

Theses of a Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

Archiving or Keeping the Tradition Alive?

**Attitudes Towards Hungarian Folk Music Culture and Their Impact
on the Institutionalisation of Folk Music Education in Hungary**

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Debrecen, 2022

The aim of the thesis, the scope of the topic

The basic problem of the dissertation is the institutionalisation of folk music education in Hungary and the practice of folk music becoming more professional in a constructivist sense (cf. Fizel, 2017: 56-57), processes that have so far escaped the attention of researchers. Only a few studies have attempted to clarify the details, but studies with a comprehensive treatment of the historical and theoretical context of the processes involved are practically missing (cf. Ferencziné, 2016; Richter, 2011).

In examining the topic, the first problem to overcome was that of involvement, as the author himself is a member of the professional community of folk music teachers in Hungary. This involvement is interesting from two aspects, since on the one hand, through the network of contacts, doors could be opened that would probably have remained closed to an external researcher, and thus it was possible to delve deeper into the subject, but on the other hand, distance had to be kept from some of the professional narratives that determined the author's own folk musician socialisation, in order to maintain an objective research attitude.

As a first step, the boundaries of the period of instrumental folk music education was delineated, taking into account the changes in the concept of folk music, since the interpretation of folk music in the 20th century shows different pictures in different periods. In addition, it was necessary to further broaden the boundaries previously defined, since without clarifying the appropriate cultural-historical background, it is not possible to understand why and how, for example, the attempt at institutionalisation in the early 1950s was included in the scope of the study. However, if we explore the processes of the academic reception of folk music, we can, on the one hand, understand the distortions in the interpretation of folk music that instigated the changes in popular culture in the 1970s, such as the *táncház* movement, and, on the other hand, gain a deeper understanding of the anomalies of the institutionalisation of our folk music education today. It becomes clear why the institutional system of classical music, which had been shaped and polished over a long period of time, has served as a mould for the teaching of instrumental folk music, in which, in turn, folk music, due to its inherent genre specificity, can only find its place only as long as it is conveyed in its separate components. The deeper one delves into ethnomusicology and ethnographic research, the more accurately he/she is able to paint a picture of folk music and its processes of transmission, the more he/she can see the wrong paths taken by the school system in relation to the teaching of folk music.

Why is it possible to say that the adaptation of the “mould” of classical music education to the field of folk music education was not an organic development? Classical music was the music of the bourgeoisie, of the middle classes, shaped primarily by Western influences, and

was not at all community-based. Classical music education was therefore part of urban culture, the institutional system of which Hungary also follows Western models. Folk music, on the other hand, was the music of the peasantry, handed down from generation to generation within the peasant (village) stratum, and was strongly tied to the community. Classical musicians performed the works of their own musical culture with greater individual freedom, making an effort to shape their own style of performance. Folk musicians, however, fostered the musical output of folk culture without a sense of individual freedom, remaining faithful to the performance style of their predecessors. In the case of folk music, interpretation is thus always the result of community consensus, dominated by modes of community “use.” For this reason, the institutionalisation of folk music education in the country can be labelled as a kind of development that squeezed music education into a “Procrustean bed.”

The incorporation of instrumental folk music education into the academic sphere is also one of the fundamental issues of our dissertation. After Hungary’s transition to democracy in 1989, folk musicians and folk music teachers perceived a receptive willingness on the part of one of the institutions of musical higher education. The question arises as to whether this reception actually took place, or whether the institution only saw the possibility of ensuring the stability of its own student numbers by deciding to launch a programme in folk music. It is difficult to give a clear answer to this question, but it is certain that it was only by being closely linked to the genre of classical music, in combination with the vocal music programme, that the school was able to integrate the major into higher education. The reason for this seems to be that the host environment ignored the characteristics of folk music regarding the passing down of tradition, and, fearing a loss of prestige, forced the guardians of folk music heritage to follow a pedagogical path that was alien to their traditions. The fear of the musical elite that managed this process was based on the belief that the musical intelligentsia would be diluted if it allowed “musical illiterates” into its own education or into the public one. The question may be asked whether the process of institutionalisation can be seen as clearly positive, or whether there are negative factors that the educational planners had not taken into account. Could the process of folk music becoming more professional have driven a wedge between members of a social group that used to be organised around the same values? How did the representatives of other musical strata experience the transformation of the prestige of the genre they were working in? Have folk musicians been fully accepted by other genres or have they remained outcasts of the musical world? What has prevented them from becoming the peers of musicians in other genres? Is it the closed and uncompromising nature of the folk music community, or differences between genres, the historical development and social embeddedness? Incompatibility and

