

«Anatomy of a Dance» An Ethnochoreological and Musicological Approach Case study from Arkadia-Greece

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Abstract: The Tsakonikos dance and the music that accompanies it are the symbols of the cultural identity of the Tsakonian people. This dance is performed at every dance event (festival, feast, wedding ritual, dance event of local cultural clubs, etc.) and is performed either with the accompaniment of musical instruments or acapella. The purpose of this work is to study the dance and the music forms that are presented by this specific dance in the community of Prastos in Arcadia and to compare them with today's music and dance performances. Methodologically, the collection of ethnographic data was carried out the on field ethnographic method, that was conducted during the period 2017-2024, and is based on the use of primary (field research and participant observation) and secondary sources (bibliography and archival ethnographic research). The recording and analysis of the dance is based on Labanotation system. The opensource music software system Muse Score 4 and the music software (DAW) Cubase Pro 12 are used to record and analyze the melody of the Tsakonikos dance. To compare the dance and musical performances of the dance, the comparative method is used. In conclusion, from the field research, it appears that in the community of Prastos the "Tsakonikos" dance does not have only a single dance form, as it has prevailed to be "considered" in the dance groups, but it appears with its own dance specificity for each generation. Regarding the music of this dance, it seems that in the community of Prastos the musical performance of the Tsakonikos dance has a specific bilateral alternating form (AB). In particular, the A' part, which is the couplet of the song, is musically presented at a noticeably slower tempo than the B' part, which is about the chorus of the song. Compared to the dance and music performances of the particular dance in the various dance events of the cultural clubs, a homogenization of both the dance and music performance is observed.

Keywords: Tsakonikos dance, Greek traditional dances, ethnographic method, Labanotation, music technology, music softwares

1. Introduction

In the Greek dance reality, it is more common for Greek traditional dances to be drawn from the communities, which are located in regional, rural and semi-urban areas outside the urban centers (Papakostas & Poulakis, 2019, p. 11). Such a case is the community of Prastos. Prastos is the old capital of Tsakonia in Arcadia. The region of Tsakonia occupies the eastern coastal side of the Peloponnese, displaying distinct cultural characteristics, such as the Tsakonian dialect, the Tsakonian dance and the Tsakonian costume. Despite the fact that it is a single geographical area, culturally each village presents its own cultural physiognomy. In the community of Prastos the dance repertoire consists of Syrtos (2/4, 4/4, 7/8), Tsamikos, Tsakonikos, Trio and various game songs, such as Vergo and the miller (Stathopoulou, 2022, 2023).

This paper focuses exclusively on the study of the Tsakonikos dance and attempts to illuminate its musical and dance aspects, which can be found in the various performances.

Due to this reason, methodologically, the collection of ethnographic data was carried out the on field ethnographic method (Buckland, 1983, 1999; Giurchescu, 1999; Felfoldi, 1999; Kaeppler, 1999; Thomas, 2003; Kyriazi, 2011; Wulff, 2013; Gkefou-Madianou, 2017). More specifically, the ethnographic method was conducted in Prastos, the researcher's native culture, during the period 2017-2024 and is based on the use of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources refer to the data collected from the field research in the form of the interview (open-ended questions for a semi-structured interview and free discussion too) and the participant observation with simultaneous recording and video recording of the resident informants (Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1987; Schultz & Lavenda, 1990; Gkefou-Madianou, 1997, 2017; Kaeppler, 1999; Tompson, 2002; Pigiaki, 2004; Emerson et al, 2007; Heyl, 2007; Plummer, 2007; Kyriazi, 2011). The secondary sources refer to the data collected based on the bibliography (Thomas & Nelson, 2003) and archival ethnographic research (Gkefou-Madianou, 1999). Regarding the selection of the informants, this was done based

