

REVIVAL OF THE TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF BANAT IN THE DIGITAL ERA – CADE STUDY: THE DOWRY CHEST FESTIVAL

Adela MARINCU POPA

Ioan Slavici University Timișoara, Romania

Abstract: In the modern era and in the context of globalization, communities are rediscovering the value and importance of traditional anchors offered by local tradition. In the specific case of popular culture, it manages to combine the fundamental elements that give sense of community and belonging, overcrowded living conditions of information and influence because of the accessibility offered online. This paper addresses the ways "Dowry Chest" Festival in Timis county showcase traditional cultural heritage of Banat and its projection in cyberspace through digital communication channels.

Keywords: tradition, cultural heritage, Banat, folklore, festival.

1. Introduction

The idea to organize and run a *folklore* festival in the area of Timis county has occurred without a doubt due to the fact that the Banat area owns a treasure of remarkable peasant culture, crystalized and lived as folkloric life by its inhabitants during the latest century (since Greater Romanian was born until present day), which isn't totally or even closely known, in its essence, by the contemporary public, whereas amateur groups which partially carried on this patrimony have obviously suffered a great setback after 1989, at least in terms of numbers. Thus, there was a need of a reasonable revival – that is, in accordance with its spirit and tradition – in this domain. At the same time, Banat region and Timis county harbor an amazing diversity and richness of crafts as a part of rural civilization and traditional art which are still being kept alive. Consequently, in the beginning of 2006, after several repeated observations, researches and field analysis, based particularly on empirical on-site findings and aspects, the Art and Culture Center of Timis County – under the guidance of the Timis County Council, through its Department for Culture, Education and Sport - decides to organize a contest-festival to stimulate the cultural activity of the county. Among the main aspects taken into consideration are the promotion of values and elements specific to the region (by its distinctive brands), related to the musical-choreographic domain, visual arts and traditional crafts, elements which have forged a rural civilization which is still functioning and even performing – under the form of village theater - and traditional gastronomy, all these with a particular focus on the areas and sub-areas of Timis county; the contest-festival has received a both symbolic and metaphoric name: *The Dowry Chest (Lada cu zestre)*.

2. The Dowry Chest Festival

This event was conceived especially as a framework, context-related component, aiming to bring more dynamism into the social-cultural life of the rural area in Banat

region and it has been initially regarded and received with a lot of reservation by the beneficiaries, the target public, while specialists in the field believed that the festival would be “perceived” as a smaller scale copy of the *Song [of praise] to Romania (Cântarea României)* festival. On the other hand, it was also the specialists that warned about the danger of alteration or even peculation of the specific objectives towards “commercial art”, as they’ve also warned about the observation of the right criteria and standards of value and authenticity.

The first edition of the *Dowry Chest* festival (which was scheduled to take place every year) was organized in 2007 and it represented a pilot edition which highlighted, by analyzing the specific sample, the actual status of the traditional culture in Timiș county, the public, as well as the interpreters–creators and the quality of their acts. We have tried to identify, from quality perspective, those acts who represent accurately the essential expression of local folklore authenticity, the preservation of local speech particularities, traditional techniques in the domain of imitative arts and craftsmen; for other artistic genres which have been accepted to compete in future editions, we’ve tried to highlight the representation of communities by selecting those participants who are able to create a spectacle as an artistic act of culture and spiritual education.

The contest included the following sections:

Section choreography:

- a) Mixed popular dances or separate dances for girls and boys
- b) Groups of dances (maximum 5 pairs)
- c) Mixed dance ensembles with one or more generations of interpreters (minimum 18 pairs of dancers)
- d) Dancing interpreters (maximum two interpreters)
- e) Thematic ensembles
 - 1. Ensembles of traditional customs and heritages
 - 2. Ensembles of folkloric creation
 - 3. Ensembles of songs and dances

Section Musical bands:

- a) Folk orchestras
- b) Folk fiddler bands
- c) Groups of instrument players
- d) Individual instrument players
- e) Interpreters, duets

Section Choirs:

- a) Mixed choirs
- b) Women choirs
- c) Men choirs
- d) Choral groups
- e) Mixed vocal groups of men and women

Section Prose or poetry in popular idioms (of the area where they come from):

- a) Groups of reciters
- b) Individual interpreters

Section Popular creators (naïve painting, amateur cult painting, (non-professional) stitching, popular costumes, embroidery, wood sculpture, pottery, icon painting, floral art etc.)

Section local traditional culinary art

Other artistic genres (fanfare, popular theatre, entertainment and variety spectacles, classical theatre etc.).

