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**HUNGARIAN COLONY IN JARAGUÁ DO SUL:  
IDENTITY AND HISTORY**

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## **The objectives of the research**

In the 1890s more than 700 people migrated to Brazil from the pre-dominantly German minority (Kraut) populated villages in Veszprém-county to settle in Jaraguá do Sul in the southern state of Santa Catarina. They joined together in 1995 to get acquainted with Hungarian culture – even though seemingly they had been fully assimilated in the host culture. Their search for identity is the main subject matter of my dissertation.

In the beginning, I had multiple objectives to attain in my work. On the one hand, I wanted to do research and archive the history of Hungarians and their descendants in the above mentioned region. A further scientific goal of my research was to explore and document the group of phenomena considered to be cultural heritage (survival) and their revelation (revival) in a sociological situation where the search for ethnical identity and national integration are not exclusive but complementary tendencies.

In addition to exploring the historical background, the research sought answers to the relations between ethnical identity and survival strategies, primarily dealing with the new adaptations in the wake of migration flows. Special attention was given to the question whether tolerance, explicitly appearing in mythologies, could control behaviour to a point where it could become a codex. The possible roots of tolerant behaviour were also thoroughly examined.

The explored community was approached not only from a historical perspective: I also wished to present a view of their contemporary lifestyle and their self-identity within that context. I intended to explore the motivation

and drives behind certain events and relations by projecting past onto their present history. I also found it important to present and analyze the relations and opinions of the community members and their descendants of past history.

My hypothesis is that the movement that started in 1995 to search for and create identity, is based on a tradition with loose roots, which clearly implies the phenomenon of *revival*. The idea itself reflected a mythical dimension of the identity search, being much closer to a created, imagined self-identity than to reality. The two levels of the real and desired identity have defined the Hungarians living in the area to date.

Another assumption is that the process itself is under a dual influence: even though it is initiated from the inside, its development was hugely affected by external factors, such as the effect of *cultural brokers*<sup>1</sup>, who defined events, set directions for ideas and defined the community's face shown to the outside at the beginning of colonization and at the outset of the revival movement, as well.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cultural brokers* are those trying to build a bridge between two different institutions, cultures or sub-cultures. A special group of *cultural brokers* are those facilitating the return to traditions. In the course of my research I used this term to describe anybody who – irrespective of his own interests - facilitates the access to cultural assets, goods for a community which would not have access to these goods otherwise at all or only with great difficulties. Cultural assets, goods can include traditions that have disappeared but are to be revived, culture-constructions shaped on a foreign model, but can also include macro- or micro elements of the community' own culture which currently do exist but would soon disappear, die out from the culture without intermediation.

## Sources

For the purpose of establishing facts, I applied traditional cultural anthropological methodologies of fieldwork. I considered it important to include data acquired by empirical ways in addition to factual data primarily used by history. The appropriate background of the research work was provided by traditional working methods such as various interviewing techniques (including bio-, genealogy- and theme-oriented interviews), traditional ways of record making (photography, video-filming), mapping object systems - by neither excluding nor prioritizing the collection of samples - and all the above was supported by the modern methods of computer-aided analysis. To achieve all that I had to strongly rely on and analyze archives of small Brazilian communities, museum collections and also those of Hungarian ones. I heavily relied on the personal and official correspondence of Lajos Boglár sr., Lajos Boglár and Ferenc Fisher, who were either researchers or participants of the events and phenomena to be explored.

The College of Szent Imre in São Paulo has an unparalleled rich library and museum, where all contemporary and past South-American-based printed Hungarian media can be found. In Jaraguá do Sul I discovered the fundamental historical, geographical and anthropological materials referring to Santa Catarina or more accurately to Jaraguá do Sul (writings of E. Silva, W. F. Piazza, A. Pichetti, C. Santos). It was especially E. Silva who released invaluable documents about Hungarian immigrants and claimed himself to be Hungarian. Regarding these sources it can be stated that in the

aforementioned library I had access to all the information referring to Hungarians.

My research in the local Emílio da Silva museum was also very successful: I came across Ferenc Fisher's<sup>2</sup> bequest of unparalleled value, including more than 60 folders full of newspaper cuttings, letters, photos of various topics e.g. inauguration of a school, national holidays, visits. In the above mentioned folder photos taken on the occasion of the ambassador's visit in 1941 were included. I found 400 items in the museum's photo archives with the first group-photo of the Hungarian immigrants from 1922. I devoted special attention to the history of Jaraguá do Sul and the establishment of the Hungarian colony, its ethno-history and the roles of special personalities therein.

