Transformations in the Traditional Dance Culture of a 20th Century Village in the Mezőség Region

THESES

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I. Background

Investigation of the transformations of the 20th century dance culture in the Mezőség Region (Transylvanian Plain) is vital from more aspects. Researches focusing on the folk culture of the Transylvanian Mezőség region, Romania, began fairly late, in the 1940s. Folk music, dances and related customs quickly dispersed in the Hungarian scientific circles. The investigations of György Martin in the 1970s called the attention to some features (certain dances, structure of the dance order, archaic customs of organising dance occasions, etc.) of the local peasants’ dance culture (heretofore referred to as Mezőség dance), which fulfil an important position in the European cultural history. Researches and informative lectures of dance folklorists promoted the popularity of the Mezőség dance culture among stage performers afterwards, to an extent that mezőségi (vernacular version of the ‘dance from Mezőség’) became an emblematic dance order of the Táncház (dance house) movement arising in the 1970s. Consequently, numerous dancers and amateur researchers from Transylvania, Hungary and other countries have visited the area since the 1980s and conducted small- and large scale investigations and observations, which are more or less reliable from a scientific point of view. In spite of this intensive curiosity and enormous datasets, no one has produced a summary, which would, at least, have summed up all available conclusions of this specific topic and given a profound overview of the current transformation and those having occurred since the scientific discovery of the Mezőség dance and dance tradition. Owing to the lack of summarizing studies in the field, a remarkably static, biased image of the Mezőség dance culture is available to both experts and the people at large. Works of semi-scientific and informative nature distort indeed, that ‘positive myth’ about Mezőség itself having spread since the middle of the 20th century; however, historic, economic, and social changes have influenced even that putatively archaic Mezőség dance culture in terms of both formal and functional aspects, furthermore, the concept of ethnic property has also changed during the course of time.

II. Structure of the Thesis

In my PhD dissertation I follow changes of the dance culture of Visa/Vișea – a village in the Mezőség region1 – in the 20th century.

I establish the introduction section by presenting the research history of the field, topics I have studied and the research methodology and delineating the framework of interpretation; moreover, I give a brief geographical and ethnographical description of the investigation area.

On founding the grounds of my research I have striven to highlight historical, economic and social transformations of the Transylvanian Mezőség region. I summarize changes having happened earlier than the 20th century as well, as I believe that the deterioration of the 17th century and the new social structure springing from it fundamentally determined the contemporary aspects of the area including landscape ecology – economy, and thus its culture, too.

Besides presenting the spatial distribution of Mezőség region’s folk culture, I accomplish a more precise definition of the local dance dialect and its subdialects. Consequently, I assemble significant results of researches concerning the Mezőség dance culture.

I scrutinize transformations of the dance culture from two important aspects:

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1 Transylvanian Plain
1. I have striven to set up the periodization of the appearance and disappearance of various dances, as well as changes occurred in the motif collection, way of performance and use of space of the individual dances, introducing the process of transformation this way.

2. I delineate social and economic concerns of organizing dance events. Material aspects of the connection among organizers of these occasions, musicians and village youths provide good account of the current economic state. Changes in the organizers’ duties, termination or emergence of certain dance events arranged, or frequented by these people, the restructuration of these occasions’ time frame contributed significant information to my investigation.

With respect to certain analysed phenomena I attempt to outline the formation of the concept of ethnic property.

The summary of my investigation’s conclusion encloses my dissertation with suggestions to further tasks to conduct.

III. Presumptions

- Socio-cultural transformations taking place in the 20th century had been preceded, what is more, determined by the ecologic modification and the relations of private properties that were concluded by the Acts on rationalisation and farm-reallocation coming into force at the end of the 19th century.

- Impacts of great historical storms of the 20th century, the two World Wars, can be detected – even if in an indirect way – on changes of the dance and music culture of Mezőség.

- Socialist alteration of the society and economy, industrialisation, and consequently the appearance of popular culture encouraged by the media after the regime change brought about decisive alterations in the life of this Transylvanian Plain village, which generated even more augmented transformations in the local culture of dance and music.

