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## Folk Dances as a Happening of Coming Together in the Streets of Athens

The focus of this work, based on my long-term field research in Athens, is the use of open urban spaces (parks, parking lots, and streets) as a gathering place for citizens to practice traditional folk dances.<sup>1</sup> The research focuses on dance events organized by informal groups of citizens, not by institutions. Results show that there is a significant presence of folk dances in the streets and parks of Athens. The paper gives special attention to the periodic dance gatherings on the occasion of the *Klidonas* holiday (June 23/24), International Bagpipe Day (March 10) and *Tsmpounoglenti* in honour of Saint Demetrius (October 26). The paper especially analyzes various aspects of these dance activities, their role in the lives of the participants and at the level of the wider social community. The participants themselves emphasize the importance of folk dances in overcoming alienation, establishing interpersonal connections, and strengthening neighborly relations.

**Keywords:** outdoor dance, traditional folk dances, *Klidonas*, International Bagpipe Day, neighborhood

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## Народни плесови као догађај окупљања на улицама Атине

У жижи интересовања овог рада насталог на основу сопствених вишегодишњих теренских истраживања у Атини налази се употреба отворених урбаних простора (паркова, паркинга, улица) као места за окупљање грађана ради практиковања традиционалних народних плесова. Истраживање је усмерено на плесне догађаје које организују неформалне групе грађана, а не различите институције. Показало се да постоји знатно већа заступљеност народних плесова на атинским улицама и у парковима. У раду је посебна пажња посвећена периодичним плесним окупљањима поводом празника *Клидонас* (23/24 јуна), Међународног дана гајди (10 марта) и плесног догађаја уз гајде у част светог Димитрија (26 октобра). У раду се анализирају различити аспекти ових плесних пракси, њихова улога како у животу самих учесника, тако и на нивоу шире друштвене заједнице. Сами актери наглашавају значај народних плесова у превазилажењу отуђености, успостављању међуљудских контаката и јачању суседских односа.

*Кључне речи:* плес на отвореном, традиционалне народне игре, *Клидонас*, Међународни дан гајди, суседство

### INTRODUCTION

Dance as a human activity across the globe has long accompanied many segments of human life, in rural and urban areas, in different cultural contexts, as an integral part of rituals, festivities, parties, etc.

Working during the period 2019-2022 on a project aimed at identifying different identities and uses of urban spaces, I focused my research attention on dance practices.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this paper will examine dance in open urban spaces, its role in the lives of people who are involved in dance practices, and the wider social community. Today, the term “street dance” generally refers to breakdancing and related dances, which I addressed in my previous research (Blagojević 2009a, Blagojević 2011). However, my field research conducted in the past years in Athens revealed that other

<sup>2</sup> Bilateral Scientific Research Project (2019-2023) “Different Identities and Functions of Urban Space: A Comparative Study of the Circumstances in Belgrade and Athens” by Department of History and Ethnology, The Laboratory for Folklore and Social Anthropology, Democritus University of Thrace and Institute of Ethnography, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. I owe special thanks to my interviewees in the research Stefanos Ganotis, Smaragda Diakogianni and Tryfon Tsatsaros.

types of dances are also performed on the street, such as the traditional folk dances that will be the focus of this paper.

As an anthropologist who loves to dance, during my field research and professional training in Greece, during 2003-2004 I started to learn Greek folk dances in Athens, first at the school at the "Dora Stratou" Theater, then at the school of Greek folk dances at the municipality of Kallithea with teacher Vasilis Karfis, and occasionally going to folk dance classes organized in the premises of the Association of Greek Archaeologists in the Athens city center. I deepened the knowledge acquired at school through the live practice of dance, on different occasions, at private and public celebrations, and mostly at *panigiria* (church celebrations) all over Greece, especially on the island of Ikaria. So, my participation in various dance occasions in Greece and their research, through free conversations with participants, recording ethnographic details, collecting photo and video materials, has been going on for almost two decades.

Knowledge of folk dances has helped me a lot in achieving communication on a personal and professional level, in creating friendly personal contacts, but also during field research in Greece. If you dance with the locals in a remote mountain or island village or at a dance gathering in the center of Athens, people accept you as a member of their group. I think that in CV's, in addition to indicating which languages we speak, we should also include information about the "dance languages" that we speak, for example, "fluently dances Greek folk dances", "uses salsa at the initial level", etc.

