

THE BUCOVINIAN FESTIVAL OF SCIENCE AS A LABORATORY OF DIALOGUE ON THE BORDERLAND: INTERCULTURAL, INTERGENERATIONAL, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT: *This article analyzes the Bucovinian Festival of Science as an innovative model of an intercultural, intergenerational, and interdisciplinary laboratory of dialogue operating in a borderland context. Embedded within the International Folklore Festival Bucovinian Meetings, the Festival of Science seeks to overcome the traditional separation between academia and society by opening scholarly reflection to local communities, festival participants, and artistic groups. The article situates the Festival within the historical and socio-cultural specificity of Bukovina – a region shaped by multiethnicity, multireligiosity, and complex migration processes – highlighting the long-term consequences of wartime displacement, diaspora formation, and post-1989 social transformations in Central Europe.*

Particular attention is paid to the Festival's organizational model, characterized by horizontal communication, itinerant events, and the integration of popular-science lectures, film discussions, exhibitions, and participatory formats. The analysis demonstrates how the Festival fosters civic engagement, counters cultural stereotypes, decentralizes cultural and educational activities, and promotes the ideal of homo bucovinensis, understood as an attitude of openness and active engagement in culturally diverse environments. By foregrounding microhistories, personal narratives, and the active involvement of participants as co-creators of knowledge, the Bucovinian Festival of Science emerges as a transnational community of memory and a meaningful tool for social integration and the redefinition of regional identities in contemporary Europe.

Keywords: *Bukovina; borderland studies; intercultural dialogue; transnational community; public science; cultural heritage.*

Introduction

The Bucovinian Festival of Science, which has accompanied the International Folklore Festival *Bucovinian Meetings* since 2015, functions as an intercultural, intergenerational, and interdisciplinary laboratory of dialogue. Embedded in the unique socio-cultural landscape of the borderland, it extends the celebration of Bucovinian culture into the sphere of public education and citizen engagement.

The Festival's fundamental mission is to deconstruct the traditional „ivory tower” of academia by opening science to the world beyond institutional walls. It encourages scholars to step outside academic structures and engage directly with local festival communities, visitors, and artistic groups. In this shared space of dialogue, invited contributors-including researchers from universities, academies of sciences, museums, and scientific associations-meet participants from various cultural, linguistic, and generational

backgrounds. By representing a wide range of disciplines and research centers from multiple countries, these scholars help shape an inclusive environment where knowledge is shared through direct interaction rather than formal distance.

Bukovina is a historical and geographical region situated between the Carpathian Mountains and the middle course of the Dniester River. It represents one of the most distinctive examples of planned colonization in Central Europe. Its modern character was shaped by the policies of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which, in its efforts to develop the densely forested and sparsely populated borderlands of the empire, implemented a system of attractive legal and administrative privileges that drew settlers from various parts of the monarchy. This process resulted in the emergence of a unique socio-cultural mosaic. Multiethnicity and multireligiosity became the foundations of local identity, forming a model of peaceful coexistence among numerous nations.

A tragic turning point came with the period of the Second World War, which permanently shattered this historical unity. In 1940, as a result of Stalin's actions, the region was divided by a new state border: the northern part, with Chernivtsi, was incorporated into the Soviet Union (today's Ukraine), while the southern part remained within Romania. The new political reality triggered mass migrations, as a significant portion of the population-fearing repression or participating in organized resettlement campaigns-decided to leave their homeland.

As a consequence, former inhabitants of Bukovina became dispersed across various countries and regions of Central Europe. To this day, families whose biographies are inseparably marked by a "Bukovinian period" can be found in many parts of the continent. It is this diaspora, by cultivating the memory of its roots, that ensures Bukovina's heritage remains alive not only within its historical borders but also as a vital element of the identity of numerous communities in Poland, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, as well as in other regions of Romania and Ukraine.

