The Dance from a Distance. The Pandemic and Its Contribution to Changing the Context of Dance

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Abstract

The ethnographic field of this study is the internet and specifically the virtual community called "Online Traditional Dance Seminars". The aim of this research paper is to study the reconstruction of the identity of Greeks involved in the kinetic activity of Greek traditional dance, during the covid-19 pandemic. Netnography was used to collect the data of the research. Oral history was also used as a method, through which everyday memory is projected as a quest of social history. For the presentation and analysis of the data, Geertz's model of "thick description" was adopted. Finally, the interpretation of the data was based on the theoretical visuals of the socio-cybernetic according to the control model of identity (ICT-identity control theory) that Burke proposed, under the terms of Berry's acculturation model. The analysis of the data showed that the traditional dance communities in Greece, in order to maintain the model of their identity, were acculturized and transformed into virtual dance communities, constructing a new identity of their collective and individual self. This new identity did not remain the same, but changed again when the conditions of the pandemic changed. This constant reconstruction of identity justifying the position that both the collective and the individual identity are not permanent, but are adapted according to the environmental conditions, being at the same time a process of interaction and internal control, that is a cybernetic process.

Keywords: *Greek Traditional Dance; Virtual Community; Acculturation; Netnography*

Introduction

The outbreak of covid-19 coronavirus has led to a crisis, which involves, firstly, a state of emergency for human health, secondly, a major shock to the global economy, and thirdly, a serious social threat. This third impact of the crisis began after the infection was described as a pandemic, as citizens were asked to keep social distance and enter, either in restriction or in isolation, in order to reduce the spread of the disease. As a result, people stopped activities through which they had fun, were entertained, educated, communicated with each other and consequently socialized.

One of these activities, which was interrupted during the pandemic, is the Greek Traditional Dance. After the cessation of this activity, the question arose "what Greek Traditional Dance now?". Thus, since April 2020, already, some initiatives of dance teachers have emerged, to answer this question,

transferring the Greek Traditional Dance from the classrooms to social media, in order to restore communication with members of their dance group. However, later, and as long as the social distance was maintained, this phenomenon of transferring the dance to a computer screen expanded even more, resulting in the creation of virtual dance communities, in which people participated, both from Greece and abroad.

Based on the above, the aim of this research paper is to study the reconstruction of the identity of Greeks involved in the kinetic activity of Greek traditional dance, during the covid-19 pandemic.

Methodology

Internet ethnography or Netnography was used to collect the data of the research (Kozinets, 2010). This is a research that studies an online community, using the internet both to communicate with participants and to draw material for the community under study. It also relies on participatory observation and the use of a guide with open-ended questions. More specifically, online ethnographic research was based on (a) text and chat analysis, (b) interactive online researches in the sense of participatory observation, and (c) interviewing and recording actions on Internet communication groups such as Facebook (Sade-Beck, 2004).

It is also an ethnographic study with autobiographical elements. It is well known to ethnographers that self-ethnography is defined as a form of personal narrative that places the individual within a social context (Burdell, & Swadener, 1999). In autoethnography or ethnographic autobiography, the narrative is done from a personal point of view (Burdell, & Swadener, 1999) and presents the actions and interactions from the author's point of view (Murhy, & Dingwall, 2001). Therefore, this research is autoethnography, as the researcher was at the same time part of the sample, that is the subject of the research, and the researcher who conducted the research.

Autoethnography is related to "native anthropology", which is defined as the study of the anthropologist's familiar "culture", that is the study of social and cultural groups living in the same context as the ethnographer who lives and works (Gefou - Madianou, 1998). It is easy to conclude that the position of the ethnographer in such a research has no clear boundaries and that the roles that shape the relationship between researcher and the man being studied, are highly complex, intersecting, and even overlapping (Wong, 2014).

Oral history was also used as a method, through which everyday memory is projected as a quest of social history (Thomson, 2009). For the presentation and analysis of the data, Geertz's model of "thick description" (2003) was adopted. Finally, the interpretation of the data was based on the theoretical visuals of the socio-cybernetic according to the control model of identity (ICT-identity control theory) that Burke (1991, 1997) proposed, under the terms of Berry's (1997) acculturation model.

