Traditional Bulgarian Folk Dances in the Contemporary Cultural Environment: Public Awareness, Cultural Identity, and perspectives for Their Promotion

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Abstract: *This study examines Bulgarian folk dances and traditional horo as a significant component of Bulgaria's intangible cultural heritage and an important factor in preserving national identity and social memory. It explores public awareness, attitudes, and participation in folk dance activities, as well as opportunities for their promotion in the contemporary cultural environment. Based on a questionnaire survey, the study analyses the role of education, media, and digital platforms in raising awareness of Bulgarian folklore traditions and supporting their preservation and transmission.*

Keywords: *Bulgarian folk dances and horo; intangible cultural heritage; national identity; public awareness; promotion*

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BULGARIAN FOLK DANCES AND HORO AS PART OF BULGARIA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

Bulgarian folk dances and *horo* constitute one of the most distinctive expressions of the country's traditional culture and represent an essential component of Bulgaria's intangible cultural heritage. They embody historical memory, social values, customs, and artistic forms that are transmitted from generation to generation, contributing to the preservation of national identity.

The book by Georg Kraev (2007) seeks to engage readers who are interested in acquiring a deeper understanding of Bulgarian cultural heritage. Folklore can be regarded as an important carrier of the collective experience, spirituality, and cultural memory of the Bulgarian people. In this context, folkloric practices, including folk dances and *horo*, play a significant role in preserving and transmitting cultural identity.

Bulgarian folk dances and *horo* perform not only a cultural but also a social function. They create opportunities for social interaction, strengthen community cohesion, and foster a sense of belonging. Dzhenev (1968) presents stage adaptations of Bulgarian folk dances performed by the State Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances, which have achieved considerable success both in Bulgaria and abroad. This demonstrates the important role of stage interpretation as a means of preserving, promoting, and presenting Bulgarian folk dance heritage to international audiences.

In the context of globalization and the rapid development of digital technologies, the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural heritage have become increasingly important (Simeonova-Kozhuharova, 2025). According to the **UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage** (UNIESCO, 2003; UNESCO, 2024), intangible cultural heritage encompasses practices, knowledge, skills, and forms of cultural expression that communities recognize as part of their cultural identity. Bulgarian folk dances and *horo* fall within this category and represent a valuable resource for cultural development and intercultural dialogue (**Fig. 1**).



Figure 1. Bulgarian Folk Culture in Front of Prague's Gothic Towers

The contemporary cultural environment provides new opportunities for promoting Bulgarian folk dances and *horo* through educational initiatives, festivals, mass media, and digital platforms. At the same time, the declining interest in traditional forms of culture among some younger generations poses significant challenges to their preservation and transmission. For this reason, it is essential to examine public attitudes, the level of public awareness, and people's willingness to participate in activities related to Bulgarian folklore.

In the context of contemporary socio-economic challenges, preserving national identity has become increasingly important. According to Dimitrova (2023), the phenomenon

of *brain drain* has a negative impact on the development of key sectors of society, including the wellness and spa tourism industry. This underscores the need for policies aimed at preserving the country's human capital and cultural potential.

In the scientific literature, folk dances are recognized as an important mechanism for the preservation and transmission of cultural memory. According to Stanoeva (2025), the documentation and presentation of traditional folk costumes contribute to the safeguarding of cultural heritage, which is closely linked to ongoing efforts to preserve and promote Bulgarian folk dances and *horo* in the contemporary cultural environment.

Stoin (1956) identifies folk music as a fundamental bearer of the folkloric memory and cultural identity of the Bulgarian people. Closely associated with this musical tradition, Bulgarian folk dances and *horo* have developed as an inseparable component of folklore, contributing to the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage and national identity in the contemporary cultural environment (**Fig. 2**).



Figure 2. Folk Dance Festival in Kostinbrod, 2025

Bulgarian folkloric tradition has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation by numerous researchers. Georgieva (1993) conceptualizes traditional culture as a mechanism for preserving and transmitting values, the "cultural code," worldview representations, and the historical memory of the community, thereby establishing it as a significant factor in the formation of cultural identity.

