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Discourses of Heritagization in East-Central Europe

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ABSTRACT

The making of heritage is a complex contemporary process that permeates society from the normative contexts of the global as well as national level to local communities. It enters extremely diverse sites, since it is part of both rural and urban life-worlds, and it is present in the institutional space of museums as well. Cultural elements that have been detached from their former contexts and made into heritage are no less diverse. The symbolic valorization of different historical periods depends on the regional and local contexts of heritage-making. The prestige (acceptance or rejection) and meanings of the legacy of certain periods, relationship to tradition, as well as the ways in which 'authenticity' is interpreted are products of a constant re-defining process steered by various social actors, such as members of local communities, cultural brokers, and experts. These positions often represent intertwining roles (researcher, expert, mediator, active or passive local actors) that are difficult to distinguish from one another in the various situations in which heritage-making can be researched empirically.

KEYWORDS

heritagization, canons, boundary formation, locality, regionality, source community

This issue of the journal represents the two-year research project titled *Heritagization, Cultural Memory, Identity*, which involved members of the Departments of Historical Anthropology and Social Anthropology at the RCH Institute of Ethnology, as well as the results of the four-year consortium project titled *Heritage Constructions in Contemporary Community Settings – Identity, Memory, Representation*, which commenced in 2022. The authors presented the results of their research at the *Social and Cultural Resilience, Heritagization, and Cultural Memory in*

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the Carpathian Basin conference, held on November 15, 2022, as well as a conference titled *Heritagization, Source Communities, Ethnographic Workshops – Issues for an inter-institutional pilot project*, jointly organized with the Museum of Ethnography, the Hungarian Open-Air Museum (Skanzen), and the Ethnographic Research Group of the University of Debrecen on May 18, 2023. In addition to this thematic issue, two monographs and a PhD dissertation (Balogh – Fülemile 2023; Eitler 2023a[1]), a collection of essays (Ament-Kovács – Eitler eds. 2023), around 40 Hungarian and foreign language papers, 50 presentations, and a poster exhibition are the balance of the research group's activities between 2021 and 2023.[2]

The term *heritage* has been a buzzword in the social sciences since the 1960s–1970s. Today, the concept has also been taken up by local communities. Local heritage-making strategies can be interpreted as a cultural response to changes in the nature of locality. In Hungary, the former Department of Public Collections of the Ministry of Culture was renamed the Department of Cultural Heritage in 1996, and the decision was followed by innovative professional exchanges from the turn of the millennium. The General Assembly of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) adopted the Intangible Cultural Heritage Guidelines in 2003 upon re-visiting and updating the 1972 World Heritage Convention. The relevant guidelines have been ratified by Hungary (2006), and the Hungarian state also set up its own heritage regime (Collection of Hungarian Values, 2012). Consequently, by the 2010s, heritagization had become the subject of wide(r) social interest and sometimes divergent attitudes (Csonka-Takács 2010; cf: Hoppál ed. 2011).

The aim of the researchers in designing this thematic issue was to shed light on the subject matter, settings, organizers, and participants of heritagization practices through a joint project. In selecting the case studies, we considered the spatial and social diversity of heritagization, so we looked at ethnic communities in Hungary as well as ethnic Hungarian communities abroad. Our research covers the period from the last century to the present day. Our methodology reflects the complexity of our institute's profile: in addition to ethnographic and anthropological fieldwork, we have also relied on archival research.

Fruzsina Cseh focuses on the Hungarian and international trade of cottage industry, folk art, and applied folk art artifacts from the 19th century to the decades after World War II. She presents national/regional identity building and related socially motivated processes, as well as sales practices that diverged from those originally intended by the artists. Similarly, *Bence Ament-Kovács* sheds light on the role of the national cultural association of Germans in Hungary and the local intelligentsia of a settlement inhabited by ethnic Germans, using the example of the painted furniture of Harta (Bács-Kiskun County) becoming ethnic heritage. Residential and industrial estates are also part of the contradictory legacies of socialism, as *Ágota Lídia Ispán* and *Vira Réka Nickel* discuss in the case of Dunaújváros (formerly Sztálinváros, Fejér County) and Tiszaújváros (formerly Leninváros, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County), and Salgótarján (Nógrád County), respectively. In both studies, the authors focus on the activities of NGOs and the processes of musealization and festivalization, thus nuancing the stereotypes of the "pastlessness" often associated with the planned cities of the socialist era. They emphasize the tangible benefits of the industrial heritage in local sport, lifestyle, and culture. *Katalin Balogné*

[1]Forthcoming.

