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CROSS-SPATIAL POSSIBILITIES: DANCE HERITAGE TRANSMISSION IN GYUMRI

Master's Thesis

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**Abstract**

This study explores the role that museums and heritage/cultural spaces within Gyumri, Armenia, play in the transmission of Armenian ethnographic dance intangible cultural heritage. By conducting qualitative research centring around Hrayrk Traditional Dance Group and the Gyumri Museum of National Architecture and Urban Life, the study examines how practitioner-led initiatives might expand informal educational efforts, harnessing museums and other cultural third spaces in innovative ways for the re-embodiment of ethnographic dance as a central component of Armenian community life. Specific avenues could be community-led events of practice, an increased sense of belonging for practitioners, and the addition of historical/cultural context.

**Keywords:** ethnographic dance, dance heritage education, intangible cultural heritage, museums, Armenian dance

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Մենք ընդմիջտ հայ ենք:

Հիրուր խեղճ

# 1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, increasing global efforts to sustain the cultural diversity of the world's peoples through intangible cultural heritage (ICH) safeguarding has become a priority of many governments, cultural and community organisations, and even museums. The standard for what is meant by ICH that continues to be used today was established in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, hereafter referred to as the ICHC,<sup>1</sup> and is defined as, 'practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.'<sup>2</sup> As practices which only exist through the agency and action of human beings, recent policy has shifted to empowering communities and existing practitioners in order to continue these lifeways, recognising the indispensable role that humans play in the very existence of any form of intangible heritage. This can be done through a variety of means, such as the creation of dedicated institutions for heritage management and transmission or collaboration with community organisations, cultural centres and NGOs.<sup>3</sup> In particular, museums whose scope includes the cultural sphere have encouraging potential for fostering ICH transmission as increasingly educative and community-centric 'third spaces'.<sup>4</sup> This study aims to examine the growth of Armenian ethnographic dance heritage education in Gyumri, specifically by exploring the role that museums and heritage/cultural spaces play in expanding transmission.

Specifically, the understanding of ethnographic dance that I will work from is one defined by Natalie Kamajian in her work on Armenian dance forms. Kamajian defines ethnographic dance, or *azgagrakan par* in Armenian,<sup>5</sup> as, 'A communal activity and social dance form...consist[ing] of ritual, wedding, and martial dances where practitioners are connected either by holding hands or waists and dancing in a single circle or a straight line.'<sup>6</sup> Armenians are an indigenous people group native to 'modern Armenia, eastern Turkey, northern Iran, western Azerbaijan, and southern Georgia,' whose cultural and social identity was formed in this region for 2000 years while under the influence of many empires and cultural exchanges.<sup>7</sup> For millennia, factors affecting Armenian identity were multi-layered, intersecting with local and empirical forces that shaped Armenian sociocultural expressions. Christian faith has been

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<sup>1</sup> Hodsdon, 'Revoicing Intangible Cultural Heritage', 16.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 10–12.

<sup>4</sup> Neyrinck et al., 'At the Interface between Living Heritage and Museum Practice: Dialogical Encounters and the Making of a "Third Space" in Safeguarding Heritage'.

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter, I will use the terms ethnographic dance and *azgagrakan par* interchangeably.

<sup>6</sup> Kamajian, 'Performing Paradox', 2.

<sup>7</sup> Maghakyan, 'Is Indigeneity Discourse Productive for the Cause of Preserving Armenian Cultural Heritage?', 89.

central to the Armenian cultural identity since the 4th century, but prior to this, Armenian pagan belief systems heavily informed cultural practice, which has a legacy even in Armenian ICH today.<sup>8</sup>

Of particular relevance to a discussion of Armenian ICH practice is the events of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923, where Armenians were forcibly displaced from their homelands and 1.5 million of them were murdered by the Ottoman extermination policy.<sup>9</sup> Today, the modern Republic of Armenia, formed after the dissolution of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, is situated between Georgia, Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan with a population that is over 98% ethnically Armenian.<sup>10</sup> This has resulted in many of the dances practiced by Armenian communities today being decontextualized from their original locales, many of which were in the Ottoman Empire (now modern-day Turkey), and given new life in various communities throughout Armenia and the Diaspora.<sup>11</sup> Armenian communities in both the modern state and the Diaspora consist of people with ancestral roots throughout the Armenian homeland, and thus this relatively recent mass displacement greatly affects how ICH is practiced. *Azgagrakan par* as it is practiced today emphasises the historic origins of dances while also unifying them into a national style (the word *azgayin*, which means national, is often used by practitioners in Armenia when referring to the source and purpose of their practice).

Though decontextualised from the historic communities which preserved them for generations, the continued practice of these dances by individuals despite displacement led to their eventual wider practice by Armenians worldwide as a result of the *azgagrakan* revival movement. This movement, as characterised by Armen Adamian, can be understood as a ‘collective network of decentralized agents active in the practice, spread and development of staged and socio-participatory performances of *azgagrakan* music and dance.’<sup>12</sup> This movement draws on ethnographic research conducted by *azgagrakan* ensembles and Armenian academic institutions during the Soviet period,<sup>13</sup> and has found a resurgence in popularity during the twenty-first century, largely as a result of the work and legacy of Karin Folk Dance and Song Group in Armenia, and various dance practitioners and their ethnographic work in Diaspora communities.

Though the ICHC emphasises intergenerational transmission through communities as central to ICH practice,<sup>14</sup> it is important to recognise the diverse circumstances through which community

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<sup>8</sup> Kamajian, ‘Performing Paradox’, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Charny, ‘Armenian Genocide (1915-1923)’.

<sup>10</sup> Minor. Rights Group, ‘Armenia’.

<sup>11</sup> Kamajian, ‘Performing Paradox’, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Adamian, ‘The Azgagrakan Movement: An Embodied Form of Armenian Nationalism’.

<sup>13</sup> Kamajian, ‘Performing Paradox’, 52.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO, *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

transmission may have been disrupted, such as forced displacement in the case of Armenians. As Harrison argues regarding indigenous music practice (an argument which can also be applied to dance), colonial strategies of displacement and assimilation have resulted in the loss of environmental and situational knowledge that once informed these practices. However, ‘relocated indigeneity’ can be possible, as constricting the validity of ICH practice strictly to the traditional, rural communities they came from denies the cultural rights of relocated people groups.<sup>15</sup> As an Armenian-American college student from New Jersey discusses in an interview, dance has a different purpose in his life than that of his ancestors. For this student, Armenian dance is for enjoyment and preservation—to remember.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in writing about the *azgagrakan* movement, Kamajian states, ‘In the context of active denial and revisionism, cultural and heritage practices such as dance and music are viewed as fundamental components in the struggle to exist and to “be” Armenian against forces that seek to erase, rewrite, and invisibilize that identity.’<sup>17</sup>

While this study focuses specifically on *azgagrakan par* in Gyumri, it is of critical importance to understand the larger Armenian dance landscape that this dance form is situated within. There are two primary forms of Armenian traditional dance which are practiced today: *azgagrakan par* and *bemakan par*, or stage dance. Kamajian defines *bemakan par* as, ‘a newly invented genre that consists of predetermined single-author choreographies and a dual gendered technique, where practitioners memorize variegated movement sequences that are frontally oriented for the purpose of staged performances.’<sup>18</sup> In the Soviet Union, folklore of the various ethnic groups represented within the state was manipulated and repurposed in ways that supported Soviet ideologies and the system as a whole. Choreographers and ethnographers created acceptable ‘ethno-identity’ dances which utilised aspects of vernacular dance aesthetics but reinterpreted them through the larger movement framework of ballet. State ensembles in each Soviet republic were formed which propagated this new and supposedly ‘improved’ form of each people group’s cultural dances.<sup>19</sup>

This ethno-identity form became what is known often referred to as the *bemakan par* dance form. As Kamajian asserts, *bemakan par* is ‘a ballet-centric genre belonging to a Western European hegemonic mode of artistic production’<sup>20</sup> whose continued practice today is ‘emblematic of the top-down approach to hegemonic Soviet cultural production that eventually was taken on by Armenians themselves.’<sup>21</sup> Thus,

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<sup>15</sup> Harrison, ‘Indigenous Music Sustainability during Climate Change’.

<sup>16</sup> Porto, ‘Haygagan Bar: Embodying the Homeland through Armenian Dance’, 29–30.

<sup>17</sup> Kamajian, ‘Performing Paradox’, 39.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Performing Paradox’, 6, 3–4.

<sup>19</sup> Shay, ‘Staging the Folk: Choreographic Issues of National Representation’.

<sup>20</sup> Kamajian, ‘Performing Paradox’, 15.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Performing Paradox’, 52.

*bemakan par* ‘obscures indigenous ways of moving and reserves dancing for only highly trained balleticized bodies, all while claiming to represent authentic Armenianness.’<sup>22</sup> Considering the colonial roots of *bemakan par* practice, and the history of its creation and use not aligning with the spirit of the ICHC, I have chosen not to centre this dance form in my study. *Azgagrakan par* as it is practiced today ‘seeks to reclaim vernacular aesthetics and integrate indigenous ways of being and moving into contemporary practice and performance’. (11) This foundation in heritage community-sourced dance practice and a rejection of cultural homogeneity makes it a more fitting choice for my research on ICH dance heritage transmission.

My research is situated within the city of Gyumri, known during Soviet times as Leninakan and during the Russian Empire period as Alexandropol, is Armenia’s second-largest city and historically considered its cultural capital. Gyumri is one of the few cities in Armenia that has retained a portion of its urban centre consisting of mostly pre-Soviet nineteenth and twentieth-century buildings that display the richness of Armenian architectural forms and expressions. A portion of these buildings have been recognised as the Kumayri<sup>23</sup> Historical Cultural Museum-Reserve.<sup>24</sup>

Accordingly, it is this recognition of the built heritage environment inherent to Gyumri’s centre that led me to include the concept of ‘heritage/cultural spaces’ in my research aims. Cultural spaces, such as art studios and youth centres, as well as most of the city’s art, history, and house museums of revered Armenian writers and actors, are largely situated within these heritage structures. Part of the architectural design of this form of traditional Armenian urban architecture was the inclusion of large interior open spaces, *baks* in Armenian, or yards. In addition to the types of tenants previously mentioned as occupying these heritage structures, restaurants, cafes, bars, banks, tech startups, artisan craft shops, private offices, and private residences (among others) all occupy these spaces. The education and transmission measures discussed in this study have relevance not just for museums, but also within the larger cultural heritage landscape of Gyumri, where this awareness is often evoked. As a community-based and body-based ICH practice, *azgagrakan par* can materialise anywhere and anytime a community chooses to enact it, and the large open spaces within these heritage structures in Gyumri also provide a more accessible space for this to occur.

Next, I would like to discuss my own positionality that informs my impetus for this research and the entire research process. I am an Armenian-American who spent my whole life dancing various styles of modern Western dance, but did not encounter Armenian dance in any form until three years ago (2022).

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Performing Paradox’, 82.

<sup>23</sup> Kumayri is the ancient name for the area that the modern name of the city was derived from.

<sup>24</sup> Kumayri Gyumri Virtual Guide, ‘About Gyumri’.

At that time, I moved to Armenia for eleven months as part of a volunteer programme for diasporan Armenians to reconnect with our heritage and contribute our personal and professional skills to various sectors in Armenia. I spent the duration of my volunteer service in Gyumri and, as someone with a history background and professional interest in the heritage sector, volunteered with a variety of heritage NGOs and museums. Out of these, I spent the most time with the local cultural heritage museum, the Gyumri Museum of National Architecture and Urban Life (otherwise known as the Dzitoghtsyan Museum, named after the family whose historic home the museum is housed in). Throughout these eleven months, I attended Eastern Armenian language classes twice a week in the evenings, which helped me to go from lacking any knowledge of the language beyond a few simple words, to learning how to speak, read, and write Armenian.

I was introduced to *azgagrakan par* through a local class led by Gyumri's *azgagrakan par* dance group, Hrayrk, that a fellow volunteer invited me to. I started attending the bi-weekly classes and after five months, I began teaching these dances in local youth centres and schools as part of my volunteer service. After seven months, I became a member of the Hrayrk Traditional Dance Group through demonstrating my proficiency in the practice of *azgagrakan par* dances. Something particularly fascinating to me was how Hrayrk would initiate dance events (what I now understand as 'events of practice,' a term which will be further discussed in the Literature Review section) where *azgagrakan par* was danced in public spaces such as the town square, one of the central streets leading from the town square, the church square, and even museum yards. I loved how this approach to ICH transmission allowed for more people beyond those who had chosen and/or were able to attend a class to witness, experience, and join in this dance practice.

After I left Armenia and began my degree, studying museum theory, practice, ICH policy, and Armenian ICH policy more in depth through my courses, I began to see how flaws in the cultural heritage management system in Armenia, the approach to museum practice, and enduring notions of *bemakan par* as the most 'evolved' version of Armenian dance were affecting the potential expansion of *azgagrakan*, or ethnographic, dance heritage education. Collaborations between *azgagrakan par* practitioners and museums existed, but this work was relatively new, and I wondered how strengthening these kinds of partnerships could bring ICH dance practice to more people and promote an understanding that it could be part of people's daily, social realities. This formed the basis for my research design and led me to formulate research questions. The following are the final questions I created and an explanation of how I arrived at them is provided in the Methodology section:

- 1) How can dance heritage transmission expand beyond formal educational settings to heritage and cultural spaces, such as museums or built heritage assets, through community-led efforts?

- 2) What role do heritage professionals and practitioners in Gyumri think museums and heritage/cultural spaces should have in expanding access to dance heritage education?
- 3) What areas of growth are there in both the museum's exhibition content and its programming for dance heritage education, practice, and community transmission? What are the current challenges to this expansion?

## 2. Literature Review

A central characteristic of ICH is its emphasis on generational transmission, retaining its ‘dynamic and adaptive’ nature through a process of ‘constant...recreat[ion]’ whereby a community<sup>25</sup> evolves and adapts it over time to their changing sociocultural circumstances. This is contrasted with a situation where ICH elements have been subjected to changes initiated by forces external to the community itself, such as state intervention according to a specific agenda. ICH must be ‘compatible with existing international human rights instruments’, meaning something cannot be considered heritage or treated as such if it violates the human rights of the community involved or other human beings.<sup>26</sup> This also means that people have a right to access and a role in the management of their own ICH.<sup>27</sup>

Further analyses of ICH theory have described the concept as distinguished from the concept of ‘folklore,’ which already existed, due to its recognition of the integral role of cultural practitioners and the bearers of tradition itself in cultural transmission. This ushered in a new paradigm of viewing each ICH element as part of a living system, rather than as a static object devoid of animating human actors.<sup>28</sup> The human actors concerned with these elements must self-identify them as part of their shared ICH and as integral to their cultural identity.<sup>29</sup> This perspective helps reinforce an understanding crucial to the ICHC, which is that inscribed elements are not the object or practice itself, but rather consist of the actions involved in a practice.<sup>30</sup> In the example of dance ICH, one particular dance tradition and its specific movements *themselves* are not what is inscribed, but rather the *practice* of this dance, the actual act of dancing, by a heritage community.<sup>31</sup>

Crucial to all discussions of ICH theory is an understanding of what is meant by ‘safeguarding’. The need for a convention concerning safeguarding arose from UNESCO’s recognition that globalism and the rapidly changing social landscape of the modern world were a threat to the cultural diversity found in the ICH practices of the world, and that there were insufficient international resources and guidelines for how to counteract the effects of these forces on heritage practices. Safeguarding is defined by the Convention as ‘measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects

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<sup>25</sup> Section 3.3 discusses the many ways to define community and relevant theory.