Fundamentally I used the already published historical, descriptive works and press releases of the age as a point of departure - if they contained any relevant information. I analyzed mostly Portuguese and Hungarian sources, a large number of German ones, but also some in English, Polish and Spanish.

## Field-work

The research serving as the basis for the paper started with a preliminary exploration of the field in 1997 in South-Brazil and continued with a three-and-a-half-month field-work in 1998 and 1999. A full year between 2000 and 2001,

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<sup>2</sup> Ferenc Fischer was officially appointed in the 1940s to liaise between Hungarian authorities and Hungarians living in Jaraguá do Sul. He was in charge of organizing the visit of Hungarian diplomats in 1940 and 1941, but more importantly he was a passionate collector of documents relating to Jaraguá.

and later in 2002, 2003 and between 2004 and 2006 three times two-months were successfully spent doing research in Brazil.

In 2001 and 2007 I managed to involve the members of the dance company “Dunántúl” (Transdanubia) of Jaraguá – visiting Hungary in 2007 - in a situational research in the homeland of their ancestors. On several occasions field research and archive research were carried out in the migrant ancestors’ home cities in Veszprém-county and in the county- and national archives.

My primary goal was to find the people who are *enabled* by their age and life experience to answer my questions and whose personalities make them *capable* of doing so. When selecting interviewees, the actual persons’ relations to their communities and their historical past were among the selection criteria. The next step was to get acquainted with the subjective history of the Hungarian heirs living in Jaraguá through their personal lifelines and fates, which includes learning about the history of families, the relations of individuals and the Hungarian colony, their professions, family relations, making notes contrasting the past and the present, survival strategies, life experiences.

A multi-dimensional approach was applied in examining the Kraut-Hungarian community. I did not plan to use revolutionary, new methods but combined the ones that had worked well and attempted to describe the communities from the perspectives of history, ethnography and ethno-history. In the course of my work I tried to include visual and personal archive materials of those interviewed (family photos, letters, documents, diaries, artifacts telling about lifestyles), and after examining these I tried to integrate the conclusions into the research. As a result of the first, partial research based on written

materials, statistics and official data, I managed to acquire quantitative data referring to local lifestyles and identity. At the premises various interviewing techniques were used in the informative conversations with the persons chosen during the preliminary research. There were about 180 hours of audio- and video materials recorded with 81 persons. I asked questions in the framework of an interview structured as a classic life-interview on topics of profession and genealogy. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese but I tried to preserve the tone and atmosphere of the original conversations when translating them.

## **The line of reasoning and structure of the thesis**

I divided the content of the thesis into five chapters.

In the first chapter I described the indispensable methodology of social sciences using empirical data – especially that of cultural anthropology. As recent research reveals, the workings of cultural systems can really be examined in particular cases such as identity change of the Hungarian colonists of Jaraguá. It is self-evident at the same time that anthropology cannot examine the laws of workings of cultural systems *in general*. It can, however, examine particular cases and identify latent general tendencies. My hypothesis was thus largely shaped by the fact that I wanted to justify it by the means of cultural anthropology. I believed that the subject matter should be typically interdisciplinary, where border sciences are also present, that the research and the processing of the data remain problem-oriented and employ the methods used in several sciences to solve a question. Nevertheless, it was evident from the outset that the examined totality of life of Hungarian Brazilians cannot be fully explored by empirical means only. The research therefore tried to define the whole as a sum of parts and create a full picture from the interference of unique life-elements.

In the first chapter of my paper I try to establish all that by giving field-work descriptions, presenting goals and hypotheses, theoretical background and critical view of sources used.

In chapter two I present Jaraguá do Sul and its vicinity – its historical and social dimensions, I give a description of the place providing new home for the examined community. I present the circumstances of the

exploration and colonization of the land and also describe the economic and social fabric where the Hungarian immigrants established themselves. Throughout the research I devote attention to the fact that the geographical environment on the one hand determines, on the other hand creates an aptitude for accepting or rejecting certain elements of culture.

The next part sums up the history of the colonization of the Santa Catarina region. I describe the settlement of the native Indians and three other cultures (German, Polish and Italian), which used to have and still have effects on the life and identity of Hungarian settlers, partly because they showed and partly because they provided a counterpoint to establishing an identity. Especially the Brazilian German culture had an important impact on the Hungarian settlers of mostly Kraut origin, of whom many had German as their mother tongue.