IV. Research and Analysis

I have been conducting researches concerning changes in the society of Visa and those of its dance and music culture since 1993. I have collected an enormous amount of material during my researches, only a portion of which I can take on processing by this dissertation.

I have had the opportunity to employ many methods during my long-lasting investigation from informal discussions to questionnaire-, structured-, semi-structured and deep interviews, besides participant observation. I strove to gain a better understanding of the still unknown phenomena, or equivocal responses that emerged during these ones by means of so-called recall interviews or checked questions, however, relevant observations, assertions and answers were revealed unequivocally on summarizing that significant amount of emic and etic data, thus the material was next to ‘self-controlled’.

During the course of the investigation I attempted to observe collected data and examined phenomena from a functionalist perspective, in correlation with each other with respect to the context – historical and economic background – in parallel, and paying special attention to the abovementioned political and historical changes. Precedents of my enterprise are represented by earlier Hungarian investigations, e.g. that of Mártá Belényesy focusing on the Székelys of Bukovina, Edit Kaposi’s study in the Bodrogköz region, and that of Lujza Ratkó conducted in the Nyírség region.
With respect to the Modern Age alterations taking place in the peasant dance culture I paid close attention to the paradigm shift emerged in European ethnology after World War II, which concentrated on analysing cultural processes, and thus contemporary research.

I have attempted to detect those elements of Visa’s local dance culture with the intention of highlighting transformations that embed transparently in the texture of local culture and society, but at the same time reflect to relation and connection systems among dance and other cultural phenomena, society and economy. I have intended to interpret the analysed elements, certain data by means of harmonizing them with the textual context presented by a given environment, and economic and social situation of the period, thus making it available for myself, as an outsider as well.

During the series of my investigations I strove to observe and introduce local dance culture from an ‘inside out’ perspective, from the aspect of the people living in it, and in the meantime I attempted to direct the classic ethnographical description toward a Geertzian ‘thick description’ type of analysis: I approached the examined phenomena from different aspects, using interpretations of more people. True stories enclosed in the appendix, as well as quotations of informants inserted into the main text are not only tools for making my statements more impressive and experiential, but also serve as case studies, and in parallel, as text consisting of local terms and mental constructions.

V. Transylvanian Mezőség Region and Visa village

The term Mezőség is a compounded toponym for a hill country enclosed by the rivers Kis and Nagy Szamos (Someş Mic and Someş Mare), Sajó (Șieu), Maros (Mureș) and Aranyos (Arieș), which assemble three hundred Hungarian, Romanian and Saxon settlements. Its population was dominated by Romanian from the 16th century onwards. Visa is located in the core of the area, some 30 km northeast of Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca; it is characterised by mixed population (Hungarian, Romanian and Gypsy). Ethnic Romanian prevailed in its population in the 16th century. Visa village is located in the core of this region, some 30 km from Cluj in northeast direction, and characterized by mixed ethnic groups (Hungarian, Romanian, Gypsy) in its population.

First descriptions of the area were narratives from the 19th century focusing on landscape erosion and Hungarian’s sporadic existence. Scientific writings, dominantly covering ecological and touristic fields, began to proliferate from the 1930s, and subsequently – with a remarkable delay – ethnographical research likewise joined in the region’s discovery in the 1940s. By means of the investigation on folk music and dance that began and thrrove in the middle of the century, and the Táncház movement springing from it gave rise to the positive myth of Mezőség, which emphasized archaic, intact and Hungarian character of the culture; whereas folkloristic researches on dance and music pointed out as early as the middle of the 20th century that all-embracing ethnic interactions represent a fundamental feature of the Mezőség culture.

Folk culture of Mezőség consists of several archaisms even today, however, time has not passed without trace. New cultural patterns and phenomena developed by transformations of the 20th century, socialist modernisation, and then globalisation prevailed in this area too, concluding transition in both social relationships and popular culture.
VI. Historical Overview: Socio-economic and Landscape Ecological Changes

I discuss the period ranging from the Hungarian Conquest and settlement to the 16th century first in the framework of historical overview. Subsequently, I give insight into the destruction of ethnic Hungarians in Mezőség, the region’s economic downfall, and the repopulation dominantly by transhumant herders from the Balkan in the period beginning with the establishment of the Principality of Transylvania and lasting until the Reform age, which was being devastated by wars and epidemics. As a result of the enormous destructions and population shift, a way of life ignoring the area’s ecological endowments overruled the preceding economic system that had largely based on biodiversity. The almost complete extermination of the quondam flourishing cultural landscape led to the decline of economy and infrastructure bringing about significant cultural enclosure.

