

# The Influence of Dance-House Tourism on the Social Relationships and Traditions of a Village in Transylvania<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This essay examines the impact of fieldwork on the life of the rural villages in Transylvania that have been the site of significant ethnochoreological and revival-movement research since the 1960s. It challenges well-established norms in methodology, calling for a more reflexive awareness on the part of fieldworkers.

## Manuscript Editor's Introduction – Colin Quigley

Sándor Varga's essay makes an original and significant contribution to the study of traditional dance among Hungarians in Transylvania. This large literature is little known to English language readers, except for the structural and historical analyses of György Martin and Ernő Pesovár that were translated in the 1960s and frequently cited in histories of ethnochoreology since that time. The research paradigm and program established by Martin for the Folk Dance Department of the Institute for Folk Music have dominated the subsequent research until quite recently. Varga challenges his colleagues to adopt a reflexive approach in assessing the impact of their presence upon those with whom they have worked in the field. At the same time Varga's work is steeped in the rich legacy of the earlier research traditions of Hungarian ethnochoreology and ethnology. While taking a stance of reflexivity more aligned with Western scholarship, he maintains an outstanding dedication to the detail and deep personal knowledge of tradition that has characterized Hungarian ethnology generally.

Varga examines the impact of what is called the dance-house (revival) movement on the life of the rural villages in Transylvania. In 1972 a group of young folk-ensemble dancers in Budapest were brought together at the instigation of several ensemble accompanists to create social events in which dancing was to be performed freely to live music *without* choreography. Such improvisatory performance characterised the dance tradition in its original social contexts and young people of Budapest found it amenable to their desire for a degree of independence from government institutional control. This approach to music and dance revival was inspired by the philosophies and pedagogical methods of several key researchers active in the late 1960s—György Martin prominent among them.<sup>2</sup> The relocation of this rural music/dance tradition to Budapest was infused with the spirit of the youth movements of that era. It quickly became very popular and soon spread both throughout Hungary and among the urban youth back in Romania. The “dance-house movement” was born. Over the last forty years, it has undergone several phases of decline and renewal, as do most revivals. It is currently experiencing another renaissance among a new generation and is now fully globalized with dance communities active all around the world. In 2011 “The Táncház method: a Hungarian model for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage” was inscribed in the UNESCO list of “programmes, projects, and activities for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage considered to best reflect the principles and objects of the Convention” for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (see

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/Art18/00515>). What had begun as an urban youth phenomenon became internationally recognized for its success.

## Note on Translation

Translating into English from Hungarian presents a number of challenges. In particular, the grammatical differences are such that a literal translation requires a full restatement of an idea to achieve its more idiomatic expression in English. Some of the original sentence structure nevertheless shows through this transformation. Because of the multi-ethnic population in the region, both Hungarian and Romanian language local terminology and usages appear and are kept in the original with an English gloss; language specific to dance and music practice, again in both Hungarian and Romanian, are perforce found throughout the essay.

## I. Introduction

It is common knowledge in ethnology that in the course of field interactions researchers inevitably influence the community they are investigating (Kaschuba 2004:60, 169-170). Whereas reflective ethnography is common in international scholarship, few Hungarian ethnographers have published reflections on their works and investigations in this respect (cf. Bakó 2004; Zempléni 2000).<sup>3</sup> We dance researchers also have to reckon with our methodological failures, namely that we have not elaborated a set of fieldwork standards for Hungarian dance folkloristics.<sup>4</sup> This is paradoxical in that Hungarian dance researchers spend significantly more time in the field than other Hungarian ethnographers and there are hardly any “dry-as-dust” pedants among them.<sup>5</sup>

Folk-dance research in Hungary has had a close relationship with the dance-house movement since its inception: György Martin and his fellows contributed to the dance-house movement’s formation as early as the preparatory phase (Quigley 2015:112-113). Subsequently, since a great number of dancers themselves became researchers, hardly any professional folk dance researchers now have not participated by dancing in some kind of dance ensemble.<sup>6</sup> The dance-house movement, which has been growing since the 1970s in Hungary and subsequently in Transylvania (Romania) as well, represented what Tamás Hofer has termed a *hard-core* approach to safeguarding traditions.<sup>7</sup> It then spread countrywide and achieved international fame by the 1990s. Dances of the Mezőség region (Câmpia Transilvanie, Transylvanian Plain), which had gained national popularity by that time, have not lost popularity over the last twenty years: not a single urban dance-house event that uses a string band comes to an end without a Mezőség dance suite and the traditional dancers of Mezőség have been constant guests of various folk dance festivals (cf. Halmos 2006:14). In a fairly parallel manner, investigations have gained renewed impetus again and again since the 1980s: besides folk dance researchers, enthusiastic amateurs visit villages of the area in order to learn and document *surviving* elements of the dance and music culture<sup>8</sup> that characterized the onetime peasant world. This intensive attention became the origin of cultural and social processes of change taking place in traditional village communities.<sup>9</sup>

The issue I have raised here concerns me in two aspects: I first met the people of Vișa (Vișea)<sup>10</sup> in 1993 as a folk dancer, then a year later I arrived there as a dance-house tourist, and finally as an ethnographer. I have been doing fieldwork there continuously since 1997. At

the same time I have been teaching the traditional folk dances of Mezőség villages (e.g., Visa) as an active dancer, have brought tradition bearers from Visa to Hungary many times, and have led troupes interested in folk dance to the Mezőség on many occasions.