My empirical findings are supported by many scientific studies that indicate the communicative dimension of dance, especially the expression of emotions through body movements (Van Dyck, Burger & Orlandatou 2017, 122-130; Burger et al. 2013, 183– 194). Ehrenreich points to the social roles of dance in gathering. Public space has often been a part of this, acting as a place for public demonstration and gatherings (Ehrenreich 2006, 23). Dance allows people to forget or overcome rivalries and disagreements through a collective enjoyable activity (Ehrenreich 2006, 44). One of the problems facing people in modern big cities is alienation. Research shows that city dwellers have a desire for more neighborly contacts, for greater interpersonal interaction, which is difficult to achieve (Hortulanus, Machielse & Meeuwesen 2006, 200). Different dance practices can help establish mutual communication and overcome different socio-cultural boundaries in urban everyday life. Most dances create a certain level of "communitas" in Turner's (1969, 1974) sense of the word, as a concept used to describe a social relation that differs from every day life. Turner sees

communitas as “rituals in which egalitarian and co-operative behavior is characteristic, and in which secular distinctions of rank, office and status are temporarily in abeyance or regarded as irrelevant” (Turner 1969, 96-97; Turner 1974, 238).

In cities with populations of one million or more, such as Athens, folk dances are mainly practiced in institutional settings, primarily indoors, but also outdoors in some cases. This occurs mainly through dance schools and associations that promote folk dancing. Additionally, folk dancing is often included as a component of celebrations and festivities or performed as theatrical and stage performances.

However, this paper will focus on folk dancing in open urban spaces, specifically those events organized by ordinary citizens and not institutions. Instead of staged choreographies performed in outdoor settings, the research will examine spontaneous dance initiatives in which everyone is free to participate. This open space leads to a more diverse group of participants, allowing friends, acquaintances, and many strangers to connect through dance. In this paper, traditional folk dances were observed as a way to give the chance for people to experience the concept of “communitas”.

The paper discusses opportunities and places for dancing, periodicity of organizing of dance events, profiles and participants. It will also analyze the role and importance of this type of dance both in the lives of the performers themselves and at the level of the wider community. In addition, the influence of various factors on the representation and visibility of existing dances in open urban space is considered. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the restrictive measures for movements and gathering of citizens, especially in Greece, affected dancing as well, i.e. its indirect ban on dancing, both indoors and outdoors, from March 2020 till June 2022. However, despite the fact that during the pandemic gathering, and dancing as well, were banned social praxis, people still gathered and danced, albeit to a lesser extent.

Research conducted by Lanye Wang in China during the pandemic showed that practicing improvised Chinese classical dance contributed to the reduction of psycho-physical problems which arose as a result of movement restrictions and other restrictive measures (Wang 2022, 28-35). Dance/movement therapy (DMT) has been known in psychiatry since the 1940s. It is based on the assumption that through dance movements people can express what they cannot express through words (Levy 2005, Van Dyck, Burger & Orlandatou, 2017, 123).

## FOLK DANCES AND URBAN SPACES

Folk dances are an important aspect of Greek culture, displaying a great diversity and richness in terms of geographical distribution, dance structures, and opportunities for dance in a wider social context (Stratou 1979, Loutzaki 1985, Zografou 1991, Tyrovola 2001).

During the 20th century, the role of folk dances underwent transformation, evolving from ritual dances to stage choreographies due to social changes and modernization. This was greatly contributed to by mass migration from rural to urban areas. With the change in economy and lifestyle in urban areas, people were no longer able to freely practice many dances in open spaces (Stratou 1979, 11-16).

Folk dances among Greeks are of great importance and appear as an obligatory element in various spheres of life, both private and public, including family and collective celebrations both in the motherland and diaspora, during annual and life cycle holidays (Loutzaki 1985, Tyrovola 2001). In Athens, one can sometimes see casual passers-by dance in central pedestrian areas to the music of street musicians.<sup>3</sup> Occasions for open-air dancing in Athens can be classified as periodic and occasional. Periodic occasions include celebrations of religious and secular holidays, while occasional ones include dance gatherings aimed at celebrating holidays or attracting people for social actions.