<sup>26</sup> UNESCO, *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 3, 5, 151.

<sup>27</sup> Lenzerini, ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Living Culture of Peoples’, 115.

<sup>28</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production’, 164.

<sup>29</sup> Lenzerini, ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Living Culture of Peoples’, 108.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Living Heritage: Safeguarding without Freezing’, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Bakka and Karoblis, ‘Decolonising or Recolonising: Struggles on Cultural Heritage’, 259.

of such heritage.<sup>32</sup> Thus, this study focuses on one particular approach to safeguarding, that of non-formal education, particularly in the museum setting.

Key values in safeguarding activities are community-directed action, mutual respect and transparency, threat assessments, and ensuring communities continue to benefit from and have access to the practice of their ICH, as outlined in the Ethical Guidelines of the ICHC.<sup>33</sup> Notably, safeguarding is more expansive than the concept of ‘protection’ in that it is more concerned with providing the necessary conditions and support for communities to practice their heritage, not with trying to encase it from any corrupting forces and, resultingly, musealizing it.<sup>34</sup> Within a post-colonial context, safeguarding can help ICH practices and their associated artefacts to take on a new life within the community once more. Empowering indigenous perspectives to determine how community transmission is expanded and how this practice will look over time, reifies the safeguarding model that places communities, rather than institutions, in charge.<sup>35</sup>

These principles are key to understanding the living heritage approach to heritage management, one which UNESCO has further developed in the years since the ICHC in the Convention’s Operational Directives and subsequent guidance publications.<sup>36</sup> This approach recognises ‘heritage [as] characterized by the continuity of the original function or the purpose for which it was originally established’. Fundamentally, it is animated by a core community that incorporates this heritage as a living expression of shaping its identity and is, in turn, transformed by that community through the very act of practice. The living heritage approach to heritage management includes ‘community-led’ management whereby the values and established management practices of the community are prioritised in all safeguarding and transmission efforts.<sup>37</sup> However, it is important to remember that living heritage is not a label for any aspect or dimension of a heritage practice, but rather, a way of thinking about heritage as it relates to safeguarding actions. As Bakka and Karoblis have pointed out, such bio-morphic metaphors when applied to community concepts have complex implications, and creating a definable category of ‘living heritage,’ would be somewhat redundant as an element certainly could not be anything other than living if it is practised by humans (practice being a requirement of the ICH definition).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> UNESCO, *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 3, 5–6.

<sup>33</sup> Bakka and Karoblis, ‘Decolonising or Recolonising: Struggles on Cultural Heritage’, 143–45.

<sup>34</sup> Lenzerini, ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Living Culture of Peoples’, 109.

<sup>35</sup> Ezenagu, ‘Mausoleum or Museum’, 585.

<sup>36</sup> Schnüttgen, ‘Living Heritage—A Contribution from UNESCO’, 43–45.

<sup>37</sup> Wijesuriya, ‘Living Heritage’, 51–53.

<sup>38</sup> Bakka and Karoblis, ‘Decolonising or Recolonising: Struggles on Cultural Heritage’, 255–57.

As UNESCO writes on the webpage, ‘About living heritage and education’, ‘The creative process of intergenerational transmission is at the centre of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding.’ To speak of transmission is to speak of a kind of informal education that runs throughout the existence of culture in human communities, up to the present day. The ICHC recommends both formal, through schools, and informal educational programmes, ‘such as short courses, community learning and capacity-building activities.’<sup>39</sup> In regards to intangible cultural heritage practices who find their being and *telos* in the body (such as song or dance), transmission often happens through a phenomenon known as ‘mimetic process,’ whereby people gain the practical knowledge of how to embody the practice through ‘creative imitation’ of a ‘role-model’. Wulf explains the significance of these processes to ICH transmission in the following:

These processes are sensual; they are tied to the human body, they relate to human behaviour and seldom unfold consciously. Through mimetic processes, human beings incorporate images and patterns of practices of intangible cultural heritage, which subsequently become part of their inner world of images and imaginations...The practical knowledge necessary for the staging and performance of cultural actions is acquired. This culturally diverse knowledge develops in the context of the staging of the body and plays a special role in the preservation and modification of cultural performances.<sup>40</sup>

This kind of process is integral to the concept of continuous recreation as described in the ICHC, which ‘adapts over time’<sup>41</sup> as practitioners take ownership of them and identify with their heritage. As a result, how practitioners perceive these practices and themselves shifts, which informs how they enact these practices and can lead to changes with each generation.<sup>42</sup> Practically, one can understand this concept in how people may join into an ethnographic dance practice, joining the line or circle and trying to emulate those dancing around them through the multi-sensory experience. In contrast to formal instruction, the practice of this dance is being transmitted through the mimetic process. Over time, as practitioners begin to identify with this heritage, they may emphasise particular movements or choose to emulate the style of one particular practitioner over another. These are examples of some ways that transmission can result in practitioner-initiated changes to heritage practice.

In order to properly discuss the safeguarding measure of informal education in Gyumri, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the state of ICH policy in the Republic of Armenia. It is difficult to determine to what extent the ICHC has been integrated into Armenian national policy, as there is no

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<sup>39</sup> UNESCO Intang. Cult. Herit., ‘About Living Heritage and Education’.

<sup>40</sup> Wulf, ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage: Challenges and Expectations’, 433.

<sup>41</sup> UNESCO, ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage’.

<sup>42</sup> Wulf, ‘Living Cultures in the Anthropocene: Taking Stock of Intangible Cultural Heritage Initiatives across the World’, 11.

dedicated website for the activities of the Armenian National Commission for UNESCO.<sup>43</sup> There is a dedicated page on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website expositing general factual information, such as UNESCO in general, Armenia and UNESCO's cooperation, statistics regarding Armenia's involvement with UNESCO, and which sites/elements have been inscribed on lists. Notably, a discussion of how all of this work with UNESCO has actually influenced Armenian government policies is incredibly lacking from the Commission and it is not clear from the website what they are doing to integrate any of this work at all.<sup>44</sup>

In recent years, new webpages providing information about ICH activities and practices in Armenia have been established by the government.<sup>45</sup> These are useful for conceptual understandings of ICH, gaining an understanding of the various ICH practices within Armenian culture, and what activity there is in the field of ICH.<sup>46</sup> However, they do not list what the primary foci of the Armenian Commission are or an outline of their safeguarding approaches. The 2009 Law of the Republic of Armenia on Intangible Cultural Heritage refers to safeguarding numerous times, but often mentions it as part of State actions and directives, rather than something handed over to communities. Local governments and organisations are instructed to work with communities, but the overall approach is quite state-controlled and managed in nature.<sup>47</sup>

To better understand the ambiguity in Armenian ICH policy, one must look to the historical and political factors that have influenced the Armenian cultural environment. During the Soviet rule of Armenia, the state tightly controlled all aspects of culture and heritage, utilising them as one of their most powerful tools for propaganda in a hierarchical system. After the collapse of the USSR, the weakness of the Armenian central government and the oligarchic corruption of leadership led to the breakdown of the complex Soviet cultural structure and a shift towards decentralisation and localism. Without the proper support systems in place at both a state and local government level for their survival, many community cultural organisations ceased to exist. After the Velvet Revolution of 2018, a newly restructured Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports was formed, overseeing all cultural policy and imbuing the sector with new life and direction for the first time since independence.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 'National Commissions for UNESCO'.

<sup>44</sup> Minist. Foreign Aff. Repub. Armen., 'UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)'.

<sup>45</sup> Minist. Educ. Sci. Cult. Sports Repub. Armen., 'Intangible Cultural Heritage'.

<sup>46</sup> Minist. Educ. Sci. Cult. Sports Repub. Armen., 'The Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Armenia'.

<sup>47</sup> Minist. Educ. Sci. Cult. Sports Repub. Armen., 'Laws of the Republic of Armenia'.

<sup>48</sup> Antonyan and Muradyan, *Full Country Profile: Armenia*, 5–10.

In a report by the Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends, the main actors in the Armenian cultural landscape are identified as governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations, cultural/educational institutions, public international organisations, public and private foundations, private enterprises, and social/virtual platforms. Due to the legacy of ‘a very complicated and unhealthy legal, structural and infrastructural’ system, as well as lack of qualified professionals overseeing these efforts at a government level, significant challenges still remain.<sup>49</sup> Communities and the individuals and groups within them as the central life force of ICH, are notably absent from the main actors of the cultural sector. They are mediated through local cultural institutions but are often not given the power to direct cultural heritage transmission, research, and discourse for themselves. This reveals a fundamental weakness in the Armenian government’s approach to ICH safeguarding, stemming from the paternalistic approach to cultural policy established during the USSR.

This history has particular implications for Armenian ethnographic dance safeguarding, due to the revival of these heritage practices during the post-Soviet period. Existing cultural organisations and institutions in Armenia were built around the *bemakan* expression of Armenian cultural heritage and an ideology that saw this form of Armenian dance as the highest, most evolved expression. This has bled into cultural policies of the Armenian government today, as most cultural professionals were taught this ideology in their education and thus consciously and unconsciously replicate it in their policy decisions. (Performing Paradox) Additionally, whether directly affiliated with the Armenian government or not, the sheer number of these groups, the breadth of structural and technical support they have, and their long-standing relationships with the government favors their representation in cultural heritage policy.<sup>50</sup> This can be seen in that many events promoting Armenian ethnographic dance heritage transmission are organised by community groups, NGOs, and local cultural initiatives.<sup>51</sup> Though they may be promoted by the government, often on the state tourism website,<sup>52</sup> it is clear that the *azgagrakan* dance form does not receive the same level of support as *bemakan par* due to a legacy of viewing it as ‘the primary expressor of Armenian dance’.<sup>53</sup>

Of particular relevance for this study is the role that museums play in ICH education. Museums, as formal institutions, can provide both more formal, such as lectures, or informal, such as participative workshops, educational experiences for their visitors and communities. The modern museum as it is conceived of today has its roots in a European model birthed during the Enlightenment, one which prized

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<sup>49</sup> Antonyan and Muradyan, *Short Country Profile: Armenia*, 4–5, 9–10.

<sup>50</sup> Kamajian, ‘Performing Paradox’, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Instagram, ‘Արի Պարի’.

<sup>52</sup> Armen. Travel, ‘Popular Events in Armenia’.

<sup>53</sup> Kamajian, ‘Performing Paradox’, 5.

documentation, classification, collection, and presentation. This resulted in a fairly static state of ‘preservation’ of material culture. In the early twentieth century, open-air museums emerged as a new category of museum designed to preserve ‘folk’ life,<sup>54</sup> perceived as a rapidly disappearing peasant/rural way of life with an ‘expressive culture that was communally produced.’<sup>55</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, shifts in the museum sector and the development of a ‘new museology’ led to a shift in priorities and the structure of museums. While still primarily collections based, museums began to change into ‘places of learning’ as well as ‘places of experience,’ where sharing knowledge, stimulating inquiry, and centring community education are foundational. Exhibitions have evolved from an overwhelming display of as many objects as possible with a barrage of text information to interactive and reflective spaces for their visitors.<sup>56</sup>

In post-Soviet countries, the history of museum development is slightly different, and the current state of the museum sector in each country varies due to the sociocultural and political shifts that have happened in the years since the dissolution of the USSR. As previously discussed, culture and education were pillars of a strictly regulated state propaganda system, with only ‘limited...selected cultural heritage’ allowed in both public and private life as it fit ‘the communist, socialist and atheist ideological frameworks.’<sup>57</sup> In the museum field, existing museums were ‘democratized’ and new, specialised museums corresponding to various academic categories as defined by the Soviet state were established, with a goal of ‘culturaliz[ing]’ the masses. Still, museums did not have much of an external focus but were primarily concerned with the work of ‘the museum’ and the priorities and interests of the staff and their collections, rather than the visitor.<sup>58</sup>

As museums in Europe and the West began to change during the second half of the twentieth century, largely as a result of consumer culture, the communist structure and continued need for some degree of a state-controlled narrative led to museums in Soviet countries not evolving alongside their counterparts outside the Iron Curtain.<sup>59</sup> In Armenia, as previously mentioned, the transition to a ‘market economy,’ major infrastructural failures of basic services during the 1990s, and the rise of an ‘oligarchic system of political power’ led many museums to crumble without proper funding and structural support.<sup>60</sup> This was a severe impediment on the sector’s ability to transform its practices into ones more focused on

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<sup>54</sup> Lüdtké, ‘Museums as Facilitators in the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage’, 443.

<sup>55</sup> Shay, *Folk Dance and the Creation of National Identities: Staging the Folk*, xxxi.

<sup>56</sup> Lüdtké, ‘Museums as Facilitators in the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage’, 444.

<sup>57</sup> Antonyan and Muradyan, *Full Country Profile: Armenia*, 5–6.

<sup>58</sup> Tchouikina, ‘Twentieth-Century Museums of National History and Literature in Contemporary Russia: Adaptation of the Soviet Experience and Crisis Management’, 425.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Twentieth-Century Museums of National History and Literature in Contemporary Russia: Adaptation of the Soviet Experience and Crisis Management’, 422–25.

<sup>60</sup> Antonyan and Muradyan, *Full Country Profile: Armenia*, 6.

education and community learning. Not only would this require the resources to do so, but it would also require a shift in ideology and education of the sector's professionals, which was also lacking due to the deficiencies in the post-Soviet education system.<sup>61</sup> In 2008, the ICOM National Committee of Armenian Museums was formed,<sup>62</sup> and its efforts alongside an improved political situation after the 2018 Velvet Revolution, a growing economy, and enhancements in education have resulted in some changes to museum practices and approaches, particularly in Yerevan, the capital city.<sup>63</sup>

Globally, museums have dealt with these paradigm shifts and determining new practices in the sector through the work of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Boasting over 50,000 members consisting of museum institutions and museum professionals,<sup>64</sup> the organisation updated its definition of a museum in 2007 to include intangible heritage.<sup>65</sup> The updated 2022 definition states, 'A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage.'<sup>66</sup> How can museums, as object and exhibition based institutions, support best safeguarding practices of ICH through their work? In the decades since the ICHC, this is the practical question that museum professionals and researchers have wrestled with. In Armenia, the role of museums in empowering ICH communities to continue heritage practice and transmission is a relatively new discussion, but government-facilitated training courses in collaboration with UNESCO aimed at developing the skills of professionals have begun in recent years.<sup>67</sup>

In some countries, a separate category of museum known as ICH museums has solidified, which are 'specifically focused on the presentation, promotion, and safeguarding of an intangible cultural expression as defined by the 2003 Convention.' A key pinnacle of their mission is to 'foster the transmission and continuity of...cultural expressions.'<sup>68</sup> The orientation of these museums as being by and for ICH communities gives them the potential to responsibly engage with ICH with less risk of appropriation. The creation of an ICH museum necessitates an understanding of what is meant by ICH and safeguarding, as well as a conceptual basis in more progressive museum practices of the previous half century. These museums are limited in number, however, and many museums around the world currently have both a thematic scope and collections which pertain directly to ICH practices, especially many culture, heritage, and history museums. Some of these museums still follow quite 'traditional' museum

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<sup>61</sup> Karakhanyan, 'Armenia: Transformational Peculiarities of the Soviet and Post-Soviet Higher Education System'.

<sup>62</sup> ICOM Armen., 'Our Story'.

<sup>63</sup> I refer here to my own experience visiting museums in various regions of Armenia and volunteering with museums in Gyumri for my assessment of where the most changes have happened.