Communication, Self-Regulation and Social Integration

All people have the natural ability to communicate. Communication is a process that satisfies the inner needs of the individual, such as his social living and survival. Through communication the individual attempts to give and receive information, to express himself, to identify, to understand the world, in other words to socialize. More specifically, man at birth comes into the world as a "potentially social being" (Papadopoulos, 2017). From the moment of his birth he comes in contact with his environment, which he needs in order to know the world and to integrate into it (Kyriakidis, 1994), but also to develop, evolve and get to know himself (Nova-Kaltsouni, 2007). Thus, the socialization of the individual is "a two-way process that consists of: a) mechanisms and modes of action that emerge from society and are addressed to the socialized individual and b) mechanisms and modes of action that the individual himself develops and 'responds' in what society directs towards it" (Nova-Kaltsouni, 2007, p. 18).

From the above it becomes clear that communication is not a simple transfer of information or meanings. It is also a process of contact, mutual understanding and interaction, both between the environment and the individual, as well as between people or groups (Josien, & Vagiatis, 1995). Therefore, without communication the cooperation and coordination of the members of a team cannot be achieved.

Human relationships, therefore, presuppose communication, as they involve the exchange of concepts (Miller, 2005). According to Paschalidis (2002), communication is an important function for human existence, as it was a key element in shaping human societies and creating cultures. Therefore, communication and society are two interrelated concepts, as communication provides both individuals and groups with the status, not only social, but also the feeling that they belong to a cultural-social unit, ie to a group (Vryzas, 2005).

The concept of social group can be defined as an organized set of individuals. These individuals are connected to each other by strong mutual bonds, which establish the consciousness of their special existence (Tsaousis, 1983). However, in order to form a unified consciousness, they must maintain a dense and direct communication, which, according to Vryzas (2005) creates a relationship and an exchange between them. According to him, communication is a process whose content is information, but it is not limited to its transmission, but also to the transmission of concepts, such as mental ideas, thoughts and feelings between two or more people who interact. Therefore, communication plays a significant role in every aspect of the individual's life and his participation in society.

Vryzas introduces in his definition of communication the parameter of exchange, that is the interaction, through which the feedback takes place. The person comes in contact with the message he receives from his environment and then, in turn, acts on it. In other words, the action of his environment creates a reaction and this reaction has certain effects. This parameter introduced by Vryzas is a key component of the cybernetic tradition of communication (Burke, 1991, 1997). The term "Cybernetics" comes from the Platonic word "Κυβερνήτης" (kybernitis, that is mean ruler) and refers to the art of governance in the sense of regulation (Ioannidis, 1997), considering that humans, animals and machines are the 'protagonists' that make up feedback loops, which communicate with each other through a continuous flow of transmitted messages and cultivate goal-seeking behaviors (Wicken, 1987). Communication, in the context of Cybernetics, is understood as a system of variables that interact, shape and control the temperament of the overall system and, like any organism, achieve balance and change (Filippidou, 2018).

In order to achieve self-regulation, individuals take action, reacting to the messages they receive from their environment, in order to adapt and be accepted in it, maintaining the standard of their identity (Filippidou, 2018). The concept of adaptation is intertwined with human nature (Brailas, 2013). Darwin, in his theory of the evolution of species, considered natural selection as a survival mechanism of the species that best adapts (survival of the fittest) to its natural environment (Darwin, 1869). "The process of adapting an organization to its environment (natural, technological, social, cultural or educational) is crucial for its survival and development" (Brailas, 2014, p. 443). Thus, in a cybernetic model of communication, systems monitor, regulate, and control the outcome of communication in order to maintain their stability and achieve their goals (Littlejohn, & Foss, 2012).

