

## Chapter 15

# Communities and Their Pasts: Tradition and Innovation in the Folk Art of Kalocsa, Hungary

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### ABSTRACT

*The rich floral patterns of Kalocsa's embroideries and wall paintings have come to represent Hungarian folk art throughout the world. The folk art of Kalocsa is in fact the art form of the traditional peasant culture of the villages established around the town of Kalocsa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the twenty-five or so farmsteads and minor satellite villages tied to them. This peasant culture is rooted in the traditions of the people who have inhabited this region and comprise their own ethnic group: they speak their own dialect of Hungarian, are Roman Catholic, have maintained their own distinct folk art tradition. The folk art of Kalocsa has been influenced in various ways in each of its four periods. Changes in folk art could soon be detected in folk costumes, which were only experienced in the sense that new products were marketed, and even then, only when these products became integrated into the style of folk costumes. In every historical period of the folk art of Kalocsa, the motifs and colors of folk costumes has had its own function and meaning.*

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 19th century, with the disintegration of traditional rural society, the way of life and culture of rural communities in Hungary changed radically. Modernisation and urbanisation rapidly began to transform the traditional way of life, which was accompanied by a kind of “undressing”.<sup>1</sup> The function of the traditions and objects of everyday use also began to be transformed into a process of representation. All these changes also had an effect on social relations including human contacts, communication and the transfer of knowledge through education.

Becoming visible has become an important means of keeping folk traditions alive, one possible way of which is to develop self-representation. Communities express their self-image through cultural practices, which are also means of communication with their environment. This representation is based on tradition, which sustains community identity. We can also consider individual traditions as representations of social relations, since “every action can be a representation of the environment in which it is created, and can also be a representation of itself.” (Verebélyi, 2005, p. 27.) Ideally, this need for representation comes from the direction of the community and is the result of internal development.

In our case study, we present the process of a phenomenon of self-representation based on the tradition of a typical Hungarian folk art region, the Kalocsai Sárköz. The folk art of Kalocsa was not only formed from generation to generation by the local people according to their own taste, but from time to time different social strata tried to influence the practice of the tradition by their own transferring tools. At the same time, due to the local patriotic feelings of the inhabitants of the region, the internal needs of the community have always been emphasised. The Kalocsa region’s tradition-based self-representation is still one of the means of communication today.

## BACKGROUND

During the 19th century in Hungary, similarly to the European trends, the discovery of rural culture led to an interest in various genres of folk art from several directions. The notion of national culture rooted in Hungarian folk culture was reinforced. In this period, the capital required for the modernisation of peasant farms was missing, but the products of handmade crafts could still create income opportunities for many people. This is the basis for the prosperity of folk art in Hungary, which has developed at different times and even in several waves (Romsics & Verebélyi, 2019, pp. 5–6). The characteristic folk art regions of Hungary emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries and became symbols of Hungarian folk art and national identity from time to time. One of these iconic ethnographic groups is the folk art of Kalocsa and its surroundings. The peak of this process in Kalocsa can be dated back to the 1930s, and a folk art industry has been created that still defines the identity of Kalocsa including personal communication tools and education system, entailing the national and international recognition and popularity of Kalocsa folk art.

Kalocsai Sárköz is primarily a geographical and historical region. Geographically, it is a lowland, a flood-ridden area, enclosed by the Danube and the surrounding marshes. It is a historical entity covering the area of the Archbishop’s manor of Kalocsa. Already in the Arpad-era, it was an important cultural region of Hungary, with Kalocsa at its centre, which had a central function. The first king of the Hungarians, St. Stephen (997-1038), founded the bishopric of Kalocsa in 1002. Its territory stretched from the altitude of Solt southwards across the valley of the Danube-Tisza to the river Sava, and included

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