on their locality and their age, and they come from three different generations. With this age range, the similarities and differences about the music and dance form of the Tsakonikos dance emerge. The informants are local residents of the Prastos community who have never been to a dance club. The dance teacher of the local Cultural Club as well as people who dance in the local Cultural Club are able to separate the "traditional" (the first existence of dance) from the "educative" (second existence of dance) dance. 52 informants from different districts of the village as well as from different families participated in this research, which in proportion to the population of the village is considered a large sample that includes the general population indiscriminately. Contrary to this tactic of inclusion and ethics, in a recent graduation thesis (Tetorou, 2023) the sample of informants comes from one family and it claims to universalize and not only to generalize the conclusions of the research in a questionable way. Specifically, the weaknesses of Tetorou's research are, on the one hand, the small number of informants (10 in number), most of whom belong to the same family, and on the other hand, the tendency to generalize its conclusions to the entire community. For the recording of this dance and more specifically the structure of the movements as well as the kinetic changes it has undergone over the years, Laban's notation system (Labanotation) is used (Koutsouba, 2005; Fox & Dawn, 2005; VanZile, 1999; Hutchinson, 1977). For the interpretation of the ethnographic data of this work, the model of three generations and the theoretical bipolar scheme of the "first" and "second" existence of the dance were used (Hoerburger, 1965, 1968; Koutsouba, 2010b).

The dipole of the first and second existence proposed by Hoerburger (1965, 1968) seems to find practices of application and reproduction until today since in some cases the fluidity of dynamic social phenomena, such as music and dance, is overlooked and homogenizing tendencies are pointed out. These tendencies do not have a relationship with reality, as it is composed through aspects highlighted by field research. "The Greek folk traditional dance, ... has as its body the 'local symbiotic group' and as its environment the traditional society, that is a society... rural..., characterized by 'collectivity and anonymity and... orality 'constitutes the main way of transmitting knowledge ... from generation to generation'. Consequently, individuals learn to dance 'naturally', unconsciously and 'practically', by participating in the various music-dance events of the community ('first existence') (Damianakos, 1984, p. 59; Hoerburger, 1968). After the Second World War and the inclusion of Greek traditional dance in the urban context, the dance acquired a more recreational and commercial character, while the educational character that already existed was transformed for the new educational contexts, thus forming the "second existence" (Koutsouba, 2011). In this case, the dance is transmitted by qualified dance teachers in non-places: classes of dance clubs, dance schools, schools, universities, theater stages, hotels, etc. (Papakostas, 2022) with "similarly performed dance movement" (Koutsouba, 2010b, p. 103).

In any case, however, the dance acquires specific characteristics. In the 'first existence' dance corresponds to the concept of 'original tradition' and its basic features are 'fluidity', variability, freedom and improvisation, while in the second the conscious revival and representation of dance aim to save and preserve it (Koutsouba, 2010b; Hoerburger, 1965). Thus, the dance manifests itself in two ways. On the one hand, it naturally emerges in the rural environment, retaining evidence of authenticity in terms of its operation and way of transmission. On the other hand, it enters the urban environment, with the corresponding effects (Toli, 2017).

Papakostas (2022), based on Appadurai's theoretical disciplines regarding 'ethnotopies' as a tool for the analysis of modernity, introduces the term 'chorotopia' and defines them as "dynamic and polymorphic landscapes that are formed through a multi-dimensional and continuous process of consensus, break-use, appropriation, rejection, maintenance, transformation and negotiation of dance and space" (Papakostas, 2022, p. 181). According to Nitsiakos (2003), the 'chorotopia' refer to heterogeneous and fluid dance identities that transcend the borders of nations-states, as they have been grounded out of their own culture. An example of a de-grounded dance event is the Tsakonian dance, as it has been cut off from its local-natural space and has been integrated into a school and enlarged national repertoire (Chelari 2009, 2011, 2012, 2015). This dance, which is a "living still part of the cultural heritage of the place, is for the Tsakonians "o dikonamou chore" (i.e. Our Dance), which "flows in their blood" and supplies them with a "concept of provoking pride", distinction and prestige" (Cheilari, 2019). The Tsakonian dance as a local dance and an integral part of the Tsakonic communities unites the Tsakons around a common heritage, common memory and identity (Cheilari, 2015b). Moving out of the geographical boundaries of Tsakonia, the dance "has become a timeless local and national symbol" (Cheilari, 2019). It is a dance that, along with local performances, is appeared at school celebrations throughout Greece, at dance festivals, at music and dance performances and even at the closing ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games. Therefore, the Tsakonian dance as a part of extra-local events "is a vital element of the process of presenting, representing, forming and forming an ethnic local identity and the corresponding ethnic identity" (Papakostas, 2022).