Origins of the Festival

The scientific strand of the Festival draws inspiration from the cyclical Bucovinian conferences initiated by Prof. Kazimierz Feleszko in the early 1990s. While these major conferences occur every five years, the Bucovinian Festival of Science was conceived as a way to maintain this intellectual dialogue in the years without a conference by modestly integrating a knowledge component into the annual folk celebrations. This project was a joint initiative of Helena Krasowska and Magdalena Pokrzyńska, whose academic paths crossed during the 1999 Bucovinian conference in Jastrowie - the final conference led by Prof. Feleszko. It has since become one of their long-term shared „Bukovinian projects”.

By introducing academic reflection into the vibrant and emotionally rich space of the Bucovinian Meetings being the lived embodiment of the festival community (Dziadowiec 2016, 230-34, 246-255; Kaźmierczak-Kałużna, Pokrzyńska 2022), the organizers complemented the festival's artistic dimension with intellectual engagement. This

formula quickly gained recognition; scholars from various Central European countries eagerly attended, while members of folklore ensembles and general festival audiences increasingly joined the academic sessions. Presentations on the history, ethnography, and cultural heritage of Bukovina - as well as on the development of the folklore festival itself - attract both experts and non-specialists, effectively bridging the gap between academic experts and the broader public.

Festival Structure and Formats

The Festival's structure reflects a deep commitment to dialogic knowledge exchange through a multidimensional environment designed to foster intercultural encounters. This framework is built upon several core pillars:

- **Thematic Lecture Series:** Two main popular-science cycles, *Close Unknown* and *Culture – Nature*, serve as the intellectual backbone of the program, allowing participants to learn from individuals whose life stories enrich the intercultural character of the event.
- **Bucovinian Film Discussion Club:** This platform offers a dedicated space for cinematic reflection, where film screenings are followed by discussion meetings that bridge personal memory with collective experience.
- **Interactive and Artistic Events:** The program includes thematic panels titled *Conversations with Bukovina at Heart*, as well as traditional and multimedia exhibitions, workshops for both children and adults, and the promotion of books and publications focused on Bukovinian topics.
- **Horizontal Model of Communication:** A defining feature of the Festival is its departure from hierarchical academic structures. By holding meetings in „neutral”, open, and often informal spaces – such as cultural centers, museums, holiday resorts, or natural landscapes (forests, lakes, and rivers) – the Festival places lecturers and participants on an equal footing. In this relaxed environment, the typical vertical model of knowledge transmission is replaced by a fluid, reciprocal dialogue where knowledge is collectively negotiated.

The scale of the Festival's contribution to public science is reflected in its cumulative achievements. To date, the project has featured 137 lectures, 26 exhibitions, 14 discussion panels, 22 book promotions, and 21 film club discussion meetings (the list of the authors and topics see: <https://www.bukowinskifestiwalnauki.eu/teksty-prelegent%C3%B3w-bfn>).

The longevity and reach of the project have been sustained through co-financing from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (spanning 2015–2017 and 2021–2025). Furthermore, its 2018 edition was held under the patronage of the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

An Itinerant Laboratory: From Local to Transnational

The Festival has evolved alongside the Polish edition of the *Bucovinian Meetings*, which now encompasses several locations across western Poland. Since 2019, the Festival of Science has expanded significantly to reach a truly international audience, reflecting the transborder and diasporic nature of Bucovinian identity, involving the members of *transborder, multinational Bukovinian community* that began to emerge in the wake of social transformations following the collapse of communism (Pokrzyńska 2010, 169, 178).

The Festival travels to locations that are either situated within the historical region of Bukovina or inhabited by its vibrant diasporic communities. This itinerant model highlights the dynamic cross-cultural network maintained by social organizations and artistic groups across Europe. These locations include:

- Poland: in the Greater Poland Jastrowie, in the Lower Silesia: Dzierżoniów, Bolesławiec, and Lubań, as well as in the Lubusz Voivodeship: Zielona Góra, Nowogród Bobrzański, Drągowina;
- Ukraine: in Bucovina: Чернівці/Cernăuți/Chernivtsi, Панка/Panca/Piotrowce Dolne/Нижні Петрівці/Pătrăuți de Jos (Bucovina), as well as the in the Eastern Ukraine: Бердянськ/Berdyansk;
- Romania: in Bucovina: Câmpulung Moldovenesc, and in the capital of Romania: București/Bucharest.