Ganeva-Raycheva (2011) emphasizes the role of folklore in the construction of national identity, which positions Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances as a meaningful element in the preservation, transmission, and popularization of cultural heritage. Contemporary studies on intangible cultural heritage further highlight the role of traditional dances as a medium for strengthening social cohesion

and fostering a sense of belonging to the community.

The expansion of mass tourism in the twentieth century, together with the advancement of air transport, significantly democratized access to cultural tourism and extended its geographical reach (Richards, 2021). Richards offers a critical reinterpretation of cultural tourism, demonstrating how traditional high-cultural landmarks have progressively been enriched by events and experiences rooted in popular culture, contemporary creativity, and everyday life through innovative tourism practices.

The study by Kazashka et al. (2024) examines digitalization as a contemporary instrument for documenting, structuring, and preserving Bulgarian dance folklore. This process contributes to the more effective promotion of Bulgarian folk dances and horo traditions and supports their sustainable presence within the contemporary cultural environment. Through the development of digital databases and specialized information resources, access to knowledge about diverse folklore regions, dance forms, and traditions is significantly facilitated. In this context, Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances are affirmed not only as elements of cultural heritage, but also as a dynamic resource for education, scholarly research, and cultural exchange in contemporary society, while Bulgarian folklore ensembles emerge as socio-cultural spaces for intergenerational communication and continuity.

Folk dances and horo dances as carriers of cultural memory and national identity

Bulgarian folk dances represent one of the most valuable elements of Bulgaria's intangible cultural heritage. They preserve the historical memory, traditions, and value system of the Bulgarian people, while transmitting cultural knowledge and social models across generations. Through their distinctive movements, rhythms, and musical accompaniment, folk dances reflect the specific characteristics of the different ethnographic regions and safeguard the richness of Bulgarian folkloric tradition.

According to Kraev (2007), traditional culture embodies the collective experience and spirituality of the Bulgarian people, while folkloric practices function as an essential mechanism for preserving cultural memory. Within the same context, Georgieva (1993) emphasizes that traditions play a fundamental role in the formation and maintenance of society's cultural identity. Folk dances foster a sense of belonging to the community and contribute to the preservation of national consciousness.

The collective nature of Bulgarian horo dances is of particular significance, as they symbolize unity, mutual support, and the connection between the individual and the community. Dzhenev (1968) notes that the diversity of folk dances reflects Bulgaria's rich regional traditions and cultural plurality. In the context of globalization, folk dances continue to perform an important function in preserving national identity and transmitting cultural values to younger generations.

Contemporary interest in folklore festivals, dance clubs, and cultural events demonstrates that Bulgarian dance folklore remains a living cultural heritage that integrates tradition and modernity. In this sense, folk dances continue to serve as a significant factor in preserving cultural memory and strengthening national identity in contemporary society.

Contemporary trends in the preservation and promotion of Bulgarian dance folklore

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in Bulgarian folk dances both in Bulgaria and among Bulgarian communities abroad. In the context of globalization, folk dance continues to serve as an important factor in preserving national identity and promoting Bulgarian cultural heritage. The activities of dance clubs, folklore ensembles, and festivals have expanded significantly, attracting participants from different age groups.

The practice of Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances has a beneficial effect not only on the musculoskeletal system, but also contributes to the preservation and promotion of national traditions (Dimitrova, 2017).

Contemporary digital technologies and social media play a substantial role in popularizing Bulgarian dance folklore. Online

platforms create opportunities for education, information exchange, and access to broader audiences. At the same time, international folklore festivals provide conditions for presenting Bulgarian culture (**Fig. 3**) to the global public and contribute to the recognition of folk dances as a significant element of Bulgaria's intangible cultural heritage.



Figure 3. Bulgarian participation in Prague, April 2025

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS BULGARIAN FOLK DANCES

This section presents the initial stage of a broader research initiative aimed at examining the role, perception, and contemporary significance of Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances in Bulgaria, as well as the impact of traditional costumes and accessories and the influence of different spatial dimensions. In this context, the conducted survey should be regarded as a preliminary empirical basis for the development of a more extensive and representative study in the field of Bulgarian dance folklore.

