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## **Facilitating Dance Activities in an Ethnographic Museum: A Case Study from the ASTRA Museum, Romania**

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This chapter examines how the ASTRA Museum safeguards traditional dance through the case of the Lads Group from Rucăr, Braşov County, Romania. Within the *Dance-ICH* project (2022–2024), researchers documented the group’s practices and meaning while involving the community in museum activities. Using fieldwork, archives, education, and digital tools, the museum built a participatory model that revitalises dance traditions, strengthens local identity, and connects them to today’s audiences.

**Keywords:** Romanian traditional dance, Lads Group, ASTRA Museum, intangible cultural heritage

Traditional dance, as a cultural and social expression, reflects the values, history and identity of communities. Its ephemeral character and dependence on live performance make its safeguarding a complex and challenging process, especially with respect to its documentation, representation of ethnographic context and contemporary adaptation. Romania's national museum the Complexul National Museum ASTRA (hereafter referred to as the ASTRA Museum) utilises various means to archive the dance movement, costumes, music and social contexts related to traditional dance and aims to balance ethnographic faithfulness with relevance to contemporary sensitivities. The museum's research and exhibition on the Lads Group from the village of Rucăr (*Ceata defeciori din Rucăr*) in Braşov County was undertaken as a collaborative partner with the project *Dance as ICH: New Models of Facilitating Participatory Dance Events (Dance-ICH)*. As well as documenting contemporary performances of the group's dancing, music, costumes, associated customs and cultural significance, the ASTRA Museum also aimed to identify ways of facilitating dance participation within an ethnographic museum.

## The ASTRA Museum and Cultural Heritage

Located in Sibiu in central Romania, the ASTRA Museum is the most important ethnomuseum in the country and operates as a dynamic institution bridging traditional and modern cultural expressions. Its mission aligns with European and national cultural policies to promote traditional cultural phenomena and it engages in research, preservation and education related to both tangible and intangible heritage. Following modernisation of the museum infrastructure and implementation of various projects and programmes on communicating and interpreting its collections for a wide public, the ASTRA Museum was widely recognised in 2019 as a pilot-museum, winning the European Museum Academy – Luigi Micheletti Award (2019). A key feature of the museum's policy is its nurturing of heritage communities, that is local communities whose heritage resources and knowledge remain and are used by the community so that they can generate income and ensure sustainable development at a local and regional level. As the museum's Director General Ciprian Ştefan, explains:

The ASTRA Museum invests in programmes meant to improve the cultural life of the community, and to encourage people to

transform tradition into an active part of their everyday life. The ASTRA Museum develops programmes meant to contribute to developing a balanced relationship between the rural and urban environments, having as a meeting point regional resources, the tangible heritage. (Ștefan 2022, 64)

With respect to intangible cultural heritage, the ASTRA Museum's programmes aim to identify, conserve, research and valorise all aspects of traditional art and culture, including folk crafts and technologies, songs, dances, customs, rituals, holidays, children's games and sports, language and verbal expressions.

As both cultural and social expression, traditional dance is not only integral to daily life in rural Romania but it also has a role to play in the goal of institutions to collect, study and promote intangible cultural heritage. Research on traditional dance has hitherto not been a primary concern of the Romanian museum sector, but the ASTRA Museum regards dance as a living expression of intangible cultural heritage. Consequently, the museum undertakes research projects employing documentary techniques of audio-visual recording, interviews with community members and the collection of relevant materials that enrich the museum's archive. It also utilises digital methods to archive dance-related elements such as the movement, music and costume.

Traditional dance affords an excellent opportunity to realise the policies of UNESCO and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) for museums to safeguard intangible heritage, using their mandate, infrastructures and resources. The aims in developing participatory schemes in relation to museum collections is to initiate and sustain cultural and organisational ventures that will attract new audiences, develop public spirit around the museum, and empower local communities in the safeguarding of their intangible heritage.