In the present study, I attempt to reveal the influence of the *hard-core* safeguarding of traditions (dance-house movement, dance-house-related tourism) on the contemporary dance culture of a village in Mezőség, Visa. Closely corresponding to this, I explore the impact of these transformations on the village community, and how these changes form and influence everyday social relationships and senses of connection among members of the community to their heritage.

## II. Introducing the Field

Since the seventeenth century the ethnic Hungarian population in the Mezőség region has been scattered in settlements of predominantly mixed population and interspersed among Romanian villages (Kósa and Filep 1980). Mezőség as a region lags behind other great regions of Transylvania in both economy and infrastructure. In these other regions, ethnic groups have lived in symbiosis and developed a culture rich in archaisms over the past two or three centuries (cf. Kósa 1998:334; Martin 1995:110). But in Mezőség, military campaigns, epidemics, and migration wreaked enormous devastation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to economic analysis of the landscape over time, the regional economy and ecology still have not recovered. Mezőség suffered unmitigated isolation and now the situation has become even worse (cf. Makkai 2003:40-61, 119-120; Varga 2011:20-25). At the end of the unsuccessful process of “repeasantization,”<sup>11</sup> the vast majority of inhabitants subsist on their pensions, which they strive in vain to supplement through farming and animal husbandry—the technologies for which are obsolete. This way of life offers few prospects for the young, most of whom relocate to cities; thus Mezőség villages tend to be composed of an aging population (cf. Kiss, Molnár, and Varga 2011:8-9).

Ethnographers began to pay heed to music and dance culture in the Transylvanian Mezőség fairly late, only in the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Today abundant audio and visual recordings, textual transcriptions, photos, and written descriptions of these traditions are available.<sup>13</sup> However, this research is deficient in that it focused on archaic features characteristic of the culture several decades ago and dance practices that continued into the mid or late 1960s. Unfortunately, our research did not reflect on the comprehensive transformation of traditional culture that was taking place almost from the time studies of the region began. We rarely posed questions concerning the social background of the phenomena we analyzed (cf. Varga 2007:124). Only a few writings concern interactions between traditional and modernized aspects of society and culture.<sup>14</sup> These writings have, nevertheless, led to significant reform in the function of traditional dances in certain villages.

Visa, the settlement I investigate, is located forty kilometers northeast of Kolozsvár (Cluj), in Kolozs county (județul Cluj). The vast majority of the approximately 600 inhabitants is ethnic Hungarian, while the smaller portion is ethnic Romanian. Romanian inhabitants interact daily with the ethnic Hungarian majority, their coexistence favored by the fact that they speak one another’s languages (cf. Kiss, Molnár, and Varga 2011:6-7). Regular weekend dance events called *tánc (joc)* in Visa used to be traditional occasions of social dancing and entertainment, but they disappeared in the mid-1960s. The only dancing opportunities for those aged over fifty—i.e., for most of the population—are dance fests after the annual *juhmérés* [feast of sheep’s milk measuring] or sometimes the vintage ball, and stage performances shown at various festivals organized outside the village or at village days. With the demise of dance-related socialization, the process of bequeathing the dance tradition from

one generation to the next was broken. The disco styles that today's young generation dances are unfamiliar to older people. The restructuring of dance occasions created a cultural gap between older and younger generations, changed the circle of participants, and transformed dances and the music that accompanied them.

### III. Relations between the Dance-House of Kolozsvár and the Villagers

In the early 1970s, the folk art movement following the first dance-houses of Budapest drew people's attention beyond the state borders to the Carpathian Basin's folk culture. Dance-houses in Kolozsvár could pride themselves on being unique, drawing traditional dancers from the neighboring villages into many folk dance events. The increasing popularity of the Kolozsvár dance-house attracted more and more young people from Mezőség villages as well as the city. Young people coming from Visea found themselves in an inclusive atmosphere where their particular knowledge and relationship brought from the village was well appreciated. This made their integration to the urban society emotionally easier. We ought to mention here the general role of dance-houses in social cohesion: older people, who would quite often wear their traditional dress, could mingle with the urban, intellectual, and other working class youth, students of secondary and tertiary education, on occasions of entertainment. Such outstanding personalities of Transylvanian dance-houses as Zoltán Kallós and Ádám Köncei maintained good relationships with researchers and dancers from Hungary and helped them gain access to traditionalist ethnic Hungarian villages (Andrásfalvy 1993:45-47).<sup>15</sup> The number of interested people has gradually grown since the mid-1980s.

### IV. Dance-House-Related Tourism

Transylvanian folk art has become a popular tourist attraction as a consequence of the augmentation and internationalization of the dance-house movement's revival. Since the regime change of 1990, foreigners, primarily of Hungarian origin, have been coming to take photographs and video recordings as well as form the ranks of participants in music and dances of some Hungarian-speaking settlements.<sup>16</sup> Numerous folk art camps have been organized since 1992, one of the most popular of which is that held in the hometown of Zoltán Kallós, the dance camp of Válaszút (Răscruți), Mezőség.