Methodology and organization of the study

In order to achieve the aim of the study, a survey was conducted to examine public awareness, attitudes, and participation in activities related to Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances as part of Bulgaria's cultural heritage. The study was carried out in 2026 using a standardized online questionnaire distributed among individuals from different age and social groups.

A total of 120 respondents participated in the survey (Mean ± SD: 43.9 ± 15.7 years). The questionnaire included items related to the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants, their level of knowledge of Bulgarian folk dances, the frequency of participation in or observation of folklore events, and their attitudes towards the role of folk dances in preserving cultural heritage. It also examined the motivation for involvement in such activities, the factors limiting active participation, and the opportunities for promoting Bulgarian dance folklore.

The collected data were processed using descriptive statistical methods and are presented as absolute values and percentages. The analysis aims to identify the main trends in public attitudes towards Bulgarian folk dances and to outline their place within the contemporary cultural environment.

Analysis of the survey results

The results obtained from the conducted study provide information related to the social status and demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as their level of

awareness, attitudes, and participation in activities associated with Bulgarian folk dances. The analysis of the data makes it possible to outline the main trends in public attitudes towards folk dances as a significant element of Bulgaria's cultural heritage.

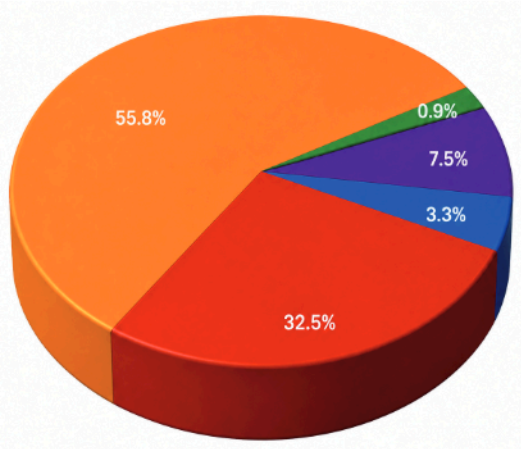


Figure 4. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents according to social status

The data presented in Figure 4 reveal a clearly expressed predominance of socially active groups among the surveyed respondents. The largest relative share is represented by employed participants – 55.8%, followed by students – 32.5%. Considerably lower proportions are observed among retirees — 7.5%, school students – 3.3%, and unemployed individuals – 0.9%. This distribution indicates that the majority of the sample consists of groups characterized by active social and educational engagement, which suggests a higher level of involvement, broader access to cultural initiatives, and greater potential for participation in activities related to Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances.

Table 1 presents the distribution of the surveyed respondents by age group, allowing the age profile of the sample to be outlined and the participation of different generations in the study to be examined.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by age group

Age group	n	%
Up to 18 years	3	2.5
18–25 years	31	25.8
26–40 years	10	8.3
41–60 years	60	50.0
Over 60 years	16	13.3
Total	**120**	**100.0**

The age distribution of the respondents reveals a pronounced predominance of participants aged 41 – 60 years, who constitute 50.0% of the total sample. They are followed by respondents in the 18 – 25 age group, representing 25.8%, whereas the lowest proportion is observed among participants up to 18 years of age – 2.5%. The mean age of the surveyed individuals is 43.9 ± 15.7 years, indicating a prevailing representation of persons in active working age. This age structure provides a solid empirical basis for analysing public attitudes towards Bulgarian folk dances as a significant component of Bulgaria's cultural heritage and as a medium for cultural continuity across generations.

The results presented in Figure 5 indicate a high level of awareness of Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances among the surveyed respondents. Half of the participants – 50.0% – define themselves as partially familiar with Bulgarian dance folklore, while 38.3% report being fully familiar with it. This distribution demonstrates a substantial degree of cultural awareness within the studied sample and confirms the continuing relevance of Bulgarian dance folklore as a recognizable component of national cultural heritage.