The ASTRA Museum actively promotes traditional dance as a vital part of intangible cultural heritage through various programmes and community engagement initiatives. Festivals such as the National Festival of Folk Traditions (*Festivalul Național al Tradițiilor Populare*) have played a crucial role in promoting interaction between local communities and visitors to the museum, while dance events and workshops held in the museum not only safeguard dance but also enhance local cultural identity and community cohesion. Two notable events organised at the museum that



Figure 1. Lads Group from the village of Rucăr, the Commune of Viştea, Braşov County. Photo: Dumitru Andrei, 2023.

profile also traditional dance are the *ASTRA Multicultural* and *NEAMURI*. These projects include collaboration with various communities and bring folk ensembles, traditional music and educational elements to the fore. The latter, organised in partnership with the Subcarpaţi Cultural Centre, presents a national musical-cultural trail of the *neamuri* (ethnicities) in Romania, gathered into a one-day experience in the centre of the museum. In addition, the *Anima ASTRA* programme profiles traditional dance through interactive workshops, creating a participatory framework where the public is invited to learn and experience traditional dances. The museum also arranges exhibitions and cultural events that emphasise the local communities' representative cultural artefacts, complementing them with participatory events or practical demonstrations.

Thus the ASTRA Museum has built a sympathetic environment and demonstrable track record for facilitating dance activities in a museum, together with its long-established reputation as a preeminent ethnographic museum complex, housing major collections and notable buildings related

to Romanian rural life. It was therefore exceptionally well positioned in 2022 to create cultural events and performances that combined archival and new ethnographic fieldwork, together with a brief to encourage embodied cultural knowledge exchange between intangible cultural heritage specialists in the museum, in the local community and among the general public, through the medium of participatory dance activities which would be held within the museum.

## Selecting and Planning the Case Study

Ethnographic museums, especially open-air museums, provide an excellent context for the re-presentation of traditional dance ritual complexes whose diverse elements typically take place across a variety of contexts in the village environment. A number of key criteria needed to be observed when, in the early stages of the *Dance-ICH* project, the ASTRA Museum began a process to identify a suitable local community with whom to work. We wanted to work with a rural community whose members, especially the young, were active in participating in a rich traditional dance culture which had been transmitted to them over several generations in the locality. It was also important that the traditions had not become fixed in their form but revealed subtle modifications over time, responding to changes within the local environment. This feature ideally required the existence of archival material about the traditional dance culture for comparative purposes between past and present. Of great importance was the local community's willingness to work with the ASTRA Museum in documenting their traditional dance culture and its associated customs, and especially for the selected heritage community to benefit from this interaction. Raising the public profile of the local intangible cultural heritage and hence its value was key in the selection process, as was the prerequisite to choose a case study in which visitors to the ASTRA Museum could participate.

We decided upon the Lads Group from the village of Rucăr, a predominantly ethnic Romanian village situated in southern Transylvania on the right bank of the River Olt in the commune of Viştea, Braşov County. In the mid-twentieth century, every village in the region had at least one Lads Group, but, over subsequent decades, interest in traditional carols, music and dances has declined. At the time of our research, within the five villages of the commune, only those of Rucăr and Viştea de Jos maintained the custom. Variation in style in Romanian traditional dance distinguishes dif-

ferent communities from each other, even within the same region, and the Lads Group dance ritual complex is an important marker of local identity for the people of Rucăr. They are profoundly attached to and proud of their cultural traditions, seeking to improve strategies for their safeguarding. Furthermore, the villagers are eager to benefit from higher exposure and understanding of their dance ritual complex in order to attract tourists and thus income to the locality.