Each year, the Festival takes place in a variety of locations (so that within a single year, three or more events are held at different times and in different settings). This itinerant nature and the continuity of events spread throughout the year constitute the implementation of the „mobile laboratory” model, encompassing events spanning multiple countries and institutions, and various local communities scattered throughout the area, beyond the main routes and centers¹. Across these varied contexts, the Festival has consistently adapted to its surroundings, proving its capacity to engage local residents and international guests in a shared, transnational community of memory.

Objectives and Values: The Homo Bucovinensis, Microhistories and Civic Engagement

The Festival pursues objectives central to borderland studies and intercultural education, specifically focusing on fostering social integration (Pokrzyńska 2020) and understanding between neighboring nations. These core values are reflected in several key areas. Firstly, disseminating knowledge. The Festival promotes Bukovina as a multicultural and multilingual model, not only as a historical region but as a template for other internally diverse societies in Central Europe. Secondly, counteracting stereotypes. By facilitating direct contact with the cultural “other” (strenger), the Festival challenges prejudices and stereotypes rooted in limited knowledge of neighboring ethnic groups. Thirdly, decentralization and inclusion. A defining feature of the Festival is its presence outside metropolitan centers. By operating in rural and small-town environments, it addresses the educational and cultural needs of communities often excluded from mainstream urban cultural life, ensuring that the „borderland laboratory” remains accessible and inclusive. Next, promoting the ideals described metaphorically in the *Homo Bucovinensis*. The project revives and reinterprets the ideal of *homo bucovinensis* – defined as a person open to and actively engaged in the surrounding cultures (Feleszko 1999, 4-5). This concept aligns with well-known metaphors describing Bukovina as “Europe in miniature”, “the Eastern Switzerland”, or a “family of nations”. These

values of tolerance and mutual understanding, developed over a century ago, are continuously renewed through the Festival's grassroots activities. Finally, fostering bottom-up integration. The Festival encourages civic engagement and strengthens local and regional identities, promoting attitudes of openness, dialogue, and cooperation to counter both intergenerational and intercultural alienation.

The interdisciplinary themes of the Festival emphasize the significance of everyday life, microstructures, and interpersonal relations in shaping broader historical processes. Rather than presenting „Great History” in abstract or top-down terms, the Festival frames historical narrative through a more intimate and accessible lens, like personal narratives and biographies, witnesses of history and anthropological imagination. By focusing on family stories and the biographies of „ordinary people”, the Festival demonstrates that the course of history is co-created by many voices. This approach weaves individual and family stories into broader historical narratives, utilizing disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and literary studies to provide a framework for recognizing the diversity of human experience. A defining feature of the Festival is the active involvement of participants who are themselves witnesses to history. By engaging them as storytellers and co-authors of the educational process, the Festival blurs the boundary between the „sender” and „receiver” of knowledge. This strengthens a sense of agency and highlights that history is shaped by everyday decisions rather than just „great individuals”. The Festival encourages individuals to recognize the value of their own lived experiences. This perspective cultivates an anthropological imagination that empowers participants to understand how their daily actions intersect with large-scale societal transformations (por. Sztompka 2005).

This grassroots approach aligns with broader trends observed in Central Europe after 1989. As decentralization and decommunization fostered a renewed interest in historical memory and authentic heritage, supplemented by newly

emerging cultural contents, such bottom-up activities have become vital tools for redefining regional identities (see Bukraba-Rylska, Burszta 2011, 25–26). By inviting „ordinary people” to share their testimonies, the Festival facilitates grassroots creativity and encourages a sense of civic responsibility in the reconstruction of social cohesion.

Conclusion: A Community of Memory and Responsibility

The Bucovinian Festival of Science demonstrates that when culture and science are combined on the borderland, they create a powerful and transformative model of inclusive dialogue. By operating within the framework of the Bucovinian Meetings, the Festival reinforces the idea that scientific reflection and folk tradition can harmoniously complement one another.

