

**University of Arts in Târgu Mureş Doctoral School**

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATION THESES**

**Swing, Paso Doble, and Csárdás: Ballroom Dancing during the Years of  
Nationalization An Analysis of a Small Town Environment**

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## **Content of the thesis booklet:**

- Justification for the topic choice, research objectives
  - Research methods
  - Theses: key findings and dissertation results
  - Bibliography: selected literature used in the dissertation
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- Publications related to the dissertation topic
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## **Justification for the topic choice, research objectives**

The choice of topic was primarily motivated by the cultural phenomenon of ballroom dancing, as well as its complexity and the social and political impact it had in Hungary. The aim of the research is to explore how the socialist period following 1949 shaped the situation of ballroom dancing, the changes in the institutionalization of dance culture, and the emergence of the modern ballroom dance movement.

Another goal is to understand how social and political environments influenced the perception and popularity of different dance types. The thesis also examines the impact of socialist realist success films on ballroom dances in Hungary during the 1945-1956 period, and it seeks to uncover how ballroom dances evolved, spread across different regions of the country, and influenced the lives of residents and dance instructors in smaller towns. Similar to the Soviet Union, the Hungarian socialist system prioritized entertaining the masses and organizing cultural events to further political ideology.

The topic is timely and relevant, as it provides an opportunity to understand how politics shaped cultural life and how local communities responded to these influences. The topic also seeks to highlight the complex and often overlooked aspects of the history of dance education in Hungary, with particular attention to the situation of dance teachers in the second half of the 20th century. The historical and political factors that influenced the practice of dance education and the working conditions of dance teachers raise many interesting questions about cultural politics and the education system. Therefore, one of the aims of the topic is to explore

how the state party system shaped dance education and how it affected the financial situation and career advancement of dance teachers. Interest in local culture and community events, as well as exploring the pedagogical aspects of dance, also motivated the research. This includes learning about the history and operation of dance courses in Baja, as well as the roles of instructors and students.

The exploration of the relationship between communist ideology and ballroom dancing also motivates the choice of topic.

I also intended to demonstrate how political ideology influenced the development and perception of ballroom dances in Hungary during the post-war period. Ballroom dances and their teaching carried significant symbolic value, and the transfer of political influences to dance culture as well as the study of social reactions justified the choice of the topic.

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### **Summary of specific objectives:**

- To uncover the poverty and economic difficulties of the post-war period and their impact on the lives of dance teachers.
- To examine how dance teachers adapted to the new social and political environment.
- To analyze the dance learning habits and preferences of young people, as well as the methods used by dance teachers.
- To explore how dance teachers responded to political ideological expectations and cultural mandates.
- To describe the role of different dance styles and orchestras in entertaining young people and supporting the livelihood of dance teachers.
- To understand, through the examination of political ideology's influence, how communist ideology shaped the evolution of ballroom dancing and dance teaching.
- To study how political authorities tried to use ballroom dancing as a political tool by analyzing the political control of ballroom dances.
- To map out, through the examination of public opinion and youth reactions, how society, particularly young people, responded to political pressure and the spread of dances.

Additionally, the research aims to uncover the ideological role of films of the era and the mechanisms of censorship and to analyze the political messages and dance styles conveyed by these films.

Another reason for choosing the topic is the significant but little-discussed aspect of Hungarian cultural history: the relationship between socialist realist films and ballroom dancing. The research shows how these films served as tools of communist propaganda and how they shaped social norms and values.

Moreover, the research aims to understand the social significance and political interpretation of ballroom dances as represented in the films of the period. Dance characters and scenes depicted in contemporary Hungarian films played a significant role in transmitting social and political messages.

Therefore, my research aimed to reveal the communist regime's methods of using films and dances as propaganda tools, thereby showing how these films shaped viewers' ideological attitudes toward the social norms and values they intended to impose.

The film analysis presents the ideological direction and social messages of socialist film production, as well as the role of stereotypes and character portrayals in ideological education, especially among young people.