Romanian ethnologist Ilie Moise defines Lads Groups as “youth gatherings of the traditional village world that are established around the solstice holidays” (usually near Saint Nicholas) which “are made up of teenagers between 14 and 18 years old, sometimes of young men between 25 and 30 years old” (1999, 7). Our field research also identified these distinctive features in the *Lads Group* from the village of Rucăr. The Rucăr Lads Group transmits and enacts a distinctive traditional dance repertoire that operates in the context of winter calendar customs and has a strong collective character and a cyclical performance frequency. There are three defining elements in these dance rituals: chanted texts and lyrics of songs that accompany the dances; the music – instruments and the melodic lines; and the choreography – the movements specific to each type of dance (Anghel 2003, 36–39). The dances – the male *Fecioreasca*, the couple dances *Poșovoaița* (*Hațegana*) and *Șchioapa* (*Învârtita*) and the group dances *Jiana* and *Sârba* – mark key winter celebrations. The elements of the ritual complex are transmitted by experienced members of the Lads Group who teach the younger members to understand and gain proficiency in the movement techniques principally through imitation (Herseni 1977, 42–45). Transmission in this dance ritual involves more than the movement structures alone. As ethnochoreologist Anca Giurchescu argues, dance also embodies a series of non-choreographic elements such as facial expressions, meaningful gestures, verbal and non-verbal sounds, costumes, how to choose partners, and the community’s social conventions and values (2001, 111).

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, research was undertaken in this region on the Lads Group ritual complex, the records of which are located in the ASTRA Museum, in local archives and elsewhere. On analysing these sources, it was evident that clear similarities existed in the carols currently performed by the Lads Group from Rucăr, a situation paralleled when comparing past and present versions of the chanted lyrics. Documentation from the ASTRA Museum Photography Archive from 1956 also revealed the stability of the traditional costume as well as the traditional dance forms.





Figure 2. Dancing in Rucăr, the Commune of Viștea, Brașov County. Photo: Herbert Hoffmann, 1956. ASTRA Museum Archive.

Through undertaking ethnographic field research during the *Dance-ICH* project, we were able to confirm that music and dance in this heritage community continue to be essential for socialising and for establishing and sustaining intergenerational connections (Bîrlea 1982, 20).

Our application of the remit of the project led us to develop field research guided by the following suppositions:

1. That working with the cultural organisations within the community would strengthen the degree of cohesion amongst its members which would then contribute to safeguarding the traditions
2. That by developing and undertaking programmes which involved socio-cultural engagement this would enable the transmission of dance through active, participatory techniques
3. That by developing regular participatory and interactive programmes this would enable public access to the intangible cultural heritage and help to valorise the dance

4. That by developing relationships with social organisations such as family, school, peer group, and public institutions, this would lead to increased access for members of the local community to the elements of the intangible cultural heritage
5. That dance belongs to complex cultural manifestations which facilitate socialisation.

In order to test these assumptions, we employed techniques of direct observation, interviews and themed discussions with our local consultants. We were aided in this by employing a specially designed interview guide, by documenting people, objects and events via photographs and video and by an observation sheet. The interview guide comprised questions to establish identification (organisation name, function within the organisation, the role of each organisation member, the history of the organisation), questions to understand how the group is organised (registration, mode of meeting and frequency, location, activities undertaken, transmission of information and technical means within the organisation, sequential roles, regulations, resources pertaining to materials, humans, logistics and budget), open-ended questions related to complementary elements such as traditional costumes, props and music (articles of clothing used, manner of their manufacture, buying, preserving the garments, signs and symbols used, repertoire – songs, chanted texts, age of repertoire), open-ended questions about the dance performance (dance, type of dance, the area distribution of the dance, choreography, associated rituals, related events, musical instruments used, sound track) and open-ended questions concerning the extent of engagement with the local community and the degree of accessibility.

Documentation included audio-video recording of the interviews, of the dances specific to the Lads Group, and of the related manifestations and main organisational activities of the group. Finally, a photo archive with representative images of local community members and of the group was created, adding to the ASTRA Museum's archive and illustrating the development of intangible cultural elements within a community over time.

The observation sheets were completed through systematic observation of attitudes, behaviour, and interactions between the members of the Lads Group throughout the entire enactment of the winter ritual season. Our objectives were to record the cultural phenomena, and the relationships between community members; but also to note relationships between the



local community and the Lads Group members in order to gain insights into correspondences (or not) between what we as researchers were told and what actually transpired.

