

# Ethnicity and Representation

## Material Folk Art at the Intersection of Local Identity, Minority Policy Goals, and Ethnographers' Aspirations in the 1970s and 1980s in Hungary

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### ABSTRACT

Those Germans who remained in Hungary after the Second World War faced complex political, economic, and social difficulties. In cultural terms, the diverse self-definitions of the Germans living in Hungary at that time precluded national cohesion, despite the use by the authorities of the unifying definition “German.” This national minority was bound together primarily by shared trauma. Individuals and communities alike were searching for their place amidst the changed circumstances, and it was the umbrella organization known as the Democratic Association of Germans in Hungary (*Magyarországi Németek Demokratikus Szövetsége*) that sought to bring them together. It was not until the 1970s that the association began to professionalize its activities and to conduct ethnographic research in cooperation with qualified specialists. During this process, the village of Harta, which was already famous for its folk art, came to their attention. It was specifically the economic potential of this settlement in Bács-Kiskun County, and its character as an ethnic and confessional enclave, that laid the foundations for the uniform objects and motifs of this local center of furniture painting. After the Second World War, the county administration’s cultural policy was relatively accepting of the furniture-making tradition here, and the local intelligentsia showed a supportive attitude towards the settlement’s German heritage. In the 1970s, there was still a furniture painter living in Harta, who won the most prestigious folk-art award, regularly participated in exhibitions and gala events, and even produced painted furniture in the cooperative’s subsidiary branch at the initiative of the local council president. This ensured that painted furniture from Harta came to represent not only the traditionalist aspirations of the German Association, but also national cultural policy. Harta furniture emerged as the most iconic style of minority painted furniture and as the shared heritage of the German community in Hungary.

### KEYWORDS

painted furniture, Germans in Hungary, Danube Swabians, nationality policy, local heritage, cultural representation

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## INTRODUCTION

Situated in Bács-Kiskun County (formerly Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County), Harta is one of the German villages in Hungary boasting a folklore heritage that is considered highly important by Hungarian ethnographers and the wider cultural community. Postcards of members of the local population in traditional costume were produced from the early twentieth century, while watercolors and drawings by Erna Piffel were published in book format for a German audience almost a century ago (PIFFEL 1938). For the Hungarian readership, Edit Fél's 1935 volume on the folk culture of the settlement (FÉL 1935) remained for decades a seminal example of the monographic ethnographic method — the study of ethnically and confessionally distinct local communities.<sup>1</sup>

In the present study, I show how the painted furniture of Harta became a dominant element in the common cultural heritage of the ethnic Germans of Hungary in the decades following the Second World War. After a brief overview of the history of painted furniture making in Harta, I focus on the opportunities available to the German community in the second half of the twentieth century as a result of their national ethnic association (i.e., the macro structure). At the same time, I examine the scope for action enjoyed by the political leadership and local intelligentsia of Harta (i.e., the micro structure) as a result of cultural and political factors in Bács-Kiskun County in terms of the musealization, preservation, and heritagization of the local tangible ethnographic heritage. The heritagization process presented in my paper is thus a selective rather than a neutral process and is organized on the basis of power (and, in some respects, of national politics). This process was unequivocally determined by the competence of the actors involved, as well as by the scope of activity of ethnographers and their networks in terms of professional authentication (BORBÉLY – ISPÁN 2019:10–11, 14; cf. JAKAB – VAJDA 2018:15–18; EITLER 2023:7–8).

## THE ETHNIC, CONFESSIONAL, ECONOMIC, AND GEOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HARTA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONSISTENT STYLE OF PAINTED FURNITURE AND UNIFORM PATTERNS (FROM THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR)

Among the territorial groups<sup>2</sup> of Germans and Danube Swabians<sup>3</sup> that were settled in the Kingdom of Hungary in the eighteenth century, Harta was one of the northernmost German

<sup>1</sup>FÉL 1991:170. See also: FÜLEMILE 2018:56–57. Due to space constraints, I am unable to provide an overview of the literature on Harta's local history, although I would mention here the relevant monograph by Ferenc Eiler: EILER 2011a.

<sup>2</sup>These are: *Ungarisches Mittelgebirge, Schwäbische Türkei, Slawonien, Batschka, Syrmien, Banat, Sathmar*. GLASS et al. 2012:18.

<sup>3</sup>The Germans living in the territory of the former Kingdom of Hungary can be divided into several groups according to the manner and date of their arrival (and partly according to their origin). Hungarian Germans include/included, for example, the Transylvanian Saxons, the Zipser Saxons (Saxons from Szepes County), Austrians living in the former western borderlands, and the Swabian settlers along the Danube, who arrived there from the Holy Roman Empire in the eighteenth century.



enclaves in the former *Bácska* (*Batschka*) region, surrounded by Hungarian settlements. The first Lutheran and Reformed German settlers probably arrived in the village in 1723, along with Hungarian and Slovak settlers. However, linguistic and cultural assimilation — with the exception of surnames — took place rapidly (FÉL 1935:3; BOROSS 1981a:519, 1982a:17–19; SCHMEL 1983:16–28). Since the first settlers were mainly serfs, and since the proportion of the land that they used, and subsequently owned, did not increase dramatically until the nineteenth century, many families left the settlement, while its function as a center of emigration was further enhanced by the high natural reproduction rates in the region. Although the village retained its majority German population until the Second World War, the number of Hungarians increased. The process was driven primarily by administrative changes related to the incorporation of former outlying areas (EILER 2011a:16–19, 2011b).<sup>4</sup>

Research has also highlighted the scarcity of livestock on the small serf plots (NOVÁK 1979:576–581), indicating that members of the local population must have had established practices to supplement their incomes as early as the eighteenth century. However, these supplementary occupations did not yet include carpentry in the eighteenth century, as the first known master craftsman in the settlement, who practiced his trade at home, without owning land, appears in a source from 1828. The large number of craftsmen — and the demand for their products — is clearly illustrated by the fact that local master carpenters had already established guilds by 1836, while dynasties of craftsmen working in the same trade soon emerged (BOROSS 1981c:520, 1982a:40–44; K. CSILLÉRY 1987a:383).