The merger of folklore and tourism is a worldwide phenomenon whose onset in Hungary dates back to the initial explorations of folk traditions and folk arts in the urban scene at the beginning of the twentieth century (Fejős 1992:338). The promotion of folk arts for tourism is especially common in Eastern Europe, where locals present traditions that, for the tourist, appear exotic in comparison with their counterparts in other parts of Europe.<sup>17</sup> Zoltán Szabó makes distinctions among the following three forms of dance-house tourism:

1. The *direct form* in which a "specialized" tourist gets in contact with "original" folklore in its original environment.
2. The *transitional form* in which "real" folklore is presented uprooted from its original environment as a stage production. "Tourists" embody the informants themselves in this case.
3. The *indirect form* in which it is not the informant who conveys folklore, but instead those who have learnt from the informants in a direct (or indirect) way (Szabó 2006:180).

## V. Relationships between the Dance-House Participants and the People of Visa

Following the onset of the exploration and scientific documentation of Visa's dance culture (1960s), and then after the birth of the dance-house in Kolozsvár in 1977 (Könczei 2004b:78), traditional dancers in Visa soon established good relations with researchers, choreographers, and dance-house participants from Kolozsvár and Hungary. Several factors made it easy for dancers and researchers to keep in touch:

- Visa is located close to Kolozsvár. As Romanian industry developed, more laborers were required and this led, from the 1970s onward, to more frequent bus service.
- The inhabitants of Visa working and studying in the city composed a significant majority of dance-house participants in Kolozsvár. They quickly befriended other young people in the dance-house owing to the opportunities such institutions afforded for participants to establish social relations. This created opportunities for dance-house musicians from Kolozsvár to play for local balls in Visa.
- Zoltán Kallós, the ethnographer of Kolozsvár who was born and bred in Válaszút, relied on his relatives in Visa to help him initiate his research in that village in the early 1950s. Many who were interested Transylvanian and Hungarian traditions visited Visa directly or indirectly as a result of his groundwork there.
- Language barriers were not an issue. Even though the majority of the population was ethnic Hungarian, Romanian inhabitants also speak Hungarian.
- Although from the 1970s onward the communist regime prohibited hospitality in private houses, there was no police station in Visa and no one to place restrictions on the movements of visitors there (cf. Molnár 2011:67-69).

Dance-house-related tourists began to visit more frequently beginning in the 1980s—primarily on such occasions as weddings, which featured significant amounts of music and dance. Dance-house-related tourists from Hungary targeted their visits to specialists and talented dancers, as well as to relatives of those they knew from Kolozsvár dance-houses—the latter being the most easy contacts. Although inhabitants of the region were prohibited from hosting foreigners in their homes, many took the risk of doing so anyway in order to foster good family relationships and friendships.<sup>18</sup> A circle of villagers maintaining almost constant contact with researchers and dance-house participants began to form as a consequence of these social networks.

Several examples of the three dance-house tourism forms can be found in the folk dance culture of Visa. The *indirect form* occurs in connection with a traditional ball or dance party. Concerned outsiders<sup>19</sup> attending pay meticulous attention, record the chain of events, and often dance actively. Political and social developments in the 1990s brought about changes in this respect too. *Direct dance-house tourism* became stronger and more *hard core*; furthermore, its *transitional form* also appeared: dance-house participants introduced an increasing number of singers and dancers into dance camps and festivals. The transitional type of tourism in Visa has had a significant influence on the social network of the village community over the past few years; folk dance traditionalists are often invited for guest appearances in festivals and folk dance camps in Transylvania, Hungary, and other foreign countries.<sup>20</sup> These patterns of interaction foster the *indirect form* of dance-house tourism. One frequently encounters Visa folk dance traditions in urban dance-house events and adapted in stage productions.

The frequency of interaction among the people of Visa and dance-house participants has increased significantly to the point of creating a closed circle of expert and favorite informants. Several other reasons explain the formation of this circle:

- Few dancers can afford to take time off from their daily rural activities, and, among the elderly, long journeys present a hardship. So the younger people tend to represent the village, even though few of their members (as compared to those of the older generation) are good dancers.
- Practical reasons also play a role: organizers commonly invite dancers who own cars, which tends to create groups composed of relatives and friends of the driver rather than of the best performers.
- Women's opportunities to dance are frequently determined by men. Patrons invite a particular man (frequently by name) to perform or teach. That man in turn tends to invite his spouse, sibling, or some other relative as a partner.
- Another important factor in selecting dancers is the quality of social relationship between the inviter and the villager: "Because this Márton [innkeeper], this Gizi's husband, this is no good dancer. Though he was invited, b'cause Hungarian always go in his buffet . . ." <sup>21</sup>

The group of village performers, then, is organized in part according to an external system of relations—relatives/friends of Kolozsvár dance house participants and informants assigned on the basis of their knowledge—and in part according to an internal social network composed of neighbors and friends.

## VI. Changes of Dance Set/Collection and the Formal Appearance of Dance

Attempts to preserve certain traditional elements in a conscious manner began in Visa, as elsewhere, as a consequence of the folkloristic interest toward the traditional peasant's culture and the influence of the revival movement which sprang from it. In the early 1980s Zoltán Kallós used his family and his field acquaintances to organize a dance troupe of Kolozsvár dance-house participants composed of Visa youths (cf. Molnár 2011:67-68). The troupe members performed several times at the grandest folklore festivals of Romania.<sup>22</sup> Dancers born in the 1960s relearned *lassú cigánytánc* (lit. "slow Gypsy dance"), a slow, couples dance that had already fallen into disuse by the 1940s. They also revived the *négyes* (lit. "foursome") in which two couples would dance together in a small circle—an organic part of the knowledge and dance practice of the 1920s generation.<sup>23</sup> From the 1970s on, young people visiting urban dance-houses have acquired an outstanding level of dance knowledge as compared with dancers from other generations, whose experience was limited to the dances fashionable during their times. These young dancers perform motifs that are popular among their contemporaries in the same, if oftentimes clumsy, way; they also employ other motifs that were characteristic of dances in earlier generations; and beyond that, they employ motifs that have never been used before in Visa.