<sup>64</sup> Lütke, 'Museums as Facilitators in the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage', 442.

<sup>65</sup> Lehmannová, '224 Years of Defining the Museum', 3.

<sup>66</sup> Int. Coun. Mus., 'Museum Definition'.

<sup>67</sup> Minist. Educ. Sci. Cult. Sports Repub. Armen., 'Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums'.

<sup>68</sup> Ferrer-Yulfo, 'Transforming Museum Education through Intangible Cultural Heritage', 320.

practices and ethos, while others have embraced a more expansive view of education in their programming and exhibition designs. Despite not being solely ‘ICH museums,’ museums with a cultural heritage purview find ways to incorporate the spirit of the ICHC into their work.<sup>69</sup>

Within the last few decades, an exciting new area of study has emerged in the realm of dance intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and its applications in the museum setting. The most relevant articles have been written by Tone Erlien Myrvold (2016,<sup>70</sup> 2017,<sup>71</sup> 2020,<sup>72</sup> 2022<sup>73</sup>), who has focused on the specific activation of museum spaces by dance ICH practitioners for educational purposes and champions ‘events of practice’ as integral to dance heritage transmission in museums. This term was coined by Erlien & Bakka when describing events in cultural heritage spaces or museums that are led by artists, or practitioners. The aim of these events is to embody dance ICH practices and provide ways for those beyond the practicing community to gain exposure to and practice these dances for themselves where there is a low barrier of entry, like a public museum.<sup>74</sup> These kinds of events are mentioned in various articles<sup>75</sup> describing dance ICH at museums in recent years, most notably in museums that are explicitly and solely concerned with dance ICH such as the Museo del Baile Flamenco or the Museu do Fado.<sup>76</sup> These kinds of museums have the means to employ much more extensive programming in the form of events of practice or even consistent workshops or classes due to the nature of their museums. Regardless of the museum’s core functions, many cultural museums can play a vital role in empowering practitioners and transferring power from staff to the community in this way. This may be a challenge for some museums to trust practitioners to facilitate events and be the primary point of interaction with visitors, but is a necessary part of ICH continuing to be transmitted through a community rather than becoming a museum object of exhibition.<sup>77</sup>

One of the key takeaways from these kinds of events is that they shift the function of dance in museum spaces from a performative one to an active, participatory one, where practitioners are not just objectified for exhibition but interact with visitors in an experiential manner. Power is not only transferred to practitioners but even to the participating visitors. Many traditional forms of dance ICH involve the distribution of power throughout the dance group due to its communal nature and this will have an effect

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<sup>69</sup> Nikolić Derić et al., *Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage. Towards a Third Space in the Heritage Sector*, 12–13.

<sup>70</sup> Erlien, ‘New Methods for Dissemination of Intangible Cultural Heritage—Transmission of and Participation in Dance Traditions in Norway’.

<sup>71</sup> Erlien and Bakka, ‘Museums, Dance, and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage’.

<sup>72</sup> Myrvold, ‘Curating Participation in Dance in Museum’.

<sup>73</sup> Myrvold, ‘Can You Relate to a Dance from the Past?’

<sup>74</sup> Erlien and Bakka, ‘Museums, Dance, and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage’.

<sup>75</sup> See all references to Tone Erlien Myrvold’s work.

<sup>76</sup> Ferrer-Yulfo, ‘Transforming Museum Education through Intangible Cultural Heritage’.

<sup>77</sup> Myrvold, ‘Curating Participation in Dance in Museum’.

in the museum setting as well.<sup>78</sup> The Scenkonstmuseet (Swedish Museum of Performing Arts) located in Stockholm takes more of a democratic approach to events of practice by expanding who it allows to lead them. Rather than requiring some kind of specific training or credentials in order to be deemed ‘qualified’ enough to lead, the museum allows people of varying skill levels to contribute to its events and exhibitions.<sup>79</sup> As these kinds of events are quite new and have not been studied in enough contexts to generate informed criticisms, the literature is limited in its critique. Myrvold<sup>80</sup> acknowledges that this might lead to simply presenting knowledge within the event context and not to the active practice of these dances by participants outside of these explicit spaces.

Yet another issue is that this approach still privileges a Western framework of concepts such as music and dance which are viewed categorically, rather than viewing these dance ICH practices as simply indigenous cultural practices that have a context within their social functions.<sup>81</sup> In the Armenian context, a variety of historical factors such as the Armenian Genocide and Russian/Soviet colonization have removed the dances even from their historic communities which practiced them, let alone from their social functions. Dance ICH practice has a much more national focus and has become a shared heritage as a result of centuries of displacement. This raises the question of how museums might be able to help bring back some of this context as they work with practitioners if it has been largely lost. Through access to archival and research materials, museums can help fill in the sociohistorical milieu that may be absent from these dance practices, and which can then be incorporated back into them as the community sees fit.

Much of the discourse in the literature surrounding dance ICH and museums centres around finding the museum’s altered role in this new kind of practitioner-centric approach. In the traditional museum model, dance is often ‘musealized’ into exhibitions, objects, text, and at best, pictures and video. In the new museum model, where museums are seen as ‘public, social institutions of learning’<sup>82</sup> then dance is brought into its social element within the museum through these kinds of activations or events. By offering a space for practitioners to lead and shifting the focus from archiving and tangible expressions through exhibitions to space for communities to practice, dance is liberated from the archive where it can be ‘imprisoned’ and held captive by the museum.<sup>83</sup> The museum’s function then shifts from collector and exhibitor, as it pertains to dance ICH, to one of facilitator. This kind of shift can be seen in the rise of open-air museums, where museums facilitated the reenactment of ICH practice through actors

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<sup>78</sup> Erlien and Bakka, ‘Museums, Dance, and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage’.

<sup>79</sup> Evans, *Movement in Museums*, 43–44.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Curating Participation in Dance in Museum’.

<sup>81</sup> Gwervevde and Mthombeni, ‘Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage’.

<sup>82</sup> Rein, ‘Flee (t) Ing Dances! Initiatives for the Preservation and Communication of Intangible World Heritage in Museums’, 101.

<sup>83</sup> Kaeppler, ‘Capturing Music and Dance in an Archive’.

and some participatory activities for visitors.<sup>84</sup> Still, in these cases, ICH was a staff-led effort, but now as the museum shifts to more of a hosting and facilitating function, the community and practitioners themselves can lead the practice and transmission of ICH. The museum simply provides an additional space for the community to have their first encounters with these practices<sup>85</sup> and leverages its role in the community to ‘raise awareness and foster respect’<sup>86</sup> for them. This can lend credibility to the practitioners and enhance the visibility of their work due to public trust in the authority of museums, which stems from their traditional role but can be subverted in this context to place authority in the hands of the community.

Another core argument in determining the museum’s role in dance ICH comes from an understanding that any former or current attempts at ‘musealization’ fundamentally ignore the reality that dance is primarily an embodied practice at its core which cannot be separated from that experience. Dance knowledge resides within the physical body and thus its ‘essence’<sup>87</sup> cannot be captured by any kind of archival form, even if it is a recording of the physical body. Exhibition, collection, or archiving does not ensure that movement will continue to be danced across generations both now and in the future—it does not by any means guarantee transmission.<sup>88</sup> This is why museums choosing to shift their focus to artist-led embodied activations and facilitating these experiences can be a more useful approach. This also highlights a weakness of the existing UNESCO frameworks such as the ICHC. While attempts have been made to shift from a knowledge-based approach, tangible discussions of the policy implications for museums have been lacking and do not address the unique challenges for practices like music and dance that do not create a product as other forms of ICH do.<sup>89</sup> In the absence of clearer direction from UNESCO, the research of Tone Erlien Myrvold, which is the most extensive on the subject of practitioner-led dance ICH in museums, provides clues into what interventions are being done in some innovative museums. Still, the long-term effects and efficacy of this kind of work have not been studied as Myrvold’s research only spans the past decade.

An aspect of the ‘events of practice’ safeguarding approach which is mentioned but not primarily focused on in the research is youth participation. Though the concept of museums as ‘social hub’<sup>90</sup> may have appeal for the entire community, youth, in particular, might be drawn to the kinds of collective shared experiences that ICH dance practices create. As Myrvold<sup>91</sup> discovered in research on youth dance

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<sup>84</sup> Lüdtké, ‘Museums as Facilitators in the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage’.

<sup>85</sup> Myrvold, ‘Curating Participation in Dance in Museum’.

<sup>86</sup> Ferrer-Yulfo, ‘Transforming Museum Education through Intangible Cultural Heritage’, 320.

<sup>87</sup> Evans, *Movement in Museums*, 50.

<sup>88</sup> Evans, *Movement in Museums*.

<sup>89</sup> Carr, ‘The Tangible and Intangible: Dance and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage’.

<sup>90</sup> Myrvold, ‘Can You Relate to a Dance from the Past?’, 63.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Can You Relate to a Dance from the Past?’

programs hosted by the Norwegian Centre for Traditional Music and Dance, the coupling of archive recordings with active participation in dance practice helped young people feel a sense of belonging and connection to this heritage, contextualizing it for themselves within a past and their present moment. This approach also bridges the dichotomy that has previously been discussed between archive and embodiment. In this way, both functions of the museum as a collection and as a social, participatory space can come together to enhance the community's experience of heritage practice.

Myrvold's research also highlights the importance of recentering the purpose of social forms of ICH dance as practices for enjoyment and connection, as this overall improved participant experience.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps most fundamentally, a focus on youth participation in ICH dance practice is critical to its transmission and continued community practice in subsequent generations. Though the value of practitioner-led museum events has been shown for whole communities, engagement efforts must find ways for youth to want to participate so they will want to continue this practice outside of events.<sup>93</sup> Recommendations or studies for how to engage youth specifically with such an embodied practice as dance ICH in an increasingly digital world have not been well explored. As noted by Evans (2023), dance knowledge is one that resides in the body and not in the mind. Thus, it follows that educational efforts must prioritize youth both possessing and practicing this knowledge for it to survive in the future.

Lastly, 'events of practice' have emerged as one of the core safeguarding measures for dance ICH as a result of their enormous community-building potential. When museums serve as a space for open-access events where all are welcome without restriction to practice their shared community heritage, not only is power transferred to communities, but communities are also reformed. This is one of the most powerful ways in which museums can provide value as facilitators. The institutional nature of a museum may allow it to more easily form the network of individuals and groups needed for a more robust and representative participation from different spheres of the community. In this way, the museum serves as a beneficial liaison between interested parties, while still empowering them to direct and lead the direction of the events.<sup>94</sup> The research of Gutiérrez<sup>95</sup> has particular relevance for post-conflict or post-traumatic settings, suggesting that dance ICH practice in museums can even serve as a tool for cultural and personal reparations. Through the practice of dance as memory and a connection to a past that may have been stolen or disrupted, emotions can be processed and connections can be formed between individuals who share this collective pain. This research in particular has relevance to the Armenian context, as the society is constantly in a post-conflict and post-traumatic state. In Gyumri, two devastating earthquakes in the

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<sup>92</sup> 'Can You Relate to a Dance from the Past?', 69.

<sup>93</sup> Myrvold, 'Can You Relate to a Dance from the Past?'

<sup>94</sup> Myrvold, 'Curating Participation in Dance in Museum'.

<sup>95</sup> 'Performance of Heritage'.

last century, Soviet brutality, and a thirty-year conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan (in addition to generational genocide trauma), has left its mark on societal and psychological health. Dance heritage practices are viewed as a connection to a former way of life that was taken from Armenians during the genocide and making these connections may help heal ongoing trauma and pain caused by war and political instability.

From the literature I have discussed in this paper, significant gaps in their work with implications for my research emerge. The primary concern is that most recent research<sup>96</sup> that has been done centres on museums with more of an explicit dance purpose or focus but not on these kinds of practice-based activations in community, history, or heritage museums. This privileges the research to societies or places where specialized dance museums are a reality, but does not address the context that many societies globally would find themselves in of having no designated dance museum to provide a space for these kinds of practicing events. My research primarily works with a local cultural heritage museum whose exhibits concentrate largely on tangible cultural heritage, a context that has not been studied in the research. Additionally, the available research does not provide much beyond suggestions of exhibitions, events, workshops, or classes for how to tangibly increase the engagement of the wider community beyond existing practitioners. There are yet to be evidence-based suggestions of ways to involve practitioners in museums that are not dedicated to dance ICH beyond an event-centric model.

As mentioned, research on dance ICH within the museum space is relatively new and has largely focused on what Erlie & Bakka<sup>97</sup> have called ‘events of practice’ whereby practitioners are empowered to utilize the museum for community-led, embodied practices of dance heritage. This allows for a redistribution of power from the museum to the community and shifts the museum’s role from one of simply archiving, collecting, or exhibiting to one of facilitating and promoting. The museum space can give a sense of legitimacy by association with their trusted institution, to the efforts of dance practitioners, and serve as a low-stakes, first touchpoint with the practice of dance heritage for those unfamiliar. This allows museums to move beyond disembodied approaches to heritage to ones that acknowledge the inseparability of dance and other body-based ICH forms from the body. This shift to a museum as a gathering space for community can encourage youth participation and increase enjoyment of the practice, but further research must be done to determine how to drive more engagement from youth specifically. The potential of these kinds of events for community-building cannot be understated, as they can form networks between different passionate individual practitioners or groups. Especially in post-conflict settings, this kind of community practice of shared heritage can serve as reparations for what was lost and

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<sup>96</sup> See all references to Tone Erlie Myrvold’s work.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Museums, Dance, and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage’.

help process the emotions of hurt or loss. Further research should focus on museums without a dance-based mission to discover how more museums worldwide can be harnessed for their dance ICH strengthening potential, expanding the possibilities for communities with various backgrounds. This will in turn help provide further suggestions beyond events and workshops for incorporating embodied ICH dance practice into the museum's educational framework. As research in this field is only just beginning, there is no doubt that possibilities for collaboration between dance practitioner communities and museums will continue to unfold.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Aim of the Study

As previously outlined, my study aims to examine the growth of Armenian ethnographic dance heritage education in Gyumri, specifically by exploring the role that museums and heritage/cultural spaces play in expanding transmission. Initially, I created 3 areas of focus based on the constructivist principles underlying a qualitative study<sup>98</sup>: How those who encounter Armenian ethnographic dance interpret their experience of it, how they construct their relationship to this heritage practice and its place in society, and what meaning they assign to heritage dance practice in their life. This helped me formulate my initial research questions, which later changed as a result of fieldwork and re-engaging with the communities in question during the data collection process. My initial research questions were as follows:

- 1) How can dance education continue to shift from a hierarchical approach to one that is more focused on dance practice as a part of everyday life that is community-led?
- 2) How can the Gyumri Museum of National Architecture and Urban Life, as a blend of both a community and cultural heritage museum, incorporate local dance practitioners into museum educational programming and events?
- 3) What areas of growth are there in existing initiatives and in the developing activation of the museum as a community space under a ‘living heritage’ framework?
- 4) How can the museum contribute to providing valuable historical context and ethnographic research to dance education both within the museum and outside its walls?

After beginning to interact and discuss with the community in person once again, my areas of focus became more specific. One’s personal experience and meaning-making process with dance heritage was still an organising principle of the research and interviews, but these were present insofar as they informed one’s perspectives on the changing landscape of dance heritage education. Through this process, my research questions were refined into 3 guiding questions (as previously mentioned in the Introduction):

- 1) How can dance heritage transmission expand beyond formal educational settings to heritage and cultural spaces, such as museums or built heritage assets, through community-led efforts?
- 2) What role do heritage professionals and practitioners in Gyumri think museums and heritage/cultural spaces should have in expanding access to dance heritage education?