In the third section I introduce the interval ranging between the Reform age and World War II, comprising either periods of wartime and consolidation, which likewise resulted in remarkable social alterations. These circumstances further augmented the region’s abovementioned economic decay, which began in the 17th century, and the ethnic tension between the local Hungarian and Romanian populations.

I dedicate the fourth section to the period lasting from the socialist realignment of society and economy to present days, during which Ceausescu’s economic and social policies, and the inexpedient processes of ‘re-peasantization’ emerging after the transition amplified the region’s economic problems, thus offering incentives for newer significant cultural changes.

VII. Spatial Arrangement of the Folk Culture in Mezőség

The exact definition of the Mezőség as an entity bearing independent folk culture and its internal structure are still subjects of debate among ethnographers. Some of them regard certain small regions (Borsa Valley, Kis and Nagy Szamos/Someș Valley, etc.) as belonging to the Mezőség, while others do not.

I distinguish a central group of the villages in the Mezőség region (Belső-Mezőség or Central Mezőség: Visa, Magyarpalatka/Pălatca, Katona/ Cătina, Pusztakamarás/Câmărașu, etc.) similarly to György Martin, István Pávai and László Barabás, and relying on material culture and folklore researches and my own investigations. On advancing outward from this core area the concentric circle of so-called peripheral areas takes place (West, North, East and South Mezőség), and boundaries on the edges of the region: Nagy Szamos/Someș Mare Valley, Lápos Valley, Sajó/Șieu Valley, Maros/Mureș Valley, Marosszéki2 Mezőség, Erdőalja/Sub Pădure area, Borsa Valley, and Kis Szamos/Someș Mic Valley, etc.

A further, smaller group of the villages can be distinguished in the area of Belső-Mezőség concerning dance and music culture; in the regular weekend dance events of these villages organised by local youths in the 1960s, gypsy musicians of Magyarpalatka would play the music. I assign the name Palatka dance district to this area in my dissertation. Among other villages, Visa is located in there.

VIII. Dance Research in the Transylvanian Mezőség

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2 Szék: former unit of territorial organisation
The history of relevant music and dance researches concerning Mezőség can be divided into three major sections:

I. Discovery of Mezőség. Pál Járdányi and László Lajtha, dance researchers, accomplished exceptionally precise and detailed descriptions of the dance and music culture of three villages of Mezőség in the 1940s, which raised the attention of ethnographers to local archaisms.

II. Owing to the first summarizing works of Zoltán Kallós, György Martin and their colleagues who conducted folk dance and music investigations from the 1950s and 1960s we can obtain accurate information about the dance culture of Mezőség.

III. Folk music and dance researchers, those concerned, amateur inquirers, people of Táncház events have been wandering to this area since the 1980s.

IX. Development of the motif collection

Ritual dances and relevant stick dances, which are representing late derivative of quondam weapon dances, had ceased to exist in the Mezőség at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.

The use of space in fast lad’s dance (sűrű legényes) went through changes between the World Wars (shifting from variants of group dance walking around the circle to solo dance), while the motif set of the dance have been changing significantly since the 1950s and 1960s (leg slaps prevail over motifs of the legs).

The trend of slow lad’s dance (ritka legényes) likewise terminated in the 1950s.

Both dance types (sűrű and ritka legényes) were influenced by the music and motifs of tîrnaveana dance, which spread in the studied area from the direction of the Aranyos Valley in the 1950s. The formalized variant of men’s dance characterized by set motifs had nearly completely displaced slow and fast lad’s dance from the dance repertoire by the end of the 1960s. Tîrnaveana is still popular among youngsters who can dance.