Special attention is given to the role of dance scenes and musical elements in the films in conveying the intended message. The dissertation focuses on analyzing the political and ideological aspects of the films, with special attention to censored content and the use of artistic tools to represent the spirit of the times.

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## **Research methods**

The research methods used in the dissertation include historical overview, document analysis, and interviews with individuals actively involved in the field of ballroom dancing during the examined period, focusing on the city of Baja and its surrounding areas.

Additionally, literature and archival research were conducted to examine the social and cultural contexts, making it possible to understand political influences and changes in social norms. The research combines film extracts and textual analyses. The dance scenes depicted in the films and their political context are analyzed, taking into account the social and ideological effects of the period.

I also study the processes of film censorship and propaganda purposes to understand how these influenced dances and their representation.

Furthermore, detailed film analysis is conducted, examining the selected films' dance scenes and their context. I analyze the dance styles, choreographies, and ideological messages conveyed by the films. In addition to this, I perform source analysis of documents, censorship guidelines, and political statements from the era to uncover the political and cultural influence of the films. The research methods also include film criticism, analysis of historical and cultural contexts, and comparison of visual and textual materials. I analyze the dance scenes and characters in the films, with special attention to the characters and the messages conveyed by the films. In addition to analyzing film texts, criticisms, and documents, I also investigate the social and political norms presented by the films.

Furthermore, I consider the cultural impact of the films and how audiences received them.

**Title: The Development of Social Dance in Hungary from 1945 to 1989: A Study Focused on the City of Baja and Surrounding Areas**

**Introduction:**

My research examines the evolution of social dance in Hungary during the socialist era (1945–1989), with a special focus on the city of Baja and its surrounding areas. This period was characterized by significant political and cultural changes that influenced how dance was perceived and practiced. I analyzed contemporary newspaper articles, films, and dance styles, taking into account the ideological and cultural impact of the time. My thesis highlights how films shaped societal perceptions and influenced the acceptance of dance styles in Hungary.

### **Textual Analysis:**

I conducted a detailed analysis of film scripts and scenes, comparing censored versions to the final, approved versions. This involved examining how societal and political issues were portrayed in these films.

### **Film Critique:**

I reviewed contemporary critiques and literature to understand the social and political impact of the films from that era. This also included an exploration of how dance was integrated into film narratives and its broader societal implications.

### **Historical Context:**

The political and social landscape of the 1950s was pivotal in shaping the ideological background of these films. This section of my research investigates the influence of socialist ideologies on cultural production.

### **Comparative Analysis:**

The films and dances from the 1950s were compared to works from other periods to understand continuities and changes in cultural policies. The choice of this topic was driven by a desire to deeply understand the cultural and political impacts of the socialist cultural revolution.

### **The Role of Cultural Centers and Groups:**

The research aims to uncover the role of cultural centers (kultúrotthon) and cultural groups in disseminating socialist ideals and engaging in political propaganda. The focus was on how these institutions influenced community life and social education.

### **Programs and Events Analysis:**

I evaluated the quality and content of events organized by cultural centers, analyzing how culture and entertainment were shaped under socialism, with a particular focus on the city of Baja.

### **The Impact of Socialist Culture:**

This section of the research focuses on how socialist authorities shaped cultural events and entertainment, attempting to align them with political ideologies. I specifically looked at how Baja's cultural life was integrated into socialist cultural policies, paying close attention to local cultural competitions and performances.

### **Political Reactions to "Jampec" Dances:**

I explored how the authorities attempted to suppress new dance styles and how young people responded to these efforts.

### **The Working Conditions of Dance Teachers:**

An essential part of my research focused on understanding how political and economic changes affected dance teachers' working conditions and pay, as well as how they navigated the challenges posed by the socialist regime.

### **Comparative Analysis of Hungarian and Soviet Cultural Policies:**

I examined the similarities and differences between Hungarian and Soviet cultural policies, particularly how each country utilized dance and cultural groups for political purposes.