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<sup>98</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 24.

- 3) What areas of growth are there in both the museum's exhibition content and its programming for dance heritage education, practice, and community transmission? What are the current challenges to this expansion?

The addition of the word 'heritage' as a modifier in addition to 'cultural spaces' was due to re-engaging with the city of Gyumri and the reality that the entire urban core is a historic landscape. Many of the open places for organic dance heritage practice are located within the historic buildings that comprise the majority of structures in the city's urban centre. The second question was added as a result of spending time with the community and realising that perhaps the most underlying and simple question I had neglected to foresee. Once back in Gyumri, I was reminded how foreign the concept of museums and heritage spaces playing a role in dance heritage education was to many people. The best place to begin any discussion of the interplay between the two would be to simply assess what people's existing beliefs were around their connection and what role should be played by these spaces. The original questions 2-4 were condensed into one more concise question as question 3, while also addressing the challenges to this growth, which was a constant theme in interviews when discussing this topic.

### **3.2 Research Paradigm**

I will be conducting a basic qualitative study with an ethnographic approach. Due to the grounding of my inquiry in understanding Armenian dance heritage education within specific contexts in Armenian society using the lens of culture, my study thus has an ethnographic approach.<sup>99</sup> Based on my guiding research foci and questions, I determined that the interpretivist and constructivist paradigms best fit both the kinds of questions I was asking and the common paradigms used in ethnographic research, as they 'form the two sides of the same coin'<sup>100</sup> and are often used interchangeably. Due to this reality, my discussion of how the paradigms fit my research and its interpretation will combine the two.

The interpretivist paradigm was chosen due to my research's focus on understanding the lived experiences, practices and perspectives surrounding Armenian ethnographic dance education of Gyumri's population. My research questions, being grounded in work with people and organisations which operate less in formal policy and target objectives, lended themselves best to relying on an interpretation of the meaning and realities that the community reveals through the research process. The grassroots nature of the ethnographic dance revival movement also contributes to knowledge, attitudes, and information about

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<sup>99</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 19–20.

<sup>100</sup> Van der Walt, 'Interpretivism-Constructivism as a Research Method in the Humanities and Social Sciences—More to It Than Meets the Eye', 59.

it being conveyed primarily through social means rather than through institutional and formalised structures that might lend themselves to less people-centric paradigms. This means that viewpoints surrounding dance heritage education and its presence in the museum/heritage space are less codified and more pluralistic, and the constructivist paradigm allows for this ‘complexity of views’ instead of strict categorisation.<sup>101</sup>

Further benefits of the constructivist paradigm are the ability to analyse how meaning is constructed historically, socially, and culturally, recognising that the process of meaning-making never occurs in vacuum, but is always influenced by a web of factors over time.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, what can be known about this movement of dance heritage education and its potential expansion into other spaces is formed through engagement with the community at hand. Since I function both as a researcher and a practitioner of Armenian ethnographic dance, this paradigm allows for subjective meaning-making and acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge between me and research participants, rather than viewing the conclusions of the study as objective information that was ‘found’.<sup>103</sup>

The design of my qualitative research is ethnographic in nature, as this is the predominant method used in cultural heritage studies and best suited for examining cultural and meaning-making processes.<sup>104</sup> The primary task in ethnographic research is ‘...to investigate some aspects of the lives of people, what they do, how they view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves’ through an ‘exploratory’ orientation.<sup>105</sup> When these principles are placed in the context of my research aims, the ethnographic character of the study becomes clear. Characteristic of ethnographic research, this study examines dance heritage education in the lives of people in Gyumri, how dance practice and transmission are currently approached, how they view the dance heritage movement, what value they place on dance heritage education, how they view other actors in the heritage community, and how they view their own role or connection to dance heritage education. My research questions all have the potential to touch on each aspect of this to some degree.

Various theoretical frameworks are relevant to the areas of inquiry of my study. One of the most fundamental is intangible cultural heritage theory, as discussed in the Literature Review. Very closely linked to intangible cultural heritage theory is cultural transmission theory, which is more broad, and can apply to any kind of information that is transferred from an origin to a destination, varying in both

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<sup>101</sup> Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 28.

<sup>102</sup> *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 28.

<sup>103</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Gray, *Research Practice for Cultural Studies*, 18–21.

<sup>105</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 20.

method and results.<sup>106</sup> Put more concretely, it is ‘...the process of acquisition of behaviors, attitudes, or technologies through imprinting, conditioning, imitation, active teaching and learning, or combinations of these.’ The nature of the relationship between the transmitter and transmittee can be further classified as vertical (generational and familial), horizontal (peer-to-peer), and oblique (generational and non-familial/systemic).<sup>107</sup> ICH education has happened most naturally for generations as a form of cultural transmission through all three of the aforementioned relationship categories. Analysing the ways that museum and heritage spaces in Gyumri currently foster the three types of cultural transmission can allow us to better understand further educational potentials in these spaces.

As outlined, this study specifically focuses on ethnographic dance and does not attempt to discuss all elements of ICH in Gyumri. The research questions of this study thus focus on one specific aspect of safeguarding—non-formal education and transmission as expressed through an ethnographic dance revitalisation movement. Clearly, all of the theoretical frameworks mentioned throughout the previous sections intersect with one another in various ways and, in some cases, are different ways of interpreting or seeing similar phenomena. Ethnographic dance heritage is a form of intangible cultural heritage, or living heritage, and cultural transmission theory provides an additional lens through which to analyse the educative processes of transmission. The following section on participant group selection will touch on how community theory can be applicable in determining relevant communities for participation.

### ***3.3 Participant Group***

In my study, two primary participant groups arise from the two interconnecting spheres of my focus—cultural heritage practitioners and museums. As a result, I concentrated my interviews on individuals affiliated with Hrayrk Traditional Dance Group and employees of the Gyumri Museum of National Architecture and Urban Life. Though the second largest city in Armenia, Gyumri has a population of roughly 112,301 people as of 2022.<sup>108</sup> Social bonds in the city are strong and many people know each other very well, contributing to a close-knit urban community. Within the cultural sector, these circles of influence are even smaller, creating significant social overlap between all of the various spheres. And from among these, only a relatively small network of museums, individuals/families, NGOs, and academic institutions touch on intangible cultural heritage practice, safeguarding, and transmission in their work.<sup>109</sup> It should also be noted that most people who live in Gyumri are born and raised there or in

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<sup>106</sup> Eerkens et al., ‘Cultural Transmission Theory and Hunter-Gatherer Archaeology’, 1128.

<sup>107</sup> Cavalli-Sforza et al., ‘Theory and Observation in Cultural Transmission’, 19–20.

<sup>108</sup> ‘The Main Results of RA Census 2022 / Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia’.

<sup>109</sup> “‘The Tradition of Blacksmithing in Gyumri’ Nomination File’, 6, 11–12.

villages on its outskirts, and that it receives very few internal migrants from other parts of Armenia.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, the need to seek out participants who are specifically representative of ‘locals’ or ‘natives’ to Gyumri is irrelevant, as nearly all inhabitants are native to the city.

When working on questions of intangible cultural heritage practice, transmission, and safeguarding, communities have increasingly become privileged as the central focus for research and implementation. Prior to the ICHC, international cultural heritage policy, including that of UNESCO, failed to prioritise community initiatives and partnerships in ICH management. With the ICHC, communities shifted from simply being ‘subjects of research’ to partners alongside researchers and policymakers.<sup>111</sup> The Convention is clear that communities play an ‘important role’—so much so that the need for communities to recognise the elements is included in the definition of ICH. Its transmission and very existence are grounded in its ‘constant...recreat[ion] by communities and groups’,<sup>112</sup> a radical reframing from previous policies which had often led to ICH being treated as disembodied cultural elements. Though communities may have been doing this kind of work for years without classifying it as such, now they had the opportunity to take centre stage in governmental and academic circles as the ultimate authorities and leaders for their own heritage.<sup>113</sup> With the dissemination of the concept of ‘living heritage’ from the ICHC, another way of viewing ICH, these heritage elements became animated by the individuals and communities who embody them as part of their way of life.<sup>114</sup> For this reason, any research regarding dance heritage practice in Gyumri and its intersection with museums and heritage spaces should primarily consult the city’s community of dance practitioners and culture workers.

As mentioned in the Introduction, what is widely considered to be ‘traditional dance’ in Armenia is typically divided between *bemakan par* and *azgagrakan par*, and this dissertation and its research focus on the latter. Therefore, I did not seek to include *bemakan par* dance groups or practitioners in my participant group. Excluding *bemakan par* dance groups, there is only one dance group in Gyumri that practices *azgagrakan par*, which is the Hrayrk Traditional Dance Group. Nearly all *azgagrakan par* practice within Gyumri has some genesis in individuals affiliated with this particular group, as my personal experience living there and interview data show. They were thus the most natural participant group for me to choose from the dance practitioner community.

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<sup>110</sup> *Migration Profile of the Republic of Armenia in 2022*.

<sup>111</sup> Blake, ‘Further Reflections on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage’, 17–18.

<sup>112</sup> UNESCO, *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 4–5.

<sup>113</sup> Blake, ‘Chapter 3: UNESCO’s 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage’, 45–47.

<sup>114</sup> Court and Wijesuriya, *People-Centred Approaches to the Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Living Heritage*, 3–5.

Hrayrk Traditional Dance Group was founded in 2016 and contains a few dozen individuals who have joined the group officially as ‘members’. They hold free dance classes for the public twice a week which can range in attendance from twenty to fifty people. Dancers come from different backgrounds, occupations and districts of the city. Though a small portion of the city’s overall population, in Armenian culture, where family ties and social networks are quite extensive, its members have connections to many people throughout the wider community. It meets the definition of a ‘heritage community’ as their ‘value [for] specific aspects of cultural heritage’ drives them to engage in transmission to ‘future generations.’<sup>115</sup> In fact, nearly every attendee of their dance classes, member of the dance group, or participant at their public outdoor dance events, is under the age of 40. The majority of them are under the age of 30. The group is completely open to people of all ages and encourages their participation, but due to a variety of cultural factors, participants are mostly below middle age.

Beyond its role as a heritage community, Hrayrk can be viewed through the lenses of heritage and education theory as both an ‘imagined community’ and a ‘community of practice.’ The community is imagined in that it ‘invokes identity connections across time and space,’ in this case, a sense of ethnic identity as Armenians and connection to the different ancestral geographic communities where these dances were practised.<sup>116</sup> It also functions as a community of practice due to its commitment to the endeavour of reviving the practice of Armenian heritage dances (its domain), through expanding opportunities for people to learn these dances (practice) in a social learning environment (community).<sup>117</sup> As the dance group can be viewed as a distinct community through various theoretical lenses, centring their voices, experiences, opinions, and expertise in my research of dance heritage transmission in Gyumri was foundational.

The second participant group I chose is the employees of the Gyumri Museum of National Architecture and Urban Life (Dzitoghtsyan Museum). Gyumri has over ten museums that range from house museums surrounding local famous cultural figures to history and art museums.<sup>118</sup> The only museum whose exhibitions and mission focus on the intangible cultural heritage of Gyumri is the Dzitoghtsyan Museum, as it exhibits the heritage crafts of Gyumri alongside exhibitions about local customs, traditional instruments, traditional dress, etc.<sup>119</sup> Other museums in Gyumri with a historical focus are more object-centric and take a traditional timeline-history approach to curation, rather than

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<sup>115</sup> *Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, 2.

<sup>116</sup> Moenandar et al., “‘By the Community, for the Community’: Boundary Narratives, Boundary Work, and Intangible Cultural Heritage”, 38.

<sup>117</sup> Mercieca, ‘What Is a Community of Practice?’, 9–12.

<sup>118</sup> I am referring here to my own experience and personally counting, as online there is no consensus on exactly how many museums there are in the city.

<sup>119</sup> ՀՐԱՊԱՐԱԿ, ‘Գյումրու Բաղաբային Կոլորիտը, Դիմագիծն Ու Կենցաղը Ներկայացնող Թանգարանը Տոնում Է 40-ամյակը’.

telling the story of the city's people and culture, as the Dzitoghtsyan Museum does. As my research questions focused specifically on how museums could be involved in expanding dance heritage education in Gyumri, this museum was the leading choice for inclusion in my research. Additionally, I knew that they had increased collaboration events with Hrayrk in recent years and wanted to explore how this collaboration between dance practitioners and the museum could be expanded. The museum has an immense outdoor yard as part of the former traditional house complex that it resides in, and even inside has cavernous rooms useful for hosting a variety of events. As Gyumri locals who do not regularly participate in heritage dances, the museum staff can be considered as part of the much broader "city community" and representative of attitudes beyond the heritage practitioner community. It should be noted that all of the museum's employees (besides maintenance staff) are women, however, this is the case at nearly all museums in Armenia and is simply a reality of the sector there. Since men are a small minority in the museum sector in Gyumri, this participant group consisting entirely of women can still be considered representative of professional opinion in the sector.

From within the two groups, participants were chosen on a voluntary basis. This method was chosen based on guidance provided by the European Commission and the American Anthropological Association that a key principle of informed consent in ethnographic research is voluntary participation,<sup>120</sup> such that participants are '...able to choose "freely" to consent to participate in research.'<sup>121</sup> From Hrayrk Traditional Dance Group, anyone attending the class during the three weeks I was present had the opportunity to express their interest in being interviewed. Multiple announcements were made during class regarding my research, information letters available, and the open call for anyone who attends to have an opportunity to be interviewed. Everyone who expressed interest and was able to find time in their schedule to meet with me was included in the participant group. This resulted in 18 interview participants from the group, some who were formal 'members,' some who had attended the classes fairly regularly for years, and others who were relatively new to the classes and to ethnographic dance. At the museum, I explained my work to the staff and anyone who felt comfortable with the interview and who had some opinion on the topic was interviewed. The museum staff is comprised of roughly 18 women, mostly in the 20-45 year old age demographic, and out of this group, 4 were willing to be interviewed. Appendix C contains a breakdown of each participant number and which participant group they came from. These interviews ranged from five minutes to one hour in length, depending on each participant's comfort with answering questions, knowledge on the subject, ability to stay on topic in their response, and topics they raised for discussion.

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<sup>120</sup> 'AAA Statement on Ethnography and Institutional Review Boards'.

<sup>121</sup> Iphofen, 'Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology', 30.

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

Due to the lack of published information on intangible cultural heritage policy in Armenia, especially within museums, and the absence of internal policy documents at the Dzitoghtsyan Museum regarding its approach to involving practitioners in intangible cultural heritage education, a literature-based study was not possible to answer my research questions. The chosen methodology was thus an empirical study, specifically a basic qualitative study with an ethnographic approach. This means incorporating the key elements of ethnographic fieldwork in how I gather data: immersion in the community of study, co-construction of meaning with participants, representation of participants' worldviews, and natural experience of the community in question, in contrast to artificially constructed situations.<sup>122</sup>

The primary suggested method of data collection for this type of study is conducting semi-structured interviews, as noted by Creswell and Poth,<sup>123</sup> LeCompte and Schensul,<sup>124</sup> and Fetterman,<sup>125</sup> among others. For studies where educational processes are in focus, investigating the 'experience of the individual people, the "others" who make up the organization or carry out the process' provides the best opportunity to assess the entire educational project and the meaning participants create through it.<sup>126</sup> Choosing a semi-structured interview versus a more structured approach allows for the co-production of 'meanings and understandings' in the interview between the participant and researcher, adjusting the discussion according to this production, while still focusing the interview on topics relevant to the research questions.<sup>127</sup>

Another way of describing the kind of interview chosen for this study is a 'responsive interview,' characterised by an acknowledgement of the researcher and participant's humanity and need for reflexivity, discussions which are profound rather than expansive, and an adaptable research design. A key principle is that the interview is an exchange, and as such, the researcher should regularly analyse the interview questions and approach, and modify them based on participant responses to gain the desired depth and topic coverage in interviews.<sup>128</sup> My existing knowledge of both the museum and dance group from my prior involvement helped me in eliminating the need for more general questions at first to help me familiarise myself with the situational context. However, the initial set of interview questions still

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<sup>122</sup> Cohen et al., *Research Methods in Education*, 292–93.