[2]Due to space constraints, we are unable to provide further bibliographic data.

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Tóth's case study is also based on a heritage element on which there is little consensus. The Jewish cemetery in Apc (Heves County) has provided the opportunity for descendants, after several decades, to visit the graves of their deceased, while also becoming part of the local cultural heritage. *Anikó Báti* focuses on the variable processes of social discourse on locality in her analysis of the heritagization and (re)construction of food in Hungarian communities. Using the example of Baja Fisherman's Soup (Bács-Kiskun County), she demonstrates possible ways of managing, conserving, and transmitting heritage. *Soma Salamon* illustrates the role of village musicians in the dance house movement, the re-evaluation – sometimes without reflexivity – of their social status and original position in local communities in a new context (e.g., urban dance house) through the example of the flute player András Hodorog of Cleja jud Bacau (Romania). *Sándor Borbély* examines similar heritage elements, presenting the activities of the local minority elites who construct the heritage of the Hungarians in Carpathian Ukraine. His analysis also reveals the lack of reflection in the decades of Hungarian scientific discourse on heritagization practices.

The forms of reflecting on one's own culture – as phenomena that fall within the interest of ethnography and can be investigated with its methodology – have been the subject of continuous attention at the RCH Institute of Ethnology since the 1980s (for an example, see: Hofer – Niedermüller eds. 1987; 1988; Diószegi – Juhász eds. 2011; Sárközi 2018; Balogh – Fülemile 2020, 2023). Our research, operating within the terminological-theoretical framework of heritage, was launched via the studies published in the 36th volume of Ethno-Lore, the Yearbook of the HUN-REN RCH Institute of Ethnology. In their introductory study, which organizes the essays on *Heritage, Globalization and Locality* into an interpretative framework, Sándor Borbély and Ágota Lídia Ispán provide a systematic summary of the history and contemporary trends in social science research on cultural heritage. Their essay presents international trends and enters into a dialogue with the results of Hungarian-language ethnographic/anthropological heritage research (cf. Jakab – Vajda eds. 2018a, b). Recognizing the way heritage is defined and constructed by various social actors, the authors advocate a *pragmatic, practice-oriented* approach. They explore heritagization as a culturally constructed practice of interpretation and producing meaning (Borbély – Ispán 2019).

Therefore, when characterizing the research conducted at the RCH Institute of Ethnology, we can confidently rely on the above-mentioned study, as well as the results of the papers published in this volume. In our brief introduction, instead of a reiterated theoretical contextualization of the case studies presented here, we opted for an exploration of the specific trends affecting our region. Our aim is therefore to find the intersection of the research carried out in the Hungarian language area (including the ethnic communities living here), focusing on different historical periods. We outline the specific features and patterns of the global trend of heritagization emerging in our region. In this essay, however, we cannot attempt to provide representative results for our region, but rather to highlight the "densification" points of the contemporary process of heritagization.

Heritage is a *fuzzy* concept of our times, as put by Gábor Sonkoly, a pioneer of Hungarian heritage studies approaching it from the perspective of historiography. Its origin is not scientific, its range of interpretation is situationally variable, polyphonic, like a fabric made up of disjointed fibers (Sonkoly 2016:24–29; Löfgren – Klekot 2012). At the same time, for studies based on the research traditions of ethnography, ethnology, and cultural anthropology, it is obvious that the idea of turning one's own past and local lifeworld into *spectacle* and *narration*

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(cf. Gagyi 2004:50; cited in Jakab – Vajda 2018a, b:7) is contemporary with the "discovery" of folk culture. It is by no means unrelated to the birth of ethnographic curiosity and the emergence of ethnology (Köstlin 1994). The development of a reflexive approach to one's own culture cannot therefore be separated from the history of sciences that study culture empirically. On the other hand, the *socialization* of heritage (Jakab – Vajda 2018a, b), i.e., the adaptation of its conceptual framework, its embedding in everyday, public, and scientific discourses, and its institutionalization in our region is a development of the post-regime change period. In this sense, cultural heritage is an "*era-specific and situation-specific solution,*" i.e., a way of transmitting the past and tradition that is characteristic of our time and society (Jakab – Vajda 2018a, b:7; Eitler 2023b).