Marietta Boross and Klára K. Csilléry have convincingly demonstrated that the painted furniture preserved by German families in Harta dates from the last decades of the eighteenth century. However, as the vast majority of the earliest known pieces have survived only from the 1820s onwards, ethnographers date the first locally made furniture from this period.<sup>5</sup> Although Klára K. Csilléry had earlier attributed the origins of the Harta (and Sárköz) furniture painting style to the second stylistic phase (or period) of Komárom painted carpentry (K. CSILLÉRY 1980:245–246, 1987a:406–409, 1987b:59), Tünde Zentai suggests, in light of our present-day knowledge, that in contrast to the earlier research paradigm, the regional furniture painting centers that include Harta should be defined as part of a Danubian stylistic area rather than a variation of Komárom painted carpentry (ZENTAI 2022a:78). The Danube, which crosses the national border and flows past the settlement, undoubtedly played a crucial role in transporting raw materials and finished products. Without the possibility of floating timber and transporting finished products by river, it would have been impossible for such an influential center of painted carpentry to develop in what was essentially a wood-poor region, or for its products to become popular even among other ethnic minorities both south of Harta and on the other side of the Danube (BOROSS 1981c:1162; SCHMEL 1983:46–48; K. CSILLÉRY 1987a:384, 408).

<sup>4</sup>On the decades between the two world wars, see EILER 2010b.

<sup>5</sup>This date also coincides with the change from hardwood to softwood (pine) in local furniture production. BOROSS 1981a:521; K. CSILLÉRY 1987a:407–408. Cf. ZENTAI 2022a:35–78.



Thus, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, a locally consistent furniture culture had emerged, which, while naturally undergoing changes<sup>6</sup> in terms of colors, motifs,<sup>7</sup> and range of objects,<sup>8</sup> nevertheless determined the style of interior decoration in Harta households, which was dependent on both denominational allegiance and wealth, right up until the time of the deportations following the Second World War (and the consequent radical changes in lifestyle) (K. CSILLÉRY 1987a:386) (Figs 1 and 2).

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULTURAL PATRONAGE AVAILABLE TO THE GERMAN ASSOCIATION IN THE HUNGARIAN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

In the years following the Second World War, Hungary underwent significant political, economic, and social transformation that enabled the establishment of a communist dictatorship. Based on the principle of collective guilt, around 200,000 citizens of German nationality were expelled from the country. At the end of the deportation process, there were approximately 230,000 ethnic Germans left in Hungary, most of whom were deprived of their rights and lived in a state of existential vulnerability (TÓTH 2001, 2016).

Well after the establishment of central cultural organizations of South Slavs, Romanians, and Slovaks in Hungary, the “German Association”<sup>9</sup> was founded in 1955 under the leadership of General Secretary Frigyes Wild (TÓTH 2018:842). The association’s official newspaper, *Freies Leben*, was launched in 1954, later being replaced by the *Neue Zeitung* in 1957. Controlled by the Patriotic People’s Front (*Hazaifias Népfront*), the association’s hypothetical task, besides providing legal opinion on individual laws, was “institutional identity building” (cf. BORBÉLY – ISPÁN 2019:14) — that is, coordinating national cultural groups and promoting central party and government policies among the minority population (EILER 2011a:145; TÓTH 2020:47–62, 385–398). The policy essentially promoting assimilation softened by the end of the 1950s, although opportunities for national minority education and cultural life remained limited

<sup>6</sup>After the First World War, master craftsmen in Harta worked mainly for the local population, thus increased competition prompted Henrik Knódel (1891–1962) to renew his style with the integration of new motifs and previously unused colors (e.g., orange, rose madder, and burgundy) in addition to the red, yellow, green, and white typically used before. BOROSS 1981a:1163. Cf.: K. CSILLÉRY 1987a:413; SCHNEIDER 2021a:15, 20.

<sup>7</sup>Despite the distinguishing features and variations discernible in the furniture of individual furniture-painting families (e.g., Csáki, Kaszt, Hauszen, Wéber, Hoffmann, Knódel, etc.), the style of Harta furniture is consistent in terms of its ornamentation. BOROSS 1981c:1163; 1981c:521–522; 1982b; 1999:49–68; K. CSILLÉRY 1987a:411; SCHNEIDER 2021a:12, 27–28, 2021b.

<sup>8</sup>This uniform set of furniture generally comprised a table with a corner bench, a bed with bedding, two or three chairs, a large wardrobe, and, from the late 1800s, a chest of drawers with a mirror above it; apart from these, various objects that had already become archaic by the twentieth century (chest, wall-mounted hanging rack, wall cabinet) were also part of the set. Even quite poor families aspired to acquire such objects, thus the furnishings in a single room might represent the work of several different craftsmen from several different periods. K. CSILLÉRY 1979; 1987a:384, 408–409; BOROSS 1999:69–131; ROMSICS 2010:15–64; BUSA 2014a:278–283, 2014b; SCHNEIDER 2021a:20; ZENTAI 2022b:39–56.

<sup>9</sup>The name of the organization changed over the years: 1955–1958: Cultural Association of German Workers in Hungary (*Kulturverband der deutschen Werktätigen in Ungarn*); 1958–1969: Democratic Association of German Workers in Hungary (*Demokratische Verband der deutschen Werktätigen in Ungarn*); from 1969: Democratic Association of Germans in Hungary (*Demokratische Verband der Deutschen in Ungarn*).





**Fig. 1.** Painted footboard from Harta, 1855 (Unknown master, Museum of Ethnography, Collection of Furniture and Lighting Instruments, NM 60.75.27, collector: Klára Csilléry, 1964; photograph: Marcell Szász, 2022)

(TÓTH 2020:62–72, 354–384, 390–398).<sup>10</sup> Positive changes in ethnic policy began to take place from the mid-1960s, mainly due to foreign policy factors. These changes were given greater urgency by the crisis in ethnic education, while the ten years that had passed since the previous party decision also justified the carrying out of a review (FÖGLEIN 2001:56–57; TÓTH 2017, 2020:72–74). The process resulted in the 1968 Party Committee decision that allowed for “cautious democratization”: within the framework of the Patriotic People’s Front (PPF), ethnic committees were established, in which increasing attention was given to the competences of professionals, while greater latitude was given to the editors of ethnic newspapers (TÓTH 2020:84). The establishment of heritage preservation and cultural groups (and their visits to both East and West Germany) was given more widespread support, as was the organization of ethnic festivals and galas. Ethnic museums and a network of libraries were set up, and the national minority studio of Hungarian Radio<sup>11</sup> and Hungarian Television<sup>12</sup> in Pécs began

<sup>10</sup>In the present study, I rely mainly on the periodization used by Ágnes Tóth (TÓTH 2020). Balázs Dobos established a similar, although slightly different periodization: DOBOS 2020.

<sup>11</sup>The German national minority studio was established in 1956.

<sup>12</sup>The German national minority studio was established in 1976.



**Fig. 2.** Painted footboard from Harta, 1938 (Painted by János Knódel, Museum of Ethnography, Collection of Furniture and Lighting Instruments, NM 64.68.1, collected by Klára Csilléry, 1964; photograph by Marcell Szász, 2022)

broadcasting regularly in German.<sup>13</sup> However, the Germans — like the other national minorities in Hungary — had to wait until the end of the 1980s for “the establishment of local, regional organizations capable of articulating real, local nationality interests... as well as for the possibility of a comprehensive, public criticism of minority policy” (DOBOS 2020:303–304).