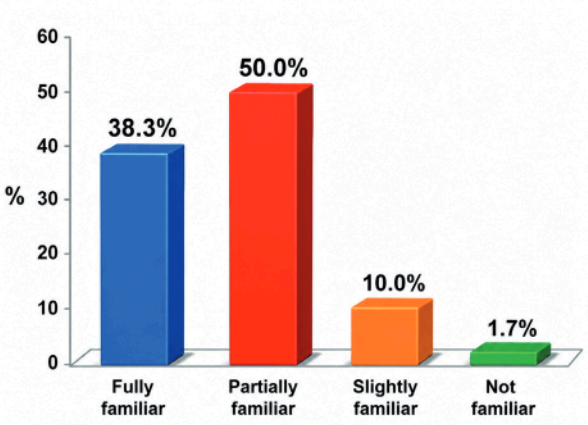


Figure 5. Level of awareness of Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances (n = 120)

A considerably lower proportion (**Fig. 6**) of respondents identify themselves as slightly familiar with the topic – 10.0%, while only 1.7% report having no knowledge of Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances. These findings indicate a high level of public awareness and a generally positive attitude towards Bulgarian folk dances as a significant component of Bulgaria's cultural heritage.

The data presented in Figure 6 indicate a high level of engagement with activities related to Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances. The largest share of respondents — 50.8% — report regular participation in or observation of folk dance performances, while 30.0% engage occasionally and 15.8% rarely. Only 3.4% state that they never participate in or attend such events. These findings confirm the sustained social relevance of Bulgarian dance folklore as a meaningful form of cultural participation.

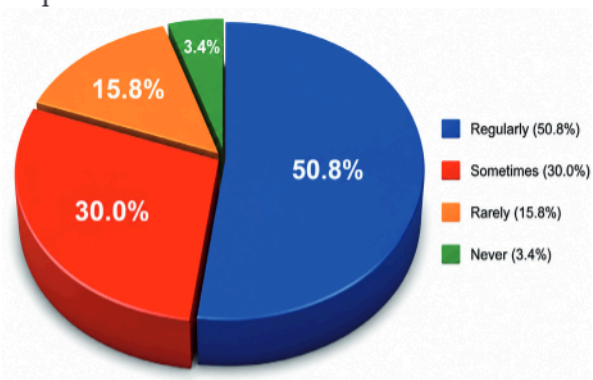


Figure 6. Frequency of participation in/observation of folk dances and horo dances

The results presented in Figure 6 indicate a substantial public interest in Bulgarian dance folklore and its active presence within contemporary cultural life. The fact that more than half of the respondents regularly participate in or attend folklore events demonstrates a preserved connection with traditional culture and a positive attitude towards folk dances as part of Bulgaria's cultural heritage. The low proportion of individuals who never engage in such activities further confirms the broad social dissemination and popularity of Bulgarian folklore.

Respondents' opinions regarding the significance of folk dances and horo dances for Bulgaria's cultural heritage are presented in **Figure 7**.

