



**Traditional handcraft among
Szeklers in Transylvania**
Master's thesis

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List of nicknames

In the texts, I use the nicknames of my informants whenever I mention them both in the product and the written part of my thesis. Here, I provide a list of the nicknames I use which is not a complete list of my informants. I mention the names of my interlocutors with their consent.

Anna néni – Anna Kovács

Árpád – Árpád Páll

Bertyó – Beáta Csiby

Domi – Domokos Páll

Erzsó – Erzsébet Bíró (Erzsó Szalon)

Etelka – Etelka Páll

Éva – Éva Salamon

Gábor – István Gábor Nagy

Gizi néni – Gizella Fehér

Gyöngyi – Gyöngyi Bíró

Hajnal – Hajnal Vitos

Irma néni – Irma Faluvégi

Kinga – Kinga Gáll

Klára – Klára Barabás

Marcsi – Marcsi Hompoth

Réka – Réka Farkas

Rézrontó – Béla Tölgyesi

Rózsika néni – Rozália Goga

Tünde – Tünde Szász

Zoli bácsi – Zoltán Szabó

Zsuzsa – Zsuzsanna Varga (Varga mézes)

Introduction

Scholars writing about tradition are split up into two groups: the ones who agree with the argument of the theory of invented tradition, and the others following a culturalist paradigm. The two sides disagree about the nature of tradition. The first understands it as something originated in the modernity with all the characteristics of the era, the second emphasizes that tradition is rooted in the culture itself, and it is more persistent than the changes. In this study, I am going to discuss these questions using examples from material culture to show the particularities in a specific context.

Primarily, I am going to touch upon theoretical questions connected to the product of my thesis, a catalogue created to present traditional handcraft. I am going into the discussion of three main theoretical fields which are related to my study. As the catalogue is designed to show material objects, the core discussion is based on studies in materiality, which is a theoretical interpretation of my product's content. These descriptions are in the context of studies about tradition which is the main topic and question in my research. Furthermore, I am giving an epistemological explanation of my fieldwork situation which is connected to the way how the catalogue is realized as a final product of my study. I have chosen to write this study in a more theoretical way, mentioning more theories than empirical examples. In this sense, the catalogue and the written study complement each other, as my product is built using photos of the objects, the words of my informants and my thoughts experiencing this material culture but doesn't touch abstract questions.

Here, I should mention some ethical considerations as well. In the catalogue and the theoretical study, I am using the names of my informants in almost every case. At the beginning of my study, I am giving a list to connect the nicknames with the full names of my interlocutors. I am doing this because most of the people I have been talking during my fieldwork would like to be mentioned with their names, as their work is presented. I gave the possibility to all of them to choose if they would like to be anonymous or not when I present their works and quotations from the interviews, explaining the way how I would like to use the material. I also respect the few cases when they chose to be anonymous.

Finally, a few words about some terms and expressions used in different languages. The ethnonym of the studied people is written in English (I am mentioning the local word as well in the beginning when I present my field), as this translation is accepted outside of the local context. In my study, I am primarily using the Hungarian name of the localities, because this is how my informants use it. Since these towns and villages are located in Romania, the Hungarian names can hardly be found on maps. For this reason, I am writing the Romanian translation in brackets. Also, whenever I feel a local word more accurate to use than the English translation, I keep using the local term and write the closest English translation or an explanation in brackets both in the catalogue and in the theoretical part of my thesis.

The focus of my study

My research connects an anthropological question related to tradition to studies of materiality. More specifically, I am interested in how the tangibility of physical objects alters the anthropological discourse about tradition. I am going to explore how tradition is present in the material objects and how it is created through them. In my thesis, I show how the question is approached by Szeklers, a Hungarian speaking minority group, through their handcrafted objects.

I have three research questions concerning the different elements of the problem. My first research question is about the objects: how are these objects understood, what is important to consider when one looks at them? The second question concerns the connections between the craftsman and the object, as well as other influential factors: how do these objects come into being, how is tradition crafted into the objects? The third one points to tradition: what are the local understandings of tradition and what kind of meanings are associated with the term?

