics, teachers and scholars who contribute their knowledge, experience and expertise. It has, furthermore, identified and addressed the challenges that face this core heritage community in the wake of Greece's adoption of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. Through existing and newly developed strategies, both institutional and individual, the ongoing cultivation of an integrated approach will help to ensure the lasting value and sustainability of the intangible cultural heritage of Greek traditional dance.

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3.

Dancing a Heritage in Horjul: Contemporary Social Dance Practices and Heritage Discourse

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This chapter explores how a local folk dance ensemble in Horjul navigates the challenge of representing its dance heritage on stage, when hindered by a lack of prior research and documentation. Whereas the ensemble focuses on artistic reinterpretations of folk dance, public events like *veselicas* reflect vibrant, socially embedded dance traditions. This duality underscores the evolving interplay between tradition and modernity. The study highlights how past and contemporary ethnochoreological research co-creates dance heritage discourses, emphasising its role in defining and sustaining dance community identity.

Keywords: Slovenia, ethnochoreology, folklore group, traditional dance, social dance, *veselica*

Introduction

“They safeguard the cultural heritage of various other Slovenian regions, as Horjul itself does not have its own authentic dances” (Jurjevanje 1999, 23).¹

This statement was included in the presentation of a folk dance ensemble from Horjul in the programme booklet of one of the biggest and certainly oldest folk dance festivals in Slovenia (cf. Pisk and Kunej 2024), where this folk dance ensemble was one of the participants in 1999. The above opinion, most likely authored by the then artistic leader or a competent member of the folk dance ensemble, reflects the broader public perception of Horjul and similar areas where ethnochoreological and ethnomusicological research has yet to be carried out and published. Since the dances from their locality have not been recorded, researched and discussed in scholarly/dance research, these dances are not ‘authorised’ by the researchers. The dances’ existence and knowledge about them is not publicly available, nor are they published in dance collections. Consequently, they do not serve as a basis for re-interpretations in modernity.

Therefore folk dance ensembles in such places do not represent “their own” folk dances, but rather the dance heritage of other places and regions in Slovenia.

Furthermore, the quote demonstrates that their heritage discourse also employs terminology (e.g. “authentic”) that academic researchers utilise with greater circumspection and restraint. However, a quarter of a century later, at a time when the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU is collaborating with the local community as part of the *Dance-ICH* project, this opinion is also slowly changing with respect to Horjul.²

What prompted the ensemble members to write the above statement? It seems almost impossible for a community in Central Europe, not to be able to draw upon a local dance tradition that they can represent in a folk dance ensemble today. Cultural anthropologists and related scholars consider tradition to be a dynamic process, continually shaped by current social,

¹ “Ohranjajo kulturno dediščino različnih slovenskih pokrajin, saj Horjul nima svojih izvirnih plesov” (Jurjevanje 1999, 23).

² Our project cooperation is limited to the municipality of Horjul, which occupies the upper part of the valley along the Horjulščica watercourse, a small area in central Slovenia. Basic geographical and demographic data of the area are presented later in this text.

political, and cultural contexts, rather than a static relic of the past (Anttonen 2005). This perspective serves as the starting point for the following discussion which explores how and why such an opinion arose and the reasons for its adoption by ensemble members.

How is it that in the present era, in order to avoid the adjectives “folk” and “traditional”, it appears preferable to add the seemingly more neutral term “heritage” next to the word “dance”, and thus to address all dance practices that are engaged with the past as “dance heritage”? It should, however, also be pointed out that heritage can be perceived as a reflexive tradition and as a selective interpretation of the past (Lowenthal 1985). Heritage is thus more intimately connected to present needs and future aspirations than to any immutable past (Lowenthal 1985; Harrison et al. 2020). The process of heritagisation, that is, the transformation of particular pasts into recognised “heritage” inherently involves selection, privileging certain traditions while marginalising or erasing others (Harrison 2013; Macdonald 2013). If this is the case, then Horjul did have and still has a dance tradition, but it was not until the twenty-first century that the local community came to recognise this and initiated a discourse on the heritage of their own dance practices.

The aim of this chapter then is to analyse how a heritage discourse is/ was created and co-created within a local community with the help of researchers both in the past and today. The research in this chapter is based on the specific case of a selected area, Horjul and the surrounding area, focusing on the tradition of dance and related musical practices.

Between Dance Practices and Heritage Discourse

Today, the term “cultural heritage” has become an integral part of the ethnochoreological and even everyday vocabulary of folk dance. Until the 1980s, however, this term was hardly ever used in Slovenia, neither in professional nor everyday vocabulary. As ethnologist Rajko Muršič considers: “For the younger generations this is certainly incomprehensible, while the older generations have actually forgotten how it was once possible to talk about monuments and traditions without using the word heritage” (Muršič 2018, 16).

Heritage is now understood as a process of meaning-making, which occurs in the process of identification, definition and management as well as in the process of display. It is “a subjective political negotiation of identity,

place and memory”, a negotiation of cultural and social values “that help us make sense of the present, our identities and our sense of physical and social space” (Smith 2012, 39). Through the negotiation and designation of heritage, through representation and new life, traditions are thus given new value. According to Regina Bendix, what distinguishes heritage from other forms of engaging with the past is its very “ability to mask the complexity of history and politics” (2000, 18). Folklorists, including ethnochoreologists in the Slovenian research milieu, have applied their knowledge to identify, categorise and make expert judgements on folklore phenomena that have become part of contemporary heritage discourses (e.g. Pisk 2023 in Slovenia; e.g. Hafstein 2018 at the global level), but also to question their future uses.

To date, the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (eRNSD 2024) includes three units that are directly related to dance heritage. All of these dance-related entries have local folk dance ensembles listed as heritage bearers. The entries pertain to the dance traditions of two peripheral areas (the “Sotiš” and “Šamarjanka” units in the north-eastern part of Slovenia and the “Easter dances and games in Metlika” in the southern part of Slovenia), where pioneering Slovenian ethnochoreological research was carried out prior to the Second World War. At that time, the dance was also undergoing folklorisation (for more details, see Kunej 2017). At the formal bureaucratic level in Slovenia, dance heritage is closely interwoven with the formal local folk dance ensembles and less with the informal local dance communities. This may be attributed to the unfortunate translation of “performative arts” into Slovenian as *uprizoritvene umetnosti* (Muršič 2018, 30). In Slovenian, this term is typically associated with staging – that is, the recreation of a dramatic text through theatrical means or the execution of a prearranged public event – rather than with *doing* or *embodied action* in general. In other words, within the Slovenian context, performative arts are more closely linked to re-presentation on the stage than to participation in an event. And on stage, the performance of folk dances remains largely the domain of organised folk dance ensembles.

Many participatory dance practices in local communities, rooted in tradition and perceived as contemporary social dance events, have not (yet) found a place in the national register. This, I hope, gives the reader a new understanding of the introductory quote and raises the question of which (and whose) dances are being performed by the folk dance ensemble in Horjul.

Folklore Activities in Horjul

The municipality of Horjul, with approximately 3,000 inhabitants, is located in central Slovenia, 20 km west of the capital, Ljubljana. The present-day municipality of Horjul, established in 1998, covers 33 square kilometres and is among Slovenia's smallest municipalities in terms of area and population. The municipality comprises nine settlements: Horjul, Koreno, Lesno Brdo, Ljubgojna, Podolnica, Samotorica, Vrzenec, Zaklanec, and Žažar. In Horjul, the largest, there is a primary school with about 330 pupils aged six to fifteen and a dislocated unit of the Vrhnika Music School with about thirty-five pupils of the same age. In addition to other societies and associations (e.g. volunteer fire departments, senior citizens' society, societies related to sports and other leisure activities), the municipality of Horjul has a single cultural-artistic society *Prosvetno društvo Horjul* (the Horjul Educational Society) with various sections (e.g. theatre, choir, folk dance ensemble, majorette and twirling group). For the purposes of this paper, my focus will be on the folk dance ensemble *Folklorna skupina Klas*. Although *folklorna skupina* literally translates to "folklore group", I prefer the term folk dance ensemble in English, as it better conveys the idea of a troupe that re-creates folk dances and artistically stages them, focusing on stylised performance rather than on the direct presentation of local dance tradition.

The activities of the ensemble are part of what is known as folklore activities (*folklorna dejavnost*). This is a term that today in Slovenia is strongly associated with the pursuits of various societies in which folk dance ensembles operate independently or as one of the sections. Folklore activities are directed by a state institution, the Republic of Slovenia Public Fund for Cultural Activities (Javni sklad Republike Slovenije za kulturne dejavnosti, hereinafter JSKD), which implements cultural policy in this field. The JSKD is an organised cultural, educational, advisory and mediation institution for various amateur cultural and artistic activities. Through its work, the JSKD aims to develop and strengthen the main areas of amateur cultural artistic creation, which, in addition to other activities, such as choral music, instrumental music, visual arts, literature and theatre, also includes so-called folklore activities. According to JSKD's website, folklore activities are "a field of amateur activity related to interpreting and recreating dance, music and other traditions" (JSKD n.d.b). In reality, folklore activities are pursuits associated with folk dance ensembles in Slovenia that "recreate dance, singing, music and other spiritual heritage, while through

costumes and instruments they also engage with the sphere of material culture” (JSKD n.d.a). Recently, however, folklore activities have been also associated with purely musical groups that recreate music heritage (vocal and instrumental). Folklore activities are characterised by amateurism, leisure and volunteering, and yet it is noticeable that there is a clear drive to produce artistic products that are as good as possible; when it comes to folk dance ensembles, the product is a stage performance, as part of which they primarily recreate dance heritage.³

The beginnings of folklore activities in the Horjul Valley date back to 1962 (Kogovšek 2008), when a folk dance ensemble was founded at a local primary school in Horjul. With occasional short interruptions and various adaptations required by the primary school curriculum, the children’s folk dance ensemble at Horjul Primary School has been in existence ever since. At present, the ensemble operates as part of a compulsory elective called “Folk Dance”, which can be chosen by pupils in the last three years of primary school, that is by pupils aged twelve to fifteen.

It was on the initiative of the folk dance ensemble at the primary school that an adult ensemble was founded in the autumn of 1978 as part of a local cultural-artistic society – Horjul Educational Society (*Prosvetno društvo Horjul*). The adult folk dance ensemble, which was later named Klas Folk Dance Ensemble (*Folklorna skupina Klas*) has been operating as a section within the society ever since.

In terms of repertoire, much like the children’s ensemble, the adult ensemble extended its focus beyond the local area. Its performances included dances from various regions of Slovenia, as well as from the borderlands inhabited by Slovenians. These performances were accompanied by corresponding costumes, which play a crucial role in the staged representation of traditional dance. It is important to emphasise that what are today regarded as traditional dances are, in many cases, those that underwent processes of documentation and revival during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Theresa Jill Buckland notes in the case of English morris dancing, these were dances that had been “designated by the collectors as authentic folk practices worthy of being recorded for revival” (2006, 199).

³ Among others, the statutory task of the JSKD is also “to preserve, nurture and develop living folk culture as part of the cultural heritage” (*za ohranitev, negovanje in razvoj žive ljudske kulture kot dela kulturne dediščine*, ZJSKD: Article 4), but their approach is not based on a bottom-up approach and a high level of sensitivity to heritage communities. Instead, it is completely focused on ensuring qualitative growth in artistic expression.

A programme for presentation of the Horjul ensemble in 2017 notes: “There has, however, always been a void when it came to presenting the area they were from” (PD Horjul 2017). This challenge, which is indeed a perplexing situation, was successfully tackled with the help of an expert in traditional clothing. They created costumes based on old photographs from the early twentieth century found in Horjul and the neighbouring villages. Although the visual aspect of their local-heritage-based stage performance is no longer an obstacle, the ensemble is still at a loss about what to present on stage when it comes to local dance elements in the choreography. The material that would make it easier for the ensemble’s artistic leader and choreographer to interpret the dance heritage on stage is very scarce and insufficient. This is especially true as the existing published dance collections do not include records of traditional dances from the Horjul area, and ethnochoreological research focusing on the past has not yet been carried out in this area.

The Klas Folk Dance Ensemble is currently recognised as one of Slovenia’s most successful folk dance ensembles. Over the past decade, it has consistently reached the highest ranks in national folklore selections and has repeatedly achieved distinguished results at the national competition of adult folk dance ensembles in Slovenia. Despite its strong anchoring in the local community and its prominent role in contemporary dance culture, the ensemble does not represent a direct continuation of the local folk dance tradition, nor does it stage inherited local dances. It has never been categorised as an “original folk dance ensemble” (Kunej 2020, 18–19) – a term analogous to what Lynn D. Maners describes as a “village folklore ensemble” (2002, 81), which primarily reconstructs and recreates the dance heritage specific to its local setting.

The Klas ensemble has consistently been classified as a so-called “re-creative” ensemble, as its performances are based on dance knowledge acquired indirectly – primarily through the work of researchers of dance traditions – rather than through direct transmission from tradition bearers *in situ*. Knowledge of folk dances has been obtained through various published sources (initially books on folk dances, later also instructional videos on DVDs), participation in seminars designed for folk ensemble members and their artistic leaders, and through the exchange of ideas and experiences with other folk ensembles or their individual members. The dancers’ and artistic leaders’ personal familiarity with the local dance traditions of their own communities has never served as a direct source

for the ensemble's stage interpretations. In the words of the Norwegian researcher Egil Bakka, the members of the Horjul folk dance ensemble could be defined as "users of selected national material" and not as its "heirs" (Bakka 2002, 62). Accordingly, their repertoire consists of choreographed stage presentations representing various regions of Slovenia, accompanied by appropriately matched costumes that contribute to the overall aesthetic and geographical framing of each performance.

On the thirtieth anniversary of its establishment (2008), the folk dance ensemble danced for the first time in costumes reflecting the heritage of Horjul and the surrounding area. Since then, this costumed stage appearance has been the one aspect that most reflects the environment in which the ensemble is active. In part, the ensemble has solved the quandary about what to present in these costumes by the fact that their performances either incorporate several elements of folk theatre (Vrtovec Beno 2023) or, in terms of choreography and music, refer to the sources of a wider regional area. It should be emphasised, however, that their performances do not aim at reconstruction but are artistic in character, representing creative expressions grounded in the choreographer's and music arranger's concepts. In these instances, strict reliance on exact dance sources is unnecessary.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that since its inception, the folk dance ensemble has consistently been guided by an artistic leader, who is typically responsible for choreography and consequently, exerts the greatest influence on the ensemble's stage presentations. As a result, decisions concerning performance content, stylistic choices, and the overall artistic direction of the ensemble rest primarily with the artistic leader, rather than emerging from the dancers themselves. While the artistic leader holds primary responsibility for all aspects of the ensemble's operation, their creative and organisational decisions are inevitably constrained by limited human and financial resources, as the ensemble functions as an amateur, leisure-time activity for local residents.

To date, the ensemble has had nine artistic leaders; notably, during the first two decades of its existence, these individuals were drawn from the local community. With the exception of the founder, all early artistic leaders were originally members of the ensemble – initially dancers who later assumed leadership roles. In more recent years, however, the position of artistic leader has been entrusted to hired external experts, who undertake the role in their spare time for a token financial reward. These individuals



Figure 1. *Stage performance of the folk dance ensemble Folklorna skupina Klas in Horjul.* Photo: Rebeka Kunej, November 2024.

are neither native to the Horjul area nor residents of the local community. Regardless of this, each artistic leader always has to strike a balance between her/his ethnological, choreological, musicological knowledge and artistic ambitions on the one hand, and on the other hand, real-life factors – such as the number of members in the ensemble, their skills, the expectations of the cultural society’s management and available funds. Even if, however, the artistic leader’s aspiration was to make sure that the ensemble’s programme is based on local music and dance traditions, they had very limited possibilities to achieve this for two reasons. Firstly, the folk dances and the associated dance tunes that the folk dance ensemble was supposed to interpret on stage no longer exist among the local community today. And secondly, the ethnochoreological material that could serve as a basis for the folk dance ensemble’s stage re-presentations is almost non-existent. To paraphrase the opening quote of the paper: folk dancing, the “original” kind, no longer exists in Horjul.

Past Research on Music and Dance in Horjul

In the twentieth century, ethnochoreological researchers gave the Horjul area a wide berth. This finding is based on an examination of the collection of folk dance records kept by the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU in Ljubljana, which contains records of folk dances from the field in the second half of the twentieth century. Most of this research was carried out in rural areas of various parts of Slovenia. This is a manuscript collection of records, mostly Kinetography Laban scores.⁴

A study of this dance collection has revealed that, among the more than one thousand dance records in the database, there are none from the Municipality of Horjul. The locality is not, in fact, an exception; research into the dance traditions of all the neighbouring municipalities was similarly neglected. Horjul can be described as just another “grey zone” on the map of Slovenian folk dances.

In accordance with Slovenian ethnological research traditions, ethnochoreological research is more focused on the past than on contemporary practices (e.g. Ramovš 1992; Kunej 2012; Simetinger 2024). It is precisely because of the focus on the past and a paucity of researchers that the research tradition has not always been able to do everything to which it aspired and has focused only on certain areas or topics that individual researchers within the research field considered to be important and in need of research. In the beginning, research attention was directed at finding those elements that confirmed the “authenticity” of Slovenian dance practice and the nation’s identity (e.g. Marolt 1954). Later, however, research was often based on the premise of salvage ethnochoreology, to paraphrase the term “salvage ethnology”, which is “concerned solely with the preservation of heritage items” (Kockel et al. 2020, 2), in this case – folk dances.

The Horjul Valley is too far from the periphery of those areas settled by the Slovenian population that was of particular interest to past ethnochoreological researchers (especially ethnochoreological research conducted among the Slovenians living in Italy, Austria and Hungary). It is also too close to Slovenia’s capital, since Ljubljana was the centre from where dance culture innovations spread to rural areas and from where the researchers of dance came. It should also be noted that the collection con-

⁴ Originally, this was a paper-based archival collection, which was digitised in 2020. Since 2025, it has been also been accessible in digital form in the repository Arzenal, a ZRC SAZU virtual repository of national heritage. (Zbirka zapisov slovenskih ljudskih plesov 2025).

tains no materials relating to the dances that are recorded in Ljubljana or other Slovenian cities. Leading twentieth-century Slovenian ethnochoreologist Ramovš explains the focus on dance research in rural areas: “part of the reason is the fact that until recently the majority of the Slovenian population was rural, and another reason was the one-sided orientation of the researchers of dance traditions” (1992, 7). Despite the criticism voiced by younger researchers in the field, this approach still partly exists. Instead, younger researchers have often redirected their research into other fields, e.g. dance-historical anthropology, contemporary dance studies and critical heritage studies. However, even in the context of such research, dance culture in Horjul has yet to become the focus of interest.

A similar situation can be observed with regard to ethnomusicological research in the Horjul area. Although ethnomusicologists have not conducted any extensive fieldwork in this region, the sound archives of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU do contain a limited number of recordings from the area, specifically from the settlements of Horjul, Samotorica, and Vrzdenc. In addition, several recordings from villages in nearby municipalities, such as Podlipa, Smrečje, and Šentjošt, are also preserved in the archives. The existing documentary material includes examples of instrumental folk music (such as bellringing, solo performances on the diatonic accordion, and the playing of a small musical group) as well as vocal traditions (including solo and multipart singing, and songs associated with rhythmic children’s games). These recordings stem from individual, one-off research visits rather than from any sustained or systematic investigation of the area’s music and dance traditions. Most of the recordings were made from the 1970s onward, meaning that only a small number are suitable for applied use. Thus, only a few could be utilised by the Horjul folk dance ensemble in its activities, primarily due to the lack of dance-related content. Moreover, given that the primary focus of folk dance ensembles in Slovenia lies in the presentation of traditional folk dance, these individual sound-recordings have not served as a foundation for interpreting dance heritage within such an ensemble.

Therefore, the question of research methodology and orientation, as well as the selective geographical and thematic focus, is crucial to understanding the nature of the documentary materials preserved at the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU. The case of Horjul highlights the need for more holistic and strategically targeted research in under-documented areas, which would enrich the discourse and interpretation of dance herit-

age in such “grey zones,” and contribute more broadly to the understanding and safeguarding of Slovenian intangible cultural heritage, particularly in the domain of dance heritage.

Dance in the Horjul Valley in the Twenty-First Century

As part of the *Dance-ICH* project, the focus was not only on the dance heritage of Horjul on a discursive and practical-applied level, but also on studying contemporary dance practices in the Horjul Valley. This approach laid the groundwork for more comprehensive ethnochoreological research that may be undertaken in the future. As part of the project, attention was devoted to public dance events taking place in the local community at the present day. Rather than on dance itself (dance as a subject), the research was focused on dance events (dance as a process) where dancing is the central element, and not, however, the only one.

Dance events can generally be categorised into two types: public and private. Regardless of the setting, dancing takes place within a (dance) community that is either publicly accessible or privately constituted. As a social activity, dancing plays a role in shaping these communities. In public dance events, the presence of a researcher typically has little or no impact on how participants engage in dancing. In private contexts, however, the situation is markedly different. Private dance communities are considerably more difficult for outside ethnochoreologists to access without disrupting the setting. The presence of a researcher, whether perceived consciously or unconsciously, often elicits a response that alters the dynamics of the event, making it distinct from similar situations that unfold without external observation.

According to ethnologist Owe Ronström’s definition, a dance event constitutes an interactional unit perceived as something extraordinary – an occurrence that stands out from the flow of everyday life and is bounded in both time and space. “It is a type of encounter to which people have come for special reasons, with certain anticipations, and the event is structured in accordance with its visual, cognitive and kinetic focus, the dancing and the music-making” (1989, 23). Ronström further emphasises that not every event involving dance qualifies as a dance event; this classification depends on the central focus of the gathering – whether it is dancing or another activity. In genuine dance events, all activities are organised around

the dancing and the music. When dance is merely peripheral and the inter-subjective centre of perception lies elsewhere, such occasions cannot be considered dance events in the strict sense.

Prior to an examination of “real” dance events, it is pertinent to provide an overview of the role of dance in the private domain. Conversations with the inhabitants of the Horjul Valley have revealed that certain private social gatherings include dancing, though it is not typically the central activity or shared perceptual focus of these events. To begin with, it is important to emphasise the role of dancing at wedding celebrations. While weddings have become less frequent in the twenty-first century compared with earlier periods – and the associated festivities have also reportedly diminished – those that do occur often include dancing, typically accompanied by live music. In fact, the availability of a preferred venue and music band frequently influences the scheduling of the wedding itself. Within the wedding context, dancing serves not only as entertainment but also as a ritualised component of the celebration, evident in elements such as the newlyweds’ first dance or the solo dances performed by key guests. The extent to which these practices reflect continuity with tradition, however, is a more complex question that lies beyond the scope of this discussion.

Another type of private occasion where dancing plays a significant, albeit secondary, role is the celebration of milestone birthdays. The extent to which live music is included in these events largely depends on the preferences and resources of the celebrants and initiators of such social occasions. While live music continues to be an important element of such gatherings, it is not always chosen; increasingly, recorded music is used at private dance parties in the Horjul Valley, reflecting broader trends observed elsewhere in the globalised world. Additionally, spontaneous social gatherings in private settings may also feature dancing. Due to the informal and often intimate nature of these occasions, however, the use of participant observation as a research methodology becomes particularly challenging and is of limited applicability for dance researchers.

In Horjul, dancing also occupies a place within the public sphere. On the one hand, it features in various events and stage performances organised by nursery and primary schools, as well as at other public events within the local community. In these contexts, the performers are typically preschool children, primary school pupils, or members of the local folk dance ensemble. However, such staged performances may not always be perceived by participants – or by the audience – as dancing in the tradition-

al or expressive sense. Rather, they may be understood as assigned performances or even as obligatory tasks, particularly when dance is embedded within educational contexts. This raises the question: is it truly dancing, or is it a form of structured classroom activity? It is important to recognise that these practices take place within institutional frameworks, where the primary focus often lies not on dancing itself, but on broader pedagogical or ceremonial objectives.

In Horjul, an important part of public dancing is the so-called *veselice* (plural form of *veselica*), village festival. For a rural community, *veselica* – that is, a music and dance party usually organised by the local volunteer firefighters’ association – is a one-day social event par excellence. The festival is public, attracts large numbers, and is usually an annual event. It is a typical form of social outlet in the countryside or non-urban areas, where half of Slovenia’s total population lives. *Veselicas* are an important part of Horjul’s dance culture and social events and meet Ronström’s definition of a dance event. These are social events where dancing is the central, but not the only, focus of the event (for a more detailed explanation of the characteristics of *veselicas* in this area, see Kunej 2014). Owe Ronström states that “it seems not only possible to think of dances where dance is of limited interest to some of the participants, but also dance evenings without anybody dancing at all” (Ronström 1989, 21) and the same is true of the *veselicas* in Horjul and the surrounding area – even for non-dancers, a *veselica* is still a dance event.

According to the mid-2022 statistics, the Municipality of Horjul had a population of approximately 3,000 and a land area of 33,000 square kilometres (Občina Horjul 2024). In 2024, the municipality hosted seven *veselicas*, which took place in six different villages within the municipality. They were organised by five volunteer fire departments (VFDs), more specifically six VFD units, with the largest department holding a dance event in Horjul and another one in Koreno, an off-site VFD unit, which covers the hillier northern area. Another *veselica* was organised by the Horjul Horse Riding Society.

From early summer to early autumn, these open-air dance events followed a fairly standard schedule. In part, individual *veselicas* in the local villages are organised on specific “traditional” dates, reflecting the practices of bygone days, when *veselicas* were organised by the village boys on the feast day of the patron saint of the village church. This continuity illustrates how contemporary dance events remain embedded in patterns shaped by religious and communal calendars of the past. However, over



Figure 2. Dance event *veselica* in Horjul. Photo: Rebeka Kunej, July 2024.

the past five decades, these dates have been adapted to the changing habits within society. An obvious adaptation is that most of the *veselicas* take place in early and late summer as opposed to midsummer, when most people are on holiday and away. The annual lull is noticeable between 20 July and 15 August, which coincides with the mandated collective summer holidays in the major local factories and tradesman's workshops. Of course, on an annual basis, the organisers of individual *veselicas* need to coordinate the dates informally, as they do not want any *veselicas* to take place on the same day or risk too many of them taking place in a very short span of time.

In summer 2024, a total of seven *veselicas* was organised in the municipality. As in the previous few years, the 2024 season started in the village of Zaklanec (1 June) and continued the following Sunday (9 June) in the neighbouring village of Podolnica, less than 1.5 km away, where the *veselica* was preceded by a ceremony held to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the village's volunteer fire department. The June round of these dance events came to an end with a *veselica* in Vrzenec (22 June). Before the summer break, a *veselica* was held in Horjul (13 July), the municipality's largest settlement. In August, after the peak summer holiday season, there was only one *veselica*, in the village of Žažar (10 August). As usual, the first days of September and the back-to-school time were

marked by the Horjul *veselica*, organised by the local horse-riding society (1 September). At the end of the open-air dance event season, a *veselica* was organised for the second year in a row in the village of Koreno on the ridge overlooking Horjul. Out of the nine villages within the municipality, only three villages, with a population ranging from 66 to 153 inhabitants,⁵ do not organise *veselicas*.

A *veselica* is a dance event characterised by live music, which is usually performed by folk-pop ensembles hired and paid by the *veselica* organisers. The selection strategies, however, vary, i.e. sometimes the organisers choose popular, established ensembles and at other times they opt for less-known local ensembles. At five of the seven *veselicas* mentioned above, dance music was played by two folk-pop ensembles whose members are mainly from the Horjul Valley. The currently most popular local ensemble, Ansambel Škof, played at three *veselicas*, while the younger – and therefore less established and experienced – ensemble Horjulski Kvintet performed all of the music for dancing at one *veselica* and was an opening act for Alp-ski Kvintet, a more established ensemble well-known all over Slovenia, at another. With regard to this, it is important to point out that the music performed is part of contemporary popular culture. *Veselicas* are typically associated with folk-pop music, which is characterised by the accordion being one of the instruments used to perform it. For this reason, many people regard this musical genre as a kind of extension of traditional folk music into popular music. However, folk-pop music is often not the only kind of music played at *veselicas*. In the later hours, the musicians change instruments (to, for example, drums, electric guitar, synthesizer) and start playing pop music. Often, they alternate sets of folk-pop music with sets of other kinds of popular music, with a break in between. From the perspective of dance practice, a *veselica* serves as a venue where polkas and waltzes are performed alongside other popular social dances, with the foxtrot being the most frequent addition.

Despite the presence of contemporary music at these events, *veselicas* are perceived by participants as part of local tradition. Their annual recurrence plays a significant role in shaping dance culture in the countryside. As dance events, *veselicas* demonstrate sustainability not by preserving his-

⁵ Koreno, with 111 inhabitants, is one of the smaller villages in this area. However, the bond that links the villagers from the villages of Koreno and Samotorica on the ridge above the valley, also contributes to the fact, at least in part, that the Koreno *veselica* is organised and attended by the inhabitants of both villages.

torical musical and dance practices unchanged, but by adapting to contemporary contexts – including the aesthetic preferences and needs of the local dance community, as well as the logistical and social capacities of the local environment. A key characteristic of a dance event is its character as “an ongoing construction, a creation in the present, where the past is used as a part of the foundation, as resources, knowledge, competence, situational assets, and where the future is used as anticipations, presuppositions, assumptions about what is going to happen” (Ronström 1989, 27). A *veselica* embodies this concept fully. It represents a vibrant and enduring dance tradition which, while grounded in past practices, is continuously reinterpreted and lived by today’s participants. For them, it constitutes a contemporary experience – a dynamic expression of dance in the present moment.

Conclusion

A comparison of the purpose of dancing in folk dance ensembles and at village *veselicas* reveals that, although the individuals involved may overlap, the motivations and functions of dance in these two contexts differ significantly. Various scholars have proposed different typologies to explain why people dance (cf. Royce 2002; Shay 1971). For the purposes of this discussion, the framework offered by Andriy Nahachewsky is of particular relevance. He identifies four broad categories of dance: ritual dance, recreational/social dance, art dance, and ethnic/national dance (2012, 14). Within this framework, the *veselica* exemplifies social dance. Its historically ritual function has largely disappeared, and within the discourse of local participants, its ethnic significance is no longer strongly emphasised. In contrast, dance within folk dance ensembles is primarily understood as a cultivation of ethnic or national identity within the artistic domain, situated at the intersection of ethnic/national dance and art dance. Nonetheless, both *veselicas* and the activities of the local folk dance ensemble contribute meaningfully to the cultural landscape of the Horjul Valley. Each, in its own modality, plays a role in shaping local dance culture, and together they can be understood as integral components of the broader domain of dance traditions recognised as intangible cultural heritage, and can ultimately be positioned within Nahachewsky’s broader category of ethnic dance.

In Horjul, however, the two dance traditions – the *veselicas*, which have a longer historical presence, and the folk dance ensemble, which repre-

sents a more recent development – differ notably in their temporal orientation. *Veselicas* are focused exclusively on the present moment; the experience of dance is immediate and embedded in the current social context. In contrast, the practice of the folk dance ensemble entails an active engagement with the past, involving processes of selection, stylisation, and staged representation rooted in historical reflection. Nahachewsky (2012, 24) describes this distinction through the concepts of “vival” and “reflective” dance. Vival dance refers to forms in which participants are fully immersed in the present flow of experience while dancing, without conscious engagement with historical or cultural narratives. Reflective dance, on the other hand, involves an awareness of and intentional relationship with the past. In this sense, *veselicas* exemplify vival dance, while folk dance ensemble performances correspond to the reflective mode.

Dance – dancing – always entails an engagement with the present. Certain forms of dance, however, such as those performed by folk dance ensembles, also involve a deliberate engagement with the past. As Nahachewsky notes, this reflective dimension “is therefore better conceived as an overlay or addition onto the basic dance experience in the present” (2012, 26). This reflective layer is one of the key reasons why the dancing of folk dance ensembles is commonly regarded as part of dance heritage, whereas contemporary social dance practices, such as *veselicas*, are not perceived in the same way within local communities. Local inhabitants do not describe the *veselica* as “our heritage”, but rather as “our tradition” or “custom”, while in the case of folk dance ensembles, heritage discourse predominates. The sustainability and ongoing vitality of *veselicas* are not dependent on heritage frameworks; rather, they endure as vibrant, living dance events, drawing large numbers of participants. At present, they do not require the designation of heritage in order to ensure their existence.

Paradoxically, this chapter may itself contribute to the future recognition and valuation of dance events such as the *veselica* as part of the Horjul Valley’s dance heritage – not only among heritage professionals, but also among the practitioners of this contemporary dance form rooted in tradition. Through their research, both historically and today, ethnochoreologists have played an active role in co-shaping and co-creating contemporary discourses on dance heritage, whether we like it or not. Each engagement with past or present dance practices, each act of research and documentation, inevitably adds new material to ongoing heritage narratives in the future. The extent to which these discourses, however, be-

come authoritative or remain open and critical depends on the individual researcher's approach and reflexivity. Ultimately, it is the local (heritage) communities themselves – those who dance – who must be placed at the forefront of defining and shaping the discourses surrounding their own dance heritage.

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Safeguarding Local Heritage: Wedding Rituals of Sárköz, Hungary

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This chapter analyses the *Sárközi lakodalom*, a local event of the heritage of Sárköz based on mid-twentieth century traditional dance events and weddings and registered in the Hungarian National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. I treat weddings as a complex heritage system, since they embrace almost all the manifestations of intangible cultural heritage, including several listed in the National Inventory. The aim of this chapter is to explore the representation of the heritage of Sárköz in the twenty-first century and the cultural identity of the community.

Keywords: Hungary, ICH, dance, wedding, identity, UNESCO

Introduction

More than twenty years have passed since UNESCO established and adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. In the time since then, it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that it has become one of the most popular conventions of the world organisation.¹ One of the tasks of States Parties to the Convention is to map and list the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) within their own countries.² But the process does not end with the inclusion of items on national inventories,³ as UNESCO's recommendations include the ongoing monitoring of heritage communities. In Hungary, the Directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Hungarian Open Air Museum coordinates the tasks related to the Convention, an important part of which is the ongoing liaison with those communities on the national inventory.⁴ The Directorate is in contact with the communities from the very beginning of the nomination process, and they go through a process of articulation and awareness-raising during the process of nomination writing, which helps them to live, safeguard and transmit their heritage.

In this study, I will analyse one of the most important events of the community inscribed on the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2012 with the title *Folk Art of Sárköz: Weaving, Embroidery, Beading and Costume, the Wedding of Sárköz, (Sárközi lakodalom)*.⁵ It reflects the importance of efforts to safeguard traditions at the local level. In traditional peasant culture,⁶ the wedding held a prominent role, being one of the main dance occasions in the life of the community, attended by both the young and old generations of the village. In this context, today's event aims to present and represent the traditional wedding procession and customs. I will compare the traditional wedding with the *Sárközi lakodalom* festival in 2023.

¹ For comparison, it is worth looking at the number of elements proposed for other conventions. If we look only at the well-known World Heritage Convention, since its creation in 1972, 1223 sites have been inscribed. The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity has inscribed 730 heritage elements since 2003.

² The *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2022) includes information about the responsibilities of the State Parties.

³ The National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage was established in Hungary in 2008.

⁴ For more on the significance of the national inventory in Hungary and the role of the community, see Csonka-Takács 2017.

⁵ In the rest of the paper, I will use the name of the event in Hungarian to make it easier to distinguish.

⁶ In the ethnographic context, the peasantry is a social category, most basically agricultural workers. The dissolution of traditional peasant societies in Hungary dates back to the 1960s.

The *Sárközi lakodalom* is not part of the heritage element on the national inventory; it is an organised event (hereafter capitalised as the Event). The main purpose is to present and promote the traditions in Sárköz and it is an artificially created event that historically never existed in this form.

This study argues that weddings (traditional and heritagised as well) can be seen as a complex heritage system in which several manifestations of ICH can be found. Various questions arise as to what extent the wedding customs and dances presented at the Event follow the wedding rites of the past. How has the heritage itself changed, and how has the fact of presentation shaped the heritage itself and the dances and music? Indeed, in what way can the practices still be seen as an expression of community identity? or is it more of a tourist attraction? This chapter aims to find answers to these issues.

The Field of Research

Geographically, my research was carried out in the southern part of Hungary, on the lower Danube, between Szekszárd and Bába in Tolna County. Following the regulation of the course of the Danube in the nineteenth century, the region underwent an explosive change. Its peasant population started rapidly to become enriched and urbanised. Nonetheless, it proved difficult for the region to continue to prosper because of the rigid estate structure and the practice of having only one child.⁷ The period of growth and affluence is reflected in the rich folklore, costume and social structure of the region (Kósa and Filep 1978, 163–164). In a narrower and ethnographic sense, only the four settlements south of the estuary of the Sió river (Őcsény, Decs, Alsónyék, Sárpilis) are counted as Sárköz; Bába, Szeremle, Érsekcsanád, Pécsvárad, Zengővárkony and Váralja are also included here, however, because of cultural similarities and marital and economic-cultural relations between the Reformed (Protestant) settlements (Borsos 2011, 203).

⁷ The practice of having one child (*egykézés*) in Hungarian peasant society began in the mid-nineteenth century as a deliberate birth control system, whereby only one child is born in a family. It was typical in closed, Reformed villages, including the villages of the Sárköz. As a result, land ownership increased in value, as wealth was not fragmented and the desire for a more demanding life was strengthened. The practice became socially accepted and eventually a moral norm. The social consequences of this birth control, including the risk of national destruction, were already recognised between the two world wars (Morvai and Tátrai 1977).

I grew up in a county-centre town on the border of this region, a positionality which has determined my attitude towards the local culture. In addition to this, since 2015, as a staff member of the Directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Hungarian Open Air Museum, I have been actively involved with communities on the national register, including the community of Sárköz. All this helps me to bring both etic and emic perspectives to this analysis.

In addition to observing the whole series of events, my research was based on semi-structured and informal interviews, film and photo documentation. My informants were women and men who were actively involved in the past and present organisation of the Event, as well as its participants and visitors. I tried to take as many photographs as possible, and in order to reconstruct the history of the Event, I collected written documents (invitations, posters, etc.) from the past.

It is important to clarify the word “wedding” as used here, because it has several meanings. On the one hand, it signifies a “traditional wedding”, that is, a rite of passage during several days in the middle of the twentieth century, when two people’s lives are bound together; on the other hand, it signals the *Sárközi lakodalom* itself, the Event lasting several days; and lastly, “wedding” refers to a party and dance occasion with a Saturday evening dinner.

Theoretical Framework

Representation

In the twenty-first century, the representation of elements of folk culture in a variety of ways is experiencing a golden age, with numerous festivals, themed days and events being held across the country to promote and make heritage more visible. The antecedents of this effort can be traced back to the traditionalist movements of the twentieth century: the *Gyöngyösbokréta* movement⁸ was launched in 1938; a strong dance-house movement⁹ be-

⁸ Between 1931 and 1944, every year around 20 August, peasant groups held dance, singing and play performances in Budapest under the name *Gyöngyösbokréta*. In 1935, the groups participating in the performances formed a social association under the name of Bokréta Association (Pálfi 1979). It was launched with the specific aim of facilitating the identification of villages that had preserved their traditions, promoting the establishment of folk ensembles in these villages, and assisting the performance of their productions in theatrical settings (Diószegi 2008, 4).

⁹ “One of the most recent waves of folkloristic discovery was the so-called ‘dance house’ move-

gan after the opening of the first dance-house in Budapest in 1972, and the so-called nomadic generation craft movement¹⁰ was also established in the same period. Although it is not the purpose or task of this study to discuss the details of these movements, it is essential to mention them in order to see that the processes of representation and heritage management in Hungary today are not without precedent. Overall, it is a question of the emergence, already in the middle of the twentieth century, of outside initiatives which have had an impact on both the traditions and the communities that sustain them. There are many ways and opportunities to promote heritage in the twenty-first century, perhaps one of the most common is the organisation of a local festival, a highlight event that gives community members the chance to showcase their heritage.

Nowadays, becoming visible (visibilisation) has become an important way of keeping folk traditions alive and one of the possible ways is to build self-representation. Communities express their self-image through cultural practices, which is a form of communication with their environment. This representation is based on tradition which sustains community identity (Verebélyi 2005, 27). Each tradition can also be seen as a representation of social relations, since “every action can be a representation of the environment in which it is created and can also be a representation of itself” (Hoppál 2008, 13). This need for representation ideally comes from the community and is the result of internal development.

It is the practice of tradition that ensures the continued maintenance of the identity of communities. An important element of tradition is the ability to adapt to new challenges, i.e. to safeguard old structures while allowing room for new elements to be used (Hoppál 2008, 13). Respect for local traditions creates a sense of local identity, which is about developing

ment (*táncház*), an urban grassroots youth revival movement that emerged in the 1970s and 80s in the period of late socialism” (Balogh and Fülemile 2008, 43). The *Táncház* (‘dance-house’) model of teaching folk dance and music combines traditional forms of acquisition with modern pedagogical and academic methods. Participants acquire dance knowledge from experienced members or tradition-bearers by direct observation and imitation, to the accompaniment of live music, while using their own individual level of creativity to develop their competence and dancing ability (see more: UNESCO n.d.).

¹⁰ Members of the nomadic generation of craftspeople were also motivated by the need to safeguard the traditional knowledge of disappearing crafts. In contrast to the socialist-era practice of cottage industry cooperatives that produced items according to pattern and marketed the forms of folk art, they sought to preserve the deeper, meaningful layers of peasant culture, the creation of objects close to nature and the preservation of traditional complex knowledge (see more: Fülemile 2018).

a sense of belonging to one's immediate environment, and thus, in a good case, to see oneself as a proud member of the community.

In the twenty-first century, local communities face many external factors that can fundamentally transform and change their culture. One of these influencing factors is globalisation, which exerts an influence worldwide. It would appear that one of the consequences of globalisation is that individual communities are becoming part of a single common world culture, without adhering to their traditions. On the contrary, though, the cultural significance of marginal and local phenomena is increasing (Siikala 1998, 7). Local traditions are always accompanied by a strong sense of identity and the development of a strong sense of place strengthens the community, contributing to the development of the municipality (Hoppál 2011, 13). As Pavlikova also points out in relation to the Czech *verbuňk* and band to the custom of the Ride of the Kings, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has strengthened the transmission of folk culture for its bearers, and competitions and festivals have helped to make all this more visible (2024, 158).

The “Discovery” of Traditional Culture

In order to understand the mechanisms and impact on communities of the Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage, we need to go back in time and look at the “discovery” of traditional culture and its representational processes during the twentieth century.

At the end of the nineteenth century, with the disintegration of peasant society, the way of life and culture of rural communities changed radically in Hungary. As a result of modernisation and urbanisation, the traditional way of life began to change rapidly, which meant “undressing”. In its first interpretation, “undressing” means the abandonment of rural folk costume and its replacement by conventional, urban dress at the community, social level. In the present study, I use the term “undressing” in a broader sense to mean the denial of rural existence (a sign of poverty), the conscious abandonment of certain elements of it and the pursuit of modernisation. This process takes place at different times in different parts of the country, but it follows a process of significant and very rapid change after the collectivisation of agriculture in Hungary. This process accelerates in almost all aspects of life, leading to a complete change of lifestyle (change of clothing, utensils, housing, construction, farming, mechanisation). The function of

traditions and objects of everyday life also began to serve a representational purpose (Csonka-Takács et al. 2023, 237). As with European trends, the discovery of peasant culture led to growing interest in various genres from several directions. The notion that national culture is rooted in Hungarian traditional culture was reinforced. In this period people lacked the necessary capital to modernise peasant farms, but handicraft products could still generate income for many. This is the basis for the “blossoming” of folk art in Hungary, which developed at different rates over time, even in several waves (Romsics and Verebélyi 2019, 5–6). Hungary’s characteristic folk art regions emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and became a symbol of Hungarian folk art and national identity from time to time (Csonka-Takács et al. 2023, 247).

Discovering the Folk Art of the Sárköz

In addition to the representational and economic interests that have previously been at the forefront, safeguarding of the cultural heritage practices of the Sárköz has become increasingly important. The need to safeguard folk art in the Sárköz region had already arisen at the end of the nineteenth century (the Millennium Exhibition, the organisation of the ethnographic collection of the county museum). The first handicraft workshop was founded in 1901 and continued to operate for more than thirty years. In the 1930s, with the help of local pastors and teachers, embroidery courses were regularly organised in other villages in the region. The aim was not only to revive and re-educate the art of embroidery at the grassroots level, but also to provide women with work and income. Several students who later became “Masters of Folk Art”¹¹ after the Second World War (Mihályné Perity, József Kovács, János Tóth) came out of these courses (Sárköz nomination form 2012).

The process of extracting the specific features and values of folk art from its own system and incorporating them into a national cultural model built up from elements of village tradition was carried out on several channels. Intellectual ideological movements, official cultural policy, but

¹¹ The system of Master of Folk Art rewards folk artists who live in their communities and are outstanding creators in five categories (crafts, instrumental folk music, storytelling, singing, dancing), thus encouraging and assuring heritage safeguarding and communication towards the next generation. The Master of Folk Art award, established in 1953, has been awarded to numerous performers and artists from Sárköz. See Csonka-Takács – Pál-Kovács 2019.

also economic and social considerations played a role in the recognition and interpretation of the traditional culture of the Sárköz region of South Transdanubia. Of course, all this also had an impact on the self-image and self-esteem of the people of the Sárköz (Sárköz nomination form 2012).