Such a system is the social one (Filippidou, 2018) and like all systems, it is also characterized by self-regulation and control, that is, it is autopoiesed and controlled (Littlejohn & Foss, 2012; Luhmann, 1990). The theory of Autopoiesis was also used in the social sciences by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1990). Luhmann argued that self-organized social systems are not made up of individuals or roles or actions, but that their constituent elements are composed of semantic communicative relationships. This fact, according to Karatsoulis (2011), means that social reproduction is not over-defined by any particular or "external" unified principle, but takes place essentially through the interaction of the individual autonomous, autopoiesing systems. According to Luhmann, every social

system can be influenced by its external environment but nevertheless operates in an autonomous way (Karatsoulis, 2011). Also, it can obey its own logic and its own rules, to create unifying links of its individual features, to reproduce and to define its "borders" (Karatsoulis, 2011).

This position contradicts the traditional standards, which considered that the socialization of the individual is a "one-way" process (Durkin, 2007), in which the changes that take place in the individual come from the effects of his environment. Today this position has changed, as, now, it is considered that the socialization of the individual is a two-dimensional process, in which both the individual and his environment take part (Filippidou, 2018).

The adaptation of the individual to a new environment and their acceptance in it involves the assimilation of new practices, new characteristics, resulting in the consequent evolution of the individual. This process by which the individual adapts to a new socio-cultural environment is called "acculturation" (Hall, 2005; Herskovits, 1938; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). This term is a neologism, while other terms are "cultural interaction", "cultural induction", "cultural dialysis" and "cultural integration" (Brailas, 2014).

The term acculturation and its similar terms imply that when an individual changes environment he adapts to the rules, values, customs, norms and language of his new environment, the new way of life (Redfield et al., 1936; Sam, 2006). In other words, the individual is acculturized, taking on new characteristics, new experiences, which if strongly destabilizing lead to learning, that is creation and consequently evolution (Kim, 2001). This acculturation varies from person to person and from group to group and depends on the degree of maintenance of cultural identity (cultural maintenance) and from the degree of intensity of intercultural communication (contact and participation) (Berry, 1997). The combination of these two parameters creates four different acculturation strategies which are (a) marginalization, (b) separation, (c) assimilation and (d) integration (Berry, 1980, 1992, 2003, 2006).

Today, with the development and spread of technology, which has contributed to the dominance of communication networks, acculturation has acquired a new dimension. Apart from the integration of the individual in his new cultural environment, the traditional one, also concerns his integration in a new virtual cultural environment. In other words, today, acculturation also refers to "the integration of the individual into the culture of the internet and the individual virtual cultures of the various virtual communities" (Brailas, 2013, p. 444).

From Traditional to Virtual Dance Communities and Vice Versa

In English terminology, the term "community" includes the Latin words "com" which means together and "unus" which refers to the number one, that is the unit (Delanty, 2010). As follows, etymologically the community is the whole that is formed by the individual together (Delanty, 2010) and on this basis the concept of community includes at least three components: (a) a group of people, (b) the place in which they operate and (c) the relationships they develop with each other (Creed, 2006; Spathari-Begliti, 2002).

In the case of the activity of Greek Traditional Dance, the group of people are the dancers and the place in which they act is the room in which the activities take place. Within this place, the dancers develop friendly relations and recognize each other as members of the dance group to which they belong, as they have common characteristics, such as their love for traditional dance, have a common goal, to learn traditional dance and they also have a common area of action, which is the hall of the club.

According to Mason (2000) communities are a special category of groups, as they are formed by groups of individuals who share common values and ways of acting and recognize each other as members of that group. Therefore, the community has to do with boundaries, that is, with borders, which separate the members from the non-members. These boundaries can be permeable or impermeable, and can often be symbolic, that is, not obvious, but a construction of the individual mind (Cohen, 1985).

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The symbolic construction of the boundaries of a community serves the personal construction of the identity of its members and this is done through community collectivity and communication. The dancers through the space of the club and the object of the dance, come in contact with each other, exchange information and ideas, in other words they interact and consequently develop social relations and, therefore, ways of forming the collective and individual self.