The recording of the dance with the Labanotation aims to show the differences in the kinetic performance of dance by generation of performance. This dance notation representation (specific dance

performances from different circumstances danced the dance and intergenerational,) facilitates the comparative method not only by using simple descriptions with the use of written language, but shaping the dance with an international system. Moreover, it is a common and widespread tactic and a tool widely used in the anthropology of dance, giving form to an intangible and fluid phenomenon, such as dance, but in no way is it a panacea.

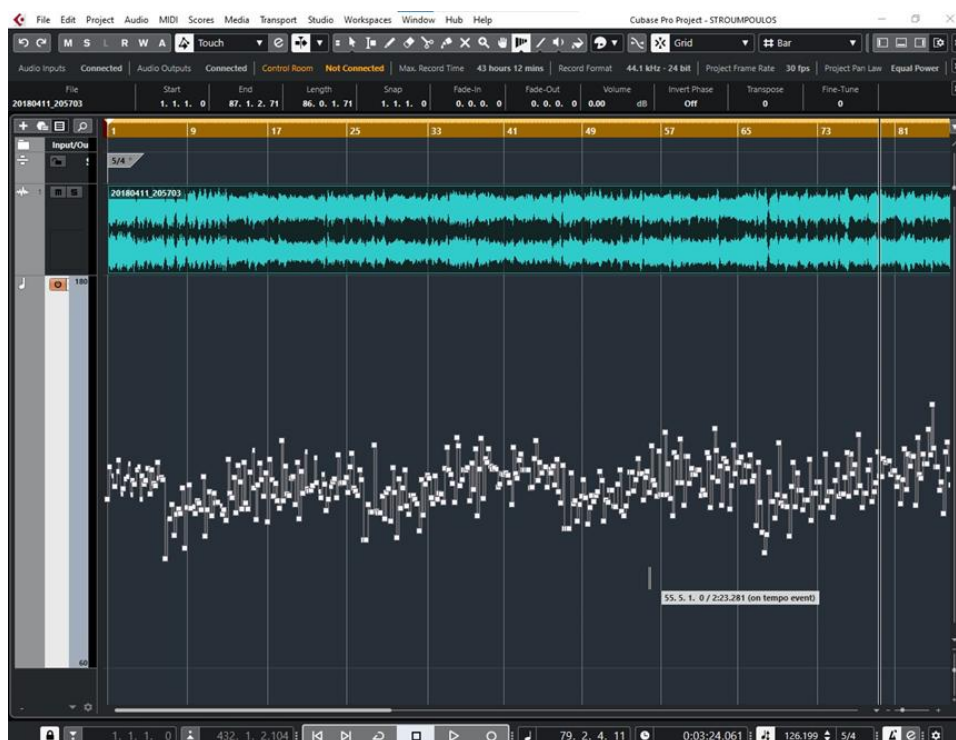
2. Ethnographic data

All the above “theoretical” can be confirmed and “practical” through the example of the Tsakonian dance. According to Bekyros and Tsaggouri (1996, p. 13) "*Tsakonian dance as a unified whole, melody, rhythm and dance is the only ancient Greek sample of music that has reached our days*". “Since... the so-called “Tsakonikos dance” came to the attention of the “Greeks”... much has been done to this day, and there is still debate about what kind and what strange category this dance belongs to” (Karas, 1996). "Tsakonikos" is the dance that, on the one hand, as Cheilari (2009) says, "spontaneously we will see it being danced during the wedding ceremony" and is a dance-symbol of the cultural identity of the Tsakonians (Cheilari, 2009). It is a dance named after the geographical context of the region gives its name, in contrast to the local context of Tsakonia where in the villages the dance named after from the respective song (Kinisan ta tsam(-n)opoula, Stazoun ta keramidia sou, Ampeli mou platifillo, Sou 'pa mana etc.), (Tetorou, 2023; Stathopoulou, 2018, 2022; Korologos, 2015; Cheilari, 2015, 2009).