After the Second World War, the preservation of material culture was taken over by the Decsi Household Industry Cooperative, where it continued to be carried out on a contract basis throughout the whole of the Sárköz region. The *Gyöngyösbokréta* movement, which started in 1931, did most to safeguard and transmit the traditional culture of the Sárköz region (folk dance, folk song) (Sárköz nomination form 2012).

After the Second World War, the revival folk dance movement soon reached the Sárköz region. The first formation of the *Sárpilisi Népi Együttes* (Folk Ensemble of Sárpilis) led by István Bogár, which later gained national fame, was founded in 1946, and then traditional groups were formed in other settlements, which still safeguard and cultivate elements of the traditional culture of the Sárpilis. Since the second half of the twentieth century, numerous events and associations have helped to promote and disseminate the folk arts of the Sárköz region, organising camps, workshops and various events to showcase their rich tradition. Institutions and NGOs, i.e. organised forms of knowledge transmit and play a major role in safeguarding. The various exhibitions, festivals and celebrations also provide a platform for community representation. Such events, like the *Sárközi Lakodalom*, provide an opportunity for community participation, involving members of the community in the safeguarding of tradition (Sárköz nomination form 2012).

The “Traditional” Weddings in the Sárköz

In order to understand the relation of the representative *Sárközi lakodalom* to the tradition itself, it is necessary to have a general view of the order of the “former traditional” weddings and in other words the pattern, the starting point. These weddings were typical in the region in the mid-twentieth century, which I have tried to reconstruct on the basis of the literature and the narratives of informants. It is not my aim to describe the entire wedding order, but only to highlight those elements that are relevant to this analysis.

In peasant society, the wedding was one of the most significant dance occasions and had an important representational function for the organ-

ising family, often at the expense of their livelihood, representing themselves beyond their financial means (Balázs Kovács 2021, 175–177). In the life of the community, the feast and the eating and drinking was and still is considered a prominent event. In the preparation of the wedding, the members of the wedding, to the extent of their relationship with the families, helped with physical work, providing ingredients for the food, ready-made dishes, wedding gifts and donations of money.

In the mid-twentieth century, there was a tradition of separate weddings for the bride and the groom. There were practical reasons for this: there was no building large enough to hold the wedding, so the groom and bride's guests were entertained separately. The newlyweds were present in one house and the other, constantly shuttling between the two venues throughout the wedding party (Balázs Kovács 2021, 200).

This is not exactly how weddings used to be in the old days. It was separate for the bride's house and separate for the groom's house. And then the couple would wander around all night.
(Pál-Kovács 2023c)

The timing of weddings was determined not only by church regulations but also by farming considerations. In the whole country, including this region, most weddings were held during carnival period, when agricultural work had not yet begun (Balázs Kovács 2021, 202).

After the announcement of the engagement, the first task, in which the best man played an active part was to invite the guests (*hivogatás*) to the wedding. The closest relatives and in-laws were invited first, followed by the immediate neighbours. It was polite to reciprocate the invitation, and so the closest relatives and neighbours helped with the wedding preparations (Balázs Kovács 2021, 195–196).

The wedding ceremonies were held on Wednesday, preparations beginning three days earlier, on Sunday, this activity of food preparation being known as the *készítő* (maker). During this process, the women baked cakes, kneaded the dough for the soup and slaughtered the animals (Balázs Kovács 2021, 200–201). “In the old days, in my mother's time, which I'd say was the twenties and thirties and before, we always had the wedding on a Wednesday. They started slaughtering the cattle on Wednesday and finished on another Wednesday” (Pál-Kovács 2023a). “There was also an order to who was invited to the maker. Who was called for what. Now, you see,

the young women were better at making pasta noodles and things like that, and the older women, who were better at bread dough” (Pál-Kovács 2023a).

In the traditional custom, the wedding gifts and presents were brought to the groom’s house the day before the ceremony. This custom was mainly prevalent, however, in the first half of the twentieth century, and later merged with the bride’s dance (Balázs Kovács 2021, 201).

In the wedding party after the reception of the musicians and guests, the first big event in the morning was the dressing of the bride, assisted by three or four women. Given the complexity of the wedding costume, the dressing was the highlight of the wedding day. This was followed by the bride’s and groom’s farewell ceremonies, where the best man spoke in rhythmic text, saying goodbye to his parents on behalf of the young couple.

The newlyweds, accompanied by their own wedding guests, arrived separately for the church ceremony and went separately to the lunch. From the groom’s house, a joyful marching procession would go to meet the bride, and a separate carriage would pick up her belongings (furniture, clothes, etc.). Often, the groom had to solve tricky games in order to get the bride (Balázs Kovács 2021, 222–238).

There was also a fixed order and rules for the wedding dinner, including the seating and the menu. The main organiser and master of the events of the wedding was the best man,¹² who set the sequence of events in motion with a set of rhythmic texts and who also “conducted” the wedding games. The games included a number of instrumental dances, such as the broom dance and the glass dance. The bridal dance and the new bride’s dance were ritual dances, many variations of which are known in the region. In traditional weddings, the newlyweds left the party after midnight while the wedding party continued.

The next morning, according to local custom, the “new” wife’s head was wrapped in a fine white shawl, known as a *bíbor*, a rite known as *tekerődzés*. At sunrise, the wedding feast was concluded with a so-called *tyúkverő party* in which the guests went to the houses of the people who had earlier left the wedding party and continued the party there. Usually, the bride did not attend (Balázs Kovács 2021, 246–262).

¹² “The living tradition of Hungarian best men” was inscribed on the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2024. See: www.szellelmiorokseg.hu

Housewives' Dance and Bridal Dance

Traditional weddings usually included a “housewives’ dance”.¹³ The women who had helped did not have opportunity to dance during the first part of the wedding party, as they were occupied in preparing and serving the dinner. At the end of the meal, the best man introduced the housewives to the wedding, one of them with her hands tied; he asked the guests to donate money because she had suffered a painful burn. The women who had been working in the kitchen then made a noisy clamour with kitchen tools in front of the wedding party. Usually, the women performed an *ugrós* dance with tools, in circles, in couples and as a solo too (Balázs Kovács 2021, 245–251). This happened, of course, not in festive costume, but in everyday outfits that could get dirty in the kitchen.

Among the dance events of traditional weddings, the bride’s dance and the dance of the new wife should be mentioned. Different variations of these dances were spread throughout the Hungarian-inhabited areas, but the common characteristic was that all members of the wedding party paid money to perform a dance with the new bride.

The Event – An Analysis of the *Sárközi lakodalmom* as Self-Representation

The Event was first held in 1966 in Sárpilis, initially not as a separate festival but as an integral part of a region-wide Folklore Festival of the Danube Region. In the early days, the main day was held in the town of Decs, also known as the capital of the region, but later it became a travelling affair, with the towns of the Sárköz region alternating hosting the main day of the programme.

In 2023, Bába settlement was the main organiser of the *Sárközi lakodalmom*. Since the beginning of the Event, there has always been a main venue where the wedding ceremony itself is held. However, even in 1966, when the Event was first organised, the aim was to involve the whole of the Sárköz region and not just one town, so the five towns have always worked together. Decs, one of the largest municipalities in the Sárköz region, was

¹³ This dance can be observed almost all over the Hungarian language area, but not always with the use of tools. In Magyarózd, a Transylvanian village, it is typical at dawn, and the dance of the women adopts several movements from the dance of the men. See Pál-Kovács 2022.

the main site until 1990, and part of this was the renovation of the houses in the main street of the village.

The leaders of the village, the workers of the cooperative, the management of the cooperative all wanted to present the best image of themselves. And that's why the town always gave help to the houses, to the residents who practically lived on the main street and in the areas where the programme ... was implemented, where the facades were repainted months before, or if necessary, plastered or repaired, so ... the settlement itself was very nicely spruced up. (Pál-Kovács 2023b)

It can be seen that it was of the utmost importance for the settlement to present a good image of itself, with a good representation of the environment and the image of the town. Nowadays, such renovation work has receded, mainly due to the economic and financial situation.

Course of the Event

In accordance with the traditional timing of weddings, the Event is not limited to a single day, but there are various activities and events that take place during the week preceding the wedding. Over the years, there has been an order as to which towns organise which accompanying events in the *Sárközi lakodalom*.

On Thursday 22 June 2023, the Event started with the wreath-laying ceremony of the Monument of Sárköz, which was attended by the mayors of the five towns and a couple dressed in costume from each, including the newlyweds from Báta. Despite the fact that the Monument, inaugurated in 2000, only includes the five ethnographically defined inner towns of the Sárköz region (Őcsény, Decs, Alsónyék, Sárpilis, Báta), the mayor of Pörbölly was the sixth to attend the opening wreath-laying ceremony. The question of Pörbölly's belonging to the Sárköz region is not the subject of this paper, but it is worth noting that it is the sixth settlement to appear in the whole series of events, clearly expressing and showing its sense of belonging to the region.

After the wreath-laying ceremony, the programme continued in Decs, where the mayors opened a wedding cooking competition. In his welcome speech, the local mayor highlighted that this Event was mainly aimed at lo-

cal people, as it was particularly important for young people to learn about the local customs and gastronomy of the wedding. After the cooking competition, the participants were invited to Őcsény for the opening of a handicrafts exhibition, which attracts a large part of the village population.

The accompanying events continued the next day in Pörböly, where a football tournament was organised for the region's schoolchildren; in the afternoon the children's dance groups of the region performed in Sárpilis; in the evening an adults' folklore show was held in Alsónyék, and on Friday evening there was a dance house in Sárpilis.

The main events of the wedding, the highlights of the Event, were held on Saturday in Báta, which began with the Whitsun custom of the so-called *Szeremlei ladikázás* (boating of Szeremle). Although the programme included the "courting custom of the carved rowing boat" and the proximity of the Danube justifies the inclusion of this custom, the wedding tradition does not necessarily include the transport of the bride in a boat.

In the afternoon, the dressing of the bride marked the beginning of the Event, which was attended by many more participants and visitors than before. As I have already mentioned, dressing was a priority in traditional weddings, but always within the close family, thus creating an intimate atmosphere. This was not the case in the wedding Event, but part of the attraction was the spectacle of the bride being dressed. The mayor of the town dresses the bride, announcing the names of the clothes and the whole dressing process into a microphone. The groom and the men did not take part in the dressing, but gathered at the so-called groom's house, playing music and singing.

The dressing was not a public event. It was always in a small circle. The *körösztők* (aunts, and other elderly women of the family) dressed the bride in the house, and when they came to pick her up, they brought her out into the courtyard and handed her over. That's certainly the reason why it was included in the wedding programme. (Pál-Kovács 2023c)

After the dressing at the Event was finished, the groom arrived accompanied by a band for the bride's luring out, which took place on a stage set up in the courtyard of the country house. Following the traditional wedding tradition, the best man requested the bride from the groomsmen. In this case the groomsmen were the mayors of the five settlements. The



Figure 1. The main actors of the event: the newlyweds, the best man and the mayors of the villages.. Photo: Dóra Pál-Kovács, Bába, 2023.

Member of Parliament for the region gave a speech on the stage (see Figure 1). Afterwards, the wedding procession arrived at the Catholic Church for a short mass, and then the procession proceeded to the main square of the town. It was here that one of the most impressive moments of the Event took place, a dance entitled the *százszoknyás karikázó*. It has been part of the Event since its inception and brings together dance groups from across the region. It is not, of course, part of the traditional wedding customs, but a form of representation of local dance traditions and community. An open-air folklore show and a fair showing local handicraft traditions enriched the afternoon's programme.

In the evening, the wedding dinner took place in a hired tent, which could be attended with a pre-booked ticket. The organisers tried to follow the traditional wedding programme throughout the evening, with a wedding menu, a housewives' dance, a bride's dance, a wedding party, a farewell party for the new couple and a homecoming procession of the newlyweds.

Participants, Actors, Roles

The main actors of the Event were of course the newlyweds, who in this case were a couple in real life, but the wedding itself is not real.¹⁴

The groom and the bride are usually chosen from the dance groups of the local area, typically from among the better dancers. At the 2023 Event, a young man from the dance group and his non-dancing girlfriend took the role of the newlyweds.

[...] an outsider can only wear all these clothes if she comes to rehearsals every week for at least six months before the Event, learns the songs, the dances and learns to wear this dress. So that's why it's luckier if you choose someone from the dance group... [...] at 2 o'clock the bride was dressed and at 8 o'clock in the morning we were still partying here and she was still in the same costume. Not everyone can take it. (Pál-Kovács 2023c)

Apart from the newlyweds, the active participants in the Event were mainly members of dance groups from the surrounding settlements. Sometimes, there was no longer an active ensemble in a given town so former members were called back for the occasion. This is important and worth mentioning because it allows them to reach out to different generations, with older and younger people coming together to take part in the Event. It can thus become a key to raising awareness and safeguarding the heritage. The Event provides an opportunity for dialogue and communication between different generations, ensuring that traditions are kept alive.

The *Sárközi lakodalom*, as an event, can be seen primarily as a performance opportunity for the dancers, but if we consider it in more depth, it is much more than that. Although we are talking about an organised event, it has an underlying meaning for the participants. In addition to learning about the dances and music, the Event also achieves the objective mentioned by the mayor of Ócsény: that the younger generation can learn about the gastronomy, customs, dances and music of the area, thus becoming part of their identity.

¹⁴ It is worth noting here that during the history of the event, there have been occasions when a real wedding has been held.

Thank God that I was born here in Sárköz and that I can do what I love. Tradition has been part of my life since childhood. I try to show the younger generation how to incorporate this tradition into today's clothes and fashion. My mother was a dancer and a member of the dance group. I inherited all her clothes and the songs and she passed on to me the songs she had learned. We danced in kindergarten and I have been dancing ever since. (Pál-Kovács 2023d)

Visitors and Communication

In the literal sense of the word, we cannot talk about wedding guests at an organised event, but the consideration of visitors to the Event is an important aspect. Since its inception in 1966, the Event has been a key feature of the region, with the explicit aim of attracting as many visitors as possible, thus promoting, maintaining and representing the traditions of the Sárköz region. For this reason, the reference to visitors is perhaps even more justified.

Most of the accompanying activities preceding the main Event were attended by inhabitants of the settlements, as well as the people concerned and their relatives: exhibitors and their families took part in the exhibition opening, and players and their families went to the football match. The Saturday programme, the wedding, was attended by a slightly wider audience. My research did not allow for a full survey of visitors, but the informal interviews revealed that the majority came from the local communities in the area and were mostly involved.

As noted above, the best man played the role of the guest inviter for traditional weddings, while for the *Sárközi lakodalom* this role was mainly assumed by the mayor and the newlyweds. In 2022 and 2023, the dates of the Event were announced at several occasions and venues¹⁵ and guests were invited from all over the country. From interviews with the organisers, it was clear that they expected a large attendance, but they lacked the appropriate boards and leaflets to deliver the information. If the target audience of the Event was not limited to local and surrounding inhabitants, communication and information was problematic, for example, local knowledge was needed to find certain locations¹⁶ (e.g. lack of directional/information

¹⁵ They were also exhibited in several municipalities in Hungary, e.g. in Szentendre at the Hungarian Open Air Museum and in various municipalities in Tolna County.

¹⁶ I missed the opening event of Saturday, the boating of Szeremle (*Szeremlei ladikázás*), as I was

signs). This includes the infrastructure of the settlement: the state of accommodation, catering facilities, institutions, roads, etc. The content and nature of the Event would make it suitable for attracting crowds, but the infrastructure of the various participating towns is not yet ready.

Dances on the Stage

As you can see from the description of the Event, the local dance groups¹⁷ presented dance performances on several days, during which the dancers performed on stage, the youngest dancers showed what they had learned during the year, and the older ones presented new choreographies. The main function of this was to entertain and to show; there was no opportunity to dance together and learn to dance. It is worth adding here Hungarian ethnochoreologist György Martin's view of staged folk dance:

... institutional support was too formalised, which in fact blocked further spontaneous processes. The professional ensembles and institutional amateur folk dance groups understandably wanted to create, or thought they wanted to create, artistic value, and they always imagined this only in the context of stage culture, theatrical production, individual creations, and they did not think of any other possibilities. (Martin 1981, 46)

The stage which acts as a platform for the creation of different choreographies is still an important part of the Hungarian revival dance movement, but the various dance houses and folk pubs provide opportunities for dancers to dance and create spontaneously. This was no different at the Event: in addition to the stage programmes, a dance party was organised in the community centre in Sárpilis, with the participation of the mayor of the village and local dancers. The musicians played only local folk music; no other dances from the Hungarian dance tradition were performed.

From the point of view of dance and representation, it is worth mentioning the *százszoknyós karikázó*¹⁸ dance performed on Saturday, the day of the wedding, which was perhaps without exaggeration one of the most

a stranger, not knowing the village. Another difficulty was that the previously announced location had been changed, but this was mainly communicated only at a local level, and as an outsider it was not easy to find the new location.

¹⁷ There were seven groups from the regional villages.

¹⁸ Hundred skirts female circle dance



Figure 2. The szájszoknyás karikázó. Photo: Dóra Pál-Kovács, Bába, 2023.

attractive elements of the Event (see Figure 2). The *szájszoknyás karikázó* is a chain and circle dance “a uniform dance with a regular structure, because the girls’ closed, circular chain does not allow for individual improvisation” (Martin 1980). This dance of the Sárköz-Danube region along the Danube River varied to a larger or lesser extent from village to village, from social level to religious denomination, and shows different stages of the formal development of the dance (Martin 1979, 82).

The *szájszoknyás karikázó*, a circle dance which was previously known as *lépő* (step) has been enacted for a very long time by the girls of the Sárköz region to give emotional expression to the accompanying songs’ lyrics and to show off their costumes. It was known as *lépő* as every Sunday, when they came out of the church, they *stepped one*, as it were (Pál-Kovács 2023b). The *lépő* was part of the traditional wedding ceremony, the bride’s last dance as a girl before she got married: “A couple of girls who were her friends and said goodbye like that. But it’s actually the bride’s last dance as a girl” (Pál-Kovács 2023b).

Even in the early years of the Event, the *szájszoknyás karikázó* was an element of the programme, which, according to memories, was created by Mihály Szabadi, a famous choreographer in the area, who was involved in

the Event. This is where women from the neighbourhood's dance groups dance a choreography together. This element of the programme is a good example of how the settlements of the Sárköz region can come together and promote local representation, as the choreography is created and performed by the community members together. Despite the fact that the *százszoknyás karikázó* is presented as a choreography, the different movements specific to the towns can be observed during the dance, which was illustrated by one of my informants during fieldwork.

Dances at the Wedding Party

One of the main elements of the Event's interpretation as a dance party is the wedding itself, a dinner attended by nearly a thousand people with pre-booked tickets.

During the evening there was tambura music,¹⁹ typical of the region, with a brass band playing only during the dance breaks. After midnight, the tambura music was replaced by a string band²⁰ which is typical of folk music in Hungary.

The traditional wedding was a good place for learning to dance, as it was an opportunity for younger members of the community to learn the dances from the elderly people, and which they could later practise on their own. Nowadays, dance learning²¹ and the transmission of knowledge takes place mainly in institutional settings. László Felföldi (2020) describes five models of dance transmission: traditional, documentary, theatrical, dance house and the intangible cultural heritage model. The traditional one takes place in local communities, through imitation and observation. The documentary model is most similar to the dance learning processes of peasant culture. It allows for the pursuit of authenticity, of accurate reconstruction, through learning from film or dance writing. "In the theoretical model the aim is the authentic acquisition and presentation of elements of dance folklore, 'shaped' mainly from an aesthetic point of view, with an artistic purpose." In the dance house model the dance tradition is transmitted or revived in a modern context. The ICH model "is based on the creative use

¹⁹ *The tradition of tambura music in Hungary* was inscribed on the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2024.

²⁰ *The string band tradition in Hungary* was inscribed on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2023.

²¹ Sándor Varga has dealt with dance teaching and its forms in traditional peasant dance culture. See Varga 2011.



Figure 3. Dancing at the wedding dance party. Photo: Dóra Pál-Kovács, Bába, 2023.

of dance folklore as integral part of local culture, local knowledge and local way of life. Folklore authenticity²² is irrelevant in this framework, since the main characteristic of heritage is its constant change” (Felföldi 2020, 87–88). In the Event, the mode of traditional dance learning is relegated to the background and the intangible cultural heritage model becomes more visible.

The living dance tradition is still an important part of the intangible cultural heritage of the Sárköz region. This was evident at the wedding party, where the participants danced almost the whole evening without a break. The serving of the various courses of the dinner was slower than usual, but it also gave the participants a good opportunity to dance. During breaks in the meal, people enjoyed themselves between the tables, with one band or another playing music. The musical repertoire consisted not only of traditional folk songs, but also of so-called “party hits” (*mulatók dalok*)²³ which the dancers enjoyed and sang the lyrics to as much as to the folk songs.

The dance set basically followed the dance order of traditional weddings, i.e. the vast majority of dances were slow and *friss csárdás* dances, *verbunk* and *ugrós* (jumping) dances, and in the case of the “party hits”, *csárdás* dances were also observed (see Figure 3).

²² The question of authenticity is addressed across a wide literature both in Hungary and abroad. In her doctoral dissertation, Anna Székely also discusses this question of how to interpret authenticity in the revival movement, and whether it is even possible. See Székely 2024.

²³ The party hits are folk song-based popular art melodies played at weddings, which became popular in the second half of the twentieth century.

The traditional programme of weddings was followed by the party events and the newlyweds were naturally more at the centre of attention. During the evening, the newlyweds and the parents were greeted, gifts were given to them by members of the wedding party, and a bride's dance was performed.

The housewives' dance (see Figure 4) was also part of the wedding on Saturday. Similarly, this was an important and spectacular feature which, due to the nature of the Event, was organised. This dance followed "the scenario" of the previous ones, where the best man brought the women to the wedding venue. In contrast to traditional weddings, there were also women in traditional costume, wearing white workers' aprons on top of their big skirts.

The slow and *friss* version of the couple dance, the *csárdás*, which is typical of the region, appeared in a variety of ways during the dance. In this region, the *csárdás* is a very deep-rooted and even recently flourishing, important dance type that is still part of their intangible cultural heritage. This is primarily a couple dance, but it appeared relatively often in the form of a circle or chain. This variation has the potential to involve participants who are not so familiar with the local dances. This makes them active participants in the dance which reinforces a sense of belonging to the community.



Figure 4. Housewives' dance at the wedding party. Photo: © László Kovács, Konkam Studio, 2023.

In Hungarian and international dance folklore and dance anthropology studies, the relationship between dancer and musician²⁴ and its analysis is often discussed. Part of my research was to find out how and to what extent the relationship between them can be detected at an organised event. It should be noted that the spatial structure and use of space²⁵ at the Event was different from that of the traditional one, which also affected the dancer-musician relationship. The spatial organisation and proxemics of various dance-types had an effect on their formal and structural character, and through this, on the creative process of the dancers (Varga 2011, 104). Due to the size of the tent and the large number of participants, the best man's speech and the instruments were also played over loudspeakers. The Event character of the wedding was reinforced by the fact that the musicians played on a large stage, which, due to its height, rendered the relationship between dancer and musician difficult, as it made the musicians stand out from the space. Nevertheless, on several occasions during the evening, dancers were observed encouraging the musicians to change the tempo of the music. It is a common phenomenon in Hungarian and Transylvanian dance houses for a dancer to slip paper money into the bow of the leading violinist, asking him to play his favourite song and paying him to do so. One dancer at the Event asked for his favourite song in this way.

In some areas of the Hungarian language area, musicians were reputed to be good dancers, often putting down their instruments to join in the dance. One of the tambura musicians danced slow and *friss csárdás* in the evening.

Conclusion

By their nature, traditions have constantly responded to their socio-cultural context and to the new challenges posed. For this reason, intangible cultural heritage is also in a state of constant change; it cannot be seen as static for it is shaped by the community in its own image. The Event provided an opportunity to showcase the traditions of the Sárköz region, but it is worth taking some time to reflect on this, because despite the efforts

²⁴ In his doctoral thesis Csongor Könczei deals with the role of the bands of the Transylvanian Mezőség region (Könczei 2011).

²⁵ Sándor Varga demonstrates that the local dance-proxemics operated as a communications-system, in which important social (ethnic, economic, gender and status) roles and relations were symbolised in Transylvanian Plein (Varga 2011).

to present traditional weddings as authentically as possible, the Event had to respond to the changing context and needs. While some elements of traditional weddings were developed and created in peasant culture and reflected the social and cultural needs of the time, in the globalised, modern world of the twenty-first century, all these elements seem a little strange. For example, the housewives' dance, which used to be an integral part of traditional weddings, with meaning and function for the community, has now disappeared from contemporary wedding rituals, and appeared here mainly for entertainment and demonstration purposes. Looking back at the course of the Event, it is clear that there were several programme elements that were not part of the traditional wedding but were incorporated into the Event to attract the public, as for example, a football tournament or a themed exhibition opening.

Tourism factors have not only led to the inclusion of additional programmes, but have also had an impact on the programmes that are part of the wedding. The dressing of the bride has lost its intimate, family character and has been replaced by that of show and spectacle. In terms of the spatial structures, the stage and sound system at the venues were also included, highlighting the various folklore elements (dance, music) and incorporating modern equipment (sound system, stage) to make them more visible and audible. As a result, the rules of the stage have already influenced the dances, transforming and changing them. Analysis of this impact is not the task of this study, but its mention is relevant for the dances of Sárköz. The choreography of the *százzszoknyás karikázó* dance, a tourist attraction, is the most attractive part of the Event and serves mainly as an illustration of the former wedding custom.

In the case of traditional weddings, the family often disproportionately represented itself, organising the wedding beyond its financial means. In terms of the wedding Event, it is often not a family, but the municipality that acts as organiser. In many cases, public grants and tenders provide the financial cover for the Event, but community donations and support are also common. In the case of the traditional wedding, the chicken and eggs were donated by the community, and in the case of the Event, the tent and the sound system were provided by the local people. Here again, we can see that the earlier community systems are still in place, but the changed medium has also changed the objects of the offerings.

Although the *Sárközi lakodalom* never previously existed in this way, it is an organised Event where tourism factors have a major influence; and

yet it is an important means of maintaining and safeguarding the heritage. For the community, the relationship with their tradition is an important part of their cultural identity, and an organised event is one of the ways of expressing and making this visible. Participating, preparing and organising together strengthens local cultural awareness and the sense of belonging within the community.

The Event aims to present traditional weddings as accurately as possible to the public and to the younger generation of the region. The wedding Event is an example of the importance of the relationship with local traditions for the region, of the way in which its folk art still binds its inhabitants together and is able to safeguard their common identity. The whole of the region's folk art reflects the objectives of the 2003 UNESCO Convention: it is handed down from generation to generation, it is constantly responding to the social and cultural environment, it is not static and it is an important part of the community's identity.

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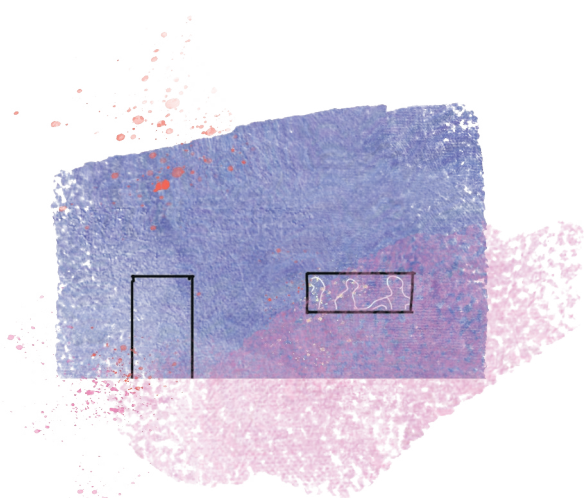
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5.

The Hungarian Phenomenon of *Táncház*: A Historical Overview

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Táncház (dance house) refers not only to a sociocultural tradition historically rooted in Transylvania, but also to a social movement in the 1970s promoting traditional Hungarian dance and music. The term also represents a teaching method and a model for transmitting intangible cultural heritage. This chapter explores the *táncház* phenomenon's many dimensions, including its international reach and characteristics in the early twenty-first century.

Keywords: *táncház*, Hungarian revival, folk dance, ethnochoreology, dance house movement

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the *táncház* (dance house) phenomenon and to explore its various meanings. I argue that the concept of *táncház* can be understood and used in multiple ways. *Táncház* literally means “dance house” in Hungarian, but the term refers to several concepts and practices as well, such as a historical term for a sociocultural phenomenon rooted in Transylvania, Romania, or a movement that started in the 1970s that connected people to share similar social objectives. *Táncház* also means a method for learning traditional dances, and it was selected by UNESCO as an excellent example of the transmission of intangible knowledge of folk culture (UNESCO n.d.). *Táncház* has established a cultural and pedagogical institutional system that has now formed a vibrant community network around it.¹ As a revival phenomenon, *táncház* provides urban people with an opportunity to engage in folk dancing and to listen to traditional music. Since its inception in the early 1970s, *táncház* as an institution and cultural practice has spread nationwide, attracted new participants, and taken on various forms in contemporary society.

I will first discuss the historical roots of *táncház* from Transylvania. Then, secondly, within the framework of applied ethnochoreology, I will demonstrate how folk dance research and publications on traditional dances are employed for revival purposes and discuss the contributions and role of ethnochoreologists in this process. Thirdly, I will outline the beginning and development of the *táncház* movement, followed fourthly by an explanation of *táncház* as a method for teaching traditional dances. Fifthly, I present the historical periods of the *táncház* movement, its institutionalisation, educational forms, and how it has appeared in the neighbouring countries as a model for practising traditional dances. Sixthly and finally, I introduce the characteristics of revival *táncház* and the various present-day *táncházak* and folk pubs in Hungary.

To draw on the history of the *táncház* phenomena, I have used relevant academic literature as well as interviews, books and memorial volumes that contain interviews and reminiscences of the pioneers and key actors of the *táncház* movement. As a result of these sources, it is possible to gain

¹ These above-mentioned distinctions were introduced by Ildikó Sándor, a Hungarian ethnologist, in a public presentation at the *Táncház módszer konferencia* (Táncház Method Conference) in Budapest on May 4, 2024 (Sándor 2024). I would like to thank Ildikó Sándor for allowing me to use her manuscript for my study.

subjective and personal perspectives on the revival *táncház* movement in Hungary.² I also consider the contemporary situation and different types of *táncházak* based on fieldwork observations and an online questionnaire.³

The *Táncház* and Its Transylvanian Roots

During the twentieth century, rural areas offered a variety of dance opportunities. Dance occasions occurred during festive seasons (such as carnival and the grape harvest) and life events (such as weddings and christenings), which diversified everyday life (Pesovár F. 1978). Dance events were distinguished by occasion and age. Spontaneous and more organised dance event forms were present in peasant society. Balls were usually held on different days of the calendar year at harvest, Christmas, carnival and Easter, and they lasted until night or dawn. Communal agricultural labour such as *aratás* (wheat harvesting) or *fonó* (hemp processing) also included dance, music and singing. Dance opportunities for children had various names that indicated the manner of the occasion, such as *gyermekbál* (children's ball), *aprók tánca* (roughly meaning dance of the tiny ones) in the Mezőség (Câmpia Transilvaniei) region, or *serketánc* in Gyimes (Ghimeş) in Romania (Pesovár F. 1982). In peasant society, young people actively participated in dance events after their confirmation, around the age of 14–16 years, when they became full members of the village's community (Pál-Kovács 2017, 59; Bondea 2023, 68). In the summer season, the so-called *vasárnapi tánc* (Sunday dances) were held after church service when the youngsters gathered together in an open-air place for a short time (Pesovár F. 1978, 8–9).

The organisers of the dance events in Transylvania were often called *kezes* (chizeş, guarantor): one or two young men who arranged the venue, hired the musicians and sorted out the finances by admission fee or calculated in advance. They had a special role during the dance evening. The *kezes* took care of maintaining order and of the musicians, as well as ensuring that dance partners were provided for the external guests from other villages (Pesovár F. 1980; Varga 2023). The informal dance occa-

² The main literature was Béla Szilárd Jávorszky's book *A magyar folk története, The Story of Hungarian Folk* (2013, 2015) which discusses the music revival movement, its milestones and key figures.

³ The research was carried out in the framework of the OTKA (SNN_21) project "In New Disguise: Changes in Traditional Music and Dance Culture in Hungary and its Environment." 2021–2024. The author has previously published under the name Anna Székely.

sions in the Mezőség region were mainly called *tánc* (dance). Young people rented a room in a house that was called *táncolóház*, *táncos ház* (*casă de joc*, dancing house), or *tánc ház* (dance house), especially in the settlement of Szék (Sic, Romania) (Varga 2015, 89; 2023, 92). *Tánc ház* therefore connotes a place, a room in a house, a barn, or in a broader sense, a whole plot that the non-married youth rented to organise informal dance events with live music (Könczei 2004, 219; Varga 2015, 89; Quigley and Varga 2021, 504). The dance house was an entertainment opportunity for the local young people and a specific manifestation of the dance life of the village of Szék, which until the middle and end of the twentieth century determined the dance organisation, the dance style (behaviour), the internal rules of dance life, and the community life of the peasantry (Könczei 2004, 81). This name and form were used as a model by the Hungarian *tánc ház* movement that emerged in the 1970s.⁴

Tánc ház as a Revival Phenomenon

The dance house movement embraced folk dance with a new approach compared to that of previous folklore movements.⁵ Under the socialist regime, art unions were established to organise culture, which was controlled by the communist party. The Soviet model affected the artistic and stage-orientated folk dance movement (Felföldi 2018, 25–28). After the establishment of the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble in 1950, hundreds of amateur folk dance groups appeared all over the country performing stylised, choreographed folk dance pieces only on the stage. In the 1950s, communist cultural policy was aimed at embracing “folk culture” and using it for different political purposes (Jávorszky 2015, 20). Following the Soviet mode, folk dances appeared at public political and cultural events, official festivities, and so on. Trade unions financed the management of dance groups (Balogh and Fülemile 2008, 44–45).

Bihari, Bartók, Vasas, and Vadrózsák were the four main trade union folk dance ensembles in Budapest. The first urban *tánc ház* was organised

⁴ Szék has been studied in ethnographic and folk music research since the 1930s, and also from the 1950s by ethnochoreologists. From the 1970s onwards, interest grew further: ethnologists, amateur collectors, young enthusiasts, and even writers visited Szék, and these encounters contributed to the emergence of a new folkloristic movement (Martin 1982).

⁵ Mary Taylor, in her book *Movement of the People*, examines the long history of Hungarian folk movements, including the *tánc ház* movement, combining historical analysis with fieldwork experiences and personal impressions (Taylor 2021).

for these folk dance group members on 6 May 1972. This historical moment had two direct antecedents. Firstly, an attempt to organise a casual, self-educational gathering for the folk dance group members called the *Club of Folk Dancers*, which operated for only a year in 1964. The organisers invited researchers, for example, György Martin, to give a lecture about ethnography, folk dance and his collections. The dancers, however, were not so much attracted by the academic lectures as by the opportunity to spend time together and to dance popular dances of the time – such as the twist and rock and roll – in other settings. The other influential moment was participation in a rural *táncház* in Szék, Transylvania. In 1971, young revival folk dancers visited the village of Szék during Christmas time and joined a dance house event, where local young boys and girls appeared in their traditional clothes to dance. The experience of live folk music and free-styled dancing was impressed upon the mindset of the Budapest revival folk dancers and intellectuals. Upon returning to Hungary, they decided to organise a similar event in Budapest for the other members of the folk dance ensembles. Thus, the first event was organised on the model of the Szék dance house. Indeed, the invitation text read: “music and dance, just like in Szék.” The participants learnt and danced Szék dances. This occasion provided an opportunity to practise the “original social dance” character of folk dance and to dance off-stage – that is, to engage in folk dancing as a social activity (Sándor 2006, 26; see also Jávorszky 2015, 29).⁶ The first successful private event was followed by two other occasions, which were also only for the Budapest dancers, first in June and then on 23 October 1972.

In the beginning, the dance house primarily provided entertainment for members of various folk dance groups. Seeing the success of the event, the organisers later lifted the closed nature of the event, making it accessible to a wider audience. According to the Bartók Ensembles’ memorandum from 1973, “the goal of the dance house is to have fun with folk dance and folk music as widely as possible in a public setting. /.../ The two most important conditions of the dance house are the creation and the widest possible dissemination of a common dance and musical language.” (Jávorszky 2013, 70). The *táncház* phenomenon spread and appeared in rural towns and settlements in Hungary. During this period, dance houses, as a new form

⁶ The term “original” was frequently used in ethnochoreological texts without further explanation, but it generally referred to the traditional settings and environments encountered in research. Its meaning can only be inferred from the context of the literature. The phrase has also been adopted into the vocabulary of *táncház* attendees.

of urban entertainment, proliferated not only in Budapest but also in the countryside (Jávorszky 2013, 104). The *táncház* events not only consisted of dance learning sessions but also of other educational and cultivation programmes, such as documentary film projections and concerts. This club-like manner determined the initial period of the *táncház* movement and created a new form of urban recreational occasion (Jávorszky 2015, 40–44). The period from 1972 to 1981 can be interpreted as a social movement, a period of grassroots initiative (Csonka-Takács and Havay 2011, 13).

Applied Ethnochoreology

In relation to the development of the Hungarian *táncház* movement, it is necessary to consider the relationship between folk dance research and the revival movement. Like other revival movements, the *táncház* movement relies for its repertoire, artistic elements, style, and history on informants, historical sources, recordings, and traditions (Livingston 1999, 71). Below, I highlight how the ethnographic and dance folkloristic field materials collected from the middle of the twentieth century provided a foundation for the folk dance movement of the 1970s.

The Hungarian movement began and operated with the help of ethnographers, folk music and folk dance researchers who brought their serious scholarly backgrounds to its assistance (Balogh and Fülemile 2008, 49; Könnczei 2010, 2). In the process of adapting and transmitting traditional folklore elements in urban settings, the roles of György Martin as ethnochoreologist and Sándor Timár as choreographer and pedagogue were invaluable. György Martin's academic work and his role in providing access to his collections influenced the early period of the movement and the efforts to revitalise folk dance traditions (Quigley 2015, 115–116; Varga 2013, 1). For the youth of the 1970s, a huge amount of film and recorded music material was available, which was also the basis of the first urban *táncház* in 1972. Martin was not only concerned with the collection and theoretical study of traditional dances but also with their dissemination, performance and development. This type of activity is recognised by later researchers as applied ethnochoreology (Giurchescu 2014, 23–24; Quigley 2015, 113).⁷ In his published curriculum vitae in *Acta Ethnographica Hunga-*

⁷ Besides Martin, other researchers also published volumes and practical handbooks intended to facilitate the acquisition and cultivation of folk dances. For instance, Ágoston Lányi and

rica, Martin notes that “in popular education, my chief endeavours were related to the training of folk dance teachers.” (Martin 1994, 8). According to Ernő Pesovár, thanks to the collection work, several dance traditions of the Hungarian language area have been explored and interpreted (Pesovár E. 2011). Since the early 1970s, there has been literature published that systematises and typifies traditional dances, defines dialects and classifies them into historical layers. During this period, in addition to Martin, several others were teaching “original dance processes” (documented during field collections) in courses at the Institute for People’s Culture (*Népművelési Intézet*). As Pesovár noted, “the whole *táncház* movement is built on this” (Pesovár E. 2011, 21).

Martin, in his published scientific works, also provided guidance on how to use the collected dances in practice and advised amateur folklore collectors on research methodology. These recommendations on use and adaptation were mainly dedicated to the *táncház* movement era of the 1970s and 1980s. In his study *A férfitáncok pedagógiai és táncvási alkalmazásáról* (On the pedagogical and *táncház* application of men’s dances) from 1983, he gives guidance on how and for what purpose men’s dances that were performed individually and in groups should be adapted for dance practice in urban *táncházak*. As an example:

If improvised men’s dances, which require greater skill, have become somewhat established in our *táncház* over the past decade, there is every possibility that the simpler, more regular *verbunk* dances may be liked too. Through them, the planned *development and enrichment* of the men’s dance repertoire can be carried out in a more solid way than before. (...) It is advisable to give this role of our dances to those dances that we wish to draw attention to as unknown material to be introduced. (Martin 1983, 195–197; my emphasis)

This article was published in the volume *A körverbunk* (*The Circle Verbunk*) edited by Ágoston Lányi, Ernő Pesovár, and Martin) which aimed to promote and popularise the *verbunk* men’s dance in the *táncház* movement. In addition to guidelines, there were also publications that emphasised the

Ernő Pesovár recommend studying the published dances in order to engage with their artistic values, the peasantry’s dance-creation process, and the structure of the dances (Lányi and Pesovár E. 1974, 3).

value, appreciation, and research of traditional dances as folk art. According to Bertalan Andrásfalvy's introduction in the volume entitled *A mezőszéki sűrű legényes* (The *sűrű legényes* from Mezőség, 1985), Martin

provides a guide and model for the continuation of the study of the *sűrű legényes*, how to grasp the essence of a particular Hungarian dance type, how to analyse and understand it as a work of art. (...) This volume can also serve as a practical textbook for all those who study Hungarian folk dance culture as a whole and for those who want to teach and stage *sűrű legényes*. (Andrásfalvy 1985, 4)

In the chapter entitled “A mezőszéki sűrű legényesek védelmében” (In defence of the *mezőszéki sűrű legényes*), there is a kind of warning against superficial knowledge, a feature which has reappeared in the history of the folk dance movement:

Those interested in this attractive dance material, however, do not always approach this wonderful dance material with the appropriate humility. The tendency to present folk dance as quickly as possible, following a superficial knowledge of it, does not lead to its appreciation but to its cheap discrediting. (“If I can't learn it, at most I can change it; at least they won't say I'm copying, but they'll acknowledge that I'm creating!”). (Martin 1985, 70)

Martin's open and helpful personality was a key factor in the way in which the folk dances he collected were given new life in the urban environment. The vital relationship between the *táncház* movement and research, however, became less and more formal after Martin died in 1983, when the relationship between the *táncház* movement and research was severed (Varga 2013).

The *Táncház* Method

The method of learning the “original folk dances”⁸ was developed together with the choreographer, folk dance teacher and folklorist Sándor Timár. Timár and Martin met in 1949 as scouts, then danced together in a folk dance ensemble before beginning to collect folk dances and music. Timár already gathered dances that he used for his choreographic work and was mainly focused on folk dance teaching and the creation of dance pieces. Martin showed his collections to Timár and also taught him in practice. The main sources of dances for Timár were from the village of Szék. He learned the dances by watching film recordings (not directly from local dancers), and then he taught these dances to his own group. During teaching, he used the *Pátria – Hungarian Folk Music Recordings* albums, that contain field recordings of village music, as accompaniment at dance rehearsals. Timár, with the Bartók Folk Dance Ensemble also participated at the first *táncház* event (Timár 2003, 44–45). Timár’s new pedagogical method for transmitting folk dances was based on the scientific research of György Martin and his colleagues. Timár, like György Martin, believed that “peasant dance steps should be learnt in their original form.”⁹ And if the right improvisational skills are mastered, it is up to the dancer to make use of this knowledge” (Jávorszky 2022, 36). The source of the acquisition was film recordings or personal experiences from the field (Jávorszky 2015, 42). Owing to the extent of these collections, the *táncház* movement’s dance repertoire included dance material from various ethnographic regions. As Béla Halmos, musician, folk music researcher and pioneer of the movement, describes: “They consciously agreed: Martin, the scientist who collects and analyses, and Timár, the one who uses and teaches it” (Halmos 2012, 27).

Timár likened the learning of improvisational dance to language learning, with the metaphor of dance and movement as the mother tongue (Sándor and Ónodi 2023, 94). Instead of repeating the texts as learnt, the speaker should aim to express their thoughts based on their knowledge of words and grammatical rules (Diószegi 1983). As Ildikó Sándor and Béla Ónodi describe: “In his methodology, the acquisition of the ‘language of the dance’

⁸ “Original folk dances” refers to movements originating in rural environments, observed during fieldwork.

⁹ The “original form” means similarly to the rural environment where the transmission of knowledge occurred through personal, face-to-face communication between generations (Balogh and Fülemile, 2008, 48).

plays an important role, and the teaching is based on the structural analysis of traditional dances, primarily the transmission of particular dances and regional variations of motifs” (Sándor and Ónodi 2023, 95). Sándor Timár summarised his pedagogical ideas on and approaches to folk dance in 1999 with the title *In the Language of Folk Dance* (*Néptáncnyelven* in Hungarian). In this process, the students have to start learning from the smallest elements, the dance motifs, and the aim is to “talk” independently as an improvisation. As translated in the article noted earlier: “in the case of spoken language, we first learn words and then the order in which the words are connected according to the grammatical rules of the learnt language. We must do the same in the case of dance” (Timár 1999, 10 in Sándor and Ónodi 2023, 95). Timár suggests that the motifs are learnt by direct observation and imitation, and to acquire improvisational abilities, the instructor must teach the basic steps and their variations. Once the pupils are confident and “know the basic forms of the dance well, they should start ‘innovating’, developing the dance naturally” (Timár 1999, 107 in Sándor and Ónodi 2023, 95). This kinaesthetic knowledge is the basis of improvisational social dancing in urban *táncházak*. The Timár method aims to ensure that the dances are acquired in a manner as close to that as witnessed when the peasant dance culture was first collected in the field and to be part of everyday life (Jávorszky 2015, 42). Another innovation of Timár was to hire string band musicians to accompany the dancing live. Ferenc Sebő and Béla Halmos, famous musicians and pioneers of the movement, played folk music at the rehearsals for the Bartók Dance Ensemble, as opposed to other groups that used cassette recordings or piano accompaniment (Jávorszky 2015, 42). Dancing to live music established and reinforced the connection between dancers and musicians, as it had occurred in the rural environment, a significant element in the revitalisation process.