This paper focuses on periodic opportunities for outdoor folk dancing, characterized by continuous multi-year duration. These are the celebrations of religious and secular holidays, during which I conducted field research on several occasions such as the celebration of the feast of the Birth of St. John the Baptist (June 24th, according to the Julian calendar), known in the Greek cultural context as Klidonas, followed by lighting and jumping over fire, celebration of the International Bagpipe Day on March 10th, and the feast of St. Demetrius the Great Martyr on October 26th in the municipality of Gerakas.

In all cases, the repertoire includes melodies and folk dances from all over the Greek cultural area. In recent years, the number of those who record musicians and dancers with cameras from mobile phones has noticeably increased, which disturbs the participants in the event. Participants bring their own food and drinks, which acquaintances exchange with each other, and sometimes it is a way for people to get to know each other and to start communication. It is necessary to emphasize

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<sup>3</sup> See video example from Eolu Street: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDwneiVlnyY>

that many young and middle-aged people who have rock, punk, funk background participate in these dance events. So, they are not the ones who only listen to traditional music in their free time. Over the past two decades, the number of people who learn traditional folk dances and who use this knowledge in various situations has significantly increased in Greece.

## DANCING AND JUMPING OVER FIRE, *KLIDONAS*

The most continuous, massive, and complex open-air dancing event in Athens is the celebration of the Feast of the Birth of St. John the Baptist on June 24 according to the Julian calendar, also known as Κλήδονας, Ριζικάρις, Φανιστής. It is worth to mention that among the Serbs this holiday is commonly known as *Ivanjdan* (=the Day of St. John), *Biljober* (= the one who picks herbs) and *Jovan Igritelj* (=John the Dancer) and is celebrated on July 7th according to the Gregorian calendar (Petrović 1970, 211). Both cultural contexts have pre-Christian customs. Common customs present in both Greek and Serbian traditions associated with this holiday are making flower wreaths, lighting and jumping over St. John fires, dancing, and girls' fortune-telling (Megas 1963, 212-221; Bosić 1996, 352-353). These customs, practiced during the summer solstice, are also found in various other traditions throughout the European continent (Frazer 1913, 160-219; Simpson 1987, 119; Trojanović 1930, 250; Vinogradova, Tolstoj 2001, 219-220).

In the Greek cultural context, this holiday is most commonly referred to as Klidonas, and we will use this term in the paper. As mentioned, it is celebrated on June 24, close to the summer solstice (June 21) and consists of three basic parts: ritual divination, lighting and jumping over fire, and dances with songs and concerts, with variations in different localities (Megas 1963, 212-221; Loukatos 1992, 19; Raftis 1995, 300-302; Varvounis 2000, 54). The Greek folklorist Dimitrios Loukatos believed that Klidonas is one of the most richly ritualized holidays among Greeks, and he suggested studying it in urban areas (Loukatos 1963, 136).

The term "Klidonas" (in Greek: Κλήδονας) etymologically refers to prediction, divination, and prophetic word, while the term "Rizikaris" (Ριζικάρις) comes from the word *risiko*, which means destiny, fateful, and finally term "Fanistis" (Φανιστής) means announcer, messenger (Megas 1963, 215; Varvounis 2000, 54). These names are associated with the popular belief that St. John the Baptist who is also known as the Forerunner announces fate and happiness. In Christian tradition, St. John is seen as a Prophet who announces the One he preached. Pre-Christian custom of

divination to discover the future spouse was later associated with him in folk tradition (Megas 1963, 217-218).

Georgios Megas provides a detailed description of the ritual divination, which begins in the afternoon of June 23. Here we will give a brief description: a child brings “dumb water” from a spring without speaking to anyone on the way home. This water is poured into a narrow-necked vessel into which the participants of the ceremony placed various small decorative items, jewelry, and in some regions, unripe fruit, such as apples marked with signs, dedicating them to a loved one in their thoughts (Megas 1963, 215). The vessel is then covered with a cloth and tied with laurel leaves, and suitable verses are recited over it (Megas 1963, 216).