Therefore, a key component of the community process is communication, which is so important that if problems arise in it, the development of the community is suspended. This happened during the pandemic, where the Greek Government imposed restrictive measures for nine months, resulting in the cessation of all indoor and outdoor activities and therefore the activity of Greek Traditional Dance. The consequence of this was the cessation of communication between the people active in this area and, therefore, the suspension of the development of their community, that is their identity.

Every conscious being feels the need to be recognized by "others" in order to satisfy its primary need for self-esteem and self-recognition (Mason, 2000). The members of the dance clubs, interrupting the activity of the Greek Traditional Dance, they didn't manage to get together at the club. Therefore, they stopped coming in contact with each other and communicating, as a result of which they lost their identity, as they were not recognized by the "others" as dancers. This, however, contradicted their standard of identity.

According to Burke (1991, 1997), when there is a discrepancy between the incoming messages from the environment and the identity standard, a new parameter is created, that of distress, which forces people to act. This is what happened in this case as well. In order to regain the identity of the dancer, they had to first regain communication with the social environment of Greek Traditional Dance. However, as mentioned earlier, spatial proximity is a necessary condition for the development of a community (Brailas, 2013), in the sense of a common space of action in which social ties are developed (Wellman, 1999). In the days of the pandemic, there was no common place for action, in the traditional sense of the word.

According to the cybernetic tradition of communication, the community is a system (Littlejohn & Foss, 2012; Rogers, & Eskudero, 2004) as it exhibits classical systemic properties, such as interaction, co-evolution and self-organization (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). Systems are constantly facing new challenges, to which they either try to adapt and consequently evolve, or they do not adapt and then they are marginalized, disorganized and destroyed. Thus, systems are often faced with a dichotomy point and are called upon to decide which path to take (Prigogine, & Stengers, 1997).

This event also happened with the dance communities in Greece. After the restrictive measures imposed by the Greek Government and the cessation of their operation, they had to be transformed, to change their characteristics, in order not to perish. As a key feature of living systems is the ability to adapt and evolve (Von Bertalanffy, 1968), dance communities have attempted to construct a different, common space of action in order to regain communication with "others" and return community identity to prior to its status, in order to comply with the identity standard.

Living in the age of technology, where developments in communication through computer networks have brought to the fore a new kind of communication proximity, traditional dance communities have taken advantage of the existing technological infrastructure and become virtual dance communities. The term Virtual Communities was coined by Howard Rheingold (1993), who described the communities that emerge on the Internet and the World Wide Web and in which social networks are formed. The demarcation of these communities, as well as the traditional ones, is done in a symbolic way, with borders, that is, whose spatial correlation is not required, but are determined collectively through the technological interaction of their members (Brailas, 2013).

One such example of the development of a dance community was the virtual dance community called "Online Traditional Dance Seminars" (Figure 1). This virtual dance community has grown through

the largest social networking site, Facebook. Prior to its construction, it was a traditional dance community with a common venue, a club hall in Drama. Following the implementation of the restrictive measures, which resulted in the suspension of its development and, therefore, of the collective identity of its members, its members sought to re-establish their communication, in order to be recognized again by the "others", but also to identify themselves as dancers.
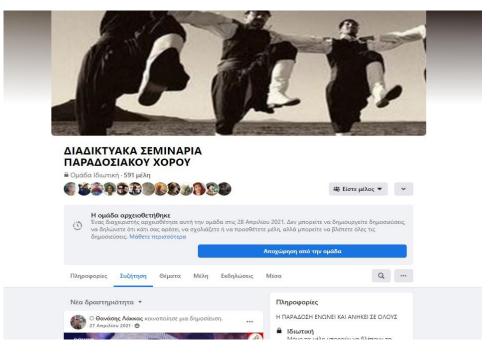

Figure 1. The virtual dance community "Online Traditional Dance Seminars" on Facebook

Through Facebook, they created a community, which initially numbered eighteen people, all members of the traditional dance community of Drama. This technologically mediated environment, the individuals "inhabited" it and created new processes of meeting and communication. However, in this Facebook environment, individuals were invisible audiences (Boyd, 2008), who communicated regardless of time. In order to have a more direct communication proximity, this community also used the communication platform developed by Microsoft, the Microsoft Teams, which provided them with live video conferencing, resulting in community members interacting in a space-time dimension (Figure 2).