The Institutionalisation of the *Táncház* Movement

From 1981 to 2000, in the movement’s institutionalisation period, training courses were launched to educate folk musicians and dance teachers for the *táncházak* (Csonka-Takács and Havay 2011, 14). The movement began to become institutionalised, receiving financial, professional and political support from the Institute of Popular Education (Csonka-Takács and Havay 2011; Jávorszky 2013). Dance house leaders’ courses started in 1976,

a monthly organised two-year course with an intensive summer camp where Timár, Sebő, and Halmos were the main tutors (Quigley 2013, 21). The aim of these courses and intensive summer camps was to train the new generation of instructors and musicians. The National *Táncház* Leader Course was held at the summer camps of 1976 and 1977, and in addition meetings were organised every month throughout the year as a “folk high school” (Jávorszky 2015, 61). The first camp for dancers was held in 1981 in the town of Járszberény. Several revival bands have created their own camps, as for example, the Téka Ensemble from 1986 to 1999 (Quigley 2013, 22). At the same time, the number of *táncház* events as a new form of entertainment expanded not only in Budapest but also in the countryside (Jávorszky 2015, 59). The *Néptáncosok Szakmai Háza* (House of the Folk Dance Professionals, one of the former institutions of the present *Hagyományok Háza*, Hungarian Heritage House) was established in 1981, where the public and people interested in folk culture could access archival recordings and methodological assistance for their work. Book publications and audio-visual materials were created and spread to popularise the *táncház* method, highlighting its function of transmitting folk dances (Jávorszky 2013, 112).

In 1982, the *táncház* movement reached a new milestone: the first *Táncház Festival and Fair* (*Országos Táncháztalálkozó és Kirakodóvásár*) where revivalists could meet, learn dances and purchase folk art products (Csonka-Takács and Havay 2011, 14; Jávorszky 2013, 112). By 1990, different branches of folk art practitioners had created their own professional organisations, such as the *Táncház Egyesület* (*Táncház Association*) social organisation (Jávorszky 2015, 84). This functions as a coordinating body, organising the annual *Táncház Festival* and the dance house season opener called *Táncházak Éjszakája: Országos Szezonnyitó Táncház* (Night of *Táncházak*: National Season Opening *Táncház*). It also publishes a quarterly called *folkMAGazin* (Quigley 2013, 22). Beginning in 1994, this contains writings that make academic studies accessible to a wider readership and disseminates information, including studies on ethnography, folk dance, and folk music. It also reviews “happenings related to the living folk art movements,” programme recommendations, news, discussions, and dialogues concerning the group (*folkMAGazin* 2022). During the 1990s, *táncház* clubs spread nationwide, and the *táncház* repertoire expanded to include Hungarian, Irish-Celtic, Balkan, Gipsy, Greek, Scottish, Klezmer, and German dance and music. *Táncházak* moved from cultural houses (*művelődési*

ház) to new places of amusement such as folk pubs which attracted young people (Jávorszky 2013, 144; 2015, 84).

The present Hungarian Heritage House was established by the Ministry of Culture and Education in 2001 and aims to nurture the revival movement as well as to preserve and promote Hungarian folk traditions. It encompasses three units that serve this aim. First, the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble, founded in 1951, which stages traditional dance-based choreographies (Hagyományok Háza 2024a). Second, the Folklore Documentation Centre which contains collections, legacies, and the library of György Martin, as well as those of ethnomusicologists László Lajtha and Béla Halmos. The Centre also produces the *Folklóradatbázis* (Folklore Database) which is available online and on-site (Hagyományok Háza 2024b).¹⁰ Third and last, the Applied Folk Arts Department organises courses, conferences, dance houses, and playhouses for children, as well as publishing music and dance CDs and DVDs and judging works of contemporary applied folk art (Hagyományok Háza 2024a; see also Quigley 2013).

In the fifty years since the 1970s, folk dance education has been present in public education from pre-school to university level (Fülemile 2018). According to a 1993 law on public education, children have the right to receive a basic art education (Nemzeti Erőforrás Minisztérium, n.d.),¹¹ and as a result of this measure, the teaching of folk dance has become part of public education (Demarcsek 2019, see also Jávorszky 2015, 87). Since 2007, the Franz Liszt Academy of Music has established degree programmes in Folk Music at the BA and MA levels while the Hungarian Dance University started its Folk Dance Educator programme in 2010. These institutions ensure the *táncház* network provides folk musicians and dance teachers (Csonka-Takács and Havay 2011, 15) and the Hungarian Heritage House provides further training to kindergarten teachers and school pedagogues (Halmos 2006, 20). Meanwhile, the social dance character, entertainment, courtship, and socialising functions also appeared from the very beginning, creating a subcultural group within Hungarian society.

¹⁰ The database is available online: <https://folkloradatbazis.hu/>.

¹¹ Nemzeti Erőforrás Minisztérium means the Ministry of National Resources in English.

Characteristics of the Revival *Táncházak*

In the 1970s, the general practice was that over a long period (a few months or weeks), participants learnt dances from only one dance dialect or village. According to Ildikó Sándor's study from 2006, after the dance teaching session there was free dancing (*szabad tánc*), in which dances were differentiated according to regions, dancers recognising the appropriate dance from the music. Even during the free dancing, a student circle operated away from the band and was separated from the dancing crowd. The "dance house-dance," that is the improvisational dance, had to be acquired by those who were familiar with folk dancing. The open *táncházak* attracted participants with no dance background, so they had to be taught the basic steps, motifs, pairings, and so on. The dance teaching started in a circle, and the main method was and remains demonstration, instant copying and multiple repetitions, supplemented with a verbal explanation. The teacher stands in the middle of the circle, showing the dance step-by-step. The session is accompanied by live music, first slowly then moving towards the tempo as performed in the rural environment. Each dance sequence is repeated several times, while the partners usually change. This and varying the elements also ensure the ability to improvise and to execute free-style dance (Sándor 2006, 31–32).

In the break between the overall structure of the dance event, the participants could join the singing session, which followed the dance-learning routine: presentation, direct imitation, repetition, practice, and performance of the full song. These songs could accompany the dance melodies, so that dancers might sing while dancing, or they could be related to the folk traditions and other types of non-dance folk songs (Sándor 2006, 32). Through their participation, people could gain experience, which was the main goal of the teaching approach of *táncház*. Educational lectures including those on ethnography were also part of the *táncház* events, which allowed participants to become familiar with certain topics and the place of dances, music, and folk customs in a system that we call traditional culture. The activity of education was typical in the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, this has been relegated to the background. During the teaching sessions, tutors usually mention the folklore and traditional dance life of the given village, local customs, its outstanding, famous peasant dancers, singers, or musicians, and their common stories, as well as some ethnographic knowledge that helps to contextualise and understand the dances that the participants learn (Sándor 2006, 32–34).



Figure 1. Kassák Club, the Sebő Ensemble's dance house in 1976. Sándor Timár is teaching in the centre of the circle. Photo: © FORTEPAN / Urbán Tamás.¹²

Handicraft activities are usually present in children's *táncházak*, where they can learn about natural materials (leather, corn, and pottery) and craft techniques. The children's plays also include folk games, storytelling and traditional custom plays (Sándor 2006, 34–35). The *táncház* events and different activities are means of transmitting experiential practices and disseminating ethnographic knowledge on local or national traditions in a complex manner.

The movement adapted not only the traditional cultural phenomena (dance, music, songs, and the like) into the urban environment but also the method of transmission, of passing on traditions. According to Ildikó Sándor, teaching in dance houses combines classic observation and mimetic practice with modern pedagogical methods. Through active involvement,

¹² Fortepan is a copyright-free and community-based online photo archive, accessible at www.fortepan.hu/en. The photo was donated by Tamás Urbán. The Kassák Lajos Cultural House in Budapest, known as Kassák Club, was a cultural centre that organised open dance houses from 1973, featuring Sándor Timár and the Bartók Folk Dance Ensemble, accompanied by Ferenc Sebő's folk music group.



Figure 2. *Kassák Club*, the Sebő Ensemble's dance house in 1976. The photo shows folk singer Márta Sebestyén holding a book. Photo: © FORTEPAN / Urbán Tamás.

activity, experiential learning, and the practice of dance, song, and knowledge, a sense of community can be experienced (Sándor 2006, 35–37).

As a result of film collections and dance folkloristic research, the movement's dance repertoire contains dance material from various ethnographic regions. From its beginnings, dance dialect fashions can be identified, which included dances from certain regions and settlements, such as Szék, as the “source” of *táncház*, Méhkerék (especially the Romanian dances), Szatmár, Mezőség, Gyimes valley, or Moldavia from Romania (Szabó 1998, 127). The development and transposition of the dance house repertoire depend on the interests of the leading dance teachers, the work of the dance ensembles, and the dance house collecting activities. As the movement developed, new, spectacular dances requiring higher technical skills became popular, such as Romanian ethnic dances from the Kalotaszeg region (Szabó 1998, 176). Currently, thanks to the continuous online publication of ma-

terial in the Institute for Musicology's *Knowledge Base of Traditional Dance*,¹³ more virtuosic, even previously unknown, dances of regions, individuals, and groups are also emerging that are used and mastered as references by dance teachers, competition organisers, choreographers and the *tánc ház* community. Certainly, Transylvania is (and remains) very popular among revival folk dance practitioners.

Since the beginning of the *tánc ház*, the so-called *adatközlők* (informants) who are usually elder people of peasant origin, have had a privileged role. They are experts in folk culture, dancing, singing, or music as bearers of local traditions. The urban revivalists regard the informants as authentic and trustworthy mediators of traditional knowledge (Székely 2021, 434). In the 1970s, dancers of Transylvanian origin were invited to participate and demonstrate their knowledge in the dance house, and by doing so, urban dancers could learn from so-called "pure sources".¹⁴ These rural singers, storytellers, and dancers are highly respected and well-known within the folk dancers' cultural grouping. According to Ildikó Sándor, in addition to the professional way of learning folk dance, which is by watching archival films and learning the movements from them, the acquisition of the dance through observation and imitation from the informants played an important role. During the direct transfer-receipt activity, the participants achieved joy and understanding through direct experience and active action. As a result of participation in dancing, singing, and handicrafts, a sense of community and experientiality also became important. The personal presence of the informants and the presentation of archival recordings provided an opportunity to study the performance and dance style of urban youth who no longer live and grow up in the tradition (Sándor 2006, 31). At the present time, the rural performers are invited to *tánc ház* movement-related events such as *tánc házak*, festivals, and camps to perform and/or transmit their local dances, songs, and music.¹⁵

¹³ The database is available online: <https://neptanctudastar.abtk.hu/en>.

¹⁴ According to Timár's reminiscences, "When we met people from Szék on the street [in Budapest], we invited them to our rehearsals and asked them to teach us" (Siklós 2006, 15). The expression, fully rendered as "from pure sources only", originates from Béla Bartók's *Cantata Profana: The Nine Enchanted Stags*.

¹⁵ Revivalists often visit famous rural performers in their homes or participate in local dance events to gain first-hand experience of traditional culture. For a more detailed discussion of the role of informants in the *tánc ház* movement, see Janku 2025.

***Táncház* as a Model for Learning Traditional Dances**

In 2011, the *Táncház method: a Hungarian model for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage* was selected for UNESCO's Register of Good Safeguarding Practices (UNESCO n.d.).

The *táncház* serves as a model for practising traditional dances as it provides a venue for the amusement of urban people. Since 1985, the urban *táncház* phenomenon has expanded among ethnic Hungarian communities in Hungary's neighbouring countries as well as among diaspora groups, such as those in North and South America (see Taylor 2008), and non-Hungarians who are interested in Hungarian folk culture, such as those in Japan (see Jávorszky 2015).

The *táncház* model was applied to safeguarding cultural heritage in other countries too. A group of Warsaw folk enthusiasts organised the first Polish *táncház* in 1994; after that, the Polish Dancehouse Society was founded (Csonka-Takács and Havay 2011, 18–19). Subsequently, similar organisations established dance houses (*domy tańca*) and groups in Poznań, Kraków, and smaller cities in Poland (Nowack 2015). The institution of *táncház* also extended to other European nations with the same name: *tanečný dom* in Slovakia, *tanzhaus* in Germany, and *plesna hiša* in Slovenia (Pettan 2010, 131). Based on the Hungarian example, dance houses were founded in Slovenia and serve as a social event and a leisure activity in addition to folk dance ensembles. According to Slovenian ethnochoreologist Rebeka Kunej, the Slovene Dance House initiative in 2001 marked the beginning of Slovenian dance houses (Kunej 2023, 48). The repertoire includes recorded materials from ethnographic fieldwork and choreographies that are taught by instructors and practised by dancers. There are two main centres of dance houses in the Slovenian countryside: the Bela Krajina Dance House from 2011 and the Resian Dance House (close to the capital, Ljubljana) from 2015. These sites teach and popularise regional dance and music among generations, with an emphasis on local traditions and participatory activity. The organisers of the Resian Dance House also emphasised the connection with live folk culture and tradition-bearers, just as in Hungary (Kunej 2023, 49–50).

Swedish dance researcher Anna Björk notes that an interest in folk dances and their collection and archiving also appeared in the mid-twentieth century in Sweden (Björk 2023).¹⁶ From the 1970s, the so-called Green

¹⁶ I would like to express my gratitude to Anna Björk who allowed me to use her presentation

Wave movement spread in the country, and participants aimed to learn local traditions, folk music, and dance. According to Björk, a Swedish folk dancer, Bert Persson, and musician Jonny Soling met Ferenc Sebő, who introduced the dance house phenomenon to them as an occasion for social dancing; they later participated in one in Budapest. In the autumn of 1977, Persson and Soling organised the first dance house in Sweden, which became weekly gatherings. The *danshusen* are based on the Hungarian model which includes not only dance workshops and free dancing but nowadays concerts as well (Björk 2023). As Björk describes, Persson and Soling adopted the idea and the structure of the dance houses, but the means of teaching are different (Björk 2023).

Contemporary *Táncházak* and Folk Pubs in Hungary

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, folk dance is available in public education, as a leisure activity and as a profession. It is practised by a certain section of society, forming a cohesive community with a wide network. The members of the group are interested in traditional Hungarian folk dance, folk music, crafts, traditional lifestyle and folk culture. They like to spend their free time learning about the above and making it part of their everyday life in the form of some kind of activity. The group of revival folk dancers can be divided into two larger units based on their attitude towards dance and their practice of dance. One practises folk dance as a lifestyle, and the other as a hobby or leisure activity. In the former, choreographers, teachers, performers, and trained and educated dancers belong to those whose lifestyle and income relate to folk dancing. The other group are amateur dancers who dance in folk dance groups and participate in *táncházak* as entertainment and exercise. They consider this activity a way of preserving and nurturing traditions, a communal experience, and a way of expressing themselves. Revival folk dance communities, according to Andriy Nahachewsky, can be viewed as a group of “enjoyers”, “preservers”, “presenters”, “creators”, and/or “all-stars” (cultivators of all) based on the motivations of individuals, with different values being prioritized in each category (Nahachewsky 2008, 41). In an urban environment, the lifestyle of the folk dancer can be combined with membership in semi-professional dance companies, active participation in folk dance shows, festivals and

notes for my study.

competitions, the maintenance of a primary network of friends and contacts, and regular visits to *táncházak* and *folkkocsmák*, folk pubs. The group of folk dancers embedded in Hungarian society is a cultural subgroup that has its own specific features and values. They approach traditions and folk culture with curiosity and respect.

The audience of recent *táncházak* is made up of folk dance practitioners who belong to an amateur folk dance group, and folk dance instructors, as well as external interested parties. The Hungarian *táncházak* can be divided into three categories: the so-called *string*, the Moldavian or *Csángó*, and the “nationality *táncházak*” (such as Greek, Swab, Balkan, etc.).¹⁷ All these names suggest both the nature of the dance and the music. Most of the string dance houses focus on the dances of Transylvanian regions and settlements. To a lesser extent, of those dances from the so-called “Little Hungary” (meaning the territory of today’s Hungary (*Kis-Magyarország*), the most popular are the dances of Szatmár, Felső-Tisza-vidék, Upper Tisza region), or from other regions such as Felvidék (northern part of the Hungarian language area), Bánát (southern part), and Kárpátalja (Transcarpathia) (Székely 2024, 87–88). The latter are typical at the regional level and are not well known among mainstream revivalists. The *Csángó* dances are mainly from the Moldavian villages around Bacău region (Romania), such as Pusztina (Pustiana), Klézse (Cleja), Somoska (Somoșca), Külsőrekecsin (Fundu Răcăciuni), and the villages inhabited by Hungarians from Gyimes (Tasnádi 1999, 176).

Contemporary *táncházak* incorporate aspects of the revival *táncház* traditional dancing events and traditions. In addition to dance, some offer educational presentations on ethnic traditions and traditional culture, as well as handicrafts and singing sessions. *Táncházak* supply an opportunity to familiarise oneself with folk culture in a complex way. They are held in cultural institutions, houses of cultures, entertainment venues and pubs during the *táncházak* from autumn until spring. In the summer, they can take place at festivals and open-air venues. Besides the “adult” *táncház*, there are dance houses for children called *gyermek-* or *gyerektáncház*, and a new form, in between those of the adult and children – the teenagers, the *kamasztáncház*. In the latter, not only the dancers but the musicians are also teenagers (aged from twelve to twenty years), who can improvise

¹⁷ More research is required to fully understand the history of nationality *táncházak* in Hungary, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. Some articles on this topic are available; for example, on Greek dance houses in Budapest, see Charitonidis 2021.

and learn to use dances in a freestyle. There are also classic *táncházak* with dance lessons, practices and live music (such as those mentioned above), where amateurs and other interested parties can join as well. Dance teaching is usually done by two teachers, a male and a female. If the dance material requires it, the men and the women separate during the dance teaching and practise their steps. In some cases, usually when *táncház* events target children, they may include craft activities and singing sessions. *Táncházak* may be organised on the occasion of various folk customs (such as the grape harvest or St. Martin's Day), during which the audience can become acquainted with the meaning, elements and significance of the folk customs in question through handicraft workshops and interactive ethnographic presentations. Sometimes, around the time of national holidays, as for example, to commemorate the 1848 Revolution and the War of Independence, a "Revolutionary" *táncház* is organised. The commemoration is complemented by educational presentations, dance lessons and craft activities. According to a revival folk dancer, *táncházak* are "the modern-day equivalent of our village balls" (anonymous respondent to the author's questionnaire, 2014).

In Budapest, it is typical that during the *táncház*-season there is a *táncház*, or *folkkocsma* (folk pub), almost every night, while in the countryside, in smaller and larger towns, these occur monthly, on rarer occasions. Dance houses are organised monthly or less often in rural areas by dance groups, cultural institutions, and recreational establishments (pubs). In this instance, the event is attended by not just locals but also members of other folk dance groups and supporters from the neighbourhood, giving the dancers a chance to interact.¹⁸ The majority of dance workshops take place in rural areas, although Budapest also has several dance sessions in various places where monthly dance lessons are given, teaching the dances of a village or dialect. The institution of the aforementioned "kezes" can be found today as well. The folk dance instructors usually function as

¹⁸ Folk dance groups and ensembles are part of an NGO or association. Members participate on a voluntary basis or through the art school system. In most cases, they focus on stage work and the creation and performance of choreographies and dance theatre performances, which are presented in competitions (so-called "qualifiers") at events linked to the municipality, and on national holidays. Folk dance groups may be formed in towns and cities, in smaller villages, in a school or in a community centre, and, like dance ensembles, they also include stage representation. However, there are also groups (mainly made up of adults) whose aim is not to present their dance tradition to an audience, but to learn a particular dance and then use it as a community practice in dance houses.



Figure 3. *Táncház* in Győr (Győr-Moson-Sopron County), organised by the Association for the Culture of the Kisalföld Region (Kisalföld Kultúrájáért Egyesület). Photo: © Anna Janku, 11 October 2024.

táncház-leaders who manage the programme of the event, undertake the teaching, communicate with the musicians, determine the break and take care of order and atmosphere. In villages, *táncházak* teach the dances to recorded music or with only a few musicians, since paying for a whole band is not affordable. They are usually organised by locals who are interested in folk dance, a member of a folk dance group or an association.

The other type can be called a free-style social dance-orientated *táncház*, where there is no teaching-learning session and it is attended usually by folk dance group or ensemble members; thus, folk dance practitioners are present, and the event is accompanied by live music. In the history of the *táncház* movement, the aforementioned *folkkocsmá*, or folk pub, is a relatively recent development which emerged from the mid-1990s. The houses of culture were supplanted by these establishments where fun prevailed, while education, informative programmes and the role of

tánc ház-leader vanished (Jávorszky 2015, 90–91). Unlike a dance house with dance lessons, a folk pub is a form of urban recreational venue where folk dancers socialise, dance and sing to live folk music. In this instance, they dance “for their entertainment.” (M2 Petőfi TV, 01:21). Either the pubs invite a folk music band or they agree to have a pub play live music and organise the *folkkocsma* on a specific weekday during the *tánc ház*-season. A few years ago, for example, the folk dancers knew that the Wednesday session was at the Hetker pub with Pálházi Bence and his band, and that on Fridays it was at Rácskert with Erdőfű. Folk pubs provide an opportunity for informal discussions and meetings between group members, where alcohol consumption is also a major factor (Szilas 2019; Székely 2016, 181; 2017, 54). According to a member, “the evening *tánc ház*ak are a great way to network, party, practise what you’ve learnt, and try dancing with other people. The folk pub is a great way to relax with a drink and meet new people” (anonymous respondent to the author’s questionnaire, 2014). Folk pubs not only occur in Budapest but also in the countryside in a lesser number.



Figure 4. “Ígjen a falu!” event in Fonó, Budapest. Photo: Fonó Budai Zeneház Facebook page, published on 21 January 2024 (accessed 17 June 2024).

According to the questionnaire responses and observations from the ethnographic fieldwork, the dance house is not only an opportunity to practise folk dance and listen to live instrumental folk music, but also a chance for the members of the movement to meet, establish and maintain relationships, and at the same time to get to know each other and to socialise. It is also a place for friendship and networking, as well as a place for dance rehearsals and group work. Consequently, it serves a similar purpose as the dancing houses that were once located in Transylvania.

Another member of the *táncház* society claims that *táncház* might be interpreted as a “Folk Disco!” (anonymous respondent to the author’s questionnaire, 2014). It did not take long for this to become a reality. A new event, called *Ígjen a falu!* (Let the village burn!)¹⁹ marks a new phase in the evolution of *urban táncházak*. It has only been held twice, in July and November of 2023, at Fonó, one of Budapest’s centres of the *táncház* movement.²⁰ This unique event combined elements of “traditional” urban *táncház* and folk pubs, but had a distinctive visual aesthetic and programme. The smell of beer, laser-lights and a smoke machine allowed the participants to unwind and focus on the music, their dancing partner, and their experience, rather than be distracted by onlookers (Kupec 2023). A cultural programme was held in conjunction with the activities. At the November event, for example, there was an exhibition opening and discussion.

Concluding Reflections

The concept of *táncház* has taken numerous forms and functions over time. Interpreted as an ethnographic and historical concept, it was an integral part of the dance culture of twentieth-century Transylvania, which defined the dance life of the village, gave children opportunity to learn dances, and provided young people with amusement and socialisation opportunities. At the end of the twentieth century, its specific characteristics were selectively taken over by the newest wave of Hungarian folklore movements, the *táncház* movement. Folk dance entered a new context where the

¹⁹ The phrase originates from the Kalotaszeg Region. A peasant dancer, Ferenc Berki “Árus”, used to shout it out in the heat of dance events, and recently, a young dancer from the village has started using it again, including on social media. The organisers of the Budapest event requested permission to use it for their programme (László Zoltán Varga, Facebook message to author, 22 October 2025).

²⁰ At the time of writing, a similar event is in the pipeline, aimed primarily at foreign visitors.

purpose for its participants was primarily recreational. A new method of folk dance transmission emerged, which was focused on acquiring “original” steps from personal, firsthand experiences or field recordings directly from the “field”, relying on the work of folk dance researchers. This became known as the *táncház* method.

The *táncház* as a model for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage expanded around the world prior to its international recognition by UNESCO. Reasons for its widespread adoption may be attributable to its function in an increasingly globalised society where individuals seek to connect through active, participatory engagement with their history, heritage, and traditions in groups that share similar interests. These embodied practices strengthen ties to the past, while adding to the cultural diversity of the present.

The institutionalisation of *táncház* has doubtless helped to attract many people from children to adults and has established a community of revivalists who practise dance or deal with folk culture as a profession or leisure activity. *Táncház*, folk pubs and clubs are spaces for the members to meet and socialise, in addition to dancing and listening to traditional music.

Today, *táncház* can also be understood as a social movement aimed at restoring, preserving, and disseminating folk traditions (Livingston 1999, 68). Revivalists define themselves and their activities in opposition to the cultural mainstream (Livingston 1999, 68). The goal of folk dancers and *táncházak* is to raise awareness of traditional values and cultural heritage through activities such as staged folk dance performances, teaching those interested in folk dance, and involving “outsiders” in *táncház* events. The *táncház* phenomenon has been rediscovered, nurtured and further developed by new generations of revivalists, who adapt traditional folklore elements to contemporary contexts.

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6.

The Role of Music and Musicians in the Revitalisation of Dance Heritage

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This chapter emphasises the important role that dance music plays in the study and revitalisation of dance traditions. By providing insight into the interweaving of music and dance in Slovenian folk culture and based on the experience of music and dance presentations as part of folk dance ensembles and folk music revival groups, it aims to set out the endeavours and experience of folk dance revitalisation so far. It also seeks to highlight that music and musicians can play an important role in the sustainability of dance heritage.

Keywords: interweaving of music and dance, dance music, participatory folk dance communities, revitalisation, music and dance heritage

Introduction

Much like in the field of ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology in other countries, researchers in Slovenia have not devoted much attention to in-depth and extensive research into the interplay and interdependence of dance and music. Specialist literature in Slovenia also lacks in-depth research on instrumental folk music, especially dance music, as music researchers have devoted more attention to vocal folk music, while dance researchers have mainly focused on dance itself.

In recent decades, it has often been observed that instrumental folk music performed in Slovenia is more suitable for listening than for dancing. This is also the case, for example, with dance music performed by folk dance ensembles and various instrumental forms of the folk music revival movement. In fact, musicians are increasingly less skilled at playing music for dancing, and their music is moving away from the previously typical danceability. For some time now, the same trend has been observed elsewhere. Several decades ago, this was also the case in Hungary, where at the beginning, during the 1970s, one of the fundamental aims of the now-recognised and established *táncház* (dance house) movement was to bring instrumental folk music back to its original function: playing music for the purposes of dancing.

This paper focuses on the role of instrumental music and musicians in participatory folk dance communities and in the process of folk dance revitalisation. It is based on the situation in Slovenia and emphasises the importance of dance music in the study and revitalisation of dance traditions. By presenting the interweaving of music and dance in the Slovenian folk culture and using the findings of research on (stage) presentation of music and dance as part of folk dance ensembles and folk music revival groups, it aims to present the efforts and experience of folk dance revitalisation to date. It also seeks to draw attention to some starting points and possibilities of the attempts to bring music and dance back from the archives to a local community. Although the dominant role of folk dance is often highlighted in the context of dance heritage, music can play an important role in the sustainability of these activities.

This research is based on personal experiences of the author, who actively participated in different folk dance ensembles during the 1980s and 1990s. He was first a musician and instrumental band leader, and later also the author of musical arrangements. He has attended a variety of seminars,

workshops and education programmes for musicians and folk dance ensemble leaders, initially as a participant and subsequently, for a number of years, also as a lecturer. For analysis of the interdependence of the dance and music in the folk dance ensembles in recent years, the author has replaced the autobiographical method with observation of, and participation in, various events featuring folk dance ensembles. Another source of information is his personal ties with the folk music revival movement and his own experiences, as he had actively participated in the movement and used to be a musician in a folk music revival group. In addition, the author draws upon collected sources, literature, records and digital ethnography.

Choreomusicology – Music and Dance Practices as Holism

The interweaving, interdependence and interplay of folk dance and folk music have been studied by many researchers of both dance and music. In ethnomusicology, calls for joint research of music and dance emerged as early as the mid-1950s arguing that “while there is music without associated movement and dance without melodic accompaniment, the two are for the most part so closely related as to demand joint analysis” (Kurath 1957, 10). The strong interdependence of music and dance is certainly also true when it comes to the traditional music and dance culture in Slovenia, as dance events did not exist without music, which was usually performed live by musicians.

The view of music and dance practices as holistic has been the object of discussions and research in several publications (for more see e.g. Stepputat and Seye 2020, 12–14; Ahmedaja 2023, 7–9). As noted by Kendra Stepputat and Elina Seye in their introduction to a scholarly music journal issue, dedicated to the theme of choreomusicology (2020),¹ “research on sound in combination with motion, and on dance in combination with music”, has gained increasing attention since the 1990s in disciplines such as musicology, dance studies, performance studies, psychology, cognitive science and acoustics. It should, however, be pointed out that ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology research which is characterised by a focus on the rela-

¹ The term choreomusicology is proposed as an umbrella term for the various approaches used to investigate music-dance interrelations, where the focus is on combining views from ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology.

tionship between music and dance has been spasmodic and the theoretical ideas that have been presented have rarely been applied or developed by other scholars. At the same time, the two authors note that, despite the fact that there is a significant shortage of theoretical writings, many more studies are focusing on specific musical and dance traditions, and the number of publications has increased significantly over the last twenty years.

In general, dance and music can correlate in different ways, in different forms and at different levels. In some cases, they correlate only at a single level, and in other cases at multiple ones (cf. Bakka 2023). While some researchers have attempted to identify a definitive or universal model of the relationship between music and dance (e.g. Giurchescu and Kröschlová 2007), many others have highlighted more general and principled connections between the two, as well as their role in the community and the social and cultural perspectives of the music and dance relationship. As previously pointed out by László Felföldi, it should, however, be noted that, “connections between dance and music are not mechanical, easily definable, or quickly understandable. There is a colourful interplay between them that is conditioned and influenced by many other (textual and contextual) factors” (2001, 163). In any case, the intensity of music and dance connections can also be different.

Music and dance are often performed at the same time and depend on one another. In many performing arts traditions, they are inseparable and not even considered separate art forms. As has been well documented in (ethnochoreological, ethnomusicological and choreomusical) literature, the ethnocentrically European term “dance” is often not applicable to systems of structured human body movement of non-European peoples, who have their own terms of reference for conceiving such activities. Dance and music are conceptually linked; in some cultures and languages, this is evidenced by expressions that use a single word to encompass the inextricable whole of music, dance and play (cf. Gore 2001; Bakka et al. 2024). The question as to why dance and music are “often considered to be separate categories, both in practice and in research” (Stepputat and Seye 2020, 7) therefore comes as no surprise. This is especially in cases where they are closely intertwined and interdependent, and one can even speak of “dancing the music & musicking the dance” (Melin 2007, 124); a feature also evident in Slovenian folk culture.

The Interweaving of Music and Dance in Slovenian Folk Culture

In Slovenian folk culture, instrumental music and dance are often closely intertwined, even inseparable, which is manifested in various ways. Generally speaking, people have always danced to instrumental music. Thus, before the late twentieth century, there were hardly any traditional folk dance events that did not feature the participation of performing musicians. This is also attested by certain common sayings and phrases. In such expressions, dance music is strongly connected to dance and musicians, and they describe the meaning and role of musicians in society. A traditional folk musician, for example, described this in an interesting way, stating that “the musician is always around, like the broom” (Kumer 1983, 152), since it was impossible to dance without musicians in times when recorded and broadcast music was not yet readily available. This is why they were highly sought-after and respected, often enjoying a privileged role in the local community (cf. Kumer 1983; Strajnar 1986). Therefore, without musicians, there was no dancing and no local parties and fun (very often connected with dancing), which many people, especially the younger ones, were very eager to have. This was often pointed out also by those who believed that dancing could quickly lead to debauchery and “moral abyss” (cf. e.g. “Št. Gotard.” 1931: 6) and that limiting the performance of instrumental music would result in fewer dance parties and consequently fewer temptations and a more virtuous life for young people.

The close connection between folk music and dance was also reflected in the musicians’ relation to dancing and dancers. There was a constant interaction between them. Traditional musicians were very familiar with dances, they also knew when and how to interpret individual ones so that the outcome was appropriate for the event and accordant with customs and tradition. Often, they were skilled dancers themselves, and while playing they observed the dancers closely, adapting the playing style to the character of the dance, and the dancers’ ability and mood (cf. Strajnar 1986). On the other hand, the dancers followed the music with their movements, responding to it through dancing. In a literal and figurative sense, they danced to the tune of musicians. Therefore, it was important for musicians to play enthusiastically so as to encourage the audience to – as the popular Slovenian saying goes – “let music into their feet” (*gre glasba v noge*), making sure that everyone would “get itchy feet” (*zasrbijo pete*) and would want to dance.

This means that music was performed in a way that was as compelling and zestful as possible, to entice and excite the present audience for dancing, to elicit a physical response. The primary function of folk dance music was therefore its danceability, to which the performance, including the aesthetic component of the music, was adapted, whereas the virtuosity of the musical performance was of secondary importance, though still appreciated.

The usual contemporary term, which is often used both in everyday communication by the general public and experts in research studies, is that a musician or music “accompanies” (*spremljajo*) dance. A commonly used phrase, for example, is that “dance was accompanied by a musician” (*za spremljavo plesa je poskrbel godec*) or that “they danced to the accompaniment of upbeat music” (*zaplesali so ob spremljavi poskočne glasbe*). In this case, dancing occupies a primary role, while the music is seen as a kind of “add-on”, “a supplement” that merely accompanies the main action. And yet, it would perhaps be more appropriate to say that it is dancing that accompanies the music, since it is music and musicians who are some sort of animating spirit and the motor of dance, and the ones that determine many aspects of dancing and dance events. This is also characterised by the popular phrase “you will dance to my tune” (*plesal boš, kot bom jaz igral*), which communicates the more important role music occupies in comparison with dance, while metaphorically acquiring an even broader meaning, i.e. doing exactly what someone has dictated or commanded (cf. “Plesati” 2014). In public perception, all this points to the very important role that music and musicians play when it comes to dance.

Music and Musicians in the Folk Dance Ensembles

Today, “folk dance” (*ljudski ples*) in Slovenia no longer exists in the environment nor fulfils the same function as when first documented by folklorists. Instead, what is considered as folk dance is often presented only in the form of stage performances. Although there are some other spaces where folk dances or “ethno-identity dances” (Shay 2016) are danced outside of the established stage production of folk dance ensembles (see Kunej 2023), the term *folk dance* is still frequently connected with the work of contemporary folk dance ensembles and what they represent on stage.

In Slovenia, folk dance ensembles (*folklorne skupine*) have a long-established tradition spanning over a century. They present tradition-based

music, dances, costumes, rituals, and customs at various public events in the form of musical-dance performances. The activities of folk dance ensembles in Slovenia rest on amateur foundations and are institutionally organised. Although the work of folk dance ensembles is generally a complex activity, where various tradition-based elements are supposed to be intertwined and combined in equal measure, the dominant role is occupied by dance. Music is usually subordinated to dance and its presentation on stage; nevertheless, music plays an important role.

The important role of dance music in folk dance ensembles originates in folk tradition, where people always danced to instrumental music. It is therefore not surprising that in folk dance ensembles in Slovenia, live music continues to be the customary way of performing. Musicians in folk dance ensembles, much like the ensembles themselves, can be very different, with dissimilar musical preferences, abilities and knowledge, but also inclinations, roles and intentions. The musicians and their music often also reflected the orientation and activities of the folk dance ensembles they were part of, as well as shifting trends in the work practices and tendencies across various time periods.

Most folk dance ensemble musicians are amateur musicians. They may be self-taught or without any formal music education, or have basic music education attained in the system of well-developed musical schooling in Slovenia, where the emphasis is on Western-classical music education and its aesthetics. Unfortunately, in Slovenian music schools, traditional musical practices are not part of the curriculum.

Until the last quarter of the twentieth century, folk dance ensembles, which performed largely local tradition and were predominantly active in rural settings, sometimes featured the participation of local folk musicians. They were well versed in the folk dance music repertoire and the traditional style of playing, which only had to be adapted for the stage choreography of the music-dance performance events. Today, there are almost no musicians of this type left in folk dance ensembles, meaning that ensembles also only represent dance traditions that have disappeared.

Over the past decades, folk dance ensembles have been seeing increasing numbers of musicians with basic music education. This is especially the case in those folk dance ensembles that draw not only from the local environment, but also represent traditions from a wider area of Slovenia. These musicians have received their musical education and acquired instrument-playing skills in music schools, where there is no opportunity to

learn about the aesthetics of folk music and how to play it, nor to acquire the skills in performing music for dancing. Moreover, most of these musicians have had no direct contact with folk culture and had to first learn about the traditional folk repertoire and style of playing, as they had not been familiar with it before joining a folk dance ensemble. This tends to lead to certain divergences between the traditional way of playing (and folk musical aesthetics) and the view of music and playing style acquired during musical schooling. Musicians also have to gain experience of playing music for dancing and learn about the characteristics of the dances.

In folk dance ensembles, academy-trained musicians are few and far between. In rare instances, they participate in larger urban ensembles; often this takes place on an occasional basis, i.e. they join an ensemble for major performances and tours. Their playing is based on the academic approach, often of a highly advanced technical and musical standard, though at times lacking a deeper connection with the dance and dancers as it is not based on the danceability but rather on the virtuosity of a musical performance.

Yet the way folk music is presented on stage not only depends on the musicians, but largely also on the authors of musical arrangements and dance choreographies. Due to changes in context and stage presentation, instrumental music in folk dance ensembles was adapted and transformed in similar ways to those established in the realm of dance as analysed by Rebeka Kunej (e.g. 2010, 2023). Being subject to the demands of public performance and stage design constraints, music and dance on stage can no longer appear in their original form but may only approximate the traditional folk template. Two principles offering two poles of the stage presentation spectrum are the concept of *passive adoption* and the concept of *active transfer* to the stage. In passive adoption, folk music and dance are adapted for the stage in a form as close as possible to the traditional template, using all their characteristic elements. Active transfer to the stage, conversely, uses only selected folk elements while evidently transforming or newly creating the rest. The passive adoption model aims to portray a notion of authenticity, frequently even idealisation and fixation of the image of folk tradition, whereas in the active transfer the tradition is subjected in great part to the creativity of the authors of the performance. Both approaches involve shaping the music and guiding the musicians, and preparing a musical arrangement for the musicians to perform with the chosen set of instruments. In active transfer to the stage, the arrangement expresses the author's strongly emphasised creative view of the music pre-

sented, while in passive adoption, the arrangement shapes the folk music that the author of the musical arrangement aims to reconstruct.

The arrangement of the musical part of a staged music-dance performance can involve various approaches, depending on the practices of an ensemble as well as the participating musicians. One of the approaches is that the music arrangement is prepared by the musicians themselves. In this case, in accordance with the choreography of the dance performance, the musicians jointly assign the order of the melodies received from the choreographer, the number of repetitions of individual melodies, their potential modulations etc., and agree on the role individual instruments will have in the performance. The musicians usually build on the choreographic concept, which presents the choreographer's perspective of the music-dance event, arranging music accordingly. The music concept is generally not fixed with sheet music but is shaped during live rehearsals into a form that is eventually memorised, and then partly improvised during performances. Such musical arrangements often incorporate elements and aesthetics of popular music that are often featured in the media and with which musicians today are much more familiar than folk music; in part, also due to the fact that they mostly no longer have direct experience of different local musical-dance traditions upon which to draw.

Often, the musical arrangement is prepared by a musically educated individual who is usually familiar with the characteristics of folk music tradition, in addition to the fundamentals of music. Since the 1990s, these individuals have mostly been researchers of traditional music whose field research has provided them with insight into folk music tradition and the work of folk dance ensembles. In the later period, i.e. during the past two decades, many arrangements have been made by the more engaged and ambitious ensemble musicians, who are often versed in art and popular music, and less so in folk music. These arrangements are often written down as sheet music, learned by musicians at rehearsals involving dancers and then played from memory.

The experience of Slovenian folk dance ensembles has shown that regardless of who makes musical arrangements and the approach taken, the authors of arrangements and choreographers, or those who take care of the dance part of a stage performance, need to work together to create the final form of the music-dance presentation. This is the best way to achieve a coherence between the music and dance and to make sure that the stage presentation is homogenous and cohesive. When it comes to this, the usual

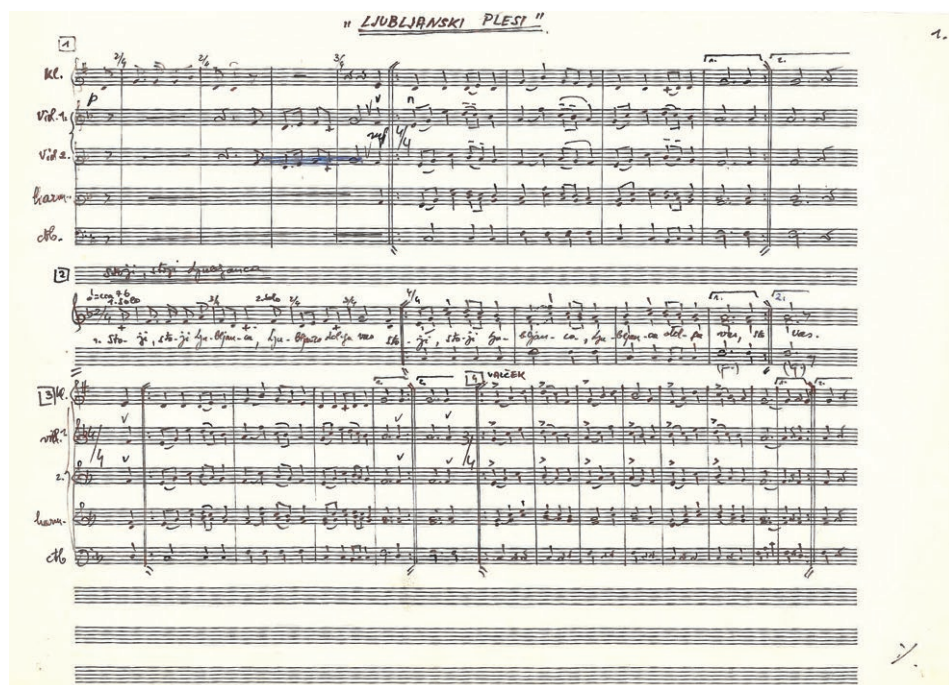


Figure 1. First page of a handwritten musical arrangement, prepared by Julijan Strajnar, ethnomusicologist, composer, and researcher of Slovenian folk music at the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU, and former musician of the folk dance ensemble. From the private archive of the author.

practice is to start with a dance and a choreographic idea; the music is then adapted and the musical arrangement subordinated to it. In folk dance ensembles, the dance and musical parts are usually taken care of by different “authors”, which can cause difficulties in co-shaping a uniform stage presentation and a proper interweaving of music and dance.

Only in exceptional cases do choreographers also make music arrangements by themselves. A Slovenian artist who certainly stands out in this respect was the late Bruno Ravnika², who authored the musical arrangements for all his numerous staged music-dance performances. It is inter-

² Dr Bruno Ravnika (1930–2023) was the leader of several folk dance ensembles, and the author of many music-dance stage productions. He was involved in the organisation of folklore activities in Slovenia and was in 1969 among the founders of the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts (CIOFF). He was an expert in recording folk dances by means of Kinetography Laban, and the initiator and contributor of several folklore-related journals.

esting to note that he built the music-dance performance from the music arrangement concept first and then matched it with the choreography. This approach is quite distinct from the one employed by most choreographers who normally ground their work in dance to which music is then adapted, with arrangements prepared by a third party (the musical arrangement author). According to Ravnikař, his holistic music-based approach and the authorship of music and dance by the same individual were key in catalysing the great popularity and success of his music-dance performances (Bruno Ravnikař, interview with author, 11 August 2020).

Experience of Dance in Folk Music Revival

It seemed that the idea of folk dancing outside the context of folk dance ensembles would come to life to the greatest extent as part of the folk music revival movement. In Slovenia, the first such folk music revival scene appeared in the late 1970s, while a significant increase in folk music revival performers was observed in the early 1990s. The movement was mainly based on the performance and presentation of music. In the second half of the 1990s, when the groups' activities became more organised as part of the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society (*KD Folk Slovenija*), the society – inspired by the *táncház* movement in Hungary – also tried to set up a dance house in Slovenia. Although a relatively large number of groups also performed Slovenian folk dance music, the dance houses did not flourish quite as much as might have been expected (see Kunej 2025).