<sup>123</sup> Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 123.

<sup>124</sup> LeCompte and Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, 1:150.

<sup>125</sup> Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*, 17:51.

<sup>126</sup> Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 22–24.

<sup>127</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 110–14.

<sup>128</sup> Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 30–37.

required redesigning and honing the foci based on the knowledge and themes which emerged from the discussions.<sup>129</sup> Thus, my initial set of questions functioned as an ‘interview guide,’ a type of ‘framework within which the interviewer [can] develop questions, sequence those questions, and make decisions about which information to pursue in greater depth.’<sup>130</sup>

Research questions were developed according to the common categories of semi-structured interview questions: survey, specific, and open/closed-ended. Survey questions are designed to help ‘map the cultural terrain’ and are placed early in the question order to lay the foundation for the more exacting questions to come. I incorporated questions about the situational background of the participant and a broad question about the relationship with Armenian traditional dance, providing an overview of the participant’s unique cultural positioning both within the city and the dance heritage community. Following this are specific questions, which can be used to narrow in on previously mentioned concepts and expand understanding of chosen facets.

To gain an understanding of current dance heritage education efforts and what opinions existed regarding museum involvement, I created a series of attribute and open-ended questions which enabled participant interpretation and valuable information surrounding perceptions, both of the interviewer and their assumptions about those of others.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, the questions’ thematic typologies were chosen based on the six categories established by Patton and their relevance for answering the research questions. For this study, the most relevant were background/demographic, opinion and values, and experience and behavior type questions, allowing me to gain insight into the how experience and background informed the perspectives of heritage practitioners and professionals.<sup>132</sup> The interview guide I initially created to guide interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

After spending time in the field and further reflecting on relevant questions to better answer my research questions, which were beginning to shift slightly, I revised the interview guide to the questions below. This allowed for a more intentional focus on the topics of concern based on fresh interaction with the community and re-assessing how they may see their role and voice in issues of museum heritage education. Some questions had probe questions added onto them, allowing for further detail within the same vein as the previous parent question.<sup>133</sup> The last of these is a hypothetical example question and probe, which is useful for opening up discussion and evaluating participants’ interpretation of and

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<sup>129</sup> *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 53–54.

<sup>130</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 439.

<sup>131</sup> Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*, 17:53–56.

<sup>132</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 444–45.

<sup>133</sup> Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 137.

reaction to a practical example of collaboration between the museum and heritage practitioners.<sup>134</sup> The parent question is based on precedent from past events to offer a familiar concept for opening up the scenario, while the probe question is designed to adjust the scenario slightly and see how participants choose to interpret the purpose and value of this kind of imagined situation. The updated interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

Additional questions were asked based on responses, such as asking the participant to expand on a response ‘for clarification, meaning-making, and critical reflection.’ Finally, I gave participants the chance to add any statements or thoughts they would like, offering them the opportunity to re-explore anything they had touched upon previously or touch on something new.<sup>135</sup> It should be noted that all interviews were primarily conducted in Armenian by the researcher and the interviewee, except for one, which was conducted in English due to the interviewee’s high degree of fluency in both languages. This approach allowed interviewees to express their thoughts most freely in their native language, communicating the depth and complexity of their perspectives without fluency limitations. Some participants spoke English to a degree, but indicated they felt most comfortable in Armenian when provided the opportunity to give the interview in that language. Interviews were audio recorded, at which point they were then translated into English during the transcription process by translators.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Due to the method of data collection being qualitative with semi-structured interviews, I chose one of the most recommended data analysis methods for this kind of data: thematic analysis. As Patton,<sup>136</sup> LeCompte and Schensul,<sup>137</sup> Seidman,<sup>138</sup> Galletta,<sup>139</sup> Rubin and Rubin,<sup>140</sup> Creswell and Poth,<sup>141</sup> and Mason<sup>142</sup> all concur, thematic analysis is one of the best methods for analysing qualitative data, especially interviews, for its ability to help the researcher systematically recognise patterns and themes emerging from the data. This then allows for the researcher to apply various theoretical frameworks (deductive analysis) to develop new interpretations, theories, perspectives, and ultimately, suggest answers to the

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<sup>134</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 161.

<sup>135</sup> Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*, 34, 53–54.

<sup>136</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*.

<sup>137</sup> LeCompte and Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, vol. 1.

<sup>138</sup> Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*.

<sup>139</sup> Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*.

<sup>140</sup> Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*.

<sup>141</sup> Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*.

<sup>142</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*.

proposed research questions (inductive analysis).<sup>143</sup> Nowell et al. describes thematic analysis as a ‘method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set,’ particularly useful for its flexibility to apply to many kinds of data and ease of use for those new to empirical research. The typical process involves familiarising oneself with the data, creating codes, finding themes, then reviewing, defining, and naming them, and then writing a final report analysing and interpreting the themes according to the aims of the research questions.<sup>144</sup>

Other data analysis methods relevant to qualitative research were considered, such as discourse, narrative, and grounded theory analyses. Narrative analysis focuses on the unique way each participant tells stories, honing in on how language shapes the meaning and form that the story takes, and why decisions in how to construct and frame the story were made. While this is a fascinating way to approach interview data analysis, it requires concentrating more on individual stories and experiences and analysing them as whole units, rather than on finding patterns and commonalities across all of the interviews. Additionally, this method is best applied when the researcher is highly familiar with the language spoken and the nuances associated with certain word choices and phrasal constructions. Due to not being a native or fluent speaker of Armenian and conducting my data analysis on English transcriptions while referring back to the Armenian language recordings, it did not make sense to choose a method so dependent on intimate familiarity with the language.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, discourse analysis also relies heavily on fluency in the language of participants, as it is concerned with ‘language practice’; that is, how specific uses of language within a social world create meaning. Consequently, this method of analysis was also not a good choice for this study. Lastly, I considered grounded theory analysis, which involves developing a coherent theory or hypothesis as the answer to the research questions. This method can be more complex and usually is better for working with larger datasets.<sup>146</sup> These challenges, along with the fact that creating a theory did not seem to provide the best kind of answer to my research questions, led me to determine that this approach was also not a fit.

Notably, the process of sorting through data to find themes and develop codes can be performed either by hand or using a myriad of computer software programmes. These tools can help make the process of organising and making sense of large amounts of raw data from interview transcripts easier and more streamlined. However, these programmes are not a substitute for the ‘cognitive process’ that is still required of the researcher in analysing, making connections, and then interpreting what emerges.<sup>147</sup> All of

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<sup>143</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 542–43.

<sup>144</sup> Nowell et al., ‘Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria’, 2, 4.

<sup>145</sup> Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, 25–27.

<sup>146</sup> Braun and Clarke, ‘Can I Use TA? Should I Use TA? Should I Not Use TA? Comparing Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Other Pattern-based Qualitative Analytic Approaches’, 42–44.

<sup>147</sup> LeCompte and Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, 1:166.

these things must still be done by the researcher, regardless of how helpful the software might be for the organisational process.<sup>148</sup> For this reason, I determined that using computer software may be more time-consuming than it is worth, as significant portions of the data analysis process would still be performed by me. In the Findings section, I will discuss which themes I identified from my data.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

With any empirical study, ethical considerations must remain a priority throughout all phases of the research process. There are many aspects of ethical concern to assess for and monitor, but nearly all of these issues can be boiled down to three guiding principles of ethical research practice: ‘respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice.’<sup>149</sup> Ethnographic considerations stem from a desire to uphold these principles despite the varying degrees of challenge that different research designs may present.

One of the fundamental social theory concepts which informs my study and its ethical implications is insider/outsider theory (also known as emic/etic theory), informing how the researcher understands their relationship to the participants, community, and social world they are immersed in for the study. An ‘insider’ is someone ‘with an already established role and relationships in the study site,’ while an outsider is ‘initially unknown or unfamiliar to the group and not from the study site’.<sup>150</sup> These traditional views of the relationship between researcher and participant community have been challenged over time, recognising the dangers of viewing the research environment as one that operates in strict duality. In reality, the field is a place in which ‘neither the researcher nor the subjects of analysis are fixed, stable and coherent, but constantly shifting, incomplete, fragmented and contradictory in relation to both collective and personal existence’.<sup>151</sup>

This perspective is particularly helpful when assessing the relationship I have with my research communities and the field environment. My time living in Gyumri for eleven months, and visiting periodically throughout in the two years since I left, have afforded me more of an insider perspective than a researcher who might come to the field relatively unknown. My position as an official ‘member’ of the Hrayrk Traditional Dance Group, who was granted access to their community after months of learning from practitioners and demonstrating what I had learned, gives me some degree of insider status.

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<sup>148</sup> Nowell et al., ‘Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria’, 7.

<sup>149</sup> Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 58.

<sup>150</sup> LeCompte and Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, 1:23–25.

<sup>151</sup> McNess et al., “‘Ethnographic Dazzle’ and the Construction of the “Other”: Revisiting Dimensions of Insider and Outsider Research for International and Comparative Education’, 298.

Similarly, my time volunteering with the Dzitoghtsyan Museum for five months in 2023 also gave me a degree of insider status compared to someone approaching the museum who did not already have some kind of relationship with most of the employees. Lastly, my identity as an ethnic Armenian provided me a kind of insider status within such an ethnically homogeneous community, particularly when dealing with heritage and cultural material, that many researchers would not have had access to.

However, this can only be seen as a *degree* of insider status, as in a city where most people have lived their whole lives in the city, whose families' roots in the city go back multiple generations, it is not possible for any outsider to achieve that level of insider perspective and status. Having a long-term relationship with the community does not negate the privilege that the researcher may have relative to the participant community, and it does not change the fact that the researcher may perceive how much the community trusts them differently than individuals in the community do.<sup>152</sup> Thus, the relationship between me and my community of study is nuanced and dynamic. After spending a few weeks back in the community again, bonds that were made more distant from absence have been restrengthened and relationships take on new dynamics.

One of the benefits of existing insider status is that the ethical peril of participants feeling that they have been objectified into 'objects of study' for an academic from outside is less likely. Participants tend to be more comfortable with someone who they already consider as somewhere within the concentric circles of the accepted community.<sup>153</sup> Though, this kind of status can have an ethical drawback, as this level of familiarity with participant communities may make the researcher more partial to certain opinions, people, etc more than someone who has no contextual knowledge. As discussed in the section regarding the Participant Group, my choice of these two communities was based on their being the best fit for answering my research questions and not because they were the most preferred groups out of the city. In data collection and analysis, I have done my best to apply the qualities of 'rigorous thinking' to my research, critically reflecting on my own assumptions and biases, and seeking to detach from preconceived beliefs in pursuit of what the data actually reveals, even if it contradicts previous conclusions or notions I had held.<sup>154</sup>

Power dynamics are crucial to ethical concerns in a research study, as the researcher must be aware of how their position in different situations may pose an unequal power dynamic with the community, and seek to make this as equitable as possible. My relationship with these communities was one of a diasporan volunteer who did not speak Armenian and struggled to learn behavioral and societal

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<sup>152</sup> LeCompte and Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, 1:23–25.

<sup>153</sup> Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 59–64.

<sup>154</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 702.

norms, as well as the dynamics and practices of belonging in both of those communities. My position was primarily one without much power. Over time, that relationship shifted as I learned more of the language and how to perform belonging in these settings. In Hrayrk, the group had the power to choose if I had mastered dance cultural heritage enough to be accepted in as a member. Eventually, my relationship with both of these groups as I worked or practiced heritage alongside them, led to more of a peer relationship and distribution of power. This dynamic helped when I came to research, as my quasi-peer status did not put me in a distant, elevated position as ‘academic researcher,’ instead allowing for me to emphasise how this research can help us (referring to myself as part of the group) understand more about Armenain dance heritage education and how to expand it.<sup>155</sup>

Central to the guiding principles of research ethics and equitable power dynamics are notions of informed consent, free participation without coercion, and privacy. My research design was approved by a research ethics committee, which required ensuring that I was clear about my study purpose with everyone offered to participate. I provided information letters to all invited to the study and during the data collection process, which participants could keep to ensure they were aware of the study’s aims and what the terms of their participation were. Participants were informed by leaders of their respective groups that they were free to participate in this study if they so desired, and this was stressed by myself in all discussions with prospective participants. The comfort of the participant and their personal interest in sharing their opinions were emphasised, placing the power in the hands of the community to determine if they wanted to contribute their perspectives or not. The scheduling of interviews was accommodated to the schedule and availability of the participants, and I made every effort to meet each person when and where was most convenient for them.<sup>156</sup>

Participants were provided with the ability to consent or decide not to participate when signing consent forms, which also described the privacy of their identity and data collected. All data was stored in a secure folder within the University of Malta Google Workspace, only accessible with my password for my account and two-factor authentication, or to specific translators whom the folder was shared with. Translators were individuals outside of the community who would not recognise participant voices and signed confidentiality agreements. Participants were informed that their identity would not be revealed besides organisational leaders, such as the dance group leader and museum director, whose identities may be inferred when referring to their positions. They agreed to this condition as part of the research framework. Lastly, questions asked did not delve into personal/private concerns that may lead the

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<sup>155</sup> Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 93.

<sup>156</sup> Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 59–64.

participant to disclosing information that could be potentially sensitive or emotionally distressing for the participant.<sup>157</sup>

### 3.7 Limitations

Of course, any research study would be remiss to not acknowledge its limitations and how this will affect the findings of the research. As previously discussed, my status as a mix between outsider and insider means that participants may adjust their responses, how they behave in my presence, how they interact with me, etc., in a manner that may not be present with those from Gyumri.<sup>158</sup> Their perception of me will always have some degree of ‘othering’ compared to a native Gyumretsi. In this study, there are three main kinds of limitations: participant groups and time frame, literature availability, and fluency.

Due to the scope of this dissertation and the specificity required in order to ensure feasibility of a study during the allotted time frame, the amount of participants, sources of participants, and time spent in the field were all shorter than more detailed ethnographic studies typically are.<sup>159</sup> To comply with ethics committee regulations, it was not possible to flexibly add many new participant groups within the cultural heritage education sector as new connections were made in the field. As organisational permissions needed to be obtained in advance, as well as the time frame of less than two weeks for data collection to occur, I did not have the extended time necessary to meet and obtain permissions to work with other groups more tangentially involved in the field.

Additionally, the perception of random members of the public was not possible under the framework of this ethics procedure, which limited the understanding of public opinion to what practitioners and heritage professionals could tell us about what they observe and perceive from others. Lastly, many teenagers and children attend Hrayrk Traditional Dance Group classes and gatherings, some of whom are official members. The approval process with the ethics committee for permission to work with a sensitive group such as individuals under eighteen years of age is quite lengthy and would take more time than was available to me in the scope of this dissertation. This meant that their perspectives were not reflected in the study which was a challenge, as children are some of the primary inheritors and recipients of cultural heritage transmission and educational efforts.