Some traditionalist dancers adopted new motifs that they observed when they were invited to dance at various Hungarian festivals beginning in the 1990s; at least one of these dancers tried to learn a new dance type. Members of the dance troupe of Visa functioning from the 1980s regularly performed *tîrnăvăeană* [Romanian, "slow men's dance"], which was still at its pinnacle at that time, but they did not relearn the *sűrű legényes* ["quick men's dance"] as a consequence of its more difficult technique. They also did not participate in ballroom dances on the stage. Such dances were not regarded as traditional by dance folklorists and dance-house participants, even though these dances were part of the active repertoire of the region.

By the late 1990s one could experience and observe that the rise in folkloristic attention from outside Visa had engendered more appreciation for traditional dance culture and correspondingly the importance of traditionalism among Visa inhabitants. The older dancers who, because of their rich knowledge of dance motifs, were invited to filmings and festivals

and taught urban youth, grew even more famous. Teenagers, however, tended to refrain from performing traditional dances. They were ashamed to perform in front of onlookers and guests, because the majority these audience members, having been socialized in dance ensembles, were better dancers. As a consequence of the often unilateral interest of dance-house participants in the traditional culture of the villages, connections between these urban youths and the local villages youths are very weak—even though members of both these groups are close in age. The local youths look negatively upon this phenomenon: “Don’t get me wrong Sanyi, but you always [look for] the elderly too. . . . Come the Hungarian, and we don’t even exist. As if we didn’t exist. At least you say a greeting . . . [said laughingly].”<sup>24</sup> Thus, the impact of outside interest in the traditions of Visa’s youths is, paradoxically, one that militates against their revival.

## VII. Impact on Organizing Dance Events

Many young people moving to the city were just about to rid themselves of rural markings because they regarded them as old fashioned. But, after joining the dance-house community in Cluj, they began to perceive these from a different perspective. Thus several of the young people of Visa turned toward their own traditional values. Some, who were good dancers anyway owing to their family heritage, had become “key figures of their traditions” by then and took on the tradition of *kezes* [lit. “guarantor”], organizers of dance events. These latter were the most important helpers for the Hungarian researchers and dance-house participants when they began visiting the village in the 1990s. These *guarantors* assisted in organizing many local dance events; created ad-hoc dance groups for such special events as folk-dance festivals, which required the village’s best dancers; and in general arranged dance events in compliance with the revival fashion. *Guarantorship* survives as a custom largely as a consequence of folklorism and the *guarantors* still organize the now very occasional events (*juhmérés*, “ball”) in which hired musicians provide live music.

## VIII. Impact on the Social Relations of the People of Visa

We saw that dancers have been selected for participation in tours (e.g., for Hungarian onstage performances) on the basis of their dancing knowledge, their kinship and friendship ties, practical factors, and matters pertaining to gender and generation. Nevertheless, several good dancers in the village have never performed at any festival or dance-related event. Most of them are women whose husbands are not dancers. Some men also remained beyond the horizon of potentially interested people, primarily because they were not relatives of those dancers who had been “discovered” in the early period.

In 1995, a couple of us, as members of a folk dance ensemble, began to invite dancers from Visa to Hungary. We had planned to host around forty people, including the musicians. We entrusted two of our acquaintances in the village with gathering the troupe. The distressing result was that five of the sixteen couples from Visa could barely dance, and another five couples were weak dancers. They were relatives or neighbors of the organizers, or worked for them. It has become quite clear on the basis of other similar cases that folk dance knowledge is not always the primary aspect in the internal system of relationships when deciding which dancer to invite, especially in the case of women. Conflicts ensued even within families in Visa as a consequence of the external and internal relationships that gave rise to invitations. According to a man from a well-known local dancer family:

Now you know what it is all about? Aunt Kati [sister of the informant] was a bit angry with us, because I switched out her for her [pointing at his wife] to come with me to dance. Something must have been [the matter], 'cause she hasn't come over since then. Not that she is angry, because we talk, we're fine. It's just that she didn't like it. With uncle Dezső [his sister's husband, a clumsy dancer] she of course cannot dance the way she dances with me.<sup>25</sup>

The exchange of dance partners had a repercussion on the man's family. In revenge, the son of the overshadowed woman, who ran a small grocery store in the village from the beginning of the 1990s, fired the man's daughter (his own niece), who had been employed at his business.

One local woman whose family Hungarian dance-house participants visited somewhat frequently in the early period (1970s) has fallen ill, making dancing harder and harder for her. Her husband, however, is one of the few who knows how to dance the local solo dance.