At the same time, from the early 1970s, the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (HSWP) made visible concessions<sup>14</sup> towards the German and other ethnic groups living in Hungary, while the Democratic Association of Germans in Hungary (DAGH), in its report on its twenty years of activity, was now permitted to mention the fact that excesses had also been committed during the period of collective punishment of the Germans after the Second World War.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in future, the Hungarian People’s Republic was “not interested in the assimilation

<sup>13</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Situation assessment (June 11, 1971), 7.

<sup>14</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 13. The 11th Congress of the HSWP and the tasks of the ethnic associations (May 12, 1975), 1–2.

<sup>15</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Briefing (September 16, 1975), 2.



of ethnic groups but in the socialist integration of citizens whose mother tongue was not Hungarian.”<sup>16</sup> Naturally, the changes did bring about any general progress in terms of the enforcement of minority citizenship rights for the association, since the DAGH, even by its own admission, was able to ensure the relative legal protection of German workers primarily in the context of the workplace.<sup>17</sup> Ethnic associations continued to play a significant role in public education and knowledge dissemination,<sup>18</sup> becoming genuinely professional thanks to the efforts of their staff and external experts, especially from the mid-1970s<sup>19</sup> (POPRÁDY 1995:245–247; TÓTH 2020:84). The homeland knowledge movement, which was mainly linked to local schools and cultural centers, also flourished among the German population in Hungary.<sup>20</sup> The *Reicht brüderlicht die Hand* language and talent contest was launched,<sup>21</sup> although participation in music and dance groups, and attendance at the shows they put on, remained the most successful initiative among the rural ethnic German population even in the 1980s.<sup>22</sup> In terms of the preservation and presentation of material folk art, the number of village museums and various exhibition venues (local history collections in community centers, etc.) increased dramatically by 1985. At that time, there were twelve German village museums in the country, while a further five institutions with other profiles (schools, community centers, and the club of the Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge<sup>23</sup>) also hosted local history exhibitions.<sup>24</sup>

## PROMOTION OF MATERIAL ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH BY THE GERMAN ASSOCIATION IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

Although the German Association had already begun to promote various ethnographic collections in the 1950s, especially those helping the work of choirs and dance groups, real professionalization in the cultural activities of the DAGH did not take place until the Party Committee decision of 1968 and the association’s third congress, on April 28–29, 1969. The changed situation is clearly illustrated by a letter sent on November 14, 1969, from General Secretary Frigyes Wild to László Kővágó, head of the National Minority Department within the Ministry of Culture: “In order to collect national minority ethnographic traditions — which, along with the incalculable cultural values associated with them, are at risk of being lost — it would be

<sup>16</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 13. Briefing on the report of the council discussion (no year), 3.

<sup>17</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Briefing (September 16, 1975), 5

<sup>18</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 13. Briefing on the report of council discussion (no year), 2, 8.

<sup>19</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 13. Report on national minority discussions held at the level of county and region in 1976 (August 31, 1976), 1–3.

<sup>20</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Situation assessment (June 11, 1971), 5.

<sup>21</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 13. 24. Briefing (September 16, 1975), 6–7

<sup>22</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Statement on public cultural activities, 1977–1981 (August 31, 1981), 1–3.

<sup>23</sup>The *Tudományos Ismeretterjesztő Társulat* (TIT) was the Hungarian umbrella association of societies involved in the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

<sup>24</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 26. Assessment of the situation of museums and village museums (May 17, 1985), 1–2.



desirable to send at least one ethnographer per year on a six-month trip to the GDR to ensure appropriately trained professionals.” The letter continues: “We already have quite a good ethnographic collection... but it has been neglected for years. The relevant professionals at the German Academy of Sciences could compile a book from this material... that would be of international significance.”<sup>25</sup> Wild’s initiatives did not lead to any change, as evidenced by the fact that the secretary general wrote to László Kóvágó again in 1972 on a similar subject. In this letter, he also reported that, with the exception of folk dance, the association was having difficulties cooperating<sup>26</sup> with the Institute of Culture,<sup>27</sup> thus, although there are no documents to support this, it is likely that the DAGH was also endeavoring to collaborate with other organizations and institutions.

This occasionally haphazard process led to cooperation between the national minority associations and the Hungarian Ethnographic Society, which yielded some noteworthy results in the field of publishing. Edited by Iván Balassa, the series *A magyarországi nemzetiségek néprajza* (Ethnography of the national minorities of Hungary) was launched, followed by several subseries in the mother tongues of the national minorities. The first volume of the German series *Beiträge Zur Volkskunde Der Ungarndeutschen*, edited by Karl Manherz, was published in 1975, and subsequent volumes, such as the introductory volume, attracted ongoing interest.<sup>28</sup> The Nationality Editorial Office, established within the Textbook Publishing House, ensured not only the publication of these series but also literature in the mother tongues of the national minorities, including books of poetry, collections of folk songs, and volumes of studies.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to professional publishing, the DAGH collaborated with the Hungarian Ethnographic Society primarily in the coordination of amateur ethnographic collections.<sup>30</sup> The 28<sup>th</sup> National Ethnographic and Dialect Collecting Competition in 1980 was significant in terms of supporting research into material folk art. One of the main categories in the competition, which was supported by the German Association, was the description of handicrafts: “a technical vocabulary and photographic illustration of the crafts of blue-dyer, cooper, cartwright, potter, gingerbread maker, carpenter, furniture painter, etc.”<sup>31</sup>

Cooperation with the Applied Folk Arts Council<sup>32</sup> was also initiated. In 1978, the DAGH, the Applied Folk Arts Council, and the editorial staff of the *Neue Zeitung* announced the

<sup>25</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Proposal on interstate negotiations between Hungary and the German Democratic Republic (November 14, 1969), 2.

<sup>26</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Letter from Frigyes Wild to László Kóvágó (October 28, 1972), 2–3.

<sup>27</sup>Professional umbrella organization of public cultural institutions in Hungary (mainly village cultural centers), established in 1951. After several changes of name and changes in the scope of its activities, its present-day successor is the National Institute of Culture.

<sup>28</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 26. Book series review (May [no day], 1983), 1–2.

<sup>29</sup>MNL OL XXIII. I. 1. Box nr. 26. Memorandum on the meeting of the editorial board (February 26, 1985), 1.

<sup>30</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Report on public cultural activities, 1977–1981 (August 31, 1981), 7.

<sup>31</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 26. Call for entries on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the liberation of the country. 1980. 3.

