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## The role of national folk dances in shaping the cultural identity of the Ukrainian people

**Abstract.** The relevance of this study is driven by the need to preserve and promote national folk dances as a means of sustaining the cultural identity of Ukrainians, particularly in the face of external threats from the Russian Federation. This research aimed to thoroughly examine the role of national folk dances in shaping the cultural identity of the Ukrainian people. The following methods were employed: a literature review for a comprehensive analysis of various sources, a comparative method to identify the interconnections and unique features of Ukrainian folk dances in the context of world cultures, and a historical method to study the evolution and role of dances in shaping cultural identity. The article revealed how national dances contributed to the formation and preservation of cultural identity, transmitting traditions, values, and shared characteristics of the Ukrainian nation from generation to generation. The research analysed the main national dance styles, such as the hopak, arkan, kolomyika, kozachok, and others. It also analysed the influence of folk dances on contemporary Ukrainian cultural trends and national self-consciousness. The revival of interest in traditional dances in contemporary society had led to the emergence of numerous dance ensembles and schools that promoted Ukrainian dances both within Ukraine and abroad. These initiatives contributed to the preservation and promotion of Ukraine's cultural heritage, as well as strengthening national identity. Particular attention was given to the role of folk dances in reinforcing ties between the diaspora and the historical homeland, as Ukrainians living abroad maintain a connection to their roots, history, and culture through national dances. This study also examined the dance traditions of Greece, Georgia, and Hungary, allowing for a comparison and analysis of the role of folk dances in shaping the cultural identity of each of these countries. The practical significance of this study lies in its application to cultural and educational programs, both in Ukraine and among the diaspora. Schools, cultural centres, and dance groups can utilise the obtained data to develop educational courses and promote Ukrainian culture

**Keywords:** hopak; arkan; kolomyika; traditional dances; national dance styles; folk rituals; culture; choreography; dance ensemble

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## Introduction

Folk dances are a vital component of Ukrainian culture and national identity. They embody the richness of traditions, rituals, and customs developed over centuries and serve as a means of preserving and passing on cultural heritage to future generations. Despite this, insufficient attention is given to their significance in shaping the national consciousness of Ukrainians, particularly outside of Ukraine. Furthermore, many regional dance styles remain under-researched and under-promoted, limiting a full understanding of their role in the cultural history and contemporary life of the Ukrainian people. Therefore, the urgency of this research lies in the need for a deep analysis and systematisation of information about various national dance styles to ensure their preservation and promote their more active inclusion in cultural practices. This will not only revitalise interest in folk dances but also strengthen cultural ties among Ukrainians worldwide, enhancing their understanding of, and pride in, their unique cultural heritage.

In contemporary research, the focus was on studying the history of folk dances, their various styles and performance techniques, and on popularising individual dances at both national and international levels. For instance, L. Eltifi (2023), as well as V. Synieok & K. Kaliievskiy (2023) in their studies, explored Ukrainian folk dances as expressions of the culture, history, and diversity of the Ukrainian people. Their research focused on analysing different styles and types of folk dances, their regional peculiarities, and historical development. The authors examined the primary styles of Ukrainian folk dances, such as the hopak, kolomyika, arkan, kozachok, and others, highlighting their unique features and symbolism, and analysing how these dances reflect the historical experiences, values, and worldview of Ukrainians.

Author D. Karpenko (2022) focused on analysing the symbolism of movements, gestures, and dance elements, which have a profound impact on cultural heritage and national identity. The author explored how contemporary choreography combined traditional folk elements with modern dance techniques and approaches, leading to the creation of a new artistic style. K. Pletsan (2022) demonstrated the importance of ethno-festivals in preserving and transmitting historical and cultural heritage. The author analysed the influence of creative industries on the organisation and development of such events, emphasising their role in promoting and supporting traditional art forms. The study included examples of successful ethno-festivals that played a key role in reviving cultural heritage. In the study by S. Karlytska & O. Kopievsky (2020), an analysis was conducted of the artistic language and motives behind contemporary folk and stage choreography, highlighting the changes that have occurred in this field in recent years. Researchers T. Drach & M. Pogrebnyak (2022) explored the role and contribution of Western Ukrainian choreographers to

the development and contemporary perception of dance art. The authors analysed the influence of these choreographers on the development of contemporary dance, their creative approaches, and innovation in creating dance productions. D. Degtyar (2021) addressed modern issues in folk and stage choreography, focusing on the artistic language and motivations of choreographers. Researcher analysed the challenges faced by contemporary choreography and highlighted the impact of artistic preferences and motivations on the creative process. The research included recommendations for overcoming these challenges and improving the development of contemporary choreography.

V. Volchukova & O. Tishchenko (2023) focused on the interaction between Ukrainian folk stage dance and dances from other European countries at various levels, including historical, cultural, and artistic aspects. The article also analysed the influence of European dance styles on the development of Ukrainian stage dance and, conversely, the impact of Ukrainian dance traditions on European cultures. On the other hand, O. Boiko (2020) explored which aspects of Ukrainian dance were highlighted in the mass media and the methods used for their presentation. Scientist analysed the extent to which the media turns to traditional Ukrainian dances and their contemporary interpretations, as well as how cultural events related to Ukrainian dance, such as festivals, competitions, performances by ensembles and dance schools, were covered. F. Petkovski (2021) examined the role of folk dance in shaping national identity. Researcher explored how performances involving folk dance contributed to the affirmation and reproduction of national characteristics in various cultural contexts. The study also included an analysis of contemporary performances and their impact on the formation of collective national norms and values.