Négyes3 dance, which was danced by two couples in a circle, disappeared from the dance order of adults and transmitted to children’s dance events, in which it existed even at the end of the 1950s.

Slow dances with asymmetrical beating that began dance cycles (slow gypsy dance and joc românesc) were the first ones to vanish from the group of couple dances in the 1950s. The Hungarians’ slow dance was reanimated by the revival movement that came into contact with the village in the 1970s (by Zoltán Kallós).

The trend of czardas appearing in Mezőség at the end of the 19th century did not change the motif collection of the couple dances of Belső-Mezőség. Although they took over its term and accompanimental music, they employed motifs of the local turning couple dances.

The beginning of the 20th century brought changes to the motif sets of the czardas, sűrű/fast czardas, and szökős/escape czardas: according to reminiscences the generation (both men and women) born in the end of the 19th century danced clicking and sliding motifs, several types of changing the turn during coupled turning; moreover, the ratio of ‘luring’ motifs were also higher in the dances of those born at the beginning of the 20th century. We were able to detect this in the dance performance of some couples dancing in archaic manner. The age class born in the 1920s and 30s would indeed spin far more under the arm, and performed more leg slapping while leaning on the girl’s arm.

It appears right now that the Romanian majority’s particularly rich couple dance form using many spinning under the arm could have been adopted by the inhabitants of isolated

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3 Quadrille
Hungarian villages by around World War I. For an accurate response to this issue we would need further, primarily historical researches, and ‘penetrating’ investigations conducted in Romanian villages in Belső-Mezőség.

Folkish artistic dances, as well as social dances already occurred after World War I, however, they did not embed organically into the local dance order. Nonetheless, the use of space in their performance and changes in the set of figures suggest that they have already been on the path to folklorization.

Modern age social dances and postmodern dances integrated neither in formal aspect nor in the use of space into the local traditional dance culture. Their occurrence in the village can be regarded as a consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation taking place in the middle of the 20th century, and on the other hand, and the strong culture-forming power of gradually intensifying media. In the latter case, not only western fashions of dance and music but also eastern impacts can be detected on the present-day popular culture of Visa.

Transformation of the dance order is closely related to the appearance or disappearance of certain dance types. Beginning from the 1960s, after the electrification of the village, the sequence of dances gradually deviated from the traditional customs, instead that, the order of music on phonograph records (later on cassettes, CD), and the preference of the disc jockey, who provided the music, have become a decisive factor.

X. Organisation of dance events

Music providers in Visa were represented by Gypsy musicians of the nearby Magyarpalatka, and nonprofessional peasant musicians until the mid-20th century. Material circumstance was clearly reflected by the quality of music providers a village could afford in a given period, similarly to the means of payment: money, goods or services. The nature of the offset refers to changes of the economy and structure of property. The establishment of farmer’s cooperatives brought to an end to the harvesting kaláka4, hereinafter referred to as ‘bee’), which had been one of the most important material sources for youngsters to organize dance occasions.

The number and duties of organizers of dance events, guarantors, also varied in different economic and social circumstances.

Romanians and Hungarians in Visa frequented dance events separately only during the two World Wars and after those, otherwise weekend dance5 were held together due to the village’s small population; guarantors belonging to separate ethnics represented interests of the members of the Romanian and Hungarian dance community in the period of consolidation.

The establishment of cooperatives and conflicts of the preceding period (separate large farmer’s and poor’s dance, kimuzsikáltatás6 were manifested in the organisation of dance events, effecting the work of the organisers, too.

Newer events were created instead of the gradually disappearing weekend dances: dance fest with record player organised in the house of culture at weekends, then discos, as well as ‘harvest feast’ relating to the cooperative.

Major duties of the guarantors involving hiring musicians and organising youth dancers ceased to exist completely due to the spread of merrymakings with record player or

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4 Voluntary cooperative work
5 Contraction of dance event
6 Sending a girl out by music as a consequence of inappropriate behaviour.
magnetophone tape recorder-played music; thus organisers of the latter events were not called guarantors anymore.