<sup>32</sup>The Applied Folk Arts Council (*Népi Iparművészeti Tanács*) functioned from 1952 as a certification body for the products and artists of the folk art and cottage industry cooperatives. Today, its successor is the Applied Folk Arts Advisory Board (*Népi Iparművészeti Tanácsadó testület*, NITT) and the Department of Applied Folk Arts of the Hungarian Heritage House (*Hagyományok Háza Népi Iparművészeti Osztálya*). AMENT-KOVÁCS 2020:192–193.





competition *Folk Arts of the Germans in Hungary*, to mark the association's fifth congress. The aim of the competition, in which the need for documentation was emphasized, was to "explore and preserve the folk art and traditions of the German ethnic minority in Hungary and to apply them in present-day material culture." Both old and newly produced objects were eligible to be entered for the competition, although the latter were required to "meet present-day standards with respect to both art and functionality."<sup>33</sup> First prize in both the "Tradition Preservation" (*Traditionspflege*) and "Applied Folk Arts" categories was awarded to entrants from Harta — to Teofil Rétfalvi and Mrs. János Öhl for their research into traditional objects, and to Péter Himpelmann for his furniture-painting skills (*ERGEBNIS DER PREISAUSSCHREIBEN 1978:7*).

Despite the obvious development in research on the popular culture of Germans in Hungary, in 1981 Miklós Klotz, the secretary of the DAGH, gave the following evaluation of the association's efforts to systematically search for, document, and preserve ethnographic artefacts: "It is our urgent task to research the living traditions of the German ethnic minority, and to collect and process customs and ethnographic objects. With the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian Ethnographic Society, the association has endeavored to make such research a regular undertaking in the period in question. The International Ethnographic Conferences on National Minority Research, held in Békéscsaba in 1975 and 1981, have given further impetus to this work. The results of the research have been published in our series 'The Ethnography of the Germans in Hungary.'<sup>34</sup> ...The collection and processing of ethnographic objects has taken place within an institutional and social framework. Founded in 1972, the mission of the German Nationality Museum in Tata is to collect, house, and exhibit objects representing the culture of the Germans in Hungary.... Besides the museum in Tata, the Janus Pannonius Museum in Pécs also focuses on the ethnography of the Germans in Hungary.... The task of providing professional assistance and supervision for the village museums and homeland collections that have been established in several locations has yet to be resolved."<sup>35</sup> It is worth pointing out that this topic remained on the agenda for years: in 1989, in its application to the *Cultural Fund*, the restructured association once again paid special attention to the collection and processing of folk motifs, albeit with a primary focus on the work of fine artists and applied artists.<sup>36</sup>

## MINORITY POLICY IN BÁCS-KISKUN COUNTY AND HARTA'S CHANGING ECONOMY

Negative discrimination against the German population in Central and Eastern Europe following the Second World War was also perceptible in Bács-Kiskun County (*EILER 2012*), while in terms of local community cohesion, the resettlement processes were further complicated by the fact that the change in population led to a transformation of the village's confessional configuration. Deportations and resettlements brought primarily Hungarian

<sup>33</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 26. Call for entries for the competition Folk Arts of the Germans in Hungary. 1978. 1.

<sup>34</sup>*Beiträge zur Volkskunde der Ungarndeutschen.*

<sup>35</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Report on public cultural activities, 1977–1981 (August 31, 1981), 7.

<sup>36</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Application to the Cultural Fund (January 13, 1989).



Catholic families from Slovakia to Harta, and the confiscation and nationalization of property temporarily weakened the settlement's agrarian economy. The distinction between "natives" and "newly settled" was thus emphasized not just in terms of the changing agricultural opportunities but also with respect to the practice of religion, and especially in the life of the Lutheran congregation, which had consisted predominantly of Germans (EILER 2008, 2011a:150–151).

However, Bács-Kiskun County's relative tolerance towards ethnic minorities is striking in a national context. According to the 1960 report of the Bács County<sup>37</sup> Secretariat of the Patriotic People's Front (PPF) on the work of the front among the ethnic minorities in the county, the minorities had indeed been involved in the work of the councils during the 1958 elections<sup>38</sup> (in keeping with Party Committee's 1958 resolution), in proportion to their numbers as measured by the census, even if this did not necessarily constitute the true representation of their interests. The same report states that the "passivity of... the German-speaking nationalities has not entirely disappeared, which ... can be attributed to that fact that many are listening to the mendacious broadcasts of Western radio, while some have unresolved property issues and many are in correspondence with people who have been settled in the West." Despite this, the Bács County Secretariat of the PPF was able to coordinate its activities with the German Association's popular front committees in the spirit of the "implementation of socialism in the village," which, according to the hopes expressed in 1960, "would also lead to an improvement in the economic situation of the national minorities."<sup>39</sup>

Importantly, in the 1950s, cooperation between the county's *national minority activists*<sup>40</sup> and the Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge was mainly intended to popularize the policies of the state party.<sup>41</sup> The national minority days held in the county focused primarily on "improving the political mood of the national minority population,"<sup>42</sup> as well as hosting "peace rallies" and "providing information on the international situation."<sup>43</sup> However, as a result of this process, the Bács-Kiskun County Cinema Company began to project German-language films from the turn of the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>44</sup> and (at least in theory) focused on creating the necessary conditions for administration in the minority language.<sup>45</sup> In the 1969 report of the HSWP County Committee on the situation of the national minority population in the Dunavecse district, two settlements were listed as "national minority villages": Harta (where 60 percent of the population was then identified as German) and Dunaegyháza (where 90 percent of the population was regarded as Slovak). Nevertheless, the ethnic data in relation to the population of

<sup>37</sup>In my study, the territorial designations "Bács County" and "Bács-Kiskun County" are given in the form in which they appear in the sources.

<sup>38</sup>MNL BKML XXVIII. 5. Report on the work of the Patriotic People's Front (August 23, 1960), 1.

<sup>39</sup>MNL BKML XXVIII. 5. Report on the work of the Patriotic People's Front (August 23, 1960), 1, 5–6, 8.

<sup>40</sup>MNL BKML XXVIII. 5. Report on the work of the Patriotic People's Front (August 23, 1960), 2.

<sup>41</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Letter from the Bács-Kiskun County Secretary of the Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge to the Democratic Association of German Workers in Hungary (October 18, 1956), 1–2.

<sup>42</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 13. Plan for the national minority day (November 18, 1959), 1.

<sup>43</sup>MNL BKML XXVIII. 5. Report on the work of the People's Front (August 23, 1960), 4.

<sup>44</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 25. Letter from Frigyes Wild to the Bács-Kiskun County Cinema Company (April 16, 1970).