Most musicians of the folk music revival movement based their respective repertoires largely on or were inspired by the Slovenian traditional music and folk musical practices. Many group members had previous experience of playing in folk dance ensembles, and they often collected or researched the folk music tradition themselves before incorporating it into their repertoires. Many of them had also received formal musical education and had a wealth of experience in other musical genres. In their musical activities, the musicians were often inspired by and followed the example of revival groups in other countries, including Hungary, and the *táncház* movement.

In the first period, pre-1990, all three most notable folk music revival groups – *Trutamora Slovenica*, *Istranova* and *Trinajsto prase* – also had folk dance music in their respective repertoires. However, this music was gen-

erally not intended for dancing, but mainly for stage presentations and concerts. A closer look at these groups' repertoires and the way they presented instrumental folk music to the public reveals that the dance music performed was changed from its original, primarily concert-centred approach, which was based on the presentation of the music itself, to that of dance and playing for dance. This, however, happened gradually and took a long time.

The group *Trutamora Slovenica* was established in 1978 – at the time it did not yet have a name – to present the findings of the founding member Mira Omerzel's ethnomusicological field research on stage. The aim of their first concerts, which were held under a common name *Slovenska ljudska glasbila in pesmi* (Slovenian Folk Instruments and Songs), was to present “folk music in a form as close to the original as possible” (Omerzel-Mirit 2013, 8). The group performed numerous concerts in Slovenia and abroad, thus presenting the Slovenian folk music by means of “original folk instruments and reconstructions” (Omerzel-Mirit 2013, 8). It also held several educational concerts and workshops, and was thus part of the school curriculum. It presented folk music in a new way that was entirely different from what was the norm at the time, especially in folk dance ensembles. Based on field experience with living folk music practice and with the help of a collection of old folk instruments, which they learned to play directly from folk musicians, they wanted to “present the Slovenian musical tradition in an undistorted form, without any popular and fashionable distractions; the songs and a colourful range of unusual and long-forgotten musical instruments helped them get in touch with themselves and their own existence” (“Ansambel Trutamora Slovenica iz Ljubljane...” 2000). When it came to this, they had a clear vision: “a concert-based revival path: research, restoration, revival, presentation at concerts, raising awareness and exposing our true and undistorted musical heritage”; and “to introduce into the Slovenian area creativity that was previously non-existent” (Omerzel-Mirit 2013, 1).

The group was focused on Slovenian folk music until 1999, after which it changed its name to *Vedun* and gradually shifted its focus to sound therapy, “old meditative music and the revival of spiritual healing sounds of the cultures of the world” (“O ansamblu Vedun” n.d.). Although the group also had direct contact with folk musicians and had some folk dance music in its repertoire, it was by no means intended for dancing. In fact, the group's performance was not one that enticed or encouraged the audience to dance; often it was not even possible to dance to the music they were

playing. Moreover, dancing would probably have distracted the musicians and their playing, as they wanted to create an atmosphere of concentrated and immersive listening, similar to that of classical music concerts. For this reason, some experts believe that the group's musical practices were, in general, too academically oriented and based on a style of Western "classical" presentation and hence do not even consider the group to be part of the folk music revival movement in Slovenia (cf. Kranjac 2014). Nevertheless, the group, with its pioneering work and its many activities, greatly influenced numerous folk music revival groups established at a later date.

When it comes to folk dance music, the same is true of the *Istranova* music group. Some experts consider the group, founded in 1980, to be the very first folk music revival performers in Slovenia (cf. Kranjac 2014; Juvančič 2005, 213). The group consisted of students who were inspired by the folk music revival in other parts of the world and searched for unconventional musical practices. The group started exploring and re-creating folk music from the region of Istria, which at the time was completely marginalised and almost entirely unknown. They used a variety of new musical elements and instruments, and incorporated them into folk music, thus building a repertoire that many performers draw from even today (cf. Juvančič 2013). *Istranova*, whose repertoire was focused on highlighting the multiculturalism of the Istrian peninsula, put on numerous performances and concerts, which largely increased its visibility and popularity. The group split in 1988.

The members of *Istranova* were also in direct contact with folk music. They went around Istrian villages, collecting and documenting folk music in a systematic and studious way. They also went there to play music. They would often show up unannounced in villages where they had previously documented folk music, and would hold free concerts, where they played together with the village musicians (Juvančič 2013). They also included folk dance music in their repertoire; their performance, however, was not intended for dancing, but mainly for concert and stage performances, although it was possible to dance to their music. Despite their local folk repertoire, their approach and performance were more similar to that of the so-called "acoustic groups" that performed "acoustic music",³ mainly aimed at a more specific and discerning (alternative) musical audience.

³ From the 1970s onwards, so-called "acoustic music" was made mostly by students who identified neither with the hard-edged electric melodies characteristic of punk rock and rock, which during this period took on a mainly rebellious note, nor with Slovenian pop songs and folk-pop

The *Trinajsto prase* group started performing in late 1987, in part as a result of socialising and ties with the *Istranova* group. On the one hand, they were inspired by their role models (e.g. *Istranova*, Hungarian groups that were part of the *táncász* movement), but on the other hand, they followed their own path, drawing mainly on the broader Slovenian folk music tradition. The group's repertoire consisted mostly of reconstructed folk dance music, and was characterised by the use of simple folk instruments and traditional playing styles, resulting in a recognisable sound akin to the sound of folk musicians. The group travelled to the Prekmurje region several times to meet local folk musicians and play music with them. Moreover, in Prekmurje, the traditional music practice was still very much alive and the repertoires of many musicians included various folk dance tunes, which people still danced to at parties. The group took a similar approach to reviving the folk music of the Primorska region. It performed a great deal both in Slovenia and other countries and also undertook many recordings for radio and TV programmes. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was one of the most popular folk music revival groups in Slovenia. It split in 1993.

Trinajsto prase was the first group to present instrumental folk music in the manner of folk ensembles that existed in the past; their aim was to “play live music in its function” ([JeS] 1994, 11) in a spontaneous, direct form to which the audience was supposed to respond spontaneously (Muršič 1993, 11). They based their music on the “fundamentals of folk music”, in which there is “no pretence and no embellishment” (Tomaž Rauch, interview, 20 July 2020). When it came to performing, their main aim was to entertain, both themselves and others. However, even at their performances and concerts, people often did not respond by dancing, although the music and the way it was performed were very suitable for dancing.

A significant increase in folk music revival performers in Slovenia was observed in the early 1990s, many with a focus on instrumental music (e.g. the group *Marko banda* and the group *Pišćaci* in 1990, the group *Kurja koža* in 1992, the group *Tolovaj Mataj* in 1994, the family group *Volk Folk* in 1996). Some groups performed only for a short period, while others are still active. Some musicians were part of several groups, and some went on to

music, which was and still is very popular in Slovenia. The “acoustic music” of that period was inspired by the aesthetic of singing folk ballads and was influenced not only by foreign folk music of Anglo-American origin, but also by the Slovenian folk music heritage, as well as elements of the music from various historical musical periods (cf. Juvančič 2016). “Acoustic music” influenced many folk music revival performers that emerged at a later time and some of which had been part of “acoustic ensembles”.



Figure 2. Members of the folk music revival group *Trinajsto prase* playing reconstructed folk dance music in a stage performance. Although the repertoire and its performance practice were well suited to dancing, the audience often refrained from doing so. Photo: © Milan Mrčun. Courtesy of the private archive of Roman Ravnič.

form new ones after the groups they had belonged to split. The repertoires and the performance of many of these folk music revival musicians also drew inspiration from local folk music tradition; in fact, these musicians often had direct contact with traditional folk musicians, and they often collected and studied folk music and musical instruments. Although their repertoires were often based on folk dance music, their playing, with a few exceptions, was not primarily aimed directly at dancing.

Important changes in this respect took place in 1996, when most members of the folk music revival movement in Slovenia joined the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society.⁴ From then on, their activities were carried out in an organised manner. The main aim of the society's activities was to achieve greater prominence for Slovenian folk and folk revival music and to ena-

⁴ The society was later renamed Folk Slovenia Cultural and Ethnomusicological Society (*KED Folk Slovenija*).

ble an easier exchange of experiences and more coordinated activities of the performers. Its aim was also to organise various trainings, workshops and seminars for the members and the general public, and to present folk revival music at various concerts. Moreover, inspired by the *táncház* movement in Hungary, the society also tried to set up a dance house in Slovenia.

The very first dance houses in Slovenia were therefore established relatively late, especially compared to Hungary, where dance houses had emerged as early as the 1970s, and their establishment was closely linked to the activities of the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society. As noted by Rebeka Kunej, dance houses were modelled on the well-established *táncház* movement, although they were based on a slightly different (political) premise and founded in different circumstances:

the first, trial dance house took place at the assembly of the society's members in late 2000, while the proper start of the Slovene Dance House project is considered to be 2001, when the dance house was organized five times between March and December. In the following years, with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture and/or the JSKD,⁵ between two and five events were usually organised per year, most often in Ljubljana and rare instances in other parts of the country. The political idea of being an alternative to Soviet-style choreographed stage presentations of dance folklore and a subculture (see Balogh and Fülemile 2008; Diószegi 2008), which carried and energised the Hungarian dance houses, was absent from the background of Slovene implementation. (Kunej 2023, 48–49)

The idea of establishing the first dance houses was presented by folk music revival musicians who wanted to perform folk dance music that had a function, i.e. was intended for dancing. Thus, members of some folk music revival groups, together with dance instructors, jointly developed the programme of individual dance workshops for the first dance houses according to their own musical and dance preferences. At that time, musicians most active in these dance houses were members of the groups *Tolovaj Mataj*, *Kurja koža*, *Volk Folk* and some members of former folk music revival groups, e.g. *Trinajsto prase*, *Piščaci* and *Istranova*. Often the musi-

⁵ *Javni sklad Republike Slovenije za kulturne dejavnosti* (Republic of Slovenia Public Fund for Cultural Activities).

cians slightly adapted the way they performed music that was part of their concert repertoires to suit the purposes of the dance houses and the dance itself, especially when musicians from several different groups played together. Occasionally, special practical workshops were organised for musicians to play folk dance music and also to facilitate their participation in dance houses. Experience has shown that playing folk music for dancing can be quite specific and some musicians were familiar neither with such musical practices, nor with the dance tradition itself.

Rather than being a social event and a leisure activity, however, dance houses soon turned into dance workshops and some kind of folk dance courses with relatively limited attendance. Eventually, these courses also started teaching dances choreographed for the stage production of folk dance ensembles, in addition to the initial dance variants recorded in the field. This was mainly due to the fact that there was a severe lack of traditional dance practice skills among the participants, as most folk dances in Slovenia had already been forgotten and were no longer danced in their primary environment. The dance house participants/dancers were often former and current members of various folk dance ensembles, and during the final years of the dance houses' existence were also university students for whom dance houses constituted a practical (and often compulsory) addition to their ethnomusicology classes (Kunej 2023, 49). The presenters/leaders, i.e. dance instructors and later also musicians, increasingly started to draw on the experiences and practices of the folk dance ensembles, many being members and therefore most familiar with these approaches. As a result, the dance house project in Slovenia was not particularly successful and after a few years, the dance houses were no longer organised.

We can conclude that the folk music revival groups and the folk revival movement in Slovenia have not significantly influenced the dance practices associated with the folk tradition. Instead, except to a small extent in dance houses organised by the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society, their performances have been more of a presentation of folk dance music for listening to and as music “on stage”. Although many folk music revival musicians and groups in Slovenia were inspired by the *táncház* movement in Hungary, dance houses and the playing of folk music for dancing as part of the folk revival movement did not catch on in Slovenia and are very different from those in Hungary.

Conclusion

Although researchers of folk music and dance in Slovenia, as well as musicians and dancers (in folk dance ensembles and folk music revival movement) themselves, have not dealt with music and dance as holistic in detail, many have become aware of how closely linked they are. The fact that dance and music are correlated in different ways and different forms, and that they are often inseparable, both at dance events and in people's consciousness, has previously been revealed by research into Slovenian traditional folk culture (cf. Kumer 1983; Strajnar 1986; "Plesati" 2014). Similarly, research on the characteristics of the performance of instrumental folk music and folk dance itself has shown that music and the way it was performed could entice people to dance and guide dancing, and it also co-shaped dance events, influencing the sustainability of folk dance practices (cf. Kumer 1983; Strajnar 1988; Ramovš 1992).

The experience of folk dance ensembles, moreover, shows that dance (on the stage) is closely related to live dance music, which is performed by different kinds of musicians and is often created by those who make musical arrangements for them.⁶ In folk dance ensembles, however, the usual practice has almost always been to have dance and a choreographic idea as a foundation; the music is then adapted to the choreography and the musical arrangement is subordinated to it. In folk dance ensembles, dance and music are most often taken care of by different "authors". This can cause difficulties in co-creating a coherent stage presentation and the appropriate interplay of music and dance. The musicians (and also the authors of musical arrangements) are thus often placed in a lower position and are overly subordinated to the stage presentation of the dance and the chore-

⁶ Records of guidelines and teachings concerning the performance and arrangement of music in folk dance ensembles had for a considerable time revealed an orientation towards "genuine" folk tradition and customs (cf. Strajnar 1986; Volk 2008; Rauch 2008, 2010), following aspirations whose seeds had been planted in the 1970s with the start of systematic institutional education and expert guidance. Such orientation, which followed historical and geographical features drawing on ethnographical data, corresponds to the concept of passive adoption to the stage, i.e. the stage presentation of folk music and dance closely follows the original and includes all the characteristic folk elements. In the last decade or decade and a half, the initial ideas gravitating towards a close portrayal of "tradition", "veracity" and "authenticity" have transformed into an "artistic concept", in which folk tradition assumes the role of inspiring the creativity of choreographers and authors of music arrangements. Over the same period, there has also been a general decline in interest and popularity in folk dance ensembles; it is, however, difficult to tell whether new approaches have contributed to the decline in interest or whether the decline in interest has encouraged the search for new approaches.



Figure 3. Folk dance ensemble stage performance with live dance music. The musicians are positioned at the back of the stage and play musical arrangements from written sheet music, which could often cause a lack of interaction between the musicians and the dancers, Ljubljana, 2017.

Photo: © Peter Košenina, Archives of the Akademska folklorna skupina France Marolt.

ographer's ideas. In addition, there is a lack of interaction between the musicians and the dancers, which is otherwise typical of traditional folk culture. Both the musical and dance parts of the folk dance ensembles' stage presentations are thus more oriented towards attractiveness and audience appeal, and are often based mainly on virtuosity – which is a feature alien to folk culture – of the performers, both dancers and musicians.

The folk music revival movement in Slovenia operated on a very different basis from folk dance ensembles, in that it was based primarily on music itself, which was presented to the public in various ways. Although the revival groups often included traditional dance music in their respective repertoires, this music was usually not intended for dancing, but rather for listening to at various performance events. A historical overview shows that it was only over time, and very gradually, that the revival groups started to depart from exclusively presenting dance music at concerts to performing it for the purposes of dancing. The idea for this came from the musicians who wanted to play music for dancing, i.e. for it to have a function

that was typical of traditional folk culture. The musicians' aim was to combine the two "domains of folk tradition", music and dance, having music as the foundation and adding dance to it. Perhaps this dominance of music and the lack of interweaving and connection between music and dance – which, when it comes to the Slovenian folk music revival movement, were not on a par and did not reach attention in equal measure – was the reason that the dance houses in Slovenia did not become more popular and were not able to sustain themselves.

Dance music is generally not meant for listening, but for dancing. And dancing to well-played music is much more enjoyable and inspiring. The active involvement of dancers enables folk dance music to survive and keeps it sustainably in the sphere of folk dancing. On the other hand, suitable folk dance music ensures the continued existence of folk dances. The experiences of both folk dance ensembles and the folk music revival movement in Slovenia show that the sustainability of folk dance music and folk dance is not easy to ensure. This is even more so, if one disregards how closely interwoven, connected and interdependent they are by focusing too much on just one of the two segments. In other countries, the coherence of music and dance has also been clearly highlighted on several occasions; for instance, well-known Austrian musicians have expressed the belief that "the craft of their musical practice serves the dancers" (Pietsch 2017, 218), thus attaching meaning to their playing that goes beyond a purely musical purpose. Equally telling is the realisation that "dance music in its initial meaning is first of all stimulation, not a timekeeper and formal prescription. The dancer doesn't want to be regulated but rather animated and excited" (Hoerburger 1966, 85). This is in line with similar findings from research on Slovenian folk dance music and dance. When it comes to their dancing, dancers like to feel creative and free, but also inspired by music. It should, however, be pointed out that musical stimuli for dancing can be different and are not always related only to rhythmic expressions (cf. Morgenstern 2023, 122).

Therefore, the musicians, the way they perform music and the music itself can make a crucial contribution to the interaction with the dancers, and above all, can have a decisive influence on the danceability of the music and on encouraging and enticing the dancers to dance. Thus, they also have a powerful impact on the popularity and success of dance events. Musicians who know how to make sure people "let music into their feet" and that everyone present "gets itchy feet" and wants to dance can contribute

significantly to the existence of fresh, creative and attractive dance events, and thus also help in the successful revitalisation of dance heritage and its sustainability.

In the case of folk dance ensembles and the folk music revival movement in Slovenia, the revitalisation of folk dance and folk music was undoubtedly hampered by the focus on either the music or the dance. One may even question whether they can be recognised as participatory folk dance communities at all, as they mainly served to present the dance and music heritage on stage. Following the example of Slovenian folk culture, in order to engender the revitalisation and sustainability of folk dance and music in participatory folk dance events, it is essential that future initiatives ensure that dance and music are more interwoven, interdependent and equally represented.

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7.

Ideologies in Disseminating Traditional Dancing: Renewed Models and Reflections on Safeguarding Dance as ICH from Norway

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This chapter investigates strategies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage amid rapid societal and technological change, focusing on the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance (Sff). Through three case studies, it examines methodological renewal, bottom-up processes, and ownership: (1) revitalisation of a regional dance tradition; (2) re-transformation of dissemination strategies; and (3) contested archival access. Based on the author's various perspectives when at Sff, the focus is on the years 2019–2024.

Keywords: Traditional dancing, safeguarding dance as intangible cultural heritage, cultural brokerage, archive dissemination, bottom-up methodologies, ideology

The Institution

In 2023, the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance (Sff) celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Since its establishment, ethnochoreologist Egil Bakka's dance archive collection has been at the heart of Sff, today one of the largest collections of traditional music and dance in Europe. Sff was founded as part of a safeguarding strategy for traditional dance and music, where research, informal (and later formal) education, and transmission were built around this ever-expanding collection. The archive is rooted in extensive fieldwork, including filming and interviewing tradition-bearers, as Bakka (1999) describes in his article 'Or shortly they would be lost forever: documenting for revival and research'. The archive was developed in collaboration with enthusiastic folk dancers and musicians, and for fifty years, it has provided a space to revive traditional dances and bring them back "home".

Sff is a foundation, a heritage institution, and an umbrella organisation with a representative board. The foundation's aim is to safeguard and transmit Norwegian traditional music and dance as expressions of cultural identity with distinctive qualities. This goal is pursued through four sub-goals: coordinating and ensuring representativeness; expertise in public administration; fostering rigorous scientific work in the documentation, examination, and dissemination of knowledge; and ensuring both quality and breadth in the transmission of traditional music and dance. The institution employs staff in areas of traditional music and dance dissemination and research, with a long-standing emphasis on dance dissemination due to its institutional dance collection history (see below). In 2009, Sff was accredited as an NGO under the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. At Sff, specialists are involved in archival work, research, different kinds of dissemination, project and innovation activities. There is an extensive national network: a network for traditional music archives, a network for traditional dance transmission, and a network for all traditional music and dance institutions, festivals and organisations. The archival materials are used by educators, curators, performers, students, researchers, enthusiasts, tradition-bearers, and revivalist organisations. Sff shares its archive through digital access, exhibitions, lectures, and collaboration with public schools, universities, heritage institutions, national authorities and NGOs. The foundation has support schemes to encourage activities that create, promote, safeguard, document, and make Norwegian traditional music and dance accessible all over Norway.

The Chapter's Content

Sff took the initiative to bring together the partners for the EU-funded *Dance-ICH* project. This initiative was built on two key pillars. The first pillar was the methodology for safeguarding traditional dance and participatory dancing, a long-term effort initially started by Bakka, and further developed through renewed models created by the staff after his retirement in 2013. This pillar forms the core of this chapter. The second pillar was the continuation and further development of *Museene danser* (Dancing Museums), a project that Tone Erlien Myrvold discusses in Chapter 9 of this book.

In this chapter, I discuss the renewed models and safeguarding methodology of Sff, exploring the institution's ideology in the period 2019–2024 of “bringing the dance back home”, in line with the principles outlined in the 2003 UNESCO Convention. Key aspects of this methodology include bottom-up processes, mediation, and cultural brokerage. I also examine safeguarding practices that place archival material – particularly a film collection spanning from 1967 to the present – at the heart of the process. Three case studies are offered here which illustrate an evolving model of safeguarding that prioritises flexibility, community engagement, and careful mediation between the past and present.

The chapter is based on empirical research from my perspectives as a dance notator, researcher, facilitator, and pedagogue, who began working at Sff in 2001. The dance notator's perspective highlights the richness of the archive, which includes multiple interpretations of the same dance by different dancers. The dance pedagogue's perspective focuses on how this richness can be taught. The dance researcher's perspective addresses dilemmas related to ownership, community involvement, and the varying attitudes towards heritage safeguarding among “ordinary” community dancers and those considered “performers of traditional dance.” My position at Sff may also be described as that of cultural broker (Jacobs, Neyrinck, and Van Der Zeijden 2014b; Baron 2021).

Ideology, the 2003 UNESCO Convention, and Renewed Models of Safeguarding

Sff's safeguarding practices have, from the very beginning, been grounded in an ideology where the film collection is viewed as a shared expression, culture and property of the local community. The dissemination of this collection emphasises the plurality and variations within the traditions. I adopt here a definition of ideology as "a set of beliefs or principles, especially one on which a political system, party, or organisation is based" (Cambridge n.d.).

One such ideology stems from the 2003 UNESCO Convention, which aligns with Sff's objectives. The Convention defines safeguarding strategies in Article 2.3 as follows:

measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage. (UNESCO 2022)

In the Nordic countries, the term *folkedans* (folk dance) is used by ethnochoreologists, revivalists, and tradition-bearers to describe both the traditional dances of rural communities and the dance materials and activities of the folk dance movement (Bakka 2007a, 13). However, there has been ongoing discussion, particularly in Sweden, about distinguishing between *folkedans* (folk dance or folk dance movement dancing) and *folklig dans* (vernacular or traditional dance). Nordic folk dance specialists, including Nilsson (2009) and Bakka (2001), associate the labels "popular dancing", "traditional dancing", and "folk dancing" with social dancing. In this chapter, I use these four concepts interchangeably, without distinguishing between revivalist activities and the so-called "authentic" traditional form.

Despite Sff's long history, a new generation of employees felt the need to question its fifty-year experience in safeguarding strategies and dissemination that connected community involvement, transmission, mediation, and facilitation to a unique archive of traditional music and dance. We¹

¹ I refer to a collective "we" that reflects the collaborative process of questioning and refining our methodology and reflexivity. This "we" encompasses the joint efforts of the staff of Sff, and

aimed to foster reflexivity regarding authority, interests, impact, and roles in the safeguarding process (Baron 2016). We sought to understand how traditional music and dance, as heritage practices, and authorised heritage discourse are crafted, preserved, and contested (Thouki and Skrede 2024). We asked ourselves: have we empowered the tradition-bearers and the folk dance movement, or have we unintentionally disempowered them through our scholarly, top-down approach? This led us to reconsider and reinterpret the principles and beliefs that should ground our work. We began reflecting on our roles as ICH mediators (Baron 2021; Jacobs and Neyrinck 2020): according to Article 15 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, the safeguarding and promotion of ICH should be a bottom-up approach, driven by the communities, groups, and individuals themselves (UNESCO 2022).

Our questions were influenced by several factors. In 2009, Sff had been accredited as an NGO under the 2003 UNESCO Convention. In 2014 and 2015, some of us became trained through UNESCO's training-of-trainers workshop. By 2012, Sff had become an associated partner in the two-year joint master's programme *Choreomundus – International Master in Dance Knowledge, Practice, and Heritage* (Choreomundus n.d.). I was a Ph.D. candidate and part-time teacher in that programme, which provided the scholarly foundation for other colleagues.

Together, we developed ideas around cultural brokerage and creation of intangible cultural heritage (hereafter ICH) networks and nodes, influenced by and in engagement with the texts of Kurin (1997), Casteleyn, Janssens and Neyrinck (2014), Jacobs, Neyrinck and Zeijden (2014a; b), Jacobs and Neyrinck (2020), and Baron (2016; 2021). In 2018, we initiated an inspirational seminar exploring the possibilities of connecting and cooperating among tradition-bearers, the revival movement, music and dance groups, their organisations, museums, and archives at the showcase festival, conference, and hub *Folkelarm* in Oslo (Sff 2019). We proposed that traditional music and dance heritage communities and the folk dance movement create networks and nodes with heritage institutions and schools connected to the formal education system to identify threats and find solutions for transmission and safeguarding (Mæland 2020). We pointed to the Setesdal Valley, where, through the process of listing their traditions on the 2003 UNESCO Representative List, they had established such networks around

especially Tone E. Myrvold, Sjur Viken, and myself, both prior to and during the application process for the EU-funded *Dance-ICH* project.

their tradition- bearers (UNESCO 2019; Lien 2020). We also highlighted our own projects, *Bygda dansar* (Countryside Dancing) and *Museene danser* (Dancing Museums) which aim to disseminate dance in participatory ways, reaching out to practitioners, tradition-bearers and relevant networks (Sff 2021a; Sff n.d.a).

Our institutional heritage and working methods at Sff are rooted in a model of cooperation with local communities to build an archive for dissemination and to empower or revive traditional dance, bringing the dance “back home”. This process was illustrated by Egil Bakka himself:

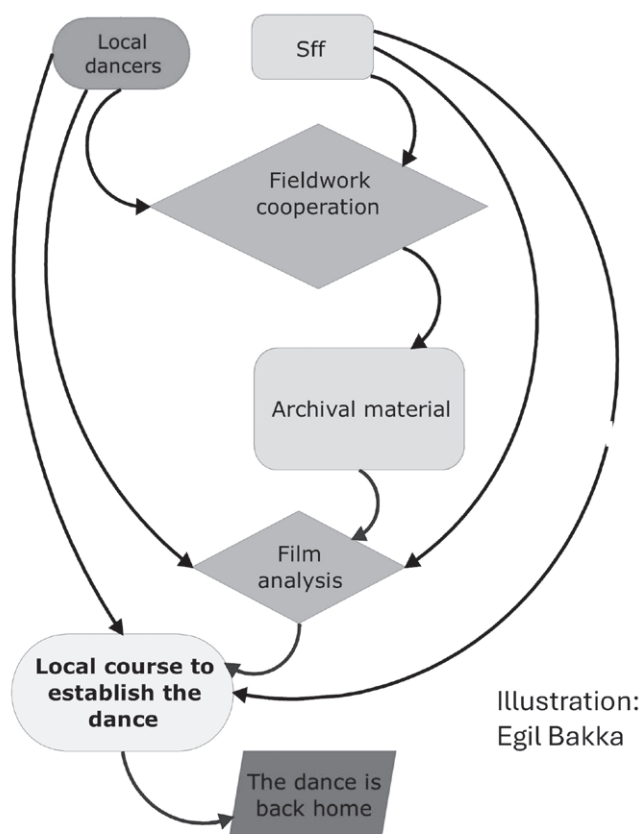


Figure 1. Sff's methodology and process of safeguarding dance as ICH. Illustration by Egil Bakka, 2005. Figure published with permission.

Illustration:
Egil Bakka

This model worked well when the collector was still actively involved at Sff. However, when the staff, who were not collectors, began disseminating the archival material, they encountered challenges – especially when there was little or no cooperation with the tradition-bearers. Well-intentioned efforts to disseminate or teach for safeguarding could create tensions, particularly when heritage communities wanted ownership of their own material and its dissemination. The material itself could be perceived as a threat by the tradition-bearers if the collected film footage depicted dances that differed in motifs or stylistic traits from current performances. Another challenge was the teaching methods. The university-educated staff at Sff had been taught with an ideology and methodology that emphasised diversity and creativity on the dance floor, reflecting the variety found in both the communities and the archival material. However, many of the tradition-bearers were self-taught in their teaching methods and often ended up teaching a fixed version of the dance, even though this was not necessarily how they danced the tradition themselves.

The “new” staff became aware that archive dissemination had to be approached with care, mediation, and cultural brokerage – often negotiating different beliefs and principles between the university-educated staff and the community, or more frequently, between various community members and tradition-bearers. As a result, we began to adopt initiatives originating from the tradition-bearers themselves, testing different methods of cooperation and mediation. The first attempt to illustrate this renewed model was presented in a paper at the 32nd Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology in Slovenia in 2022 (Mæland 2022).

The renewed model (see Figure 2) – moving from archival material to transmission, and bringing the dance “home” – will be exemplified in the following text through three examples: 1) reviving a local dance tradition, 2) re-transformation of Sff’s dissemination strategies in different regions of Norway, and 3) rethinking archival material dissemination in the digital age.

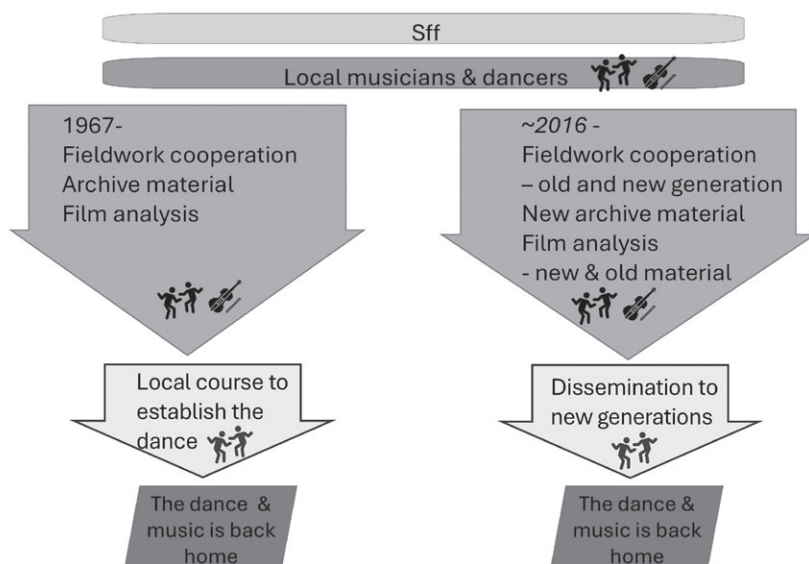


Figure 2. *Renewed model – Sff's methodology and process of safeguarding dance as ICH.*
Figure by Mæland, 2022.

The Project Springar Dancing from Sørfjorden

The term *springar* from the Sørfjorden fjord in Hardanger refers to both the tunes traditionally played on the Hardanger fiddle and the couple dance with distinctive characteristics in terms of motifs and rhythm. The dance involves multiple couples dancing in a counter-clockwise ring, each performing their dance motifs separately but in synchronisation with the rhythm. Many types of tunes are played and safeguarded in the *springar* tradition of Hardanger. The dance is one of the oldest forms of traditional couple dance in Norway, dating back to pre-1800 and follows, according to Norwegian Ethnochoreology terminology, a classic three-part structure each with distinctive motifs: a *winding part* where the couple turn under each other's arms with one or two hand holds, an *unfastening part* where the couple separate and dance solo, and a *couple turning* in close embrace (Bakka 2007b).

In the project *Springar from Sørfjorden / Sørffjordspringar*, Sff's methodology was applied. Sff's approach is rooted in action-based knowledge development, using the film archive to provide opportunities for revitalising

and safeguarding variations of local dances in collaboration with local communities. Sff has developed methods for analysing traditional dances, focusing on aspects such as couple motifs and movement qualities, including the *svikt* analysis (Bakka 2007b; Bakka and Mæland 2020), with the goal of transmission (Bakka, Flem and Okstad 1993) and safeguarding traditional dances as multitrack practices (Bakka 2020). The teaching methodology is continually evolving to ensure sustainable safeguarding. In an online article by Mæland, Rosvold and Velure (2025), we discuss revival strategies for the regional *springar* dance from Sør fjorden in Hardanger, Norway, using the further developed Sff methodology of transcription and analysis of film archival material:

1. Dance transcription, analysis, and dissemination of dance documentation have been central to our work. By transcription, we mean carefully writing down what a dance couple does in a particular performance, capturing each specific realisation as accurately as possible using the notation system developed at Sff (Bakka, Flem and Okstad 1993). The transcription methodology involves observing and analysing dance movements, practising them, and conveying them as faithfully as possible.
2. This method was developed to gain knowledge about dance through collected film material, following an epistemological tradition where knowledge about dance is only acquired through the actual dance realisations that occur in time and space. This method captures the practical knowledge of skills, norms, and the dancers' concept of dance in a traditional context (Bakka and Karoblis 2010). A "dance concept" can be defined as "the sum of motor skills, knowledge, and performances that enable a dancer to perform a dance in accordance with the norms in the environment" (Bakka, Flem and Okstad 1993, 39). It is from this dance concept that dancers can produce varied but acceptable versions of a local dance.
3. The goal of the analysis, based on the transcriptions, is to understand the grammar, patterns, variations, improvisation, diversity, and personal freedom within this tradition. In the *Sør fjordspringar* project, we transcribed each dance couple and every instance they danced on film in the archive. We sought to avoid oversimplifications in the presentation, aiming to capture the complexity of the *springar* tradition in Sør fjorden (Mæland, Rosvold and Velure 2025, 5-6, my translation).

The project was initiated by tradition-bearer Magne Velure, who had been involved in the fieldwork cooperation in Hardanger and Sørfjorden with Bakka in 1967 when they were students. Velure, originally from Sørfjorden, was at that time both a dancer and teacher of the *springar*. In 2019, he contacted me at Sff and Magni Rosvold at her workplace, hardingfela.no, to revisit and work with the archival material. Rosvold worked as a folk dance mediator in the Hordaland region, which includes Sørfjorden. At the time, Rosvold and I were collaborating on the *Bygda dansar* (Country-side Dancing) project (see below).

Rosvold and I initiated a process with our colleagues at Sff, with local heritage institution colleagues in Hordaland, and with fiddlers and dancers from Hardanger, inviting them to discuss and dance the archival material, and to engage the tradition-bearers in filming and interviews. Due to COVID-19, the process was not straightforward, and digital meetings were required. However, we managed to meet in person as well, and Rosvold organised numerous events in Hordaland. The renewed model above was created to illustrate this process (Figure 2).

Velure, now living elsewhere in the country, remained in close contact with the local traditional music association and was invited to teach the *springar* at weekend seminars. Rosvold often attended these events to document them. Simultaneously, Rosvold and I tested our analysis and how to disseminate the pluralities of the archival material through workshops. Rosvold also initiated teacher training courses in Hardanger. At the *Dance-ICH Workshop 2* in the Hungary Open Air Museum in May 2023, I demonstrated two of these methods through practical teaching, discussing the relevance of teaching according to a multitrack practice. A multitrack practice is not limited to an authorised form and often features multiple alternatives in its structure. Practitioners can choose between several options which “represents a particular challenge for the safeguarding of ICH” (Bakka 2020, 39–40).

One method I used, developed as early as 1999 during my BA studies in Norwegian Applied Ethnochoreology at NTNU, became an inspiration for many dance teachers. We saw how it could easily be applied to this material. The teaching method is a dance game, which gradually adds more rules: dancers perform one by one, moving, in time with the musical rhythm, randomly all over the floor, as in the *lausdans* (solo unfastening part of the dance), and then, on cue, they add new couple motifs. The game transitions from dancing alone (unfastening part) to finding a new partner on the floor

to dance different turning motifs under each other's arms or couple turns. Ultimately, the game evolves into a semi-structured dance, incorporating motifs and steps similar to the *springar*. This method works well when introducing the *springar* to new audiences, especially to children and to young people, teaching them how to play with (or choose between) duration, steps, and alternative motifs.

We faced, however, a large archival collection of forty dance realisations, spanning from 1967 to the present, which we transcribed and analysed (Mæland, Rosvold and Velure 2025). Drawing on our previous knowledge and teaching experience, we tested how to teach the dance within a comprehensible frame while providing attendees with the tools to explore the variations we had detected. We aimed to create a space for variation and improvisation, fostering a dance floor that resembled a traditional social dance event, where people could enjoy their own specific version of the dance. We organised the dance motifs and steps as a multitrack grammar, with rules for variations and improvisational elements within the framework of the *springar* dance concept.

This work was a significant learning process. The systematic work we did was fruitful, yielding new knowledge and facilitating cooperation with tradition-bearers, younger generations, and the official school system. However, the authors also encountered some resistance. From my perspective, I had assumed that my two colleagues – the tradition-bearer and the folk dance teacher from the region – were considered locals. Both had extensive experience of cooperation with the main traditional dance and music association in the area, *Hardanger Spelemannslag* (Hardanger Fiddle Association). While there was interest from the members, and they participated in workshops and seminars, there were challenges with timing and alignment of objectives. Reflecting on the process, I believe the resistance stemmed from different aims and views of tradition. This raised tensions between top-down and bottom-up processes. Our goal was deep analysis and transmission of a multitrack practice, while their goal seemed simply to bring the dance back home.

Another factor that we faced was that few people on the board of *Hardanger Spelemannslag* were from Sørkjorden. This raised the question: what about the *springar* from where many of them live, in Granvin, the neighbouring municipality? It's a good question that we also pondered: there is less archival material from Granvin, and fewer living tradition-bearers than from Sørkjorden. Some tradition-bearers from Granvin believe the *sp-*

ringar from Sørfjorden is not “theirs”, as most of them are from or live in Granvin. There are very few recordings of traditional dancers from Granvin nor are there many who are still alive. Except from a few motifs and steps, we found very little distinction between the archival material from Granvin and that from Sørfjorden.

These questions lie at the heart of the ideological debate within the Norwegian folk dance movement. Since the late 1960s, the ideological shift among traditional dance collectors and central folk dance teachers in Norway was to move away from national romanticism toward local dance traditions. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a movement among researchers and tradition-bearers that emphasised these differences. However, this shift is now being questioned. Today, Velure and I hypothesise that the *springar* belongs to a larger region of Hardanger, beyond just Sørfjorden. Our hypothesis aligns with the ideological shift questioned by other researchers in Norway, who also question the municipality-based ideological approach:

Could we actually find evidence that people in pre-industrial communities had a perception of song, music, or dance that varied from village to village, as we see in the folk music community from the 1970s onward? (Haug 2005, 36, my translation)

Social anthropologist Jan Petter Blom, an influential pioneer ethnomusicologist in Norway, pointed out that we may either emphasise patterns in playing and dancing that connect, or those that differentiate (Blom 1989). The “brute facts” show regional differences in *springar* playing and dancing in Norway, but determining where to draw the line is impossible due to geographical, generational, and individual differences, as well as artistic innovation and social interaction (Omholt 2006). Per Åsmund Omholt concludes in his Ph.D. thesis: “It is most fruitful not to view traditional areas as fixed borders, but as more fluid, movable areas surrounding different centres, depending on which dimensions one focuses on” (Omholt 2006, 16, my translation). The archival material from Hardanger seems to support Omholt’s research.

This discussion highlights how the interplay between researchers and traditional bearers over time influences traditional practices and their dissemination, and how this may lead to local tensions and challenges with researchers and heritage institutions such as Sff.

Safeguarding Traditional Dance – From Bygda dansar to Dansespor

Sff's methodology also served as the safeguarding method for the long-standing traditional dance transmission project *Bygda dansar* (Countryside Dancing). For 21 years (2001–2022), Sff, through *Bygda dansar* (BD), worked in various regions of Norway to safeguard the living practice of dancing local traditional participatory dances, with young people as the target group. It was a three-year, ambulatory project that moved from one region to another. In each region, Sff's teaching methodology and educational model were adapted to the geographical and local environments, beliefs, participants, and dance and music traditions of the area (Sff 2021a; Mæland et al. 2021). Some of the principal objectives were to create meeting spaces for the young, between them and the local traditional milieu, the professional folk dance teachers employed by Sff and Sff's dance archive; to develop new methods and techniques for presenting and teaching traditional dance, and to develop the competence of local traditional bearers as instructors. BD was initially funded by the Norwegian Culture Fund and later received annual funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture.

BD was based on three key priorities: 1) The need from revival organisations to recruit young people to play, dance, and engage in their activities 2) Sff's goal of archival transmission – bringing the dance from the archive back to the community and 3) Norwegian cultural funding policies at that time, which supported professionalisation. The negotiation between these priorities sometimes led to tensions, as described below.

The project was promoted as good practice on the *Safeguarding Practices* website. The main purpose of the website is to share experiences related to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the Nordic and Baltic regions. In 2017, I outlined five key factors for the success of safeguarding traditional dance among young people in Norway:

Professional Dance Teachers: The success of the project was largely due to the professional dance teachers who had the time, energy, and pedagogical tools to recruit youngsters. They brought skills for cooperation with dancers from the revival movement to revitalise dance traditions based on living traditions and film documentation of traditional dancers and musicians. The plural understandings of local dance traditions were transmitted to the youth.

Collaboration with local tradition-bearers: Dancers and musicians from the area were brought into the project to teach, dance, host social dance gatherings and to ensure that young people felt welcome in the folk music and dance movement.

Traditional dance and music from the particular region formed the basis for all activities, including staged performances. The emphasis was on maintaining the diversity of human body types and dance styles: solo and couple dances with rhythmic footwork and their connection to traditional music. This uncompromised approach ensured that the young peoples' embodiment was grounded in traditional social dancing rather than in staged versions.

Professional musicians, choreographers, and stage directors were involved, ensuring that the young people worked seriously with traditional dances from their area. The professional staff maintained high-level dancing and performances.

The young participants: A crucial success factor was the young people themselves. Effective recruitment strategies and the creation of positive social environments for the young helped them to stay engaged in the project. Through dancing, local youth communities were established in their home counties and these local communities came together in national arenas, forming a shared national community for traditional dancing (Mæland 2017).

Despite these positive aspects, BD began to face challenges. Over time, the project's three priorities – each with its own set of goals – became less connected to the changing social structures. The project also lacked sufficient resources to adequately meet all of its goals, leading to frustrations among both local tradition-bearers and professional dance teachers.

In 2021, two surveys and reports were written as part of the evaluation process initiated by Sff (Hjemdahl 2021; Mæland et al. 2021), both of which confirmed the success of Sff's teaching methodology. Many former participants are now tradition-bearers and nearly all the young professional dancers have backgrounds in one or more *Bygda dansar* projects. According to the participant survey, 47% of respondents stated that BD was a significant reason for their continued engagement in traditional dance today. The teaching methods received positive feedback from the young participants, project staff, and local stakeholders. The action-based knowledge developed through the film archive, emphasising rhythm, variation, improvisation, expression and personal style, was particularly highlighted in the

reports. In the participant survey (from the young people's perspective), three main reasons for continued participation emerged: the social atmosphere and camaraderie, the opportunity to improve as a dancer, and the influence of the teachers. These factors were emphasised by the 47% who credited BD with playing a significant role in their continued engagement with traditional dance (Mæland et al. 2021, 67–70). The results showed that although each project was unique with different teachers, Sff's employed teachers made a lasting impression and played a key role in creating social environments and developing dance skills.

Both reports also revealed, however, that the recruitment strategies, which aimed to attract young people with no prior experience in traditional dance from high schools to BD, were not successful. The independent report, which interviewed various stakeholders, also indicated that BD was often seen as a top-down model by many participants:

The project has great potential in its collaboration with the local folk dance communities, both in terms of process, professional skills development and participation from local communities. It is in the relationship between regional anchoring and national professionalisation that many of *Bygda dansar*'s major challenges have occurred and there is potential for improvement. The challenges the project faced related to different expectations for what BD should contribute to a region, how regional communities should be involved, co-determination and resource allocation. Furthermore, challenges have arisen around management, mediating and transferring knowledge, and determining who controls the 'right' knowledge about dance. Not least, it has been challenging to agree on how much impact, involvement and ownership the regional communities should have. There also seem to be different perceptions of how BD contributes to regional folk dance communities and what kind of local imprint it leaves on a region. The project model used by *Bygda dansar* did not align with the level of participation expected. (Hjemdahl 2021, 7–8, my translation)

We, the Sff staff, reflected on the fact that, in almost every region we entered, we encountered multiple voices vying for ownership of the traditional dance in the area. Many of the professional teachers employed by

Sff, even those from the same region, had to mediate between these different viewpoints. However, this bottom-up mediation role was not always recognised locally, and as a result, we ended up in situations where none of the stakeholders felt that we were fully aligned with their interests. In BD, the project staff, including the teachers, deliberately chose a role that empowered the young people, aiming to secure common ground for stakeholders to continue as tradition-bearers and to maintain their engagement with the youth.