After sunset, the girls take out a covered and decorated closed vessel, to remain under the stars (Varvounis 2000, 65). It is believed that the vessel acquires prophetic power after the stars influence it. The girls take turns guarding the vessel (Megas 1963, 216). Then, the girls and boys who put the objects in the vessel gather in the previously designated house and the ceremonial opening begins. Appropriate songs are being sung while a child takes out objects one by one. Items come out in random order, and for each of them an improvised prophecy in the form of a couplet is spoken about the owner of the item. These verses can be erotic, prophetic, but also mocking and satirical (Megas 1963, 216; Varvounis 2000, 67). This is followed by a dance with food and drinks. On their way home girls pay attention to the first name or word they hear on the street, connecting it to their destiny (Loukatos 1992, 20). However, over time, the magical-religious role of divination faded, and the custom became a form of theatrical performance/folklore (Varvounis 2000, 77). On the eve of Klidonas we also observe other ways of practicing divination, such as the practice of seeking future knowledge to the ashes or to the dreams in order for the expecting husband to be revealed (Megas 1963, 216).

Even today, customs related to the celebration of the Birth of St. John the Forerunner are cherished all over Greece. Municipalities, various dance and other citizens' associations organize series of events that generally include a staged display of fortune-telling customs, followed by a dance performance with the lighting of fire, where the audience plays the role of spectators. Even in such organized performances, sometimes there is a general dance participation of all those who are gathered.

In this paper, however, we will only deal with gatherings of citizens that are not initiated by state organizations. In various parts of the city, people organize in order to celebrate Klidonas, with fire-jumping and dancing to



the live traditional folk music. People of all ages take part in these dance events, but young people still predominate.

Regarding the number of participants and the continuity of Klidonas, there are different celebrations on a smaller or larger scale, those that take place continuously or occasionally. As an example of an occasional small-scale celebration, I will mention Klidonas in a neighborhood in Halandri municipality, which I attended at the invitation from my friends in 2008. On that occasion, about twenty people from the neighborhood gathered, a few of whom were musicians and all of them knew each other. They lit a fire on the sidewalk, and the dancing took place on the road. Neighbors brought out a table on which there was food and drinks and they treated every passer-by. It is a side street in a quiet neighborhood, cars almost never passed, but there was an occasional regular bus line where the driver was given food and drink through the window.

However, my first participation in the celebration of Klidonas was at a large-scale event with a lot of participants, on June 23, 2005, in the municipality of Kesariani. This celebration is characterized by continuity. The celebration is organized there on the evening of June 23, on the eve of the holiday, in a relatively small area – the parking lot. The long-term participants with whom I conducted interviews say that the celebration in this neighborhood was particularly well organized from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, because there were no crowds then, about fifty people, age 30-50. However, over time this dance event became more and more popular, so the number of participants increased every year, and their average age decreased. This led to a situation where there were hundreds of participants who could not be accommodated in that area, with many young people around the age of twenty. Too many people were crowding in a small place, too many kids just hanging out. In 2022 in Kesariani, the celebration was held on June 24, and according to free estimates of the musicians participating in the event, there were about 2,500 people.

Celebration of Klidonas in the neighborhood and archaeological park of Plato's Academy stands out for its atmosphere and number of participants. On several occasions from 2009 to 2019 I did research there with participation.

I received detailed information about the celebration of Klidonas in Plato's Academy from Stefanos Ganotis, one of the main organizers and restorers of this celebration in recent times. He was born in 1970 in Halkida, and five years later he moved with his parents to Athens, in the neighborhood of Plato's Academy. His earliest childhood memories are



related to the celebration of Klidonas and the lighting of fires organized by the elderly residents, descendants of the Greeks who escaped from Asia Minor after the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922. However, the custom died out in this neighborhood in the mid-1980s, when the last residents who practiced it became very old and could no longer devote themselves to it, and some of them even died.

In 1996, as a teacher of traditional folk dances, Stefanos Ganotis organized the group “Perperuna”<sup>4</sup> for learning and performing Greek folk dances and music. It should be noted that the music and dance group “Perperuna” performed in important concert places such as Megaro Mousikis, the ancient theaters of Epidaurus and Odeon of Herodes Atticus. They traveled all over the world, to China, Finland, Egypt, Turkey, Romania, etc. They have a brass band and a choir “Perperuna” that performs Greek folk polyphonic songs. The teacher of singing is Avgerini Gazzi. There are now about 50 permanent students in “Perperuna”, of which 20 are top performers who participate in public performances on stage, dance and play music. They have been there for 25 years. There are many who come for a short time and leave. The age structure of students is from 18 to 70 years of age. There is a great stratification of students in other matters as well, in terms of education there are university professors and people with completed high school, then, in terms of economic status, there are well-off people and people with very modest incomes, ideologically there are leftists, rightists, believing Christians and atheists, policemen and anarchists. All of them dance together.