incongruity were predictable when the training patterns from classical music frameworks were adopted, and with the emerging body of research exploring the nature of folk music, there is a growing consensus that a more credible context for folk instrument teacher training could be created by embarking on a path of genre autonomy and linking it to ethnography. Arguments and counter-arguments, which were sometimes tabooed, and sometimes clearly stated, have been raised about the introduction of this training into higher education. On the one hand, the continued existence of a thereto well-functioning community practice of folk music education was seen to be in peril, while on the other hand, the promise of a prestige equal to that of classical music seemed to emerge from its inclusion. The ambivalent attitude of the professional elite is clearly identifiable in the resistance which, although in different forms at the start of the training, can be traced in the behaviour of the leading actors of both training institutions – the Bessenyei György Teacher Training College and the Liszt Academy of Music.

Outline of the methods used

Qualitative and quantitative methods were both used to treat the subject of our thesis from several perspectives. Document analysis and qualitative content analysis were found to be the most appropriate from among qualitative research methodologies, together with the application of oral history. The focus of our study was primarily on the training of ethnomusicologists, and within this, teacher training, which is the highest level of education where the process of institutionalisation of ethnomusicological education took place. However, it is impossible to understand our subject without a comprehensive picture of the changing concepts of folk music that can be identified throughout the 20th century. For this very reason, the literature orientation have necessarily been extended to the literature of other disciplines (Kéri, 2001). In addition to the literature of education and cultural studies, the relevant literature of ethnography, ethnomusicology, musicology and lifestyle history, among others, has helped us to deepen our understanding of the subject.

The study and analysis of the writings of Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók is of central importance for our topic, since the artistic and pedagogical consequences of the perception of folk music and the interpretation of folk culture in the period under study can be best understood through the works of these two composers. László Németh's and the tendencies represented by the so-called "folk writers", the folk movement, István Györffy's programme and some of Sándor Karácsony's views that strongly influenced the intellectuals' thinking on folk culture, also proved to be inescapable.

Folk song adaptations from the first half of the 20th century and those from various periods of state socialism are offering different pictures. The so-called “*Páva*” controversy, which emerged in the 1970s along the lines of the movement, was a case in point, of which the documents were examined with qualitative content analysis. In addition to the literature review and content analysis described above, the research was based on interviews, because it was considered necessary to further refine and clarify the results of our empirical data collection. The chosen interview type, the semi-structured interview, seemed the most suitable for creating an interaction between the interviewer and the respondent, due to its semi-formalised nature while providing an appropriate framework for both parties (Nádasi, 2000). Twenty interviews were conducted, and three groups of interviews were distinguished according to the type of interviewees: students, teachers and scholars.

In the course of our documentary analysis, relevant documents have been examined in the archives of the University of Nyíregyháza, which enabled one to delineate the circumstances and conditions of the start-up of the degree programme. We explored the difficulties arising from the peripheral situation of the departments set up for art majors and the problems that the unit operating the folk music teacher training had to overcome in order to ensure the conditions of professional training. The type of analysis used is interpretative, and the events of the period are discussed in the context of university-level music education. The documents examined have been selected along the lines of the issues outlined above, always with the aim to draw on as many sources as possible. Sources that have so far escaped the attention of researchers could also be included in the analysis, thus providing a comprehensive picture of the background to the launch of the training. In order to analyse the data collected in the course of the research, it was necessary to clarify issues such as conflicts of interest in education policy and sectoral policy, taking into account the context in which the documents were produced. In the course of the research, national, institutional and departmental provisions from several angles were also examined.

For the quantitative analyses of our thesis, a database of statistics was compiled from the Hungarian Education Office. In the case of the University of Nyíregyháza, the published data did not allow statistical analysis in the period of “split” teacher training (that is, split into BA and MA levels), so for the period in question refinements were made for all data based on the university’s Neptun (online student registry) system, indicating the specialisations chosen by the students. Finally, former full-time students of the legal predecessor institution of the University of Nyíregyháza were included as well, whose answers to our questions were analysed around three main clusters. First, the question whether the students’ aspirations for

employment had changed over time was examined. Second, it was scrutinised how the example of the possible presence folk musicians among ancestors and relatives had an impact on those who have completed a degree in music and folk music teaching. Finally, the ways to characterise teachers of music and folk music who have graduated from a teacher training course and who envisage their own future as folk music teachers in the short and long term, from the aspects of their professional self-image, their ideas on their careers and degree of involvement in the professional community, were examined.