Thus, my analysis is based on the theories of tradition and the studies of materiality. However, my approach to combine these is not new, as many attempts were made in anthropology to describe traditional handcraft of different communities which I use as reference works. About Szekler handcraft I found only a few articles in English, all of them in the context of Romanian pottery (Constantin 2011, Buchczyk 2015). Other studies are written by the Transylvanian ethnographic school in Hungarian language which is worth to describe briefly, as

the use of this ethnographic literature in anthropological studies raises further questions. Materiality studies of the Transylvanian Hungarians are mostly connected to the Hungarian national ethnology, as studies working with the national folk culture are named (Čapo & Zrnić 2014:85). These were developed mainly in the context of the Eastern- (also some Central and South-) European nation-state. Analyzing the relationship between Eastern-European ethnology and anthropology Michal Buchowski (2012) argues that the academics from the named region can be found on the bottom of the disciplinary hierarchy. Studies written by Eastern-European anthropologists are not cited and not considered as part of the discipline unless they are trained in the West. Buchowski claims that this exclusion is based on stereotypes which cannot be applied to the discipline today, and he argues for cooperation. Writing about Croatian ethnology, Čapo and Zrnić (2014) claim that the discipline is closer to anthropology than it is considered. However, a gap can be found between the Hungarian ethnographic studies of Transylvania and the Western anthropology. In contrast to the previous argument, Vilmos Keszeg, a Hungarian ethnographer working in Transylvania, states that here the discipline still did not succeed to overcome its roots. The original aim to preserve national culture is still present, and certain principles are followed which give the priority for research concentrating on the spectacular and aesthetic in the rural peasant culture, while other characteristics are neglected (Keszeg 1995). During my work, I also found that ethnographic descriptions of the material folklore have a retrospective view, concentrating on the restoration of the old customs. In contrast to this, I am examining the current practices of the craftsmen, and their discourses about traditional practices. Despite the different aims, in my analysis, I am also using the findings of the Transylvanian ethnology, as I found detailed descriptions of certain objects and procedures in these writings.

Finally, some notes about nationalism and national identity, being topics related to the tradition and traditional objects. In this study, I am not going into the questions of nationalism, as this would be beyond the limits of my paper, even though, I do agree that my material could talk about this topic as well. I also acknowledge that nation-building happens together with the raise of tradition. In the case of my field, the construction of collective identity is a more complex phenomenon than nationalism itself, as a regional identity should be also considered (Bíró 2002) which can influence the choices in the market (Csata 2015:18). On a larger scale, relational ethnicity in Transylvania was studied by Brubaker concentrating on the everyday interactions

rather than the use of symbols (Brubaker 2006; partially Brubaker 2004). A further question could be how the objects “talk” about national and regional identities.

The field site and its history

The field my study concerns is located in the middle of Romania where a Hungarian speaking population is living. Image 1 shows where the region populated mainly by Hungarians (dark green territory in the middle) can be found. The Hungarian speaking people of this territory call themselves *Székely* which is translated into English as Szekler or Sekler (Secui in Romanian). Even though this area is not an administrative entity of the country, it is called *Székelyföld* in Hungarian which is the accurate translation of Szeklerland (Secuime in Romanian). I should mention that not all Hungarians living in Romania are Szeklers. Other, smaller Hungarian communities can be found all around Transylvania that are not using this ethnonym. Szeklers are also distinguished by using a dialect of the Hungarian language with some specific regional expressions, but in general, their language is understandable for other Hungarian speakers as well.