### **Baja's Dance Traditions:**

I documented the traditions of social dance in Baja, paying special attention to the pre-1945 period and the interwar years. The research covers the history of social dance in Baja, with a focus on the role of local dance teachers like Petris Brúnó and Hegedűs Károly. The role of dance clubs and cultural events organized between 1945 and 1989 is also detailed.

### **Interviews and personal accounts:**

Due to the limited availability of written sources, I supplemented my research with interviews. Key figures interviewed included dance teachers, former students, and individuals associated with local dance institutions, such as György Besesek and Magdolna Hegedűs, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the local dance culture.

### **Changes in Dance Education and Competitions:**

I traced how social dance teaching methods evolved over time and how competitions were organized. This also involved analyzing changes in dance technique, the grading and scoring system, and the organization of events.

### **Cultural and aesthetic changes:**

I explored how the aesthetics of dance attire and audience behavior evolved over time, focusing on the emotional and methodological aspects of dance education and performance.

### **Key Findings:**

One of the main conclusions of my research is that the development of social dance in Hungary was closely intertwined with the political regimes in power. During the socialist period after 1949, social dance was centralized under state control, with the state directing its promotion and teaching to align with its political objectives.

### **Research Sources:**

My research utilized a variety of primary sources, including documents from the Hungarian National Archives, the Bács-Kiskun County Archives, the Hungarian National Theatre Museum and Institute, and the Baja Türr István Museum. Additionally, newspaper articles, films, and academic literature provided further insights into the cultural and political context of dance during this period.

### **Geographical Scope:**

The research focused primarily on Bács-Kiskun County, particularly Baja and nearby villages, as well as Budapest. A key goal was to uncover the differences between urban and rural cultural groups and their respective influences on dance culture.



## **Methodology:**

The research employed macro-level analysis, with a focus on the broader operations of dance groups, examining their political, social, and cultural roles.

I also conducted archival research, critical analysis of cultural events, and interviews with key figures to supplement my findings.

## **Conclusion:**

Through this research, I aimed to provide a detailed account of the social dance culture in Hungary during the socialist era, highlighting how political regimes shaped dance education and entertainment in Baja.

The modern social dances, such as the foxtrot and tango, survived and became popular despite political influences. My dissertation also highlights how dance significantly contributed to the formation of communities and the transformation of social norms.

Some of the research results in this dissertation have already been published in professional journals and conference proceedings. These publications detail the state of social dance during the socialist era, the changes in the social perception of dance, and the spread and promotion of modern dances in Hungary.

The transformation and spread of social dances during the 1945–1956 period were closely tied to the goals of communist propaganda. Through the censorship and ideological influence of films, dances were used as tools to shape social norms and values. Films often mocked the customs and dances of the Horthy era to reject the old regime and promote the new ideological system. Dance scenes, although often featuring amateur movements, played a significant role in shaping the political and social views of the audience.

The dance scenes depicted in films played a crucial role in the ideological education of the audience and in promoting the values of the communist regime through their propagandistic presentation of dances. Films intentionally portrayed the negative aspects of the past, such as mocking the dances and customs of the Horthy era, to encourage the rejection of the old system by the population and the acceptance of communist ideology.

Dance scenes often reflected the political and social messages of the films, and directors incorporated their personal expressive forms, even though these were shaped according to the ideological expectations of the regime. In films, characters such as Teddy boys and similar figures, as well as American swing dances, were portrayed negatively, as remnants of the old system in opposition to the new communist ideals. In contrast, young people depicted as moral and honorable represented the new communist values.

The character Swing Tóni, who represents American swing, is portrayed as a foreign and harmful influence, opposed to communist values and culture. The aim of the films was to encourage the audience to accept the new ideas and to show that the new world provides a better and happier life.

Furthermore, the films served to reshape cultural and social norms, using entertainment as a tool for education while promoting new ideological values. In some cases, parts of films were cut or even significantly reduced, as the Film Directorate expressed disapproval of certain scenes. The purpose of the cuts was to refine the message of the films to align with political norms.