In the fourth, and largest part I attempt to describe the life of the Hungarian settlers of Jaraguá do Sul. I devote a separate chapter to describing the circumstances prior to immigration and the motives leading to it, followed by the description of the myth of travelling and settlement present in personal and community traditions. For a community, which cut off all relations with their motherland and settled in an unknown place, this is the most important proof of their own past and their own existence - in a broader sense of the term.

I deal with the lifestyle and mindsets of the “Jaraguá Hungarians” in several subchapters. The Hungarian identity appearing in the research presents a credible picture even if not all aspects were explored and presented. Some aspects of lifestyles appearing to be more important during research were paid more while less important areas were

paid less attention to, some individually typical cases were even omitted. I deal with social, communal and kinship systems, the relations between work and ethnicity and with religion and religious life being of substantial importance even today. I judged lifestyle elements that are generally typical of human life and could be relevant to any other human being to be less important or negligible with regard to the research. I included only those that showed significant diversion from the surrounding environment.

I describe in detail and separately the building blocks of the preservation, establishment and revival of identity. I attempt to create a preliminary common social-scientific horizon and define various identity dimensions such as individual, collective, ethnical and national identities. I examine and analyze the changes of identity from the time of settlement to date. As various historical events and eras (two world wars and the time of *Estado Novo*) fundamentally influenced self-identity, I give an explanation of the motives behind these, too. I render an equally detailed analysis of the two most important identification factors of eating and dancing. The Hungarians of Jaraguá found in these two factors the fundament they could build their identity onto and also the source that helps them keep it even today.

The last part of the thesis is a summary of results followed by an appendix containing references, sources used, photos helping the interpretation of the text, transcripts of the most important interviews, tables of various data and databases. In addition, a DVD is attached to the thesis.

The documentary film on the DVD is titled “*Búvópatak felszínre tört*” (The Underground stream emerging), which was made jointly by Dr. Lajos Boglár and myself based on the interviews and other materials recorded in Jaraguá do Sul.

## **New scientific findings of the thesis, further opportunities for research**

The novelty of the thesis stems from the approach on the one hand, and the identification and exploration of the specificities of the national identity reviving in the community of Hungarian origin living in Jaraguá do Sul on the other. The fact that the search for Hungarian identity is observed in a community originally of German minority (Kraut) renders the subject matter unique. Even the denomination of the community in Jaraguá do Sul is rather problematic. As time was passing, circumstances and their own identities were changing, various names were used to identify them both by themselves and others. In Hungary they were clearly considered as members of the German minority (Kraut). As Hungarian- and German-speaking citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in the course of migration census sometimes their Hungarian and other times their German ties were taken into consideration. On the place where they settled, a location under strong German influence, they were considered Hungarian and German alternatively, and were named accordingly. Between the two world wars this group was clearly identified as Hungarians, afterwards as Germans, and more and more frequently as Brazilians. Nowadays most often they are again considered as Hungarians (they call themselves *Hungarézze*).

The fact that the thesis presents the still ongoing search for identity of a community that has never been the subject of any research can be regarded as new scientific finding. As any work based on field research describing a small community, cultural minority, this thesis also aims to

preserve values, draw attention to them, and is a basic research of local significance. A further result of the thesis – although it is not reflected therein - is that the initial research motivated researchers working in this domain, and since then several field researchers have chosen this location and subject matter to be the focus of their research.

The completion of the present thesis also concludes a phase of the research. However, this work has not come to an end, as the search for identity of the Hungarians in Jaraguá do Sul has not come to an end, either. Developments, events influencing the attitude of the community take place on a permanent basis. The most recent event of this kind was the visit of the Dunántúl dance company to Hungary in August 2007. However, the narratives derived from this search for identity, the subsequent changes, its benefits, results - including the repeated visits to the “homeland” and the visualization of the Hungarian-image by means of photographs taken on this occasion - the way various revival-phenomena become organic tradition are all issues that offer future research opportunities.

### **Publications of the author relating to the subject matter of the thesis**

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Óry Kovács, Katalin: Identitás évszázados távlatban. Korunk 7. (unpublished) 2008,

Óry Kovács, Katalin: Jaraguai magyarok. Korunk 11. (unpublished) 2008,

**Documentary film by the author relating to the subject matter:**

Boglár, Lajos-Kovács, Katalin: „A bűvópatak felszínre tört.” Magyar leszármazottak Brazíliában. (Underground stream emerging. Hungarian descendants in Brasil.) Documentary film. 1998, Duna TV.