To test the hypotheses, cross-tab analysis was predominantly conducted. Most of the questions were closed questions with other response options, which were coded during processing. To explore mixed relationships, variance analysis and t-tests were used, and Chi-square fit tests, where the sample proportions of groups against a hypothetical proportion was tested. To test the last hypothesis, four clusters were created along two dimensions based on our own definition. Once the clusters had been formed, differences between groups were tested using mainly cross-tab tests, and variance analysis and t-tests to detect mixed relationships was carried out.

Findings listed in the manner of theses

The novelty of the topic lies in the fact that no comprehensive work on the history of institutional instrumental folk music education in Hungary has been published to date. Based on our literature research, it can be concluded that the attention of researchers has been focused primarily on the history of ethnomusicology, almost completely ignoring the pedagogical aspect. By broadening the frame of reference, the findings were interpreted within the context of various disciplines, which has enabled the author to uncover deeper connections. Compared to the limited number of, and mostly descriptive, work that has been carried out so far, the findings have provided new data and conclusions for the discipline from the very beginning of the study.

First of all, it can be concluded that the forced adoption of a Soviet-style approach to ethnography was the main cause of the tension in relation to folk songs and folk-style composed songs, and folk culture more broadly, in the scholarly discourse of the period under examination. The concept of folk music taking root as a paradigm in the first half of the 20th century did not fit in with the state socialist concept of cultural policy.

The attention of urban youth turned once again to peasant culture as a result of the first “Röpülj, páva!” folk song contest organised in 1969-1970. The first broadcast highlighted the

deep-rooted values of folk art, the adaptability of folk culture to modern media, and the cultural needs of society at a whole new level of aesthetic quality. The (second) competition organised in 1981 is also seen as a turning point. As a result of the programme, some intellectuals considered it important to speak out against the interpretation of folk culture in contemporary cultural policy and to draw attention to the fact that the aspect of originality could not be ignored, irrespective of the interpretation of the concept of folk music, and to the possibility of keeping folk culture alive through active, new forms of community interaction.

An analysis of the press controversy that arose in the wake of the contest shows that the prevailing perception of folk music in the period under discussion was rather liberal in terms of genre boundaries, dismissing the results of ethnography. Folk music was seen merely as musical material, dressed up in the popularising costume of the time. It disregarded regional distribution, preferring new style songs from the history of folk music, with which it mainly intended to serve the public taste. Consequently, it could not have any higher public cultural aspirations. It relegated folk song adaptations, exiled from elite art, to the category of folk music, with the declared aim to help people understand high art. In contrast, the emerging concept of folk music was one of originality and authenticity. In addition to the historical stratification of the melodies, it also took account of their regional characteristics and, importantly, embraced the performing style of the peasant society which was the original medium. Not exclusively, but initially, this new concept preferred old style songs – sharply separating itself from the prevailing views. Its selection principle was quality and value, based on authenticity. Our analysis has revealed that the debate was not specifically about criticising the clearly flawed rationale of the contest. Criticising the programme was merely a convenient “pretext” for intellectuals to highlight the untenable and contradictory ambitions of the cultural and educational policies of the time, which used folk culture to serve their own interests under a false guise. By blurring the boundaries of genres, by adding the stylistic features of the composed folk-style pieces, by reworking them, this policy conveyed Hungarian folk songs to the public in a uniform and formalised way. The value and originality as principles were completely relegated into the background, giving way to popularised, “industrially produced” arrangements that satisfied mass demand.

A further result of our dissertation is that, through the analysis of folklore texts, the patterns of natural transfer of knowledge taking place in tradition have been pointed out. Our analyses revealed elements that could be generalised for certain musical instruments, but there were also motifs that called for different learning patterns depending on the region or the ethnicity of the learner. The conclusions also point to the limits of knowledge transfer in

schools, which could lead to a more sensitive approach to the teaching of particular instruments in institutional instrumental education. At present, we can see that, although it has moved closer to ethnography as a co-discipline after 1989, institutional folk music education is not yet able to fully embrace the specificities of traditional instrumental knowledge transfer. The current rigidity of the school system does not allow for the diversity of instruments and their function in the tradition to be reflected within its framework.