<sup>45</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 14. Report on the national minority situation (March 26, 1981), 2.



these villages were admittedly approximate,<sup>46</sup> while the report emphasized the existence of “a perfect assimilation process in all areas.”<sup>47</sup>

Individuals of German descent could be elected to Harta’s village council from the outset,<sup>48</sup> and the representation of the minority population was constantly monitored.<sup>49</sup> Beginning in 1965, there was a trend for the party secretaries to be of Hungarian nationality (József Kovács, Imre Szokola), while the president of the local council (András Nánai) was of German origin. Later, the inverse was true: the party secretary (Péter Gottschall) was of German origin, while the local council secretary, Imre Szokola, was of Hungarian descent (EILER 2011a:163). In 1981, the population of the six national minority settlements in the Kalocsa District was 19,897. Almost 70 percent of the population (11,865 individuals) identified themselves as belonging to a particular nationality (in the district as a whole, the proportion was around 21 percent).<sup>50</sup> At the time, exactly 50 percent of the village population (2,254 out of 4,508 people) declared themselves to be of German nationality. The proportion of people of German nationality was 56 percent among members of the council, 58 percent among members of the council committees, and 44 percent in the elected bodies of the PPF. This means that the rate of representation in Kalocsa District can be defined as slightly higher than average.<sup>51</sup>

Importantly, that representatives of the local German nationality community also had the opportunity to hold various political and cultural positions (EILER 2011a:165).<sup>52</sup> In 1981, Harta delegated one person to the National Board of the PPF and another to the PPF County Committee’s Nationality Subcommittee.<sup>53</sup> In 1987, the proportion of positions held by the national minority population in local governing bodies (Party Committee, Joint Council, Joint Council Executive Committee, PPF Committee, PPF Presidency, Communist Youth Association Committee) was at least 50 percent (with the exception of the Communist Youth Association). It is also worth noting that the village sent one delegate to the Board of the DAGH, one to the National Committee of the PPF, and one to the PPF National Minority Committee of Bács-Kiskun County, while another individual from Harta chaired the National Minority Committee of Bács-Kiskun County Council.<sup>54</sup> The efforts of András Nánai, president of the council, who thus had a growing network of contacts, coincided with a gradual relaxation in minority policy at national level. This process was closely associated with Bács-Kiskun County’s policy of supporting culture, and with the initiative taken by museologists from the county museum and regional museums to promote the homeland knowledge movement and ethnographic research on national minorities.

<sup>46</sup>MNL BKML XXXV. 4. Dossier nr. 8. 10. Report on the situation of the national minority population (May 12, 1969), 5.

<sup>47</sup>MNL BKML XXXV. 4. Dossier nr. 8. 10. Report on the situation of the national minority population (May 12, 1969), 7.

<sup>48</sup>Ferenc Eiler pointed out that these individuals did not come from the pre-Second World War local elite (EILER 2011a:148).

<sup>49</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 14. Action plan (July 12, 1978), 1.

<sup>50</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 14. Report on the national minority situation (March 26, 1981), 1.

<sup>51</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 14. Report on the national minority situation (March 26, 1981), Appendix.

<sup>52</sup>It should be noted that the apparently successful advocacy in Harta is not representative of all ethnic Germans in Hungary. DOBOS 2020:302.

<sup>53</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 14. Report on the situation of the national minority population (May 26, 1981), 7.

<sup>54</sup>MNL BKML XXVIII. 732. b. 2–3./1987. Report (March 4, 1987), Appendix.



## MUSEALIZATION, REPRESENTATION, AND MEMORY: LOCAL ASPIRATIONS AND HARTA IN LIGHT OF THE GERMAN ASSOCIATION AND NATIONAL POLITICS

Following collectivization, the local community were threatened not only with the consequences of a population change that affected social cohesion, but also with the radical transformation of their accustomed way of life. To ensure effective functioning and successful production, it was important to eliminate ethnic conflicts and segregation in the new cooperatives. According to Ferenc Eiler, it was primarily because these obstacles were successfully overcome (with increased production and the consolidation of ethnic relations) that Harta, compared to other German villages, very quickly attracted the attention of the ethnic minority press.<sup>55</sup> This heightened interest on the part of the press can be traced back to the unification of the local cooperatives. The cooperatives, which were the main employers of the local population, merged under the name “Ferenc Erdei Cooperative” in 1974, thus ending the earlier trends towards ethnic segregation (EILER 2010a:330–331, 2011a:148–151, 159–166).

It was during this period of radical changes in lifestyle that the first folk dance group was formed in the winter of 1950–1951.<sup>56</sup> From the academic year 1952/1953, German lessons for children were offered at the local school under the direction of Teofil Rétfalvi (EILER 2011a:153, 166–167). During a German lesson for a fifth-grade class, Rétfalvi decided to collect objects in the settlement related to the national minority with the help of the children, and his initiative was supported by the parents. He established a local history study group, and the first display case was installed on the back wall of one of the classrooms in 1953. It contained objects that were no longer used at the time. This collection, the forerunner of today’s village museum, soon outgrew the space available in the classroom; it was housed first in the school’s “assembly hall,” and then in the stairway of the council building’s north entrance (H. BARTHA 1999:105; EILER 2011a:154). In 1965, with the help of the PPF council president András Nánai, a sum of HUF 100,000 was raised for the purchase of a building. The money was used to buy the predecessor of today’s village museum, an old German house opposite the Reformed Church (EILER 2011a:161). Teofil Rétfalvi and his students continued to collect new objects for the local history collection, while the professionalization of the technical equipment in the building, which was opened in 1967, can be credited to the contribution of museum directors János Bárh from Kalocsa and Ede Solymos from Baja.<sup>57</sup> At the opening ceremony, Rétfalvi shared the following thoughts concerning the exhibition space: “Anyone who visits the Harta Local History Collection can justifiably claim to have encountered the Harta of old, to have had a glimpse of the Harta of old” (RÉTFALVI 1974:2473). The continued operation of the local history collection was ensured by András Nánai, who managed to secure a further HUF 100,000 in state support for the maintenance of the institution with the assistance of the first secretary of the District Party

<sup>55</sup>A list of articles that appeared in the columns of *Freies Leben* and *Neue Zeitung* is published in AMENT-KOVÁCS 2023:206.

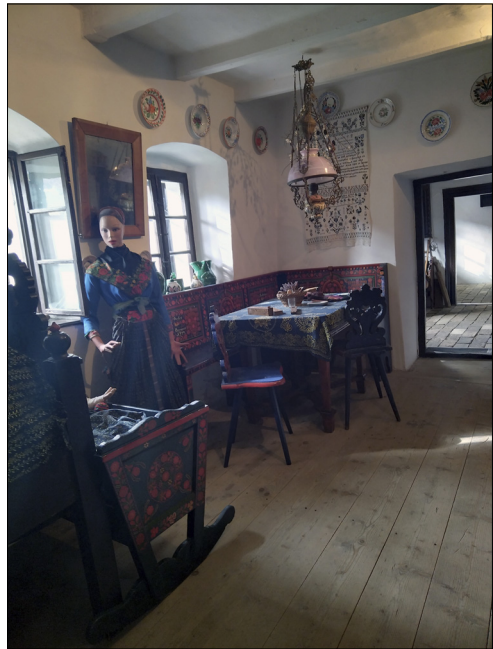
<sup>56</sup>The dance group was officially recognized from 1963: WÜNSCH 2002:34, 41.