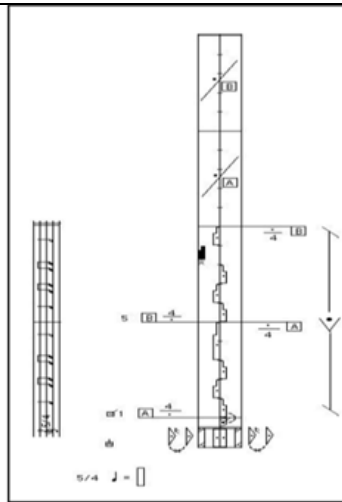
For all of the above to be understood, there will be an age division in three generations. Regarding the separation of generations, Loutzaki (1989) distinguishes generations into older (old generation) and younger (young generation). According to the distinction of Loutzaki (1989) and taking as a given that every generation changes every 25-30 years (Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1993), in this work the distribution is as follows:

- A) The first generation includes those born between 1925 and 1935.
- B) The second generation includes those born between 1955 and 1965.
- C) The third generation includes those born between 1985 and 1995 approximately.

Based on all the above, from 2017 until today (2024) there is a continuous recording of this dance and its music in every dance performance. The locals, according to their testimonies, divide the Tsakonian dance into two alternating rhythmic parts (slow-fast (Picture 1)) and respectively divide their dance. The dancers of the first generation divide the Tsakonikos into two alternating parts (Fa). According to Panagiotis "*The first part is the slow, which is also the simple and in the second that becomes faster is the hopscotch that we say...*" (Interview with G. Stathopoulou in April 2018).



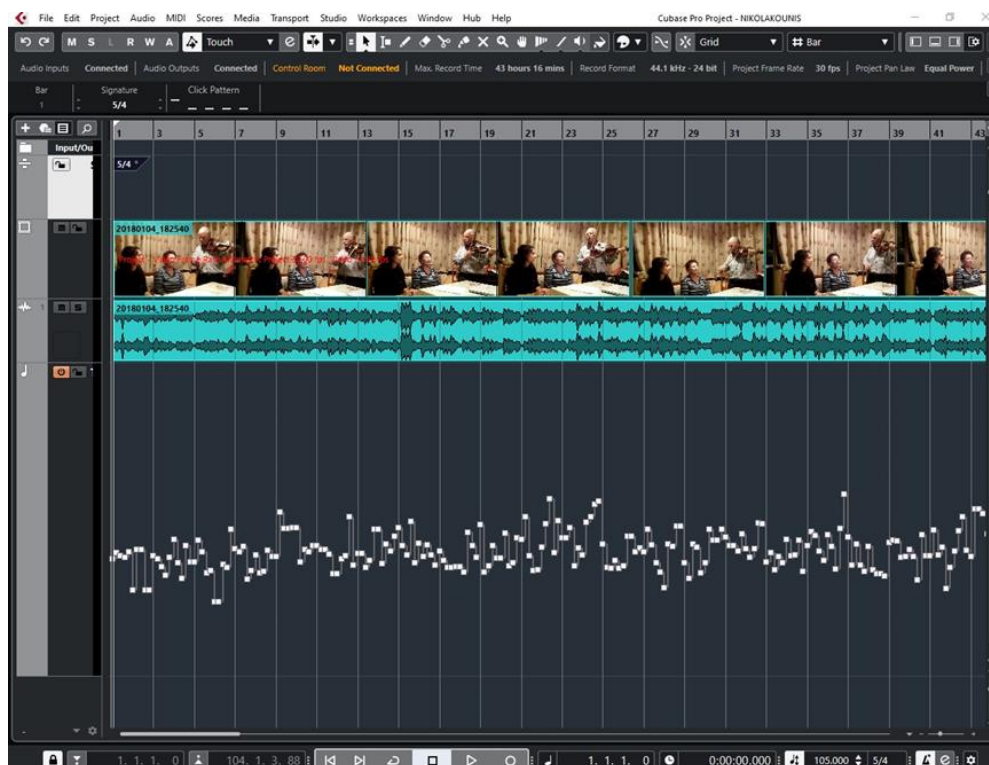
Picture 1: Audio recording of a local band