## The Lads Group from Rucăr

By correlating archival information and conducting ethnographic research, including oral histories, within the local community, we were able to demonstrate continuity and change in this ritual dance complex over several decades. In 1908 the village of Rucăr had three Lads Groups (Irimie 1956, 5) which had dropped to two by 1956, the younger one composed of members aged fifteen and the elder of members aged seventeen, although at certain periods these two groups became mixed between young and old. Historically, according to the mayor of Viştea (Andrei 2022a) the Lads Group was a friendship group organised by an *ad hoc* committee of single boys aged above eighteen years. Given the decrease in the number of young men in the village, a married man of older years may now join the Lads Group. Training to join the group begins in childhood, the young boys imbuing its spirit from an early age and trying to learn the dances and carols representative of their local community.

Preparations for the annual ritual typically began in the autumn at the grape harvest but the main season for the observance of the ritual dance complex is during the winter holiday season. In early December, young unmarried boys and girls gather at the house of the Host to form the Group, and young men are elected to take on specific roles, taking over the entire organisation of the village in their responsibilities to respect and carry out the traditions and customs. Since the mid-twentieth century, the criteria for electing the “mayor of the group” (*vătaful mare*) have shifted. In 1956, the grounds for election were on account of the candidate being a “smart boy and he listens to what we are saying” (Irimie 1956, 6) whereas in recent times the Lads Group from Rucăr elect the mayor according to his experience and knowledge, organisational and leadership skills (Andrei 2022a). The positions within this Lads Group are the mayor, vice-mayor, treasurer, cook, cupbearer and the stoker – this last position concerns the purchase of firewood needed for the closing rituals of the event.

Dancing accompanies all the events organised by the Lads Group from beginning to end. In December the young married boys and girls learn

and rehearse the whole repertoire of dances and shouts. During the day on Christmas Eve, the performance of simple carols mainly by young children begin. This is followed in the evening by the boys who sing longer, more elaborate carols to notable people within the village hierarchy, such as the mayor, priest, teacher, professor, engineer and the like. The boys eventually visit the homes of unmarried girls who join them in carolling. On Christmas Day, Saint John's Day and Epiphany, in the afternoon, the community gathers at the Cultural Centre where the Lads Group start the dancing. On New Year's Eve, the Group dances at crossroads and at community wells in a ritual observance to guarantee a water supply for the whole village. Other dancing by the Lads Group from Rucăr takes place around people, fountains, and crosses, an activity that implies taking control over that particular person, place or object.



Figure 3.  
*Lad wearing the cap.*  
Photo: Dumitru  
Andrei, 2023.

Costume plays a significant role in the ritual complex (ASTRA Museum 1955). Symbolic accessories mark the group's identity or the social status of the wearer. For example, the cap (*căciula*) which the Rucăr group call *vâstră* is placed on the head of the Host while carolling in order to protect him from harm. In the Rucăr group, the young men always wear their cap, which they make themselves, when dancing and carolling. It is decorated with peacock feathers, beads, tassels, round fragments of glass and pieces of vibrantly coloured fabric. Even at the end of the ritual period, even if they no longer wear the whole costume, the Lads Group from Rucăr always dance and sing wearing their cap. In interview, the mayor of the commune underlined the uniqueness of the costumes from Rucăr, in comparison with those from other villages in the region:

The main colours remain black and white. White symbolizes the purity, while the black stands for the peoples' life that was not that easy...In Rucăr we talk about *șurțe* (aprons) in special colours. Only here will you find this kind of model. Or, for example, the *mânica* (sleeve) from the blouse is not fastened, it is wide and sewn with *pui*, (traditional motifs) we say like the Dacians', that of the older type. (Andrei 2022a)

At the end of the ritual complex (the *bătutul tufei*), just parts of the overall costume such as the blouse, cap or boots may be worn. This occurs in January when the Lads Group is dissolved, following dancing accompanied with chanted texts at ritually significant places. Each member of the group builds himself a torch for climbing the hill where bales of straw have been prepared to set alight and roll down to the valley. This ritual has a playful and amusing character (Irimie 1956, 27) which is expressed through the lyrics, the dancing and the accessories used (small or big bells attached to the feet). The procession involves the whole community in the final ritual in which the presence of fire symbolically prepares for the New Year and buries the year that is passed, a ritual that is preserved to this day.