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<sup>157</sup> *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 59–64.

<sup>158</sup> LeCompte and Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, 1:23–25.

<sup>159</sup> Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*, 17:10.

Another limitation was the lack of availability of published literature surrounding ICH education and museums in the Armenian context. Though more discussions of this are happening within organisations such as ICOM Armenia and in the policies of museums in Armenia, formal discussions in literature or online publications/forums are largely nonexistent. This is exacerbated by the fact that the heritage sector as a concept in Armenia is poorly developed at a societal level and many institutions are largely still structured similarly to the Soviet frameworks. This impacts the research in that primary data must primarily be sourced from interviews and experience, and literature consulted for review was from other cultural contexts, not the one at hand. Also, the lack of public understanding of the sector due to its poor development also influences how participants understand the purpose of the study, questions they are asked, and the preconceived notions they may have in their mind of what a museum can be and what education can look like.

Finally, my own lack of fluency in the language affects the entire research process, as I did not use an interpreter during interviews. Despite being at a B2 level, this cannot be a substitute for native or fluent proficiency in the language. This limited how well I could redirect the conversation during an interview, rephrase or further explain a question if not properly understood from the provided text, understand the full context of all I experienced while interacting with the communities, and perform data analysis. Relying on translations of the interview audio recordings for data analysis, with the assistance of the original audio when necessary, affects the interpretations and conclusions that are drawn in some way. Ideally, further research in this field would be conducted in Armenian to gain the fullest understanding of the questions at hand. Considering the lack of research conducted using these theoretical frameworks and approaches in Armenia and especially in Gyumri, research with limitations may be considered an improvement over no research at all.

## 4. Findings

As mentioned in the previous section, my chosen data analysis method is thematic analysis. I went through my interview transcripts (which had been translated into English) and assigned sections of the interviews to relevant concept codes. Then, I analysed the common threads across various codes while considering my research questions to create themes that could be analysed to draw new conclusions and suggest answers to my questions. The themes I identified were consistent collaboration, community identity, contextual foundations, invitation versus initiative, and youth contagion. The following section is structured according to my three research questions and the themes that provided insight into what the data revealed about the subject of inquiry for each respective question. Although, all themes will have some degree of relevance to each research question and my findings.

### **1) How can dance heritage transmission expand beyond formal educational settings to heritage and cultural spaces, such as museums or built heritage assets, through community-led efforts?**

#### ***4.1 Community-Led Events of Practice***

For this research question, community identity, and youth contagion emerged as key to current and imagined-future efforts to bring ICH dance heritage transmission to new heritage/cultural spaces and, in particular, museums. Nearly all participants mentioned first encountering some form of Armenian traditional dance (regardless of style) in formal educational situations such as at school or through youth centres and organisations. This approach to interacting with dance ICH did not appeal to many of them and most people credit Hrayrk, and its ‘events of practice’ approach, in their adolescent years as the pivotal reason for igniting a passion for *azgagrakan par* within them.

Participants often spoke of how much had changed in the ten years since the founding of Hrayrk Traditional Dance Group and the beginning of the *azgagrakan* movement in Gyumri, particularly the group’s founding members (Participants 6,<sup>160</sup> 7,<sup>161</sup> 8,<sup>162</sup> 9,<sup>163</sup> 12,<sup>164</sup> 14,<sup>165</sup> and 15<sup>166</sup>), who experienced all of this for themselves. At that time, the movement first began at the local public university and quickly caught on with the youth, with groups reaching up to around 70 people, according to Participant 7’s

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<sup>160</sup> Participant 6, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 27 June 2025.

<sup>161</sup> Participant 7, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

<sup>162</sup> Participant 8, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

<sup>163</sup> Participant 9, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

<sup>164</sup> Participant 12, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 01 July 2025.

<sup>165</sup> Participant 14, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 01 July 2025.

<sup>166</sup> Participant 15, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 02 July 2025.

recollection. As I am phrasing it, this element of a ‘youth contagion’ was present from the beginning of the movement in Gyumri. The first members of Hrayrk were young people of university age, which greatly affected the future of *azgagrakan par* practice and transmission in the city. Participant 7 remarks that the events of practice taking place at the university ‘*became friendship, a circle of friends, and little by little that feeling matured in me, that national<sup>167</sup> dance for me is not an activity or pastime but already an ideology.*’ They speak of how, through this newfound sense of community and the practice of dance ICH together, a new identity is formed within from this cultural experience that ‘*settles in a person*’.<sup>168</sup>

This sense of community identity, both as a collective but also in each individual identifying as part of this community as a result of dance practice over time, was seen as integral to the reason for ICH dance practice and the key to growing participation in transmission activities. By Participant 2’s estimation, ‘*The more often we hold dance lessons and dance with passion, the more others will catch that spark and want to join in.*’<sup>169</sup> Speaking of those who attend dance ICH events of practice initiated by Hrayrk Participant 5 relates:

*Many in the community even know the dances themselves and always look forward to the last Sunday of the month when they can come and join the Hrayrk performance. Even my neighbours and many others ask me when the Hrayrk dance event will take place so they can come and watch or dance. The community really enjoys all of this, and I think having these performances is a great idea, not just for us to do ethnographic dances, but also for everyone, even those who don’t usually dance simply come there and dance.*<sup>170</sup>

Participant 6 elaborates on this concept by saying, ‘*We also have what you might call ‘followers’—people who love national culture and come to all the events and participate. These are our regular attendees, people who love and are interested in national dances and are always present at our dance lessons... Young people and the public look forward to it.*’ Participant 6 also identified this growing community identity as vital to the continuous recreation of dance ICH, thus expanding dance heritage transmission.

*‘We consider it a success if at each holiday, event, or dance lesson, 1 or 2 people join our list of dancers, so to speak, because that means 1 or 2 more people have learned about national dance,*

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<sup>167</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, the word *azgayin*, or national, is frequently used to refer to the ethnographic or traditional culture of a people group.

<sup>168</sup> Participant 7, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

<sup>169</sup> Participant 2, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 26 June 2025.

<sup>170</sup> Participant 5, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 27 June 2025.

*learned how to perform it, and can carry the idea forward. We hope they'll help others, too, and spread it further. In other words, we plant the seed, then we grow it together and turn it into something the people can use, something that we have, that we've always had, and that we should always preserve.*<sup>171</sup>

This participant conceives of dance ICH practice as nurtured by the collective effort of a community and capable of expanding to others through its relevance as an everyday practice inherent to the identity and cultural life of the community. Put another way, Participant 7 emphasises *'...but we don't leave dance on the stage, we bring it down to the community, because from where it came and reached, it should be taken back to the same place, the community, because dance was originally a ritual.'*<sup>172</sup>

Participant 16 touches on the relevance of ICH dance practice as a part of the everyday cultural life of people when they say, *'National dances should be taught in all public spaces, even if only two people are interested—it's worth it. It doesn't matter which region you're from; if you want to learn, we are ready to teach. Where there's willingness to learn, a teacher will always be found.'*<sup>173</sup>

This flexible approach in favor of dance heritage education anywhere and everywhere is very compatible with the events of practice model, as one grounded in the use of public space for transmission.<sup>174</sup> One participant (17) even directly suggested an event of practice (without using the term): *'Besides [holiday event collaborations], I think museums can also support in other ways, like by providing space. For example, "You can use our courtyard for dance instruction." If they announce, for instance, that Hrayrk and the Avetik Isahakyan House Museum are cooperating and holding dance instruction in the yard, people would be excited and would come.'*<sup>175</sup> It is precisely this concept of providing a space for practitioners, for all three forms of vertical, horizontal, and oblique forms of cultural transmission,<sup>176</sup> that can be expanded upon. Existing events as part of holiday ICH celebrations also have a place within safeguarding practice, but to provide an open space for practitioners to 'occupy' with dance goes a step further in enhancing support for dance ICH transmission.<sup>177</sup>

As the interviews demonstrate, practitioners in Gyumri already conceive of events of practice as the primary means for expanding informal dance ICH education and see the community as integral to any manifestation of this practice. The existence of this mindset amongst the dance practitioner community, as

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<sup>171</sup> Participant 6, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 27 June 2025.

<sup>172</sup> Participant 7, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

<sup>173</sup> Participant 16, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 02 July 2025.

<sup>174</sup> Erlien and Bakka, 'Museums, Dance, and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage'.

<sup>175</sup> Participant 17, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 02 July 2025.

<sup>176</sup> Cavalli-Sforza et al., 'Theory and Observation in Cultural Transmission', 19–20.

<sup>177</sup> Erlien and Bakka, 'Museums, Dance, and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage', 147.

well as the events of practice which currently take place in monthly events and as part of holiday celebrations, point to the potential for more cultural/heritage spaces to become sites for community practice when and how they see fit. Any place and any moment can become a moment for a dance event, as mentioned by one young participant (5), *‘But it can also happen spontaneously on an ordinary day...Because traditional dance music and its rhythm are so compelling, they naturally draw people in. Even if someone has no idea what it is, once they come closer and see, they’ll immediately want to take part. That’s the power of ethnographic dance and music—it attracts people on its own.’*<sup>178</sup>

This kind of spontaneous practice in new places throughout the city has even more potential considering the ‘youth contagion’ phenomenon taking place. Participant 11, a museum employee, noted, *‘And let me say, it’s not only during events. There have often been times when I was passing by, I live in another part of the city, there is a space there, and young people, ninth to tenth graders, take speakers and dance to national songs. This is very commendable. I have been present at such an event. It was not a large-scale one, but the children had organized a small event.’*<sup>179</sup> Participant 6 comments that young people have a tremendous effect on those around them and their families and that this ability to influence across generations is critical to generating more community identification with heritage and ultimately, increased practice.<sup>180</sup> The founding of Hrayrk itself on the local university campus and its current members today consisting of a number of teenagers attests to the movement's strong ties with the youth. As *azgagrakan par* practice is already so popular amongst them, museums hosting more events of practice for the practitioner community would also bring many young people to them who otherwise don’t choose to regularly visit museums.

## **2) What role do heritage professionals and practitioners in Gyumri think museums and heritage/cultural spaces should have in expanding access to dance heritage education?**

### ***4.2 From Invitation to Belonging***

In my second research question, the conflicting theme of invitation versus initiative provides a useful dichotomy for understanding how museums, or any space that could host an ‘event of practice,’ can frame their role in dance ICH education. Consistent collaboration, another identified theme, was mentioned by practitioners and museum staff alike as something they would like to see more of, but the invitation versus initiative dichotomy can help us understand why this may not be happening.

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<sup>178</sup> Participant 5, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 27 June 2025.

<sup>179</sup> Participant 11, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 03 July 2025.

<sup>180</sup> Participant 6, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 27 June 2025.

Practitioners often used the language of being ‘invited’ when discussing events of practice, particularly when it came to collaborations with specific organisations such as museums. This revealed that practitioners do not currently see themselves as welcome to ‘occupy’ the museum space more frequently, as it exists for providing a platform for these kinds of ICH practice events, but rather that they feel a power dynamic exists where the museum must explicitly invite them for some purpose, usually workshops or holiday events. Participant 7 phrased it, *‘Even if they just provide a space, invite us, or organise an event, that alone would be a big thing, it’s mutually beneficial. One part is that we’ll have another successful dance workshop, and the other is that the museum (or event venue) will have a successful event.’*<sup>181</sup> This reveals Participant 7’s view that this relationship is symbiotic between the two actors, while still placing the power to create the event in the museum’s action.

This participant also mentioned being ‘invited’ by the staff to hold dance workshops for them, but not for visitors. Here, the focus was thus on participatory dance heritage education, but not in a way that was directed by and for the ICH community to practice in the museum space, but rather to more formally teach. They use this language again to describe Hrayrk’s participation in holiday celebrations at the museum. Participant 9 also uses the language of being invited by the museum staff and describes the frequency as ‘occasionally’ and ‘now and then’ for holidays.<sup>182</sup> In speaking about collaboration with cultural organisations located within heritage structures, Participant 10 also refers to dance practitioners being invited to conduct classes. While this is a form of heritage education, it comes as a response to a specific format and structure for the practice, rather than as part of the cultural life already existent in these organisations. This participant suggests that dancing in the museum space when *‘they haven’t planned such an event,’* may be met with displeasure by the museum. At times, invitations have come from cultural centres or businesses that see hosting practitioners in their space as a way to publicise themselves, which this participant notes detracts from the focus on cultural practice and dance education.<sup>183</sup>

Conversely, museum staff mentioned that they would be open to more events with Hrayrk, not only for holiday events, but on a more regular basis. However, It was unclear from their responses how this would come about, as they did not state that they would invite Hrayrk to ‘occupy’ the museum with dance practice more often. Instead, their responses suggested that the initiative for increased collaboration should come from Hrayrk, and the museum would support them once approached. This mindset was observed by one member of Hrayrk, Participant 17, about museum staff, *‘Experience shows that museums*

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<sup>181</sup> Participant 7, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

<sup>182</sup> Participant 9, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

<sup>183</sup> Participant 10, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

*are not that initiative-driven...There must be a special holiday for them to organize something. Unfortunately.*<sup>184</sup>

When referring to existing collaborations and potential work with dance ICH experts for exhibitions, Participant 3 used the language of ‘inviting.’ In discussing increased future collaboration with practitioners, the participant uses more passive and hypothetical language: ‘...it would be a very beautiful program if an agreement is made with Hrayrk’, and ‘It would be a wonderful program if implemented.’<sup>185</sup> In a slightly different vein, Participant 11, a museum employee, repeatedly used the phrasing ‘We organise’ to describe how work with dance heritage practitioners came about both in the past and possible future events. This perspective does not require practitioners to approach the museum first regarding an increase in their presence in the museum space, but it also does not centre the museum as existing for what the community chooses to do within the museum space. The concept of staff as the trained professionals who should create specific content and format for an event is prevalent in this participant’s suggestions of what and how the museum should organise.<sup>186</sup> This reveals that though the museum has an external-facing and educative approach which has shifted from Soviet museum practice, it has yet to transition to viewing its role in ICH education as one of supporter and host rather than director.

All participants recognise that museums, and other heritage/cultural spaces, do and should continue to support dance ICH events and transmission. Participant 9 states, ‘*Collaborations with museums can help us bring people closer to ancient dances and make them modern again. Collaboration with museums is a must and necessity.*’<sup>187</sup> Participant 16 appreciates their role and remarks on how the sector is changing, ‘*In recent years, there’s been a positive trend in Gyumri where cultural centers actively work with groups like Hrayrk to host joint events. This is a commendable and highly effective practice. It’s also great to see cultural institutions helping spread traditional song and dance.*’<sup>188</sup>

However, a closer analysis of how they view this role reveals that practitioners still do not feel that the museum space is theirs for practising their heritage without a specific prior action from the museum. They still view their belonging as mediated through individual inclusions by the museum. The museum reinforces this by also seeing its role as manager and curator of these ICH events, as opposed to a support structure for the ICH community-directed events of practice. Events of practice and opportunities for dance practitioners to occupy the museum may provide the circumstances that allow practitioners to

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<sup>184</sup> Participant 17, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 02 July 2025.

<sup>185</sup> Participant 3, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 03 July 2025.

<sup>186</sup> Participant 11, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 03 July 2025.

<sup>187</sup> Participant 9, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

<sup>188</sup> Participant 16, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 02 July 2025.

access a sense and lived reality of belonging without the museum space that no longer relies on invitation or more formal collaboration proposals.