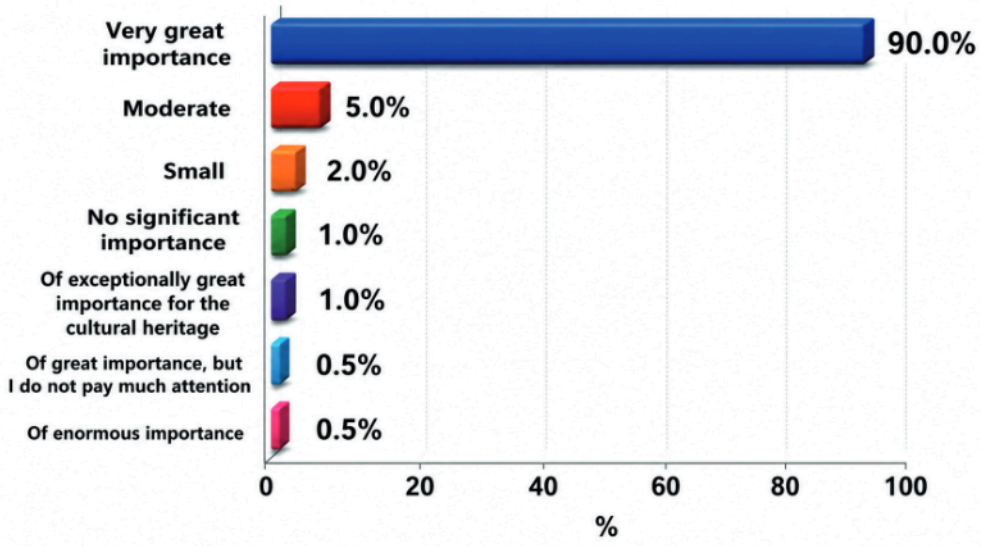
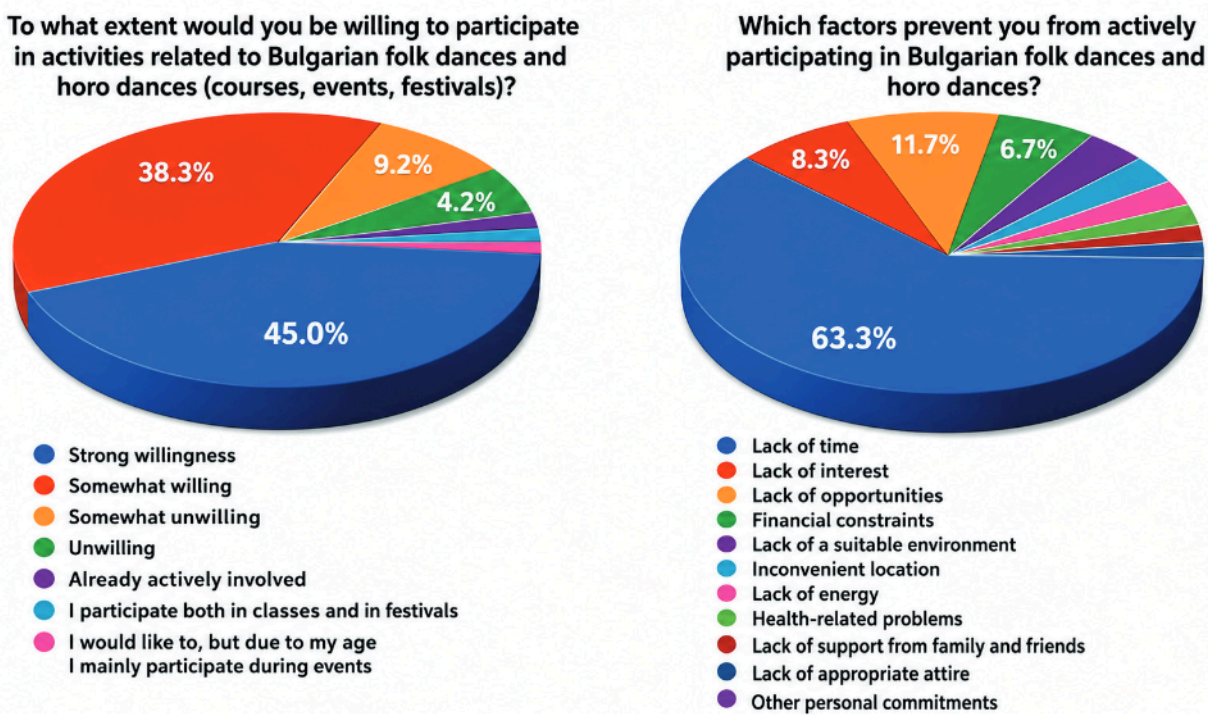


Figure 7. Public assessments of the significance of Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances

The results of the conducted survey, presented in **Figure 7**, should be interpreted in the context of public attitudes as a key factor for the sustainable preservation and transmission of cultural values. Bulgarian folk dances occupy a distinctive place among traditional forms of cultural expression, as they integrate historical memory, social practices, and national identity. Therefore, examining public assessments of their significance for the preservation of cultural heritage provides valuable insight into the level of societal engagement with the safeguarding of traditional Bulgarian culture.

A significant aspect of public attitudes towards Bulgarian folk dances is people's willingness to actively participate in activities related to their practice, promotion, and dissemination. At the same time, it is important to identify the factors that limit participation in such initiatives. The analysis of these indicators provides information both on the potential for the further development of folklore-related activities and on the existing barriers to broader public involvement. The obtained results are presented in block **Figure 8**.