The fact that the traditional dance communities did not remain in their previous state, led over time members of other traditional dance communities from various parts of Greece and abroad, to join this virtual dance community, reaching the number of six hundred members. These members of the virtual dance community, known as "Traditional Dance Online Seminars", constructed a new identity of their collective and individual selves, calling themselves 'dancers', re-aligning their identities with the socially relevant information their environment.

In order to achieve this matching, the people who participated in this virtual dance community had to follow some internet conventions on how to become a member and how to behave online, to follow some rules of participation, but also their sanctions in case that violate them. People, that is, they had to adapt to a new culture, the culture of the internet. In other words, the people who participated in this virtual dance community were acculturated, that is, they changed their socio-cultural environment and adapted to the rules, values and in general to a new way of virtual life, which allowed them to interact successfully with the participants of this culture.

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Figure 2. The virtual dance community "Traditional Dance Online Seminars" on the Microsoft platform teams

The members of this virtual dance community they incorporated the new information introduced into their socio-cultural system, without, however, abandoning their previous dance culture in order to adapt to their new environment. The strategy that followed was that of integration or harmonization (Berry, 1997), which allows the coexistence of different cultures, that is the preservation of cultural identity and the pursuit of intercultural communication. Therefore, the members of the virtual dance community called " Traditional Dance Online Seminars" did not "abandon" their collective identity, but renegotiated it on the basis of the new social conditions that emerged with the emergence of the covid -19 pandemic.

This virtual community had a limited lifespan. After the restrictive measures were lifted, it was archived, and its members returned to their traditional dance communities. This time permanently? And if not, until when? Until the social conditions and the views of the "others" for them change again. After all, the sense of "belonging" is not unchanged, but instead is an active process that involves constantly transformational processes, allowing team members to change the meanings of their actions in direct interdependence with their social environment (Filippidou, 2011).

Discussion-Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to study the reconstruction of the identity of the Greeks involved in the kinetic activity of Greek traditional dance, during the covid-19 pandemic. Netnography was used to achieve the aim and the research data were interpreted on the basis of socio-cybernetics, under the analytical terms of acculturation.

The analysis of the data showed that, during the covid-19 pandemic and the long-term restrictive measures imposed, the dance communities, as autopoiesed and controlled systems (Littlejohn & Foss,

2012; Luhmann, 1990), attempted to maintain balance, which was disturbed by the changes that took place in social conditions. In other words, the dance communities tried to maintain their standard of identity. Thus, they reacted to the messages they received from their social environment and the result was their adaptation to another culture, a virtual. Thus, they were transformed from traditional dance communities into virtual dance communities.

When an identity activates, a circle of feedback is created which consists of four structural elements (Stokes, 2006, 2007) which are: a) the standards of reference or adjustment (an overall of self-meanings) b) the input of information from the environment or a social situation, including reflected appraisals of the perceptions related to self c) the process which compares the input of information to the standards of function of a comparator and finally, d) the output to the environment in which it was compared to which is the source of behaviour that aim to bring the introductory exceptional information in connection with identity standards (Burke, 1991). Therefore, in order for traditional dance communities to maintain the standard of their identity, the evaluations of others for them had to be consistent with it. Thus, they chose the acculturation strategy of integration and turned into virtual dance identities.

The digital culture of the virtual dance communities restored the communication and social relations between the people participating in Greek Traditional Dance activities, with the consequence that they regain the identity of the dancer who conforms to their identity standards and thus the balance is restored. in their team. Following the lifting of the restrictive measures, the virtual dance communities lost their functionality and their members returned to their traditional dance communities, in order to continue to be recognized as dancers, a fact that is also determined by their identity model. In this way they re-formed a new identity, justifying the position that both the collective and the individual identity are not permanent, but are adapted according to the environmental conditions (Filippidou, 2011), being at the same time a process of interaction and internal control, that is a cybernetic process (Filippidou, 2018).

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