**3) What areas of growth are there in both the museum’s exhibition content and its programming for dance heritage education, practice, and community transmission? What are the current challenges to this expansion?**

#### *4.3 Contextual Collaborations*

For my final research question, the theme of contextual foundations, or the context surrounding a dance practice’s origins and meaning, was prevalent throughout the responses of heritage practitioners and museum staff. This formed the basis of most of the ideas that both groups had for the ways that the museum could better support dance ICH education, whether through exhibitions or at events of practice. The museum does not have any content in exhibitions on Armenian traditional dance heritage, despite displaying a variety of tangible cultural heritage objects from ritual cultural heritage traditions, many of which are associated and accompany dance practice. From the museum staff, Participant 3 suggested the idea of an exhibition or a lecture, as well as an event of practice with a historical discussion, to provide more background on dances:

*‘...it would be even better if, in addition to presenting the dance movements, the history of that specific dance is also taught, because every dance has its own history. In our museum, we don’t have a specific exhibition on dance art, but if such events are organized, I think the invited dance group or the group leader could present the history of the given dance first, and then start teaching...They can be called classes, periodic classes, which people can attend and learn.’*

When asked about who would provide this historic background, the participant stated that they did not have Armenian dance specialists and that their participation in providing the dance context would be the best way of incorporating this into events.<sup>189</sup>

Participant 11 was in favor of establishing an exhibition section dedicated to dance ICH, but also had ideas for specific exhibition topics such as *‘What costumes are worn when dancing Armenian dances?’*, referring to the Armenian traditional clothes specific to certain regions where Armenians historically lived.<sup>190</sup> Participant 19 mentioned a proposed concept of an exhibition *‘to represent carpet*

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<sup>189</sup> Participant 3, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 03 July 2025.

<sup>190</sup> Participant 11, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 03 July 2025.

*making through dances*, specifically dances which have connections to carpet making, and thus highlighting two ICH practices.<sup>191</sup> Participant 4 was also open to the idea of a dance ICH exhibition, but shared the view of Participant 3: *'It would be much better if experts from certain fields would be involved in this process and we would be able to deliver a more engaging exhibition.'*<sup>192</sup>

In outdoor events of practice held throughout the city, Hrayrk already accompanies all of their dance events with a short speech regarding the dance's contextual origins. Participant 6 states, *'For example, during outdoor dance sessions, we dance and also explain the real meaning of the dance, what it was for, when it was performed, and in which region it originated. These three key pieces of information really change people's perspective.'*<sup>193</sup> Many members of Hrayrk stressed in their interviews the importance of understanding the meaning of dances and being cognizant of this background while engaged in dance heritage practice. For Participant 22, this context makes the concept of generational transmission of heritage real: *'When you dance, and they explain the meaning behind the dances, it feels more real because they're showing you. You trust that this is how it was, that it's been passed down - and that's what's so interesting: whatever has been passed down.'*<sup>194</sup> Participant 9 described various dances which have roots in other forms of culinary or craft ICH practices and how museums can discuss all of these elements when educating on Armenian ICH.<sup>195</sup>

The key areas of growth for the Dzitoghtsyan Museum's dance ICH education work as identified from the interviews are in creating innovative exhibitions presenting the historical and cultural context of specific dance practices, but especially in conjunction with the related non-dance ICH practices that are relevant to that dance. Participants identified this as a way to amplify dance ICH education even when practitioners are not present to dance in the museum. During events of practice, the approach already practiced by Hrayrk of verbally providing the dance's context prior to the practice of the dance, can bridge this gap. Challenges that arose in discussions were the lack of current interactive media in the museum's exhibitions, that could better represent dance ICH if an exhibition were to be created, as well as the lack of specialised knowledge and research in the museum's collection on dance ICH.

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<sup>191</sup> Participant 19, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 03 July 2025.

<sup>192</sup> Participant 4, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 03 July 2025.

<sup>193</sup> Participant 6, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 27 June 2025.

<sup>194</sup> Participant 22, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 06 July 2025.

<sup>195</sup> Participant 9, interview by Christine Abrell, Gyumri, 30 June 2025.

## 5. Conclusion

This study was created out of a desire to understand more about a rapidly growing Armenian ethnographic dance, or *azgagrakan par*, revival movement and how transmission efforts can continue to expand with increased support from the museum and cultural spheres of Gyumri, as a city with a rich legacy of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The research questions examined the potential for increased dance ICH practice and related educational content in museums and heritage cultural spaces, and what can fuel this expansion. Additionally, this study examined the shared values and differences in how museum staff and heritage practitioners understand the museum's role, particularly within the community, and how they are to engage with ICH dance education.

Essential to this study was a theoretical understanding of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) core principles and its recommended heritage management policies. The work of scholars and heritage professionals in the years since the ICHC to further develop the Convention's framework into practical recommendations and widely accepted working understandings of its terms informed the conceptual basis of my study that could be applied to an analysis of the Gyumri context. Museum theory also played a significant part in understanding the shifts in museological paradigms that have allowed ICH safeguarding within the museum space to be a possible reality. In particular, examining the work of Tone Erlien Myrvold, a dance ICH researcher who has studied and written extensively on the role of museums in safeguarding specifically dance ICH practices, provided a fundamental conceptual basis to apply to the Armenian context in understanding the dance ICH transmission efforts currently underway, and those that might be possible in the future. The chosen methodology was a basic qualitative study with an ethnographic approach, grounded in constructivism and interpretivism, using semi-structured interviews to gather data. In order to interpret this data, thematic analysis was applied to the data set.

Upon utilising thematic analysis, I arrived at the following themes: consistent collaboration, community identity, contextual foundations, invitation versus initiative, and youth contagion. These themes assisted in interpreting my interview data into conclusions that helped answer my research questions. As many members of Hrayrk explained in their interviews, dance forms community identity and has created a practitioner community, that goes beyond the Hrayrk class attendees. The concept of events of practice already exists within Hrayrk's dance ICH transmission activities, and expanding consistent practice into museum, cultural, and/or heritage spaces represents yet another way for the community to gather and interact with new participants. The relationship between museums and heritage/cultural spaces with ICH is clear to both museum staff and practitioners. Exactly how this kind of collaboration is to come about is not clear, however, with practitioners feeling that they do not

automatically belong in these spaces and must be invited. Similarly, museum staff reifies this in the language they use when discussing how they interact with practitioners and in placing the onus on the practitioners for more collaborations between the two. Finally, the analysis revealed that both practitioners and museum staff feel that cultural context of dance ICH practices is vital to the practice of this cultural heritage, whether inside or outside the museum. This is an area where exhibitions and museum programming can help provide integral understandings of dance origins and meanings. Museum staff expressed that they don't feel qualified to create this content, and that it would be best if 'dance experts' helped provide the research. Collaboration between practitioners who have studied ethnographic dance research with museum professionals more familiar in curating exhibitions or designing educational programming can provide a means to overcome this current gap in the museum's displays.

Significantly, this research fills a gap in the discourse in the Armenian cultural heritage landscape (not only the sector in Armenia, but also in the Diaspora) surrounding ethnographic dance heritage as a practice and transmission. As my research revealed, practitioners already conceive of these concepts through their own lived experience, but strategic efforts from the cultural and heritage sectors to examine their own role in helping safeguard dance ICH and prioritising the dance practitioner community throughout the process could be improved. Even amongst the *azgagrakan* revival community, it is still fairly uncommon to understand Armenian *azgagrakan par* not just as the dances, objects to learn and acquire through memorisation, but as a living, cultural heritage practice that evolves within practising communities as they determine what value it continues to have for them. The current revival movement, though effective in restoring indigenous ICH practices in contrast with hybrid, balleticised forms from the Soviet occupation, does still have an emphasis on 'mastering' certain dances and relies on a class format of following an instructor as one of its primary means of transmission. This approach can result in practitioners seeing themselves as 'passive keepers' of dances and vocal about the 'correct' way to do a dance, trying to keep it as close to the established ideal as possible.<sup>196</sup> This can lead to another kind of musealisation, where practices become frozen in time by their classification and inventorying.<sup>197</sup>

A greater understanding of the concepts of ICH and its safeguarding could help practitioners shift to transmission approaches and ways of practising that allow for more fluidity, evolution in dance practice within the community, and a less hierarchical dynamic in dance ICH education. I hope that my study can begin to generate reflections and discussions about this amongst ICH practitioners, communities, heritage and museum professionals, and cultural policy makers. Within Gyumri, I hope it can be insightful as to how *azgagrakan par* practitioners presently understand their practice and its relationship with the

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<sup>196</sup> Helmersson, 'The Enthusiasts and the Dance Heritage—about the Revival of Traditional Dances in Sweden', 149.

<sup>197</sup> Gwervevende and Mthombeni, 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage', 400.

museum and heritage sector at this point in history. And, I hope it can generate more continuous collaborations between these practitioners and museums, in a way that hands the community authority and uplifts them.

As mentioned in the Methodology section, my study was limited in a variety of ways, and these limitations are opportunities for where future research could concentrate. Including minors and their perspectives in studies could provide a better understanding of how youth who have grown up under this *azgagrakan* movement conceive of their own relationships to dance heritage practice, and how this differs from previous generations. Research could consider the implications of this paradigm shift in how it may transform dance ICH transmission endeavours as dance practice becomes more central to Armenian social and community life. Additionally, future studies which may attempt to work within the same topical area at a greater depth should ideally be conducted by researchers who are fluent in Armenian. My study also did not take into consideration how funding and access to interactive and multimedia technology affect museums' abilities to realise their goals for more immersive ICH practice experiences and safeguarding within an exhibition. Should future studies hone in more specifically on the potential for ICH practice and safeguarding via exhibitions in Armenia, they might consider assessing the potential alongside the economic and structural factors that might inhibit its actualisation.

Additionally, studies with similar research aims to mine that could focus on the entirety of Armenia would provide a better picture of how *azgagrakan par* practice and museums/cultural spaces interact. Research investigating the Armenian government's ICH cultural policies could evaluate how effective they are, and whether or not *de jure* policy is actually being implemented in the ways it was designed. Inquiry as to how philosophical biases amongst policy makers influence which heritage practitioners are better supported by the government may reveal systemic inequities that are crucial to understanding challenges to ICH transmission. Even turning attention to the Diaspora, where Armenian communities often form sizable minorities in certain cities and regions, research could focus on how museums and cultural spaces in other countries can be open to empowering these minority communities in their practice and work of generational transmission.

Gyumri is a city in which much is rapidly changing, as economic growth and political reforms have sharply accelerated its transformation in recent years compared to prior decades. As a city with a strong cultural ethos, many cultural expressions will continue to flourish there, and new ones will appear. Amongst this rich cultural diversity, the wealth that lies in Armenian ethnographic dance practices could have an even more central role in Armenian community life than it does today, after decades of repression and imposed alteration from Soviet cultural policy. As dance ICH transmission efforts continue to grow and this 'youth contagion' matures into a larger part of social and communal interactions, years of

safeguarding measures may see promising outcomes. Will museums, heritage, and cultural spaces recognise their vital positioning to support their communities and allow them to determine how these spaces are activated for ICH education? Will events of practice become part of the daily rhythm of the urban environment rather than only for holiday celebrations? Advancements in the collaboration between these spaces and practitioners in recent years point towards a promising future in this regard.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guides

The following is the initial interview guide I created:

1. Please choose from the following age groups: 18-25, 25-40, 40-65, 65+
2. In which city were you born/did you grow up, and in which city do you currently live?
3. Tell me about your experiences with or relationship to Armenian dance and dancing.
4. If you have attended any dance gatherings in public in Gyumri, what were your impressions?
5. What did you appreciate about it and what was strange to you?
6. Do you visit museums in Gyumri and if so, which ones and why?

This is the revised interview guide as a result of immersion in the field and a reassessment of how to best answer my research questions:

1. Please choose from the following age groups: 18-25, 25-40, 40-65, 65+
2. In which city were you born/did you grow up, and in which city do you currently live?
3. Tell me about your experiences with or relationship to Armenian dance and dancing.
  - a. Can you tell me all of the places/settings where you have learned or danced Armenian traditional dances?
4. If you have attended any dance gatherings in public in Gyumri, what were your impressions?  
What do you think the public thinks about these events? Do you think that this helps encourage interest in learning Armenian traditional dances?
5. Do you have any ideas of new places or settings where dances could be danced or taught to others, that are not currently very common?
6. Do you visit museums in Gyumri and if so, which ones and why?
7. What role do you think museums and cultural spaces should have in supporting dance heritage education?
8. If museums or cultural spaces in Gyumri allowed you to teach dances to visitors and dance in part of the museum space or in the yard, would you be interested in doing something like this?
  - a. Would you only want to dance during a special event, or would you be interested in dancing during any normal day at the museum, so visitors can see and join?

## Appendix B: Participant Group Key

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Participant Group</b>
Participant 1	Hrayrk
Participant 2	Hrayrk
Participant 3	Dzitoghtsyan Museum
Participant 4	Dzitoghtsyan Museum
Participant 5	Hrayrk
Participant 6	Hrayrk
Participant 7	Hrayrk
Participant 8	Hrayrk
Participant 9	Hrayrk
Participant 10	Hrayrk
Participant 11	Dzitoghtsyan Museum
Participant 12	Hrayrk
Participant 13	Hrayrk
Participant 14	Hrayrk
Participant 15	Hrayrk
Participant 16	Hrayrk
Participant 17	Hrayrk
Participant 18	Hrayrk
Participant 19	Dzitoghtsyan Museum
Participant 20	Hrayrk
Participant 21	Hrayrk
Participant 22	Hrayrk

## Information letter

20 March 2025

Dear participant,

My name is Christine Abrell and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for an International Master degree in Education in Museums & Heritage. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation titled *Cross-Spatial Possibilities: Dance Heritage Transmission in Gyumri*; this is being supervised by Dr Deborah Williams, Senior Lecturer in Dance. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to explore the growth of Armenian ethnographic dance heritage education in Gyumri and the role that museums and cultural spaces may play in this. Your participation in this study would help contribute to a better understanding of developing new potential avenues of dance heritage transmission. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer some interview questions and engage in a conversation related to the study's aim. This will take you approximately 5-20 minutes to complete.

Data collected will be non-identifiable. Any data that may lead to the identification of research participants will be stored on a secure UM-approved server with the appropriate access settings applied, to ensure data security.

Any material in hard copy form will be placed in a locked cupboard and digital material in a password-protected Drive. Only my supervisor and myself (and in exceptional cases, examiners) will have access to this data.

The findings which emerge from this research may be published (e.g., in a dissertation, academic journals) and/or presented (e.g., during conferences, meetings). Your name (or any other identifying information) will not appear when the findings are reported.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased.

All data collected will be erased on or before 13/08/2026, one year after completion of the study.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact myself or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Yours Sincerely,



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**Christine Abrell**  
**[christine.m.abrell.23@um.edu.mt](mailto:christine.m.abrell.23@um.edu.mt)**  
**+1 760 814 3073**



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**Dr Deborah Williams, Senior Lecturer in Dance**  
**[deborah.williams@um.edu.mt](mailto:deborah.williams@um.edu.mt)**  
**+356 2340 7822**



## Տեղեկատվական նամակ

20 մարտի, 2025թ.