In 2000 in the neighborhood of Plato's Academy, along with his friends and students Stefanos Ganotis renewed the custom of celebrating Klidonas and lighting and jumping over fires, accompanied by live music and dancing. In the neighborhood of Plato's Academy, Klidonas is celebrated on the very feast of the Birth of Saint John the Forerunner, on the evening of June 24. In the first year there were about twenty participants. They gathered in front of the building where the elderly people who used to perform this custom lived, lit the fire and jumped over it, singing appropriate Midsummer songs and dancing. The young people from the neighborhood liked it very much, so the following year there were about fifty participants. Every year after that the number increased more and more, so that in recent years, until the Covid-19 pandemic, that is, before 2020, there were several thousand participants from all over Athens.

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<sup>4</sup> Perperuna (in Greek: Περπερούνα) is a ritual for summoning rain, known in the wider area of the Balkans under various other names, such as “dodole” among the Serbs.

They maintained the custom even during the pandemic, despite bans on gatherings and strict epidemiological measures, but with a smaller number of participants.

Every year Ganotis goes to the local police station to report the gathering in the archaeological park of Plato's Academy and to say that they have taken all the necessary measures to ensure that everything is safe, that they have enough water and fire extinguishers, that they have doctors with them to provide help if someone needs it and they have never had a problem with the police.

In the first years, they practiced the whole custom, including the fortune-telling part of the ceremony, however, since the number of participants has greatly increased over the years and reached several hundreds, even more than a thousand, for practical reasons it was impossible to perform the ceremony described above. Now, more attention is paid to the fire and the music, and the love divination is placed in the background, because everyone is impatient for the fire to be lit as soon as possible and the dancing to begin. Younger people jump over the fire, alone or in pairs, holding hands.

People dance to live music played on traditional folk instruments, without sound system. In the first years, Stephanos Ganotis played the Cretan lyre, and then his musician friends started coming. Every year there are several groups of musicians who play music from different parts of Greece. The instruments include various types of percussions, lute, violin, clarinet, trumpet, zurla, bagpipes, etc.

The structure of the participants is very mixed in every way. In terms of age, the largest number of participants is 25-70 years old, but there are a lot of parents with small children, as well as people 80 years old or older. Men and women are equally represented, only that a much larger number of women participate in dancing, while the proportion of men among musicians is higher. This celebration is not ethnically exclusive, so in addition to Greeks, Roma, migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and people from various parts of the world participate. In the neighborhood of Plato's Academy this is a live celebration, not a concert, everyone who comes participates in their own way. Sometimes people bring their instruments and play music from the countries they came from, e.g. from Iraq.

During my research, I came to know that in the neighborhood of Plato's Academy there are many groups of people who are involved in theater, music, and dance, and who are very different from each other, especially ideologically, sympathizers or members of different parties. However, for

the celebration of Klidonas, when it is necessary to do something together, everyone becomes “one team”.

In terms of clothing, there is no dress code. The choice of clothing is largely influenced by the air temperature and activities related to fire jumping and dancing. Thus, since the Athenian nights are warm at the end of June, and especially next to the lit fire, many participants have shorts, short-sleeved shirts, comfortable shoes for dancing.

During the celebration of Klidonas, people from the neighborhood group themselves on their own initiative to help its realization in the best possible way. In addition to playing and dancing, members of the music and dance group “Perperuna”, organize and clear the space during the evening. There is also another group of people in charge of controlling the fire, so that it has the appropriate intensity and does not break out, so that no one gets hurt. Doctors are in the third group. People bring their own food and drinks, but the staff from the “Tavern at Plato’s Academy” located there also takes care of it, etc.

According to the testimony of the people who gather at the celebration of Klidonas at Plato’s Academy, they “are not interested in doing something that happened before, but we use music and dance as a tool for people to connect with each other, to become a team (in Greek: παρέα)”. Stefanos Ganotis says that the custom itself is not the goal: “Every year we organize the Klidonas celebration not to show that we can dance well, but to become a team together. In this way, young people can feel that there is some space that belongs to them. In big cities everything is impersonal. When you feel that a space belongs to you, then you want to protect it”.