According to the message of the films, condemnable behaviors such as excessive alcohol consumption and inappropriate lifestyles cause conflict in the lives of the main characters, while the young people representing new communist values are shown to be on the right path. The goal of the films was to demonstrate to the viewers the difference between the right and wrong way of life and to depict the consequences of condemned behavior.

### **Political and ideological influences:**

The films reflect the political ideologies of the time, especially the impact of censorship and state control on artistic creations. Creators often found creative solutions to express their personal views despite censorship.

### **Censorship and Artistic Freedom:**

Censorship had a significant impact on the content and form of the films. Screenplays underwent multiple reviews, as the goal of censorship was to enforce political ideology.

### **Film Techniques and Artistic Tools:**

The films used the artistic tools characteristic of the era, such as powerful sound effects and visual transitions, to depict the conflicts between the individual and society.

### **Social Reactions:**

The films aimed to educate young people and reinforce social norms by trying to influence the audience through the behavior of the film's characters and the moralizing nature of the stories.

### **Cultural Centers and Films:**

Traveling cinemas and cultural centers helped in the widespread distribution of films and the promotion of Hungarian cinema. Cultural centers often still preserve old projection equipment, and in many cases, they now function as theaters.

### **Dance and Ideology:**

The films featured various dance styles, but ideologically, social dances and American styles were often portrayed in opposing ways. The then-new dance styles, such as the Charleston, were associated with negative societal connotations, while there were reservations about traditional dances. The films also portrayed the changes in social positions and greeting customs, reflecting the cultural expectations of the time.

### **Cultural Centers and Dance Education:**

The establishment and operation of cultural centers played a significant role in spreading culture and promoting new ideas. Factories and workshops served as important communal spaces, contributing to the development of dance groups.

### **Impact of Political Propaganda:**

Political propaganda had a significant impact on the teaching and promotion of dances, which was achieved through the press, cinema, theater, and mass organizations.

**Political and Social Influences:**

Cultural centers played a major role in spreading political ideology and were important tools in promoting socialist ideas.

**Cultural and Community Effects:**

Cultural centers contributed to the revitalization of community life, although they were often criticized for the quality of their programs and performances.

**State Supervision and Criticism:**

The centers operated under close state supervision, often leading to the political control of the programs' content.

**Shaping Socialist Culture:**

Socialist politics had a significant impact on the shaping of cultural events in order to enforce political ideology.

**Cultural Life in Baja:**

In the city of Baja, socialist cultural policies were successfully implemented through cultural centers and cultural competitions, although the effects of the system and local responses were often contradictory.

**Teddy boy dances:**

The new dance styles, such as Teddy boy dances, were suppressed, but young people secretly showed interest in them, reflecting a desire for cultural diversity.

**Cultural Competitions:**

Cultural competitions and supervisory committees played a significant role in ensuring the political control of culture and entertainment.

### **Dance Teachers' Financial Situation:**

Research revealed that the wages of dance teachers significantly differed from those of professionals in other art forms and how this changed under central control.

### **Political Influences:**

State supervision and party loyalty played key roles in the careers of dance teachers, often leading to professional dissatisfaction.

### **Changes in Dance Teaching Practices:**

Dance teachers adapted to the changing political and economic environment, often ensuring the continuity of education through creative and sometimes illegal means.

### **Development of Social Dance Culture in Baja:**

Focusing on the pre-1945 and interwar periods, examining the cultural influences of ethnic minorities on dances, as well as the role of dance and music in local communities. The evolution of social dance and music genres in Baja, including the results of local and national competitions and the contributions of dance teachers.

### **Development of Cultural Centers:**

The formation and changes in cultural centers were not uniform, but significant growth and development were observed from the 1950s onwards due to central control.

### **Dance Venues:**

Baja had several important dance venues, such as the Posztó Club, Dózsa Hall, Officers' Club, and Csitanica, which hosted various dance events.

### **Events and Systems:**

Events such as the Harvest Ball, Katalin Ball, and Carnival Ball, as well as regular dance parties, characterized the period.

### **Role of Dance Teachers:**

Károly Hegedűs and György Besesek played significant roles in social dance education and organizing events in and around Baja.