Researching the role of national dances in other countries and cultures was crucial for understanding the complexity and diversity of the global cultural heritage. Dance served not only as an art form, but also as a means of preserving and transmitting traditions, history, and values. Studying how different countries and cultures preserve, develop, and interpret their national dance traditions contributed to a better understanding of global cultural diversity and promoted intercultural dialogue and exchange (Brosius & Polit, 2011; Petkovski, 2024). The significance of this research also lied in its ability to identify both commonalities and unique differences in the dance traditions of not only Ukraine, but also other peoples, fostering the development of global respect and mutual understanding. So, this research aimed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of various regional dance styles and their impact on the national identity of Ukrainians both within Ukraine and abroad. The study sought to test the hypothesis that folk dances have a significant influence on maintaining national identity and

cultural heritage among Ukrainians, including those living outside of Ukraine.

### Materials and Methods

The first step in conducting the research was a literature review, which provided a comprehensive examination of a variety of sources, such as scholarly articles, monographs, books, ethnographic reports, historical materials, and dissertations, dedicated to Ukrainian national dances and their impact on cultural identity. When selecting sources for the review, priority was given to articles and monographs that provided detailed descriptions of the history and cultural context of Ukrainian folk dances. Subsequently, a review of academic works on dance ethnography and anthropology was conducted to understand the role and significance of dance in various cultures. Regarding the selection of specific dances for analysis, their popularity and significance in Ukrainian dance heritage were taken into account. In particular, dances such as the hopak, arkan, kolomyika, kozachok, and others were studied in detail, as they reflect the diversity and richness of Ukrainian culture. Additionally, regional variations of these dances were analysed to better understand their specificity and influence on local dance traditions.

The literature review outlined the key concepts of the research, ranging from the history and evolution of Ukrainian dances to their role in shaping national consciousness. The review encompassed various areas related to the research topic, including the historical development of Ukrainian folk dances, their origins, symbolism, performance techniques, and regional variations. This review also helped to elucidate how dances interact with other elements of Ukrainian culture. Based on the results obtained, a comparative method was applied, which involved analysing the relationship between Ukrainian dances and other cultural elements, including songs, music, and traditional costumes. Comparison helped to identify the unique characteristics of Ukrainian folk dances and their role in shaping cultural heritage and national identity. In this study, a comparison was also conducted to identify regional features of Ukrainian dances. When studying the diversity of dance styles, the focus was on how these traditions changed depending on geographical location, historical context, and the socio-cultural conditions of different regions of Ukraine. This made it possible to identify unique aspects of dance traditions in each region and their influence on cultural identity and national identity.

Subsequently, the results of the literature review and comparison were systematised and combined to form a deep understanding of the role of national folk dances in shaping the cultural identity of the Ukrainian people. This approach allowed for a comprehensive view of how dance practices influence the preservation and transmission of Ukrainian cultural traditions. The historical method was used to trace the evolution of Ukrainian folk

dances from ancient times to the present day. An analysis of historical sources allowed for tracing the development of dance traditions, their changes, and adaptations to different historical periods. The historical method provided a context for understanding contemporary Ukrainian dances and their connection to national identity. Thus, the application of various research methods allowed for obtaining a complete and holistic picture of the role of national folk dances in shaping the cultural identity of the Ukrainian people. Through these methods, various aspects of the topic were analysed, and important conclusions were drawn about the significance of Ukrainian dances for preserving cultural heritage and national identity.

In the final stage, attention was paid to the importance of national dances in other countries and cultures, namely, an analysis of the dance traditions of Greece, Georgia, and Hungary to study their impact on the cultural identity of each country. This contributed to a deeper understanding of the global cultural heritage and created opportunities for intercultural dialogue and cooperation. Such an analysis provided valuable information on ways to popularise and interpret dance forms in various contexts. This, in turn, also contributes to raising awareness of the diversity of global dance art and helps to identify best practices that can be used to preserve and develop national dances.

### Results

The influence of various historical epochs on the formation of dance styles and traditions in Ukraine is crucial for understanding the complexity and uniqueness of Ukrainian cultural heritage. Each historical period left its mark on the development of dance traditions, shaping a variety of styles and performance techniques. This section explores how different historical periods influenced the formation of dance styles and traditions, providing specific examples to illustrate. During the period of Kyivan Rus, dances were an important part of cultural life and were performed during holidays and rituals. Dances in this period reflected the everyday aspects of life and the spiritual beliefs of people. Although there are few written sources from this period regarding dances, it is known that dances were an important way of expressing cultural values and traditions, as well as reflecting various important events in a person's life, such as weddings or religious rituals. Ukrainian dances have their origins in ancient rituals and ceremonies that were an integral part of agrarian and everyday life. For example, spring dances, such as "vesnianky" and "haiivky", were combined with rituals of awakening nature and the beginning of the sowing season. They were often accompanied by songs and music, creating cohesive rituals that combined various aspects of cultural expression. Such dances were a symbolic gesture of the beginning of a new cycle, which in many cultures was accompanied by the celebration of new life and fertility. Autumn dances, such as

“zhnyvarski” or “zhnyviani”, accompanied the completion of the harvest and preparation for winter. Such dances reflected the everyday concerns of people, their beliefs, and their ideas about the world. For example, harvest dances symbolised the joy of the harvest and the completion of a difficult agricultural cycle.

