ETHNOLOGY – FOLK DANCE – REGIONALITY
IDIOSYNCRASIES OF THE INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH OF FOLK DANCE
CULTURE IN THE AREAS OF THE HAJDÚSÁG, HORTOBÁGY AND BIHAR

by Horváth Péter (M. A.)

Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Baranyi Béla és Prof. Dr. Keményfi Róbert

UNIVERSITY DEBRECEN
Doctoral School of History and Ethnography

Debrecen 2018.
I. The Subject and Objectives of the Dissertation

I started my Ph.D. studies in the Doctoral School of Regional Sciences at the University of Debrecen in the 2013/2014 academic year and continued in the Doctoral School of History and Ethnography (after the former was closed). The key objective of my dissertation originally titled the Regional Functions and Possible Effects of Folk Culture on the Society of the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihor Euroregion and later modified to Ethnography – Folk Dance – Regionality was to explore the forgotten traditions of several settlements of the region and to study their possible impact on the image-building of villages today, how such traditions may improve their attractiveness for tourists, help them retain their population and thus influence the future of people living there.

This may help people living in the area studied in this dissertation to set a new path for their settlements building on local features and reviving and reinterpreting their traditions. Besides all these, I also set out to investigate if there are any other values in the settlements of the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihor Euroregion that may be studied and/or revitalized in any form in the area of folk dance culture. At the same time, I examined the intertwined nature of the past and present of folk dancing at the crossroads of dance studies, ethnography, cultural anthropology, and regional sciences focusing on regional contexts.

Mikepércs serves as an excellent example in this sense as the former dance traditions and the revival of the choreography of the Mikepércs csárdás (1955) in 2009 created a new form of community collaboration. Thanks to the Guinness world record achieved (with several hundred people, including myself, dancing the legendary choreography) an important question was raised: was this dance born in the Bihar or Hajdúság region? At that point I could not find the answer to this question. Therefore, it is not by chance that I decided to do research in my dissertation on the folk dance culture of the Hajdúság, Bihar and Hortobágy regions.

What I found in Mikepércs also confirmed that the exploration of archival materials may contribute to and advance the work of dance studies and dance groups, and beyond these also the cultural life of settlements by establishing a link between the past and the 21st century. My objective is to create a regional database that accommodates the traditions of micro-regions related to folk dancing as preserved in different archival and document sources and thus to enable their complex use in the scholarly study and artistic rendering of dance traditions, while also providing assistance in preserving, protecting, and re-discovering such traditions in particular settlements.
II. Research Methods Applied in the Dissertation

My research first relied on the phonograph recordings and manuscripts of István Ecsedi, the relevant publications, manuscripts and dance collections of György Martin, András Béres, Gyula Varga, and later on Constantin Costea as well as the study and digitization of their video recordings. With time, however, the scope of collectors and settlements to be studied was also extended as a result of the more detailed scrutiny of manuscripts found in archives.

Empirical studies carried out on site also play a significant role in this type of research. This, however, presupposes the completion of the survey of available materials. The main institutions visited for this purpose were the Institute for Musicology in Budapest, the Hungarian Heritage House, the Museum of Ethnography, the Folklore Institute of Bucharest, the University and National Library at the University of Debrecen, the Archives of Hajdú-Bihar County, and Déri Museum in Debrecen.

It has also been revealed during my work that Hungarian dance studies have tended to create strong and categorical groups in terms of the dialects in the Carpathian Basin based on the material processed. However, it seemed that in the areas studied it is rather difficult to draw the borderlines of specific regions adequately. This was one of the dilemmas I had to face when trying to classify the folk dance heritage of the historical Hajdú and Bihar comitats in the transition zone of the Great Plain and Transylvania especially when using a newer, interdisciplinary, ethnographic-cultural anthropological and at the same time regional approach. I found that besides the traditional approaches to classification, more detailed studies of the settlement spaces of dance collections would also be beneficial from a geographical, historical, social perspective, along with the complex, interdisciplinary examination of constantly changing systems of public administration, and the former networks of relationships and local identity. All these could contribute to a better understanding of the past, present and future of the local, regional, national, and international language of dance.