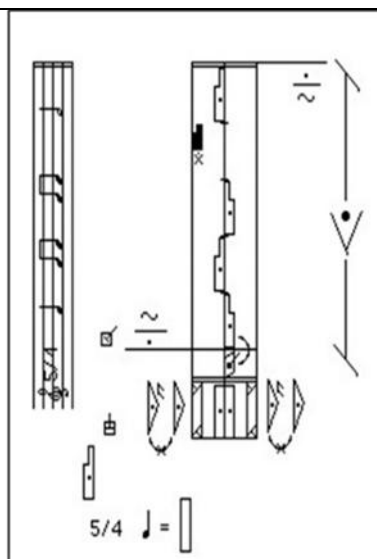
$$F1\alpha \sum_1 [\delta_{1/4} + \alpha_{1/4} + \delta_{1/4} + \alpha_{2/4}]$$

$$F2 \sum_1 [\delta_{1/4} + \alpha_{1/4} + \delta_{1/4} + \{(\delta)\alpha_{7-\alpha}\}_{2/4}]$$

Michael, who was the expert instrument player of the village and famous throughout Tsakonia and the Tsakones of America and belongs to the first generation, argues that the dance is kinetically danced the same throughout the music accompaniment. Its differentiation lies in rhythmic guidance, which presents bilateral alternating form (slow-fast (Picture 2)) (Interview with C. Stathopoulou in January 2018). Michael's dance view is a single testimony, which was not confirmed by other informants. However, under no circumstances can it be overlooked since its view is reproduced through the local Cultural Club of Agios Andres-Prastos (Fg).



Picture 2: Local music recording

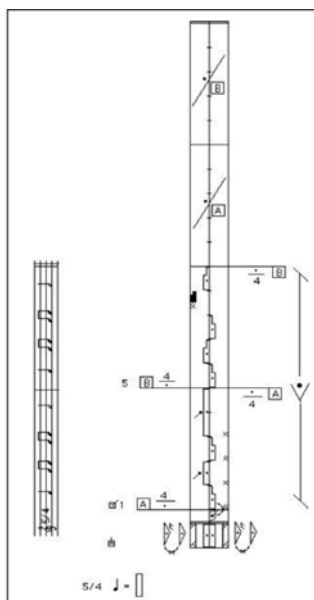


$$F1 \Sigma_1 [\delta_{1/4} + \alpha_{1/4} + \delta_{1/4} + \{(\delta)\alpha_{7-\alpha}\}_{2/4}]$$

$$F2 \Sigma_1 [\delta_{1/4} + \alpha_{1/4} + \delta_{1/4} + \{(\delta)\alpha_{7-\alpha}\}_{2/4}]$$

The above testimonials are verified via the technology and the use of music software. In particular, by inserting various characteristic recordings into the Cubase pro 12 music software, the analysis of their waveforms results in the bilateral alternating slow-fast temp (Picture 1 and Picture 2).

Dancers from the second generation claim that during the first (slow) part of the dance there is a slight knee folding. Matoula in her interview (Interview with G. Stathopoulou in April 2018) said that as a child she knew the dance with kneecaps, while through the classes at the cultural club she learned to dance it "humbly", meaning without a fold.



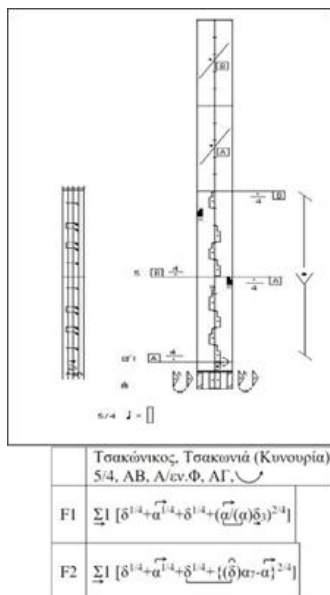
$$F1 \Sigma_1 [\delta_{1/4} + \alpha > \delta_{1/4} + \delta_{1/4} + \alpha > \delta_{2/4}]$$

$$F2 \Sigma_1 [\delta_{1/4} + \alpha_{1/4} + \delta_{1/4} + \{(\delta)\alpha_{7-\alpha}\}_{2/4}]$$

Interestingly, the informants of both generations stated that in the second part, the fast, there was a jump, which during the performance of the dance was made into a rest. "Fast is jumpable," said Xoula (Interview with G. Stathopoulou in August 2017). It is very important to take into account the definitions that the dancers who come from Prastos themselves use. The words they use are more than simple descriptions, while revealing very specific and commonly understood qualities of movement.