The Sff staff took the traditional milieu's views on the project seriously, addressing the issues raised in Hjemdahl's report, our surveys and our own reflections. As a result, in 2022 we developed a new programme called *Dansespor* (Dance Traces) to continue the work of BD, although we chose not to follow any of Hjemdahl's models directly. After evaluating Sff's strategy, our expertise and the needs of the folk dance community, we identified a challenge we wanted to address: a programme that would align with Sff's strategy and the needs of the folk dance community. We concluded that Sff should take on an advisory or facilitative role, focusing on folk dance instructors, tradition-bearers and enthusiasts who wish to create activity in their region or existing environments. We also decided to expand the target audience to include primary school teachers, extra-curricular arts educators (*kulturskolelærere*), museum pedagogues, voluntary organisations, and upper secondary school teachers.

Our aim was to create a lasting impact, avoid "hitch-hiking", and acknowledge that performing folk music goes hand in hand with a commitment to dance. We developed *Dansespor* as a programme to meet the needs of today and the future, with the overarching goal of creating activities that promote familiarity and knowledge of traditional dance, while facilitating more attractive presentations. The programme was designed to be flexible, adapting to the needs we encounter. We established sub-goals that could be adjusted as needed.

Since autumn 2022, *Dansespor* has focused on:

1. national courses and gatherings that provide knowledge about local dance traditions and offer a toolbox for attractive dissemination activities,
2. a network for traditional dance mediators across the country, and

3. grants for local dissemination projects for those who have attended courses and are part of the network—offering mentoring and follow-up for selected folk dance mediators in collaboration with their local environments.

These sub-goals aim to create a structure where the safeguarding and promotion of traditional dance is a bottom-up approach, initiated by communities, groups, and individuals themselves. They enter our seminars with safeguarding goals, and we act as facilitators, providing tools, guidance or serving as dialogue partners. The seminars also help to create networks and connections among participants and offer grants to establish these networks in their home regions. We also work closely with other national institutions involved in folk dance, such as the offices of the two largest membership organisations for traditional dancers, musicians and tradition-bearers. These organisations have members across towns, cities, and rural areas throughout Norway, many of whom regularly practise traditional dance in social settings or more professionally on stage. We are conscious of complementing their offerings, bolstering the teachers and supporting volunteers organising the activities. We aim to contribute positively to strengthening volunteerism and regularly invite our partners to evaluate the process to enhance and develop our activities based on stakeholder needs.

The traditional dance milieu has already indicated the need to strengthen activities for young people and has asked us to cooperate on new youth initiatives now that *Bygda dansar* has concluded.

From my perspective, these new structures have improved our working conditions with tradition-bearers, folk dancers, enthusiasts and cultural heritage professionals. We are now mediating on behalf of those who request our help, using a bottom-up approach. We ask them about their needs and propose activities they may find interesting, or not at all.

Dance Archive Dissemination and Digital Access

The Sff archive, in its fifty-one years of existence, has been a valuable resource for research, education, transmission and revitalisation. Over the years, we have built strong, long-term relationships of trust with various stakeholders and tradition-bearers. The active use of the archive has led to the documentation of dance forms, publications and the revitalisation

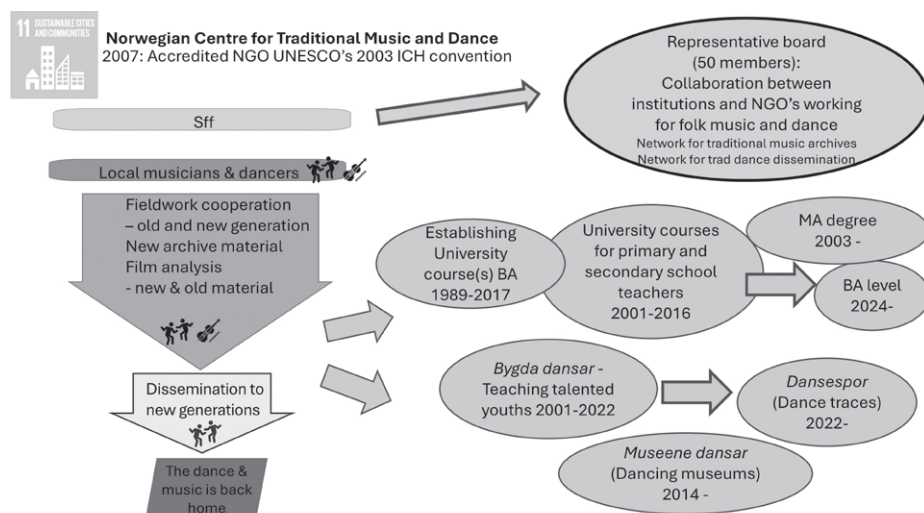


Figure 3. This figure shows how Sff's archive methodology and process of safeguarding dance as ICH, are operationalised through Sff's networks, projects and university studies. Figure by Mæland 2023.

of local dances through collaboration with local communities. From 1989 to 2014, Sff transmitted its knowledge through basic Ethnochoreology courses in collaboration with the Department of Dance and Music at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). These university courses were grounded in archival materials to disseminate knowledge about the traditions, unique features of traditional culture and methodological tools for research and revival. Many of these former students have passed on their knowledge in their own regions and further developed their expertise through in-depth fieldwork with tradition-bearers and additional research in the archive.

Starting in autumn 2024, Sff's staff collaborated to revive the core Bachelor's-level subjects in Norwegian Applied Ethnochoreology, a course open to the Traditional Dance community, including individuals of all ages. This development is a result of political efforts to re-establish a Bachelor's programme in Traditional Dance Performance at the Department of Traditional Arts and Traditional Music at the University of South-Eastern Norway. This programme, which was previously offered by NTNU in collaboration with Sff and Ole Bull Akademiet (a heritage organisation from another part

of Norway) from 2009 to 2012, traces its origins back to an initiative by Sff in 1989 when a 30-credit university subject was introduced, continuing until 2014 (a few courses ran until 2017).

The Sff archive has become an invaluable resource, particularly for students and tradition-bearers who express a desire for digital access to its content. Sff offers digital access, however most of the material is not openly searchable. This situation is frustrating for stakeholders who expect open access and wish to see all materials made available on platforms such as YouTube (Thedens 2018). We, as employees of a national archive, face at least two challenges related to the demand for open access. First, much of the material has yet to be digitised or properly organised, nor is it in formats suitable for digital distribution. Second, there are ethical and ideological concerns: should the archive provide free digital access for all, or should access continue to be mediated by knowledgeable staff? Norwegian ethnomusicologist Tellef Kvifte discusses the dilemma of accessibility versus understanding the material (meta-data). He writes:

On the one hand, the service of specialist archivists will help the user to also formulate better what to search for, as well as give the user directions regarding what is considered proper use of the material. Searching on internet may provide as much – or more – material than a visit to an archive will, but it may be more difficult to know what one actually retrieves, what kind of material it is, under what circumstances it is collected, and the kinds of cultural contexts one should know in order to evaluate the material properly. (Kvifte 2014, 293)

At Sff, the policy has been to prioritise dissemination to the communities where the material was collected – essentially, “bringing the dance back home” – and not necessarily to folk dance groups outside these communities. Our primary audience remains these communities, students and researchers. This policy is informed by traditional ownership, legal considerations, and the consent given by those who contributed to the archive, as well as the conditions under which each film or recording was made (Viken 2017). A colleague at the National Library of Norway has questioned our policy, suggesting it might foster distrust. In 2018, he pointed out that few users were contacting the archive (Thedens 2018). However, since then, the number of inquiries has increased, and today we receive daily requests

for material. Over the past years, we have worked to improve our services. A dissemination archivist was appointed to focus on this area, and more material has been digitised. Users are now provided with meta-data and assistance with their revitalisation projects. These efforts have enhanced our archive's reputation, resulting in more satisfied users.

Kvifte, who has extensive experience working in archives, questions the effectiveness and limitations of folk music archives. He has observed that many users search for an “authentic” version of traditional music and dance, and asks if traditional music and dance is about a product (found in the archives), the masters (the tradition-bearers), or the “oral” processes of learning through interaction and feedback. He argues that the latter causes the variation that is at the heart of traditional cultures (Kvifte 2014). Such variation may be harder to convey through archives unless both the variety and the context are preserved and transmitted through knowledgeable staff.

Returning to Sff's focus on protecting communities' ownership, this connects to the 2003 UNESCO Convention, which recognises the right of communities, groups and sometimes individuals to control the transmission of their cultural material. Over the years, we have encountered tradition-bearers who are both sceptical of and feel threatened by the material in the archive. Many of my colleagues and I, past and present, have had to mediate between the archive's content and the concerns of tradition-bearers, or between different tradition-bearers themselves. Since both the staff's knowledge of traditional dance and the archive's material demonstrate richness and variation within local contexts, we use this knowledge to foster acceptance of diversity. There is no single “correct” version of a tradition; rather, we aim to accept what exists in its diverse forms. These negotiations often lead to an understanding and a desire for continued collaboration with knowledgeable staff.

The *pol*s, a dance tradition from Røros Mining Town, is well-known in Norway's folk dance revival movement. It has become nationally popular and is included in the repertoire of nearly every folk dance club in Norway. While the popularity of the *pol*s benefits the community, it complicates the question of geographical ownership. Folk dancers without direct ties to the community seek to deepen their understanding of the dance and often turn to the sound or film archives for guidance. Our usual response has been to direct these individuals to high-quality dance representations by living tradition-bearers available on YouTube or to encourage them to travel to learn

from these bearers. This approach has generally been accepted, as access to tradition-bearers is good, and the tradition is considered alive and well.

In recent years, however, the tradition-bearers of Røros have shown more interest in archival materials of past bearers. Several seminars have been held to explore this further. As part of our search for new safeguarding models, we found an opportunity to collaborate with the tradition-bearers in an initiative led by TrondheimFOLK, a professional folk music and dance organiser. This collaboration resulted in the creation of an “archival concert”, later renamed *arkivdansekonsert* (the “dance archival concert”). We developed this event as a pilot project combining academic content dissemination, viewing archival material, interviews, and live playing and dancing by tradition-bearers (Sff 2021b; 2021c). This collaboration allowed us to share our knowledge of meta-data, while also learning from the tradition-bearers about the materials in our collection. Funding for the project made it possible for the tradition-bearers to participate, and together we reviewed the archival material, selecting pieces they wanted to showcase at the event.

Initially, we were cautious about negotiating between the archive and the tradition-bearers, but we soon realised that both the dancers and musicians found the material exciting. They reconnected with the past traditions that had meaning for them, and were not concerned with playing or dancing differently from the archival sources – perhaps because the sources themselves revealed the diversity of living traditions. The collaborators recognised this diversity within their own practices. The only fear expressed was actually the potential loss of that diversity.

Together with the tradition-bearers, we decided to bring some of these conversations to the stage, where we contextualised the desire to safeguard the rhythmic variation, improvisation, expression and personal style within the *pols*. They all expressed a sense of loss due to the refinement and unification that had occurred in the revival movement and within the folk dance and music clubs.

In the first versions of the archival dance concert, we performed alongside the tradition-bearers, interviewing them and introducing the archival materials. We also collaborated with a dramaturge. The feedback we received indicated that our involvement gave solid recognition to the tradition-bearers. The event was overwhelmingly well-received, especially when we offered it during the showcase festival *Folkelarm* as part of our fiftieth anniversary in November 2023.

We chose to integrate this idea into our *Dansespor* (Dance Traces) programme, where we also shared the concept as part of our toolbox (Sff n.d.b). Currently, our collaborators in Røros have been asked multiple times to participate in similar dance archive dissemination events, and similar concepts are being developed in collaboration with other tradition-bearers in Oslo. Through *Dansespor*, we have funded a collaboration project in Haltingdal, a region with a strong traditional heritage, involving a museum, tradition-bearers and young dancers and musicians. The goal was to pass on nearly lost variations to the younger generation of tradition-bearers. The young adults, guided by a tradition-bearer and an expert in interpreting the plurality in the film collection, were empowered and enthusiastic. The participating young adults have already used their newfound knowledge to disseminate traditional dance beyond the project.

These mediated processes are not straightforward, and the varying ideologies of Sff and its stakeholders contribute to this complexity. As I have discussed, we have had to exercise our skills in translation – acting as brokers and facilitators – to find common ground between professional discourses and local practices. However, it is also our duty, as a heritage institution, to challenge and engage with the community’s knowledge, as emphasised in Norwegian official documents outlining the political direction of the museum sector towards 2050. The Ministry of Culture stresses the importance of building understanding and identity through local traditions, while simultaneously challenging self-understanding to foster new perspectives. Museums must remain both repositories of knowledge and spaces for critical engagement with that knowledge (Meld. St. 23 2020–2021, 54).

Conclusion – Ideology, Safeguarding, and Bottom-Up Processes

This chapter has drawn upon my experience as a dance notator, researcher, facilitator, and pedagogue at Sff especially from the period 2019–2024. I argue that Sff’s experiences and development over more than fifty years reveals crucial lessons in cultural heritage safeguarding. Sff’s shift from an archive-centred approach to a more community-engaged model highlights the complex relationship between institutional expertise and community ownership of cultural traditions.

Three key insights emerge:

1. The tension between archival preservation and living tradition requires careful mediation. Archival documentation is essential for safeguarding dance traditions, but it must be transmitted in ways that respect and support the variation of living cultural practices. The success of projects like the *Sørffordspringar* revival and the archive dance concerts shows how archival material can enrich rather than constrain contemporary practice when properly contextualised.
2. Effective cultural heritage safeguarding requires a balance between institutional expertise and community agency. Sff's transition from *Bygda dansar* to *Dansespor* reflects a broader shift from what became perceived as top-down transmission to facilitative support, emphasising that sustainable safeguarding must be driven by community needs. This aligns with the 2003 UNESCO Convention's emphasis on bottom-up approaches, while maintaining the value of professional expertise in supporting community efforts.
3. Finally, the challenge of digital access versus mediated transmission highlights broader questions about cultural heritage in the digital age. My experience suggests that while digital accessibility is important, the context, interpretation and ethical considerations provided by knowledgeable mediators remain crucial for meaningful transmission of cultural traditions: when traditions are shared digitally, provenance may quickly be lost and forgotten. From that follows that if we as a national institution declare our digital archive as heritage with open access, it is no longer a matter of the local community but for the wider community and the state and its heritage cultural policy. How this corresponds with the rights of communities, groups and individuals according to the 2003 UNESCO Convention has to be further explored and negotiated in the years to come.

These insights point to an evolving model of safeguarding that prioritises flexibility, community engagement, and careful mediation between the past and present. The future of safeguarding traditional dance lies in combining institutional expertise with community ownership, as demonstrated by Sff's recent initiatives like the *Sørffordspringar* project, *Dansespor* and the dance archive concerts.

Through consideration of three specific cases, this chapter has highlighted key aspects and aims to contribute to broader discussions on safeguarding cultural heritage in an era of technological and social change. In future practice, successful strategies must continue to evolve, balancing accessibility with context, expertise with community ownership and archival objects with living traditions.

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8.

Transmitting Social Dance Practices in Flanders as Living Heritage

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In safeguarding intangible heritage, success hinges on ensuring that heritage communities retain control over their practices, deciding what to transmit and how. Heritage institutions, however, can facilitate safeguarding. In order to do so, CEMPER (Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage in Flanders) adapted existing models to explore the viability and sustainability of music traditions and applied these to folk dance in Flanders.

Keywords: sustainability, intangible heritage, folk dance, safeguarding

The project *Dance as ICH: New Models for Facilitating Participatory Dance Events (Dance-ICH)* focused on how cultural heritage institutions can best support the safeguarding of participative dance practices. The goal was to develop new models for facilitating participatory dance events and safeguarding dance as intangible cultural heritage (ICH) through collaborative processes with heritage communities. CEMPER (Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage in Flanders) adapted existing models to explore the viability and sustainability of music traditions (Grant 2014, Schippers and Grant 2016) and applied them to folk dance in Flanders. Through fieldwork, we tested these adapted models with the objectives of 1) expanding CEMPER's network within this community, 2) initiating open discussions about safeguarding practices, and 3) investigating the potential role of museums and other heritage professionals in general in safeguarding dance as ICH.

This chapter provides an overview of how we tailored these research models to folk dance within the Flemish context. Based on the research data, we evaluate the efficacy of this model within this specific setting.

Heritage Community

In any effort to research and safeguard cultural heritage, defining the boundaries of a community becomes a complex but necessary task. In the context of folk dance in Flanders, this task is especially difficult due to the diversity of practices, historical baggage and cultural associations surrounding the term “folk dance”. While the dynamism and fluidity of ICH make it challenging to assign rigid labels, practical considerations often demand clear definitions to guide research, policy and safeguarding actions (Council of Europe 2005, 2; Wood and Judikis 2002, 12; Grant 2014, xiii; Jacobs 2020, 277–279).

Social Dance

Based on advice from Danspunt, an organisation supporting Flemish amateur dance groups, we adopted the term “social dance” (*folk-, volks- en werelddans*) in our communication to appeal to different kinds of dance practitioners. We defined social dance as group-based practices, passed down through collective participation, and relatively accessible to all. Respondents were asked to specify the dance practice(s) to which they felt

connected, allowing us to acknowledge the diversity of social dance practices in Flanders. This inclusive approach, however, highlighted the complexities inherent in researching and safeguarding ICH, describing something fluid without being overly restrictive or overly broad. As Grant (2017) notes, attempting to define something so dynamic risks “fixing a moving target”, potentially overlooking the processes of change and exchange that shape dance practices over time.

In our research, we used the term social dance to broaden our scope, although this term is not commonly used by the communities, leaving some participants feeling unaddressed. Similarly, “dance practice” did not resonate with all participants. Through discussions and interviews, we found that while some participants are accustomed to “heritage talk”, many did not see their practices as part of it. We adapted our approach to better reflect the folk dance community’s self-identification.

Despite our inclusive efforts, we primarily connected with the traditional folk dance and *balfolk* communities, rather than the wide spectrum of social dance. This reinforced the importance of terminology, leading us to opt for the term “folk dance”, which in this case applies to the traditional folk dance community and the *balfolk* community in Flanders.

Folk Dance in Flanders: Background and Evolution

Traditional folk dance and *balfolk* in Flanders share the same roots but have evolved differently. In the 1950s and 1960s, traditional folk dance experienced a revival, particularly among urban enthusiasts who gathered in groups to learn and perform dances that had formerly been part of rural life. These included spring, harvest and fairground dances connected to the agricultural cycle, which had once varied from village to village. Between 1965 and 1980, significant data on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century dances were collected.

By the late 1970s, international folk dances from across Europe began to emerge in Flanders, supported by weekly dance evenings and festivals that promoted both traditional and newly introduced dances. In the early 1980s, numerous national and international workshops made these dances more widely available. Through this exchange, traditional dances were shared and spread across Europe, resulting in both traditional folk dancers and *balfolk* dancers often starting from similar dances.



Figure 1. Boombal in Mechelen, 1 February 2023. Photo: CEMPER.

During this period, *balfolk* distinguished itself from traditional folk dance through commercialisation, offering more classes and workshops. The rise of Boombal in the early 2000s helped *balfolk* grow, creating a new community around larger dance events (Van Craenenbroeck and Devyver 2022, 122–124). Boombal began as a student initiative in Ghent and quickly developed into a series of popular, party-like evenings where live bands played folk music for social dancing. Its informal, festive atmosphere attracted a younger audience and gave *balfolk* visibility and momentum.

Characteristics of Folk Dance in Flanders

Traditional folk dance and *balfolk* in Flanders share roots but have evolved into distinct practices. Both include European dances such as the schotische, waltz, mazurka, and polka but traditional folk dance emphasises Flemish dances linked to agricultural traditions, such as the maypole dance (Van Craenenbroeck and Devyver 2022, 123). These are performed either in their traditional form or as part of new choreographies.

Traditional folk dance groups, also known as *volkskunstgroepen*, focus on performance with fixed sets and choreographies, often practising weekly and wearing traditional costumes. They also engage in related activities such as flagwaving and crafts (Reuzegom Leuven n.d.; Registratie immaterieel erfgoed n.d.; Dans-info n.d.; Van Craenenbroeck and Devyver 2022, 121–122).

Balfolk, on the other hand, involves larger, more informal gatherings at balls or festivals, where dancers do not rehearse weekly in fixed groups. There is more flexibility in the steps and the dancers are not focused on performance. Although traditional folk dance groups also attend festivals, they tend to remain together, whereas *balfolk* dancers mix with others in more spontaneous varied forms (Indesteege 2005; Boombal n.d.; Van Craenenbroeck and Devyver 2022, 125).

Methodology

In this chapter, we will outline the methodology employed in our research, detailing the data collection methods used. We will discuss the design and implementation of the questionnaire, the approach for individual interviews, and the structure of the roundtable discussion. Additionally, we explain the data analysis techniques applied to interpret the findings, emphasising how this multifaceted approach enabled us to capture the diverse experiences and perspectives within the folk dance community. We begin by outlining the organisation and context in which the research was conducted.

CEMPER

CEMPER, the Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage in Flanders, is based in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. It provides services related to the cultural heritage of music and performing arts, implementing UNESCO's and Flemish heritage policies but does not maintain a museum or public archive. As a dedicated professional team working on ICH, our approach is typically bottom-up. We respond to requests from heritage communities, playing an advisory and supportive role in helping them define safeguarding actions that reflect their values and needs. If desired, we also assist them in applying for inscription on the Flemish Inventory for Intangible Herit-

age, our regional equivalent of UNESCO's Representative List (Departement Cultuur, Jeugd en Media n.d). We also, at times, initiate projects when we identify specific needs within the heritage communities, either through direct observation or research. In this case, however, the *Dance-ICH* project inspired us to explore the sustainability of folk dance proactively. Instead of waiting for the community to approach us, we took the lead, our aim being to map the community, encourage reflection on folk dance as ICH and engage in conversations on its sustainability and safeguarding.

The ethical principles of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasise that communities, groups and individuals should take the primary role in safeguarding, identifying, and valuing their ICH practices (UNESCO 2015). The Department of Culture in Flanders has insisted upon community involvement and thinking about safeguarding actions as formal requirements for cultural practices to be eligible for a place on the Flemish Inventory of ICH. In this way, it acknowledges the community's engagement to safeguard their intangible heritage. Safeguarding actions react to the threats and opportunities that the community perceives, reflect the values they attach to their ICH, and focus on those aspects that they find important. This allows the community to find creative solutions to changes in their environment and to let their heritage evolve in a way with which they can identify (Adell et al. 2015, 10). Our role entails consolidating all community opinions about values, threats and opportunities, facilitating conversations around them, and assisting the community in devising safeguarding actions.

In this case, the top-down approach at the start presented challenges. For many of the dancers, the concept of intangible heritage (and the associated policies) was unfamiliar territory, which likely impacted their engagement and response. While we, as heritage professionals, focus on safeguarding policies, many participants view their dancing as a hobby or passion, rather than as a practice or tradition to be safeguarded consciously within a formal heritage framework. This reveals a disconnect between heritage discourse and the everyday experience of practitioners, many of whom are not primarily interested in nor have the time for engaging with their practices on a meta-level.

Our role was to bridge this gap, facilitating discussions about safeguarding while respecting the personal nature of their practice, and empowering the community to see its place within the heritage framework.

Theoretical Frameworks

The questions used in our research were inspired by two frameworks: Huib Schippers' and Catherine Grant's *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures: An Ecological Perspective* (2016) and Grant's "How to Identify and Assess Endangerment: The Music Vitality and Endangerment Framework" (2014, 105–126). While these models have been developed and used to assess the sustainability of music cultures, their application to dance practices remains underexplored. Notably, Tanya Merchant applied Huib Schippers' model in her study "Queer and Trans Inclusivity Efforts as Sustainability Strategies in Urban Contradance" (2025) demonstrating its relevance to dance contexts. A secondary objective of our study was to ascertain the viability of utilising these models within the realm of dance.

Recognising the synergy between these models and the relevance to our research goals, we opted to integrate aspects from both frameworks into our research. By combining the holistic approach of *Sustainable Futures* with Grant's quantitative assessment of vitality, we aimed to construct a comprehensive methodology for analysing folk dance in Flanders.

We chose to retain the five domains from the *Sustainable Futures* framework – systems of learning, musicians and communities, contexts and constructs, infrastructure and regulations, media and music industry, and issues and initiatives for sustainability – adapting them to the context of dance. For each domain, we formulated specific questions to deepen our exploration, as we believe these domains encompass the most critical aspects of dance culture sustainability and will improve our understanding of the factors that influence it. A sixth section of the framework examines the broader implications of these domains, analysing community initiatives that support the long-term viability of their dance culture.

Modes of Outreach and Inquiry

To understand the values and concerns within the folk dance communities, we employed a multifaceted approach, utilising a questionnaire, individual interviews and a roundtable discussion.

Survey

We began our research with an online questionnaire to broaden our reach and allow everyone in the folk dance community to share their perspectives. This approach enabled us to gain insights into the community's network, identify key stakeholders, and understand the different viewpoints within the field. The survey was conducted from 21 February to 2 April, 2024 (42 days) and received 75 unique responses. It consisted of 35 mandatory questions, of which 8 were open questions and the other 27 multiple choice, some with options for additional comments.

To tailor the questionnaire specifically to Flemish folk dance, we adapted Grant's survey into Dutch, removing music industry-specific questions and incorporating dance-related terminology. We included at least one qualitative question for each domain from *Sustainable Futures* to explore the values that practitioners attribute to their practice.

We distributed the survey widely within our network, targeting a diverse range of stakeholders, including dancers of varying expertise, event organisers, dance teachers, musicians, choreographers, the wider public and dance enthusiasts. We published the call on our website, in newsletters and on social media platforms. We also collaborated with key organisations, such as Danspunt, Actieve Interculturele Federatie (AIF+), Instituut Vlaamse Volkskunst (IVV), Vlaamse VolksKunstBeweging (VVKB) Flanders Folk Network and Muziekpublique to communicate about our survey. In addition, we reached out directly to dancers, dance instructors and festival organisers in our existing network.

The questionnaire included a question about respondents' willingness to collaborate further, through interviews or a roundtable discussion, offering us insights into their commitment to the project's future. These interviews and the roundtable provided an opportunity to expand on the survey results.

While the 75 responses indicate an interest for further collaboration within the community, this number is relatively low. Upon reflection, we recognise that simplifying some of our questions could have made the research more accessible. Striking a balance between accessibility and a level of scientific depth needed to make the results useful provided a challenge. Additionally, it is possible that many respondents did not feel addressed by the terms "social dance" and "dance practice", which may have limited the questionnaire's reach. Sending out the same survey to each dance

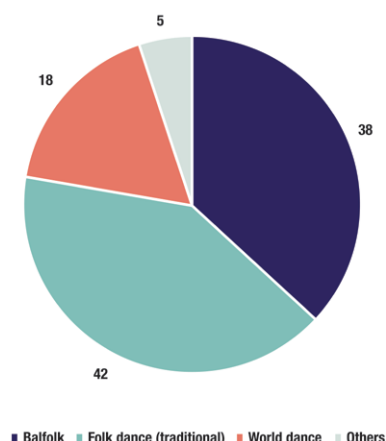


Figure 2. The dance practices in which participants of the survey are Involved: folk dance (traditional), balfolk, world dance and others. Made by Plouy and Witkamp.

community – such as *balfolk*, traditional folk dance, swing dance and the like – separately could have respected their self-attributed identities and differences. Some participants, however, did see the connection between the different dance communities, and preferred a more unified approach. This underscores the complexity of engaging a diverse community while respecting the identities and preferences of its members.

Interviews

We conducted ten individual interviews from 5 April to 16 May 2024. For these, we drew on a range of questions from the comprehensive list provided by Schippers and Grant, translating and simplifying them for clarity. The questions were categorised into two groups: those related to the general dance practice and those focused on individual experiences. Conducted in a semi-structured manner, the interviews encouraged respondents to express themselves freely, enabling us to extract insights that held particular significance for them. Additionally, these interviews provided an opportunity to seek clarification on certain survey responses from the participants.

Roundtable

Following the completion of both the questionnaire and the individual interviews, we facilitated a roundtable discussion, lasting two hours in our office. The roundtable included six participants: three from the traditional

folk community, two from the *balfolk* community, and one who represented both groups. We began by defining ICH, heritage community, and safeguarding. The group further elaborated on the terminology of social dance and its connection to both traditional folk dance and *balfolk*. This naturally led to a discussion of the differences and similarities between the two traditions. Based on preliminary results of the survey, we curated a selection of questions to further deepen these insights. We asked what elements constitute the dance practice, who is involved in it, the perceived evolutions in the transmission of folk dance, the societal importance of folk dance, its accessibility, and the participants' ideas and needs for safeguarding. Although the roundtable was structured, it provided ample room for participants to express their views freely, and the enthusiasm among the participants was evident as they engaged in meaningful exchanges.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved a systematic approach to ensure the rigour and validity of our findings. For the quantitative data derived from the questionnaire, we summarised responses across the six domains by identifying the median and the variance. This allowed us to identify trends and patterns, offering insights into the predominant themes. In addition, we utilised graphical representations such as bar charts or pie charts to present the results visually and to illustrate the distribution of responses between traditional folk dance and *balfolk*.

Qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire responses and individual interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. We employed a coding process to categorise the data based on themes that emerged directly from the responses and the theoretical framework used for this research, which facilitated a deeper understanding of practitioners' values, experiences, and perceptions.

By triangulating data from the questionnaire, interviews, and roundtable discussion, we aimed to construct a comprehensive narrative that reflects the complexities and nuances of folk dance in Flanders. This analytical framework underpins our conclusions and recommendations for safeguarding actions.

Report

Based on the data analysis, we developed a detailed report summarising our findings and insights. This report (CEMPER 2024) reflects the rich and nuanced voices and experiences gathered through the questionnaire, individual interviews and the roundtable discussion.

The findings were presented thematically, following the *Sustainable Futures* framework. The report combined both quantitative and qualitative data, highlighting key trends, themes and narratives. When relevant, we emphasised the differences between traditional folk dance and *balfolk*. We included graphical representations of the quantitative data, making it accessible and visually engaging for the folk dance community members.

We shared this report with the community for their review and feedback, allowing them to reflect on our findings and validate our interpretations. We received, however, minimal feedback. The only notable response came from *Folkmagazine* and *Volkskunst* which published summaries of our findings (Laekeman, 2024, 9; CEMPER, 2024, 32–34). By returning the report to the community, we aimed to foster a sense of ownership and agency regarding the safeguarding of their practices, to ensure that the conclusions and recommendations corresponded with their values and needs and to strengthen their relationship with CEMPER. The limited feedback underscores the need for targeted outreach and engagement strategies. It also raises the question of whether extensive reports are effective when working with non-professionals, whose involvement is key to safeguarding efforts. Moving forward, we will keep the report as an overview and seek more accessible ways to present its content. Below, we provide a summary of the report and outline how we arrived at the results for each domain.

Results

Systems of Learning

This section of the research examines the transmission of folk dance, based on the hypothesis that this plays a crucial role in sustainability. We explored the balance between formal and informal learning methods, the use of notation versus learning by doing, and contemporary trends in teaching and learning practices in a postmodern society. The survey assessed both the methods of transmission and the perceived effectiveness

of these approaches. In the individual interviews, we focused on gaining deeper insights into the transmission methods, exploring the challenges and successes. In the roundtable we discussed the interplay between traditional and modern teaching approaches, the role of technology in dance transmission, and how cultural shifts are impacting learning practices.

Discussion of Results

Respondents often became involved in folk dance through friends and family, followed by local dance organisations and neighbourhood events. Other entry points include internet resources and youth movements. Traditional folk dance groups are typically family-oriented, the activity passed down from parent to child, creating a close-knit, supportive community. *Balfolk* participants, on the other hand, tend to become involved through friends. These characteristics need to be kept in mind when developing safeguarding actions.

Informal dancing is the most common way to transmit folk dance in Flanders. This is followed by formal lessons, events like dance parties and festivals, and workshops. Traditional folk balls typically require prior knowledge and *balfolk* often includes an initiation for beginners. Popular festivals attract (new) dancers and enthusiasts, fostering strong social bonds within the dance communities, with word-of-mouth being a significant promotional tool. Written instructions and internet resources are less frequently used.

Formal lessons in *balfolk* are offered by various schools, focusing on individual improvement and proper technique. Traditional folk dance groups often hold weekly rehearsals with step-by-step instructions for performance dances. Workshops and stages with guest instructors are also common. Courses for dance leaders include detailed dance descriptions and historical context. There is a concern within the community of *balfolk* that the essence of dances might be lost through reliance on memory and observation, suggesting that notation systems could help to preserve techniques and history. In this respect, *balfolk* participants might learn from traditional folk dance and its elaborate notation system. Audiovisual media are increasingly used to transmit dance knowledge, supplementing traditional methods such as verbal descriptions. More work, however, is needed to document dances in an audiovisual way.

Survey results on the successful transmission of social dance across generations show a mixed but generally positive view. Dedicated dancers, musicians, and teachers are crucial to the communication of knowledge and enjoyment. The strong social cohesion enhances participation and emotional well-being, making these groups a vital part of members' social lives.

Folk dance fosters strong community bonds and a sense of belonging, yet it faces challenges in attracting new members and gaining public recognition. A major challenge for traditional folk dance is attracting younger generations, as some groups face declining membership due to aging participants.

The transmission of these practices is generally effective within the community but it fails to reach beyond it. Enhancing visibility through professional communication, leveraging audiovisual media, and engaging younger generations through education and youth movements are crucial for their viability. Flexibility and an emphasis on the social benefits of membership may help in attracting new recruits..

Dancers and Communities

This domain examines the positions, roles and interactions of dancers within their communities and the social basis of their traditions. The survey assessed key themes linked to accessibility and inclusion and the perceived growth or decay of the community. In the individual interviews, we focused on gaining deeper insights into specific dynamics within the heritage community and the impact of age, gender, culture and socio-economic status. During the roundtable discussion, we explored who belongs to the community, the criteria for community membership and identified barriers for participation.

Discussion of Results

The core of the heritage community consists of dancers who are connected to groups or meet each other at balls. There is little interaction between traditional folk dance and *balfolk* communities as each forms a small world of its own where familiar faces are always encountered. Dance communities span multiple generations, the traditional folk dance scene providing specific groups for children, teenagers, and seniors.

Musicians are vital to dance, with live music enriching the experience. Many traditional folk dance groups struggle to find musicians, leading them to use recorded music. Some have grown accustomed to it and even prefer its consistency and reliability. In the *balfolk* music scene, musicians can be found more easily because of the vibrant music community where many folk musicians earn their living by playing at dance events.

The term *volkdansgroup* is used for traditional folk dance groups, but *volkskunstgroup* is also common, which encompasses dance, singing, crafts, and flag waving. These groups frequently participate in international events such as the *Européade*. Most groups operate as informal associations, while some are structured as non-profit organisations. These latter, unlike informal groups, have a formal legal structure, with statutes, a board, and accountability for finances, which allows them to apply for subsidies. In addition to dance groups, there are guilds which are historic brotherhoods often rooted in medieval traditions such as archery or shooting. While guilds also once had dance traditions, these have largely disappeared today due to a lack of younger participants. Youth movements are also part of the heritage community but dance less frequently than before.

Folk dance is volunteer driven, involving the organisation of events, costume-making, dance documentation and more, leading volunteers often to describe this work as unpaid second employment.

The survey reveals a generally positive view of accessibility. Most respondents find the community welcoming with few to no barriers, although some minor obstacles exist. Interviews suggest that, while efforts are made to integrate new members, challenges such as tight-knit groups, complex dances and costume requirements can hinder participation. *Balfolk*, on the other hand, is noted for its inclusiveness, although some experienced dancers see room for improvement in managing differences in skill level. Financial accessibility is high, but low fees could reduce member commitment. Overall, the community strives to balance inclusivity with maintaining quality and engagement.

The number of people involved in folk dance seems to be largely stable, but there are differences reported. Traditional folk dancers noted a perceived decrease in the number of dancers and other people involved. Various factors contribute to the decline in participants. First of all, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many groups temporarily stopped dancing and some dancers withdrew to become involved in other leisure activities. Second, some dance groups broke up because of insufficient members or

when their dance leaders left on account of personal factors such as career moves, starting a family, a health situation and so on. These trends highlight the vulnerability of traditional folk dance and underscore the need for concerted efforts to revitalise folk dance participation.

Balfolk dancers are more positive and report an increase in participation. The folk music scene has seen a growth in both the number and quality of musicians over the past decade. This professionalisation, however, has led to higher standards and potentially higher costs.

Traditional folk dance faces specific challenges. Unlike *balfolk*, which allows for more casual participation, traditional folk dance groups require a long-term commitment from members to attend weekly rehearsals, performances and steering committees, which can be hard to maintain in today's fast-paced world, where people prefer more flexible activities.

There is, moreover, increased competition from other hobbies, making it even more challenging to attract and retain members. As a result, traditional folk dance groups struggle with shrinking membership, leading to a vicious cycle: fewer dancers make it harder to put on a performance, thus reducing visibility and discouraging new members from joining. The results of the research findings clearly highlight that to survive, these groups may need to adapt by offering more flexible participation options or by emphasising the social and cultural benefits of their activities. Furthermore, festival organisers of *balfolk* also have to commit to long-term engagements, which can be demanding but necessary for sustaining interest and participation. Without festival organisers, there would be no balls for individuals to attend.

Contexts and Constructs

This domain assesses the social and cultural contexts of folk dance traditions: the underlying values and attitudes influencing folk dance. A section of the research focused on perceived prestige and its impact on community engagement, as this is often underestimated. In addition, we examined the realities and attitudes surrounding recontextualisation and authenticity, along with obstacles such as prejudice and stigma, as well as the role of the media and government in these dynamics.

Discussion of Results

Folk dance provides a way to relax and enjoy social interaction without the pressure of conversation, allowing people to connect through shared enjoyment of music and movement, often leading to friendships. It brings together dancers and musicians from different generations and backgrounds to share their passion. This offers significant physical benefits, improving health, flexibility and coordination. The support and encouragement within communities also contributes to mental well-being by reducing stress and boosting self-confidence.

Many respondents feel that folk dance connects them to their roots and strengthens their cultural identity, cultivating a sense of European togetherness, serving as a bridge between past and present and preserving traditions for future generations. Folk dance provides continuous opportunities for learning and skill development, contributing to personal growth and a deeper appreciation for the art form. Participants often volunteer to sustain and promote their dance practices, organising events, teaching classes, and preserving cultural heritage.

Folk dance plays a crucial role in strengthening the social fabric of society by uniting people, promoting well-being, and fostering understanding between different groups. They offer an alternative social activity that emphasises dancing and interaction in a more inclusive and less intense environment than typical nightclubs.

The perceived popularity of folk dance varies. Traditional folk dance experienced a boom in the 1960s, and *balfolk* is now on the rise again after a dip in its popularity. Factors such as media attention and social trends, and the expansion of leisure activities, play a role in this. Regional differences also affect popularity, with *balfolk* being more prevalent in urban areas than in rural ones.

Lack of awareness and misconceptions about folk dance contribute to its general perception. Outsiders' opinions significantly impact dancers' self-perception, sometimes leading to less pride and promotion of their dances. Folk dance is unknown to the broader public and therefore underrated, resulting in a lack of prestige for the art form. Greater visibility and appreciation could be achieved through enhancing communication, introducing dance in schools and youth movements, and increasing government and media support.

Infrastructure and Regulations

This domain primarily pertains to the material aspect of dance, including places for rehearsal and performance, as well as the availability of technical requirements. Within this domain, we also investigated the extent to which regulations facilitate or hinder the flourishing of folk dance. This includes considerations of umbrella organisations, grants, municipal support and copyright laws.

Discussion of Results

Finding affordable practice spaces and covering associated costs remain ongoing challenges. Securing funding is difficult, as initiatives often rely on local governments that lack substantial financial capacity. Financial support or access to free or discounted dance floors depends on the goodwill of individual politicians. Many respondents indicate that the shift of cultural authority from the provinces to the municipalities and cities was a significant loss. Music licensing is a major hurdle for groups and festival organisers, with a large part of the budget allocated to music rights. For many respondents, the rules surrounding these rights, especially for traditional music, are unclear, and there is little transparency about how much of the money actually goes to the musicians.

Traditional folk dancers express nostalgia for an earlier period when multiple umbrella organisations were active. Although these organisations often competed rather than collaborated, each had a large following. Today, these organisations have either disappeared or merged into Danspunt, which supports all amateur dance practices. VVKB and IVV still exist without subsidies and have the potential to strengthen each other. They often collaborate on projects, such as courses for dance leaders, and seek to improve cooperation with subsidised organisations like Danspunt and CEMPER.

Several organisations have joined forces to create *Dansbank*, a public online platform for folk dance descriptions and videos. Organisations and individuals hold archives with thousands of descriptions which they want to make accessible. Collaboration has currently stalled, however, as a result of practical issues, leaving the descriptions in separate archives and inaccessible online.

Balfolk has dedicated organisations; some organise festivals, while others provide lessons and initiations. Muziekpublique is a non-profit association that promotes folk music and dance and support festival organisers.

The gatherings organised by organisations are highly appreciated, providing opportunities for participants to meet and exchange ideas, helping to face challenges collectively. Some respondents, however, expressed concern about a perceived disconnect between dancers and the overarching organisations. Respondents specifically cited a lack of communication and cooperation, with some feeling that the organisational priorities do not always reflect the needs of the dancers. This was reported to hinder collaborative efforts aimed at the sustainability of folk dance. These findings emphasise the need for more targeted and inclusive collaboration, where both practitioners and organisational leaders work together.

Media and Dissemination

Originally, this domain was called “Media and the Music Industry” but we changed it to “Media and Dissemination” to better reflect its focus on the sharing and promotion of folk dance. The research identified factors that influence accessibility through community-based initiatives and digital platforms. The survey examined the primary methods of dissemination within the folk dance community, while the interviews explored the impact of media representation, performance opportunities, digital platforms, and how folk dance is shared and promoted. Additionally, the roundtable discussion addressed the role of local governments and heritage organisations such as museums.

Discussion of Results

With a few exceptions, folk dance is rarely featured in mainstream media. Their dissemination often occurs within the existing folk dance community, sometimes intentionally.

Viability relies heavily on community-based dissemination and the strategic use of online platforms. Folk dance events and activities are disseminated through websites, social media, and online event calendars, allowing participants to stay informed about upcoming practices, workshops, and festivals, fostering broader engagement within the folk dance community. Occasionally, local events are promoted via local communication channels, reaching a limited audience outside the folk dance community.

The internet and social media play significant roles in circulating folk dance. Dances are frequently recorded and uploaded to YouTube, albe-

it with varying quality. Organisations such as VVKB, IVV, Danspunt and Dansgazet (a private initiative for documenting dance descriptions) have observed a growing demand for audiovisual material alongside written descriptions. Videos serve as valuable resources for dance groups and individual dancers to refine their techniques. The increasing demand for audiovisual material suggests a shift in how dance is learned and shared, indicating potential for broader reach and engagement if quality content is consistently produced and accessible.

Over the past twenty to thirty years, there has been a decline in performance opportunities. Currently, groups perform at self-organised events or heritage-related activities. The groups that focus on performance need those opportunities to have a goal to work for in their weekly rehearsals. Performances are often unpaid or compensated with a small, symbolic amount used to cover travel expenses or added to the association's fund. Payment is never the main motivation for performing. For the dance community to thrive, ongoing efforts to finding performance opportunities is essential, ensuring that both new and existing members can continue to experience, learn and grow. Respondents felt that museums and local governments could provide more performance or participative dance opportunities.

Issues and Initiatives for Sustainability

Each of the five domains highlights specific issues related to sustainability, and it is important to recognise their interconnection. These domains should not be viewed in isolation but as part of an integrated ecosystem.

Documentation and archiving are practical strategies for sustainability, which the *Sustainable Futures* framework addresses in a separate section distinct from the five domains. This focus reflects the numerous initiatives aimed at documentation and archiving cultural expressions, with the primary goal of preserving them for future generations. Documentation, however, extends beyond mere preservation; it plays a crucial role in sustaining and revitalising dance practices.

In both the survey and interviews, particular attention was given to issues surrounding documentation and archiving, as well as other sustainability initiatives. We also explored the support required from organisations like CEMPER and other heritage organisations to ensure the longevity and vitality of these practices.

Discussion of Results

Traditional folk dance and *balfolk* have shared advantages, such as high community involvement, social, physical and mental benefits and a high number of activities and courses. But they also face similar challenges: limited funding and government support, minimal media coverage, misconceptions by the general public, shortage on accessible and qualitative dance floors, and a heavy reliance on a few dedicated volunteers.

There are also differences to consider. Whereas *balfolk* dancers seem less worried about the viability of their practice, a significant number of traditional folk dancers is particularly concerned about sustainability: traditional folk dance is at a critical juncture, and without intervention, it might disappear. These respondents are highly engaged and proactive in their efforts to sustain and promote their dance practice.

Viability of folk dance can be enhanced by defining priorities. The most emphasised aspect is generational transmission. Engaging youth is notably important, with a strong focus on reaching out to young people, nurturing them and ensuring the dance traditions are passed down. There is a need for more promotion, including public dance activities and actively approaching schools and local communities. Practitioners emphasise the importance of modernising and refreshing folk dance to make it more attractive to younger generations. This includes the use of social media, organising contemporary events, and involving young instructors.