### **Educational System:**

Social dance education was organized and conducted in the form of individual and group courses, and dance teachers and local communities faced numerous challenges.

### **Personal Experiences:**

Interviews revealed that the success and difficulties of the dance scene often depended on personal relationships and local community support.

### **Activities of Brúnó Petris:**

Brúnó Petris played a significant role in dance education and organizing balls both in Budapest and Baja. He was notable for supporting artistic and dance events, as well as baby dance education.

### **Role of Károly Hegedűs:**

Károly Hegedűs was a key figure in the dance scene in Baja, teaching both folk and ballroom dance. By establishing a dance club and organizing competitions, he had a significant impact on the local community.

### **Teaching and organizing practices:**

Dance teachers were responsible for organizing balls, instructing the opening couples, and coordinating the dance order. Dance classes and clubs were often free for young people, with costs covered by cultural centers. This section would present the detailed structure of dance classes and clubs, the structure of lessons, and the teaching methods used. The political and professional context of dance education, including the role of the dance teacher and the influence of cultural centers, will also be covered. The role and contribution of Károly Hegedűs and Magdolna Hegedűs in the dance education of Baja will be explored, along with

the tracking of professional and educational development, including the use of various dance categories and choreography.

**Answers to research questions:**

The answers received during the research regarding the main research questions.

**Key findings:**

The most important discoveries and results identified during the research.

**Connections and trends:**

Connections and trends found in the results.

**Theoretical and practical significance:**

The significance of the results within the given scientific field and their practical applications.

**Role of culture and dance:**

Dance was an important part of the culture in Baja and its surroundings, especially through dance school classes and graduation balls. The popularity of local dance schools and competitive dance grew steadily, and summer dance schools became a central event following school graduations.

**Political impacts:**

In the 1950s, the political background had a significant impact on the state of dance. Many new styles, such as swing and rock and roll, were banned, and dances were evaluated from a political perspective. Western dances such as the tango and samba were also banned due to ideological and political reasons, while folk dances and traditional ballroom dances were emphasized.

**Life of dancers:**

Dancers often faced financial and time constraints, which prevented many from continuing their careers. Those who persevered became competitors or remained actively involved in the life of dance clubs.

**Dance instructors and family members:**

Dance instructors' family members were also actively involved in the world of dance, such as Mónika Beseseke, Krisztián, and Dorka Oroszlán. The experiences shared between older and modern dance instructors are considered important for the younger generations.

**Cultural challenges and development:**

The current state of dance education faces complex challenges, including the preservation of traditions and the need to meet new expectations. The revival of old but valuable dance events, such as mass dances and the election of ball kings and queens, could contribute to strengthening the community.

**Professional development:**

The role and tasks of dance schools and cultural centers have transformed, especially through professional training courses managed by local cultural houses and professional organizations.

**Development of local dance education:**

Interviews revealed that the organization and process of ballroom dance education differed in Baja and Bácsbokod, but both locations significantly impacted the life of the community.

**Personal experiences:**

The personal experiences and stories of dancers and dance teachers contributed to understanding the historical and emotional aspects of dance education.

**Methodological and temporal differences:**

In Bácsbokod, ballroom dance was taught to live music, while in Baja, the courses organized in cultural centers were documented.



**Role of the local community:**

Community support and local cooperation played a key role in the success and development of dance schools.

**Impact of Károly Hegedűs:**

Károly Hegedűs had a significant influence on the development of dance education, especially in Baja and its surroundings, contributing to the advancement of dance school systems.

**Rules regarding competitive dances:**

The rules and categories of competitive dance were continuously changing to support the development of dancers and the organization of competitions.

**Development of dance instructor training:**

The importance of dance instructor training grew, and teachers were required to have increasingly higher levels of qualifications.

**Development of the competitive dance system:**

The rules and categories of competitive dance changed significantly over the years, including adjustments to categories and scoring systems.

**Development of dance techniques:**

Dance techniques and technical requirements evolved, with stricter rules for the technical readiness of dancers and the styles of dance.