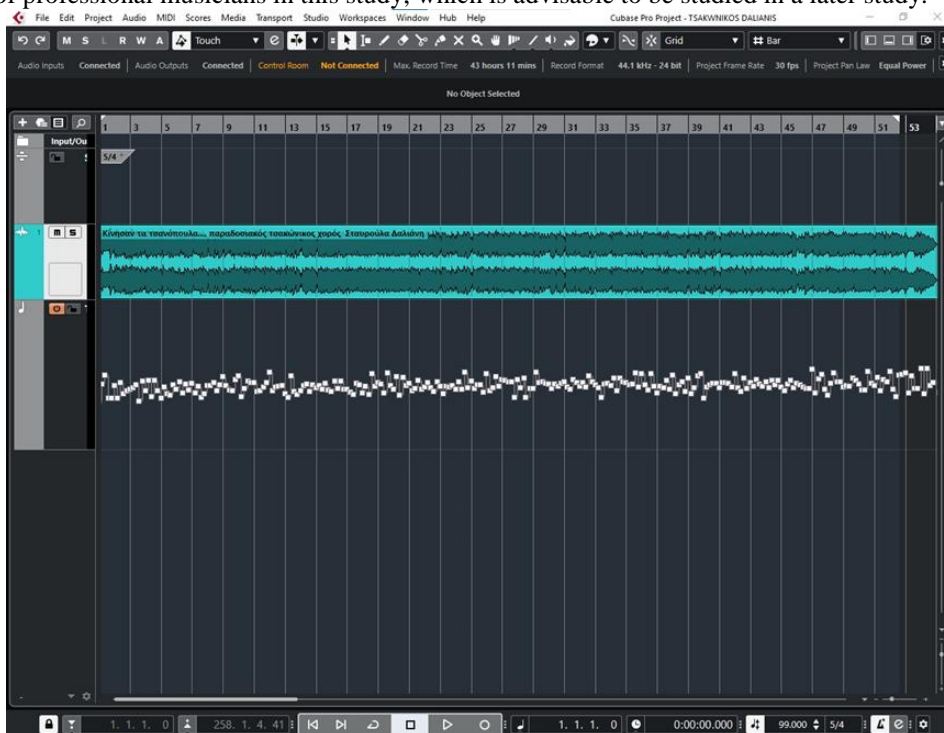
The third generation is described as the "generation of cultural clubs", since the knowledge acquired by the children does not come from the feast, trying to imitate the older ones, but from the teaching of each dance

teacher. As soon as there is teaching, the “existence” of dance changes. It is no longer first (existence) being in the feast and at the festival (a’ and b’ generation) but it becomes second through the process of teaching and mediation by a body and also by a teacher-organizer who often makes decisions and shapes the performance (c’ generation) and there are significant differences which are observed in the performance of the dance both in terms of its style and in the musical performance.