The case studies in this issue outline the specific features of the heritagization process in our region: the laws, organizations, and institutions involved in the process of heritagization, the ways heritage as an approach and reflexive attitude "functions" at the level of actions. In our introduction, a description of the heritage regimes that exist and are at play in the region – the normative systems of rules governing heritage, defining the relationship between (state) institutions and society (cf. Bendix et al. 2012:12–13) – seems indispensable. There are the bureaucratic units set up to implement the UNESCO's global heritage conventions at the state level, and there is also the Collection of Hungarikums – Collection of Hungarian Values, established at the initiative of the Hungarian State.[3] The parallel heritage regimes embody two different paradigms of thinking about and managing heritage. While the former aims to discover and safeguard *cultural diversity*, building a worldwide system, and within this system, organizing inventories essentially on a country-by-country, i.e., territorial basis (cf. UNESCO 1995), the latter is intended to demonstrate cultural identity (with an emphasis on ethnic unity).

Safeguarding the practices of *cultural groups* is a global ethical guideline that is key to maintaining diversity and thus the common heritage of humanity, which ultimately guarantees the sustainable development of the world. At the same time, Susan Wright points out that culture-bearing groups and ultimately the boundaries of culture are far from self-evident: they are created through a process of definition, which is always a technique of exercising power (Wright 1998:12–14). The parallel nature of heritage regimes resonates with the specific features of the social and political historical development of the region. Heritagization as a practice of boundary formation was easily integrated into the contemporary nation-building methodologies

[3]Besides the differing logic of the two heritage regimes, we can also observe fundamental differences in the way they work. In the UNESCO paradigm, the inventory is managed by an expert body, The Intangible Cultural Heritage Expert Committee of the Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO. The list is made at the national level: from here it is possible to move on to the global lists. The Collection of Hungarikums – Collection of Hungarian Values, on the other hand, advocates a multi-level approach: select elements can be moved from local/regional/departmental lists to collections of values of counties or collections of Hungarian values abroad, and from there they can be elevated to the status of national value and inscribed in the Collection of Hungarian Values. At the top of the national value pyramid is the Collection of Hungarikums. Another difference is that the scope of UNESCO national lists is the administrative territory of a state. For cultural phenomena that transcend national borders, states can make use of the possibility of joint interstate nominations. The Hungarian system of collections of values extends beyond Hungary's state borders and organizes the elements into foreign collections at different levels. In theory, both systems are based on the bottom-up principle, although in practice the picture is much more varied (see: Eitler 2023a:136–138). As an additional distinction, it should be stressed that the committees of various levels of collections of values of the Hungarikum movement are linked to public administration bodies (e.g., local governments). However, in the case of the UNESCO system, inclusion on the national list is decided by the organization's own expert committee. For details, see: Bali 2022a.

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that were re-launched after the regime changes (cf. Niedermüller 1999:252–253; Taylor 2009). This is particularly true of the East-Central European states where nation-building has been based on the concept of the *cultural nation* (cf. Bali 2022b:23–25). All these facts make it clear that the concept of heritage is far from universal. It may vary according to regions, states, sub-state administrative units, or even groups without such demarcation, all with different paths of development. Not to mention the situational nuances of the use of the term. Nor can it be ignored that seeing something as a heritage permeates society much more deeply than the practice of officially declaring it heritage. The boundary of these inventories does not also demarcate the boundary of heritagization as a social practice.[4] Unlisted heritage is not free from the poetics and politics of heritage regimes that socialize heritage through public discourses (cf. Harrison 2009).

The papers included here trace the process of heritage construction in a variety of settings. Different dynamics can be observed in urban and rural settings, depending on which phenomena are and can be included in the heritage canon. In the case of planned socialist cities (Tiszaújváros, Dunaújváros), Ágota Lídia Ispán highlights a peculiar dissonance in her study. The heritage discourse pushed by the bureaucratic heritage regime seeks primarily the remnants of the pre-socialist era, the rural character "preserved" in the urban space. In contrast, the interpretation of heritage by local memory communities is structured along experience, biographical function, and nostalgia. Vira Réka Nickel's essay warns even more emphatically of the disorganized, non-canonical nature of the industrial past and the fate of the industrial landscape in Salgótarján. In these cases, therefore, heritagization is not independent of the (nation)state-level interpretation of heritage.[5] In contrast to the memory culture of the source communities, it is difficult for the distinct characteristics and emblematic phenomena of the socialist period to fit into the dominant nation-state narrative.[6] The point of our empirical research may be precisely to gain insight into the interaction – sometimes interplay – between certain heritage discourses that seek to set norms and heritage practices observed at different levels of analysis, and to strive to understand them (cf. Herzfeld 2005; Fülemile 2020).