**Operation of dance schools and clubs:**

The operational methods of dance schools and clubs and the educational structure underwent significant changes, with courses and training schedules modernized.

**Organization of competitions:**

Changes in the organizational practices of competitions, such as larger dance floors and stricter rules.

### **Audience and costume culture:**

The audience at competitions and the costumes worn also underwent significant changes.

The dissertation's main findings generally focus on the following:

- A detailed presentation of the phenomena, trends, or problems investigated.
- A comparison of results with previous research.
- Formulation of new findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

### **Political control and manipulation:**

The communist regime sought to use ballroom dancing for political purposes, such as suppressing reactionary thinking and spreading political ideology.

### **Public opinion and social reactions:**

Ballroom dances, especially swing, sparked political and social debates, reflecting the youth's desire for freedom and resistance to political ideology.

### **Development and popularity of ballroom dances:**

Despite political pressure, ballroom dances like swing and kiss waltz gradually gained popularity, although their development was limited by political ideology.

### **Poverty and livelihood issues:**

Post-war economic difficulties severely affected dance teachers, who were often paid with basic food items for teaching dance.

### **Adaptation of dance teachers:**

Dance teachers found it difficult to adapt to the new social and political environment, especially in the tension between folk and modern dances.

### **Preferences of young people:**

Young people were attracted to new, modern dance styles like swing and rock and roll, which they danced secretly.

**Political reactions:**

Political leaders sought to limit the spread of swing, promoting desired dances through advertisements.

**Dance styles and music:**

Changes in different music and dance trends reflect the entertainment needs of young people and cultural dynamism.

**Professional issues of dance instructors:**

Detailed presentation of problems caused by untrained dance instructors and illegal dances.

**Impact of reforms:**

The impact of the State Dance Teacher Training Course and regulations from the Ministry of the Interior on the professional standards of dance teaching.

**Development of dance research:**

Gyula Horváth Jr. and the directions of dance research, as well as the four main areas of research.

**International influences:**

The results of the London conference and the integration of samba and rumba into education.

**Political and social aspects:**

The impact of political debates on dances and dance clubs.

**New Hungarian dances:**

The development of Hungarian ballroom dancing and the rejection of foreign dances.

**The bibliography of the dissertation** is extensive, including Hungarian and international sources. The bibliography includes historical works on the formation of ballroom dancing, political and social-historical analyses of the socialist era, and contemporary research on the development of dance culture. It also includes sources necessary for studying the era's films and ideological directions, including relevant literature, historical and cultural analyses, and studies on the history of censorship, socialist realist films, and their censorship and ideological content. These include historical and cultural analyses of films, studies on ideological propaganda, and sources that discuss the social and political significance of dance art.

Additionally, the bibliography details the literature and related historical documents necessary for the research. It also includes film criticism books, contemporary film critiques and articles, censorship, and film production documents. It also contains sources discussing the significance of musical and dance scenes in films, as well as documents outlining the filmmaking and censorship processes.

**Books and articles on dance education and history:**

Literature on the work of Károly Hegedűs and Tibor Bánáti, as well as the development of dance education.

**Local newspapers and documents:**

Written materials related to dance schools in Bácsbokod and Baja, and the dance education of local communities.

**Competition systems and regulations:**

Documentation of the evolving competition rules and categories over the years.

**Publications on the dissertation's topic:**

Published materials on the topic include analyses of socialist realist films and the role of ballroom dancing between 1945 and 1956, critiques and studies examining the ideological impact of the films from that era and the role of dance as a cultural tool, and research on the

relationship between socialist realist films and social propaganda. Additionally, it includes research and publications on the political influence on film production.

Among the publications used during the research are contemporary film reviews, ideological analyses, and studies discussing the political and social significance of dance scenes.

It also includes articles and literature on film screening and distribution in cultural venues.

Literature and reviews on the films analyzed and their socialist ideological content are also an important part of the research.

Publications on different aspects of the research include the films and cultural influences of film and dance styles, as well as the social role and development of cultural clubs.

The sources included in the bibliography also take into account the period's political and social impact.