In Rucăr, the musical instruments used to provide the melodic line for dancing are: violin, clarinets, accordion and keyboard. In 2022–2023, the Lads Group contracted a music band to accompany the dances but at the same time, a young member of the Lads Group learned to play the saxophone and now accompanies the group when carolling and dancing, together with one of the girls who plays the drum. This is a less expensive arrangement for the group.

There are different types of dances specific to this ethnographic region Țara Făgărașului (Bucșan 1957, 4) that are repeated in a strict order: *Fecioreasca*, *Purtata*, *Învârtita*, *Poșovoiaica*. In the case of the Lads Group from Rucăr village, there are four repetitions of the dance cycle in the following sequence:

1. Men's dance, *Fecioreasca*
2. Couple dances, *Poșovoiaica* (*Hațegana*), *Șchioapa* (*Învârtita*)
3. Group dances *Jiana* and *Sârba*

*Fecioreasca* is considered to be a men's ritual dance, energetic, virtuosic and composed of figures which are specifically adapted to the local men's dancing skills. Accompanied by chanted texts, it involves jumps performed in a sustained tempo, zig-zag "walking" movements executed to the left and right, hand to foot taps and elevated arms. The dancers keep a distance between them, the space being necessary for the free arm movements and vigorous jumps. The whole is made up of four dance sequences, each of them consisting of three specific figures which are repeated. A demanding dance, *Fecioreasca* can last up to ten minutes and requires peak physical condition from its performers.

In ASTRA Museum's Archive there is a chanted text documented by Pimen Constantinescu, Nicolae Munteanu, Gheorghe Popovici and Andrei Vasiliu which was collected from villagers in Rucăr in 1956 (Monteanu 1956; Popovici and Vasiliu 1956) and could be heard during the *Fecioreasca* dance: "Shout boys, shout, / Do not sit like in winter gatherings, / That you have mouths to shout, / And feet to dance!" A similar text was collected in 2023 but it is chanted at a different moment – it no longer accompanies the dance but can be heard as the Lads Group follow their itinerary through the village: "Shout boys, shout! / Shout that you do not steal, / That you have mouths to shout / And feet to dance!" (Andrei 2023). *Poșovoiaica* can be performed in pairs or in a group of three persons. It differs from the other couple dances in that it lacks a "walking" element, consisting of only two parts – walking on the spot and spinning. The component elements of the dance repertoire are extremely varied according to the rhythm of the dance or the execution technique. A distinctive feature in the performance of *Învârtita* or *Șchioapa* as it is called in Rucăr is the limp step: this first occurs on the third step, then the second and when the dancers change direction. The limp step again appears at the third and second step, a feature that leads to desynchronisation between couples even when dancing the same dance

(Andrei 2022b). The *Șchioapa* is danced face to face, the girl placing both her hands on the lad's shoulders while he puts his arms around the girl's waist. The dance tempo is *allegro moderato* and is accompanied throughout by chanted texts. The dance begins with "walking" – a movement of four steps to the right and then to the left which is repeated four times. It continues with spinning with the lame step. One of the group dances, the *Sârba* is performed in a semicircular formation while the *Jiana* can be performed either as a circle or couple dance (Bîrlea 1982, 70–108).

Joining the Lads Group marks a rite of passage for the young men of the community and the dances and carols represent not only a cultural expression of the community but also operate to attain social cohesion, reflecting the values and rules of the community. It was extremely important therefore to researchers from the ASTRA Museum that the project should not only document the ritual dance complex as it is enacted today and within living memory, but that it should be represented to and engaged with by the public within the museum setting, bearing witness to its ethnographic complexity. Of especial importance to the ASTRA Museum was genuine collaboration between the local community members and the museum in achieving that task. The result was an Exhibition at the ASTRA Museum on view from November 2024 until December 2025 which, as well as presenting findings from the local research initiative, also displayed material from the other five partner countries involved in the *Dance-ICH* project.