The history of education in Hungary has so far failed to provide a detailed account of the history of folk music teacher training and its beginnings; only a few sources touch upon the subject in passing. One of the main achievements of this thesis is that through the processing of primary sources it has succeeded in providing the field of education with completely new data and approaches to the training of folk music teachers, launched in 1991 at the Bessenyei György Teacher Training College in Nyíregyháza. In addition to this institution, the folk music training of the Miskolc Philologists Association and the Liszt Academy of Music were also examined. Contrary to the findings of the literature available to the general public, our results show that the Miskolc folk music training cannot be considered as a separate major, and the results also raise the question of whether the course, which does not have valid accreditation, can be considered a real specialisation at all.

The section of the research dealing with the education in Nyíregyháza can be labelled with the concept of microhistory. The investigations sought to answer the question of how the systemic problems arising from the lack of integration of folk music education into the classical music framework manifested themselves in the training provided by a single institution. As a by-product of our investigation, it also became apparent how the unit running the course, while facing the difficulties of training and stabilising the status of the Department of Music within the institution, was also struggling with new, thereto unknown challenges posed by economic, social and political changes. This period was characterised by the loss and transformation of international relations, infrastructural deficiencies and funding problems arising from the specific nature of the training. The most important challenges of the recent past and the present are the repeated restructuring of the higher education system and the instability in the number and composition of students and teachers. Other challenges are posed by the changing prestige of folk music, the general decline of taste in society, the rise of popular music genres, the underpaid and under-appreciated careers of performers and teachers, and the resulting difficulties in earning a living.

Folk music teacher training at the Liszt Academy of Music, which has been in existence for barely over a decade, has faced, and continues to face, a number of difficulties. Our research

has explored the interest groups involved in setting up the course and the potential that the university's management at the time saw in the training. It has been shown that even in the mid-2000s, there was still a controversial view of folk music as a researchable subject, and that its transmission was thought to be fully learned only in its natural context and in its own natural way. The prestige of the major, both within the institution and nationally, can be identified as being provided by the recruitment base of teachers and by the Academy's network of contacts. Our results point to the tensions arising from the structure, nature and character of the major, which can be detected not only within the walls of the institution, but also in the work of the teachers working in arts education. Our statistical analyses show that the status of training within the institution has developed positively, and that in the ten-year period since the start of the course, folk music training has become the second most important of the four musical genres covered by the university, so it can be stated that the institution's management has correctly assessed the market niche.

However, the fact could not be ignored that there was a certain resistance on the part of both host institutions. The Nyíregyháza training place emphasised the covert inferiority of the genre by seemingly fulfilling the official requirements by getting the paperwork done, by widening the frameworks, by ignoring certain criteria, by seeking greater freedom and concessions compared to other majors, and by making all these seem a common practice. The Liszt Academy, however, delayed and slowed down the organisation of training for as long as possible, the reason for this being that it was more aware of the problematic nature of the inclusion of instrumental folk music in the academic sphere.

The results of our quantitative research on full-time music and folk music teachers at the College of Nyíregyháza and its legal predecessor institution between 1991 and 2011 reveal that two fields of work stand out among the job opportunities in the two periods that have been identified. On the one hand, primary school singing-music teachers with specialised folk instrument knowledge, and primary school instrumental folk music teachers on the other hand. A comparison of the two periods shows that there has been a significant increase in the proportion of people finding employment as instrumental folk music teachers, one reason for this being that the introduction of secondary school folk music education from 1994 onwards has been able to attract students into higher education who, thanks to early career socialisation, choose to become folk music teachers. Based on the further research findings, it has been revealed that teachers with folk music ancestry and relatives in connection with folk music regard folk music teaching as their main activity in higher proportions and are characterised by a more in-depth and mature sense of vocation than their peers without such a family

background. In the next section, the question of the professional self-image, career vision and vision of the future of colleagues who see their future as folk music teachers in the short and long term was answered. The results yield a negative picture for the future of folk music education, with only 38% of the teachers in the survey thinking of themselves as folk music teachers in a five-year perspective. The teachers' vision of the short-term future perfectly determines their vision of the long-term future, so only those who think of themselves as folk music teachers in the near future will stay in the profession in the long term, too. The processes described above are likely to have a negative impact at all three tiers of education, as the majority of teachers with the appropriate qualifications are likely to leave the profession in the short term.