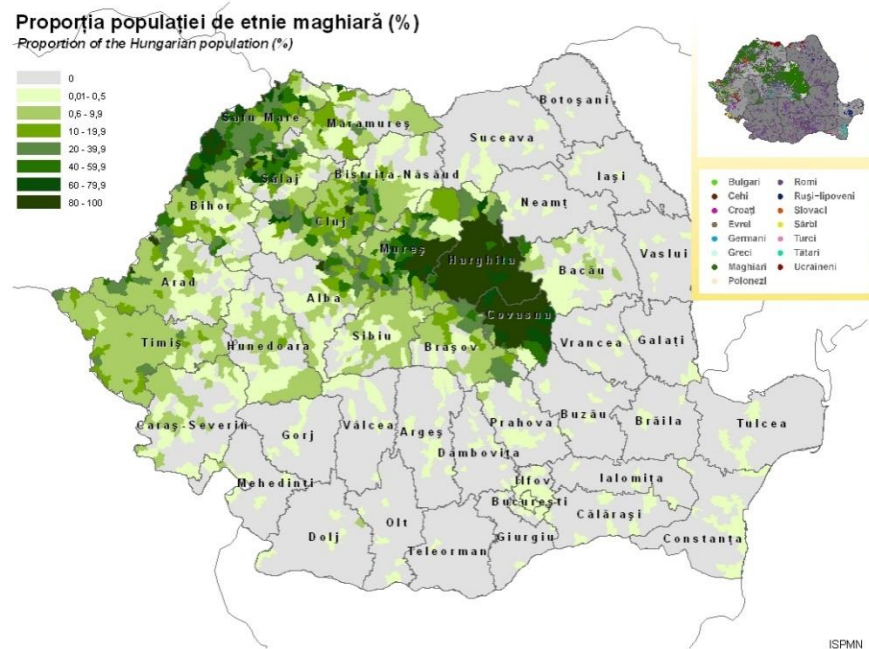


Image 1: Proportion of the Hungarian population in Romania according to the 2011 census.

Source: ispmn.gov.ro

Szeklerland is situated on three administrative districts of Romania: Hargita (Harghita), Kovászna (Covasna) and Maros (Mureş) counties, and it almost overlaps their territories. My actual fieldwork took place in one of these counties, Hargita, where the proportion of Hungarians is the highest among the three. According to the last census 257 707 Hungarians are living here, which makes 82.90% percent of Hargita County's population¹.

The claim for the autonomy of Szeklerland is a topic of the everyday political discourse in my field. Movements and demonstrations are organized on this demand. However, there are no significant political implementations, and the Romanian part is not willing to cooperate in this question. The claim for autonomy is based on the Hungarian population's ethnic majority in the area, using historical arguments. In the next paragraph, I am going to present the most important historical events connected to Szeklerland. I will emphasize the events important for my empirical material.

The origin of Szeklers is a debated topic among historians. Different theories can be found, also, Romanian and Hungarian researchers have different opinions. One theory claims that Szeklers were Hungarians resettled in this area. Others originate these people from different tribes who joined to Hungarians conquering the territory where they are living today. A third interpretation says that Szeklers were coming to Europe before Hungarians. Certain theorists originate Szeklers from Romanian tribes who were conquered by Hungarians. However, it is known that people defending the Hungarian borders were settled on the territory in the 12th century, and they were called Szeklers (Egyed 2006:7-15). The population performed military services which made them free from serfdom obligations. They gradually lost these rights over the centuries. From the beginnings until the second half of the 19th century the Szeklers were organized into administrative units called *szék* (=chair) (Egyed 2006:25-29). The Szekler *szék*-s are still frequently used denominations of the regions in the ethnographic literature today. Throughout the centuries, the history of Szeklerland should be seen together with the history of Transylvania which in 1556 became the autonomous part of the Ottoman Empire, and in 1699

¹ Source: <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/>(accessed on 11-08-2019)

part of the Habsburg Empire. Later, after 1849, this is transformed into Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. An important change happened in 1919, when – after the Monarchy lost World War I – Transylvania became part of the Romanian Kingdom (Egyed 2006). The borders were established in 1920 by the Treaty of Trianon which is still remembered by Hungarians as a tragic event. From 1947 Transylvania together with Romania became influenced by the Soviet regime, under communist rule. In the history of Szeklerland, it is remarkable that its territory was considered an independent administrative unit between 1952-1960 with the name of Hungarian Autonomous Region, and as Maros-Hungarian Autonomous Region from 1960 until 1968. Even though this autonomy is often connected with positive feelings, for Szeklerland it did not mean real independence from Romania (Bottoni 2008). The communist rule in the country ended in 1989, and in the upcoming democratic system, certain rights were established for the ethnic minorities (about minority rights see Varga 2006).

Epistemology and methodology

The current study is primarily based on a material collected during a 4 months fieldwork which I conducted between April-June and August-September of 2018. Additionally, during the period of thesis writing, I was also moving back and forth between the field and Denmark, having conversations and taking a few pictures when I found something relevant. As the field is the place where I grew up, I believe that I have more knowledge about the place than just the collected material. I should also take into consideration the different challenges of this type of fieldwork. The conflicting roles of the local and outsider played an important role in my study, therefore, I am going to discuss this using the relevant literature before presenting my methods.