<sup>57</sup>KUSTÁR – GOTSCHALL 2009:4–5. Although the authors also mention János Bárh as director in their brief history of the village museum, János Bárh, by his own admission, was involved only in supervisory tasks in the village.



Committee in 1977.<sup>58</sup> In 1987, in its report on the implementation of nationality policy tasks, the village council made special mention of Teofil Rétfalvi's more than thirty years of activity as a collector and museum guide.<sup>59</sup> (Figs 3–5).

The musealization of home furnishings in Harta thus began locally in the 1960s, while nationally the trend can be dated largely to the 1970s. In Tata, the first collections began in the predecessor to the present-day German Nationality Museum in 1972: János Fatuska organized an exhibition drawing on these collections in as early as 1973, before the museum became independent in 1975. In the following years, the holdings of the museum, which was permanently short of space, were systematically expanded on a national scale (KEMECSI 2002:80–81, 2022:332–333; BUSA 2014a:275). Most of the Harta furniture was added to the collection between 1973 and 1977 (BUSA 2014a:278, 284). In terms of the collection methodology, besides the ethnic merit of the exhibited objects (cf. BÍRÓ – GAGYI 1987:77), their ethnographic value — as emphasized by Mónika Busa — seems to have been decisive, since the Harta furniture was displayed “as the last iconic evidence of folk art”<sup>60</sup> in exhibitions such as *The Interior Decoration of*



Figs. 3–4. Details of the exhibition in the Harta Village Museum (photographs by the author, 2022)

<sup>58</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 14. Invitation to the session of the Council of Harta (October 25, 1977), 4.

<sup>59</sup>MNL BKML XXVIII. 732. b. 2–3./1987. Report (March 4, 1987), 1, 3.

<sup>60</sup>Exhibitions were thus previously organized around types of objects, with little concern for the life stories or identities (etc.) behind the representative objects of the former households or the items that had once been in everyday use. BUSA 2014a:283–285. Comp. VEREBÉLYI 2018:29.





**Fig. 5.** Bust of Teofil Rétfalvi, the teacher from Harta who founded the local history collection, in the courtyard of the village museum (photograph by the author, 2022)

*Hungarian National Minorities* (1975), *The Folk Art of the Germans in Hungary* (1976), *German Folk Art in Hungary* (1986), and *The Peasant Furniture of Harta* (1989).<sup>61</sup> These objects were later curated into a new permanent exhibition (*1100 Years of Coexistence: The History of the Germans in Hungary from the Conquest to the Present Day*), which opened in 1997 (KEMECSI 2002:208). In 1983, Harta interiors represented German furniture in Hungary in the GDR's Center for Culture and Information (Dohndorf 1983:7). In 1981–1982, the Budapest Museum of Ethnography also selected Harta, when — in fulfilment of an exchange agreement to represent the material culture of the German nationality population in Hungary — the furnishings of a

<sup>61</sup>János Fatuska mentions in his report on the year 1981 that a series of exhibitions under the title *Folk Art of the Germans in Hungary* was planned for 1982, with painted furniture being the focus of the first thematic exhibition. MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 24. Report on the activities of János Fatuska (November 30, 1981), 2.





complete room from the settlement were collected for display in Kittsee, Austria. At that time, the Ethnographisches Museum Schloss Kittsee was operating as a branch of the Vienna Museum of Ethnography, and its exhibition aimed to present the folk culture of Eastern and Southeastern Europe (K. CSILLÉRY 1987a:375).<sup>62</sup>

In addition to the above, a major week-long celebration of the 250th anniversary of the settlement's repopulation following the Ottoman occupation took place in 1973. The event, which was attended by relatives of those who had been deported, who were otherwise already regular visitors to the settlement, was reported in the Hungarian national press (EILER 2011a:170). Thus, as a German village, Harta attracted the attention of museum specialists as well as that of the national and regional press. Inhabitants from the village, with its flourishing culture, were regular winners of costume competitions held at Swabian balls nationwide, and in 1981, the Hungarian Post Office used images of the folk costume of Harta to illustrate the costumes of Hungary's German population on stamps issued to celebrate ethnic minority folk dress (Figs 6 and 7).

## PÉTER HIMPELMANN, MARIETTA BOROSS, AND THE REDISCOVERY OF THE PAINTED PEASANT FURNITURE OF HARTA

Folk art objects had already appeared among the furnishings of intellectuals, in bourgeois households, and in holiday homes before the Second World War, and the second golden age



**Fig. 6.** Dr. Friedrich Wild, secretary general of the Democratic Association of German Workers in Hungary, presenting first prize in the folk costume competition to one of the two Harta couples at the National Costume Competition held at the Marx Károly University of Economics in Budapest in 1960 (unknown photographer. Source: *Neue Zeitung* 4(10):3. 1960)

<sup>62</sup>The catalogue was compiled by K. Csilléry 1982, who also wrote the introduction.



**Fig. 7.** Stamps issued by the Hungarian Post Office in 1981 depicting folk costumes of Hungarian nationalities. The Germans in Hungary were represented by a couple from Harta. (Identification number: MPIK 3478 a-dB. Property of the author.)

of painted Harta furniture was also owing to their secondary use (BOROSS 1981b:7, 1981c:519). As a result of the resettlements and radical lifestyle changes that followed the Second World War, local people stopped buying furniture and burned many of the objects that symbolized their peasant roots and German nationality, while wood from other such items was used to build pigsties or rabbit hutches (BOROSS 1981a:524). However, many families in Harta kept various items of painted furniture, even complete sets, after moving from their old-style longhouses into the new “cube” houses. Furthermore, from the late 1960s, an increasing number of families that had been deported from Harta were able to visit their native village to buy locally made painted furniture. As part of this trend, which can be defined as “nostalgia tourism” (cf. ILYES 2003), locals sold a wide range of objects, from 200-year-old wooden chests to newly made gourds painted with Harta designs (BOROSS 1981c:1163; EILER 2011a:162). Such processes encouraged locals to preserve their old pieces of furniture, and even to create representative “parlors” in their homes from sets of Harta furniture (K. CSILLÉRY 1987a:413–414).