The institution of the guarantor has survived as a consequence of dances organised on the occasions of the gradually rarefying public holidays, and consequently, due to balls and fests of ‘measuring sheep milk’, which the revival movement brought about after the regime change.

XI. Conclusion

After the Hungarian Conquest, the agriculture of the ethnic Hungarians in the Transylvanian Mezőség had been prospering until major setbacks caused by historical events of the 17th and 18th centuries. The Hungarian inhabitants, and subsequently mixed Hungarian – Romanian – Saxon populations were exterminated by genocide-like blasts at several occasions. The continuous resettlements and movements of inhabitants led to an almost complete exchange of the area’s population. Drastic transformations simultaneously happening in the society and economy generated tabula rasa from cultural aspect as well, designating a brand new situation in the Mezőség.

The cultural prosperity and peace at the beginning of the 17th century under the rule of Prince Gábor Bethlen found the local ethnic Hungarians in island-like diasporas, whereas the majority of the society was represented by partly settled, partly wandering Balkan peoples.

Socio-anthropological investigations indicated that it often occurred in the 17th – 18th centuries that settlers uprooted from village environment could generally quickly develop new, heterogeneous village-like location, which were characterized by completely independent, but archaic culture at the same time (see the analogy of Gyimes/Ghimeș).

Western cultural influences conveyed by Reformation, Renaissance and Baroque were encountered an intensely conservative Byzantine type of cultural elements. The counter-phenomenon of a new way of life developing during the 18th century was embodied by poverty in all respects – citing Zsigmond Jakó. All these led to the socio-cultural isolation of the region. Consequently, cultural influences diffusing from the West reached Mezőség slowed down and weakened. Therefore altered economic forms and strategies, novel adaptations to the ecological environment became characteristic features. All the abovementioned concluded a peculiar cultural and social face, which we call the folk culture of Mezőség today.

National Romanticism and the notion of modernity in the Bourgeois Culture, which was spread by the nobles with one parcel (hereinafter referred to as small landed nobility) in the area, further affected the setting. Local ethnic groups of this area largely contributed to the diversity and simultaneously the homogeneity of local folk music and dance culture, as it has already been declared by both Béla Bartók and György Martin. The collective dances of Hungarians, Romanians, Gypsies and Saxons, as well as Gypsy musicians who would play their music in a remarkably wide area, all contributed with their own particular tastes to the multiplicity of the local dance and music culture. The economic and infrastructural underdevelopment of Mezőség region and the existence of Hungarian language enclosures have both influenced the conservation of this cultural unit.

I strove to highlight during the elaboration of my work that two important aspects of the dance culture, namely the formal and structural changes of dance besides the transformations of dance organisers’ duties and the represented community and the way of organising the events are all in close correlation with production and property structure, as well as social structure.
Economic and social environment in the Mezőség had been changed by the end of the 19th century, generating changes in contemporary way of life and culture.

We have to reckon with a fairly rich weapon-dance culture with diverse motif set. Its ‘proprietors’ did use to be the fairly mobile herder class, whose migratory way of life connected them with farther areas (e.g. Great Hungarian Plain, Felső-Tisza/Upper Tisza region) too. Rationalisation farm-reallocation taking place in the 19th century limited and bound extensive animal husbandry, and thus the explicitly significant herding too. Similarly to South Dunántúl /Transdanubian region certain elements (e.g. stick dance) could have been introduced in the villages of Mezőség, where it remained in the Romanian practice until as late as World War I.

Peasants who cultivated their separated, reallocated lands slowly but steadily left traditions of the earlier community life behind, their perspectives changed.

Transformations in the music and dance culture of the villages in Belső-Mezőség proceeded slowly due to isolation and poorly developed state of the middle class. Archaic motions began to disappear from the motif collection of the slow asymmetric and turning-spinning couple dances somewhat between the two World Wars, however they still can be traced in dances of elderly people. The posture during dance and fest could have undergone a somewhat similar process, shifting from introversion to extroversion. Changes in the spatial organization of dance, for instance the vanishing of the communal (around the circle) forms of the lad’s dance, likewise reflects to the abovementioned states, just like community works within the framework of ‘bee’, which ended up celebrating and dancing.