Block Figure 8. Preconditions and barriers to participation in activities related to folk dances

The data presented in Figure 8 reveal a high level of willingness to participate in activities related to Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances. The largest relative share of respondents – 45.0% – express a strong willingness to engage in courses, events, and festivals, while 38.3% respond "rather yes." This indicates that more than four-fifths of the surveyed participants – 83.3% – demonstrate a positive attitude towards active involvement in activities associated with folk dances. A considerably lower proportion of respondents report a negative response or lack of interest.

With regard to the factors limiting participation, lack of time emerges as the leading barrier, indicated by 63.3% of respondents. It is followed by lack of opportunities – 10.8%, while financial constraints and lack of interest are represented to a much lower extent. These results suggest that limited participation is not primarily related to a negative attitude towards folk dances, but rather to objective organizational constraints associated with the dynamics of contemporary lifestyles.

The obtained data indicate the existence of substantial potential for expanding activities related to Bulgarian folk dances. The high motivation for participation, combined with the relatively low proportion of individuals who do not express interest, demonstrates

a favourable social environment for the development of initiatives aimed at promoting and preserving Bulgaria's intangible cultural heritage. Expanding access to training programmes, festivals, and cultural events could contribute to more active involvement of different age and social groups in the practice of folk dances.

The promotion of Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances is a key factor in preserving and transmitting traditional culture across generations. In this context, respondents were surveyed regarding the approaches they consider most effective for the broader popularization of Bulgarian dance folklore. The results are presented in **Figure 9**.

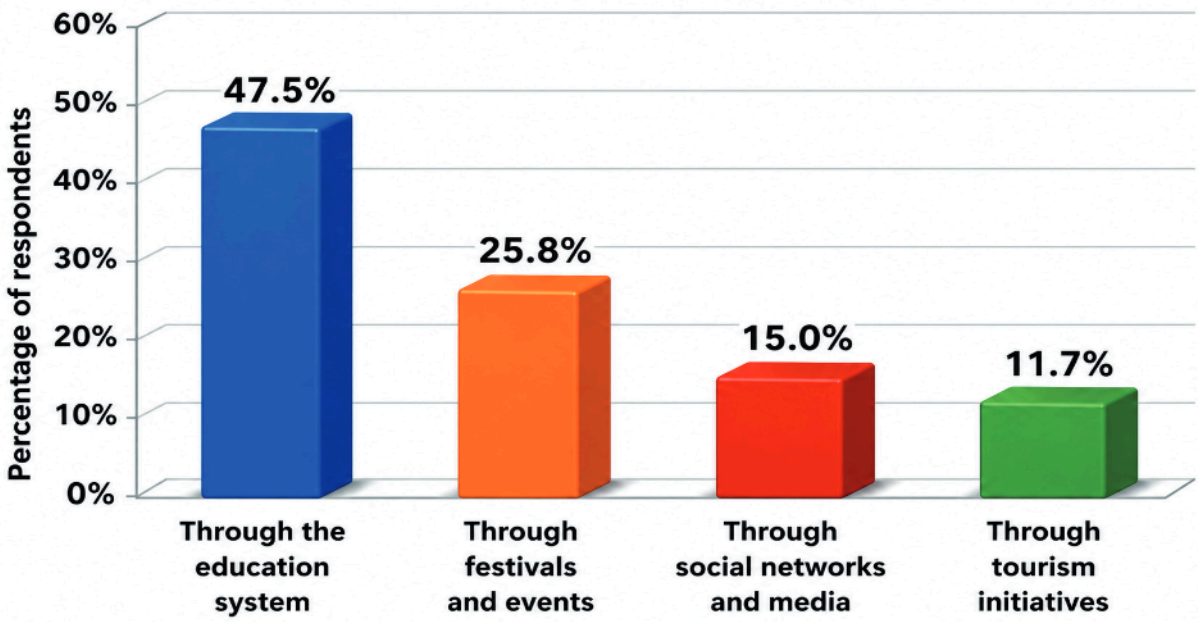


Figure 9. Preferred approaches to promoting Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances

The data presented in Figure 9 indicate that, according to the respondents, the most effective approach to promoting Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances is through the education system, as indicated by 47.5% of the surveyed participants. Festivals and cultural events rank second, with 25.8%, highlighting the importance of direct participation, cultural interaction, and experiential engagement. Social networks and the media are identified by 15.0% of respondents, which reflects the growing role of digital communication channels in the dissemination and visibility of folklore heritage. The lowest proportion of respondents assign priority to tourism initiatives – 11.7% – despite their potential to present Bulgarian culture to broader national and international audiences. These findings suggest that the sustainable promotion of folk dances should be grounded primarily in educational and cultural policies, supported by contemporary communication tools and active public engagement.

In the context of digitalization, contemporary media and online platforms (Fig. 10) occupy an increasingly important place in the preservation and promotion of cultural values. Therefore, respondents were surveyed regarding their assessment of the role of media and digital technologies in the popularization of Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances.

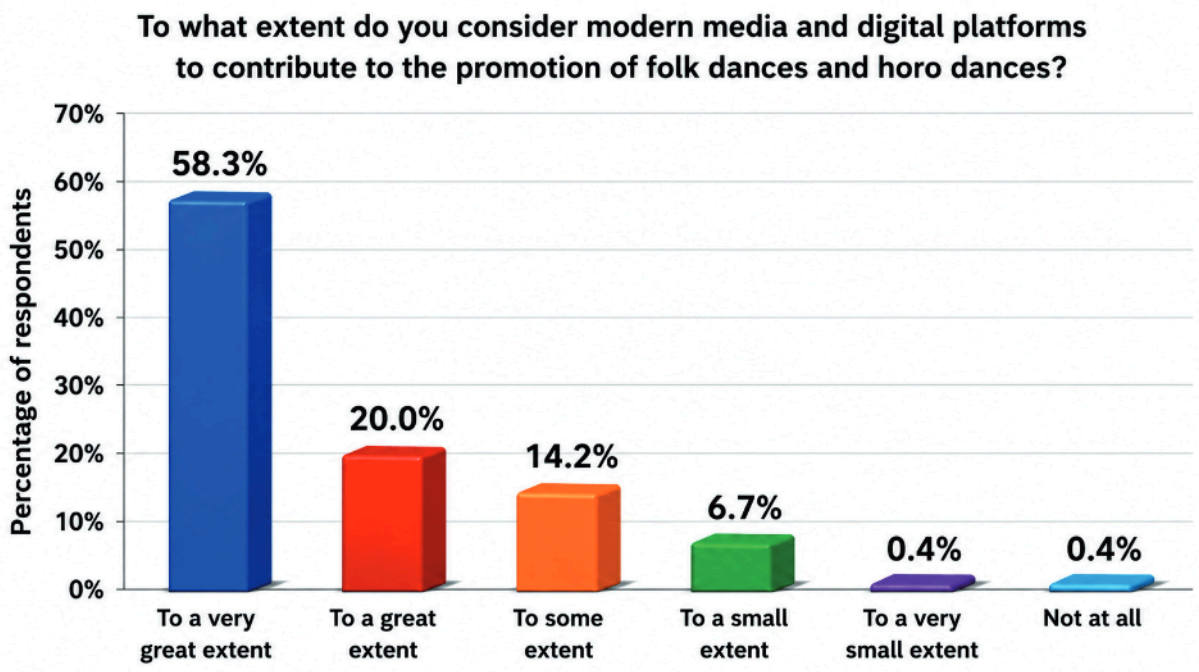


Figure 10. Assessment of the impact of media on the promotion of folk dances

The data from the conducted survey, presented in **Figure 10**, indicate a predominantly positive attitude towards the role of contemporary media and digital platforms in promoting Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances. The largest proportion of respondents – 58.3% – consider that media and digital platforms contribute to a great extent to the popularization of folklore heritage. An additional 20.0% of respondents state that their contribution is partial.

Conversely, 14.2% of participants assess the impact of contemporary media as limited, while 6.7% believe that they do not contribute to the promotion of folk dances. A negligible proportion of respondents – 0.4% – indicate uncertainty in their assessment, while another 0.4% report having no opinion on the matter.