Painted furniture from the settlement was introduced to the German community in Hungary by Marietta Boross<sup>63</sup> (Fig. 8). In her 1957 study of the melon growers of Csány, Boross had already referred to the Harta cooperative in connection with local labor migration (BOROSS 1959:618), although her research into painted furniture, in the light of recollections, began at

<sup>63</sup>Her importance is highlighted in his historical survey by MANHERZ 2012:72





**Fig. 8.** Marietta Boross examining a painted wardrobe made in Harta in 1881. (Photo by László Papp. Source: *Neue Zeitung* 27(7):7. 1983)

the turn of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>64</sup> thanks to a chance request for certification.<sup>65</sup> She spent six weeks collecting in the village, followed by several more field trips and archive research after the material was processed. The first presentation of her results to a professional audience took place at the *2nd International Conference on Ethnographic Minority Research* in Békéscsaba (BOROSS 1981a). This was followed in the course of the next few years by a series of academic and popular publications on the subject (BOROSS 1973, 1981b, 1981c, 1982a, 1982b, 1986, 1997, 1999).

Marietta Boross's short monograph on Harta furniture was intended for publication as a self-standing volume by the Nationality Editorial Office of the Textbook Publishing House, although it was eventually published in 1982 as the first volume in the series *Ungarndeutsches Handwerk*, together with a study on pottery in Mecseknádasd and Óbánya by Mrs Imre Lantos (BOROSS 1982).<sup>66</sup> The book was edited by Karl Manherz, lecturer in the dialectology of Germans in Hungary at the Institute of German Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. The content of Boross's study was reviewed by György Domanovszky, one of the best-known folk-art scholars at the time, and Tibor Bodrogi, director of the Ethnographic Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, who, like the critics, were both positive in their assessment.<sup>67</sup> The successful volume has been reprinted on two occasions (BOROSS 1986, 1999).

<sup>64</sup>Reported by Péter Schneider, 2022.

<sup>65</sup>After his retirement, Péter Himpelmann made a few objects at the request of two brothers from Harta who had emigrated to West Germany, but only officially certified objects could be taken out of the country. This is how the master craftsman came to the attention of the Applied Folk Arts Council. Reported by Mrs Julianna Sebők, née Leitert. For more information on the certification process, see CSEH 2021:589.

<sup>66</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 26. Publication plan (December 4, 1978), 2. See also MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 26. Working papers for the meeting of the editorial board (May 29, 1980), 4; MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 27. Letter from György Mészáros and Mrs. György Tóth to Antal Réger (September 25, 1981), 1.

<sup>67</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 27. Editorial opinion of Tibor Bodrogi and György Domanovszky (August 6–7, 1981). On the critical reviews, see SZOJKA 1987; VEREBÉLYI 1989.



During Marietta Boross's fieldwork in Harta, she stayed with<sup>68</sup> Péter Himpelmann,<sup>69</sup> whose work she successfully channeled towards both the German Association and the Applied Folk Arts Council. Boross became good friends with the retired master craftsman and encouraged him to start painting furniture again after a gap of many decades and to give professional opinions on a regular basis. She also contributed to the production of a half-hour German-language television film *Bemalte Bauernmöbel von Hartau/Harta* in 1983.<sup>70</sup> Boross played a key role in Himpelmann being awarded the title of *Master of Folk Art* in 1979. He was the second German<sup>71</sup> to be awarded this title in Hungary, and the first furniture painter.<sup>72</sup>

In the decades that followed the Second World War, the first available sources on the efforts made by local leaders to promote the local production of painted furniture date from the mid-1970s. Strikingly, in 1975, in connection with Péter Himpelmann being awarded the title of



**Fig. 9.** Péter Himpelmann, furniture painter from Harta, Master of Folk Art. (Photo by Marietta Boross. Source: BOROSS 1986:140)

<sup>68</sup>Reported by Mrs. Péter Schneider, 2022.

<sup>69</sup>Péter Himpelmann (1914–1999) worked as an apprentice cabinetmaker in Harta from 1928 until the death of his teacher, Péter Hoffmann, in 1935. He obtained his license after submitting a special application (as he was not yet of age) and opened his own workshop, where he made and painted his own furniture and sold it until the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war, he worked in Kalocsa, then in Dunaujváros, and later at the Vecsés trading company. HH NIO 0457. Questionnaire (July 29, 1975); HH NIO 0457 Questionnaire (January 24, 1983) (Fig. 9).

<sup>70</sup>Directed by Johann Wolfart; sound engineer: Vilmos Velkovic; cinematographer: György Lajtai; expert: Marietta Boross. The film is available for free from the Csorba Győző Library archive: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGbhWUYkSvI&t=1514s> Last downloaded: February 17, 2023.

<sup>71</sup>The first ethnic German to win the title was István Teimel, a potter from Óbánya, in 1973.

<sup>72</sup>On the title of Master of Folk Art and the “training” of authentic, emblematic artists, see AMENT-KOVÁCS 2021:561–562; CSEH 2021:603–604.



*Applied Folk Artist*,<sup>73</sup> the local leaders — council president András Nánai<sup>74</sup> and party secretary Imre Szokola — wrote a joint letter supporting the award.<sup>75</sup> Then, in November 1977, council president András Nánai reported to council members that, to the best of his knowledge, furniture painting in Harta “is practiced by three highly talented individuals,<sup>76</sup> although, due to their advanced age, it is feared that the continuity of this unique ‘Harta folk art’ cannot be guaranteed.”<sup>77</sup> His successors likewise monitored the situation, and, in 1987, they stressed the need to support the training of new talent in the production of painted furniture.<sup>78</sup>

Although no applied folk-art cooperative was established in the village,<sup>79</sup> a branch of the local Ferenc Erdei Cooperative was set up through the intervention of council president András Nánai.<sup>80</sup> Despite being a short-lived initiative, it ensured the passing on of furniture painting skills within an organized framework (BOROSS 1981c:525). The training, led by Péter Himpelmann, began in 1980 in two groups, one of which produced smaller gift objects designed by the master,<sup>81</sup> while the other produced larger pieces of furniture<sup>82</sup> with the assistance of a carpentry workshop<sup>83</sup> set up specifically for this purpose (Fig. 10). Although the artists active today — Mrs Péter Schneider, née Mária Haraszti (b. 1953), Mrs László Monda, née Klára Schettner (b. 1958), and Mrs Julianna Sebők, née Leitert (b. 1958) — who use the traditional Harta forms and motifs, began learning furniture painting from one of the older masters in the village in the second half of the 1970s, they all attended the course run by Péter Himpelmann and also worked in subsidiary branch of the cooperatives, thus the initiative was unquestionably decisive in terms of their career development. Péter Himpelmann was assisted in leading the groups of enthusiastic youngsters, probably recruited from among the talented girls working in other factories (such as the local pasta factory), by the more skilled and experienced young women mentioned above, and even Himpelmann’s daughter worked in the subsidiary branch of the cooperative.<sup>84</sup> Furniture painting on the premises of the cooperative was carried out on an hourly basis (i.e., there was no predetermined quota for

<sup>73</sup>HH NIO 0457. 5. Biography of Péter Himpelmann (July 30, 1975).