In the northern and western portions of Mezőség the strata of rural nobility owning small and medium-sized estates, who were gradually sinking in the hierarchy during the age of modernisation and lived together with the antecedents of quondam villains, played a key role in the dispersal of the new national dance type, czardas, at the end of the 19th century.

Cultural influences transmitted by small landed nobility only meagrely affected Belső-Mezőség, which is likewise indicated by the old-fashioned, nearly intact features of the motif set and musical accompaniment. Instance of urban and bourgeois effects are only available from the 1920s onwards.

As the significance of landed property increased, 20th century symptoms of the peasants’ typical hunger for land occurred consecutively, which led inexorably to the irreversible disintegration of social unity and cultural norms of peasants societies in many places. As those disposing of few private landed properties could have been large farmers – in case of holding large livestock – earlier, the amount of owned land became the basis of wealth at that time. As a consequence of the latter, the peasant society was divided to a narrower stratum of large farmers and a great number of poor smallholders. All these factors did not lead to serious social fracture on account of the small available arable land, its poor quality and the underdevelopment of infrastructure in Mezőség, however, social tensions within the village society rarely lurked in Visa and its neighbourhood indeed, on the occasions of organisations of dance events (large farmer’s dance –poor’s dance) and certain dance customs (kimuzsikáltatás).

The practice of ‘land goes to land’ appeared in marital relationships in Mezőség in this period too. Consequently, practices of prohibited relationships and bride kidnappings turned to be more frequent, at the end of which they did not hold great dance merrymakings, but instead, a small-scale wedding dinner was made at best.

Some of the social institutions (e.g. the esztena,7 that were maintained by the village community have survived that era. Communal events arranged according to villages or village

7 Sheep shepherds’ partnership.
portions carry several elements that are presumably remnants of a former land community system. Roots of various cooperative works likewise trace back to this period.

Visa has never belonged to the group of rich villages in the dance district. Although on the basis of collected data one can arrive at the conclusion that good musicians would often provide music at weekend *dances* owing to the support of the local landlord or local and neighbouring large farmers (by allowing the operation of ‘bees’) and to the predictable economic situation and the great number of musicians in the first half of the 20th century.

Both of the World Wars and also the conjoining social changes made influence on the culture of Visa and its surrounding. I consider intensifying ethnic conflicts here, which can be detected on the modifications taking place in the organisation of Visa’s dance events.

World War I brought an intensive exchange of cultural elements, augmenting the homogenisation of local ‘everyday culture’ to a certain degree. Influences of the western (urban) culture conveyed by Hungarian transmission after the split caused by the verdict of Trianon moderated.

The Second World War and the act of regaining northern Transylvania regenerated the spread of national ideology (manifested by folkish songs and irredentist and soldier songs) again, besides unifying aspirations in institutionalised context (teaching of the *magyar kettős*/Hungarian couple dance in public education, etc.) arriving from the mother country.

The rural society of Mezőség further preserved the 19th century forms of community morals and norms in that period. Owing to this, the peasant’s folk dance culture in the villages of Belső-Mezőség indicated strong inclination to integration; several dances embedded to the dance order of Visa at that time, among which solo and couple forms of the *tirnaveana* integrated almost completely, and simultaneously other dances, e.g. waltz and *hétlépés* (seven steps), also got on the way of folklorization. The characteristic figurative set were complemented with expressive elements (increasing number of under-arm spinning, difficult slapping motifs) of the most frequently performed dances (*czardas*, *escape czardas*). Balls affiliated to traditional spontaneous and regular dance events, which further increased the dance organisers’ duties.

Inhabitants of Visa could afford to arrange less musical events in the arduous period after World War II and under the establishment of cooperatives. This is verified by a growth in the number of local ‘amateur’ musicians, and their more frequent contributions at the adults’ dance events; whereas peasant bands of Visa provided music merely at household merrymakings and children’s dances.

