

# **9th Symposium of the ICTMD Study Group on Music and Dance in Southeastern Europe**

21–26 October 2024, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

## **REPORT**

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### **Introduction**

The 9th Symposium of the ICTMD Study Group on Music and Dance in Southeastern Europe is reflected upon with great enthusiasm in this report, marking the first contribution by new members of this vibrant academic community. The opportunity to summarize the symposium’s outcomes and provide perspectives shaped by diverse academic contexts was made possible through the support and trust of the Study Group and its organizing committees. Representing European institutions (Aleksandar and Katarina) and the United States (Dimitris), an effort has been made to present a balanced and comprehensive overview of this remarkable event. Care has been taken to ensure the account remains both concise and insightful, while capturing the essence of this significant gathering.

This year’s symposium was held in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, from October 21 to 26, 2024, and offered a multifaceted exploration of themes at the intersection of music, dance, and cultural heritage. Over the course of five days, 47 presentations were delivered, addressing the following three core themes:

- 1. Heritagization of music and dance in southeast Europe: Museums, collections, archives, and copyrights.**
- 2. Integration of traditional dance and/or music from southeast Europe in artistic performances: Old and new approaches for adaptation of local tradition for the stage.**
- 3. Modes and contexts of transmission of music and dance traditions in the 21st Century: Rehearsals, seminars, summer camps and festivals, both in personal and virtual methods.**

The opening session featured warm welcomes from representatives of the program and organizing committees, including Chairperson, Mehmet Öcal Özbilgin, Programme Chair, Josko Čaleta, Local Organizing Committee Chair, Paul-Alexander Remeş, and Study Group Secretary, Liz Mellish. Their addresses underscored the significance of this gathering, which brings together one of the most active and diverse ICTMD study groups, fostering interdisciplinary dialogues and advancing research on the music and dance traditions of Southeastern Europe.

Beyond the academic program, the symposium provided enriching cultural experiences curated by the local organizers. Highlights included:

- A concert by the Traditional Music Ensemble, Icoane from the „Gheorghe Dima" Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca- A village visit to “Frata”, offering participants an immersive cultural experience.

- An anniversary performance by the “Mugurelul” Students Folk Ensemble from Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca .

- A festive closing party featuring traditional music, dance, food, and drinks.

- An excursion to the “Turda” Salt Mine, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The symposium successfully highlighted the vitality of the International Council for Traditional Music and Dance (ICTMD) and its study groups, showcasing scholarly contributions from participants representing 13 countries. These papers and presentations, enriched by spirited discussions, underscored the symposium’s academic rigor and collegial atmosphere.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the Cluj Program Committee led by Paul-Alexander Remeş, and the local organizers, particularly Nick Green, Liz Mellish and Alina Remeş. Their meticulous planning and hospitality ensured an unforgettable event, blending intellectual engagement with cultural celebration.

## **Symposium Themes**

### **1. Heritagization of music and dance in Southeast Europe: Museums, collections, archives, and copyrights.**

This theme explored the processes of preserving and institutionalizing music and dance traditions in Southeast Europe, with a focus on tangible records such as archives and collections. Inspired by UNESCO’s ICH Convention and linked to Critical Heritage Studies, the discussions emphasized how contemporary practices engage with historical records—reviving, adapting, or deviating from them—and what this reveals about cultural dynamics. It also examines the role of institutions, NGOs, and individuals in managing these records, addressing issues of public engagement, inclusivity, and the representation of marginalized communities. Finally, the theme investigated intellectual property concerns, including the balance between collective heritage and copyright frameworks, ownership of living traditions, and the use of historical materials in digital and institutional contexts.

### **2. Integration of traditional dance and/or music from southeast Europe in artistic performances: Old and new approaches for adaptation of local tradition for the stage.**

This topic examined the adaptation of traditional music and dance for staged performances in Southeastern Europe, highlighting the longstanding division between "authentic" folklore and choreographed adaptations. It questioned whether distinctive schools or traditions have emerged under influential choreographers and what defines their characteristics. The concept of authenticity is central, as it challenges performers to balance historical fidelity with

creativity, variability, and modern relevance. Discussions extended to the incorporation of traditional elements into contemporary performance art, exploring how stylistic transformations maintain or reinterpret cultural values. This theme also addressed the transmission of knowledge, revealing tensions between spontaneous cultural expressions and institutionalized canons.

### **3. The modes and contexts of transmission of music and dance traditions in the 21st Century: rehearsals, seminars, summer camps, and festivals, both in person and virtual methods.**

Focusing on how music and dance traditions are taught and disseminated today, this theme considered both in-person and virtual methods such as rehearsals, seminars, summer camps, and festivals. It highlighted the shift from spontaneous, community-driven learning to structured, expert-led training by choreographers, folklorists, and ethnomusicologists. While professionalism often limits variability, significant contributions from creative individuals continue to shape performance practices. This theme also reflected on the evolution of knowledge transfer, questioning the roles and definitions of experts and teachers and explored the coexistence of institutionalized and amateur transmission methods in preserving and transforming cultural traditions.