The participants of Klidonas at Plato’s Academy, as they say, want to “avoid folklorization”: “we are not interested in dressing up in costumes and pretending to be “old”. We do not want to show that we know, for example, epic dances and dress up in epic costumes. We want to be who we are in the time we belong to and, if we can, take something from the past and adapt it to our own measure. We do not want to pretend to be someone else”.

On the other hand, the music and dance group “Perperuna” had shown, dance performances in large theaters and concert halls, wearing national costumes, accompanied by live music. They consciously distinguish the show from the celebration and entertainment in their neighborhood. They say that they like folklore ensembles, but “in another place and in another time”, that is, in a different context.

They don’t want to advertise the Klidonas celebration anywhere, because they have already become known among people who are looking

for such events. Crews from various TV channels came several times, but they told them that they didn't want to film them. They are not only uninterested in television, they do not want it.

This is Ganotis' view on that matter: "When they told me that was the way to become famous, for the world to know you, I said that I want us to get to know each other, in person, and not through television."

It should be emphasized that there are participants who go to both of the aforementioned celebrations of Klidonas, and in Kesariani on June 23 and Plato's Academy the evening later.

## THE INTERNATIONAL BAGPIPE DAY

International Bagpipe Day was co-founded by the International Bagpipe Organization and the Bagpipe Society by Andy Letcher and Cassandre Balosso-Bardin. It was first celebrated worldwide on 10 March 2012 (International Bagpipe Organization). International Bagpipe Day has been celebrated in Athens since its inception, when a group of bagpipe players, dancers and bagpipe lovers gathered on March 10, 2012 on Philopappou Hill.<sup>5</sup> Today, International Bagpipe Day is celebrated throughout Greece, mostly institutionalized, at the initiative of dance associations or municipalities, where dancers are dressed in folk costumes. I participated in the civic initiative of celebrating this holiday in Athens both for personal pleasure and for field research on several occasions, in 2012, 2014 and 2019.

In addition to participating in the observation, I got the data for writing this paper through an interview with Smaragda Diakogianni in November 2021. Smaragda has been involved in Greek traditional folk dances since she was young, and in 2012 she and a group of friends started the celebration of the International Bagpipe Day.

The gathering of bagpipers and other participants of the celebration is usually in the afternoon of March 10, around 4 or 5 o'clock in front of the Thisio metro station (electric train). A large number of bagpipers gather with all sorts of Greek traditional bagpipes, land and island types, some made of modern materials – elastics and there is always a Scotsman in a kilt with Scottish bagpipes. While people are slowly gathering, bagpipers are playing and there is some dancing already in front of the metro station. This celebration brings together many bagpipe fans, people who like to listen to them and dance to their sound. Some bring various types of

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71t3k7tling>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlpHcn6tEzs>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swytzaKM8hc>

percussion instruments to accompany bagpipes (tarabuka, tambourine, etc.). When a large number of people gather, the procession slowly moves along the promenade of the Apostle Paul, with the final destination of Philopappou Hill, from which there is a view of the Acropolis. The repertoire includes songs, concerts and dances from various parts of Greece. The party lasts until late at night.

Since Philopappou Hill is located within the archaeological complex, Smaragda Diakogianni was giving her identity card to the guardian of the archaeological site every year. Then the police came, talked to some of the participants of the celebration and left them to dance in peace, because they did not know that the event should be reported. However, having learned from the experience of previous years, in order to avoid harassment by the police, in 2018 they founded the Cultural Association "Phileortos", a non-government and non-profit association of citizens whose aim is to organize various celebrations with dance and music.

As a result, since 2018 there are two groups celebrating. In one of them, there are bagpipers and their friends who think they do not need any permits, because the city belongs to everyone. They continued to gather on the evening of March 10 and celebrate as described, "on their own". In the second group are the members of the "Phileortos" Society, who postpone the celebration of the International Bagpipe Day to the nearest weekend. In this case, the celebration starts around 1:00 p.m. in front of the church of St. Irene on the promenade of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, where a part of the crowd plays music and dances.<sup>6</sup> Then the ceremonial procession goes along the promenade, occasionally making a stop to dance. This group is more visible, because the promenade of St. Dionysius the Areopagite is quite visited; there are always a lot of passers-by, local and foreign tourists. They film bagpipers and dancers and they post the footage on social networks. Thus, the whole event takes on the dimension of a public performance, and the people gathered around the "Phileortos" Society on World Bagpipe Day become a kind of tourist attraction. Around 6pm in the afternoon they end their walk and dance on the Plaka, on the plateau in front of the Metropolis. The last event they organized before closing due to the Covid-19 pandemic was the International Bagpipe Day in 2020. Due to strict epidemiological measures and limited movement of citizens in Greece, "Phileortos" could not organize the celebration in 2021 and 2022.