Հարգելի՛ մասնակից,

Իմ անունը Քրիստին Աբդել է և ես ուսանում եմ Մալթայի համալսարանում «Թանգարանային և մշակութային ժառանգության մասին կրթություն» միջազգային մագիստրոսական ծրագրով: Ես կատարում եմ հետազոտական աշխատանք «Մշակութային միջավայրերի կամրջման հնարավորությունները: Պարարվեստի ժառանգության փոխանցումը Գյումրիում» թեմայով իմ ատենախոսության համար: Այն ղեկավարում է պարի ավագ դասախոս, գիտությունների թեկնածու Դեբորա Ուիլյամսը: Այս նամակը հրավեր է՝ մասնակցելու հետազոտական աշխատանքին: Ստորև կներկայացվի տեղեկություն հետազոտության և Ձեր մասնակցության վերաբերյալ, եթե որոշում կայացնեք մասնակցել:

Իմ հետազոտության նպատակն է ուսումնասիրել Գյումրիում հայկական ազգագրական պարարվեստի ժառանգության վերաբերյալ կրթության զարգացումը և թանգարանների ու մշակութային կառույցների՝ այդ գործում ունեցած հնարավոր դերը: Ձեր մասնակցությունը այս հետազոտական աշխատանքին կօգնի ավելի լավ հասկանալ պարարվեստի ժառանգության փոխանցման նոր հնարավոր ուղիների զարգացումը: Այս հետազոտության ընթացքում հավաքագրված ցանկացած տվյալ կծառայի բացառապես այս հետազոտության նպատակներին:

Եթե որոշեք մասնակցել, Ձեզ կխնդրվի պատասխանել հարցազրույցի մի քանի հարցերի և մասնակցել հետազոտության նպատակին ուղղված զրույցի: Դա Ձեզանից կպահանջի մոտավորապես 5-20 րոպե:

Հավաքագրված տվյալները չեն նույնականացվի: Ցանկացած տվյալ, որը կարող է հանգեցնել հետազոտության մասնակիցների նույնականացմանը, կպահվի Մալթայի համալսարանի կողմից հաստատված անվտանգ սերվերում մուտքի համապատասխան կարգավորումներով՝ տվյալների անվտանգությունն ապահովելու համար:

Թղթային տարբերակով ցանկացած նյութ կտեղադրվի փակ պահարանում: Միայն ես և իմ ղեկավարը (և բացառիկ դեպքերում՝ քննողները) կունենանք հասանելիություն այս տվյալներին:

Այս հետազոտության արդյունքները կարող են հրապարակվել (օրինակ՝ ատենախոսությունում, ակադեմիական ամսագրերում) և/կամ ներկայացվել (օրինակ՝ կոնֆերանսների, հանդիպումների ժամանակ): Ձեր անունը (կամ ցանկացած այլ նույնականացնող տեղեկատվություն) չի հայտնվի արդյունքների հրապարակման ժամանակ:

*Թարմացվել է Ակադեմիական հետազոտությունների էթիկայի կոմիտեի (UREC) կողմից 2025թ. հունվարի 18-ին:*

Այս հետազոտական աշխատանքին մասնակցությունը լիովին կամավոր է. այլ կերպ ասած՝ Դուք ազատ եք ընդունելու մասնակցության առաջարկը կամ հրաժարվելու դրանից՝ առանց որևէ պատճառաբանություն նշելու անհրաժեշտության: Դուք նաև ազատ եք հրաժարվելու հետազոտական աշխատանքից ցանկացած պահի՝ առանց որևէ բացատրություն տալու անհրաժեշտության և Ձեզ համար առանց որևէ բացասական հետևանքների: Եթե որոշեք հրաժարվել, Ձեր հարցազրույցից քաղված բոլոր տվյալները կջնջվեն այնքան, որքան տեխնիկապես հնարավոր է (օրինակ՝ մինչև դրանց անանուն հրապարակումը), եթե, իհարկե, տեղեկատվությունը ջնջելը լրջորեն չի խոչընդոտի հետազոտական աշխատանքի խնդիրների հետապնդմանը կամ այն դարձնի անհնար, իսկ այդ պարագայում էլ տեղեկատվությունը կպահպանվի անանուն ձևաչափով:

Եթե համաձայնում եք մասնակցել, ապա խնդրում ենք հաշվի առնել, որ Դուք չունեք ոչ մի ուղղակի օգուտ կամ նպաստ: Ձեր մասնակցությունը չի ենթադրում որևէ հայտնի կամ ակնկալվող ռիսկ:

Խնդրում ենք հաշվի առնել, որ որպես մասնակից՝ դուք իրավունք ունեք, համաձայն Տվյալների պաշտպանության ընդհանուր կանոնակարգի (GDPR) և օրենսդրության, հասանելիություն ունենալ, ուղղել և անհրաժեշտության դեպքում խնդրել Ձեզ վերաբերող տվյալների հեռացում:

Հավաքագրված բոլոր տվյալները կջնջվեն մինչև 2026 թվականի օգոստոսի 13-ը՝ հետազոտության ավարտից մեկ տարի անց:

Այս տեղեկատու թերթիկի օրինակը տրամադրվում է Ձեզ՝ պահպանելու և հետագայում վերանայելու համար:


Շնորհակալություն Ձեր տրամադրած ժամանակի և ուշադրության համար: Եթե ունեք որևէ հարց կամ մտահոգություն, կարող եք կապ հաստատել ինձ կամ իմ ղեկավարի հետ ստորև նշված տվյալներով:

Հարգանքով՝



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Քրիստին Աբրել  
christine.m.abrell.23@um.edu.mt  
+1 760 814 3073



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Դեբորա Ուիլիամս, գիտությունների  
թեկնածու, պարի ավագ դասախոս  
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*Թարմացվել է Ակադեմիական հետազոտությունների էթիկայի կոմիտեի (UREC)  
կողմից 2025թ. հունվարի 18-ին:*

## Participant's Consent Form

### *Cross-Spatial Possibilities: Dance Heritage Transmission in Gyumri*

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Christine Abrell. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in interviews in which the researcher will engage in a conversation and ask questions to explore Armenian ethnographic dance education in Gyumri. I am aware that the interviews will take approximately 5-20 minutes. I understand that the interviews are to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others by: Developing new potential avenues of dance heritage transmission.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that **all data** collected will be erased on completion of the study and following publication of results within 1 year of completion of the study, on or before 13/08/2026.
8. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research. If my identity could be inferred as a result of my identification as an organisational representative, I have the right to review all quotes/transcript text attributed to me in the final dissertation before its submission.
9. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.

10. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this interview to be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

**MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE**

- I agree to this interview being audio recorded.
  - I do not agree to this interview being audio recorded.
11. I am aware that extracts from my interview may be published (e.g., in a dissertation, academic journals) and/or presented (e.g., during conferences, meetings) using a pseudonym (a made-up name or code, e.g., respondent A).
12. I am aware that, by marking the first tick-box below, I am giving my consent for the identity of the organisation I represent to be revealed in publications (e.g., in a dissertation, academic journals), reports or presentations (e.g., during conferences, meetings), arising from this research, and responses I provide may be quoted directly or indirectly.

**MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE**

- I agree that the identity of the organisation I represent may be disclosed in publications/presentations.
- I do not agree that the identity of the organisation I represent may be disclosed in publications/presentations.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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+1 760 814 3073

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**Dr Deborah Williams, Senior Lecturer in Dance**  
deborah.williams@um.edu.mt  
+356 2340 7822



## Մասնակցի տեղեկացված համաձայնության թերթիկ

### *Մշակութային միջավայրերի կամրջման հնարավորությունները: Պարարվեստի ժառանգության փոխանցումը Գյումրիում*

Ես ստորագրությամբ տալիս եմ իմ համաձայնությունը՝ մասնակցելու Քրիստին Արդելի կողմից իրականացվող հետազոտողական աշխատանքին: Տեղեկացված համաձայնության այս թերթիկը մանրամասնում է իմ՝ հետազոտողական աշխատանքին ունեցած մասնակցության պայմանները:

1. Ինձ գրավոր և/կամ բանավոր ներկայացվել է հետազոտության նպատակի վերաբերյալ տեղեկություն: Ինձ հնարավորություն է ընձեռվել հարցեր տալ, իսկ իմ հարցերին տրվել են սպառիչ պատասխաններ:
2. Ես նաև գիտեմ, որ ազատ եմ մասնակցության առաջարկը ընդունելու, առանց պատճառաբանությունը հստակեցնելու ու առանց սույժերի մասնակցությունը դադարեցնելու կամ դրանից հրաժարվելու որոշման մեջ: Մասնակցելու որոշում կայացնելուց հետո ես իրավունք եմ ինձ վերապահում չպատասխանել հարցերից ցանկացածին: Եթե ես որոշեմ դադարեցնել մասնակցությունս հետազոտողական աշխատանքներին, ապա ինձնից ստացված ցանկացած տեսակի տեղեկություն կջնջվի, ինչքան որ դա լինի տեխնիկապես հնարավոր (օրինակ՝ նախքան դրա անանուն դասակարգումը և հրապարակումը), եթե, իհարկե, տեղեկատվությունը ջնջելը լրջորեն չի խոչընդոտի հետազոտողական աշխատանքի խնդիրների հետապնդմանը կամ այն դարձնի անհնար, իսկ այդ պարագայում էլ տեղեկատվությունը կպահպանվի անանուն ձևաչափով:
3. Ես գիտեմ, որ հրավիրված եմ մասնակցելու հարցազրույցների, որոնց ընթացքում հետազոտողի հետ կծավալվեն զրույցներ, և կբարձրացվեն հարցեր Գյումրիում հայկական ազգագրական պարերի ուսուցման վերաբերյալ: Ես գիտեմ, որ հարցազրույցները կարող են տևել մոտավորապես 5-20 րոպե: Ես գիտեմ, որ հարցազրույցները իրականացվելու են ինձ հարմար ժամի և վայրում:
4. Ես գիտեմ, որ իմ մասնակցությունը չի ենթադրում ոչ մի հայտնի կամ ակնկալվող ռիսկեր:
5. Ես գիտեմ, որ ուղղակիորեն ոչ մի նպաստ կամ օգուտ չունեմ այս հետազոտությունից՝ որպես մասնակից: Ես նաև գիտակցում եմ, որ այս

*Թարմացվել է Ակադեմիական հետազոտությունների էթիկայի կոմիտեի (UREC) կողմից 2025թ. հունվարի 18-ին:*

հետազոտությունից կարող են օգուտ քաղել ուրիշները, քանի որ հետազոտությունը նոր հնարավոր ուղիներ է բացում պարային ժառանգության փոխանցման վերաբերյալ:

6. Ես գիտեմ, որ համաձայն Տվյալների պաշտպանության ընդհանուր կանոնակարգի (GDPR) և օրենսդրության՝ ինձ իրավունք է վերապահվում հասանելիություն ունենալ տվյալներին, ճշգրտումներ կատարել, ինչպես նաև ինձ վերաբերող տվյալները ջնջելու հայտ ներկայացնել, եթե կա դրա անհրաժեշտությունը:
7. Ես գիտեմ, որ հավաքված տվյալները ամբողջությամբ կջնջվեն հետազոտական աշխատանքների ավարտից և աշխատանքի արդյունքները հրապարակելուց հետո մեկ տարվա ընթացքում՝ 2026 թվականի օգոստոսի 18-ին կամ դրանից առաջ:
8. Ես իրազեկված եմ, որ այս հետազոտությանը վերաբերող որևէ հրատարակությունում, զեկույցում կամ շնորհանդեսում իմ անձնական տվյալների և ինքնության վերաբերյալ տեղեկություն չի լուսաբանվի:
9. Ինձ տրամադրվել է իրազեկող տեղեկատու նամակի օրինակ, և ես գիտեմ, որ ստանալու եմ նաև տեղեկացված համաձայնության թերթիկ:
10. Ես իրազեկված եմ, որ ստորև վանդակները լրացնելով՝ ես իմ համաձայնությունն եմ տալիս, որ հարցազրույցը ձայնագրվի և վերածվի տեքստի այնպես, ինչպես կա:

**ԼՐԱՑՐԵՔ ՄԻԱՅՆ ՀԱՄԱՊԱՏԱՍԽԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԵՎ ԿԻՐԱՌԵԼԻՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԴԵՊՔՈՒՄ:**

- Համաձայն եմ, որ հարցազրույցը ձայնագրվի:
- Համաձայն չեմ, որ հարցազրույցը ձայնագրվի:

11. Ես իրազեկված եմ, որ հարցազրույցի որոշ հատվածներ կարող են հրապարակվել (օրինակ՝ ատենախոսությունում, ակադեմիական ամսագրերում) և/կամ ներկայացվեն (օրինակ՝ կոնֆերանսների, հանդիպումների ժամանակ) անանուն կամ ծածկանվանք (հնարված անուն կամ ծածկանուն, օրինակ՝ Մասնակից Ա):
12. Ես տեղյակ եմ, որ առաջին վանդակը նշելով՝ իմ համաձայնությունն եմ տալիս, որ իմ կողմից ներկայացվող կազմակերպությունը հետազոտական աշխատանքի արդյունքում ներկայացվի և հիշատակվի հրապարակումներում (օրինակ՝ ատենախոսություն, ակադեմիական ամսագիր), զեկույցներում կամ շնորհանդեսներում (կոնֆերանսների, հանդիպումների ժամանակ), իսկ իմ պատասխանները՝ ուղղակի կամ անուղղակի հղումներում:

*Թարմացվել է Ակադեմիական հետազոտությունների էթիկայի կոմիտեի (UREC) կողմից 2025թ. հունվարի 18-ին:*

**ԼՐԱՑՐԵՔ ՄԻԱՅՆ ՀԱՄԱՊԱՏԱՍԽԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԵՎ ԿԻՐԱՌԵԼԻՈՒԹՅԱՆ  
ԴԵՊՔՈՒՄ:**

- Ես տալիս եմ իմ համաձայնությունը, որ իմ կողմից ներկայացվող կազմակերպության ինքնությունը նշվի և բացահայտվի հրապարակումներում/շնորհանդեսներում:
- Ես չեմ տալիս իմ համաձայնությունը, որ իմ կողմից ներկայացվող կազմակերպության ինքնությունը նշվի և բացահայտվի հրապարակումներում/շնորհանդեսներում:

Ես կարդացել և ընկալել եմ վերոհիշյալ պնդումները և համաձայնում եմ մասնակցությունս ցուցաբերել այս հետազոտությանը:

Մասնակցի անունը՝ \_\_\_\_\_

Ստորագրություն՝ \_\_\_\_\_

Ամսաթիվը՝ \_\_\_\_\_



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Քրիստին Աբրել  
christine.m.abrell.23@um.edu.mt  
+1 760 814 3073



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Դեբորա Ուիլիամս,  
գիտությունների թեկնածու,  
պարի ավագ դասախոս  
deborah.williams@um.edu.mt  
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*Թարմացվել է Ակադեմիական հետազոտությունների էթիկայի կոմիտեի (UREC)  
կողմից 2025թ. հունվարի 18-ին:*



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23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025

**RE: Application for Research Ethics Clearance EDUC-2025-00318 Christine Abrell**

Dear Christine Abrell,

With reference to your application EDUC-2025-00318 Christine Abrell for Research Ethics clearance, I am pleased to inform you that **FREC finds no ethical or data protection issues in terms of content and procedure.**

**You may therefore proceed to approach potential informants to collect data using the tools/documents outlined in this application.**

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Gravina', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Joseph Gravina  
Chairperson Faculty Research Ethics Committee  
Faculty of Education

## **Non-exclusive licence to reproduce the thesis and make the thesis public**

I, Christine Marie Abrell ,

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Christine Marie Abrell  
**28/08/2025**