Vechornytsi were traditional Ukrainian evening gatherings for young people, typically held during the autumn and winter periods when fieldwork was complete, and people had more free time. They provided an opportunity for young people to come together for socialising, meeting new people, and engaging in various folk customs and traditional activities. Vechornytsi played a significant role in the social life of Ukrainian youth, fostering community and cultural values. Usually, vechornytsi were held in homes or specially equipped premises provided by hosts or homeowners. Young women and men would gather to spend time on traditional activities such as embroidery, weaving, sewing, or making various crafts, as well as dancing and singing. Girls often worked on handicrafts, creating items for their future households, while boys engaged in men’s work or told stories, joked, and sang. Additionally, vechornytsi provided an opportunity for young people to meet potential partners and express interest in each other. This was significant in terms of establishing future family ties and maintaining traditional family structures. Dancing and music were an integral part of vechornytsi. Young people performed folk dances such as the “kolomyika” or “kozachok”, accompanied by folk instruments like the bandura, sopilka, or violin. These dances were a form of entertainment and also helped young people to showcase their abilities and character. A variety of games and competitions could also take place during vechornytsi, contributing to a friendly atmosphere and maintaining interest in traditions. For example, young people could compete in riddles, sing folk songs, or participate in various humorous contests. Vechornytsi also had a ritualistic aspect. During gatherings, rituals could be performed related to calendar holidays, such as Christmas or Masliana, or certain periods of young people’s lives, such as the transition from a single to a married life. One example of a traditional vechornytsi is the celebration of the feast of St. Basil the Great, which takes place on the night of January 13-14. During this holiday, young people gathered to celebrate the beginning of the new year, performing traditional songs and dances, and conducting rituals related to the future harvest and a happy life. These gatherings were crucial for creating future family ties and supporting traditional family structures. Dancing and music were not just entertainment but also served as a way to strengthen community bonds and preserve cultural heritage. By participating in vechornytsi, young people learned about their traditions, values, and social roles, ensuring the continuity of Ukrainian cultural heritage.

Traditional Ukrainian dances are closely intertwined with religious beliefs and rituals, as they reflect the

spiritual essence of the people and their understanding of the world. Dances accompanied important events on the church calendar, emphasising the connection between people, nature, fertility, and life cycles. They also played a significant role in wedding ceremonies, symbolising the transition to a new stage of life and strengthening family ties. Performing dances during religious holidays created unity among the faithful, bringing them together in a shared spiritual experience. Dances played a crucial role in the wedding itself. The bride performed the “rushnyk dance”, where the rushnyk symbolised the path of a shared life. Also popular were the “weaving a wreath” dance, during which the bride weaved a wreath of flowers, and the “dance with a wreath”, symbolising the transition from single life to married life. During the wedding feast, dances continued to accompany the celebration. For example, the “bride’s dance”, performed by the bride with young women, reflected the joy of the newly formed family. Dances at weddings were a way of expressing joy, community, and unity; they helped to involve guests in the celebration and lift their spirits.

Ukrainian religious rituals were also accompanied by dances that were part of the cultural and spiritual life of the people. The feast of Ivan Kapala, an ancient holiday dedicated to the summer solstice, was accompanied by dances around a bonfire. Participants celebrated by performing “Kupala” dances, which symbolised purification and unity with nature. During Christmas, Ukrainians performed “koliadky”, which were accompanied by dances. These songs and dances were part of the carolling ritual, when groups of people went from house to house, singing carols and greeting the hosts. During the celebration of Easter, various ritual dances were performed, accompanied by solemn songs. For example, “haiivky” were performed – spring dances dedicated to the resurrection of nature and the celebration of spring. Other religious holidays, such as Trinity, were also accompanied by dances. For instance, on this day, dances were performed around trees, symbolising fertility and a connection with nature.

The Cossack period had a significant impact on the development of dance, particularly styles such as the hopak and kozachok. Cossacks were renowned for their dancing prowess, which demonstrated their agility, strength, and courage. The hopak became a symbol of Cossack bravery and freedom, and its popularity has endured to the present day. The hopak, one of the most famous Ukrainian dances, was performed by Cossacks during festive events, especially after victories in battle. By dancing the hopak, Cossacks demonstrated their courage and skill in military manoeuvres. This dance often involved complex jumps, spins, and rapid movements that reflected the Cossacks’ military expertise. Other dances from this period, such as the “kozachok”, were linked to military traditions and reflected the heroism of the Cossacks. The kozachok had rhythmic and lively movements that reflected the fiery nature of Cossack celebrations.

Khorovods, narrative, and everyday dances are fundamental categories of Ukrainian folk dances that play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage by conveying the traditions, rituals, and customs of the Ukrainian people. Each category has its own distinct characteristics and varies in style, theme, and symbolism. Khorovods are among the oldest folk dances in Ukraine. They are performed in a circle, with participants holding hands or placing their hands on each other's shoulders. Khorovods are accompanied by singing and are performed during festive occasions such as weddings, Easter, Ivan Kupala, and other calendar celebrations. For instance, the "Vyshyvanyi Khorovod" is a popular wedding dance performed during the festivities honouring the newlyweds. Participants move in a circle around the bride and groom, highlighting their unity and wishing them a happy married life. The "Vesn-yanka" is a spring khorovod that is executed during the celebration of spring's arrival and the awakening of nature. It is characterised by slow and fluid movements that symbolise renewal and rebirth.