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<sup>6</sup> See video example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEPHOFDjclA>

## TSAMPOUNOGLENTI IN HONOR OF SAINT DEMETRIUS IN GERAkas

The people who in 2018 founded the above-mentioned Cultural Association “Phileortos” from 2013 to 2022 every year continuously (except for 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic) organized a dance party with bagpipes, so-called *Tsampounoglenti* (in Greek: Τσαμπουνογλέντι) near the church of St. Demetrius in Gerakas, Palini municipality, on the day of church celebration, October 26. We mention this gathering because it was a civic initiative for five years, in the period 2013-2017. In 2019, the party started at 1:30 p.m., and the dancing lasted until late at night. The participants of the celebration, who come from various, often very distant parts of Athens, bring their own food and drinks, tables and chairs. Musicians from the “Phileortos” Association and their musician friends take turns playing traditional folk music from various parts of Greece without financial compensation. Thus, in 2019, in addition to singing, various types of bagpipes and percussion instruments, lyres from Thrace, lutes, violins, and kanonakis could also be heard. This means that the musicians covered a very wide dance repertoire to the great satisfaction of many dancers.

The “Phileortos” association also performs open-air Christmas carols, *kalanda* songs accompanied by musical instruments (obligatory bagpipes), and there is no dancing, but a group of ten people walking singing and playing in the center of Athens, on Plaka, occasionally stopping on the street. In their repertoire, they must have *kalanda* from the island of Ikaria. They performed *kalanda* after the pandemic for Christmas on December 25, 2022 and New Year on January 1, 2023. A large number of passers-by always gather around them and listen to them enthusiastically. The example given by Smaragda Diakogianni is illustrative: on New Year’s Eve, while they were singing *kalanda*, one of the homeless people who was lying against the wall got up and put money in their box as a sign of gratitude for the *kalanda*. Members of the “Phileortos” and their friends gather not only outdoors, but also indoors (taverns, halls), especially in winter, when the weather is colder.

## CONCLUSION

In our digital age, when social life takes place on various social networks to a large extent, gathering in public, open spaces for any kind of dance represents a kind of revolutionary step forward. Although many dance events are recorded and then shared in the Internet sphere, they are still a practice of interpersonal connection that takes place in real time and space.

In this research which focused on traditional folk dances, we observed the city of Athens. The representation, mass and visibility of a certain type of dance is influenced by the attitude of the wider social community towards dance, as well as various legal regulations concerning the gathering of citizens in public places.

In Athens citizens gather to dance folk dances in open spaces regardless of their age, social status and political affiliations. Dancing moments help to overcome multiple forms of social stratification, if only for a short time. This research has shown that there are dance events for which the concept of neighborhood is important. This is especially important in the case of the celebration of the Feast of the Birth of St. John the Baptist, Klidonas, in which different categories of people from the neighborhood, which in other conditions do not communicate or are even opposed (e.g. anarchists - members of conservative parties, rich - poor, etc.), participate.

However, although the neighborhood is the core of the event, these celebrations are open to all interested citizens, regardless of their place of residence, nationality, etc. The people who gather at these celebrations do not do so as a performance, but solely for their entertainment. On the other hand, it was precisely the laws and the need to register a dance gathering that influenced a group of citizens celebrating World Bagpipes Day to organize themselves into the Association "Phileortos" and then by changing the place and hours of the celebration, that celebration was transformed from an open street party into a kind of performance for passers-by.

Meeting, holding and dancing with each other in the street is an instinctive desire to live authentically, an urge for common people to rise or just circulate within - sometimes the imaginary shelter - of a neighborhood. All the same, there is a real, uncovered need in our days to define the presence and the future people's local (non-digital) communities. In this way, there can be a striking nostalgia for the old days or for "nostalgic gestures" expressed necessarily through tradition. It is something that makes sense as part of an ongoing search of modern man to be socially re-connected.

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Celebration of Klidonas (24 June 2019) in the neighborhood and archaeological park of Plato's Academy, Athens

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