Overall, the results show that 78.3% of the surveyed respondents perceive media and digital platforms as factors exerting a positive influence on the promotion of Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances. This confirms the significance of the digital environment as an effective instrument for disseminating knowledge about Bulgarian folklore heritage, stimulating interest among younger generations, and expanding public awareness of traditional culture. The obtained data support the need for more active use of social networks, online platforms, and digital media in initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting Bulgarian folk dances.

PERSPECTIVES FOR THE PROMOTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF BULGARIAN FOLK DANCES

In the context of globalization and the dynamic development of information technologies, the promotion of Bulgarian folk dances requires the application of contemporary approaches that combine traditional forms of cultural activity with the new opportunities provided by the digital environment. The results of the conducted survey indicate that a significant proportion of respondents identify the education system, festivals, cultural events, social networks, and digital platforms as key instruments for the dissemination and preservation of folklore heritage.

The inclusion of Bulgarian folk dances in the educational process through extracurricular activities, school initiatives, and cultural-educational programmes is of particular importance. In this way, young people are provided with opportunities to become fa-

miliar with traditions from an early age and to develop a lasting connection with national culture. At the same time, the organization of festivals, gatherings, and folklore events creates conditions for the active participation of different age groups and for the preservation of living tradition.

Contemporary media also play an essential role in the sustainable development of Bulgarian folk dances. Social networks, online platforms, and digital content provide opportunities to reach broad audiences both within the country and among Bulgarian communities abroad. This contributes to increasing public awareness and to promoting folklore heritage among younger generations.

The sustainable development of Bulgarian folk dances requires cooperation between educational institutions, cultural organizations, local communities, and state structures. Only through targeted policies and active public support can the preservation, development, and transmission of this valuable cultural heritage to future generations be ensured.

The promotion and sustainable development of Bulgarian folk dances require the integration of traditional and contemporary educational approaches. According to Dimitrova (2019a), the development of specialized knowledge and practical skills is an important prerequisite for the effective preservation and presentation of cultural heritage. The author emphasizes the significance of new educational programmes and competencies for the training of specialists who can contribute to the more effective promotion of cultural values, as well as to quality assessment in relation to standards for wellness services (Dimitrova, 2019b). Such an approach would support the preservation of Bulgarian folk dances and their affirmation as a significant element of national identity within the contemporary cultural environment.

CONCLUSION

Bulgarian folk dances and horo dances continue to occupy an important place in the contemporary cultural environment as carriers of national identity, historical memory, and cultural values. The results of the conducted survey indicate a high level of public awareness and a positive attitude towards the significance of folk dances for the preservation of Bulgaria's cultural heritage.

The findings reveal a willingness to participate in wellness-related activities associated with folklore, while the main barriers are linked primarily to lack of time and limited opportunities for involvement. The data confirm the significant role of the education system, festivals, media, and digital platforms in promoting Bulgarian folk traditions.

Based on the obtained results, it can be concluded that the preservation and development of folklore heritage require targeted efforts by educational (Nesheva, 2021), cultural, and public institutions aimed at increasing interest and encouraging the active participation of different generations in safeguarding Bulgarian traditional culture. It is recommended that folk dances and horo dances be included in school curricula and extracurricular activities in order to foster a lasting connection with national culture from an early age.

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Българските народни танци в съвременната културна среда: обществена информираност, културна идентичност и перспективи за популяризиране

Ирина Петкова–Нешева

Резюме: Настоящият доклад разглежда българските народни хора и танци като значим компонент на нематериалното културно наследство и като съществен фактор за съхраняването на националната идентичност, социалната памет и културната устойчивост на българското общество. Изследването анализира обществената информираност, нагласите и участието в дейности, свързани с народните танци, както и възможностите за тяхното популяризиране в съвременната културна среда. Чрез анкетно проучване се изследва ролята на образованието, медиите и дигиталните платформи за информираност относно българските фолклорни традиции.

Ключови думи: БГ народни танци и хора; културно наследство; национална идентичност; обществена нагласа; популяризиране