The contest was organized on three stages: inter-communal level stage, area level stage and county level stage, with subsequent filters / selections.

The unexpected results shown in the first edition, which saw more than 5000 amateur participants from Timis county to the *Dowry chest* festival, have persuaded the Culture and Art Center of Timis county to further develop the regulation of the festival, by making successive and welcome modifications, thus giving a new to this contest-festival.

The 12th edition of Dowry Chest, which took place last year, has brought significant modifications in the structure of the festival. There have been major modifications which we can say that have efficiently restructured the entire festival: the contest has been structured on two categories: "Laureates" and "The Dowry of Timis", juries were organized on each previously established area center, the county-level stage has been eliminated and money prizes have been introduced. Seven area centers have been established: Traian Vuia, Sânnicolau Mare, Jimbolia, Dumbrăvița, Gătaia, Buziaș, Giarmata Vii. Money prizes have been awarded, as follows: Great prize – 4500 lei, Category „Laureates” 1st prize – 4000 lei, 2nd prize – 3500 lei, 3rd prize – 2500 lei. Folk groups and ensembles of dances and songs have participated, as well as fiddle bands, vocal interpreters and instrument players, choirs, fanfares, reciters in dialects, craftsmen, collectors and representatives of traditional gastronomy, to all the sections of the festival: music, choreography, traditional gastronomy, exhibitions, collectors and craftsmen, as well as dialect literature. A total of 275 prizes have been awarded, out of which 96 prizes – 1st place, 85 prizes – 2nd place, 75 prizes – 3rd place, 18 special prizes and the great prize. In total, 7 spectacles have been organized in each of the 7 area centers, with a total of over 50 hours of show in 63 participating localities.

This year's 13th edition of the Dowry Chest festival started on March 16th 2019. As previously described, in accordance with the new regulation implemented in 2018, the contest has been structured on two categories, "Laureates" and "Dowry of Timis" for all sections, in order to be able to award more prizes and in order to have a different jury for each skill level. The localities who were included in the category "Laureates" are the winners of the previous two editions (2017 - 2018). The winners of the great prize and of the 1st prize per localities of the 2018 edition (Ghiroda and Giroc) have participated to this edition only as invitees. Moreover, the winners of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd prize per localities at the „Dowry of Timis” category of this year have been promoted to the "Laureates" category of 2020. For our 14th edition of 2020 the only localities which will remain in the contest at the category "Laureates" are those who ranked on the 2nd and 3rd places, whereas the others (places 4, 5 and 6) will participate in the "Dowry of Timis" category.

The festival took place in seven previously established host centers, as per following schedule:

"Dowry of Timis" CATEGORY:

- I. DUDEȘTII VECHI Area Center, Saturday March 16th 2019, 14:00 h
- II. PECIU NOU Area Center, Sunday March 17th 2019, 14:00 h
- III. VARIAȘ Area Center, Saturday March 23rd 2019, 14:00 h
- IV. TOMEȘTI Area Center, Sunday March 24th 2019, 14:00 h

V. NIȚCHIDORF Area Center, Saturday March 30th 2019, 14:00 h

"Laureates"

Area Center 1: DETA, Sunday 31.03.2019, 14:00 h

Area Center 2: SÂNNICOLAU MARE, Sunday 07.04.2019, 14:00 h

The Gala of the „Dowry Chest” festival shall take place on June 7th 2019, at the Banat Village Museum, where the winners of this year's edition of the festival shall present a spectacle where they shall present the cultural dowry of Timis county to the interested public.

3. Conclusion

In 2016, in the study entitled *Bringing forward the values of the area cultural patrimony – Dowry Chest festival* – where we have analyzed thoroughly the 10 year experience of the festival, we've notified "(...) the vital necessity, for future sustainability, for the festival *Dowry Chest* to be (re)structured into two wider area-based and category-based sections for participating communes, based on their economic and cultural potential, since during the last 10 years we have always had the same two (alternative) winners of the Great Prize: the Commune of Giroc and the Commune of Ghiroda. We would like to highlight here the lack of a good dissemination and of an intense and continuous cultural media advertising, which generates the risk of loss of interest of other participating communes if, in the near future, we shall not have a clear separation on clear categories for communes, with corresponding sections, in accordance with the design of strategy and reorganization, which is the actual direction of reorganization". We see that the structure of the festival, designed for two years now starting from 2018 and maintained, proves that the *Dowry Chest* has become a real model of confirmation for the cultural network of Timis county and also a best practice model for the stimulation of the local cultural life. Moreover, the *Dowry Chest* has highlighted, during its 13 years of existence, not only the common cultural heritage, but also the adherence to its living spirit.

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