In addition to physical spaces, the importance of online spaces in the process of heritagization is becoming increasingly evident. The virtual patterns of postmodern image-making are an integral part of the meanings produced offline, and in some cases, through the labelling of phenomena, they are an indispensable step in the practice of heritage construction (cf. Boos 2017; Lovas Kiss 2017b:247, 2017c:101; Pusztai 2018:37–38; Prosser-Schell et al. 2018:56–57). The online space is the place for assigning meaning – the interpretations that heritage-makers want to communicate and the interactions coming from the recipients (Lovas Kiss 2017b:248, 2017c:100. Cf: Greschke 2007). Online communication can be one possible form of internal

[4]For a relevant case study, see: Ament-Kovács 2022:87–91.

[5]For a diverse European overview of this issue, see Sonkoly ed. 2023.

[6]The practice of valorizing the pre-state socialist past at the expense of the socialist period dates back to the years of the regime change. The habitus described by Gil Eyal, Iván Szelényi, and Eleanor Townsley as the *negation* of negation is closely related, on the one hand, to the fact that in the years of transition, in response to new challenges posed by changed, uncertain conditions, members of society resorted to some past pattern or model that they considered to be secure, tried-and-tested. On the other hand, the habitus described above was driven by the ideology of the post-communist states' regime-changing and opinion-shaping elites, which expected citizens to free themselves from the communist past and its "sins" through various social rituals – sacrifice, purification, and confession (Eyal et al. 2000:8–9, 18–20, 34–39, 189).

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interactions within a group doing the heritagization. For example, the Facebook page and profile analyzed by Ágota Lídia Ispán, while aiming to reach a much wider audience, provides an opportunity and a place to discuss locality-related encounters and lived experiences. According to Katalin Balogné Tóth's research, the online contributions of the *Közösen Apcért Civil Társaság* (Together for Apc Association), a group that feels responsible for the Jewish and non-Jewish local heritage of the Heves County settlement of Apc, are messages aimed more at the public than at the community doing the heritagization. The content of the Facebook page encourages its members to *identify* the Jewish memories and monuments as their own heritage (Lovas Kiss 2017b:247): the Association thus "inscribes" the Jewish cemetery in the "collective" local heritage.

The practice of heritagization affects a variety of offline and online spaces, and creates meaningful physical and virtual spatial formations. Already in the context of the emergence of modernity, Konrad Köstlin warns of the importance of assigning meaning. He notes that the recognition of a specific spatial entity as a cultural region is far from self-evident. Emerging ethnographic interest and tourism played a key role in bringing to life the units treated as ethnographic landscapes in the ethnographic canon (Köstlin 1994). The body of knowledge accumulated by ethnography is a "resource" for the trends of regionalism(s): it serves to re-spatialize the forms of ethnographically documented and published folk culture prior to modernization, and to create regional identity formations (Fejős 2002:73, 81). Sándor Borbély's analysis in this issue, however, warns the reader that the elements built into the public consciousness as folk or popular culture represent only one possible type of phenomena considered worthy of heritagization. Borbély characterizes the contemporary heritage construction activities of the minority elite of Hungarians in Carpathian Ukraine as an attempt to "rescue" the present, i.e., contemporary elements that lack historicity. In the process that is being analyzed, the minority elite is also heritagizing its own activities and, by the act of entering them in the inventory, is making them part of the canon of regional culture.

The above observations point to the canonical nature of heritage: heritage is created through identification, selection, and acknowledgment as heritage (cf. Pusztai 2007:16–17). Heritage is what a group of people see as heritage. The construction of the canon is influenced by the historical past of a region/country, the way it became a nation, the origin and composition of the elite that presided over its becoming a nation, and the features that determine the discourses of the national interpretation of the past. Looking at the map of Europe, we can see quite different kinds of heritage lined up according to a timeline that becomes meaningful for a given society.[7] As for the identity of the canonizers, the journal's studies present a colorful picture. Local civil organizations (Katalin Balogné Tóth), representatives of local and regional elites (Sándor Borbély), artists from outside the communities (Fülemile 2023), cultural specialists, members of specialist committees (Fruzsina Cseh and Bence Ament-Kovács), public personalities, actors at various levels of public administration (Lídia Ágota Ispán and Vira Réka Nickel), and media professionals (Anikó Báti) also act as transmitters by assigning meaning. At the same time, they convey knowledge about heritage as a concept and value category. Their movement is a mediation between cultural knowledge, i.e., between the phenomenon to be made heritage and its associated