Talking about anthropology at home invokes different meanings and contexts. Marilyn Strathern (1987) claims that developing self-knowledge is the advantage of an auto-anthropology when increasing reflexivity is what anthropologists do. The author claims that any other anthropology than the Western one cannot be auto-anthropology, because the essence of anthropology lies in the self-knowledge as understood by the West and on the Western terms like society and culture. It is a fact that the knowledge developed by anthropologists has different

roots than it would be understood in an Eastern-European context. As I described at the beginning of my study, until recently, Western anthropology and Eastern-European national ethnologies had different lines of development. Anthropologies of "empire-building" and of "nation-building" were distinguished by a group of anthropologists in 1982 (Peirano 1998). In the case of the Transylvanian ethnology, the different interest still exists, unlike it is in some other countries (for example, Čapo & Zrnić 2014). For this reason, I can't use self-reflexivity while developing an anthropological theory. The anthropological interest of my study lies in developing a different perspective towards something familiar. This different perspective comes from my experiences outside of the area what I call home. Living abroad helps me in developing the anthropological question in the sense that it makes strange what used to be familiar, and it asks for familiarizing it again, this time from another perspective. From this point of view, the motivation of my study is very close to what Sarah Green mentions as an attempt of the anthropological studies to untangle differences between places (Holbraad et al. 2018:4). Strathern (1987:25) claims that in the classic case of the anthropology (other than auto-anthropology) there is a process of a translation made by the anthropologist who translates experiences for the readership from another culture. Raymond Madden, an Australian anthropologist writing about home-town anthropology, is arguing against a dialog between the informants and the reader of the article, where the anthropologist takes the role of the translator. He rather believes in a circular model where the informant and the reader can be the same person (Madden 1999:265-270), and there is a continuum between the different understandings. In my case, I find it important to emphasize that my anthropological interest concerns the use of my study primarily outside of the local context. Even though I think the locals would benefit as well from my work, the majority of my informants do not speak English, so for their sake, another type of translation would be needed to make the message work. On the other hand, just like Madden, I do not think there is a gap between the world studied by me and the readers of the study or public of the product. My field is influenced by the Western studies and today there is a process of Westernization in Eastern-Europe as well. I believe that many ways of common understanding can be found and would make the base for a productive dialog.

What concerns my experiences in the field, these are more self-reflexive than the theoretical interpretations of them. I consider the field of my study my home where I was born and where I grew up. My concept of home is close to Madden's (1999:261-262), as he imagines

his home on a smaller scale which mostly concentrates on a single locality compared to other anthropologists, who are talking about anthropology at home when they are doing fieldwork in their home countries. My concept still represents a bigger area than a town, as I did fieldwork in multiple localities. Nevertheless, my home-town was one of them, this was the place where I started my fieldwork, and where I was based during these months. Moreover, I also visited the village where my mother is coming from, I have been hosted by my cousin, and I have been guided by my aunt in the village where she's working. Furthermore, I knew some of the people who became my informants from previous experiences. My interest in handcraft and craftsmanship is also old, as it comes from my childhood when I have also tried several different crafts myself. Even though, as a fieldwork site, I revisited something already known to me, moving forward with my fieldwork, I found more and more new experiences, and I discovered aspects of handcraft that were not important to me earlier.

Sarah Pink (2000:105-107) is writing about the limitations of personal and professional experiences. For her purposes, these limits are made as an anthropological construction after the experiences. I am borrowing this technique from her, but I should mention that my personal experiences are less involved in my study than her private life is. She did her fieldwork among her friends and even her husband was among the key informants. Compared to her, I have a less personal relationship with my informants. Even though I knew some of them before my fieldwork, I did not maintain a close relationship with them, and this time, I contacted them with the intentions to work together on my study. Whereas my work with the craftsmen had a professional motivation, I also found myself in social situations when I could not delimit my professional and personal experiences. They happened on the occasions of family events and meetings with my friends when the topic was connected to my fieldwork. Thus, I am taking into consideration some of these personal conversations with anthropological purpose as well. As I spent more time doing fieldwork, my personal and professional life became more separated. At the end of the four months, I found less relevant information in an everyday conversation and more potentials in working with the craftsmen themselves.