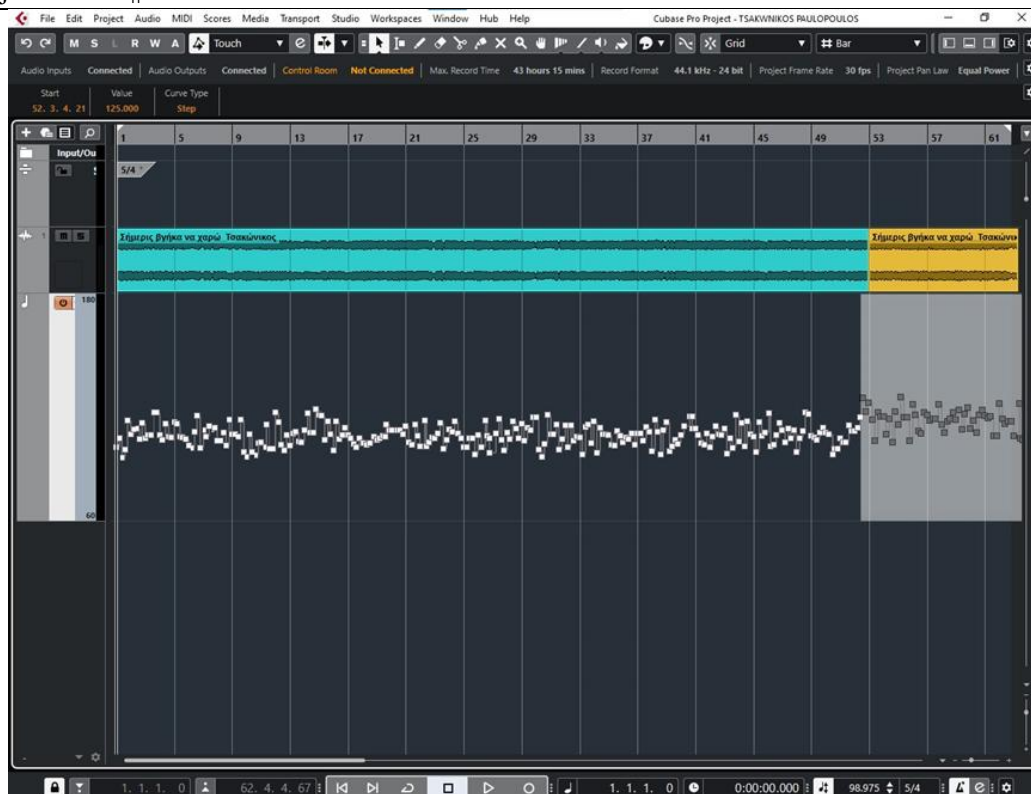


The “outsider”, non-local, musical bands when playing Tsakoniko do not alternate the rhythmic training to slow and fast (Picture 3 and 4), which “strikes” badly in the ear of the Prastiotes, since it does not appear to be in accordance with the informal aesthetic codes that they themselves advocate. In the following images, the wavelength of the sound of the recording is reflected in an almost straight line. Therefore, the characteristic two parties (slow/fast) that appear in local singing and local music performance are absent.

Because each study deals with specific elements it was not possible to investigate in depth the musical influences of professional musicians in this study, which is advisable to be studied in a later study.



Picture 3: Recording of the Dalianis band



Picture 4: Audio recording of the Pavlopoulos band

3. Discussion

This diversity of dance is summarized in Matoula's words "At the events of the traditional club outside the place we dance according to the tradition of the teacher. In events within our place as we have been taught by the elders". This states that in a dance coexistence of generations everyone will dance what they know. On the other hand, the diversity of musical performances can be seen in the words of the instrument player Iliia "[At Astros] we were not allowed to do it as we wanted. Both times it dances the same way. I'm telling him go one like this, one like that. "No, that's what I'm telling you. Both times the same." What should I say to him now?"

The characteristics of traditional dance (collective music, anonymity and verbality) that make it a good of folk creation, contribute to the processing and transmission of knowledge and experiences from generation to generation (Buckland, 1983; Damianakos, 1984). Thus, over the years, the transformation of dance and music is observed from generation to generation. As dance is a living element of society - not a museum kind - its structure is based on the self-designed moods of the dancers. According to Nitsiakos (2003, p. 104) "the same dance can vary not only from village to village in the same area but also from district to district or even from family to family".

In conclusion, from the on the field research it appears that in the community of Prastos the "Tsakonikos" dance does not have a single dance form, as it is firmly believed in the dance groups of cultural clubs, but it presents various peculiarities and composes a complex dance concept for each generation. In contrast to the music of the dance, it seems that in the community of Prastos the musical performance of the Tsakonian dance has a specific bilateral alternating form (AB). In particular, the A' part, which is the couple of the song, is performed musically in a significantly slower tempo than the B' part concerning the song's refrain. In comparison with the dance and musical performances of this dance in the various events of the cultural associations, the homogenization of dance and music can be seen.

From all the above, both the dialectics and the dynamics of the dance phenomenon are featured. The dialectics between the different generations showing the multiple beings of the Tsakonian dance and the dynamics of the dance phenomenon in Prastos beyond the strict bisections old/new, authentic/non-authentic. It is a dance that is danced in places and non-places, which "as a living organism... creates, develops, resists influences or alters, dies and re-lives, transforms... always taking into account... the intangible... character of... and the subjects' role..." (Papakostas & Poulakis, 2022) performing it every time. In conclusion, Prastos is a dynamic 'chorotopi' based on the dialectic between old and new, "tradition" and modernity. It is, therefore, a

place characterized by the coexistence of parallel traditions (Charitonides, 2018), which are intertwined with the dance performances of their respective entities.

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