## Facilitating Dance Activities within ASTRA Museum

As noted above, the ASTRA Museum has a history of engaging its audience in participatory events, including traditional dance workshops, lessons on musical expression and other activities that promote local cultural traditions. However, the *Dance-ICH* project was the first time that the ASTRA Museum has been involved as a partner within an international project dedicated to dance. Working with a complex network to engage the local community and the wider public, the ASTRA Museum proposed the following methods to facilitate participation: an interactive exhibition, dance workshops and events, educational programmes for the public to learn dance steps specific to the area, film projections and meetings with specialists in the field. Through analysis of past and present research on the Lads Group from Rucăr, a detailed perspective on a local tradition was





Figure 4. Lads Group from Rucăr, the Commune of Viștea, Brașov County. The exhibition Dance – Europe's Living Heritage in Motion, ASTRA Museum, Sibiu. Photo: Silviu Popa, 2024.



Figure 5. Case study projection. The exhibition Dance – Europe's Living Heritage in Motion, ASTRA Museum, Sibiu. Photo: Silviu Popa, 2024.



offered to both the community and public. The ASTRA Museum created a structure that combined active participatory and performance events in order to demonstrate the worth of dance in a cultural and community context and which facilitated aesthetic and emotional responses to the dance, creating a strong bond between performers and spectators. As collaborative partners in the *Dance-ICH* project, the museum researchers were also able to contextualise Romanian rural dance among the wider dance traditions of Europe.

The resultant Exhibition from the *Dance-ICH* project used various techniques to valorise dance, including audio-video materials and descriptive panels. The former followed three conceptual directions:

1. The Dance Loop – this entailed short dance clips put together in one video sequence, the focus being on the music and movements of the dancers. The aim of the collaborative partners was to integrate all the selected dances from the partner countries into a single visual presentation.
2. Pedagogical Dance – this was an instructional video featuring dances from each of the six case studies from different countries. For each country, a specific, local dance was identified, the recording underlining the dance sequences, the steps, the position of the dancers, the rhythm, and the music. In the Romanian example slow motion video techniques were also used to emphasise the types of movement for each dance sequence.
3. The Case Study – the case study was featured in a documentary film in which each collaborative partner explained their approach to their selected dance community. Our example compared past and present records, noted the community's place in time and space, its specific features, modes of organisation and operation, the dance types, customs and rituals. It also identified clothing items, alongside the repertoire of music, song, chant and choreography of the ritual dance complex.

During the Exhibition at the ASTRA Museum, educational sessions were organised for six groups of primary school pupils who learned about the dances specific to each of the collaborative countries in the project. The introduction to the Exhibition included location of the six partner countries on a large-scale map and a discussion about which musical instruments are associated with traditional dancing. For participants to gain an interactive experience, musical sounds specifically related to each instrument were

made accessible via QR codes which were attached to the bilingual captions identifying each exhibit. The Dance Loop video enabled the children to explore the rhythms of the music and the dance movements, while an interactive interface also facilitated individual selection and investigation of specific communities. Further analysis and information were provided in the descriptive panels from each partner country. The pupils were able to recognise and compare musical instruments displayed in the exhibition with those presented in the case studies, noting similarities and differences. The photo-corner area with the figures of two amateur musicians from the Lads Group in Rucăr allowed the children to identify themselves with the characters and to explore details of the traditional costume. Participants also had occasion to learn a dance technique of their own choice from the Exhibition, selecting their favourite dance via a digital interface before learning the specific dance steps and practising the movements.

The last section of the Exhibition was dedicated to the Lads Group from Rucăr, the organisation of which was realised entirely in a co-creative manner with the community members. This process led to items of traditional costume being loaned for exhibition and to the selection of related archival photographs for display. A documentary film on the community of Rucăr in which members of the Lads Group are the chief protagonists effectively conveyed the genuine ethos of the Lads Group.