Narrative dances told stories or depicted specific scenes from everyday life. They often had a dramatic character, and the dancers played the roles of characters involved in certain events. For example, the hopak was a narrative dance that told about the heroic feats of the Cossacks, their courage, and their strength. The "Kryvyi dance" was also a narrative dance that told about the process of working in the field or harvesting. Dancers performed movements that symbolised various stages of agricultural activity, such as ploughing, sowing, and harvesting. Everyday dances were more casual and were performed during various informal gatherings, parties, or celebrations. They often had a playful or humorous character and could include improvisation. For instance, the kolomyika is an everyday dance accompanied by songs of the same name. It is characterised by a lively tempo, turns, and jumps. Dancers often improvise, creating their own variations of the dance. The "Horlytsya" is another example of an everyday dance accompanied by melodic love songs. It is performed by couples, emphasising the tenderness and grace of the movements. Khorovods, narrative dances, and everyday dances have a significant impact on preserving and transmitting Ukrainian cultural heritage. They help to convey traditions, rituals, and customs that shape the national identity of Ukrainians. Through their performance during festive events, festivals, and other events, these dances remain a living part of Ukrainian culture. Dance groups, ensembles, and schools play an important role in popularising khorovods, narrative, and everyday dances. They provide opportunities for young generations to learn these dance forms and maintain a connection with their cultural heritage. Thus, khorovods, narrative, and everyday dances are important components of Ukrainian folklore heritage, contributing to the preservation of traditions and their transmission to future generations.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of national consciousness contributed to a renewed interest in Ukrainian folk dances. Ethnographers and researchers began to record folk dance traditions, preserving them for future generations. For instance, Pavlo Chubynsky, a renowned Ukrainian ethnographer, recorded the dance and song traditions of the Ukrainian people, contributing to the preservation of this heritage. During this period, dance ensembles developed, popularising Ukrainian dances throughout the country. Some of the most popular dances of this period included the kolomyika, which was widespread in Western Ukraine and was noted for its rhythm and melody, reflecting the characteristics of Ukraine's mountainous regions.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Soviet cultural policy aimed to standardise and ideologise Ukrainian folk dances. Professional ensembles, such as the Pavlo Virsky Ukrainian National Folk Dance Ensemble, were established to perform adapted and modified versions of these dances. While Soviet ideology influenced the content of the dances, many traditional styles and techniques were preserved and developed thanks to the work of professional dancers and choreographers like Pavlo Virsky and Vasyl Avramenko, among many others, who made significant contributions to the development of Ukrainian dance. Following Ukraine's independence, the country began to restore authentic Ukrainian dances and support their development. Numerous dance groups and schools popularise Ukrainian dances, enriching the country's cultural life. For instance, the Pavlo Virsky Ukrainian National Folk Dance Ensemble (Fig. 1) continues the traditions of classical Ukrainian dance and develops new styles that combine elements of contemporary choreography with folk motives.



**Figure 1.** Pavlo Virsky Ukrainian National Folk Dance Ensemble

**Source:** The Virsky Ensemble will perform in Uzhhorod as part of an all-Ukrainian tour (2015)

Therefore, the influence of different historical epochs on the formation of dance styles and traditions in Ukraine has contributed to the creation of a unique cultural heritage. Each period added its own features to the development of Ukrainian dances, ensuring their

vitality and dynamism. In the modern world, Ukrainian dances are an integral part of the cultural heritage and have great significance for the national identity of the Ukrainian people. An analysis of different regional styles of Ukrainian folk dances has revealed the unique characteristics of each dance style, reflecting the richness and diversity of the country's cultural heritage. Geographical location, historical circumstances, and cultural factors have significantly influenced the formation of the dance traditions of each region.

The hopak is one of the most famous and vibrant Ukrainian dances, originating in the steppe regions of Ukraine, particularly in areas associated with Cossacks, such as the Zaporozhian Sich. Characterised by its energy, acrobatic movements, jumps, and high leg lifts, the hopak symbolises courage, strength, and freedom, reflecting the Cossack spirit. A traditional example of the hopak's performance is its role in Cossack military victories, where it was danced after battles to celebrate their bravery and triumph. Today, the hopak is one of the most popular dances, performed by dance companies and ensembles both in Ukraine and abroad. The arkan is a mountain dance originating from the western part of Ukraine, especially the Carpathian regions such as Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv oblasts. Performed by Hutsuls, this dance is known for its masculinity and coordination, as it was performed by men who formed a circle, holding each other's belts. The arkan has a slow, rhythmic character and is accompanied by the playing of the trembita or sopilka. Reflecting the mountain traditions, courage, and mutual assistance that were essential for life in mountainous conditions, the arkan is a symbol of Hutsul culture. It was also often performed during festive events such as weddings.

The kolomyika is a lively and melodic dance popular in the western regions of Ukraine, particularly Galicia. It is often accompanied by a song of the same name, performed at a fast tempo and with a unique metrical structure. The kolomyika is known for its rhythm, melody, and humorous song lyrics that accompany the dance. The performance of the kolomyika involves a variety of movements related to turning, jumping, and leaping. Dancers often improvise during the performance, adding a special charm and unpredictability to the dance. The kozachok is a fiery dance associated with Cossack traditions. It is characterised by a lively tempo, sharp movements, jumps, and stomps. The kozachok reflects the energy and agility, as well as the skills of Cossack warriors. An example of the kozachok's performance is its role in wedding celebrations, where men would demonstrate their dancing prowess. This dance was popular in the steppe regions of Ukraine, such as Dnipropetrovsk and Kherson regions. In addition to the mentioned styles, other regional dances have their own unique features. For example, the "kryvyi dance" is a traditional dance performed in various regions of Ukraine. It is known for its serpentine or "crooked" line formed by the dancers

during the performance. The "Podilski dances" are also known for their speed and playfulness. They are accompanied by cheerful melodies and movements that reflect Podillia's culture and traditions. Thus, geographical location and cultural factors significantly influence the formation of dance traditions in each region of Ukraine. Mountainous regions, for example, have their own characteristics associated with the conditions of life in the mountains, which is reflected in the style of the arkan. Steppe regions, associated with Cossack traditions, have formed dances such as the hopak and kozachok. Therefore, different regional styles of Ukrainian folk dances reflect the richness and diversity of the country's cultural heritage. Each dance has its unique features, linked to the history, geography, and cultural characteristics of the region from which it originates. This creates a unique character of Ukrainian dances, which remain an important element of the nation's cultural identity.