Another critical area is the existence of sufficient knowledge and skills among people to continue this practice, reflecting the importance of educational continuity. There is a plea for more education and awareness about the cultural value of folk dance. Integrating folk dance into cultural and educational sectors, such as part-time art education programmes and youth movements, could help to reach out.

Intentional efforts to maintain the strong sense of community are also needed, such as the focus of the *balfolk* scene on creating a safe space on the dance floor. Persistence and engagement are necessary to enhance the viability. This is a current strength, supported by a number of very dedicated participants, although the challenge is to find new and younger volunteers.

Support, both financial and physical, is crucial for the viability of folk dance. This includes obtaining subsidies to organise festivals and events and securing spaces with good dance floors. There is also a call for more support from government and other agencies. Collaboration between dance groups, associations, and organisations is needed to organise this in

a more integrated way. Some participants advocate for more professionalisation in the sector, including the payment of teachers and the provision of subsidies for local events. Sharing knowledge and experience is also emphasised as an important aspect of sustainability. The looser connections in the *balfolk* scene seem more welcoming than the often tight-knit groups found in traditional folk dance. Conversely, traditional folk dance, with its extensively documented and shared dance descriptions, provides a structured learning method, while *balfolk*, relies more on observation and practice, offering a more experiential approach. Being aware of these different approaches makes it easier to exchange with each other. In addition, media attention can help increase the visibility of folk dance. While public recognition is considered less important than intergenerational transmission and competence in knowledge and skills, it can significantly influence success in reaching a broader audience. Finally, attention is called to the need to improve the accessibility of folk dance, such as offering affordable courses and organising public dance rehearsals.

Documentation

Throughout our discussion above, we have already made some remarks about documentation in written and/or audio-visual form. The perceived quality of records within folk dance varies, with traditional folk dance putting more emphasis on documentation and archiving. Documentation often relies heavily on the involvement of individuals, such as Hubert Boone, a prominent figure in the field, who has made significant contributions to documenting dance traditions. To compensate this, several overarching initiatives, including VVKB, IVV, Dansbank and De Dansgazet, are working towards increased accessibility, producing new material and disseminating traditional folk dance practices. IVV, for example, catalogued approximately 260 dances in their Flemish dance archive. Nonetheless, accessibility remains a challenge, due to scattered personal archives and limited digitalisation.

Balfolk organisers have largely ceased audiovisual documentation, relying on past recordings. Also here, the degree of documentation often hinges on the enthusiasm of individuals within the community, leading to uneven preservation efforts.

So, despite good initiatives, challenges persist. First of all, there needs to be a growing consensus about what the folk dance community wants to



Figure 3. An illustration from the Archive of IVV showing how to dance a quadrille. Source: Institute for Flemish FolkArt (IVV).

consciously preserve from contemporary times for future generations, so that these priorities can be documented in a structured and coordinated way. Second, there is a growing recognition of the need for better availability of archival material that was already produced in the past, both for traditional folk dance and *balfolk*.

These challenges correlate with music documentation. High-quality recordings are scarce, yet they are essential for purposes such as rehearsals for performances. The production of new recordings is hampered by lack of access to professional equipment and not every group has the budget for such costs.

Past and Current Initiatives

In addition to schemes that focus on documentation, several groups undertake transmission initiatives, as, for example by participating at a local market or event in order to recruit new members. Some also offer workshops in schools, mostly at the school's request. These workshops involve teaching

simple and accessible dances or steps, sometimes in combination with music. These initiatives, however, tend to be small-scale and uncoordinated.

Larger initiatives do exist but often rely on non-structural funding. IVV, for example, will host a Flemish gathering with a spotlight on the quadrille, featuring a symposium and performances. Folk organisers in Limburg will arrange regional *balfolk* dance courses, thanks to additional funding. The free poster campaign by Werkplaats Immaterieel Erfgoed (WIE), ICH organisation in Flanders, which featured the slogan “intangible heritage feels so good” was widely praised. Many dance groups participated, increasing their visibility in Flanders and Brussels.

Support

There is a general need for greater coordination within the dance communities. The participants were very pleased to share their opinions and experiences with each other and pleaded for more exchange between the communities and participants involved.

Workshops, gatherings and organised events can foster community bonds, but recognition from local governments, the cultural sector and media is vital for broader acceptance and visibility. Financial support, even beyond direct subsidies, through logistical assistance and professional involvement, is essential for sustaining folk dance.

Simplifying project submission processes and raising awareness about the importance of documenting and archiving dances are crucial steps, as well as more direct support and collaboration among various cultural and heritage organisations.

Support from museums was initially not a priority for respondents, but they expressed a willingness to explore this further. It became evident that museums are often perceived as repositories for objects, and there is a concern that involving museums might signify the end of a tradition. To keep the tradition alive, museums would need to offer dance venues. One group had the experience of dancing in a museum and, although the experience was mutually fulfilling for both the museum and the dancers, they eventually lost contact. This group suggested creating a database for potential events, as volunteer-run groups often lack the time to prospect for opportunities themselves. Interestingly, some museums have shown a proactive interest in supporting dancers, particularly in the use of such a database. This interest was not captured as a result of this particular research, but

during other steps during the *Dance-ICH* project, such as a workshop and subsequent feedback from museums. Museums see this database as a valuable tool to connect with dance communities and to plan events, to share resources and to make social dance practices visible within their spaces.

Towards Safeguarding

Our work extends beyond identifying threats, challenges and opportunities. We are now taking steps to facilitate the development of a safeguarding plan. In the first place, we shared the research findings with the respondents and other stakeholders and plan to organise workshops to discuss the findings and the safeguarding process. We, as facilitators, will guide these sessions ensuring ownership remains with the participants. Balancing guidance with autonomy is key, as fostering active engagement and addressing diverse priorities can be challenging.

Setting priorities is critical. Participants will identify and prioritise the most pressing threats and the most promising opportunities. Following this, they will develop specific strategies and assign roles to ensure ownership. We will help to explore resources such as funding, training and external support. When necessary, we will provide capacity-building to enhance their ability to execute the plan effectively.

Although we are still working towards safeguarding, our adapted methodology did prove useful for our purposes. These were: 1) expanding CEMPER's network within the folk dance community, 2) initiating open discussions about safeguarding practices, and 3) investigating the potential role of museums and other heritage professionals, including ourselves, in safeguarding dance as ICH. Although originally designed to assess the viability of music cultures, these adapted methodologies proved to be a useful framework for discussions about folk dance.

1. By applying this methodology through a survey, interviews and a roundtable discussion, we successfully expanded our network within the community, engaging with many respondents whom we did not previously know. We received positive feedback from participants who felt acknowledged in both their passion and concerns. Additionally, the participants themselves expanded their own network, which is already a significant step towards safeguarding.

2. Safeguarding actions should always involve the heritage community. To achieve this participation, it is crucial to first identify who belongs to the community – essentially, everyone who identifies with the practice. By using a survey, we reached various participants, and through interviews and a roundtable discussion, we gained deeper insights into the practices, dynamics and diverse opinions within these communities. This personal contact, coupled with an open exchange of ideas, helped us to build the trust necessary for the rest of the process. The written report serves as a starting point, laying a solid foundation for open discussions and collaboratively developing a safeguarding plan that takes all opinions into account.
3. The potential role of museums and other heritage professionals in safeguarding dance as ICH needs to be further investigated. However, we have already gained some insights. The role that museums and heritage workers can play in safeguarding varies widely. The involvement of communities, groups, and individuals in safeguarding ICH is a key distinguishing feature of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, compared with other cultural heritage agreements. This aspect is complex, however, and is subject to varying global measurements and valuations, raising ethical and political questions in its application (Adell et al. 2015). Cultural heritage researcher Marilena Alivizatou (2021) discusses participation as both a conceptual framework and a practical approach for safeguarding endeavours. She emphasises that effective implementation of the 2003 Convention requires diverse partnerships involving governments, tradition bearers, and intermediary cultural brokers.

As cultural brokers, our role is to facilitate partnerships that ensure that safeguarding practices are inclusive and reflect a community's needs and values. In this case, we took the initiative to engage with the folk dance community, and key institutions saw this as an opportunity for collaboration and mutual strengthening. Our experience shows that an engaged community, supported by diverse intermediaries, significantly boosts the effectiveness of reaching a larger audience and fostering partnerships.

While museum workers can be a part of these partnerships, many dancers still see museums as spaces for conservation rather than for safeguarding. This fosters the idea that museums will only reinforce the outdated image of social dance in Flanders. Our role as cultural brokers is crucial in demonstrating how museums are evolving towards more societal

roles, where communities participate and retain ownership of their living heritage. It is essential to approach this role with sensitivity and a genuine commitment to community involvement.

Conclusion

CEMPER developed a comprehensive methodology aimed at engaging the folk dance community in Flanders. Previously, this methodology had been applied exclusively to the field of music. Extending this approach to dance – particularly folk dance – represents a first for CEMPER and a milestone in our efforts to safeguard dance as ICH. This expansion is a crucial evolution, broadening our scope and allowing us to engage with the folk dance community.

In applying this methodology to folk dance, we have encountered both successes and challenges. The structured inquiry approach proved effective in helping the folk dance community to expand its network, raise awareness and develop a deeper understanding of safeguarding concepts. Nonetheless, challenges arose in the later phases when applying the research results. These included difficulties in transitioning from institutional leadership to a community-driven process and a lack of immediate ownership within the folk dance community due to reliance on CEMPER's direction, and obstacles to sustaining long-term engagement beyond the initial phases.

Moreover, tensions around defining community boundaries emerged during the research process. The question of who constitutes the “community” was more complex than anticipated. This underscores the importance of flexibility and adaptability in research methodologies in heritage studies where communities are ever-changing.

In conclusion, the modified methodology from Huib Schippers' and Catherine Grant's frameworks has proven effective for our primary objectives of this project. Not only did this methodology enable the identification of new stakeholders and the expansion of a more comprehensive network, it also provided a structured, practical way for communities to engage with safeguarding processes. Establishing personal connections through interviews and discussions, and the trust and partnerships that come with it, can create a foundation for long-term collaboration. Encouraging open dialogue about safeguarding practices helps to identify the needs and concerns of heritage communities. Engaging the community in the safeguard-

ing process ensures that actions are relevant and supported by those most invested in the heritage. This approach aimed to foster greater involvement and a sense of ownership among heritage community members, though this was not always fully realised. While the process encouraged engagement, some participants remained reliant on institutional support. Nevertheless, this was an inclusive process that allowed for deep reflection on the community's needs and values in their search for sustainability.

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9.

Curating Participatory Dance in Norwegian Museums: Four Approaches to Creating an *Events of Practice* Exhibition

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This article discusses the concept of *events of practice exhibition* in the *Dancing Museums* project. *Dancing Museums* has been a development and research project at the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance (Sff) since 2014. *Events of practice exhibition* is a concept that explores how to use the local communities' dance concepts, viewpoints and participation to disseminate living dance heritage and make it relevant to the museum audience. The overarching aim of the project is to enhance the relevance for different target groups and potential users, and to build networks around dance as living heritage in the museum.

Keywords: participatory dance, living heritage, community, exhibition, museum

This chapter builds upon earlier research that aimed to develop exhibitions and performances as a means of dissemination for dance in museums (Erlien 2014). Significantly, it also aspired, through a project entitled *Dancing Museums*, to help dance practice enter museums in an informal and permanent way, as a contributory strategy to safeguarding dance knowledge. This idea clearly resonated with the widespread Nordic custom of dance parties. But safeguarding requires more than simply opening museum doors to dance parties. I maintain that through dissemination of live dancing / dance events in an exhibition and communication / dialogue with visitors, it is possible to make dance heritage in museums relevant and sustainable for future generations.

Central to my work is the concept of *events of practice exhibition* which was developed in the *Dancing Museums* project (begun in 2024). Over a decade of development and research plus six exhibitions, the *Dancing Museums* project became a model for disseminating dance knowledge and curating social dance in Norway. Several different strategies were developed and tested: the facilitation of heritage communities, mentoring of museum and dance networks, curation of exhibition design and content, arranging participatory events, and teaching dance as intangible cultural heritage (ICH) to museum pedagogues, adults, children and teenagers. In addition, the work focused on supporting dance as living heritage through communication and dialogue with different groups of the general public, such as visitors, students, school classes, immigrant groups and the Sami people. What was striking was the value created when museums took part in the important network of communities, groups and individuals that are the core of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003).

The 2003 UNESCO Convention served as a fundamental framework from which the *Dancing Museums* project formed its principal methodology. According to the Convention, equal value should be placed on expressions at the local and universal level, in addition to appreciating popular cultural forms and “high culture” forms on their own terms. In achieving this effectively, museums and new museology could be tools for challenging old paradigms and recognising new modes of thinking and forms of practice. The Convention highlights the needs of stakeholders, and this entails new and changed perspectives on what, from a curatorial point of view, is judged to be valuable. As I will argue, when museums or other cultural institutions deal with living heritage, stakeholders should be in-

cluded in defining which intangible aspects should be promoted and safeguarded in these institutions (UNESCO 2003).

My experience of organising three exhibitions in Trondheim (2015–2018), two touring exhibitions co-created with a range of different local communities in the whole of Norway (2018–2026) and one Nordic cooperation exhibition touring in Norway, Sweden and Finland (2020–2023) led me to establish four main curatorial methods: (1) co-created exhibition elements; (2) curated dance events; (3) participatory events; (4) dialogue between all interested parties. When used together, these constitute the concept of *events of practice exhibition* and provide a creative template for implementation within a museum or other institution of cultural heritage. These ideas were further tested, explored, and fresh innovations made in the European project *Dance as ICH: New Models of Facilitating Participatory Dance Events (Dance-ICH)*, which was conducted across six different European countries and for which I acted as project leader and led a focus project in Trondheim. The overall method is the use of local communities' dance concepts, viewpoints, stories and participation in order to disseminate and transmit living dance heritage, thus ensuring its relevance to museum visitors and to any new community members. Through the example of three touring exhibitions drawn from the Norwegian and Nordic projects, this chapter discusses each of the methods noted above, underlining the crucial interconnections within a museum context between the dance event and the contextualisation of cultural heritage as exhibition. The key question is how this might be done by inclusion, and not exclusion, in dance heritage communities. I also argue, in brief, why and how museums should play a part in future sustainable structures for safeguarding dance as living heritage.

New Trends in Museology

Fieldwork at ten European museums revealed a lack of innovative methods in how museums disseminate dance as living heritage to the general public (Erlien 2014). This gap could be filled by using methods in line with both the “new museology” (Black 2005; Davis 2008; Kreps 2008) and the 2003 UNESCO Convention. The continuous early-twentieth-century practice of staging folk dances represents an institutionalised form of dissemination whereby the host museums – that is, museums entrusted with custody –

protect their own tradition and history of folk dance group performances. Although this practice is popular with tourists, change is needed to be aligned with new museology trends which promote the idea of the active visitor, who takes part in a multi-dimensional visit, consisting of a holistic adventure of knowledge, activities, amusement and experience (Hooper-Greenhill 1992).

Over the last decades, there has been a new focus on a people-centred and action-oriented democratisation of museum practices for satisfying visitor expectations. The social role of the museum as a meeting place and its educational role, both formal and informal, has led to a transformation: from the museum operating as an autonomous institution to improving inclusion of community involvement through its selection of which memories to disseminate (Kreps 2008). The late museologist and professor of heritage policy, Patrick Boylan supported the need for a more people-centred museum practice and found good solutions in the concepts of the ecomuseum (Boylan 2006) and the post-museum (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). Community museology is an alternative branch of new museology that is used extensively in the model of an ecomuseum (Davis 2008). There are examples of postmodern museums that operate as a type of entertainment that aim to mix the open-air museum's historical mission with directing visitor behaviour in a similar manner to that of those visiting a theme park (Davis 1995). By experiencing something that is fundamental to the context, visitors, it is argued, will be drawn into performing themselves rather than watching others perform. This leads to a deeper exploration of the museum's role as cultural interlocutor.

With respect to this term of cultural interlocutor, Richard Kurin (1997) proposes that museums should execute the role of social engineering by researching the communities that they are trying to represent. Ralph Regenvanu (quoted in Alivizatou 2008, 50) considers that museums need a total transformation in order to work with ICH, and that they should do this by becoming more of a cultural centre. Marilena Alivizatou (2012) argues that living heritage can be disseminated as a process, a lived, evolving interaction in the engagement of communities and uses R. West's (2007) words: "museums as a dynamic cultural centre" (quoted in Alivizatou 2008, 52) or "social engineers". Today, curators work with cultural heritage and try to communicate it in accessible terms for the general public (Martinon 2013). Curatorial methods, defined as any activity, behaviour, body of practices and knowledge related to, amongst others, the interpretation of cultural

property are conceptualisations that challenge traditional thinking on curating (Kreps 2008). Traditionally, curatorship emphasised scholarly authority and custodianship of collections, whereas today it increasingly focuses on collaboration, inclusivity, and shared meaning-making with communities. These new forms may be evident in the relational nature of curatorial work and diverse museological forms of today. In the field of new museology, community museology and indigenous heritage presentation, curatorial work can imply a means of curating a continuing and functioning heritage practice while sustaining important intangible qualities of the heirs of the cultural heritage. These might include dance variations, enjoyment of live music at dance parties, typical dance structures and dance improvisation. These are all functions of a vital museum as expressed in new museology trends (Boylan 2006).

From a museological perspective, recognising the intangible as acceptable museum content is a means to break curatorial authority and to challenge the spatially bounded concept of a museum (Lynch 2017). New approaches to museology have caused key changes in “western museum practices”, and many of these are essential in understanding dance as living heritage in a museum setting (Erlien 2014, 2015; Erlien et al. 2018; Erlien and Bakka 2017; Myrvold 2020, 2022).

Methodological Inspirations

Dance as embodied cultural heritage is a powerful tool for the inclusion of diversity, for communication between cultures, and for both physical and mental wellbeing. The *Dancing Museums* project has resulted in seventeen different exhibition spaces or social engineering locales (Giddens 1979) created for both internal dance community members and the public. This mixture of outsiders and insiders (Simon 2016) brings together new constellations of participants in museums. Participatory dance community members, the general public, museum pedagogues and curators can realise remarkable results together, all of which contributes to social and cultural sustainability that changes local communities and the futures of dance groups and individuals.

The curation of dance participation involves organising people to dance together (Myrvold 2020). The *Dancing Museums* project drew inspiration from museum director, consultant and researcher Nina Simon who called

for museums to be used for social bridging in order to build stronger communities, and thus to become relevant and meaningful for a broader audience. She defined participation as a means to transform the visitor from a passive consumer to an active participant who can add content to the exhibition. In *The Participatory Museum* (2010), Simon proposes five stages of engagement to encourage people to participate socially with each other. Her notion of “me-to-we” promotes individual experiences to support collective engagement. When individuals are connected to other individuals, she argues, they will start to feel as if they are part of a communal experience. In this transformation of a cultural institution into a social hub, the staff members are responsible for connecting people through the content on display. The final stage in fostering engagement is when sharing content as a common principle between institution and visitor results in the entire institution feeling like a social place.

Simon describes four different but equal working methods for this participation of insiders and outsiders in an institutional setting: (1) co-creation – where communities, groups, individuals (hereafter CGIs) and museum employees decide content and methods together and have an equal stake; (2) collaboration – where CGIs and museum employees embark upon an active partnership, but the initiative lies with the museum; (3) contribution – where CGIs provide ideas and suggestions to the museum; and finally (4) hosting, which implies that the museum turns over a portion of its facilities and resources to the CGIs for them to manage and implement their plans. Two criteria are important in ensuring that content will result in positive engagement and aid social participation. First, the provision of new information that will stimulate a positive cognitive effect and yield conclusions that matter to the individual. Second, consideration of how much effort is required to obtain and absorb that new information – the lower the effort, the higher the relevance.

In accordance with these strategies, a dance arena should be a social platform, a third space (Oldenburg 1999), open and warm with an inviting atmosphere. The driving idea is to enable visitors to become dance community members and to find their way back to their own personal history of dance experiences. Key aims are for visitors at a dance arena to experience social learning, creative participation and meaningful conversations about dance content, something so relevant and valuable that they wish to become practitioners and community members.

Turning towards the policies and strategies outlined by the 2003 UNES-

CO Convention, Article 15 states that the initiative of safeguarding and promotion of ICH should be a bottom-up approach from the CGIs themselves. Safeguarding – the process of transmitting the embodied knowledge of living heritage to new generations – is a concept whose meaning is shaped by what the practitioners of the heritage element themselves invest in it. In particular, the Operational Directives for the Convention’s implementation declare that community centres, associations, museums, archives, and similar entities have a role in “supporting” heritage communities in safeguarding strategies. They should raise public awareness about their heritage by, for example, co-creating exhibitions, seminars and debates with museum support and participatory presentation approaches. The heirs, also referred to as the stakeholders of the heritage, should be included in the widest possible participation and involved actively in its management. Safeguarding means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage. In other words, safeguarding is about supporting communities in practising their living heritage in a way that is meaningful to them.

Although the Operational Directives of the 2003 UNESCO Convention do not provide a “how to” strategy, their suggestion of co-creation, emerges as the most valuable approach to safeguarding. Co-creation describes a partnership in which both parties define their needs and goals at a project’s inception and work together towards fulfilling them. Communities should have more power than in a regular participatory project, as this underlines the value of those practising the heritage. Not only the practice itself, but both the institution’s and community’s goals should be achieved. The finished outcome of the collaboration is then co-owned by the community and the institution (Simon 2010). In the case of dance as living heritage in museums, safeguarding requires negotiation with two equal partners (Lynch 2017) rather than an institution operating as the carer and the visitors/local community becoming beneficiaries. Without an expert touch, however, safeguarding may become problematic, running the risk of linearisation – that is, the impoverishment of a living heritage element – or derailment, as when outside forces push the dance element out of its context or form (Bakka 2020).

Rather than curators, specialists of intangible cultural content should instead operate as facilitators, employing the skill of translation to find common ground between professional discourses, dissemination methods and terminology of ICH in the encounter between local practices and heritage communities processes (Alivizatou 2012, Van Mensch and Meijer-van

Mensch 2011). A facilitator is a neutral person who helps a group of people articulate their common objectives and assists them in planning and finding ways to achieve their objectives, and understand/formulate challenges. Facilitators are not in a position of authority, imparting knowledge that only they hold; instead, they put in place structures and processes which will assist the group in communicating their own ideas (Van Mensch and Meijer-van Mensch 2011). As a related concept, cultural brokers

study, understand, and represent someone's culture (even sometimes their own) to nonspecialized others through various means and media. 'Brokering' also captures the idea that these representations are to some degree negotiated, dialogical, and driven by a variety of interests on behalf of the involved parties. (Kurin 1997, 30)

In the role of a facilitator or a cultural broker, the individual is in charge of the cultural dialogue. As Burbules (2007) argues, this has a dynamic character, composed of give and take processes, which may lead not just to new knowledge but also to amazement and uncertainty, furnishing opportunities to ask new questions.¹

The above framework, coalesced from recent trends in museology and in museum theory, underpinned my practical explorations in the potential aspects of museum dissemination and curation of intangible cultural dance heritage. Dance communities within Norway were selected in order to represent varied locations and genres.

Method 1: Co – created Exhibition Elements

The first method used was the involvement of dance communities in Norway, which were selected to represent varied locations and dance genres. To exemplify this method, I will explain the process of curating one exhibition and its nine different versions while touring for four years. The first touring exhibition produced was a 'best-of' exhibition made from the three first exhibitions in the project. The exhibition was scheduled to tour long distances in Norway, nine museums in total, and we planned for national relevant content as the recurrent idea. What was added to the best-of-Nor-

¹ A person that uses dialogue to make people feel important could be the museum curator. Compare, for example, the role of the artist in participatory art making (Bishop 2004, Bourriaud 1998).

way content were installations curated to be adapted locally. First of all, a geographical area was decided by the host museum in order to invite the local dance communities in the museum's vicinity to participate and engage in the curation of the local dance content. Another aim was to encourage interest from the local audience. By projecting local material and dance history, we hoped to encourage the local inhabitants to visit the exhibitions.

To begin with, it is important to clarify the types of material, both tangible and intangible, with which we are dealing. The intangible in dance is the embodied kinaesthetic knowledge inherited over time and held within a dancer's body. It is a powerful human practice because it integrates the intellect, mental apparatus (reason and cognition) and affect (emotions) (Grau 2016). Dance's social function is essentially as a non-verbal medium of communication that establishes contact between people, or between people and the supernatural (Giurchescu 1984). Its social structure, including movement patterns, style, the use of space and leading/following techniques in partner dance and group dances, is a symbol of social relations between individuals, between individuals and groups, and between groups. These structures can thus be judged as a culturally determined programme, where social, historical and environmental factors interact with the physical, psychological and mental features of the individual. As a dialogic interaction between product and process, new meanings are constantly created by giving new meaning to old forms (Kaeppeler 1991).

These intangible factors are documented in tangible materials, collected and sent by different dance heritage communities to the curators of the exhibitions. The team received text formats, films, metadata for the films, photographs, slogans, ideas for types of installations and suggestions and requests for content to be collected and produced for dissemination in the exhibitions.

The exhibition curator always exercised a neutral approach to the overall concept of the exhibition, providing initial input for each exhibition and for each part of the exhibition. The external content was either sent to Sff or we had meetings with the dance heritage communities to co-creatively find the people, information and voices that were needed for promotion purposes and awareness raising (Erlien et al. 2018). The team then asked the key community members to guide us further as to where we might obtain permission to film the everyday life of dance communities and dance parties. Obtaining people's consent to be filmed, promoted and projected

visually in a public space such as a museum rarely caused problems, as the individuals mostly expressed pride or humility when asked.

Archival film material from the archives at Sff was chosen carefully to improve understanding and provide more depth in variations and age of the co-created content. In addition, pedagogical documents for teaching school children and for guiding visitors were also offered by the host museums. If the host museum had no prior experience of dance dissemination, or knew no other dance pedagogues from its network, I, as a curator of the content and a dance pedagogue, taught the museum pedagogue(s) the basic steps, structures and rhythms of the main Norwegian traditional dances.

All forms of participation, which Simon divides into collaboration, contribution, co-creation and hosting, have aspects of networking. To curate living heritage and its artifacts can be a challenge in terms of ownership and who has the right to decide. In accordance with the 2003 UNESCO Convention, the heirs of the practice should have granted their prior consent. The process began with an open invitation in the local newspaper and on social media. As people reacted but were slow to send material, we realised that museum professionals had to intensify their efforts and ask for specific material. This method effectively connected the museum with local dance communities, as conversations and email outreach expanded its network across the regional dance scene. One good piece of curatorial advice is always to include the dance communities in the interactive installations, together with the diverse types of arranged dance events during the hosting of the exhibition.

Additionally, the work involved in asking for permission to show old archive clips from the Sff archive was undertaken in collaboration with Sff, the host museum, local dance enthusiasts and local community members. This was also a revelatory experience for the museum pedagogues as it put them in contact with the relatives of highly respected, traditional dance stakeholders from the village or city. This way of working was challenging but it produced unexpected and valuable results, especially in the post-exhibition period. Many museums reported an expanded network and a continuous programme of organising and facilitating dance events and dance content.



Figure 1. Dance exhibition “Everybody dance!” at Rockheim, 2022. Photo: Jana Pavlova, Sff.

Method 2 – Curated Dance Events

Alongside content displayed in the format of film, text, pictures and interactive installations, the exhibitions have also included dance events, in the form of *events of practice* (Erlien and Bakka 2017 – see Method 3 below) and curated participatory dancing /curated dance events (Myrvold 2020). A dance event is a focused gathering with an expressive specialist who maintains the integrity of the dance, in case the activity might be questioned and threatened by participants, time, space or other activities. This specialist is a person knowledgeable in dance interaction, given that dancing is a form of socialisation, enjoyment and pleasure (Crease 2002). The social dance floor provides a sense of inclusivity and acceptance, of belonging to the body of dancers, the space and the traditions that participants share, providing an ideal environment for learning with other dancers by intuitively copying a large number of dance experts (Bakka 1978, 1999). Thus, the aim is to be able to witness dance qualities such as personal style, variation and rhythmical expression on the dance floor. Such an event is a free space for social interaction and existential activity (Crease 2002), operating as a neutral, welcoming space without any obligations,

except to dance with other regular dancers and newcomers – it operates as a third space for dancing (Oldenburg 1999).

Curated dance events, on the other hand, are organised by a project manager, project team or host museum, to highlight connections between certain heritage communities and the curated exhibition content. These have either been thematic dance parties such as a swing dance party or a Sami dance course and social dancing, or multicultural social dances with a mix of two to six different dance traditions. We also arranged events with talk shows followed by dancing, curated dance seminars, dance competitions, dance days and pedagogical programmes in collaboration with the local dance community during the touring exhibitions.

My use of the term ‘curated dance event’ to signal a dance event within an exhibition is inspired by dance scholar Inés Moreno’s notion of “occupation of duration” (2014). This explains the connection between a dance community’s or institution’s structural lines and codes, the logic of an exhibition and how these elements together shape a new contemporary, recurring, curatorial activity.



Figure 2. A dance party for deaf dancers, Trondheim, 2018. Photo: Jana Pavlova, Sff.

My approach was to invite, facilitate and lead dance meetings between different groups of dance stakeholders, knowing from my experience as a mentor for dance groups, that each would like to attract more participants and a larger network. As a neutral space, the museum venue proved to be an initiative and a form of support for gathering local people across communities. The fewer labels attached to the venue, the more open and inclusive the events became, fostering enthusiasm and, ultimately, sustainability. If used thoughtfully then, such diversity can be a tool. This was evident through curated dance events attended by diverse dance groups participating simultaneously, and through the curation of dance dialogues with an audience of young people and a general audience, discussing similarities in ethnographic dance concepts.

Commencing dialogue with dance leaders and lead musicians to ask how they might all best work together for mutual benefit, museum pedagogues gained new knowledge, recognising and enabling the dance groups' desire to raise awareness and safeguard their living heritage. Dependent on good collaborations with the communities, since they rarely function as expressive specialists, the museum pedagogues took on a triple role, as producers, hosts, and cultural brokers/facilitators of living heritage. It is in fact the expressive specialists who maintain the possibility that the dance event will take place (Ronström 1989) through the third method: *events of practice*.

Method 3 – Events of Practice

The idea of dance hosting – that is, the use of the museum as a social arena hosted by a dance group or community (cf. Simon 2010) was developed and theorised from the second to sixth exhibition (2017–2024). Referred to as “dance hosting” in Norwegian oral everyday language, it is termed *events of practice* by Erlien and Bakka (2017) in academic and cultural political terms.

Museum employees require external help in order to accomplish their agenda of working with living heritage as they have no control over what the exhibited content of invited dance groups might entail. An *event of practice* should be requested by dancers proficient in a specific dance tradition, who should then be encouraged to promote their practice on their own terms (Erlien and Bakka 2017). The concept of *events of practice* was realised through museums sending invitations for groups to book the “invited space” (Frazer 1992) for free and with only one requirement: to talk to and



Figure 3. *Events of practice at Rockheim, Trondheim, 2022.* Photo: Jana Pavlova, Sff.

invite a general audience to dance. The museum could only succeed in this strategical aim, of course, if the invitation to the dance communities, the stakeholders, was accepted.

Although the group was in charge of what happened at the venue the museum host needed to ensure the input of an expressive specialist who understood his or her role and that the atmosphere in the dance space was informal, warm and welcoming enough to encourage the public to dance. Luckily, most dance groups already had this kind of person.

All museums on the exhibition tours undertook these recommendations, reporting back that although unusual, they proved easy means of getting visitors to be engaged and participate actively in the museal experience. This meant that the museum staff felt comfortable and satisfied with the pre-event networking preparations and that this type of dissemination activity was also new and exciting for the visitors. In opening their doors to new groups of people for disseminating intangible cultural heritage, museums also positioned themselves as “facilitators” of an exchange over which they had no control. Instead, they raised awareness and ensured respect by implementing projects and activities for safeguarding, as recommended by Article 18 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. This leads to Method 4: the change in how museum professionals communicate about dance.

Method 4 – Sustainability Through Dialogue

The package that Sff provides to host museums consists of a three-part staff training programme in the following: first, bottom-up working methods with the dance communities; second, how the exhibition space and the exhibited elements can be useful in the curation of pedagogical programmes and space for dance; and third, dialogic techniques and storytelling that can support sustainable dance transmission.

My experiences in this project revealed to me the importance of knowing how to communicate about dance. Museum pedagogues, communicators and curators may be experts in cultural heritage communication, but they need training to present information on dancing's embodied knowledge, its structures and historical contexts. This function can be undertaken by a knowledgeable enthusiast, a dance pedagogue, a museum pedagogue, or a curator, but should ideally embrace the role of an expressive specialist at a dance event. There are, in my opinion, correspondences between a facilitator, arts-based researcher and dance pedagogue, since they are all experts in fostering participation.

It is essential to encourage and engage nondancers to share stories from earlier dance experiences or family dancing, helping them to remember and reconnect. Through asking the right questions, carefully listening and responding positively, the facilitator can recreate dance relevance and establish a person's relationship to dancing as cultural heritage. Such a role emphasises good dialogic methods for negotiating representations of the past that are adapted to the present, and how to harmonise these non-authorised practices of today with the carefully documented and authoritative forms of past practices. One basic question for the museum professionals concerns the best way to disseminate intangible exhibition knowledge captured in elements such as old dance clips so that the general audience understand their relevance and meaning. All host museums on the tours offered pedagogical programmes which were a combination of mini-lectures about the context and background of the exhibited content, followed by a dialogue session and a dance class, ending in participation in a short dance party session.

Using the exhibited cultural content, references to a time, place, people, traditions, embodied knowledge, music and memorable historical events, a facilitator stimulates visitors to talk freely, helping them to see historical trajectories or connections between the different dance stories: to under-

stand that hip hop battles are the same kind of dance communication as the male dance battle of the Norwegian *halling* dance some centuries earlier: that leading in salsa is the same embodied communication as leading in swing dances, and that enjoying a dance party also incorporates the feeling of power and togetherness of the participants. Through such methods, visitors to the event may understand that they are also a part of dance history and heritage, and appreciate how human it is to dance.

In debriefing this experience with the participating visitors, we aimed to highlight and investigate the heritage relevance and value for these new generations. This dialogue was also a part of the curated experience that was finally to be co-curated by the visitors. To start the dialogue, I used participant interactive facilitation as a method on the dance floor in the actual curated experience (Myrvold 2022). This was taught to the museum pedagogues, in addition to reflections regarding which types of answer we could receive, and then how to respond. We asked simple questions such as “Do you smile when you dance?”, “Do you have dance memories?”, “Why do you dance?”, “What is your favourite music to dance to?”, “Do you see any similarities in these two dances?”, “How would you do this dance structure?” The museums reported that this way of asking questions about very simple experiences and memories resulted in numerous good conversations about social dancing as living heritage. They also reported that as a result local museum audiences became educated, raising awareness thus making it easier to arrange permanent future dance events. Feedback from the tours also stated that the level of ownership and anchoring by the museum pedagogues was crucial for success when using this dialogic method.

I consider this style of dialogue to be related to strategies of coaching, resilience-building and adaptive management of a community for a sustainable future. For ethnomusicologist Jeff Titon (2015) sustainability may be defined as recognition that change is both natural and inevitable. Change requires management in order to guarantee continuity, integrity and resource availability for the future. Thus, resilient dance communities need to be nurtured with safeguarding strategies based on adaptive management that captures and embraces the dynamic nature of the world and maintains the most desirable state whenever possible. In an ideal situation, the culture worker learns the culture’s sustainability goals and helps its people plan and then implement a sustainability strategy which they self-manage, relying on the culture worker as a collaborator and consultant, in a role similar to that of an empathetic coach (Titon 2015). The coach



Figure 4. Dance teaching at the dance seminar “Hosting a dance party” at Rockheim, Trondheim, 2025. Photo: Jana Pavlova, Sff.

is there to help the mentee reach goals and must guide the process and not direct it, while the mentee is responsible for the conversation and must set the agenda (Hart, Blattner and Leipsic 2001, 234).

Participation comprises both physical and dialogical interactivity (Simon 2010; Skydsgaard, Andersen and King 2016). The former concerns embodied intelligence, our senses, our physical experiences and bodily somatic processes. The latter expands participation to include dialogue. Narratives and storytelling are therefore also of importance: narratives from members of the same target group as the audience help to increase the personal relevance of the concept of the exhibition; narratives from other generations can help participants to see cultural differences; and narratives from experts offer insight into research and help to humanise science, making this accessible to the general audience by linking the exhibited context to real life (Skydsgaard, Andersen and King 2016). Cultural interlocutors and facilitators work as translators of different generations of socialisation and need to differentiate between which relevant stories to tell to a specific target group. Nonetheless, together they can emphasise

the continued social functioning of the living practice, raise awareness about social and health functions, embodiment, personal and social development, good relations and use of the senses. Dancing together, touch, and being present are tools with a high degree of functionality, but these can also be beneficial in the act of communication.

After implementing these methods, the museums reported back on stories of fathers who have gone from refusing to dance to stepping outside of their comfort zone and dancing at the end of the tour. The exhibitions have also resulted in countless good conversations, new and old dance stories, dance meetings between Norwegian and immigrant communities, and dancing a traditional dance for the first time in thirty years and executing it perfectly. Thousands of teenagers have encountered social dance as a space for rehearsing relational skills such as empathic embodied compassion, flirting, smiling, having fun, acknowledging other people's expressed emotions, being a good audience, giving feedback, feeling cohesion and togetherness, and most importantly, seeing their cultural expressions as much of a cornerstone of cultural life as older heritage expressions. They have felt and understood connection to the heritage of older generations and have participated in an embodied experience of being part of the safe, inclusive flock.

Conclusion: Concept of *Events of Practice Exhibition*

The *events of practice exhibition* concept may be defined as the combination and intentional alignment of the four methods discussed above: co-created exhibition elements; curated dance events; participatory events; and dialogue between all interested parties. The goals and resultant benefits are twofold: firstly, the aim of making the local dance community and dance traditions sustainable by recruiting new members; secondly, the value of a permanent space for dance as living heritage for social and cultural sustainability, including wellbeing, inclusion and diversity factors.

These two dimensions may be merged. It is essential to acknowledge participatory dance as significant cultural heritage and to promote its role in fostering social and cultural sustainability. And it is possible to increase active membership of dance communities by addressing the value of dance at regular public dance events, pedagogical programmes and dance exhibitions in museums. To achieve this, it is essential to curate, organise, and

host dance events in order to establish a sustainable framework for safeguarding living dance heritage within museums. This framework which I have termed *events of practice exhibition* should therefore contain more than just the *events of practice* (dance events). These events need to be recurrent and in a permanent space, and include the specific role of the facilitator. A cultural institution, in this case a museum, and its living heritage facilitator can thus help the dance community by promoting and incorporating their practices into an organisational system, without interfering with the execution of the intangible heritage practices itself. For future and continuing research, it will obviously be important to research these methods over time, in different contexts, and to question the distribution of roles in co-creative processes and sustainable structures when it comes to funding and recourses. Overall, the decade of research in Norway, together with the *Dance-ICH* project, have demonstrated a field in development within museums and similar institutions, but that through the concept of *events of practice exhibition* promises future benefits for the sustainability of dance as intangible cultural heritage.

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10.

The Role of the Ethnographic Museum in Safeguarding Traditional Romanian Dance

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This paper examines challenges and opportunities in safeguarding Romanian traditional dance within the framework of the UNESCO 2003 Convention. It distinguishes between traditional dance, folklorism, and dance of the ethnographical type, emphasising the ethnographic museum's potential role in revitalisation, education, and community engagement. By aligning conservation with safeguarding principles, museums can foster sustainable cultural transmission and recontextualisation of Romanian dance heritage.

Keywords: traditional dance, folkloric dance, folklorism, dance of the ethnographical type, ethnographic museum, revitalisation, community participation

Introduction

Since the signing of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 (UNESCO 2023) and its incorporation into national legislation (Law 410 of 2005) there has arguably been sufficient time for its principles to have been implemented into Romanian cultural practice. Certainly, significant transformations in Romania have occurred that impact successful safeguarding: the creation of government institutions and bodies to manage the intangible cultural heritage (hereinafter ICH), changes in rural communities and perception of their own local culture and cultural heritage, and an openness in ethnographic museums, in particular, to ICH and to capitalisation of touristic interest in traditional culture.

There remains, however, room for improvement, especially with regard to the safeguarding of Romanian *traditional dance* which is hampered by two major problems. One major impediment is the dominance of theatrical conventions for the performance of *traditional dance*, namely folklorism, which remains uppermost in the Romanian public's consciousness and taste. The other issue is the continuing lack of compatibility between the ethnographic museum's adherence to the model of preservation and that of safeguarding.¹ The causes of this situation are multiple but space permits here only a brief contextual summary.

Safeguarding and Intangible Cultural Heritage

The UNESCO 2003 Convention has occasioned many debates, variously highlighting its strengths, limitations, ambiguities, and problems.² Two potentially conflicting understandings of its notion of safeguarding are articulated as “a pledge for a faithfulness to the past” (Bakka 2015, 149) and “a mechanism through which selected aspects of “real life” are dressed with patrimonial value by governmental agencies, thus becoming meta-cultural realities” (Arantes 2012, 22). According to the UNESCO 2003 Convention, key aspects of safeguarding are: (a) recognition by bearers of the ICH element

¹ For a broader discussion of these models, termed, “conservation paradigm” and “safeguarding paradigm” by Norwegian ethnochoreologists Egil Bakka and Tone Erlien (see Bakka 2015; Erlien and Bakka 2017: 136).

² See, for example, Kurin 2004; Taylor 2008; Arantes 2012; Știucă 2014; Hulubaș 2015; Bakka 2015; Lo Iacono and Brown 2016; Carr 2023; Bakka and Karoblis 2021.

as an element of their own tradition, namely that practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, objects, instruments, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with them are assumed by the interested communities, groups and individuals (hereafter CGI) as elements of their own tradition; (b) intergenerational transmission; and (c) the recreation of the element belonging to the ICH. A tangible object that has a connection with the intangible element is also part of the ICH (so there is no break between the tangible and the intangible), and the heritage bearers are both subjects and objects of the actions of heritage constitution and safeguarding (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 2). Involvement of the CGI is reinforced in Article 15 of the Convention, which expressly mentions the encouragement by the signatory State of the participation of the CGI in the safeguarding process.

Responsibilities for safeguarding, as per the UNESCO 2003 Convention, are divided, negotiated and assumed between several interested individuals and bodies: (a) the community or group of bearers of cultural elements (communities, groups, individuals or CGIs); (b) the scientific community; (c) the political community, including state and private (non-governmental organisations or NGOs). Safeguarding actions can be undertaken individually and/or in partnership between (a), (b) and (c): identification and documentation can be carried out from (a), (b), (c); research – from (b); conservation, transmission – from (a); protection, promotion, improvement, revitalisation – from (a), (b) and (c).

In Romania, in order for a cultural element to be considered an element of intangible heritage, it must be mentioned in the National Repertoire of Intangible Cultural Heritage (n.d.), compiled by the National Commission for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage within the Ministry of Culture of Romania. In practice, the intangible cultural heritage is a politically manageable practice cut from a very complex socio-cultural reality, from a cultural continuum in which modernity and tradition intertwine. Not every element of a community's culture is an element of heritage. In order to fulfil this condition, an element of tradition must be identified and inventoried as an element of heritage, the construction and identification of cultural heritage being both a political act and an act of power (Kuutma 2012, 42). Interestingly, the text of the UNESCO 2003 Convention does not explicitly refer to intangible cultural heritage as “traditional”. Instead, the notion of “traditional” is implied. The specified conditions require that the cultural practice is transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups, and has

an element that supports the sense of identity and the sense of continuity (UNESCO 2003). Thus, safeguarding is a series of actions that have, as their ultimate goal, the perpetuation of elements of intangible culture through intergenerational transmission (UNESCO 2003, 3). In Romania, such conditions are exclusively identifiable with peasant dances which are considered by Romanians to be “traditional”.

Traditional Dance, Dance Folklorism and Dances of the Ethnographical Type

Generally, it is possible to distinguish two types of dance activities which are related in varying degrees to the cultural heritage of the Romanian peasantry. I term these “traditional dance” and “dance of the ethnographical type”. I briefly outline their provenance and characteristics below, together with a short explanatory note on the meaning of dance and folklorism in the Romanian context .

Traditional Dance and its Relationship to Peasant Culture

It is important to recognise that the peasantry not only represented a separate stratum of Romanian society, but also accounted for nearly eighty percent of the population during the interwar period of the early twentieth century. Their distinctive lifestyle and world view was rooted in rural communities which were dependent on a social, economic and cultural existence organised around the household and the village (as living spaces), around the family (the small community) and the inhabitants of the village (as an extended community). Certain characteristic behaviour and social practices, values, meanings, mentalities and non-ceremonial/ceremonial/ritual expressions that were formerly practised in peasant culture continue to be manifest in contemporary Romania. Romanians refer to the social-cultural environment and its inhabitants who inherited this peasant culture as “traditional culture”. This, in brief, is the context for Romanian traditional dance which is directly related to peasant dance, retaining all its attributes.