### **Survey of research approaches and scholarly perspectives represented at the Symposium**

In this summary, it is important to highlight the diversity of approaches and perspectives presented during the 9th Symposium of the ICTMD Study Group on Music and Dance in Southeastern Europe. It was observed that some presentations were highly descriptive, which did not detract from their value as a means of disseminating knowledge about the cultures and traditions of Southeastern Europe. Such presentations offered valuable insights into the documentation and interpretation of specific social phenomena, such as the focus of the first panel on the stage interpretation of folk traditions from Bulgaria. Another indicative example of the benefits of descriptive approaches was the Romanian panel, which was dedicated entirely to the documentation of traditional music in the Apuseni mountains.

Nevertheless, it became evident that descriptive presentations rarely included theoretical frameworks, which are becoming increasingly prominent in contemporary ethnomusicology. Such frameworks are not only prevalent in North America, where abstract and theoretical approaches to research are often preferred over documentarian methods, but also lately across Europe, reflecting broader paradigmatic shifts within the field. This creates an opportunity for critical reflection on the optimal balance between empirical documentation and theoretical depth, particularly in the context of researching traditions from Southeastern Europe.

In addition to documentarian and descriptive presentations, the symposium also featured a variety of new approaches to music and dance research, incorporating recent theoretical advances. Some stand-out papers that presented innovative approaches include Marko Kölbl's presentation on the representation of minorities in Austrian heritagization processes, which incorporated post-migrant theory as a frame of analysis. A concern with minority communities

and diasporic cultural practices also motivated the research of Katarina Petrović, Aleksandar Arabadžiev, and Nina Wasilewa-Zanechev, who presented on Balkan diasporic practices in Vienna, and Daniela Ivanova-Nyberg, who spoke about Bulgarian dance groups in the United States and Canada.

Another significant theme with contemporary relevance is the impact of digitization and the internet on the production and transmission of heritage. In this light, Ventsislav Dimov presented how elements of traditional Bulgarian music manifest on virtual stages, namely digital platforms and social media applications. Belma Oğul & Hilal Baktaş's paper considered the potential uses of Web 3 technologies like blockchain on the decentralization of archives, incorporating insights from post-human theory. Dilyana Kurdova presented on the work of her own non-profit in revitalizing archived material through rendering it accessible within her virtual community of Bulgarian folk dance enthusiasts. Naila Ceribasic considered the role of new stakeholders in the compilation and dissemination of digitized historical recordings, which is now led not by traditional institutions but by individuals operating on the internet, whom she termed "cura-searchers." Tanya Karamanos examined the potentials and limitations of online learning of traditional Romanian violin music.

Further considering the impact of technology for traditional music and dance, several presenters addressed new developments in the preservation of musical and dance traditions in Southeastern Europe (SEE) within museums, archives, and collections. For example, Bálint Szabó emphasised the importance of technology in the processing, annotation and distribution of dance film recordings. He placed particular focus on the preservation of tapes, and on significance of the communication channels used for the dissemination of these recordings, posing the question of how they could be optimised for a broader audience and researchers. His entire analysis was conducted with the support of his research institute (Hungarian Research Network), thereby underscoring the challenges inherent in the technical limitations and copyright issues, as well as the opportunities afforded by digitalisation, including greater accessibility of documents and the potential for enhancing the management of preserved materials.

In addition to Bálint Szabó, Gül Kaplan Ekemen introduced a new 3D technology for the preservation and transmission of knowledge on traditional dances, thereby demonstrating an innovative approach to research methodology and the notation of traditional dances. The TÜBİTAK project is specifically concerned with the collection of data on Turkish folk dances, employing magnetic motion capture devices and the subsequent transfer of this data into three-dimensional digital models. Although this device is unable to fully capture every movement, including those of the hand behind the body, the development of this new technology can assist in identifying blind spots or missing details in movements that frequently occur during two-dimensional recordings of traditional dances. Ultimately, she highlighted the significance of this novel technology in motivating younger generations to become more engaged with traditional dance forms.

Another area of innovative approaches was the collaborative and applied research that was presented at our symposium, which demonstrated the benefits and ethical implications of long-

term ethnographic research. Joško Čaleta & Iva Niemčić presented their work done in collaboration with the community of the Adriatic island of Lastovo, for the documentation of the annual Poklad (carnival). In this fascinating example of collaborative research, the community of Lastovo invited the Croatian ethnomusicologists to assist them with their documentation processes. The local community created the knowledge themselves, conducting interviews and writing up their findings, while the two scholars served as advisors and advocates, transmitting the knowledge that the community created through their sponsorship of performances and publications, as well as through presenting at symposiums like our own. A further example of the ethical benefits of long-term applied research was presented by Thede Kahl and Andrea Pascaru. The two scholars discussed their work on the Gagauz and Vallahades linguistic and musical practices, which was conducted under the auspices of the commission “Vanishing Languages and Cultural Heritage” (VLACH) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. VLACH’s online publication of detailed video documentation on these endangered languages and cultural practices inspired us, as it demonstrated the significance of rendering our documentation efforts publicly accessible and available.