## Conclusion

Our role as a national ethnographic museum in Romania is to be involved both in the promotion of communities, their customs and traditions, and in raising awareness among community members of the values they hold and which they can exploit for their benefit and that of other communities. Through this *Dance-ICH* project, we aimed to create a link between visitors and national traditions, emphasising the value of dance in safeguarding cultural identity and strengthening intercultural connections. To counteract the decline in interest in traditional dance and all that implies, we implemented various educational and cultural initiatives, such as the organisation of dance workshops in order to sensitise young people and stimulate their desire to learn these customs currently enacted by the heritage communities. The entire programme was notable for its diversity, consistency and interactive character. Through collaboration

and research, we achieved our goals of facilitating the transmission of knowledge of intangible cultural heritage, utilising modern technologies and audio-visual materials, as well as elements of traditional exhibition techniques, such as panels and descriptive captions. The events were designed to be accessible and educational, stimulating the curiosity and active involvement of the audience.

At the participatory event at the opening of the exhibition in November 2024, the mayor of Viştea commune underlined the importance of involving cultural and public institutions in the safeguarding and promotion of heritage, emphasising the vulnerability of small communities to cultural dissolution. This event, organised together with the Lads Group, offered an interactional framework to bring together the community from the city of Sibiu with that from the village of Rucăr, transforming the ASTRA Museum into a performance space for traditional dance. The openness with which the people of Rucăr engaged themselves in collaborating with the museum's specialists was a result of their great interest in making their local traditions and dances better known and also their concern to strengthen the cohesion of their own community. There were some challenges for the museum researchers such as the reluctance of some community members from Rucăr to attend events organised in unfamiliar locations such as the museum. To address this, we implemented training and familiarisation sessions designed to help participants feel more comfortable with the new formats. We also encouraged their active involvement in the process of organising the events so that they could become more confident and undertake key roles in promoting their heritage.

Strategic marketing via promotion and media dissemination services in local, national and international media both on- and offline targeted the attraction of a diverse audience, from dance enthusiasts and specialists to the general public, including children, young people and adults. The dance events organised as part of the Exhibition brought together different cultural and ethnic communities, valorising the dance specific to each one involved in *Dance-ICH*. The museum's series of participatory events gave visitors the chance to learn different elements from the traditional dances of local Romanians and of other ethnic populations resident in the country. During March–April and July 2025, weekly courses of Romanian and Saxon traditional dances, coordinated by professional dancers from the ensemble “*Junii Sibiului*” and the Saxon dance group of the Saxon Forum from Sibiu, were organised for young people and adults. Less formalised

spatial arrangements between the performers and the audience, such as circular formations or other configurations, promoted a stronger sense of being part of the dancing experience. Participants felt freer, for example, to respond to aesthetic moments (such as clapping their hands) or to ask questions. During these events we collected impressions from participants using questionnaires and direct interviews. Many visitors said that they were moved by being given opportunities to learn traditional dancing in an interactive arena. Some highlighted how as a result they felt a greater connection to Romanian traditions, citing feelings of well-being and of bonding. Many visitors expressed a desire to participate in future events, suggesting a growing interest in this type of cultural heritage and a greater commitment to safeguarding and promoting local traditional dances.

Overall, the events organised in association with the Exhibition had a significant impact on all participants, affording them opportunity to express their creativity through dance and to pass on their knowledge. At the same time, the general public could discover and appreciate the cultural uniqueness of Rucăr village, especially through the prism of traditional dance and music. Inviting the communities that preserve the intangible cultural heritage of dance and also the visitors to engage in the cultural activities we proposed, generated active exploration and learning. In the future, we will be able to develop, in partnership, new programmes and activities of dance that meet the community's needs in order to more fully realise and enhance the vision of the ASTRA Museum as a world leading cultural institution that bridges tradition and modernity.

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