In order to draw the borders of macro, meso and micro regions and to draw holistic conclusions, we also need to investigate the extent of the networks of settlements having such collections and the perception of their identity. At the same time, it was another important question what those options were at the specific settlements that they could use to “benefit from the identified heritage culturally”, let these include the opening of an art school, a cultural festival, organization of a village fest, or the establishment of cross-border twin city cooperation maybe by means of a working dance group. The more detailed study of the region
involved in this research is exemplified by one settlement in sufficient detail. The dissertation introduces the case study of Mikepércs, which must on the long run be extended with the comprehensive and comparative analysis of other, neighboring settlements.

Meanwhile, I have also studied the possible impact and relationship of folk culture and history both at the local (settlement-based) and larger, regional – Hajdúság, Hortobágy, Bihar – level, simultaneously with the analysis of the networks of relations, identification of special features, and the detection of similarities and differences.

I first studied the historical network of relations for Mikepércs in more detail, however, it proved to be a difficult task to establish which of the nearby settlements Mikepércs had stronger and weaker historical links with. The topic itself is not negligible, however, as the networks of settlements, their points of densification, extent or for that matter the complete lack of connections may provide a more accurate depiction of the flow of certain cultural goods, including folk dance motifs or partly also folk songs, and the nature of their regional prevalence.

When discussing the former system of cultural contacts, it also came up as a key question whether by means of establishing/extending collaboration between villages studied in the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihor Euroregion we could strengthen the regional relations along and across the border, and whether the opposing or sometimes mutually beneficial goals of European integration, the more and more powerful influence of globalization, modernization (civilization) and the preservation of folk culture may be identified in the changes of social relations. With a more scrupulous study of folk dance traditions, I analyzed the issue of economic-social and cultural cohesion from both an ethnographic and regional dimension, in close relation to the extension of European integration and the Schengen process.

By studying dance traditions, I examined the question of economic, social, and cultural cohesion not so much from the perspective of political history, but rather that of ethnography, cultural anthropology, and regional sciences. My aim was to identify how the values of cultural heritage may be explored, preserved, and revitalized and how inter-ethnic cultural relations may be developed further. All these, however, can be addressed in more detail only based on more comprehensive research conducted in the future.
III. Research Results

1. Former ethnographic research on regional identity and the spatial extent and variability of a given culture may be further extended with the study of the life of unique individuals, interviews, data collected from museums and archives, birth certificates, thus with information relevant in the local space. All these may also support the idea that the extent of folk culture and the identity construction of a given community do not always overlap with the geographical or administrative regions.

2. The ethnographic micro-region surrounded by the Nyírség, Érmellék, Oradea, Sárrét, Hortobágy, Hajdúság and Debrecen was formerly considered “characterless” and was “non-classifiable” based on previous research. Yet, my studies have shown that it exhibits a special character and people living here share a special identity. The sense of belonging and a characteristic regional feature outlines an independent micro region, which may be best named Érvidék.

3. Folk culture, including folk dancing, is one of those possible cohesive forces even today that may preserve and strengthen interregional connections in cross-border areas, including the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihor Euroregion, practically the area of the former Bihar comitat.

4. We have completed the folk-dance-focused case study of Mikepércs, a settlement located at the border of Hajdú and Bihar comitats, which covers the segments of the past (once operating within the context of folklore) and the living local dance traditions and the related system of conventions, while also discussing the past and present history of the dance material and choreography.

5. We have defined the concepts used in the analysis.

6. To be able to provide a comprehensive analysis, we explored the network of relations for Mikepércs between 1867 and 1906 based on marriage certificates.

7. We discussed the history behind the choreography and re-discovery of the Mikepércs csárdás.
8. We studied the choreography and the related dance collection in view of the relative feature of authenticity.

9. We analyzed the Mikepércs csárdás from the perspective of traditions and folklore ("folklorismus").

10. Our study was also extended to cover the impact of the Mikepércs csárdás on the identity formation of the village community.

11. We have compiled a lexical repository of collectors, locations researched before and recorded in dance films, and collections covering the Hajdúság, Hortobágy, and Bihar regions which will facilitate scholarly research and the work of heritage groups in the future.

12. We worked on identifying the micro, meso and macro regions of the area under scrutiny, and we also attempted to define new and least studied regions, including the macro dialect of the Partium, the sub-dialect of the Middle-Tisza region, and Érvidék itself. In the process we considered historical, regional, and identity construction processes occurring in the region.