<sup>74</sup>András Nánai’s affinity for handicrafts and material folk art may have been influenced by the fact that he worked as a harness maker before the Second World War (H. BARTHA 1999:102).

<sup>75</sup>HH NIO 0457. Letter in support of Péter Himpelmann for the title of Folk Applied Artist (July 29, 1975).

<sup>76</sup>Although the source does not name the individuals, they were certainly Mrs Márton Kunc, later Mrs Péter Hársfői (Hoffmann) (née Katalin Himpelmann) (1905–1993), János Knódel (1911–1990), and Péter Himpelmann (1914–1999). For their biographical data, see SCHNEIDER 2021a:10.

<sup>77</sup>MNL OL XXVIII. I. 1. Box nr. 14. Invitation to the meeting of the Council of Harta (October 25, 1977), 4.

<sup>78</sup>MNL BKML XXVIII. 732. b. 2–3./1987, Report (March 4, 1987), 6.

<sup>79</sup>Despite this, having been awarded the title of Folk Applied Artist, Péter Himpelmann was even able to sell his objects in the capital as an individual artist. Reported by Mrs László Monda, 2023. On the marketing of applied folk art objects, see the study by Fruzsina Cseh in this issue.

<sup>80</sup>For a parallel, see: Eitler 2018:238.

<sup>81</sup>Péter Himpelmann had already begun making souvenirs, mainly for holidaymakers and excursionists, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by tourism, according to recollections. Reported by Éva Ament, 2022.

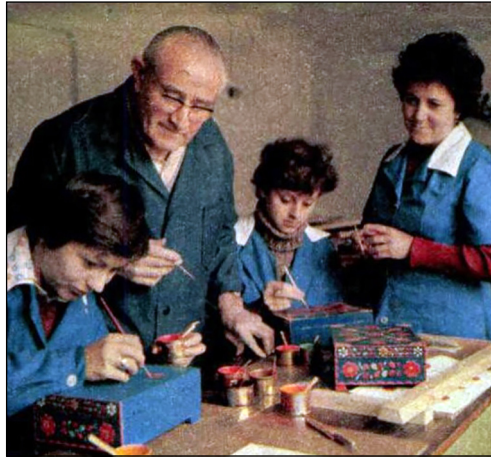
<sup>82</sup>Reported by Mrs. Péter Schneider, 2022.

<sup>83</sup>Reported by Mrs Julianna Sebők (née Leitert), 2023.

<sup>84</sup>Reported by Mrs. László Monda, 2023.







**Fig. 10.** Péter Himpelmann with his students (Unknown photographer, *Képes Újság* 21(45):3. 1980)

finished products), and sales were handled by the cooperative.<sup>85</sup> After three years, however, production was discontinued, because the cooperative's management did not consider such products to be profitable (SCHNEIDER 2021a:30). The production of painted furniture was long continued individually, in the footsteps of Péter Himpelmann, by those who had already mastered the craft.

## SUMMARY

In the decades that followed the Second World War, the German ethnic minority living in Hungary faced complex difficulties. In local terms, besides the pressing issue of property confiscation, ties with relatives, neighbors, and friends that went back for generations were broken and thousands of people were forced to live in vulnerable, uncertain conditions. National cohesion among the population that was defined by the authorities as German was not guaranteed by the self-definitions of the Germans living in Hungary at that time, since the previously separate groups (Germans of medieval origin, the Danube Swabians, and the urban German population) were bound together exclusively by their common trauma, besides the practical disadvantages of the collective punishment that remained apparent until 1953. Individuals and local communities alike were searching for their place in the changed circumstances, and the Cultural Association of German Workers in Hungary, also in quest of a way forward, sought to bring them together after its formation in 1955.

Despite changes to its name and organizational restructuring, the task of the German Association remained the coordination of the cultural life of the German population in Hungary

<sup>85</sup>Reported by Mrs. Péter Schneider, 2022.





and the transmission of central party propaganda until the 1960s. The association undoubtedly paid attention to the collection of ethnographic values of the mainly village-based German population and to the preservation of local traditions in as early as the 1950s. However, these efforts — in keeping with the association's mandate — were primarily aimed at ensuring the functioning of dance groups, choirs, and orchestras, thereby outlining the framework of state-sanctioned manifestations of minority identity (SÁRKÖZI 2022:131–132). Professionalization was driven mainly by the cautious democratization that became perceptible from the 1970s onwards, when the association, besides its enthusiastic volunteers, often cooperated with experts and leading institutions in the field of ethnography (e.g., the Hungarian Ethnographic Society, the Museum of Ethnography, and the Ethnographic Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences). By the time the network of national minority museums and libraries was established, the publication of mainly German academic works had already been undertaken by the Nationality Editorial Office of the Textbook Publishing House. The association's weekly mother-tongue newspaper, the *Neue Zeitung*, also reached a wide readership, and German-language radio and television programs were available throughout the country.

From a historical perspective, the ethnic and confessional isolation of Harta, along with the village's economic characteristics (the pressure to find additional employment and involvement in trading on the Danube) were factors that led to the emergence of the local center of painted furniture production by the first decades of the nineteenth century, and to the development of a unique collection of objects and motifs that remained consistent until the Second World War. Undoubtedly, the making and use of this furniture would not have survived if the politics of Bács-Kiskun County had not been relatively inclusive with respect to ethnic minorities, and if the county had not shown outstanding support for culture, which, from the late 1960s, was closely associated with the homeland knowledge movement. The advocacy of the local intelligentsia and Harta Council on behalf of German heritage was also necessary, ensuring as it did the village's prominent role, from the late 1950s, in both the German Association's tradition conservation ambitions and cultural representation, and in the wider sphere of national politics.

Fortunately, in the early 1970s there was a furniture painter still living in Harta, whom Marietta Boross had the opportunity to visit; she encouraged him to continue his work and integrate it into the activities of the Applied Folk Arts Council. Thanks to Boross's short monograph and active journalism, the aging master achieved national acclaim and was awarded the title *Master of Folk Art*. The regular participation of Péter Himpelmann in exhibitions and ethnic minority gala performances, and the parallel activities of the German Nationality Museum in Tata, had elevated the furniture of Harta into the most iconic style of painted furniture and had made it the shared heritage of all Germans living in Hungary by the 1980s. At the initiative of the village council (and its president, András Nánai), it became possible to integrate this local heritage, even if temporarily, into the activities of the local cooperative, and to involve interested and talented young people, providing for a new generation of furniture painters in Harta who are still active today.

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