I won't let my husband go dancing I'm telling you. He went many times, not only now. Not with anyone, ever! I won't let him! If I stay here at home, he will stay at home too; that's it! It's simply that. . . . He wanted to take his co-mother-in-law, that Uncle Peter would take his co-mother-in-law. And I said no, this dance-house meeting is the concern of me and my husband! 'Cause we've been the two of us since eighty-seven, gone to dance until recently. . . . My daughter is after Pista's [relative and neighbor, with who they performed together many times earlier] wife's sister. Sisters-in-law. Yet like this. That Pista is envious. And then Uncle Mátyás [also a relative and a former dancer] has become likewise that way. We wouldn't have thought so. We could get on so well with each other, and now see how big fuss he made about not being able to go with his co-mother-in-law. So, let her take anyone with herself, we are not angry, but she will never ever go with Peter [her husband]. Neither does he go nor does he say we should go [looking at Uncle Peter]. So, they may go, we are not angry, they won't get that solo anyway [referring to Uncle Peter's dance]. He is the one and only in the village."<sup>26</sup>

After that wife forbade her husband from going dancing, the two of them were gradually sidelined from that externally defined circle, with interested parties visiting them on fewer and fewer occasions. This has led to several confrontations with other villagers. On the occasion of a dance-festival performance where they and one of their neighbors were honored with a medal:

Really, we have the silver medal that he got [my husband]. And Pista [the neighbor] got a bronze one. The city's coat of arms is on it, very nice. And then . . . when we'd arrived home, here he shouted over the fence . . . he insulted us, so there was a burial the other day, where we didn't even address each other. It was his niece who was being buried then. And he was there also, Mátyás, he lives in the neighborhood, but they didn't talk. We are walking like mutes. We don't talk, don't say anything. So this Pista, has not been talking to us for ten years, or more, because of that medal. He shouted to us over the fence that we should f.k our medal, 'cause it was good for nothing.<sup>27</sup>

The frequent television broadcast of film footage on the dances of Visa also contributes to the breakdown of relations among the locals: "Just 'cause our neighbour was once shown on TV, well what shall I be saying now . . . how [proud he got]. Let's say we are old enough, still we can dance a slow couple dance, we can waltz too, and two-three, as much as they turned . . . – I have just watched it – on the stage, 'cause I watched Duna Television. I could have danced as much as she did, even in this situation after undergoing an operation."<sup>28</sup>

Problems frequently arise between the host and the guest: dance-house participants very often crowd the home of a famous dancer or musician informant associated with the dance-house movement. The hospitality required in such a case imposes an unreasonable burden on



the host's family.<sup>29</sup> The necessary reciprocity concerning the mutual exchange of favors and presents doesn't always function rationally and as a result urban visitors often end up taking advantage of the locals.<sup>30</sup> A set of wedding events between 1980 and 2005 were cases in point. While these were excellent occasions for Hungarian and Romanian researchers and dance-house participants alike to study the dances of Visa in their functional setting and even to participate in them, foreign visitors (as I remember it) often arrived without advance arrangement. In every single wedding of the thirteen I observed, some dance-house participant guests discretely removed themselves from the wedding before the *mutatás* [lit. "showing up"], the midnight ritual in which the best men go around Visa with a bowl or a bucket to ask for the presents or the donation meant to be given to the couple just married.<sup>31</sup> The guests conveniently return after this ritual, having missed their opportunity to reciprocate in kind. Consequently, by the end of the 1980s, Transylvanian dance-house participants arriving at Visa were dismissed as *koldus* ["beggars"]. In response, wedding organizers began to set up a separate table for the Hungarian visitors where the best men would stop by twice to collect gifts.<sup>32</sup> These men would also comb the wedding site for loiterers during the *mutatás* to get their contributions as well.

In many cases the visitors demonstrated a complete inability to adapt to local norms:<sup>33</sup> "Uncle Béla was doing a figure [roughly parodying here]. . . . When he drinks he always behaves like that. Then he was doing all figures for the Japanese [a Japanese dance researcher]. Then the Japanese man thought he would want to punch him, and gave him a slap. What did he do? In a wedding . . . Béla has a habit that when he drinks, he . . . does figures. So he was doing one for the Japanese. And the Japanese man mistakenly thought that he would punch him. So he hit Béla so hard that he overturned immediately."<sup>34</sup>

My experience is that hosts in Visa carefully consider mutuality in the sphere of favors. Until I learned the fundamental social norms, related behavioral customs and habits of hospitality in Visa—particularly in the first five years of my research—I landed myself in many extremely embarrassing situations.<sup>35</sup> My social network in the village has still not returned to smooth operation since that time; besides establishing truly working friendships, compensating for each favor consumes a great deal of time, effort, and money. Each of these examples of interaction reflects the somewhat unilateral character of the relations between the dance-house-related visitors and the people of Visa. It should be added, however, that many people in both Transylvania and Hungary have very good relationships with families in Visa. Numerous mutual work relationships, deep friendships, and even marriages have also been formed upon these relations in the past decades.

## IX. Two Case Studies

Nowadays, inhabitants of Visa do not organize local feasts or traditional dance events for their own sakes but rather in response to external interest. The most expressive example of this is the *juhmérés*, which is held every spring on the very first weekend after St. George's Day. That is the first time in the year when animal herds are driven out to graze. Prior to the grazing, villagers measure each owner's sheep's milk-yield in order to decide how many times an owner can milk the sheep that are grazed in a common herd during the summer season. This custom is of extraordinary significance in the communal life in economic terms, too. The milk *measuring* is followed by an event featuring traditional folk dance. On many occasions after 2003, Hungarian dance-house participants hired musicians for the *measuring* event.<sup>36</sup> My university students and I witnessed an evening dance resulting from such an external arrangement in 2007, and one internally arranged in 2008.