The specific techniques used to perform folk dances, as well as the symbolism of movements, gestures, and dance elements, have a profound impact on the transmission of cultural heritage and national identity. Ukrainian folk dances are distinguished by a variety of styles and performance techniques. For example, the hopak is characterised by complex acrobatic elements such as high jumps, turns, and various figures. Men perform the movements with great strength and energy, demonstrating their agility and courage. The kolomyika is a lively dance accompanied by a song of the same name. The performance of the kolomyika involves rapid footwork, turns, jumps, and lifts. Dancers often improvise during the performance, adding individual characteristics and emotionality to the dance. The arkan, a mountain dance from the Carpathians, is performed by men who form a circle, holding each other's belts. The arkan has a slow and rhythmic character, but it also includes sharp and clear movements that reflect strength and courage. The performance of the arkan is accompanied by the playing of the trembita or sopilka. The kozachok is a lively dance characterised by a fast tempo, jumps, and stomps. Performing the kozachok requires high skill and physical preparation, as it involves complex movements and tempo changes.

Research into the impact of dance on the national identity of Ukrainians demonstrates that folk dances play a significant role in shaping and strengthening national identity. Ukrainian dances not only transmit cultural values and historical heritage but also contribute to Ukrainians' awareness of their belonging to a particular cultural and national community. They are a means of preserving and passing on traditions from generation to generation, fostering national identity and pride in one's cultural heritage. The influence of dance on the national identity of Ukrainians can be seen on various levels. On the one hand, dances have an educational function, as young people learn and master dance traditions, helping them better understand the history and culture of their

people. On the other hand, dances contribute to bringing people together in communities, allowing them to develop a sense of belonging to a particular group and nation. The influence of dance on the national identity of Ukrainians can also be traced in the context of contemporary culture. Contemporary Ukrainian musicians and choreographers often use elements of folk dances in their work, combining traditional and modern styles. This helps to preserve traditions but also gives them new life and relevance for the younger generation.

Contemporary dance companies, ensembles, and schools play a crucial role in popularising Ukrainian folk dances, preserving their authenticity and passing them on to future generations. These organisations

showcase the richness of Ukraine's cultural heritage on national and international stages, attracting new audiences and disseminating knowledge about Ukrainian dance traditions. The aforementioned Pavlo Virsky Ukrainian National Folk Dance Ensemble is one of the most famous dance companies in Ukraine and the world. Founded by Pavlo Virsky in 1937, the ensemble combines classical and contemporary elements in its performances while preserving the authenticity of Ukrainian dances. Renowned for its choreographic numbers, the Virsky Ensemble tours the world, promoting Ukrainian culture. For easier understanding, examples of some other well-known Ukrainian folk-dance ensembles are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Famous Ukrainian folk-dance ensembles

Name	Location	Achievements
State Honoured Academic Ensemble of Dance of Ukraine "Zhuravka"	Cherkasy	Performances on national and international stages, with a wide repertoire including various regional styles of Ukrainian dances
Folk Dance Ensemble "Veselka"	Lviv	One of the oldest groups, specialising in traditional Ukrainian dances, including Hutsul, Podillia, and Bukovinian styles
State Academic Ensemble of Dance of Ukraine "Nadiia"	Kharkiv	Extensive repertoire, including Ukrainian dances and contemporary choreographic compositions, with performances at international festivals
Kyiv Municipal Academic Ensemble of Dance "Kyianka"	Kyiv	Specialises in traditional Ukrainian dances such as hopak and kozachok, as well as contemporary choreographic pieces
Folk Dance Ensemble "Vesnianka"	Khmelnitskyi	Promotes Ukrainian dances internationally, participating in international festivals and competitions, and representing various styles of Ukrainian dance
Children's School of Folk Dance "Barvinok"	Kyiv	Specialises in teaching Ukrainian folk dances, preparing participants for leading dance companies, and contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage

Source: developed by the authors

These dance groups, ensembles, and schools play a crucial role in popularising Ukrainian dances, ensuring their preservation and dissemination. They provide opportunities for young talents who aspire to master the art of folk dance and also represent Ukrainian culture on the international stage. Thanks to their efforts, Ukrainian dance traditions continue to live and evolve, supporting the national identity and cultural identity of Ukrainians. Folk dances play a crucial role in the lives of the Ukrainian diaspora, fostering a sense of national identity among Ukrainians abroad (Bobesky & Mulvaney, 2019; Hong, 2022). They serve as a means of preserving cultural heritage, uniting Ukrainian communities, and passing on traditions to future generations. Ukrainian dance companies and ensembles in the diaspora organise performances, festivals, and educational programs that popularise Ukrainian culture and strengthen ties with the historic homeland.

The Ukrainian dance ensemble "Veselka" in the USA is one of the oldest and most well-known Ukrainian dance groups in the United States. Founded in 1949 in New York, "Veselka" popularises Ukrainian dances and culture among Americans and the Ukrainian

diaspora. The ensemble participates in numerous festivals and cultural events, showcasing various regional styles of Ukrainian dance (Ukrainian San Antonio, 2024). The "Barvinok" Ukrainian dance school in Canada is an educational institution in Toronto that specialises in teaching Ukrainian folk dances. The school offers classes for children and youth, providing an opportunity to learn traditional Ukrainian dances and maintain a connection with their cultural heritage. Graduates of the school often join dance companies and ensembles, continuing to promote Ukrainian culture (Barvinok Ukrainian dance school, 2017; "Barvinok" dance school..., 2019; Church, school, and creativity..., 2020). The "Vyshyvanka" dance school in Chicago is referred to as "Ukraine beyond Ukraine" (Dance school "Vyshyvanka" in Chicago..., 2019; "Vyshyvanka" dance school..., 2023). These dance groups, ensembles, and schools serve as vital hubs of Ukrainian culture within the diaspora, contributing to the preservation and popularisation of Ukrainian dances. They provide opportunities for Ukrainians abroad to maintain connections with their roots and pass on traditions to future generations. Thanks to their efforts, the Ukrainian diaspora can uphold its national identity

and preserve its cultural heritage, remaining part of the broader Ukrainian community. Research into the role of national dances in other countries and cultures has revealed a wide range of ways to preserve, develop, and popularise dance heritage in various contexts (Edensor, 2020; Pavlicová, 2021). Studies have shown that dance traditions are a significant carrier of cultural identity, reflecting the historical, social, and religious aspects of people's lives. Examining the role of national dances in other countries and cultures has revealed the diversity and richness of dance traditions around the world. Studying dance culture in countries such as Greece, Georgia, and Hungary highlighted the importance of these traditions for preserving and developing national identity.