My work has revealed that the folk dance and folk music corpus that may be found in archives of the studied area is much richer than what we had presumed based on the preserved and processed, so to say "widely available", rediscovered or choreographed “represented traditions.” The rediscovery, preservation and maintenance of the local-regional culture may play a crucial role in the future also, which can obviously facilitate relations with both the Hungarian areas outside Hungary and the neighboring peoples. Irrespective of the currently seen negative trends, the cultivation of folk music and folk dance culture plays an especially important role in modern, unifying Europe and particularly in the Carpathian Basin.

Thus one of the objectives of my research was to complete a scholarly study and analysis of several, already forgotten traditions of various settlements of the region and to make them accessible holistically for future research also. Besides all these, I have also attempted to analyze the possible impacts of the above-mentioned processes on the image-building of villages, the improvement of their attractiveness for tourists, retaining their
population, developing their identity, thus overall on the life of the local populace through the example of one settlement, in this case that of Mikepércs. At the same time, my research may also provide an opportunity to make the so far unknown and unused materials found during my work accessible for future scholarly research. This also enables folk dance and folk music ensembles, heritage and other groups that have played an indispensable role in the cultivation of folk culture to this day expand their repertoire on a scholarly basis, thus enriching the cultural life of their settlement and more extensively their region and wider living space.

For this purpose, I believe folk dance and folk music are the most suitable as (although today we may talk about a subculture, an urban survivor) in case we also consider the folk dance ensembles in cities and the recent revival of the dance-house movement, these are those segments of ethnography that may be represented most easily and which may also be presented as stage productions. At the same time, besides scholarly investigation they also provide a new, tradition-based sense of community involving larger groups of society by creating social events.

When working on my dissertation, I used the proven and tested methodology of several disciplines and thus I studied the given area from the perspective of dance dialects at the crossroads of ethnography, cultural anthropology, and regional sciences. The research findings based on new approaches have also confirmed that the micro region surrounded by the Nyírség, Érmellék, Sárrét, Hortobágy, and Hajdúság regions, which had been considered as one lacking any unique features and unclassifiable by previous research and which was seen as a smaller or larger region depending on the context of the studies, does indeed have an existing and separate identity in terms of ethnographical and regional considerations. I called this region Ýrvidék in this study. Whether this new terminology will be used and further developed by the smaller and larger scholarly community will be decided in the future. This research at the borderline of various disciplines, however, has practical benefits as well from the perspective of a topic-specific aspect, as it has already been noted.

The maps associated with the dance dialects introduced by György Martin and still in use today may be further refined by more detailed studies carried out recently, not only in the area of the Hajdúság and Bihar regions, but in the entire Carpathian Basin. Moreover, when conducting a more comprehensive study of folk dance dialects, we cannot disregard the classifications of neighboring peoples and the research results of associated disciplines, including folk dance research, ethnography, cultural anthropology, geography, and regional sciences, further complementing the influential work of György Martin.
The research conducted for this dissertation has raised the attention of folk dance ensembles and heritage groups working both in Debrecen and the neighboring settlements. Therefore, beyond the study of the Mikepércs folk dance corpus and its free dance and choreographic renewal, the examination of the materials found in Berettyóújfalu, Hajdúszoboszló, Nyírcsád, Létavértés, Hajdúhadház and Kaba has also presented itself, which could later be further extended by the fully unexplored materials of the Érmellék region found in the Hungarian Heritage House and the Folklore Institute in Bucharest.

Future projects would also be facilitated by the collection of the musical materials of the area surrounded by the Nyírség, Érmellék, Sárrét, Hortobágy and Hajdúság, i.e., the Érvidék region. These could serve as a foundation for publications that would contribute to raising awareness of both musical and dance materials. The finding, arrangement of folk dance films relevant for Hajdú and Bihar comitats and the case study of Mikepércs itself represent the first step in a long journey from which both scholars and heritage communities related to regional folk dances may benefit, and their work may be enriched with so far little known or unknown music and folk dance materials in the future. Besides scholarly works, this may also appear in the form of free dance in dance houses, it may contribute to the creation of stage performances, and the work of researchers, folk dance ensembles, and heritage groups may also play a central role in identity formation in the life of these settlements, also enriching the local folk dance communities that today survive mostly as subcultures.

There are many other settlements in the region with materials worthy of study, the analysis of local-regional differences and similarities may be complete only with the comprehensive study and comparison of their dance histories; these in the future may provide more accurate insights into the relationships existing in the Hajdúság, Hajdú, and Bihar regions and their small, medium, and large regional borders, thus contributing to the preservation of cultural values.

