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Serbian and Romanian balls: the paradox of ethnically determined dance events as a medium of social inclusion in south-eastern Hungary

Srbski in romunski plesi: paradoks etnično opredeljenih plesnih dogodkov kot medija socialne vključenosti na jugovzhodu Madžarske

Dynamic social, political, and historical processes in Hungary have resulted in multicultural communities along its current border areas. Ethnic identification is often emphasized due to identity politics which highlight majority-minority relations. These tendencies have often been initiated in the political spheres, while the local social context does not recognise them in the same way today. In this paper I present two dance events, located in Szeged and Elek in South-eastern Hungary, that have an initial role of performing specific ethnic identity through multiple symbolic presentations. Investigating the realisations of these balls further, the diversity of participants narrate the inclusion of diverse local inhabitants in terms of status, gender, age, and ethnic determination.

The project is grounded empirically through participant observation and interviews in 2019-2020. I will comparatively summarize some key features about the structure, symbolic presentation, cultural mediums, and multiple meanings of two Serbian and Romanian Balls in Hungary. On the one hand, activities during the dance events seen through the structural lens raise several points for discussion. On the other hand, the presentation will examine various meanings of the dance events in the communities which host the balls, and how diverse participants may experience them. The paper illustrates how ethnically determined dance events may function in multicultural contexts.