The Festival serves as a vital meeting ground across multiple levels, like intergenerational connection and transborder integration. It bridges the generational gap by providing younger participants with access to living history through the personal narratives of older generations – often the young people re-discover their own family stories and their own grandparents. It links local residents of festival towns with visiting folk groups and international guests, especially from from Moldova, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary. These interactions help build bridges between hosts and visitors, rooted in a shared cultural landscape.

Ultimately, the integrative power of the Festival extends to a symbolic, timeless dimension. By highlighting the interconnectedness of personal, family, and communal histories, the Festival nurtures a sense of co-responsibility for a collective past. It stands as a vital, transnational community of memory, proving that the values of tolerance, mutual understanding, and the ideal of *homo bucovinensis* remain as essential today as they were a century ago.

Notes

¹. Organizers of Bucovinian Festival of Science 2015–2025: Biblioteka Kultury w Iłowej; Central Cultural Bucovina; Centrum Kompetencji Cyfrowych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego; Centrum Studiów Sławistycznych SLAVIA Uniwersytetu Narodowego im. J. Fedkowycza; Fundacja Sławistyczna;

Gmina Gaworzyce; Gmina i Miasto Jastrowie; Gmina Nowogród Bobrzański; Institutul „Bucovina” al Academiei Române; Instytut Sławiastyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk; Instytut Socjologii Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego; Konsulat Generalny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Winnicy; Liceum Ogólnokształcące nr 1 im. Bolesława Krzywoustego w Głogowie; Lubuskie Towarzystwo Naukowe; Miejski Dom Kultury w Lubaniu; Miejsko-Gminny Ośrodek Kultury i Rekreacji w Nowogrodzie Bobrzańskim; Muzeul „Arta Lemnului”, Câmpulung Moldovenesc; Muzeum Archeologiczno-Historyczne w Głogowie; Muzeum Etnograficzne w Zielonej Górze; Muzeum Miejskie Dzierżoniowa; Muzeum Regionalne w Lubaniu; Nadleśnictwo Jastrowie; Nadleśnictwo Okonek; Narodowy Instytut Kultury i Dziedzictwa Wsi; Obwodowe Towarzystwo Kultury Polskiej im. A. Mickiewicza w Czerniowcach; Oddział Czerniowieckiego Obwodowego Towarzystwa Kultury Polskiej im. A. Mickiewicza w Piotrowcach Dolnych; Ośrodek Kultury w Jastrowiu; Pałac w Kruszynie; Polskie Kulturalno-Oświatowe Towarzystwo „Odrodzenie” w Berdiańsku; Polskie Towarzystwo Leśne Oddział Nadnotecki; Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze Oddział w Zielonej Górze; Primăria Municipiului Câmpulung Moldovenesc; Regionalna Dyrekcja Lasów Państwowych w Pile; Regionalne Centrum Kultury w Pile – Fabryka Emocji; Społeczna Organizacja „Pankowskie Towarzystwo Kultury Polskiej im. Adama Mickiewicza”; Stowarzyszenie Głogowska Edukacja Kresowa; Stowarzyszenie Inicjatyw Lokalnych HORYZONT; Stowarzyszenie Przyjaciół Drągowiny „Rosa”; Stowarzyszenie Res Carpathica; Studium Europy Wschodniej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego; Universitatea „tefan cel Mare” din Suceava; Urząd Gminy Dzierżoniów; Urząd Miasta Dzierżoniów; Urząd Miasta i Gminy Jastrowie; Urząd Miejski Nowogród Bobrzański; Urząd Miejski w Howej; Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu im. J. Fedkowycza w Czerniowcach; Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu Narodowego im. J. Fedkowycza w Czerniowcach; Zespół Szkół Ekonomicznych im. Jana Pawła II w Głogowie; Zespół Szkół Zawodowych PBO w Zielonej Górze; Związek Polaków w Rumunii.

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8. <https://www.bukowinskifestiwalnauki.eu/>