Standard of living among the inhabitants of Mezőség – with respect to the majority – improved on account of the socialist industrialisation and urbanisation. But at the same time the founding of farmers cooperative tumbled the village community and its institutions: dance events at ‘bees’ gradually terminated from the 1960s onwards, and sweeping changes affected organisations and arrangements of dance occasions. Morphological simplifications of the most frequently performed dance types (*czardas* and *escape czardas*) – being in operation until today – began in this period, as well.

Money circulation prevailed in the villages of Mezőség likewise in this period, therefore children’s dance occasions (temporarily) dominated in Visa. From the 1950s slowly stabilizing economic situation repeatedly influenced on the opportunity of employing professional musicians: locals of Visa could again afford to hire better musicians for regular *dances*, moreover, they could invite the best possible bands to more distinguished events, and with five musicians instead of the regular three.

During the cooperative’s ca. thirty years of operation former moral codes steadily diminished simultaneously with the weakening of the bonds of the village community; swindling public property, stealing, wangling – even if tacitly – became approved. Lads for example raised money for financing the expenses of dances often by defrauding their own
families. These tendencies refer to the slackening of social bonds of the seemingly unified earlier village community.

Electrification, which was accomplished in the middle of the 1960s, brought about sweeping changes in hiring musicians. Musicians employing bowed instruments were gradually displaced at weekend dances, and substituted by record player, later tape recorder and then computer. The appearance of migration towards cities beginning in the 1970s opened villages bit by bit for commuters and popular culture conveyed by media. New musical and dance streams absolutely different from those experienced earlier infiltrated to the village in a campaign-like manner owing to this trend, and completely modified the former dance culture. Those elements disappeared first that integrated during the 20th century: social dances had been in practice only until the 60s, and consequently their significance lessened gradually. The only exception to this tendency is represented by waltz, which is still danced at weddings as a typical ritual piece (bride’s dance).

This period was the onset of a process during which the village society tore apart concerning forms of amusements and self-expression: elderly people remained the proprietors of traditions, whereas youth became authorities on the modern culture. Organisation of the dance activity was steadily taken over by public institutions (e.g. house of culture, council of Zsuk/Jucu) from the 1960s and then by entrepreneurs, while the youth of Visa shifted to the consumption of cultural goods instead of cultural self-sufficiency and creation. Choreological modifications of the dances reflect to the same: dance types characterised often by more formal variants (lad’s and couple dances) in the traditional peasant dance culture, and their organic unit as well as their morphological diversity have vanished by now, the contemporary culture of popular dance and music indicates homogeneity and simpler face with respect to form and structure. All these stand for functional changes as well: movement sequences consisting of complicated structure and elaborate motifs had to be practised even for years, until one could use that proper dance. This is indeed not applicable to dances that are fashionable today. Considering the quality and quantity of work invested in learning, the elaboration of movements and aesthetics we can reckon with an unequivocal impoverishment process from the 1950s, which refers to the restriction of opportunities in the domains of self-expression and cultural creation.

The Romanian microeconomic crisis of 1995 influenced Visa too; families that attempted ‘repeasantisation’ without more significant capital turned out to be losers of the period. Because of all these events, exaltation that characterised the beginning of the 1990s converted to disappointment dispersing negative effect in every sphere of life (education, individual success, communal and cultural life, etc.). As a result, the retention force of village community is weakening consistently in correspondence with the decline of communal events, such as dance events, weddings.

The population of Visa began to decrease in the 1970s, and remarkably accelerated from the 1990s. It can be assumed that the reason why cultural segregation in the nearby Cluj, which can be detected from the 1990s, and the emergence of subcultural groups along various musical ‘mainstreams’ have produced meagre effect in Visa is due to its small (and continuously diminishing) population.

On the examination of the diffusion of the abovementioned cultural phenomena we can declare that music and dance trends of distinct historical periods setting off from Western Europe and reached Central Transylvania, and within it what we examine, Belső-Mezőség by the end of the 20th century by the transmission of Hungary. The flow of the procedure changed irreversibly in the 1990s, when western music and dance fashions began to be broadcast by the media and not by Hungarian conveyance. The dispersal of the eastern mahala and manele music styles, as well as the intensifying related variants of Turkish-like
belly dance serve as a curious phenomenon, indicating the ‘balkanisation’ of the popular culture of the investigated area, and possibly Transylvania.

