

Report from the ICTM Ethnochoreology Sub-Study Group on Fieldwork Theory and Methods.

Fieldwork experiment in Romania, May - June 2004.

The fieldwork experiment (the fourth in a row) took place in the villages Breb and Ocna ?ugatag, district Maramure? of northern Romania, organized by Anca Giurchescu. Nine researchers from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, USA and Romania, as well as the villagers were involved with the project. They all appreciated it as a successful professional and human experience.

The main purpose of the fieldwork was the study and recording of the 'village dance' (joc) and its ongoing symbolic transformation from a well-framed pre-marital ceremonial to a cultural manifestation having performance and entertainment as main functions in a tourism oriented social context. The 'village dance' that was organized by the leaders of the young-men age group every Sunday and festive days, lost its periodicity the last four-five years. This fieldwork experiment assisted in the re-vitalization of this social context, which a few years ago played an important role in community life. Cultural associations carry out the process, and a well-known musician of the village Hoteni is the local representative.

Organized around Pentecost (30 and 31 May) the field research intended to disclose how the "revitalized" dance events are experienced and interpreted by the local people. What are the social-cultural, artistic and economic implications of this subtle and intricate process. Some of the inquiry subjects were the following:

- Description of the village dance (joc) as experienced by different age groups (based on information and interviews with old, middle age and young people);
- The way participants (of different ages and walk of life) interpret and comment the event (eliciting information from onlookers during the development of the event);
- The place of the village joc in the present social context and its future development, as commented by the local people;
- The impact exerted by our presence on the local population.

According to the preliminary program the group met in the village Hoteni (the 26th May) arriving via Budapest or Bucharest. Using the well functioning system of 'rural tourism' the participants were located in two villages (Hoteni and Breb). A member of each group took on the role of interpreter. The introductory meeting focused on the aims, strategies and the limits of the 'fieldwork experiment' and on the distribution of responsibilities.

The first days were dedicated to accommodation with the physical and human environment. We observed people at work, discussed with the villagers and especially with the local musicians and learned the local dance repertoire. In the evenings there were commentaries on video recordings showing the village joc as it was performed several years ago.

On Pentecost (30 May) the whole group participated and recorded in Sat ?ugatag the religious service that took place in the cemetery, the church being too small for the great number of participants. The village joc that followed was introduced by a procession of young men accompanying the musicians to the dancing place and closed by a party organized in a private home.

The second Pentecost day (31May) we recorded in the village Breb a religious celebration dedicated to the dead, the village joc, and a dance party (b?ut?) traditionally organized by young men.

A one day excursion throughout the “historical Maramure?” gave us the possibility to admire the old wooden churches with high and pointed towers, houses with huge carved wooden porches, the “marry cemetery” of S?pân?a with painted crosses that describe in images and witty stanza the life of the deceased, and an open-air museum in the town Sighet.

The fieldwork was closed by a common discussion summing up and evaluating the results of this experiment. The seven days of fieldwork resulted in tens of hours of video recordings, thousands of digital photographs, recordings of music and interviews, direct observation notes of several events and diaries.

According to the opinion of the participants the dance events (joc) experienced by the group were carried out by the entire community in such a natural and spontaneous way and with such a commitment that the fact of being the result of preliminary impulses from our part (for example payment of the musicians) became totally irrelevant. Feedback inquiries demonstrated that the community considered these dance events to be fully traditional “just the way they always were”. On the threshold between preservation and transformation, the ambivalent position of the village joc in Breb and Sat ?ugatag has a certain degree of generality and plays a significant role in the future development of the local cultural inheritance. Therefore, we anticipate that the tangible and theoretical results of the fieldwork in Maramure? may offer a solid base for a case study on the process of revitalization to be publicly presented or published.

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