In the first case, an enthusiastic *guarantor* visiting from Hungary was the main organizer of the evening dance-house and hired the musicians. Even the community of sheep owners (*turma*)<sup>37</sup> considered his opinion when deciding about the date of the *juhmérés*. While participants in the *juhmérés* were in great spirits having a joyful time in the local *buffet*, the Hungarian visitors were documenting this as an endangered traditional folk custom. We were in fact witnessing an event in which the people of Visa were participating in their folk dance traditions in a traditional environment and in the context of an appropriate function. It turned out, however, that the *guarantor* made several mistakes during the event due to his lack of competence and proper preparation. First, he had not organized food for the musicians, who were appalled and did not want to play music. The *guarantor*'s local acquaintance had to save the day, taking on an unreasonably great portion of the event's management. Second, the Hungarian *guarantor* did not know the community of sheep owners and so did not know who were entitled to take part in the event and who were not. As a consequence of the gradually increasing crowd, a number of the owners who could not dance went home, and then they reclaimed part of their own share having already paid for the *measuring*'s cover charge the first day.

In 2008, differing information was circulating about the arrangements for the *measuring* and even the date of the ritual was uncertain. Finally we set out curiously on the appointed day after having had a discussion with some people from Visa on the phone. We were surprised when the host on our reception asked us if we were going to organize the entertainment after the *measuring*. On the assigned date locals still did not know whether the famous musicians from Magyarpalatka (Pălatca) would come or not. When it was revealed that we had not hired them, the people of Visa looked for CDs and audio cassettes so that the *measuring* would not happen without an evening entertainment.

The story about the *measuring* of 2009 yielded another lesson. As a consequence of the previous year, several Hungarian dance-house participants cooperated and made preliminary phone inquiries with the sheep owners of Visa concerning the *measuring*'s date. The Hungarians were to cover the traveling and hiring expenses of the musicians, whereas locals would provide their feeding. A week before the assigned date we received a phone call saying that the *sheep measuring* had already been held a week earlier. It was revealed only later that sheep owners split into two groups: some (with a good number of dancers) would have insisted on the agreed date, but a smaller group wanted to arrange the *measuring* at the time of the Romanian Easter, since separated lambs can be sold at good price then. This reason was, of course, regarded as more important than their relationship with the dance-house participants. Their advocate went around the village saying: "Hungarian haversackers [those overly concerned with preserving archaic ways] should not decide on the date of the *measuring* in Visa!,"<sup>38</sup> with which he managed to persuade the majority to hold the *juhmérés* a week earlier. Some of the sheep-owning families who were on good terms with the Hungarian dance-house participants resented this and quit the sheep owners' community in the aftermath. As a consequence the *turma* of Visa significantly decreased in number, and its social function was damaged, i.e., its capacity to promote local cohesion was reduced.

The impact of external interest is therefore ambiguous: on one hand it can vitalize a folk custom in the short run; and on the other hand it can harm internal cohesion of the village community, thus making its own goal (traditionalism) more difficult in the long run. *Sheep measuring* is slowly gaining a new function: while it used to be a ritual in which the sheep owners affirmed and maintained their social cohesion, today it serves to represent local tradition for the benefit of those outside the community. It affirms the relationship among some selected members of the community and the tourists interested in dance-house.<sup>39</sup>

## X. Summary

In this study I have attempted to delineate the influence of dance-house-related tourism on the social relationships of a Mezőség village and the prestige of the local traditional culture. The introduction of Visa in the research interest of ethnography and dance research resulted in a two-way communication connection, of which one component is the village, characterized by its traditional culture, and the other is the group interested in that culture (cf. Molnár 2011:67). Information streams and creates effects in both directions: folklorism compels a response from the community of Visa. The local inhabitants have been sensing the interest in their traditions and traditionalist initiatives and, welcome or not, they respond to this interest. Only by means of their sheer interest did researchers and amateur collectors arriving there to explore traditional culture implant the idea of appreciation and enhancement of the surviving traditions and the revival of those ones already forgotten (cf. Sándor 2006:26, 28). Locals encountered the role of traditionalist involuntarily, one which was brought forth by the folkloristic interest.

The process I have described here shows that, by recognizing their value, some elements of a vanished tradition can be reincorporated into communal life; however the functions of these elements are transformed in the process. On the other hand, the social network formed by urban interests and the valorization of traditional knowledge have an immense but not always beneficial effect on the quality and intensity of internal social connections. Finally I must note that in general we pay little attention to the ethics of interpersonal cultural relations and the pedagogical aspects of folklore phenomena during the discourse about dance-house-related tourism, despite the fact that its aesthetic value and community-forming capability can be contrasted with “revue-and-souvenir-folklorism,” which is based mainly on financial interests (cf. Bausinger 1982:85, 90; Fejős 1992: 344).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared in Varga 2014 and was subsequently translated into Romanian in Varga 2015. This English language version contains a few small changes from these earlier versions but remains essentially the same.

<sup>2</sup> Varga cites several Hungarian sources on the history of this movement; Quigley’s “The Hungarian Dance House Movement and Revival of Transylvanian String Band Music” (*Oxford Handbook of Music Revivals*, ed. Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill, 182-202 [New York: Oxford University Press, 2014]) extends these treatments up to the present and includes its music as well as its dancing practice.