The collaborative and applied research summarized in the above paragraph serves as a laudable example of research with a clear moral impetus. Following these examples, our community at the ICTMD Study Group for Music and Dance in South East Europe could collectively strive towards a clearer framing of the purpose and ethical stakes of our research projects. Our efforts as scholars could benefit from a clear demonstration of the value of our ethnomusicological and ethnochoreological research. Furthermore, we have a moral responsibility to consider and clearly state who benefits from our research practices. We should thus address how our research projects—whether that be documentation, archiving, theorization, or applied research—may be beneficial for the communities which we study, and for humanistic concerns at large.

## **Conclusion**

The closing session of the symposium offered an opportunity for reflection and forward-looking discussions. Newcomers provided a comprehensive summary of the event, highlighting key statistics, prominent topics of discussion, and ideas for future symposia. Special recognition was given to the efforts of the local committee, the technical team, and the executive committee. In particular, the Chairperson, Mehmet Öcal Özbilgin and Joško Čaleta expressed gratitude for the constructive feedback from the newcomers, emphasizing the importance of continually improving the symposium experience. A notable focus was placed on including younger researchers and fostering a dynamic, inclusive environment. The hope was shared that the next symposium, scheduled for September 2026 in Vienna, will see even greater participation.

Two primary themes were selected for the 2026 symposium: “**Migration, Diasporic Communities, and Multicultural Politics**” and “**Economic Aspects of Music and Dance.**” These topics reflect the evolving landscape of ethnomusicological research and its relevance to contemporary societal challenges.

## **Feedback (Constructive criticism) from the Newcomers**

Newcomers offered valuable insights to enhance the symposium's structure and engagement:

1. **Timing and Format:** It was noted that there was insufficient time allocated for questions, answers and discussions. A proposed change involves adopting a 20-minute presentation format followed by 10 minutes dedicated to discussion.

2. **Interactive Presentations:** There is a growing need in the ICTMD SEE group for modern, engaging presentation styles that resonate with the younger generation of researchers, sparking meaningful dialogue and fostering innovation.

3. **Utilizing Practical Knowledge:** The symposium participants possess significant embodied knowledge of music and dance, reflecting their extensive experience, expertise, and immersion in their respective fields. This wealth of practical and theoretical understanding represents an invaluable resource that could be leveraged more effectively in future events. By creating opportunities for interactive demonstrations, workshops, or collaborative sessions, participants could not only share their insights but also engage in meaningful exchanges that bridge theory and practice, enriching the overall symposium experience and fostering deeper connections within the academic and artistic community.

### **A Symbolic Closing Farewell Dance - “Sikter Cocek”**

In a spirited conclusion, participants were invited to engage in what we called a “Sikter Cocek” (circle dance, accompanied by the lively tune ‘Cifte Cifte Pajtonlari’ in 9/8 rhythm).<sup>[1]</sup> This moment served as both a cultural highlight of the symposium and a symbolic farewell, emphasizing the central role of music and dance in uniting participants. Often in the Balkan broader area, this Turkish adopted word gesture is not merely used in a negative context as in the native language, rather it developed as a humoristic friendly farewell, stressing the joyful acknowledgment of the strong bonds formed, with the promise of meeting again—of course, in our case with dance and music as the cornerstone of future gatherings.<sup>[2]</sup>

This symposium underscored the significance of blending academic inquiry with the lived practices of music and dance, providing an inspiring foundation for future exploration.

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Čifte Čifte Pajtonlari - Ansambl Biljana*. Croatia Records. (2019, December 27). [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuab8tRDBtw>  
Originally released on the vinyl *Biljana - Ohrid* by Croatia Records on January 1, 1978.

<sup>[2]</sup> One humorous example of the word “Sikter, [Siktir]” in the broader Balkan area can be found in the tradition of serving coffee during social gatherings, such as “Slava” (an Orthodox family feast). Upon arrival, guests are welcomed with “Bujrum Kafe” (Welcoming Coffee), symbolizing hospitality. Conversely, when it is time for guests to depart, they may be playfully served “Sikter Kafe” (Farewell Coffee), signaling the end of their visit (See also: “Ivkova Slava,” Movie, 22:20, YouTube,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3bd30\\_ZqNY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3bd30_ZqNY)). This lighthearted custom not only makes room for the new “Slava” visitors but also conveys the hope of meeting again soon in good health and joyful circumstances. Such practices highlight the blend of humor and pragmatism in the region’s hospitality traditions.