The internal relation system of the villages in Belső-Mezőség also transformed by the modification of the stranger lad’s institution (the stranger lad had to show his skills by dancing with a local girl), and the disappearance of dances at fairs: the Palatka dance district lost its significance; in these days, youngsters of some neighbouring villages that used to belong to distinct cultural unit (Zsuk, Szék/Sic) appear at weekend dance events. Termination of the village’s socio-cultural segregation is indicated by the vanishing of the custom regulating the reception of lads from distinct villages.

The process of homogenisation can be detected on the ethnic features of certain elements of the dance culture. The concept of property relating to individual dance types existing before the 1960s is only vaguely present in the cases of the contemporary dances and music; dance events organised separately by distinct ethnicities have disappeared.

**Píkapos** (originated from ‘pick up’ referring to record players) merrymakings of the 1970s, and subsequently discos presented the succession of weekend dance events to a certain degree, but only in the function of weekend amusements. I can reveal about the role of disco in the social structure that the group of participants has remarkably narrowed: older generations have completely been excluded from weekend dance events on account of the changed music and dance taste and the late opening; therefore they are less familiar with the dress and social codes practised in the disco then with former norms. This reflects to the diminishment of the cohesive and creative force of the dance in the community.

Presumptions formulated at the beginning of my dissertation have been justified. Each major social change brought by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries can be detected on the dance culture of the investigated village. These alterations, of course, are in correspondence with not only one social event, and did not occur immediately either. Disappearance of the ‘wedding with cart’ was for example preceded by a gradual decline in the importance of extensive animal husbandry, which led to the drastic decrease of the status value of white oxen. The last ‘wedding with cart’ was held in Visa right in 1960, in the time of the cooperative’s creation; a large farmer who joined the cooperative last, carried his daughter’s trousseau all the way down the village by cart so as to represent his resistance.

All the abovementioned indicates that transformations in the motival set of the individual dances, the appearance and disappearance of certain dance types could be concluded by various, multi-layered socio-cultural changing processes.

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**Publications and Scientific Lectures Relating to the Dissertation’s Topic**

**Studies**


Editions

2010 Kései virágkor. Tanulmányok az erdélyi Mezőség tánckultúrájáról. Folkszemle,
Lectures

2005 Térhasználat egy erdélyi, mezőségi falu tánckultúrájában. Martin György tiszteletére rendezett konferencia. Székesfehérvár

2006a A tánctanulás társadalmi háttére. “Párbeszéd a hagyománnyal” c. konferencia, PTE BTK Néprajz és Kulturális Antropológia Tanszék. Pécs

2006b Use of space in the dance culture of Mezőség region. ICTM konferencia. Kolozsvár


2006d Néptáncútatás az erdélyi Mezőségben. Mezőség konferencia I, Rendező: Babeş-Bolyai Tudományegyetem Néprajz és Kulturális Antropológia Tanszéke és EME. Kolozsvár

2007a Etnikus jegyek egy mezőségi falu tánckultúrájában. VIII. Nemzetközi Kulturális Antropológia Konferencia. Arad

2007b A tánctanulás hagyományos és intézményes módjai. Tánchagyomány: átadás és átvétel c. konferencia. Szeged

2007c Etnikus jegyek Mezőség tánckultúrájában. Előadás a Szlovák Tudományos Akadémián. Pozsony

2008a Changes in the dance culture of Mezőség region. IPEDAK ICTM Seminar. Trondheim, Norvégia.

2008b Változások a belső-mezőségi falvak tánckincsében. Mezőség konferencia II. Rendező: Babeş-Bolyai Tudományegyetem Néprajz és Kulturális Antropológia Tanszéke és EME. Kolozsvár

2008c A mezőségi tánckultúra változásai a modern korban. SZAB konferencia, Szeged

2009 Néptáncc kutatása Erdélyben. Előadás a fiatal néprajzkutatók IV. szemináriumán, Zabola

2010 Az erdélyi Mezőség hagyományos tánckészlete. Előadás a Makói Művészeti Iskola által rendezett néprajzi konferencián. Makó