Romanians regard peasant culture as an important aspect of their tradition and as a significant component of their ethnic identity. That is why peasant dance is also perceived as part of the cultural tradition and hence

assimilated with traditional dance. From my perspective on this filial relationship, traditional dance retains key peasant cultural features: rural in its environment, non-literate in transmission, folkloric in form and customary in its norms. It is informally transmitted primarily via imitation, and aspects of its evolution are typically attributed to the collective character of creation. The traditionalism that marks the dance is combined with adaptation and variability: these are traits that support the balance between values of the past and those of the present. As a cultural expression, traditional dance works syncretically and is closely linked to other languages (musical, verbal, and the like) in order to perform essential functions for the wellbeing of the individual and the community (socialisation, social cohesion, communication, transmission, fun, education).

Dance and Folklorism

The attributes of traditional dance noted above are no longer found to a large extent when they become part of *folklorism*, because folklorism in Romania means the selective use of folklore outside its peasant context. Folklorism modifies the expressions of peasant culture, adapting them in this way to a new cultural paradigm specific to modernity. In the case of peasant dance, this change led to its approximation to the traditions and theatrical style of classical dance. In the interwar period and then in the period when the communist regime was established in Romania, most of the Romanian instructors and choreographers involved in the transmission of peasant dance in the urban environment were professionally trained or frequented classical or modern dance studios. Consequently, these instructors and choreographers lacked an ethnographic/sociological perspective on the transmission of peasant dances; instead, it was one deeply influenced by dance and ballet performance.³ Hence their way of conceiving “folkloric” stage dance performances was mediated and shaped by understanding, through the stylistics of classical dance⁴ (Vasilescu 2022, 46).

³ Although during the interwar era, ethnography and sociology were two sciences that developed strongly, the ethnographic/sociological vision of peasant dance did not influence transmission outside peasant culture.

⁴ Even today, professional folk ensembles that capitalise on traditional Romanian dance include classical dance studies in their daily work schedule, a training which exerts strong influence on the style of interpretation, in blatant opposition to the stylistics of traditional dance. That is why I believe that, at least for the situation in Romania, the generic term “stylistisation” (used internationally) is better translated as “balleticisation”, a term that refers much more precisely to these stylistic changes.

Through its cultural institutions, the communist state reinforced this institutionalised version of what it claimed to be “folklore” and did not support organic folklore which was integrated into peasant society. Under the supervision of Soviet “inspectors”, “folklore” creation (actually inspired by the folklore of dance) developed very quickly through the establishment of “folklore ensembles” in the period 1948-1960 (Vasilescu 2022, 44–54), taking centre stage of mass culture, inhibiting and marginalising the real life of peasant folklore.

These performance institutions (some professional) became or were imposed as models for the mass movement of folklore dance ensembles. They contributed profoundly to the profile that Romanian folklorism still has today – spectacular creations inspired by dance folklore. They thus represent a departure from the principles underlying the safeguarding process of intangible cultural heritage.

Dance of the Ethnographical Type

My definition of those dances in Romania which I term “dances of the ethnographical type” refers to a dance that has been realised in its creation and performance by a performer who is outside the context of traditional culture and thus is situated within the framework of folklorism. Folklorism as understood in Romania may denote not only stylised, or more accurately termed, balleticised uses of folklore elements that were once practised in peasant culture; it may also signal selected use of folklore elements and thus constitutes a wide framework. A *dance of the ethnographical type* is thus within this frame of folklorism for it refers to a *traditional dance* copied by a person who has not inherited or played a full part in the cultural or traditional background from which the dance originates. This understanding has parallels, though it should not be viewed as conflatable, with Egil Bakka’s notion of “user” (1992) which he coined in relation to twentieth-century revivalist practices of Norwegian folk dance and costume. It is also attuned to the concept of reflective dance as defined by Canadian ethnochoreologist Andriy Nahachewsky (2012) and which indicates a scenario where a performer enacts an active consciousness of that dance’s relation to its past. I might also broaden my discussion here to embrace the notion of ethno-identity dance as distinguished by American ethnochoreologist Anthony Shay (2016). However, my reference to these correspondences and distinctions in conceptual terminology aims to draw attention to this wid-

er literature which has some affinities with the practice of Romanian *traditional dance* but, which given the complexity of the topic, deserves far fuller treatment than may be afforded in this chapter. For present purposes, suffice it to say that there are undoubted overlapping correspondences with these various definitions but also important deviations when considering the Romanian situation.

In defining *dance of the ethnographical type* then, I have approached the subject from the perspective of the performer and focus mainly on the formal aspects of dance. The criteria that operate here are: (1) the relationship that the person who practises the dance has with the tradition of a community (put simply, dance of my own tradition versus dance foreign to my tradition) and (2) a formal criterion: that of conformity/non-conformity of the dance forms to that tradition. The form of the dance is given by the kinetic and rhythmic structure – the compositional modalities – and the style of interpretation. The *dance of the ethnographical type* is thus defined by this formal relationship with its model, a *traditional dance*, and is characterised by the intention to use the stylistic parameters of traditional dance movements. I have referred to this relationship elsewhere (Petac, 2015) in terms of *referentiality* vs. *fictionalisation*, as processes through which traditional dance transforms into *dance of the ethnographic type*.

It is important to comprehend that the term *dance of the ethnographical type* is by no means equivalent to the dance as recorded by the dance ethnographer in the field. In this respect, I deviate from habitual usage in the ethnochoreological literature. For the researcher, the recorded *traditional dance* becomes an ethnographic object, just as any other object brought from a house (peasant or not, to illustrate an aspect of a material or immaterial culture) into a museum becomes an ethnographic object. The object of observation (*traditional dance*) does not change its form. Taken out of its organic context (traditional culture) dance thus becomes, an object of ethnographic observation. The researcher does not recreate it physically, dancing it, unless he or she can, for didactic purposes. The moment he or she dances it, however, the researcher enters the logic of a creator who reproduces, and *re-creates* a model foreign to his or her own culture of movement (unless of course recording from within their own culture).

A further question might relate to why this category of dances is considered, within my typology, to be *dance of the ethnographical type* and not simply ethnographical dance? The answer is that dances within folklorism change in their form, are no longer identical to their source and in their

translation from traditional culture to modern culture are re-created according to criteria foreign to the initial ones. This therefore results in a new type of dance, subject to a new taxonomy, in a new framework.

Most of the concept of *traditional dance*, as well as the socio-cultural determinations are lost when the dance as practised in peasant culture is copied. The other potential models of movement that can arise based on the concept of dance are lost, given that this concept of dance will no longer be known in so many of its potential variants. Like any copy of an original, the *dance of the ethnographical type* can be faithful to or further away from the dance as it was practised in peasant or traditional cultures. Within folklorism, *traditional dance* forms, as they are transformed into forms of the *dance of the ethnographical type*, inevitably undergo a process of resemanticisation.

How then might *traditional dance* in Romania be safeguarded for the future? And what role might the ethnographic museum take in making this happen?

The Ethnographic Museum as an Institution for Safeguarding Traditional Dance

The contemporary museum is a space in which new knowledge and discoveries are created and incorporated through participation and interactive pedagogies. No longer a repository of artifacts, a *participatory* museum is an institution open to multidirectional content experiences, a platform where visitors are content creators, distributors, collaborators, and critics (Simon 2010).

Knowledge is thus no longer the exclusive attribute of the museum employee but is instead built through dialogue, rendering the museum more attractive to visitors, more personal and in the process, more democratic (Kreps 2020).

Museum collections and exhibitions offer ways to construct personal and collective identities, as well as to maintain community cohesion. In this context, the museum is both a place and the voice of memory (Keene 2005, 98). As British museum curator Suzanne Keene observes, “identity and memory are inseparable, and objects – things – are very important in building and maintaining both” (2005, 91). In this sense, the ethnographic museum emerges as a particularly appropriate institution for safeguarding this heritage.

The question posed by Norwegian ethnochoreologists Tone Erlien and Egil Bakka (2017, 137) – namely, whether museums are sufficiently prepared to safeguard traditional dance – resonates within the Romanian cultural environment. From the perspective of Romanian museum legislation, aligned with European standards and the recommendations of ICOM and UNESCO, I would be inclined to answer in the affirmative. The reality, however, is that the core museum principle of conservation, is not yet organically intertwined with the principle of safeguarding. Although museums can and should safeguard ICH, they currently lack the optimised functions, procedural rules, and secondary legislation. In my opinion, the principal problem in achieving the letter and spirit of safeguarding traditional dance in Romania lies in the prevailing public and institutional mentality which remains largely shaped by the performative model of folklorism.

The ethnographic museum has two ways to engage in safeguarding traditional dance: first, *in situ* protection of traditional dance; and second, protection within the ethnographic museum (in particular in the open-air museum). In these two models there can be: (a) activities without the practice of dance (scientific, educational, promotion and improvement activities); (b) dance practice activities; (c) mixed activities (dance practice combined with museum education activities, scientific activities, and so on).

Safeguarding *In Situ*

The ethnographic museum can support a community of traditional dance bearers through several means: by engaging in identifying, documenting, and researching dance/dance practice; through promotion and valorisation actions (dance practice events, exhibitions, films, studies on the heritage of the respective dance; through revitalisation actions; and through advisory activities on the safeguarding procedure and on the benefits and risks involved in this process. Of great importance here is ethnochoreological research for the quality of *in situ* safeguarding. Careful research into the processes of creation, transmission and signification of dances in their contexts can outline a clear picture of dance concepts and its socio-cultural functions (and therefore of the emic perspective); nor should the importance of the video/audio/photo recordings created during the research be neglected. These recordings can always be referred to as scientific authentication landmarks for a particular dance practice.

Revitalisation is a safeguarding activity in which the museum can become involved and help a community that is about to lose a dance practice. The central element of this action is ethnological testimony. By *ethnological testimony* I mean a bearer of an element of culture, who can be directly or indirectly involved in the transmission of that cultural element. The ethnochoreologists/researchers of the museum can advise (using information and recordings about that dance), but only the ethnological witness can confirm/censor and acknowledge, authenticating the revitalised dance forms as elements of the local tradition. A model of good practice for the involvement of the ethnographic museum in the *in situ* safeguarding of a dance/dance practices/dance event involves: (1) ethnochoreological research of the local *traditional dance* culture; (2) elaboration of research reports, ethnochoreological studies on the local *traditional dance* culture; and (3) developing recommendations on future actions included in the guarantee. In the case of revitalisation, it must be recognised that the reconstruction of that tradition is an act of cutting out certain elements from a tradition, an activity that may lead to the exclusion of certain elements more or less relevant to that dance practice. Therefore, a revitalisation must aim to encompass as wide as possible all the aspects involved in that dance practice, no matter how negligible they may seem at first glance.

Traditional Dance Practice Event in the Ethnographic Museum

In an open-air museum, for example, a Traditional Dance Practice Event (hereinafter TDPE) can take place in spaces that were originally used as a dance space for village dance events.⁵ In this way, an atmosphere can be restored that contributes to the consolidation of the dance experience in the memory of the participants, and thus to socialisation. For the community of *traditional dance* bearers, the TDPE can be integrated as a new event of the local culture, as a new dance context.

For *traditional dance* bearers, TDPE can be considered as: (a) an act of promotion of their dance; (b) an action with educational value; (c) a mu-

⁵ In the village, during the warm periods, people dancing took place in summer in open spaces (usually somewhere in the middle of the village), in barns (buildings where the cart and other agricultural work tools were housed) or, in certain ethnographic areas, in constructions specially intended for dance, otherwise called: *pavilion*, *shed*, or *gazebo*. In winter or in the cold period, dancing took place in the room of a house.

seum action (an “exhibition of intangible artifacts” [Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 53]) and (d) an action combining all of the above.

From the museum’s perspective, TDPE can be thought of as a lived exhibition in which there is an *evanescent intangible artifact*. Given, however, the impossibility of the visitor holistically to know the local culture of *traditional dance* and to integrate it into his or her cultural practice, both the dance and the dance exhibition do not constitute an act of safeguarding *in situ* (a fact also noted by Bakka 2015, 153–154).

What the museum visitor can partially know is the form of the dance, its movement patterns. In TDPE, the visitor has access to the features of dance through his or her body, understanding the particular way in which that community relates through dance. So, the key points of TDPE in the ethnographic museum are: socialisation through dance (with all the benefits it brings to the contemporary individual) and getting to know the culture of that community through one’s own body and mind. Erlien notes these aspects when she states that “the core of the problem is then how to expose a socialising practice rather than a show” (2020, 34).

The interaction between the museum visitor and the bearer of the *traditional dance* adds to the museum a dimension of space that is discovered sensorially and emotionally. The context that the ethnographic museum offers reinforces this knowledge with ethnographic information. The museum thus transforms itself into a place of rational, emotional and sensory knowledge.

These “exhibitions” being lived and practised cannot be made permanent. This ephemerality is an important feature of these “dance exhibitions”, compared to a permanent exhibition such as an open-air ethnographic museum, because *traditional dance* bearers are not dance professionals nor museum employees, nor is dancing their sole occupation. For them, dance is first and foremost a socio-cultural practice that, in the community’s calendar, has relatively stable dates. The permanence of such an exhibition of lived dance contradicts the very logic of safeguarding by intervening in the rhythmicity imposed by the local tradition on dance occasions. TDPE in the museum is an exception to the usual calendar of the traditional community. Therefore, the ethnographic museum may at most influence the community that organises the dance practice event, but it cannot make its inclusion a permanent “exhibition”.

Dance Workshop

Another type of activity that may involve *traditional dance* in the museum is the dance workshop. In such activities, the main dimension is didactic, seeking to educate participants about heritage, the target groups being children, students, and those who are just eager to learn. This requires interactive methodologies and concern for developing movement skills. Depending on the age group, the objectives can be established around knowledge of the local repertoire and understanding the diversity of dance culture by assimilating the differences in movement and rhythm between different types and ethnographic areas. The major goal of these workshops is to develop dance skills in the movement patterns of different dance traditions, to socialise and to foster a positive perception of tradition.

A sustainable model of safeguarding *traditional dance* through the dance practice event in the ethnographic museum I believe must have: (1) a clearly defined concept and objectives; (2) the presence of a community of bearers of *traditional dance* (dancers, musicians); (3) the creation of dance and music repertoires with a clear and attested local identity; (4) a museum space suitable for dance; and (5) opening of the event for the practice of dance by museum visitors.

Dance of the Ethnographical Type Practice Event in the Ethnographic Museum

Held in an ethnographic museum, the *dance of the ethnographical type* practice event (hereinafter DETPE) is certainly the most appropriate alternative to the dance of the ethnographical type performance and the most appropriate way for the re-folklorisation⁶ of dances. This type of activity does not fall within the process of safeguarding, but rather borrows from the logic of safeguarding by virtue of the fact that there is a direct and close relationship between the non-spectacular practice of dance and socialisation within the dance community. This relationship is the foundation of the re-

⁶ The term “re-folklorisation” can be understood as a designator of the process by which a cultural element (for example, dance) that has disappeared from a culture with oral transmission (in the Romanian case, the dance culture called “traditional”), that is, from a folkloric culture, is reintegrated into the processes of oral transmission, that is, those processes of transmission and creation that respectively support the production of variants of the element.

signification of *dance of the ethnographical type* forms and is also the basis of the process of refolklorisation of dances, a process that, in my opinion, must be a fundamental goal of these events.

The coagulating element of *dance of the ethnographical type* communities is dance. These communities are usually made up of people who live in urban areas. Ensembles or groups of the *dance of the ethnographical type* can be considered dance communities insofar as the practice of dance is carried out according to the characteristics of DETPE, rather than according to the features of the spectacular dance model as in dance folklorism. The *dance of the ethnographical type* can achieve the maximum degree of referentiality only when practised within the framework of DETPE.

The disappearance of theatrical conditions and the rediscovery of community relations specific to a dance event is the key to rediscovering the function of dance as a social coagulant. The disappearance of the stage and its conventions, of standardisations and homogenisations, of the choreographer and choreography, of stylistic approximation and structural eclecticism, and of a high degree of fictionalisation makes way for the organic manifestation of dance, as a social practice rather than an artistic one.

The dance space once again becomes a space whose proxemics can facilitate social relations between the participants of the DETPE, to support the resignification of *dance of the ethnographical type*. Dancers can rediscover the organicity of the development of forms through the processes of folkloric creation. In this way, the style of the *dance of the ethnographical type* can find its realisation in terms of the model (*traditional dance*).

DETPE can therefore recreate the context necessary to realise the concept of dance and to rediscover the processes typical of folklore, leaving free the reconfiguration of this concept with each realisation (see Bakka and Karoblis 2010, 173–174). The high degree of faithful replication of the peasant or traditional dance in the performance of the *dance of the ethnographical type* supports the reconstruction of the concept of dance, as it was created in traditional culture.

How may these ethnographical-type dance communities relate to the diversity of local or regional repertoires? Given the fact that that the community does not have a local tradition to which it may lay claim, the following question is raised: what dances/dance repertoires should be adopted by a dance community? Here we may look at the problem in the logic of safeguarding, through the concept of localisation. I believe that a dance community must refolklorise a repertoire from the neighbouring locali-

ties, viewed concentrically from the locality where the community exists. In this way, the dance community recovers heritage from the traditional local culture, contributing to the preservation (not safeguarding) of some dance concepts and zonal styles.

The museum can become involved in strengthening DETPE by offering the space for dance practice and specialised consultancy, encouraging the presence of visitors to these events. In DETPE, the intervention of museum employees must be negotiated and as minimal as possible. The DETPE can certainly operate in the ethnographic museum as a dance exhibition, but it must be clear that the object of transmission is no longer the *traditional dance* but its *copy*, even if this copy has a maximum degree of faithful replication. These “dance exhibitions” can be included, at least during the warm season, when outdoor activities are possible, in the museum’s offering of activities.

Examples of Good Practice

I now refer in brief to some of my experiences as a project manager, as a president of a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)⁷ with an ethnochoreological profile, and as a museographer-ethnochoreologist in an ethnographic museum.

The project *Dance Pavilion (Pavilionul de joc)*, 2013, focused on researching traditional dances from two villages in two different areas of Transylvania and on promoting these repertoires both among the community and for visitors to the Transylvanian Museum of Ethnography (MET). Dance workshops were organised both in the researched localities (Răchițele and Urca, Cluj County) and in the open-air ethnographic museum (see figure 1 and 2).

In 2013, we managed a much larger project dedicated mainly to the study and promotion of a dance culture in Frata commune, Cluj County. The project had two major dimensions: research into the local dance culture, and an event to promote this culture in the outdoor section of the MET. During the promotional event, visitors were able to learn to dance, become acquainted with the music of the area and taste the food prepared by the locals (figure 3).

⁷ Together with Anca Giurchescu, we founded, in 2012, the Etnocor Association. Centre for Ethnochoreological Studies, an NGO whose mission is to support the research and promotion of traditional dance.



Figure 1. Group of kindergarten children who learned to dance as part of the Dance Pavilion project. Photo: © Adrian Pop.



Figure 2. Dance moment in the National Ethnographic Park "Romulus Vuia" within the project dedicated to dance and music culture in Frata commune, Cluj county. Photo: © George Ciupag.



Figure 3. Children who learned to dance in the project *Pavilionul de joc*. Photo: © Petac Silvestru.

In 2017 and 2018, in the open-air ethnographic museum (outdoor section of the MET) we organised two iterations of the *Pavilionul de joc* project,⁸ a project with a pronounced didactic character. The activities of teaching dances from several ethnographic areas very far from each other (therefore different movement cultures) were framed by other complementary activities that diversified the themes of knowledge. The goal was heritage education through/for dance of primary and secondary school students. Emphasis was placed on understanding the systemic relationships that exist between different components of traditional culture (between dance and music, between dance and folk costume, the role of aerophone instruments, the image of a traditional village and other such themes). The courses were held in the open-air museum households, the guides through the museum completing the information about the ICH. The dances were taught by local lecturers/bearers of *traditional dances* (see figure 4).

The *EduCoreologica* project was a large project that also developed an important scientific component, by organising, within the project, the

⁸ The Romanian word *joc* derives from Latin *jocus* and denotes, in one of its main meanings, *dance*, the activity of *dancing*.



Figure 4. Participants in the EduCoreologica project dancing in one of the households in the “Romulus Vuia” National Ethnographic Park in Cluj-Napoca. Photo: © George Ciupag.

first edition of the “Anca Giurchescu” Ethnochoreology Colloquia. The main target groups of the project were *traditional dance* groups from nine localities throughout Romania and MET visitors. Among the goals of the project were: to promote local dance cultures, to raise awareness among young people in *traditional dance* groups on the importance of dance traditions and dance practice, and to achieve stylistic differences between the dances of different ethnographic areas.

The constants of these projects were: researching the dance culture in the localities where *traditional dance* is still danced; recording and archiving dance material, musical material and other information about choreographic and musical culture; putting *traditional dance* bearers in contact with children/young people/MET visitors; heritage education of the public; development among *dance of the ethnographical type* practitioners of knowledge and perception in line with the logic of safeguarding traditional dance; and practising dance, as a method of getting to know a local culture.

In summary, a model of good practice of *dance of the ethnographical type* in the ethnographic museum can include some ideas that derive from both

the ethnochoreological approach to dance and from the logic of safeguarding. This means combining two key aspects: (a) a high degree of referentiality to the source dances; and (b) socialisation within the community of dance practitioners. Other aspects that matter are: (1) a resizing of the concept of localisation; and (2) an inhibition of the concept of nationalisation of the repertoire; (3) good documentation of the dances they practise; (4) an ethnochoreological understanding of the processes of dance creation and transmission; (5) close contact with *traditional dance* bearers; (6) good interactivity between dancers and musicians (very important in the process of performing the dance); (7) creating an emotional environment that is open to learning; (8) and finally, freedom granted to museum visitors so that they can experience cultural diversity through their own bodies and minds.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, UNESCO's policy on ICH is a big step forward towards boosting the perpetuation of *traditional dance* for as long as possible. It is a radical change which, however, at least in Romania, has produced few effects. Legislative blockages and superficialities; cross-references and uncertainties of institutions' responsibilities regarding ICH; an outdated legislation with respect to the safeguarding framework and the lack of enforcement rules; the habitus of the majority and the strong establishment of dance as folklorism; the lack of ethnological and heritage education of both the population (already mostly urban) and some decision-makers; increasingly accelerated modernisation and depopulation of villages; and the lack of a Romanian university specialisation in ethnochoreology are just a few of the aspects that make me sceptical about two aspects: (a) namely that, in the long term, *traditional dance* and traditional dance practices will resist the pressure of modernisation and (b) that the paradigm of safeguarding can help rebalance the scale given the weight of the spectacular model within folklorism.

So far, there has not been a critical point that would make me optimistic. Safeguarding is not assimilated at the level of the cultural and educational system and is not very well known in those communities where it would greatly matter. The spectacular model in folklorism remains pervasive and puts immense pressure on alternative modes of promotion (dance practice events). It consumes resources that could be channelled towards safeguarding actions.

As far as the ethnographic museum is concerned, the necessary change needs to be singular: a new unitary perspective on both material and intangible cultural heritage, organically harmonised and adequately legislated, through intertwining the model of conservation with that of safeguarding.

The analysis above has aimed to shed light on some aspects that concern *traditional dance* and *dance of the ethnographical type*. Dance is one of the most cherished activities through which tradition can be experienced and constructed. The stabilisation of dance practice events in the offering of ethnographic museums would bring social, cultural, economic benefits both to dance communities and to the urban community in the broadest sense. Dance practice communities, especially within dance schools, are a sign that, in a market economy, dance can live a second life in the form of *dance of the ethnographical type* with as much referentiality as possible. This saves dance forms that are of crucial importance for the history of culture, for the history of dance and for education.

I have emphasised, I think quite forcefully, that staged folklorism is a path that tends to kill traditional dance and inhibits safeguarding. The model of dance staging in folklorism has proven to be a poisoned apple for dance traditions in bearer communities. My opinion is that at the base of this situation is found, within the modernity-tradition dialectic, only the repudiation of the elements of tradition and not their acceptance in specific forms. Modern people wish to dance, but without making the effort of documenting and without making the effort to recover forms and styles (representations of traditional culture).

Safeguarding, however, is built on a different logic: that of reconciliation with tradition and acceptance of tradition, as its bearers consider it to be. It promises a radical change that, however, at least in Romania, has produced few effects. Unlike the stage model of folklorism, the *dance of the ethnographical type* practice event (which also belongs to folklorism and heritage making process), even if it does not include acts of safeguarding, employs a logic of safeguarding. This alternative face of folklorism (a meta-cultural phenomenon, typical of modernity, as well as safeguarding and heritage-making, the constitution of tradition) can recover from traditional culture the concepts of dance, movement models, and stylistics and resemantise them through acts of socialisation.

As long as this mechanism of repudiation of tradition, typical of modernity (Patapievicici 2020) is alone at the basis of our relationship with tradition, the elements of traditional culture will disappear. Let us not for-

get: tradition, like heritage construction, consists of symbolic processes through which the past is constructed in the present and from the perspective (theoretical, ideological and the like) of the present.

It is therefore within the power of those who enact and construct tradition to do so in a way that is convergent with modernity, to know *what* and *how* to choose so that modern representations interpret past representations in a convergent, rather than divergent, manner. This chapter indicates, I think substantially, what exactly we should look at and what content should be chosen in this process of constitution of tradition and heritage. For this, the ethnography of dance, its ethnology and anthropology are the solutions. *Dance of the ethnographical type* is a possible path to tradition and its source, in the case of traditional Romanian dance, namely peasant dance.

I conclude with a quote that, in its letter and spirit, summarises my position as a museographer-ethnochoreologist involved in safeguarding *traditional dance*:

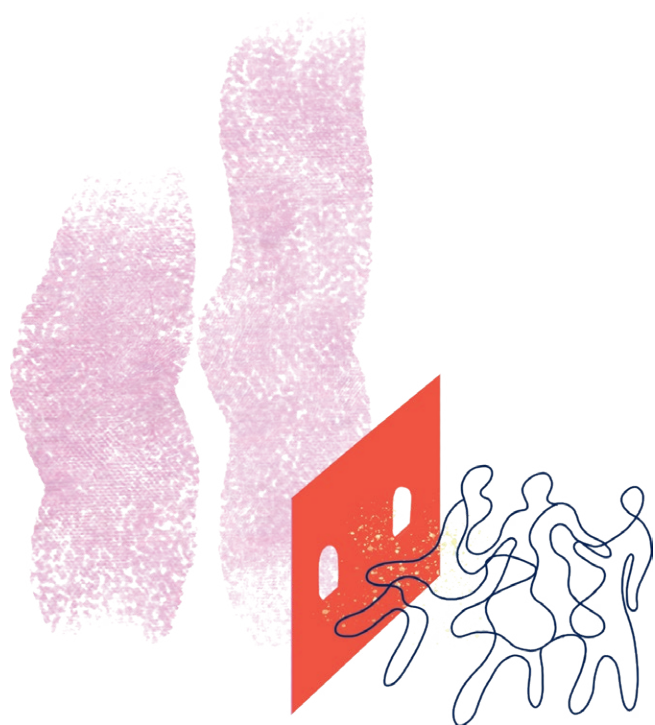
Modernity is disastrous when it seeks to fully replace tradition and is remarkable when it seeks to achieve it by other, more unprejudiced means. When she is jealous of tradition, and puts her jealousy into practice, modernity quickly turns into a nightmare. When it forgets that it is not an end and makes its genius available as a means to noble ends that go beyond it, then modernity reveals its own goodness, which is by no means negligible. The proper genius of modernity is to serve what is high and does not belong to it. And what is high, only tradition can say. (Patapievici 2020: 179)

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Music and Dance at the Intersection of the UNESCO Paradigm and Museology

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The role of the Coordinator for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage brought the Slovene Ethnographic Museum a new perspective on intangible heritage, which the museum has been dealing with since its foundation. This article focuses on intangible heritage related to music and dance, which we illuminate from two angles. The first focus is on the systemic safeguarding of intangible heritage from the position of the UNESCO paradigm. The second is a focus on music and dance as important components of customs and their musealisation.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, music, dance, museology, community

Introduction

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum (hereinafter SEM) has dealt with intangible cultural heritage since its foundation, but on the museum's acquisition of an important new role, fresh perspectives on intangible cultural heritage emerged. Examining music and dance as intangible cultural heritage, we discuss the systematic safeguarding of music and dance in relation to the 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and consider them as important components of customs and their musealisation.

In 2011, the SEM assumed the role of national Coordinator, which arose during preparation for ratification of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) in Slovenia. At that time, the museum undertook to develop knowledge frameworks and participate in the systemic safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage which continues in practice today. This orientation in the operation of the museum brought to it a new perspective on intangible cultural heritage, which, from a museological perspective, the museum's employees have been dealing with ever since its foundation¹ (see e.g. Jerin and Pukl 2022, 54; Židov 2020, 56–60). The museum remains devoted to research on intangible cultural heritage, since the movable heritage that the museum keeps in its collections is inextricably linked to its intangible component, “which ‘lives’ outside the museum, in the communities that practice it” (Židov 2020, 50).²

In this article, we want to shed light on two views of intangible cultural heritage related to music and dance, which are strongly intertwined due to the SEM's role as one of Slovenia's central ethnological institutions. Both views are directed towards a common interest – that is, the study and consequent safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. This heritage is inscribed in the national list called the Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter the Register) and is also a subject of museological analyses. Approaches to its safeguarding are based on research and documentation, as well as on education and transfer (Nikočević 2003, 62), whereby it is essential that its safeguarding does not become its limitation or musealisation but must promote the development opportunity that heritage carries within itself (Kovačec Naglič 2012, 19). The musealisation

¹ The SEM celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2023.

² For more on projects related to intangible cultural heritage prior to assuming the role of the Coordinator, see Židov and Jerin 2015, 330–332.

of intangible cultural heritage presents a challenge for museum curators who care about the protection of movable heritage. Questions arise, such as what and how to exhibit intangible heritage, since we cannot materialise knowledge, skills, habits, customs and the like. Dance and music are especially demanding for musealisation, as their final product is not tangible (as opposed to, for example, in pottery).

The first part of the paper is aimed at an overview of the Slovenian Register and the placement of music and dance within it. Based on this, we will indicate the essential characteristics of the Slovenian inventory of intangible cultural heritage and highlight its value in its safeguarding. The second part of the article deals with music and dance as important components of customs, their musealisation and new approaches in museum presentation.

Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Slovenia according to the 2003 UNESCO Convention

Some indicate intangible cultural heritage as the essence of heritage, which represents the living culture of human communities, their evolution, and their continuing development (Lenzerini 2011, 102). They believe it necessary to safeguard intangible cultural heritage because of its frequent invisibility and propensity to disappearance, given its dependence on successful transmission from generation to generation (Convention 2005, 97). The basic mechanisms of its safeguarding at national and international levels are offered by the 2003 UNESCO Convention, whereby it is essential to be aware that with the signing of the Convention, intangible cultural heritage is no longer only a matter for the bearers, but also for the state that regulates it (Židov 2014, 157). The latter must provide the conditions that enable cultural communities to continue creating, maintaining, and transmitting their heritage (Blake 2018, 22).

The Republic of Slovenia ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention at the end of 2007 and in 2008 it implemented it into the legal order with the adoption of the Cultural Heritage Protection Act.³ As a fulfilment of the obligation of the signatory state of this international document, the creation of a national list of intangible cultural heritage, managed by the Ministry of Culture, began in the same year. This is a part of the Register of Cultural

³ For more on the first views on intangible cultural heritage in connection with the 2003 UNESCO Convention, see in Židov 2017.

Heritage,⁴ a central collection of data on the cultural heritage present in the territory of the Republic of Slovenia.

For professional support in creating and supplementing the list, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia established the public service of the Coordinator, a function which is performed by the SEM. The former operates at the intersection of the interests of the bearers of the heritage (communities, groups, and individuals) and politics, whose activities in the field of cultural heritage are guided by international documents, statutory rules, and formal procedures. Its role at the national level is to empower the bearers or raise awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage and the activities carried out by the bearers directed towards the safeguarding and transmission of intangible cultural heritage. It is their attitude towards heritage that can trigger decisive steps on the way to its safeguarding (see Jerin and Pukl 2018, 5). The Coordinator's activities are thus aimed at identifying and documenting intangible cultural heritage during the fieldwork, various methods of presentation and promotion, and related safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage among the general public, at both the national and international levels. We could say that the work of the Coordinator includes the translation of the Convention "into a language that is understandable to the bearers and encourages inscription on national lists" (Židov 2019, 13) and thus "ranges from the field to UNESCO" (Židov 2018, 47). At the same time, after the establishment of the Convention, the profession found itself in an intermediate position - it must act as arbiter, promoter and critic of heritage (Lukić-Krstanović 2012, 230–231).

Among the Coordinator's main tasks is the preparation of proposals for the inscription of intangible cultural heritage into the Register,⁵ whereby the proposals are prepared based on the initiatives received, and which are evaluated by the expert body established in 2011 – the Coordinator's Working Group. The Working Group evaluates initiatives based on criteria⁶ established on the basis of the 2003 UNESCO Convention and other national law and rules dealing with intangible cultural heritage.⁷ Anyone can sub-

⁴ In addition to the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, it also consists of the already existing Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage and the Register of Movable Cultural Heritage, which is just being established.

⁵ The Register currently consists of 134 elements and 401 registered bearers of intangible cultural heritage (Register, 21 August 2025).

⁶ The criteria for entry into the Register are available at the following link: http://www.nesnovnadediscina.si/sites/default/files/merila_zavpis_junij_2021.pdf.

⁷ Ever since the ratification of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, dilemmas regarding the inscripti-

mit an initiative to inscribe a new element in the Register or a bearer of an already registered heritage. The bearer of the heritage must be aware of this intention and must agree⁸ at the onset of the registration process onto the national list. In the process of preparing a formal proposal for inscription, intangible cultural heritage elements intended for inscription into the Register are classified into one of the five domains⁹ as defined onto the 2003 UNESCO Convention. During this period of preparation, the Coordinator actively collaborates with experts from various institutions who deal with the field of heritage. The experts come from regional museums from across Slovenia, research institutes, the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture. The collaboration of the members of this group of experts is very valuable for the Coordinator, as the experts are brought together by the same topic of the intangible cultural heritage under consideration, shedding light on it from different perspectives. This can be very useful and valuable but, in some cases, can lead to a situation in which the Coordinator finds itself at the intersection of different interests. Sometimes the members, who are not so familiar with UNESCO values and the ever-changing highlights in the welfare of heritage, each have their own vision as to what should happen with the heritage and how should we, as the experts in this field, help the bearers to maintain the “good health” of “their” heritage. This can be a specially intriguing situation when preparing the formal proposals for inscription of the intangible cultural heritage in the national Register.

The Register is a continuously updated list, created through a participatory approach (see Van Mensch and Meijer-Van Mensch 2015, 56–58; Blake 2020, 324–332), in cooperation with bearers of the heritage and experts in individual areas of intangible cultural heritage. It is important that the

on of intangible cultural heritage into the registers have also arisen in the profession, since it is a matter of selection based on certain criteria and exclusion (for more, see e.g. Hafstein 2009, 93).

⁸ The bearer expresses his or her agreement by signing the *Statement of the bearer*, by which he or she confirms that he or she is aware of the submission of the initiative in which he or she is proposed as a bearer of the heritage and that he or she agrees to the possible entry in the Register.

⁹ The 2003 UNESCO Convention talks about the following domains of intangible cultural heritage: 1. oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage, 2. performing arts, 3. social practices, rituals and festive events, 4. knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, 5. traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO 2003, Article 2).

bearers are involved in safeguarding of the heritage at all levels,¹⁰ as they are responsible for its vitality (Tauschek 2015, 292). At the same time, it is necessary to realise that “all heritage-related interventions /.../ change people’s attitude towards their work, their culture and themselves” (Židov 2018, 56). Interest in becoming inscribed in the Register is increasing each year, and the number of registered elements as well as bearers has been rising gradually since 2011, with the representation of intangible cultural heritage elements within individual types being very diverse.¹¹ For some of the elements that are not very tangible, but have mostly an intangible essence, the inscription in the Register is of great importance. We aim to explain below why this is the case when we discuss the elements that are classified in the Slovenian Register under the domain of “performing arts” and fall within the scope of music and dance. We then present the established Slovenian system of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage at the national level based on individual cases.

Register between Theory and Practice: From Ritual Easter Dances to Singing Partisan Songs

An overview of the elements within the domain of performing arts in the Slovenian Register reveals that there is a total of seventeen elements in this category, eleven of which are related to music and dance. These are the elements “Easter dances and games in Metlika”, “Wind orchestra”, “Folk-pop music”, “Bell-ringing”, “Four-voice singing”, “Six-voice singing”, “Sotiš”, “Šamarjanka”, “Playing the tambura”, and “Singing partisan songs” and “Making simple folk musical instruments”.

Music, together with dance as its embodiment, is, on the one hand, the most profound and inalienable human activity, in which all social elements come together into a whole that cannot be placed on a single level of existence. In its liveliness, it literally embodies common life and is therefore the fundamental pillar of the life of any human community, even deeper and more primal than language (Muršič 2018, 30).

¹⁰ Blake mentions that the bearers should be involved as much as possible “in the management and safeguarding of heritage, including in its identification” (2020, 324).

¹¹ The Register contains the most elements under the domain of traditional craftsmanship (53), followed by social practices, rituals and festive events (40), performing arts (17), oral traditions and expressions, including language (10) and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe (14) (Register, 21 August 2025).

These are cultural phenomena completely intangible in nature until the bearers transform them into audible and visible elements of our culture through their activities. Through fieldwork, these activities are regularly documented (for example with a camera) by the researchers of this topic and are, in the process of postproduction, included in the digital archives of different institutions that deal with music and dance. This kind of documentation represents an important “document of time” as the intangible cultural heritage is constantly being recreated by its bearers. Doing this kind of fieldwork, we must be constantly aware that in parallel with documenting, we also have to note related information about the bearers, time and place of documenting etc. The presentation of the elements of the intangible cultural heritage with the above-mentioned documentation in the Register is considered as an important archive of the current state of the element of the intangible cultural heritage which is accessible to all.¹² At the same time the inclusion of the bearers enables the state, as the caretaker of the list, to raise awareness about the importance of this heritage. Unquestionably, there are other elements of the intangible cultural heritage, which are still alive today among the bearers and play an important role in their lives and would deserve to be included on the national list. It should be emphasised, however, that in Slovenia we follow the principle that anyone can initiate the process of consideration for inscription, whereby the most desirable are initiatives that come “from the bottom up”, i.e. from the field - from the bearers to the profession. This is also emphasised by the 2003 UNESCO Convention itself, since in the context of the UNESCO paradigm, in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, the bearers are especially in the foreground, defined as communities, groups and individuals who take care of the transmission of heritage from generation to generation and constantly recreate it (UNESCO 2003, Article 2). In other words, in Slovenia, we do not undertake a systematic review of certain topics and their presence in the field, which would certainly lead to more inscriptions from this field, even in the case of music and dance. The Register with all registered elements and registered bearers nevertheless reflects the great

¹² Currently, the Slovene Register, which is accessible online, includes only the photographic and descriptive presentations of the inscribed elements of the intangible cultural heritage. The Coordinator constantly draws attention to this problem when communicating with the manager of the Register, as he is aware of the importance of presenting the “less tangible” elements with films. Because of the unresponsiveness of the manager, the Coordinator decided to include films in the presentations of the inscribed elements of the intangible cultural heritage on its own webpage.



Figure 1. *Doing fieldwork among the community of bearers.* Foto: Anja Jerin, Beltinci, 2024 (SEM Documentation).

diversity and wealth of intangible cultural heritage in Slovenia, both in terms of the classification of registered elements of different domains and the number of registered bearers of intangible cultural heritage and their geographical dispersion throughout the entire territory of Slovenia.¹³ The importance of such a list is particularly evident through the fact that the most desirable for registration are initiatives that arise based on the expressed interest of the bearers.

One of the main criteria for inscription into the Register is the liveliness of the heritage in connection with the activities of the bearers, who in various formal and informal ways ensure that some intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation, that it has successors who will develop it further and take care of its updating in space and time. They are the ones who “recognize, enact, transmit, change, create, or shape culture in and for the community” (Besednjak 2004, 268). If a heritage has no active bearers, it cannot be inscribed into the national list. For each heritage element that meets the criteria for registration, the profession first

¹³ An example of an element with one recorded bearer of intangible cultural heritage which is present in a limited geographical area is “Six-voice singing” (called also *Lučko petje na štrto* since that kind of singing is found around Luče in the Upper Savinja Valley) (Petje na četrtko 2024). An example of an element with several registered bearers from all over Slovenia is the “Singing partisan songs” (Petje partizanskih pesmi 2024).

must identify the bearers. For some intangible cultural heritage elements, several bearers are recorded in the Register (e.g. for the “Wind orchestra”, twelve bearers were registered as of August 2025), while for certain elements the bearers are identified, but due to the large number of them, they are not inscribed in the Register (e.g. for “Folk-pop music”). In addition, for elements related to music and dance, only groups of bearers are currently inscribed in the Register; organised as folk dance ensembles, associations, musical ensembles and informally organised groups of individuals. The constant variability of the Slovenian list of intangible cultural heritage, the extent and content of which is influenced by the continual changes taking place in the field, directly results from the activities of the bearers. That is entirely per Article 12 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, which provides that “each State Party shall draw up, in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory” and that “these inventories shall be regularly updated” (UNESCO 2003, Article 12).

Actuality is something that pervades all elements inscribed in the Register and is directly related to the “implementation” of heritage in its primary time and space, whereby a participatory approach is essential for its documentation (Van Mensch and Meijer-Van Mensch 2015, 58). Illustrating the above with the example, “Easter dances and games in Metlika”¹⁴ element, means that only the dances and games performed during Easter time by members of the folk dance ensemble in the town square of Metlika are inscribed in the Register. The event is chiefly intended to be presented to the local population in the primary time and space; whereas, the stage performances of the presentation of dances and games, which are sometimes offered to the general public by folk dance ensembles outside of Easter time, are not included in the Register. The stage performances in some way represent a way of “freezing” heritage in the shape and form presented to the audience, which inhibits the heritage’s natural course and dynamic development. Of course, stage presentations, which have their own meaning and value, are among the various ways to popularise and thus raise awareness about a heritage. This can be seen, for example, in the phenomenon of the element “Folk-pop music” as a genre of music which, on the one hand, is completely spontaneous and strongly embedded in the everyday and festive life of both its listeners and performers, while on the other hand,

¹⁴ See the element “Easter dances and games in Metlika” (Vuzemski plesi in igre v Metliki 2024).

it is strongly present on stage as well. A similar example from the field of dance heritage relates to those living dances *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* which are still danced on various occasions (e.g. at parties, junior proms, graduations, weddings or feasts) completely spontaneously, and at the same time they are part of the stage performances by folk dance ensembles from Prekmurje. It often seems that spontaneity is the defining characteristic of heritage, which enables it to survive to its greatest extent. Observed from the point of view of sustainable development, we can say that this is a feature of heritage that does not lead to its (excessive) commercialisation and exploitation even in the long term, as it encourages the existence of heritage within the community in forms and frameworks that reflect its current wishes and needs.

Intangible components form our spiritual, social and material culture. Various social phenomena leave traces in the lives of all of us because they are part of our everyday lives; we live with them, and our involvement in them has a strong influence on the course of our lives. This also applies to all the previously noted elements in the field of music and dance in the Register, whose bearers are involved in special forms of social activity with a common interest, which often characterises a large part of their free time (see Jerin 2020) and social engagement. The aforementioned components of our culture are frequently a part of various celebrations (e.g. festivities, local celebrations), as well as life-cycle (e.g. personal holidays, birth, junior prom, graduation, wedding, death) and annual cycle customs (e.g. Easter, Shrovetide, 1 May, Christmas, New Year) and as such the subject of research in various sciences,¹⁵ including ethnology. From the standpoint of ethnology, customs represent “forms of interpersonal relationships and actions that /.../ rise from everyday averages to a more important, emphasised or festive place in the community” (Bogataj 2005, 15). They play an important role in shaping identity and building feelings of belonging among the bearers and are deeply rooted in them. They act as identification practices that shape our activities (see e.g. Volarič 2010, 43) and by performing certain social functions, we manifest ourselves as social beings (Levec 2004, 8, 16).

¹⁵ In the rest of the article, we will talk about customs as a subject of museological study.