[7]For example, while the eras most favored by Finnish re-enactment and traditionalist movements are the Viking era, the Middle Ages, and the Swedish-Russian wars of the 18th century (Pusztai 2020:482), Italian urban festivals tend to invoke the medieval and Renaissance milieu (Mugnaini 2006; Doidge 2015). And for practitioners of the sport, the Breton *gouren* evokes a pre-modern era, preceding the rise of the French hegemonic identity (Nardini – Épron 2021).

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"know how," and knowledge of the functioning of heritage as an abstract quality or bureaucratic apparatus. Therefore, the above canonizers can be characterized as *cultural brokers*. Whether they are members of the given community or not, their activities are based on a constant crossing of boundaries (Michie 2003; cf. Pusztai 2018:23, 33–35; Eitler 2023a:117–119).

Through their publications and lectures, ethnographers in Hungary have had a formative effect on the knowledge base of local communities (e.g., monographs on local history, anthologies of folklore texts, etc.) and, more generally, on society's image of heritage (Linnekin 1991; Marinka 2018; Balogh 2022:17–18). Thus, the active and direct social involvement of ethnographers is not a recent phenomenon either, as they often played a role in legitimizing the professionalism of an event (Biró – Gagyi 1987:68–72; Pop 1987).

For contemporary researchers focused on heritage, the importance of a reflective approach to their own involvement is also underscored by two imperatives (Lovas Kiss 2017a). The functioning of heritage regimes and institutions with a heritage profile relies fundamentally on the collaboration of ethnographers. The criteria for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List are set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines, but they do not offer any "ironclad" principle(s) that would provide the World Heritage Committee with clear parameters (Liwanag 2017). For the above reasons, the involvement of ethnographers and anthropologists as *experts* in the nominating committees of member states[8] or in the local source communities is inevitable. The formative involvement of researchers in the compilation of heritage lists focusing on Hungary (or Hungarian communities abroad) has also not been articulated. In some institutions that lack status, the status of ethnographers within public collections is being converted into that of public education specialists, and their investigative attitude into an organizing one. On the other hand, ethnographers with "simply" research intentions must also quickly overcome the illusion of "having no effect." Their work is of particular interest to groups and actors involved in heritagization: ethnographers can provide 'raw material' for the stakeholders' activities, who are concerned with the nature of representation produced by ethnographers. Heritagization is also an image-making process and, as online communication and Open Science practices become the norm, ethnographic exit has an impact on the image of the social group being studied (Eitler 2023a:153–160).

The case studies in the current thematic issue of *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* also provide reflections of ethnographers on the early practices of heritagization and heritage-making: both Fruzsina Cseh and Bence Ament-Kovács highlight this issue in a historical context. In her study of the folk art trade, Fruzsina Cseh emphasizes the formative involvement of ethnographers stemming from their authority in the context of the qualification of artifacts and the work of the designers. This is closely related to the question of how the commercial interest that catalyzes the production of artifacts can be integrated into the identity constructions of creators and organizations and the heritage discourse on their folk art. Bence Ament-Kovács describes how the "top-down" heritage construction and cohesion efforts of ethnographers and institutions collaborating with the Democratic Association of Germans in Hungary as experts have affected the German community in Hungary – previously hardly considered a community as such – recovering from the collective trauma of displacement. He also highlights the formative activities of an ethnographer locally documentable to this day. Vira Réka Nickel notes the disregard of

[8]In Hungary: Directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Hungarian Open-Air Museum, Szentendre.

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industrial heritage as one of the contemporary Hungarian dilemmas of heritagization and points out the opportunity of involving contemporary researchers in the problem-solving process.

Although our collection of studies does not attempt to provide a synthesis or representative findings for East-Central Europe, the aim of our introduction, as well as the case studies, is to explore the specific features of recent tradition-making strategies, new tradition constructions, and identity formation trends of Hungarians and ethnic Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin through representative, locally and periodically specific focal points. We invite the reader to take in the panorama, from festivals to groups formed in front of the blue light of digital screens, from the embers under cauldrons to the furnaces of industrial cities, from the flute music coming from dance houses to the crowded shelves of shops selling folk art.

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