

PhD thesis abstract

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Community and Authenticity:

An Examination of the Contemporary Hungarian Folk Dance Revival Movement

In my doctoral thesis, I investigated views and practices related to the notion of authenticity and the contemporary folk dance community. Using multi-sited ethnography method, I conducted classical ethnographic fieldwork in Budapest at a *legényes* solo male dance competition and at a folk dance camp in Transylvania, Romania. Additionally, I extended the scope of the study by analysing memes on related social media platforms.

The research was based on two hypotheses. Firstly, the investigation assumed that the folk dance community could be defined as a distinct cultural group based on its organisation, functioning, and dance culture. In the analysis, I utilised approaches from subcultural studies and dance anthropology. According to the second hypothesis, the two basic factors of the concept of authenticity are the folk dance collections recorded during the 20th century and the performers of peasant origin, the so-called “*adatközlők*” (informants), who are born into the tradition.

Jan Assmann’s work on cultural memory, particularly the concepts of “cold” and “hot” memory provided a theoretical basis for defining the characteristics of the group. For folk dancers, the recollection of the past manifests as a chosen activity. Through the reconstruction of folk dance collections, a “frozen” state of the past is preserved, while through personal and direct contact with the “*adatközlők*” and experiences of living traditions, a hot memory is created.

In the context of the folk dance competition, contestants are judged according to the folk dance archive film and their dance performance skills. Authenticity involves a representation faithful to the recording, encompassing not only the reproduction of movements but also the external features of the social class or period, the individual movement character of the “informant” dancer, and the personality of the revival dancer. At the folk dance camp, the participants have the opportunity to meet representatives of traditional folk culture in an organised setting and to learn about the cultural values of the Transylvanian Plain. Through the authenticity of the performance, campers experience local traditional culture in an organised manner, bringing them closer to the folk culture they wish to learn and preserve.

The concept of authenticity determines the functioning, activities, and mindset of the examined community. The purpose of its redefinition is to mark the boundaries of the group and demonstrate the commitment of its members.