In Greece, national dances such as the sirtaki and hasapiko have deep historical roots and are a vital component of the country's cultural heritage (Aristidou *et al.*, 2022; Filippidou, 2022). These dances not only reflect the traditional values and customs of the Greek people but also embody their harmony with nature and society. They are often performed during national holidays, festive events, and religious ceremonies, symbolising the unity, joy, and spirituality of the Greek people. Greek dance companies have a significant impact on popularising and preserving these dances both domestically and internationally. Their active participation in international festivals and competitions contributes to the spread of Greek culture and traditions in various countries around the world. Through performances and workshops, Greek dancers share the richness of their heritage, inspiring audiences to learn and perform Greek dances and songs.

Georgian folk dances are not only a captivating spectacle but also a significant part of the national culture that has been passed down through generations. Performed with great skill and technical complexity, these national dances are a crucial element of Georgia's cultural identity, illustrating its historical experiences, social norms, and religious beliefs. Each Georgian folk dance possesses unique characteristics reflecting the specific region from which it originates (Samsonadze, 2021). For instance, the kartuli dance, symbolising mutual respect and love between a man and a woman, is renowned for its elegance and grace, where men and women perform movements with great care and precision. In contrast, the khevsuruli embodies more aggressive motives imitating battle actions with swords and shields, reflecting the warlike spirit of the Georgian people. The khorumi dance, recreating scenes of battle, is an expression of the courage and strength of Georgian warriors who historically defended their land against numerous enemies. Acharuli, on the other hand, demonstrates fun and playfulness, with vibrant costumes and joyful interaction among dancers, emphasising the community and joy of the Georgian people. Dances are passed down through families and dance schools, where older generations of teachers impart their knowledge and skills to younger ones. This process not only preserves traditional

movements and steps but also recreates the cultural and social contexts in which these dances were created. The significance of Georgian folk dances as a crucial part of Georgia's intangible cultural heritage is supported by various cultural institutions and artistic groups that organise performances both domestically and internationally. Georgian folk dances are a vivid expression of the country's cultural identity, allowing the preservation of history and traditions for generations to come. They reflect various aspects of Georgian society, from the heroic to the romantic, and serve as an important means of personal self-expression.

Hungarian folk dances are a vibrant expression of national identity and cultural heritage, showcasing the country's rich history and diverse traditions (Shay, 2023). Among the most famous of these dances is the Csárdás, known for its energetic and passionate music, which emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This dance embodies the essence of the Hungarian spirit, characterised by a fast tempo, complex steps, and dramatic changes in pace. Another significant dance is the Palóc, which represents the cultural heritage of the Palóc community, embodying their unity and cultural pride. Similarly, the Kanásztánc, typically performed by men, imitates the movements of herdsmen, reflecting the pastoral way of life deeply rooted in Hungarian culture. The legényes, a solo dance for men, is known for its energy and acrobatic elements, celebrating the stamina of youth and rural Hungarian traditions. The Táncház method is renowned as the Hungarian model for transmitting intangible cultural heritage, having been recognised and included in UNESCO's register of best practices for safeguarding in 2011. Táncház is a cultural and social phenomenon that emerged in Hungary in the 1970s as a response to policies limiting cultural expressions, aiming to revive and promote traditional Hungarian folk music, dance, and culture. Táncház involves gathering people in community centres, homes, or other venues to learn and participate in traditional Hungarian folk dances accompanied by live music. This method allows participants not only to learn traditional dances but also to feel a connection to the culture through direct interaction and creative engagement with others. This approach preserves and transmits Hungarian folk dances and music as a living cultural practice, engaging new generations and fostering greater cultural awareness. Táncház has become not only a method of cultural preservation but also an effective way to support and develop national identity on the international stage.

Folk dances play a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of the Ukrainian people, reflecting their historical traditions, social customs, and cultural values. These dances serve as a means of preserving a unique cultural heritage, passing on not only the technique of performance but also deep emotional and historical contexts from generation to generation. Thanks to the diaspora, Ukrainian folk dances are also actively developing and

popularised abroad, becoming part of the global cultural mosaic. A similar situation can be observed in other European countries, where folk dances are an integral part of national identity. They play a key role in preserving cultural heritage, strengthening the connection of modern communities with their historical roots and promoting mutual understanding and cultural exchange between countries. Through national dances, one can see how the cultural features of each country are interwoven into the broader context of European culture, allowing for a better understanding of their uniqueness and significance. Thus, folk dances not only entertain but also serve as a means of cultural enrichment and preserving identity at various levels – from local to global.

## Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate the significant influence of national dances on the formation of national identity and cultural heritage. They have confirmed the importance of national dances in preserving and transmitting traditions to future generations, as well as their role in maintaining the connection between the past and the present. The research has shown the interconnectedness between Ukrainian national dances and the dance traditions of other countries, revealing commonalities and differences in approaches to preserving and developing dance traditions. Folk dances of Ukraine and other European countries reflect a deep cultural connection of each nation with its history and traditions. They are a means of transmitting cultural heritage from generation to generation. Common to all of them is the use of dance as a form of folk self-expression, where dance movements and rhythms serve as a language that tells about important historical events, social rituals, and everyday life. At the same time, the methods of preserving dance traditions vary: for example, in Hungary, the *Táncház* movement plays a significant role, actively involving the public in learning and practising traditional dances, while in Ukraine, there is a significant emphasis on folk festivals and academic study of folk dances. The study also highlights the importance of intercultural interaction and exchange of experience in the field of dance.