<sup>3</sup> The reason why only a small number of publications has been published on this topic so far is that it concerns several delicate issues: on one hand it challenges the static and often aestheticizing aspects that characterize our contemporary discipline, and on the other hand it calls for self-reflection—which may cause uneasiness for researchers by making them confront the possibility that their presence and operation may have had a negative influence on the community under investigation. We gain a more favorable result by looking into the studies concerning the relationship between tourists being interested in folklore phenomena and villages visited by them. The scholarly writings in the book edited by Margit Feischmidt (2005) relate to this topic either directly or indirectly. See also Fejős 1992; Kovács 2000; Molnár 2011; Sándor 2006; Szabó 1998, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Péter Niedermüller referred to this in 1992 as a deficiency characterizing the entire ethnographic discipline (1992:364).

<sup>5</sup> On the basis of my own experience, most of the professional and amateur dance researchers do not apply the methodological approaches that have been developed by ethnologists since the great paradigm shift of the social sciences in the 1920s (cf. Kürti 1995; Felföldi 1999:57-62, 63-65). Great emphasis was placed on the importance of these in the international ethnological-anthropological practice; several scholarly books and chapters have been published on the topic in the past forty to fifty years (Babbie 2008; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Faubion and Marcus 2009; Junker 1960; Kaschuba 2004:167-182; Lawless, Sutlive, and Zamora 1983; Naroll and Cohen 1973; Spradley 1979, 1980; Royce 1977; Wolcott 2005). Apart from guidebooks dealing with the collection/gathering of Hungarian folk dances (Kaposi 1956; Morvay 1953; Pesovár 1983), only four brief

methodological writings were published concerning the special data collections of dance folklorists and dance filming (Martin 1983, 1998:590-595; Pálffy 1990, 1991), none of which reflect on the abovementioned issues. Questions raised by experts of ethnographic filming and visual anthropology (Ruby 1996; Tari 2002:171-178, 184-185, 190-193) have still not been answered by the Hungarian dance folkloristics.

<sup>6</sup> The close relationship between folk-dance research and the folk-dance movement has also been remarked on in one of László Felföldi's articles (1998), in which he mentions applied dance study as a possibly new, independent field of research.

<sup>7</sup> Based on Iványi Vitányi's theory, Tamás Hofer differentiated between two types of safeguarding traditions: soft-core (light, entertaining, revue-like representation of folk art heritage primarily applied to stage) and hard-core types. The latter stands for the almost unchanged learning and interpretation of archaic elements. Such an approach is like that advocated by Bartók, Kodály, and later Martin and his associates concerning the preservation of folk art (Hofer 1989:71).

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that the "myth of the field worker" arose among Hungarian folk dancers just as among ethnographers in the era after Malinowski (cf. Kaschuba 2004:61).

<sup>9</sup> I should mention that they do not distinguish among outsiders who arrive in Transylvanian villages: regardless of arriving with the intention of conducting research or spending leisure time, those who are interested in folklore phenomena are all regarded as *guests*, "*idegen*" (vernacular for alien), or *Hungarian, of Hungary*.

<sup>10</sup> Data or narratives represented in this study may violate personal emotions, or harm local social relationships, therefore informants remain anonymous, only with their sex and age marked.

<sup>11</sup> Term used by Hungarian scholars István Kinda and Peti Lehel (2005:342, 351) for the social and economic process caused by decollectivisation after the fall of the socialist regime in East-Europe. As the result of the decollectivisation (1990), rural families reclaimed their lands which were collectivized in the period 1948-1962 (cf. Cartwright 2000).

<sup>12</sup> For different periods of the exploration of Mezőség, see Keszeg 2010:13-17.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Martin 1995, especially chapters concerning the dance dialects of Mezőség, or dance types existing in Mezőség.

<sup>14</sup> A study by Flóra Kovács (2000) discusses transformations of the culture of Szék village—a place famous for the preservation of its traditions in the ethnographic and dance-house-related discourse—at the end of the twentieth century, and reflects on the circumstances surrounding the formation of dance events. In his studies, Péter Molnár (2005, 2011) investigates dance's social function and position by the comparison of traditional and modernized dance culture concerning two villages in Mezőség. Csongor Könczei refers to the contemporary changes of traditional dance culture in several of his studies (2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

<sup>15</sup> Many dancers of those generations to whom they handed down their knowledge have relocated to Hungary since the 1980s (cf. <http://www.hagyományokhaza.hu/oldal/1740/>, accessed 29 August 2016). The Romanian communist regime tended to prohibit and restrain the operation of Transylvanian dance-houses gradually from the mid-1980s. The vast majority of dance-house participants moved to Hungary, whereas those who stayed in Transylvania more or less gave up the lifestyle associated with dance-house movement. It was the task of reorganizers to create new fundamentals for dance-houses in the new social and political atmosphere of the 1990s.

<sup>16</sup> The number of attending ethnographers and bystanding tourists could significantly contribute to the success and prestige of a wedding or a ball after measuring sheep's milk in Transylvanian villages following the dance-house-related tourism's intensification and diffusion.

<sup>17</sup> Zoltán Fejős considers Hungary a Great Power in folklore, where the issue of authenticity is raised with remarkable acuity. This observation appears to be anachronistic in many cases, as encounters and interactions between tourists and folk artists bring forth inherently new, nontraditional situations (cf. Fejős 1992:338, 343). The touristic opportunity provided by dance-houses and dance events become important from this perspective, where guests can become active participants and creators of the happenings (cf. Fejős 1992:344).