Museological Consideration of Music and Dance as Integral Aspects of Customs

The musealisation of intangible cultural heritage represents only the tip of the iceberg, as the exhibition is simply the final product – presenting the results and interpretation of a specific topic that we have researched and documented from multiple perspectives over an extended period of time. Exhibition projects are just one of the many media through which we spread knowledge and research findings. One of the strengths of the SEM is its role as Coordinator. Namely, the work of the Coordinator and curators in the museum overlaps and complements that of each other. Music and dance are often the subject of expert consideration and research within the curatorship of the Department of Spiritual Culture¹⁶ at the SEM. In carrying out this work, we rely upon numerous written (literature), oral (interviews, fieldwork) and archival (photographs, documents, field notes) records from the fields of ethnology, ethnochoreology, ethnomusicology and museology, sourced from both museum documentation and the archives of other institutions. The Slovenian ethnochoreologist Mirko Ramovš wrote that people formerly used to dance mostly at weddings and on Carnival days, on various holidays and during the week after the end of communal work (1981, 2). In the past, dancing was more often a part of annual customs, life-cycle customs, work customs and celebrations. In Slovenia, dancing is still frequently practised at weddings, parties, festivities and celebrations. Nowadays, the ban on dancing which “applied mainly during fasting and Advent” (Ramovš 1981, 2) is often ignored. Dance is still, however, an integral part of certain customs, for example, Carnival customs (carnival characters jumping, dancing with the housewife, ...) where we hear that certain Carnival characters “dance for a fat turnip”.

The mask dance must only be improvised during the Carnival rounds and at the Carnival dance, e.g. high jumping and twirling of individual masks, but there used to be also special dances intended only for this occasion. Otherwise, the masquerades danced any dance customary within a certain environment. (Ramovš 2003, 48)

¹⁶ Research areas include: carnival customs, superstitions, music and dance.

This is still the case today.

Dance and music have significantly co-shaped and continue to strongly influence the course of many customs that are part of the social sphere of life. Despite this, ethnologists tend not to consider the broader social context since their research “together with ethnographic experiences are usually limited to time and space, but not always socially” (Knific 2010, 117).

Individual museum objects that are part of the museum’s collections bear witness to the importance of dance in the everyday and festive life of people throughout different periods of history. So far though, at the SEM there has been no in-depth research conducted on dance heritage, its roles and its occurrence, which would interpret dance heritage through its existing artefact collections.

Museum objects that show folk dances from different time periods form part of collections in different museum departments as, for example, on beehive panels and in paintings.



Figure 2. *Beehive panel from the SEM Collection with motif of a couple while dancing and musicians, dated in the middle of the nineteenth century. Photo: Marko Habič, 2010 (SEM Documentation).*

Music and Dance in Museums

In 2007, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) defined a museum as "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment". In 2022, a new definition was adopted in Prague:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing. (ICOM 2022)

The current definition has been upgraded with a new methodology of museum work, which highlights the operation of museums in cooperation with communities and an emphasis on a participatory approach.

"Museums, with their rich collections and contents, influence the understanding of the world from their beginnings and help to interpret developments within the society in which they are placed" (Babšek 2023, 3). Interpretations of museum objects have changed according to different theoretical views, the development of museology as a science, typologies of cultural components, and the like. Ethnologist Bojana Rogelj Škafar (2008, 5) posits that a "museum exhibition is an interpretive visual medium of a certain disciplinary model" which reflects the period in which it was set up. Museum objects have become "multipurpose carriers of information: material witnesses of everyday and festive ways of life, bearers of stories about creativity, imagination, ingenuity, knowledge..." (Smerdel 2008, 14). Museums are thus the guardians of movable heritage which may communicate various kinds of information through its artefacts. But what happens when we want to musealise dance, a category with a completely intangible nature? What kind of museum objects can we use in this case? What types of objects are available to us?

“Ethnochoreology, the science of a nation’s dance tradition, considers dance as any rhythmic movement that is not gainful, but serves or has served a cult or magical purpose, the expression of some content or idea, and for entertainment, as well” (Ramovš 1981, 1). There is nothing material. Special shoes or clothes are not essential to dance,¹⁷ neither are objects; dancing can be accompanied by singing, which means that not even musical instruments are necessary. There are no objects, there is no tangible end product as, for example, in traditional craftsmanship (pottery, woven baskets, paper flowers, and such like). The same is the case with the musealisation of music: in vocal music there is no instrument (except vocal cords), only in instrumental music can we display musical instruments as a tool with which we “produce music”.

In Slovenia, there is no museum dedicated only to dance, not even a permanent exhibition that treats dance as a central theme. There are different types of museums around the world where one might learn about the heritage of a particular dance or dance heritage in general,¹⁸ as well as museums about musical instruments and music museums.¹⁹

Music or musical instruments are often (more than dance) part of permanent museum exhibitions in Slovenia (and abroad). At the SEM, the permanent exhibition *Between Nature and Culture*, in the social and spiritual section, presents folk instruments used by folk musicians in different periods. The collection of instruments used for performing art and traditional music at Ptuj Castle (Ptuj – Ormož Regional Museum) is one of the largest in Slovenia. Musical instruments at exhibitions often serve as a supplement to a specific theme.²⁰

During the first step of the musealisation of such topics as music and dance, experience indicates that it is of significant importance to take into detailed and comparative account all the sources of the information that are available at the time: fieldwork data collected among the heritage bearers, with information in institutional archives and documentary sources of various kinds. In the second step of the musealisation process, based on the

¹⁷ Traditional costumes in Slovenia are mostly worn for stage performances.

¹⁸ Such museums are: Dance Museum Köln, National Museum of Dance and Hall of Fame (New York), Flamenco Dance Museum (Seville).

¹⁹ Such museums are: the Violin Museum (Cremona), National Cleveland-Style Polka Hall of Fame and Museum (Cleveland), Barcelona Music Museum (Barcelona), House of Music (Vienna), House of Music (Budapest), Musical Instruments Museum (Brussels).

²⁰ As an example: between 2007 and 2008, the SEM presented the exhibition *Sounds of Slovenia: From Folk Musicians to the Avseniki*.

results of this process, curators create a verbal description of a phenomenon that they wish to exhibit to visitors. Verbal descriptions are supported with a photograph and an object that carries a certain informative value. Museum exhibitions are a medium for delivering content, which must be very clearly, professionally and straightforwardly presented so that they can be understood by museum visitors of different generations with different interests and who are usually not experts in the field presented. Modern technology such as video clips, interactive presentations and pedagogical-interactive elements which enable the presentation of the topic in all its manifestations can be of great help nowadays in the exhibition of dance and music and other ICH elements. We are, however, reluctant (partially) to use these devices, as modern technical solutions are financially excessive and often break down. Purchases of technical equipment (screens, computers, tablets, etc.) can usually only be financed from project funding which does not allow for maintenance costs.

Musealisation of the *Sotiš* and *Šamarjanka* Dances in SEM

Unlike other UNESCO conventions, the participatory approach and importance of the bearers advocated in the 2003 Convention changed and widened understanding of cultural heritage (Neyrinck 2017, 319). This was the chief approach adopted for an exhibition on dance, such as *Dance – Europe’s Living Heritage in Motion*, for which the contents were co-created all the time by the heritage bearers of the heritage – the dancers. This was conducted in consonance with “contemporary museology” which “calls for inclusive museums that are not only responsive and engaging, but most of all participatory” (Van Mensch and Meijer-Van Mensch 2015, 49).

At the beginning of the project *Dance as ICH: New models of Facilitating Participatory Dance Events (Dance-ICH)*, we considered in depth which dance heritage from the Slovenian territory would be the central theme of our case study. In the end, we decided on *sotiš* in *šamarjanka*. In 1996, Ramovš had noticed that “the dance tradition in Prekmurje and Porabje²¹ has practically died out. Folkloric groups are trying to keep and preserve the tradition... *Sotiš* and *šamarjanka* are still very popular with the young and old at weddings and other parties” (1996, 14). The continuing popularity of both

²¹ Porabje is a part of the far west of Hungary where the Slovene minority lives.

dances is the main reason that they were inscribed in the Register and selected for presentation at an exhibition within the project.

Sotiš is a name given in the Prekmurje region to a variety of couple dances known as *šotiš* (schottische). It is defined by a specific structure of two triple steps forward (or right-left), and a four-step turn (or triple steps). In certain variants, a part of the performance includes clapping (Sotiš 2024).

Šamarjanka (Varsoviienne) is a couple dance from the Prekmurje region with a two-fold structure: the first part is characterised by a repetitive performance of two side steps and a half turn, while the second part consists of repetitive half-turns to the left and right. It is danced to a tune in a three-beat mode (Šamarjanka 2024).

In cooperation with the Veseli Marki folk dance ensemble from the Beltinci Elementary School, led by Jelka Breznik, and the Marko folk dance ensemble (Cultural Society Marko Beltinci)²² we decided to present both dances at the exhibition. When we asked the community if they could choose only one dance to present at the project exhibition, they shook their heads and sighed: “We can’t do that, because both are equally important”. We recorded both *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* for presentation at the exhibition.²³ The next question for the heritage bearers was: which variant should we present in the museum? Mirko Ramovš wrote about several variants of *šamarjanka* (1999, 88–97) as well as several variants of *sotiš* (1996 119–145). We need to keep in mind that Beltinci is located 180 km from Ljubljana and that people in other regions of Slovenia (presumably) do not know these two dances, unless they are members of a folk dance ensemble. Contemporary “(re)creative efforts of folk dance ensembles” (Knific 2010, 116) and stage performances reflect the ideas of individual dance teachers, hence we decided together to present completely rudimentary variants of the *sotiš* and *šamarjanka*.

In March 2024, we recorded the material²⁴ to be played at the exhibition in the recording studio. The purpose of the film²⁵ is to give museum visitors

²² There are three cultural societies inscribed in the Register as bearers that keep the *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* dances alive. For the case study, we collaborated with the one that covers the youngest generations, has a strong youth section and also members who are older. If we were to start fieldwork within the project again, we would include all three cultural societies.

²³ The exhibition was on display from 10 October 2024 until the end of June 2005 at the SEM.

²⁴ At the same time, we recorded the video material for the educational film, which is part of the joint exhibition of the partners of the project and is presented in other project partner museums as well. This part is partially different from the recording described above, as it is adapted to a different technical presentation.

²⁵ In the past, the *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* dances were presented in various videos from different aspects: documentary, pedagogical, ethnochoreological. The camera operators and producers

a dance experience such that they can learn to dance the *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* to the music, even when the dance community is not at the museum and they cannot pass on their knowledge. Filming the educational film was a challenging task for everyone involved, as we wanted to record the basic steps of both dances clearly and simply so that they would be understandable to museum visitors who would then be able to master them with a few repetitions. Since it is a couple dance, we recorded the couple dancing from the beginning. Then we recorded women's and men's steps separately: first while counting, then with counting and music (slower tempo). Then the two dancers danced together again at a slow tempo while counting the steps. At the end, the dancers danced to the music at the usual tempo. The role of the accompanying musician is very important, because it depends on him "whether the dance goes to the legs" (Ramovš 1991, 100). An accordion player was also present at the recording, who subtly followed the action, adjusted his musical response while the dancing was in progress and played the music as agreed upon with the dancers.

The recording was challenging for the dancers as they are "amateur" dancers who have lived with the dance since childhood. This means that many aspects are obvious for them: they do not think about steps and movements, but we expected them to break down the dance into individual parts and a rudimentary dance form. Good preparation (preliminary meetings and test recording), alignment of goals and script preparation are essential for such a recording. Even though we were well prepared, we recorded some frames several times and adapted their content accordingly while recording. As screenwriters, we had the "advantage" of not possessing dance knowledge and we therefore acted as guinea pigs to achieve our goal: if we can understand and learn to dance, then so will visitors to the exhibition. This recording was, therefore, a very special and challenging experience for us as curators. "As facilitators, museum professionals will see professionalism as their responsibility to create and sustain a participatory environment, cultivating cultural awareness and sensitivity" (Van Mensch and Meijer-Van Mensch 2015, 61). That is why it is even more important to enable and "let/allow" the bearers to present and musealise their heritage as they see and understand it themselves. Thus, the decision regarding the selection of the musician - the accordion player, the tempo

were different: from folk dance ensembles, to schools, researchers. We are aware that in this field much has already been undertaken. Our approach differs from others in that we filmed for the purpose of presenting pedagogical - interactive content at the exhibition.



Figure 3. *Filming of an educational film for the exhibition.* Photo: Adela Pukl, Ljubljana, 2024 (SEM Documentation).



Figure 4. *Sotiš and šamarjanka dances presented at the exhibition in the SEM.* Photo: Adela Pukl, Ljubljana, 2025 (SEM Documentation).

of the music, and above all, the fact that they wanted to record with live music, was theirs. And as Jacobs wrote: “It is not easy to do the right thing, even if you try” (2020, 281).

An inseparable part of dance is music. In Slovenia, there are only a few dances which are accompanied by song alone, most of them being accompanied by instruments (Ramovš 1991, 91). Thus, there is no *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* without musical accompaniment. “In Prekmurje, a string ensemble with cymbals was common” (Ramovš 1981, 4). These can be heard and seen today at various performances of folk dance ensembles. Music for *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* can be performed with different ensembles. That is why nowadays they are danced to music performed by numerous bands of national entertainment ensembles. Quite often, the accordion player takes over the role of the whole band, a solo accompaniment which has been typical in Slovenia since the middle of the nineteenth century. The accordion “combined all three necessary components of polyphony by itself – leading melody, accompaniment and bass – and could take over the function of a group of musicians” (Cvetko 2008, 124). An accordion player was part of the recording and at the opening of the exhibition;²⁶ the folk dance ensemble wanted to dance to the sounds of a string ensemble with a cymbal.

The entire process of cooperation with the dance community was conducted in the spirit of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, where a bottom-up approach is encouraged. Although the representatives often wanted to leave the decision to us, we always looked for solutions and made decisions together. When working in the field, it is still possible to perceive that the communities that keep the intangible cultural heritage alive place themselves in a subordinate position in relation to the so-called “experts”. That is why it is all the more important that curators and researchers establish mutual trust with the bearers of heritage.

²⁶ The opening of the exhibition took place on 10 October 2024, at the SEM in Ljubljana.

Conclusion

Music and dance as cultural expressions, which are an integral part of the intangible cultural heritage as defined by the UNESCO Convention, were discussed in Slovenia even before its ratification. In 2005, this topic was included in the guide to the intangible cultural heritage of Slovenia which was published on the then *European Cultural Heritage Days* (for more see Prešeren and Gorenc 2005). The events that took place during the *European Cultural Heritage Days* were devoted to directions that offer the possibility of safeguarding “the diversity of the identities of nations and ethnic communities in the widest material, social and spiritual scope, which are threatened by globalisation processes in the field of economy, communications, languages, dialects and culture in general” (Hazler 2005, 5). Adoption of the 2003 UNESCO Convention brings to each country a new perspective on intangible cultural heritage and the implementation of the Convention according to UNESCO’s guidelines and desired goals of the country.

Completing the Slovenian National Register requires considerable professional effort– work in the field and cooperation with the communities, which is reflected in the number of elements inscribed in the Register (134 elements and 401 bearers – on 21 August 2024 – of which there are ten elements that are related to music and dance), and the great interest of bearers in the registration. This suggests that music and dance are important elements of our identity and that people recognise them as a type of intangible cultural heritage that underpins their everyday lives. At the same time, we must be aware that maintaining such a Register (list) means positioning “selected” intangible cultural heritage as elements of the identity of the Slovenian nation on the map of elements, which are often used to promote Slovenian culture and the nation. Nevertheless, music and dance are still an important aspect of annual customs, life-cycle customs, work customs and celebrations. In Slovenia, even today, spontaneous singing and dancing are still common at weddings, parties, festivities and celebrations.

The musealisation of each topic consistently presents challenges in terms of collecting policy, interpretation of museum artefacts, quantity of material, selection of objects, and the like. The musealisation of intangible cultural heritage, especially dance and music whose final “product” is intangible, something that cannot be placed in a display case, is an immense challenge. Therefore, when dealing with these topics during work processes at the museum, a participatory approach is essential, which means

intensive cooperation with heritage bearers and joint creation of content and decision-making with respect to musealisation.

In addition to their economic impact, museums also generate knowledge for and about the community; they are spaces of social interaction and dialogue, a source of creativity and innovation for the local community. To contribute to sustainable development, museums must be involved in the community as active and important community stakeholders (Babšek 2023, 11).

In the exhibition *Dance – Europe’s Living Heritage in Motion*, created as part of the *Dance-ICH* project, the SEM expanded the section where we present the dance heritage of Prekmurje, with an emphasis on the living *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* dances which are spontaneously danced on various occasions (e.g. at parties, junior proms, graduations, weddings or festivities). Many dancers also perform as part of folk dance ensembles, where different generations, from the youngest to the oldest, create different choreographies. These simultaneously represent their creativity and their connection to tradition. Folk dance ensembles play a significant role in transferring knowledge and raising awareness of the presence of dance tradition in Prekmurje, a knowledge which then suddenly comes to life with good music at numerous celebrations and events.

When working on the case study and preparing the exhibition, we combined the experiences and work of the Coordinator and the SEM. As a museum, we wish to use the potential of the opportunity available to us to employ ways of promoting intangible cultural heritage to its advantage, thereby contributing to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and raising awareness of its importance (see e.g. Nwabueze 2013). We hope the museum’s visitors will get itchy feet and learn to dance the *sotiš* and *šamarjanka* from Prekmurje.

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12.

Facilitating Dance Activities in an Ethnographic Museum: A Case Study from the ASTRA Museum, Romania

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This chapter examines how the ASTRA Museum safeguards traditional dance through the case of the Lads Group from Rucăr, Braşov County, Romania. Within the *Dance-ICH* project (2022–2024), researchers documented the group’s practices and meaning while involving the community in museum activities. Using fieldwork, archives, education, and digital tools, the museum built a participatory model that revitalises dance traditions, strengthens local identity, and connects them to today’s audiences.

Keywords: Romanian traditional dance, Lads Group, ASTRA Museum, intangible cultural heritage

Traditional dance, as a cultural and social expression, reflects the values, history and identity of communities. Its ephemeral character and dependence on live performance make its safeguarding a complex and challenging process, especially with respect to its documentation, representation of ethnographic context and contemporary adaptation. Romania's national museum the Complexul National Museum ASTRA (hereafter referred to as the ASTRA Museum) utilises various means to archive the dance movement, costumes, music and social contexts related to traditional dance and aims to balance ethnographic faithfulness with relevance to contemporary sensitivities. The museum's research and exhibition on the Lads Group from the village of Rucăr (*Ceata defeciori din Rucăr*) in Braşov County was undertaken as a collaborative partner with the project *Dance as ICH: New Models of Facilitating Participatory Dance Events (Dance-ICH)*. As well as documenting contemporary performances of the group's dancing, music, costumes, associated customs and cultural significance, the ASTRA Museum also aimed to identify ways of facilitating dance participation within an ethnographic museum.

The ASTRA Museum and Cultural Heritage

Located in Sibiu in central Romania, the ASTRA Museum is the most important ethnomuseum in the country and operates as a dynamic institution bridging traditional and modern cultural expressions. Its mission aligns with European and national cultural policies to promote traditional cultural phenomena and it engages in research, preservation and education related to both tangible and intangible heritage. Following modernisation of the museum infrastructure and implementation of various projects and programmes on communicating and interpreting its collections for a wide public, the ASTRA Museum was widely recognised in 2019 as a pilot-museum, winning the European Museum Academy – Luigi Micheletti Award (2019). A key feature of the museum's policy is its nurturing of heritage communities, that is local communities whose heritage resources and knowledge remain and are used by the community so that they can generate income and ensure sustainable development at a local and regional level. As the museum's Director General Ciprian Ştefan, explains:

The ASTRA Museum invests in programmes meant to improve the cultural life of the community, and to encourage people to

transform tradition into an active part of their everyday life. The ASTRA Museum develops programmes meant to contribute to developing a balanced relationship between the rural and urban environments, having as a meeting point regional resources, the tangible heritage. (Ștefan 2022, 64)

With respect to intangible cultural heritage, the ASTRA Museum's programmes aim to identify, conserve, research and valorise all aspects of traditional art and culture, including folk crafts and technologies, songs, dances, customs, rituals, holidays, children's games and sports, language and verbal expressions.

As both cultural and social expression, traditional dance is not only integral to daily life in rural Romania but it also has a role to play in the goal of institutions to collect, study and promote intangible cultural heritage. Research on traditional dance has hitherto not been a primary concern of the Romanian museum sector, but the ASTRA Museum regards dance as a living expression of intangible cultural heritage. Consequently, the museum undertakes research projects employing documentary techniques of audio-visual recording, interviews with community members and the collection of relevant materials that enrich the museum's archive. It also utilises digital methods to archive dance-related elements such as the movement, music and costume.

Traditional dance affords an excellent opportunity to realise the policies of UNESCO and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) for museums to safeguard intangible heritage, using their mandate, infrastructures and resources. The aims in developing participatory schemes in relation to museum collections is to initiate and sustain cultural and organisational ventures that will attract new audiences, develop public spirit around the museum, and empower local communities in the safeguarding of their intangible heritage.

The ASTRA Museum actively promotes traditional dance as a vital part of intangible cultural heritage through various programmes and community engagement initiatives. Festivals such as the National Festival of Folk Traditions (*Festivalul Național al Tradițiilor Populare*) have played a crucial role in promoting interaction between local communities and visitors to the museum, while dance events and workshops held in the museum not only safeguard dance but also enhance local cultural identity and community cohesion. Two notable events organised at the museum that



Figure 1. Lads Group from the village of Rucăr, the Commune of Viştea, Braşov County. Photo: Dumitru Andrei, 2023.

profile also traditional dance are the *ASTRA Multicultural* and *NEAMURI*. These projects include collaboration with various communities and bring folk ensembles, traditional music and educational elements to the fore. The latter, organised in partnership with the Subcarpaţi Cultural Centre, presents a national musical-cultural trail of the *neamuri* (ethnicities) in Romania, gathered into a one-day experience in the centre of the museum. In addition, the *Anima ASTRA* programme profiles traditional dance through interactive workshops, creating a participatory framework where the public is invited to learn and experience traditional dances. The museum also arranges exhibitions and cultural events that emphasise the local communities' representative cultural artefacts, complementing them with participatory events or practical demonstrations.

Thus the ASTRA Museum has built a sympathetic environment and demonstrable track record for facilitating dance activities in a museum, together with its long-established reputation as a preeminent ethnographic museum complex, housing major collections and notable buildings related

to Romanian rural life. It was therefore exceptionally well positioned in 2022 to create cultural events and performances that combined archival and new ethnographic fieldwork, together with a brief to encourage embodied cultural knowledge exchange between intangible cultural heritage specialists in the museum, in the local community and among the general public, through the medium of participatory dance activities which would be held within the museum.

Selecting and Planning the Case Study

Ethnographic museums, especially open-air museums, provide an excellent context for the re-presentation of traditional dance ritual complexes whose diverse elements typically take place across a variety of contexts in the village environment. A number of key criteria needed to be observed when, in the early stages of the *Dance-ICH* project, the ASTRA Museum began a process to identify a suitable local community with whom to work. We wanted to work with a rural community whose members, especially the young, were active in participating in a rich traditional dance culture which had been transmitted to them over several generations in the locality. It was also important that the traditions had not become fixed in their form but revealed subtle modifications over time, responding to changes within the local environment. This feature ideally required the existence of archival material about the traditional dance culture for comparative purposes between past and present. Of great importance was the local community's willingness to work with the ASTRA Museum in documenting their traditional dance culture and its associated customs, and especially for the selected heritage community to benefit from this interaction. Raising the public profile of the local intangible cultural heritage and hence its value was key in the selection process, as was the prerequisite to choose a case study in which visitors to the ASTRA Museum could participate.

We decided upon the Lads Group from the village of Rucăr, a predominantly ethnic Romanian village situated in southern Transylvania on the right bank of the River Olt in the commune of Viştea, Braşov County. In the mid-twentieth century, every village in the region had at least one Lads Group, but, over subsequent decades, interest in traditional carols, music and dances has declined. At the time of our research, within the five villages of the commune, only those of Rucăr and Viştea de Jos maintained the custom. Variation in style in Romanian traditional dance distinguishes dif-

ferent communities from each other, even within the same region, and the Lads Group dance ritual complex is an important marker of local identity for the people of Rucăr. They are profoundly attached to and proud of their cultural traditions, seeking to improve strategies for their safeguarding. Furthermore, the villagers are eager to benefit from higher exposure and understanding of their dance ritual complex in order to attract tourists and thus income to the locality.

Romanian ethnologist Ilie Moise defines Lads Groups as “youth gatherings of the traditional village world that are established around the solstice holidays” (usually near Saint Nicholas) which “are made up of teenagers between 14 and 18 years old, sometimes of young men between 25 and 30 years old” (1999, 7). Our field research also identified these distinctive features in the *Lads Group* from the village of Rucăr. The Rucăr Lads Group transmits and enacts a distinctive traditional dance repertoire that operates in the context of winter calendar customs and has a strong collective character and a cyclical performance frequency. There are three defining elements in these dance rituals: chanted texts and lyrics of songs that accompany the dances; the music – instruments and the melodic lines; and the choreography – the movements specific to each type of dance (Anghel 2003, 36–39). The dances – the male *Fecioreasca*, the couple dances *Poșovoaița* (*Hațegana*) and *Șchioapa* (*Învârtita*) and the group dances *Jiana* and *Sârba* – mark key winter celebrations. The elements of the ritual complex are transmitted by experienced members of the Lads Group who teach the younger members to understand and gain proficiency in the movement techniques principally through imitation (Herseni 1977, 42–45). Transmission in this dance ritual involves more than the movement structures alone. As ethnochoreologist Anca Giurchescu argues, dance also embodies a series of non-choreographic elements such as facial expressions, meaningful gestures, verbal and non-verbal sounds, costumes, how to choose partners, and the community’s social conventions and values (2001, 111).

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, research was undertaken in this region on the Lads Group ritual complex, the records of which are located in the ASTRA Museum, in local archives and elsewhere. On analysing these sources, it was evident that clear similarities existed in the carols currently performed by the Lads Group from Rucăr, a situation paralleled when comparing past and present versions of the chanted lyrics. Documentation from the ASTRA Museum Photography Archive from 1956 also revealed the stability of the traditional costume as well as the traditional dance forms.



Figure 2. Dancing in Rucăr, the Commune of Viştea, Braşov County. Photo: Herbert Hoffmann, 1956. ASTRA Museum Archive.

Through undertaking ethnographic field research during the *Dance-ICH* project, we were able to confirm that music and dance in this heritage community continue to be essential for socialising and for establishing and sustaining intergenerational connections (Bîrlea 1982, 20).

Our application of the remit of the project led us to develop field research guided by the following suppositions:

1. That working with the cultural organisations within the community would strengthen the degree of cohesion amongst its members which would then contribute to safeguarding the traditions
2. That by developing and undertaking programmes which involved socio-cultural engagement this would enable the transmission of dance through active, participatory techniques
3. That by developing regular participatory and interactive programmes this would enable public access to the intangible cultural heritage and help to valorise the dance

4. That by developing relationships with social organisations such as family, school, peer group, and public institutions, this would lead to increased access for members of the local community to the elements of the intangible cultural heritage
5. That dance belongs to complex cultural manifestations which facilitate socialisation.

In order to test these assumptions, we employed techniques of direct observation, interviews and themed discussions with our local consultants. We were aided in this by employing a specially designed interview guide, by documenting people, objects and events via photographs and video and by an observation sheet. The interview guide comprised questions to establish identification (organisation name, function within the organisation, the role of each organisation member, the history of the organisation), questions to understand how the group is organised (registration, mode of meeting and frequency, location, activities undertaken, transmission of information and technical means within the organisation, sequential roles, regulations, resources pertaining to materials, humans, logistics and budget), open-ended questions related to complementary elements such as traditional costumes, props and music (articles of clothing used, manner of their manufacture, buying, preserving the garments, signs and symbols used, repertoire – songs, chanted texts, age of repertoire), open-ended questions about the dance performance (dance, type of dance, the area distribution of the dance, choreography, associated rituals, related events, musical instruments used, sound track) and open-ended questions concerning the extent of engagement with the local community and the degree of accessibility.

Documentation included audio-video recording of the interviews, of the dances specific to the Lads Group, and of the related manifestations and main organisational activities of the group. Finally, a photo archive with representative images of local community members and of the group was created, adding to the ASTRA Museum's archive and illustrating the development of intangible cultural elements within a community over time.

The observation sheets were completed through systematic observation of attitudes, behaviour, and interactions between the members of the Lads Group throughout the entire enactment of the winter ritual season. Our objectives were to record the cultural phenomena, and the relationships between community members; but also to note relationships between the

local community and the Lads Group members in order to gain insights into correspondences (or not) between what we as researchers were told and what actually transpired.

The Lads Group from Rucăr

By correlating archival information and conducting ethnographic research, including oral histories, within the local community, we were able to demonstrate continuity and change in this ritual dance complex over several decades. In 1908 the village of Rucăr had three Lads Groups (Irimie 1956, 5) which had dropped to two by 1956, the younger one composed of members aged fifteen and the elder of members aged seventeen, although at certain periods these two groups became mixed between young and old. Historically, according to the mayor of Viştea (Andrei 2022a) the Lads Group was a friendship group organised by an *ad hoc* committee of single boys aged above eighteen years. Given the decrease in the number of young men in the village, a married man of older years may now join the Lads Group. Training to join the group begins in childhood, the young boys imbuing its spirit from an early age and trying to learn the dances and carols representative of their local community.

Preparations for the annual ritual typically began in the autumn at the grape harvest but the main season for the observance of the ritual dance complex is during the winter holiday season. In early December, young unmarried boys and girls gather at the house of the Host to form the Group, and young men are elected to take on specific roles, taking over the entire organisation of the village in their responsibilities to respect and carry out the traditions and customs. Since the mid-twentieth century, the criteria for electing the “mayor of the group” (*vătaful mare*) have shifted. In 1956, the grounds for election were on account of the candidate being a “smart boy and he listens to what we are saying” (Irimie 1956, 6) whereas in recent times the Lads Group from Rucăr elect the mayor according to his experience and knowledge, organisational and leadership skills (Andrei 2022a). The positions within this Lads Group are the mayor, vice-mayor, treasurer, cook, cupbearer and the stoker – this last position concerns the purchase of firewood needed for the closing rituals of the event.

Dancing accompanies all the events organised by the Lads Group from beginning to end. In December the young married boys and girls learn

and rehearse the whole repertoire of dances and shouts. During the day on Christmas Eve, the performance of simple carols mainly by young children begin. This is followed in the evening by the boys who sing longer, more elaborate carols to notable people within the village hierarchy, such as the mayor, priest, teacher, professor, engineer and the like. The boys eventually visit the homes of unmarried girls who join them in carolling. On Christmas Day, Saint John's Day and Epiphany, in the afternoon, the community gathers at the Cultural Centre where the Lads Group start the dancing. On New Year's Eve, the Group dances at crossroads and at community wells in a ritual observance to guarantee a water supply for the whole village. Other dancing by the Lads Group from Rucăr takes place around people, fountains, and crosses, an activity that implies taking control over that particular person, place or object.



Figure 3.
Lad wearing the cap.
Photo: Dumitru
Andrei, 2023.

Costume plays a significant role in the ritual complex (ASTRA Museum 1955). Symbolic accessories mark the group's identity or the social status of the wearer. For example, the cap (*căciula*) which the Rucăr group call *vâstră* is placed on the head of the Host while carolling in order to protect him from harm. In the Rucăr group, the young men always wear their cap, which they make themselves, when dancing and carolling. It is decorated with peacock feathers, beads, tassels, round fragments of glass and pieces of vibrantly coloured fabric. Even at the end of the ritual period, even if they no longer wear the whole costume, the Lads Group from Rucăr always dance and sing wearing their cap. In interview, the mayor of the commune underlined the uniqueness of the costumes from Rucăr, in comparison with those from other villages in the region:

The main colours remain black and white. White symbolizes the purity, while the black stands for the peoples' life that was not that easy...In Rucăr we talk about *șurțe* (aprons) in special colours. Only here will you find this kind of model. Or, for example, the *mânica* (sleeve) from the blouse is not fastened, it is wide and sewn with *pui*, (traditional motifs) we say like the Dacians', that of the older type. (Andrei 2022a)

At the end of the ritual complex (the *bățutul tufei*), just parts of the overall costume such as the blouse, cap or boots may be worn. This occurs in January when the Lads Group is dissolved, following dancing accompanied with chanted texts at ritually significant places. Each member of the group builds himself a torch for climbing the hill where bales of straw have been prepared to set alight and roll down to the valley. This ritual has a playful and amusing character (Irimie 1956, 27) which is expressed through the lyrics, the dancing and the accessories used (small or big bells attached to the feet). The procession involves the whole community in the final ritual in which the presence of fire symbolically prepares for the New Year and buries the year that is passed, a ritual that is preserved to this day.

In Rucăr, the musical instruments used to provide the melodic line for dancing are: violin, clarinets, accordion and keyboard. In 2022–2023, the Lads Group contracted a music band to accompany the dances but at the same time, a young member of the Lads Group learned to play the saxophone and now accompanies the group when carolling and dancing, together with one of the girls who plays the drum. This is a less expensive arrangement for the group.

There are different types of dances specific to this ethnographic region Țara Făgărașului (Bucșan 1957, 4) that are repeated in a strict order: *Fecioreasca*, *Purtata*, *Învârtita*, *Poșovoiaica*. In the case of the Lads Group from Rucăr village, there are four repetitions of the dance cycle in the following sequence:

1. Men's dance, *Fecioreasca*
2. Couple dances, *Poșovoiaica* (*Hațegana*), *Șchioapa* (*Învârtita*)
3. Group dances *Jiana* and *Sârba*

Fecioreasca is considered to be a men's ritual dance, energetic, virtuosic and composed of figures which are specifically adapted to the local men's dancing skills. Accompanied by chanted texts, it involves jumps performed in a sustained tempo, zig-zag "walking" movements executed to the left and right, hand to foot taps and elevated arms. The dancers keep a distance between them, the space being necessary for the free arm movements and vigorous jumps. The whole is made up of four dance sequences, each of them consisting of three specific figures which are repeated. A demanding dance, *Fecioreasca* can last up to ten minutes and requires peak physical condition from its performers.

In ASTRA Museum's Archive there is a chanted text documented by Pimen Constantinescu, Nicolae Munteanu, Gheorghe Popovici and Andrei Vasiliu which was collected from villagers in Rucăr in 1956 (Monteanu 1956; Popovici and Vasiliu 1956) and could be heard during the *Fecioreasca* dance: "Shout boys, shout, / Do not sit like in winter gatherings, / That you have mouths to shout, / And feet to dance!" A similar text was collected in 2023 but it is chanted at a different moment – it no longer accompanies the dance but can be heard as the Lads Group follow their itinerary through the village: "Shout boys, shout! / Shout that you do not steal, / That you have mouths to shout / And feet to dance!" (Andrei 2023). *Poșovoiaica* can be performed in pairs or in a group of three persons. It differs from the other couple dances in that it lacks a "walking" element, consisting of only two parts – walking on the spot and spinning. The component elements of the dance repertoire are extremely varied according to the rhythm of the dance or the execution technique. A distinctive feature in the performance of *Învârtita* or *Șchioapa* as it is called in Rucăr is the limp step: this first occurs on the third step, then the second and when the dancers change direction. The limp step again appears at the third and second step, a feature that leads to desynchronisation between couples even when dancing the same dance

(Andrei 2022b). The *Șchioapa* is danced face to face, the girl placing both her hands on the lad's shoulders while he puts his arms around the girl's waist. The dance tempo is *allegro moderato* and is accompanied throughout by chanted texts. The dance begins with "walking" – a movement of four steps to the right and then to the left which is repeated four times. It continues with spinning with the lame step. One of the group dances, the *Sârba* is performed in a semicircular formation while the *Jiana* can be performed either as a circle or couple dance (Bîrlea 1982, 70–108).

Joining the Lads Group marks a rite of passage for the young men of the community and the dances and carols represent not only a cultural expression of the community but also operate to attain social cohesion, reflecting the values and rules of the community. It was extremely important therefore to researchers from the ASTRA Museum that the project should not only document the ritual dance complex as it is enacted today and within living memory, but that it should be represented to and engaged with by the public within the museum setting, bearing witness to its ethnographic complexity. Of especial importance to the ASTRA Museum was genuine collaboration between the local community members and the museum in achieving that task. The result was an Exhibition at the ASTRA Museum on view from November 2024 until December 2025 which, as well as presenting findings from the local research initiative, also displayed material from the other five partner countries involved in the *Dance-ICH* project.

Facilitating Dance Activities within ASTRA Museum

As noted above, the ASTRA Museum has a history of engaging its audience in participatory events, including traditional dance workshops, lessons on musical expression and other activities that promote local cultural traditions. However, the *Dance-ICH* project was the first time that the ASTRA Museum has been involved as a partner within an international project dedicated to dance. Working with a complex network to engage the local community and the wider public, the ASTRA Museum proposed the following methods to facilitate participation: an interactive exhibition, dance workshops and events, educational programmes for the public to learn dance steps specific to the area, film projections and meetings with specialists in the field. Through analysis of past and present research on the Lads Group from Rucăr, a detailed perspective on a local tradition was



Figure 4. Lads Group from Rucăr, the Commune of Viștea, Brașov County. The exhibition Dance – Europe's Living Heritage in Motion, ASTRA Museum, Sibiu. Photo: Silviu Popa, 2024.



Figure 5. Case study projection. The exhibition Dance – Europe's Living Heritage in Motion, ASTRA Museum, Sibiu. Photo: Silviu Popa, 2024.

offered to both the community and public. The ASTRA Museum created a structure that combined active participatory and performance events in order to demonstrate the worth of dance in a cultural and community context and which facilitated aesthetic and emotional responses to the dance, creating a strong bond between performers and spectators. As collaborative partners in the *Dance-ICH* project, the museum researchers were also able to contextualise Romanian rural dance among the wider dance traditions of Europe.

The resultant Exhibition from the *Dance-ICH* project used various techniques to valorise dance, including audio-video materials and descriptive panels. The former followed three conceptual directions:

1. The Dance Loop – this entailed short dance clips put together in one video sequence, the focus being on the music and movements of the dancers. The aim of the collaborative partners was to integrate all the selected dances from the partner countries into a single visual presentation.
2. Pedagogical Dance – this was an instructional video featuring dances from each of the six case studies from different countries. For each country, a specific, local dance was identified, the recording underlining the dance sequences, the steps, the position of the dancers, the rhythm, and the music. In the Romanian example slow motion video techniques were also used to emphasise the types of movement for each dance sequence.
3. The Case Study – the case study was featured in a documentary film in which each collaborative partner explained their approach to their selected dance community. Our example compared past and present records, noted the community's place in time and space, its specific features, modes of organisation and operation, the dance types, customs and rituals. It also identified clothing items, alongside the repertoire of music, song, chant and choreography of the ritual dance complex.

During the Exhibition at the ASTRA Museum, educational sessions were organised for six groups of primary school pupils who learned about the dances specific to each of the collaborative countries in the project. The introduction to the Exhibition included location of the six partner countries on a large-scale map and a discussion about which musical instruments are associated with traditional dancing. For participants to gain an interactive experience, musical sounds specifically related to each instrument were

made accessible via QR codes which were attached to the bilingual captions identifying each exhibit. The Dance Loop video enabled the children to explore the rhythms of the music and the dance movements, while an interactive interface also facilitated individual selection and investigation of specific communities. Further analysis and information were provided in the descriptive panels from each partner country. The pupils were able to recognise and compare musical instruments displayed in the exhibition with those presented in the case studies, noting similarities and differences. The photo-corner area with the figures of two amateur musicians from the Lads Group in Rucăr allowed the children to identify themselves with the characters and to explore details of the traditional costume. Participants also had occasion to learn a dance technique of their own choice from the Exhibition, selecting their favourite dance via a digital interface before learning the specific dance steps and practising the movements.

The last section of the Exhibition was dedicated to the Lads Group from Rucăr, the organisation of which was realised entirely in a co-creative manner with the community members. This process led to items of traditional costume being loaned for exhibition and to the selection of related archival photographs for display. A documentary film on the community of Rucăr in which members of the Lads Group are the chief protagonists effectively conveyed the genuine ethos of the Lads Group.

Conclusion

Our role as a national ethnographic museum in Romania is to be involved both in the promotion of communities, their customs and traditions, and in raising awareness among community members of the values they hold and which they can exploit for their benefit and that of other communities. Through this *Dance-ICH* project, we aimed to create a link between visitors and national traditions, emphasising the value of dance in safeguarding cultural identity and strengthening intercultural connections. To counteract the decline in interest in traditional dance and all that implies, we implemented various educational and cultural initiatives, such as the organisation of dance workshops in order to sensitise young people and stimulate their desire to learn these customs currently enacted by the heritage communities. The entire programme was notable for its diversity, consistency and interactive character. Through collaboration

and research, we achieved our goals of facilitating the transmission of knowledge of intangible cultural heritage, utilising modern technologies and audio-visual materials, as well as elements of traditional exhibition techniques, such as panels and descriptive captions. The events were designed to be accessible and educational, stimulating the curiosity and active involvement of the audience.

At the participatory event at the opening of the exhibition in November 2024, the mayor of Viştea commune underlined the importance of involving cultural and public institutions in the safeguarding and promotion of heritage, emphasising the vulnerability of small communities to cultural dissolution. This event, organised together with the Lads Group, offered an interactional framework to bring together the community from the city of Sibiu with that from the village of Rucăr, transforming the ASTRA Museum into a performance space for traditional dance. The openness with which the people of Rucăr engaged themselves in collaborating with the museum's specialists was a result of their great interest in making their local traditions and dances better known and also their concern to strengthen the cohesion of their own community. There were some challenges for the museum researchers such as the reluctance of some community members from Rucăr to attend events organised in unfamiliar locations such as the museum. To address this, we implemented training and familiarisation sessions designed to help participants feel more comfortable with the new formats. We also encouraged their active involvement in the process of organising the events so that they could become more confident and undertake key roles in promoting their heritage.

Strategic marketing via promotion and media dissemination services in local, national and international media both on- and offline targeted the attraction of a diverse audience, from dance enthusiasts and specialists to the general public, including children, young people and adults. The dance events organised as part of the Exhibition brought together different cultural and ethnic communities, valorising the dance specific to each one involved in *Dance-ICH*. The museum's series of participatory events gave visitors the chance to learn different elements from the traditional dances of local Romanians and of other ethnic populations resident in the country. During March–April and July 2025, weekly courses of Romanian and Saxon traditional dances, coordinated by professional dancers from the ensemble “*Junii Sibiului*” and the Saxon dance group of the Saxon Forum from Sibiu, were organised for young people and adults. Less formalised

spatial arrangements between the performers and the audience, such as circular formations or other configurations, promoted a stronger sense of being part of the dancing experience. Participants felt freer, for example, to respond to aesthetic moments (such as clapping their hands) or to ask questions. During these events we collected impressions from participants using questionnaires and direct interviews. Many visitors said that they were moved by being given opportunities to learn traditional dancing in an interactive arena. Some highlighted how as a result they felt a greater connection to Romanian traditions, citing feelings of well-being and of bonding. Many visitors expressed a desire to participate in future events, suggesting a growing interest in this type of cultural heritage and a greater commitment to safeguarding and promoting local traditional dances.

Overall, the events organised in association with the Exhibition had a significant impact on all participants, affording them opportunity to express their creativity through dance and to pass on their knowledge. At the same time, the general public could discover and appreciate the cultural uniqueness of Rucăr village, especially through the prism of traditional dance and music. Inviting the communities that preserve the intangible cultural heritage of dance and also the visitors to engage in the cultural activities we proposed, generated active exploration and learning. In the future, we will be able to develop, in partnership, new programmes and activities of dance that meet the community's needs in order to more fully realise and enhance the vision of the ASTRA Museum as a world leading cultural institution that bridges tradition and modernity.

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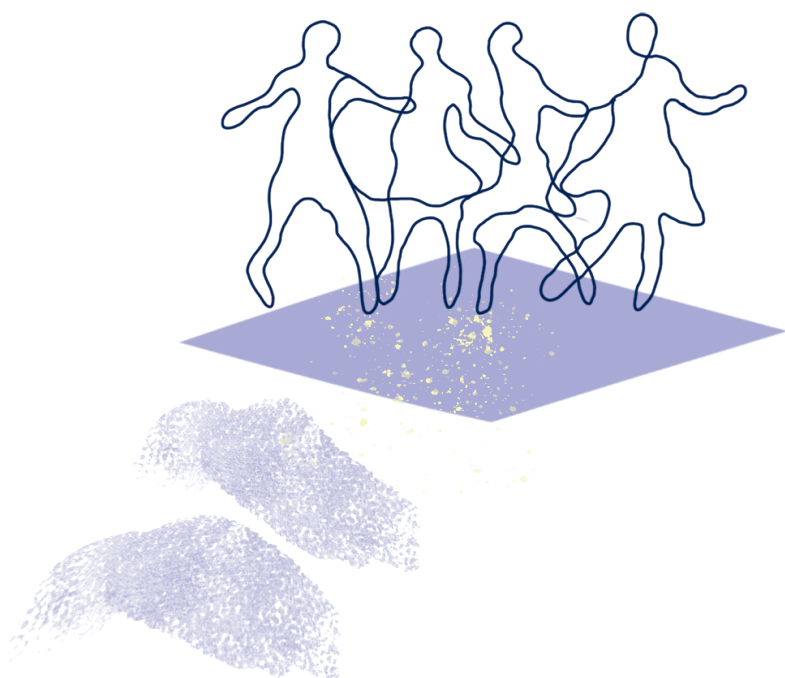
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