For example, J.C. Van Camp (2019) examined the issue of identity in dance, focusing on its impact on the art form. The author investigated how the concept of identity in a dance context has changed over time, and how these changes have influenced dance practice and perception. Common to both J.C. Van Camp's (2019) research and this study was a focus on the role of dance in shaping national identity and cultural heritage. Both studies paid attention to the impact of dance art on preserving traditions and transmitting values to future generations. Both studies also emphasised the importance of intercultural interaction and exchange of experience in the field of dance. The differences between the studies lie in their approaches and contexts. The author's research focused on the changing understanding of identity in dance from

a historical perspective, and on exploring how these changes have influenced dance practice. In contrast, this study focused on the role of national dances in shaping national identity, specifically on concrete examples from other countries and cultures. Furthermore, this research encompassed a broader range of issues, including the preservation of dance traditions, the symbolism of movements, and the influence of dance in supporting the national identity of Ukrainians. J.C. Van Camp (2019) concluded that dance was a key factor in shaping cultural identity, although its influence can change over time and depend on context. Researcher also emphasised that understanding dance as a means of expressing identity was a complex process that required attention to social, cultural, and historical factors. When comparing these findings with the results of this study, one can observe a commonality in the significance of dance as an element of cultural identity. Both studies recognised the impact of dance on the formation of identity and highlight its importance as a factor in cultural self-expression. However, this research further concentrates on the role of specific folk dances of the Ukrainian people, thereby providing a deeper understanding of their contribution to the formation of cultural identity and the uniqueness of Ukrainian cultural heritage. Thus, Van Camp's study and this research complemented each other, offering different perspectives on the issue of identity in dance and its impact on culture. Both studies underscored the significance of the art of dance in shaping identity and preserving cultural heritage.

J. Zhang (2020) explored folklore identity and its significance within the context of various cultures. The research focused on how folkloric identity is formed, maintained, and transmitted through various folkloric mediums such as dance, music, storytelling, and other traditions. The author explored the role of folklore in shaping and sustaining cultural identity, as well as its impact on society. Their findings highlighted folklore as a pivotal component of cultural self-awareness, reflecting a people's unique traditions and values through music, dance, rituals, and crafts. The study emphasised that folklore contributes to the affirmation of national identity and the preservation of national heritage. A commonality between scientist's work and this research is the emphasis on the importance of folkloric heritage in shaping and sustaining national identity. Both studies underscored the role of folklore, particularly dance, in transmitting traditions and values to future generations. They also drew attention to the influence of folklore on society and cultural development. However, the two studies differ in their approaches and contexts. Research by J. Zhang (2020) adopted a broad perspective, examining folkloric identity and its role in shaping culture across various nations. In contrast, this study focused specifically on the role of national dances, particularly in Ukraine, and their impact on national identity and cultural heritage. This research analysed specific dance styles,

their symbolism, and their significance in maintaining Ukrainian national consciousness.

The study by D.J. Jackson (2020) on the festivals of the Polish-American community highlighted their role in supporting and expressing Polish-American identity through cultural practices such as music and dance. These elements were crucial for preserving traditional values, aligning with the findings of this research into Ukrainian dances. Both studies underscored the significance of cultural festivals and performances in strengthening ethnic identity and connections within the diaspora. Cultural expressions, as demonstrated in both studies, served as mechanisms for sustaining the continuity of identity across generations, and adapting to new social contexts within the diaspora. Both Polish and Ukrainian folk dances played a pivotal role in shaping cultural identity, which is transmitted from generation to generation. They ensured the preservation of unique cultural heritage and serve as a bridge between the past and the present for Ukrainians and Poles abroad, evolving and adapting to changes in the global context. This research indicated similar trends in the development of national consciousness through cultural practices among Ukrainians, supported by a study by D.J. Jackson (2020), demonstrating the universality of this phenomenon across different ethnic communities. Both studies also highlighted how cultural festivals and dance performances serve as vehicles for educating younger generations, fostering appreciation for their culture, and promoting deeper understanding and mutual respect between different cultures. They acted as platforms for the exchange of cultural experiences and knowledge, encouraging their participation in the cultural life of their communities. Thus, an analysis of the cultural role of dance in Poland and Ukraine, as well as among their diasporas in other countries, confirmed that folk dance is a powerful tool for preserving national identity. It helped maintain cultural roots and transmit important traditions and values to subsequent generations, which was key to safeguarding cultural heritage in the face of globalisation. This study of Ukrainian dance, along with researcher's work, has shown that regardless of geographic location, cultural traditions continue to form the foundation of national identity and contribute to strengthening cultural identity across generations. These findings encouraged further study and support for traditional art forms, which play a crucial role in contemporary cultural diversity and intercultural understanding.

Researchers H. Payne & B. Costas (2020) explored the potential benefits of teaching creative dance in state primary education. The authors focused on how dance can contribute to the socio-emotional, artistic, physical, and cognitive development of children aged 3-11, which aligns with the UK's national curriculum. Similarly, this research highlighted how Ukrainian folk dances influence national identity and cultural awareness, reflecting similar aspects explored by H. Payne & B. Costas (2020).