Conclusions

It is clear from the analyses that the world of schools and their views on the transfer of knowledge do not currently allow the genre of folk music to be fully integrated into the framework of institutional education. In support of this claim, it is sufficient to draw attention to one of the fundamental functions of instrumental folk music, namely that of making music for dance, which is impossible to achieve in the context of one-to-one lessons. To avoid over-generalising, it should be noted that not all folk instruments require the same degree of this activity. The function of folk instruments as traditionally understood is therefore a central issue. The responsibility and collaboration of each discipline needs to be rethought in order to nuance the functions tied to the instruments that can be learned from tradition. The author sees the role of educational science as providing appropriate answers as to how the diversity revealed by the co-disciplines can be properly interpreted and framed in the reality of schools. It is therefore believed that schools should initiate a process of change in the direction of cultural identity. The rigid curricular structure and the spatial and temporal framework of instrumental folk music lessons, which have been created on the basis of the classical music training, should be made more flexible. The structure fragmented between different branches of art needs to be changed along a more complex approach to allow for cooperation between the different areas of folk culture, in order to achieve a higher level of experiencing the functions that are rooted in tradition. An example of this would be working with folk dance students, where, accompanying dancers, students could experience new functions that until now they have only been able to do in extracurricular settings – if their training institution could provide the conditions for this. However, this requires a change of mind-set.

The situation of today's schools is not an easy one, as we are in the process of a culture change. We are witnessing a shift from a typographic culture to cultural constructions defined by electronic media. The world of values and experiences represented by digital culture is increasingly shaping the tastes of young people as they grow up, which makes it even more difficult for schools to find the place and function of popular culture in an environment very far removed from their own. The key question, therefore, is whether institutional folk music education can maintain and strengthen the position it has already achieved. If it is unable to provide real answers to this question, it is a real danger that this layer of culture will sink or become relegated to museums for good. One of the school's tasks is therefore to help children discover the roots of their own national culture. It should find ways of making the treasures of folk culture more widely accessible. The school's task is not an easy one, since it now conveys the content of folk culture in the general education curriculum deprived of the specificities of its genre. Moreover, the teaching of folk instruments in the context of art education has become rather elitist, since without adequate family support, this educational content cannot reach all social groups.

The main question for the modern school is how it can renew in a way that it adapts to the realities of Hungarian culture. The school system's attitude towards folk culture is characterised by a double-faced attitude. On the surface it seems to be supporting it, but the boundaries of its representation are made increasingly narrow. It relegates its deeper layers to the realm of art education, which, however, brings about the phenomenon described above. The study of folk music is becoming the preserve of a narrow group of people motivated by family ties. The school system's relationship with folk music should be infiltrated by a trend similar to the one seen in the public education of the 1970s. In this period, living with folk culture was a form of behaviour, and the corollary of this was to cultivate it. Nowadays, the chances of democratic participation have become more limited with the folk music profession becoming more professional and more elitist. The negative effect of institutionalisation is identified in the fact that the cultivation of folk culture is seen as a narrowly defined profession rather than as a form of behaviour.

A further unresolved problem is that only a small segment of folk music teachers see a real perspective in the profession of a folk music teacher. In view of the results presented, the question arises as to who shall keep folk culture alive. Will it be teachers who have the appropriate qualifications but are considering leaving the profession, or will it be communities who are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by folk culture but do not see it as a profession?

This dissertation is a kind of diagnosis. The result of the research has brought to the surface certain problems that the profession must face. Hungarian folk instrumental education was integrated into the higher education framework relatively late, only after the transition to democracy in 1989. In some respects, however, it can be said that it was too early, since the educational institution that took it upon itself to launch the major was not fully prepared for the task that required a lot of compromise and creativity. One of the reasons for this claim is the lack of a professional background that should have been provided by the practice schools for teacher trainees, and of appropriate teaching aids. The former resulted in a lack of practice for students in the application of the knowledge acquired during theoretical training. Second, the lack of teaching aids was a difficulty for both students and trainers. Depending on the individual skills of the trainers, this could theoretically provide a great deal of freedom for the teachers, but it could also create uncertainty. The use of classical music as a model could seem a safe solution, since this teaching structure, shaped over a long period of time, had already proved its worth. When primary-school level folk music education started, the choice might be considered appropriate, since it is only in the musical material that substantial differences between the genres can be identified, but as the nature of folk culture becomes more deeply understood, it is becoming increasingly clear that the teaching of instrumental folk music suffers distortions if it is confined within the transmission traditions of other genres. This work can help to correct the mistakes made and to shade and clarify the questions that have remained unanswered.

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Registry number: DEENK/365/2022.PL
Subject: PhD Publication List

Candidate: István Ferenc Bíró
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of Human Sciences
MTMT ID: 10049059

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ISBN: 9786155073182

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of the Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) database.

13 July, 2022