<sup>18</sup> It appears to be an important factor from this aspect that guests' accommodation was (and still is) associated with high social prestige in itself among villagers, which was even more appreciated when the guest was from the mother country.

<sup>19</sup> These are usually amateur folk dancers, ethnographer students, folk-dance troupe leaders, or folk musicians.

<sup>20</sup> I mention only some randomly selected instances: traditional folk dancers of Visa performed in the National Dance-House Festival and Fair in 2007; they took part in a folk dance training session lasting several days in Szeged in 2008; they are regularly present in the Festival for Traditional Dance and Music of Mezőség, Szamosújvár (Gherla), etc.

<sup>21</sup> 66-year-old woman. Recorded by Kata Stein in Visa on April 23, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> This is also verified by photos of 1981 and 1982 dance-house meetings in Székelyudvarhely (MTA ZTI Ft. 1113, 1143) taken by the Folk Dance Department of the MTA ZTI (Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences) and articles (Kelemen 1982).

- <sup>23</sup> In accordance with the reminiscences of the troupe members, they haven't even seen the *foursome* in the village, which had already disappeared in the dance set by the mid-1940s.
- <sup>24</sup> Eighteen-year-old male. Recorded by Sándor Varga in Visa in January 7, 2001.
- <sup>25</sup> Fifty-nine-year-old man. Recorded by Kata Stein in Visa on April 24, 2007.
- <sup>26</sup> Sixty-six-year-old woman. Recorded by Kata Stein in Visa on April 23, 2007.
- <sup>27</sup> Sixty-six-year-old woman. Recorded by Kata Stein in Visa on April 23, 2007.
- <sup>28</sup> Sixty-six-year-old woman. Recorded by Kata Stein in Visa on April 23, 2007.
- <sup>29</sup> Visits usually fall into the summer period, when agricultural labor obligates local people anyway.
- <sup>30</sup> I can cite two examples to illustrate this: the number of guests coming from various parts of Hungary had grown to twelve at the home of a familiar male singer and dancer of Szék by the third day of the week-long Szék Days feast in the summer of 2000. On having a chat with the family, it turned out that none of the guests had arranged their visit in advance, and then, after a week's time, they just simply disappeared. In another case, a foreign troupe arrived at a wedding at Szék. After two days of staying as guests, they vanished without waiting for the beginning of the ceremony and stole several sets of attire. Fortunately, cases like the latter happen only rarely.
- <sup>31</sup> The amount given and the name of the giver are formally called out loud after the collection is made.
- <sup>32</sup> This table was usually the one closest to the band. Guests were told that the company at that table could "hear folk music better" there; however, the truth is that organizers could better keep an eye on the dance-house participants.
- <sup>33</sup> These can typically be observed in dance camps. Guests from abroad form a separate cultural unit ("the camp"), sustaining their own urban system of relations and norms, to which the locals visiting the camp usually conform for their entire week-long stay in the village. It is almost impossible to experience local behavioral customs, and the general "rural culture" in such a case. (I gained my experiences in the dance camps of Kalotaszentkirály [Sâncraiu], Szék, and Válaszút.)
- <sup>34</sup> Seventy-five-year-old man. Recorded by Sándor Varga in Visa on May 10, 1997. It should be added that the man in question, Béla Nagy, was over seventy years old then.
- <sup>35</sup> It happened on our first visit in the summer of 1994 when arriving from a trip that I and my companions noticed that our hostess had looked into our luggage; what's more, we couldn't find some of our belonging that night. On the spur of the moment, led by our rage, we moved to another family without having thought through the implications of our actions. The case, which didn't go unnoticed, brought serious shame to the family in question. Right before setting off home, we found our objects that we thought to have been stolen; we told our new hosts but it didn't ameliorate the situation. I would not be happy today either if my luggage was disturbed, but knowing how such a delicate issue can be related to the concerned, the village, and what can be told to whom, I could handle such sensitive situations much more diplomatically later on. I might say without being immodest that I am on good terms with the people of Visa, with the amendment that the woman concerned has still not forgiven me.
- <sup>36</sup> Sheep owners in Visa have begun to cut down on hiring bands for the *juhmérés* since the 1970s. They listened to dance music from vinyl record or audio cassette in most cases. The gradually increasing interest in Hungary raised the issue of whether they should revive old-style dance events with live music, however steadily growing hiring costs of the bands necessitated the financial contribution of the Hungarians. The spirit of the first *juhmérés* was so high in the late 1990s that the fame of the accompanying event had spread among the dance-house movement, thus attracting more and more visitors.
- <sup>37</sup> In Romanian: Turmă. It means sheep herd, although the people of Visa also call the community of sheep owners so.
- <sup>38</sup> It is a practice among some dance-house participants to wear traditional clothing and accessories, such as the haversack, which is already an old fashioned phenomenon for the people in Visa. Seventy-five-year-old man. Recorded by Sándor Varga in Visa on January 15, 2010.
- <sup>39</sup> Citing Béla Bartók: "The art of a village can solely be a spontaneous manifestation; as soon as someone wants to intervene and drive it artificially, village art will cease to exist on the spot" (in Sárosi 1972:16).

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