The digitization and restoration of so far little or unstudied dance films preserving the folk dance motifs of Hajdú and Bihar comitats has already been completed. This enables the scholarly study of these materials and as a result they can reenter the realm of folk dance studies and contemporary folk dancing in general.

As we have already mentioned above briefly, it was one of the key objectives of the dissertation to complete the lexical collection and development of a thematic database of dance films relevant for Hajdú and Bihar comitats and found in museums and collections, which attempts to study the given area as a unified whole, providing a basis for a database enabling a more detailed and holistic comparative research. Digitization and restoration
should be continued as data recorded on 40-80-year-old film and more than a hundred-year-old phonograph recordings are slowly disappearing, which would represent an irreplaceable loss in terms of our knowledge of so far little-studied areas. On the long run, the digitized versions (in this case actually representing the intellectual value) could in the future become available, not only in the given collections but possibly also in an online database open for scholars and the general public. This could help us preserve the digitized materials, introduce them in a uniform manner, and thus it would contribute to both their scholarly, empirical and representative processing.

IV. Candidate’s Publications Related to the Dissertation

1. A népi kultúra és a néptánc lehetséges szerepe az interdiszciplináris régiókutatásban. [The possible role of folk culture and folk dance in interdisciplinary regional studies] Interdiszciplinaritás a régiókutatásban IV. Electronic essay collection. In: BARTHA ÁKOS – SZÁLKAI TAMÁS. (Eds.): A publication of the Hajdú-Bihar County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives. Publisher: SZENDINÉ ORVOS ERZSÉBET, director of the Hajdú-Bihar County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives. 2014. 79–90.


9. Elfeledett hagyományok nyomában. [In the wake of forgotten traditions.] BARANYI BÉLA 70. A kapocs. In: TAMÁS JÁNOS and POPP JÓZSEF. (Eds.): Publisher: University of Debrecen, Faculty of Economics and Rural Development, Faculty of Agriculture, Food Sciences, and Environmental Management. 2016. 181-188.

10. Mikepércs kapcsolati hálózata az 1867-1906. közötti házassági anyakönyvek tükrében. [The network of relations of Mikepércs based on marriage certificates issued between
10


13. Néptáncgyűjtők adatbázisa Hajdú és Bihar vármegek térségéből. (Bököny, Nagyiván, Nyír és Polgár településekkel kiegészítve. [A database of folk dance collectors from the region of Hajdú and Bihar comitats (Supplemented with the settlements of Bököny, Nagyiván, Nyír and Polgár)] Regionális szemle. Vol II, no. 1. In: DR. DAIKO DI KRISZTINA (Ed. in chief). Published by the University of Debrecen, Faculty of Economics. 2017. 69-83.

V. Candidate’s Conference Presentations Related to the Dissertation


Candidate: Péter Horváth
Neptun ID: IRVJCB
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of History and Ethnology
MTMT ID: 10061013

List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book chapters (5)

   In: Interdiszciplinaritás a Régiókutatásban Fialat kutatók nemzetközi konferenciája IV.


Foreign language international book chapters (1)

   In: Value changes in a transforming economy: Challenges in the Carpathian Basin. Eds.:
   Andrea Csata, Gergely Fejér-Király, Ottília György, János Kassay, Benedek Nagy, Levente-

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (8)

7. Horváth, P.: Néptáncdialektusok interdiszciplinális kutatásának szempontjai Hajdú és Bihar
   vármegekben. Utánközlés másodközlés,
   Civisporta. 1 (1), 45-65, 2017. ISSN: 2560-015X.

8. Horváth, P.: Néptáncgyűjtők adatbázisa Hajdú és Bihar vármegek térségéből (Bököny,
   Nagyiván, Nyíracsád és Polgár településekké kiegészítve).

   térségében.
   Köztes-Európa. 8 (1-2), 41-67, 2016. ISSN: 2064-437X.

    vármegek térségében.


    határmenti térségében.
    Agrártud. közl. 63, 73-78, 2015. ISSN: 1587-1282.

13. Horváth, P.: Az Európai Unió kohéziós politikája a kulturális örökségvédelem, és
    hagyományátulajdonítás terén Közép-Kelet Európában.

    térségében.
    Agrártud. közl. 55, 49-54, 2014. ISSN: 1587-1282.

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on
the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

26 September, 2017