Both studies acknowledge that dance not only served a physical development function, but also fostered critical thinking, creativity, and social interaction. H. Payne & B. Costas (2020) concluded that dance played a vital role in education and should be given a more central place in the curriculum. This opened the door for the further integration of dance programmes into school lessons worldwide, positively impacting child development. When analysing this research in the context of H. Payne & B. Costas (2020), a common trend emerges: dance is a significant component of cultural education that contributes not only to physical development but also to the psychological and social growth of individuals. These findings underscored the need for further research and development of dance programs in educational institutions, which could enhance the role of dance in shaping well-rounded and healthy young people

Researchers K. Chappell *et al.* (2021) conducted an in-depth analysis of the impact of dance on health and well-being across various life stages through a systematic review of existing studies. The authors identified that dance contributed to several key aspects of personal development: self-expression, identity, a sense of belonging, self-esteem, aesthetics, affective responses, and creativity. They highlighted the significance of dance as a form of expression that has a profound impact on social, emotional, and cognitive processes, providing a multifaceted approach to assessing health and well-being. Specifically, dance was found to enhance physical health by promoting physical activity and to contribute to emotional well-being through expressiveness and emotional freedom. The research also indicated that dance can play a crucial role in shaping both personal and collective identity, helping individuals feel part of a community and maintain social connections.

The authors also highlighted the importance of integrating dance programmes into social and educational initiatives, given their positive impact on personal development and overall well-being. They emphasised the need for broader recognition of dance as a tool for promoting health and well-being, calling for further research and policy development in this area. These findings resonated with this study on the impact of Ukrainian folk dance on national identity. This research demonstrated that dance not only serves physical development, but also played a critical role in preserving cultural heritage and supporting cultural identity. Both studies underscored that dance practices can be powerful tools for strengthening social cohesion and identity. They indicated the potential of dance as a tool for cultural and educational policy through the integration of dance programmes into broader social and educational frameworks to ensure holistic personal development. This affirmed the necessity for further research and the development of programmes that incorporate dance elements as a means to achieve wider social and educational goals.

## Conclusions

This research has established that national dances played a pivotal role in maintaining a connection to the historical past and cultural heritage, preserving traditions for future generations. The findings confirmed the influence of national dances on national identity and cultural self-awareness. It was revealed that dances serve as a means of shaping and expressing Ukrainian culture, providing people with a sense of belonging and pride in their heritage. An analysis of the symbolism of movements and dance styles has unveiled the multifaceted nature of Ukrainian culture and its historical development. The research results highlighted the deep connection between national dances and the history of Ukraine. It reflected the rich cultural heritage of the country, encompassing various historical periods, including the times of Kyivan Rus, the Cossack era, and other significant phases in Ukraine's history. Dances are unique chronicles that convey folk legends, historical events, everyday life, and traditions. As such, they served as a bridge between the past and the present, preserving the memory of important events and the heroic deeds of ancestors. This connection to history not only helped to preserve cultural heritage, but also strengthened the national identity of Ukrainians.

It was noted that the preservation and popularisation of national dances contribute to cultural development and intercultural exchange. In particular, further study of regional variations in national dances, focusing

on their unique characteristics and historical context, is crucial for maintaining the authenticity of dance traditions. Preserving authenticity helps maintain cultural diversity and the uniqueness of each region. This research also highlighted the importance of dance technique and its influence on the preservation and transmission of traditions. The research addresses how folk dances influence the formation of cultural identity among Ukrainians and the preservation of their traditional values, fostering a connection between the Ukrainian people and their cultural heritage. For future research, it is recommended to focus on a deeper analysis of dance culture and its impact on cultural identity, particularly among the Ukrainian diaspora abroad. It is also important to broaden the scope of research by including comparisons with other cultural contexts and conducting a detailed analysis of the historical and contemporary aspects of national dances. This could involve interviews with experts and dancers to identify key factors in their preservation and development.

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None.

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## Роль національних фольклорних танців у формуванні культурної ідентичності українського народу

■ **Анотація.** Актуальність цього дослідження обумовлена необхідністю збереження та поширення національних фольклорних танців, як засобу підтримки культурної ідентичності українців, особливо в контексті зовнішніх загроз від російської федерації. Мета дослідження полягала в глибокому вивченні ролі національних фольклорних танців у формуванні культурної ідентичності українського народу. У дослідженні були використані наступні методи: літературний огляд для всебічного аналізу різноманітних джерел, метод порівняння для виявлення взаємозв'язків та особливостей українських фольклорних танців в контексті світових культур, а також історичний метод для дослідження еволюції та ролі танців у формуванні культурної ідентичності. У статті було розкрито, як національні танці сприяють формуванню та збереженню культурної ідентичності, передаючи традиції, цінності та спільні риси української нації з покоління в покоління. В роботі було проведено аналіз основних національних танцювальних стилів, таких як гопак, аркан, коломийка, козачок та інші. Також, проаналізовано вплив фольклорних танців на сучасні українські культурні тенденції та національну самосвідомість. Завдяки відродженню інтересу до традиційних танців у сучасному суспільстві, з'явилися численні танцювальні колективи та школи, які популяризували українські танці як на території України, так і за кордоном. Ці ініціативи сприяли збереженню та популяризації української культурної спадщини, а також зміцненню національної ідентичності. Особлива увага приділяється ролі фольклорних танців у зміцненні зв'язків між діаспорою та історичною Батьківщиною, адже українці, які проживають за кордоном, через національні танці зберігають зв'язок зі своїм корінням, історією та культурою. У даному дослідженні також було розглянуто танцювальні традиції Греції, Грузії та Угорщини, що дозволило порівняти та проаналізувати роль народних танців у формуванні культурної ідентичності кожної з цих країн. Практичне значення цієї роботи полягає у її застосуванні в культурних і освітніх програмах, як в Україні, так і в діаспорі. Школи, культурні центри та танцювальні колективи можуть використовувати отримані дані для розробки навчальних курсів та популяризації української культури

■ **Ключові слова:** гопак; аркан; коломийка; традиційні танці; національні танцювальні стилі; народні обряди; хореографія; культура; танцювальний колектив