To go forward with the delimitation of my study, I am going to refer to Matei Candea's (2007) article where he argues about self-imposed boundaries. Candea states that the multi-sited field is not as different from the traditional anthropological field as it seems. He claims that the

anthropologist should take several decisions about the field, even if the fieldwork is conducted in a single village. These decisions might concern the spatial limits of the study or other situations when the researcher should choose between events to attend or people to talk to. Regarding the current study, the question of boundaries became more important during the second half of my fieldwork when I recognized the different possibilities of conducting my study. Thus, I took decisions which I hoped would best suit my study. Because I was interested in more details, I chose to spend more time with a few people with whom I had a close relationship instead of contacting new informants. I did this despite the fact, that – as my study developed – I found out about more and more craftsmen in the area who could be my possible informants. Thus, my study and product do not show a complete picture of the crafts made in the area. For example, the art of embroidery is not presented in itself, even though many forms exist. Consequently, my study concentrates rather on several characteristics which I or my interlocutors found important, and not on presenting the crafts themselves. Another epistemological decision I made was rather expanding the field of study than limiting it. In spite of my initial endeavor to find crafts which are considered traditional, I started to look at the problematic cases as well, where it is not clear what is traditional or not, and/or what is handcraft or not. These cases were useful to give another perspective for my topic.

Regarding localities visited during the fieldwork, my only limitation was to collect data from the territory of Harghita County. During my fieldwork, I visited two homogenous craft communities: Korond (Corund) known for its pottery and Kőrispatak (Crișeni) where straw hat making has a tradition. However, in these villages, I did not try to understand the structure of the local communities and the ways how they function (which would be an interesting topic but beyond my capacities). Rather, I looked for individuals or families and their works. I should also mention another village, Máréfalva (Satu Mare), noted because of its Szekler gates which I visited but I did not succeed to collect significant data there. Besides these villages, I found craftsmen in the bigger towns of the county and living in isolated localities as well. I would describe my method of searching for informants as following the network of craftsmen. Asking about each informant's colleagues led me to meet other people. As access to the field, I used my existing contacts mostly from my hometown. The other important locations of my fieldwork were craft fairs where I contacted new informants and I did participant observation. The one big fair I participated at was held in the main town of the county, in Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc),

preceding an important pilgrimage of Hungarians. Smaller markets were organized on the annual celebrations of localities or other occasions, for example, Children's Day.

Since I am local, have a general knowledge about the field, and speak the language of my informants, I did not have difficulties contacting people for my study. In general, my experience was that the phone numbers of the craftsmen are public, and they are ready to engage in conversations. My main methods during the fieldwork were participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The participant observations mainly took part in the workshops of the craftsmen, where meanwhile I was crafting together with them or helped them with additional tasks. I did some participant observation on the craft fairs as well, as I mentioned previously. While I make the difference between the interviews and the participant observation with analytical purposes, these were complementary during my work. In general, it was usual to start the interactions in a more formal way, more as a structured interview, which became more and more informal in the course of the conversation. My informants expected me to be prepared with questions and have some kind of formal way of asking them during the meeting. Most of them were used to these situations, as they had experience with students and reporters coming to them with different purposes. They were also keen on giving me the right historical information and bibliography (or books to borrow) to look upon the facts. Soon I realized, that these formal encounters were good to indicate my presence in the given situation. On the other hand, my informants usually did not feel like helping me out with the goals of my fieldwork when we had an informal conversation between or after my questions. Nevertheless, they started these discussions easily, and we had nice conversations, which sometimes gave me more useful data than any of my prepared questions.

During the meetings and interviews, I was using a reinterpreted methodology of photo-elicitation (as presented by Banks 2001). This method is used to facilitate conversations with the use of images which are interpreted by the informants. The photos can be taken or chosen by the interlocutors, in this case, not just the explanation but the photograph itself is an expressive material. The method was useful when I asked my informants to talk about the details of their previously created products. When a certain object was not accessible, we used their photos instead. In every other case, it was more convenient to talk about the objects themselves.

Throughout the data analysis, I was working with different types of material collected during the fieldwork which make the base of my study and product. My records of the conversations and interviews sum up in approximately 45 hours of material which I coded after the fieldwork. I kept two different kinds of field notes as well. I noted down my impressions and unrecorded conversations after the meetings in Hungarian, and I made more analytical notes about my observations in English. As visual material, I took 390 photographs, these are complemented by others taken by my informants which I am permitted to use with their consent. I also made a collection of 25 objects for the Ethnographic Collections of Moesgaard Museum. Besides all the collected materials, I should consider my experiences during the participant observations which would be hard to quantify, as it is not even clear how to delimit my fieldwork from my personal life.

Understanding tradition in the local context

Hagyomány is the Hungarian word for “tradition” which is the term that my informants use. The noun is more often used than the verb deriving from it – *hagyományozni*, which means the process of tradition making. Both words come from the root of *hagyni* which means “to let”, “leave” or “allow”. The verb *hagyományozni* refers to a conscious act of giving something to the next generation. Like this, *hagyomány* can be translated as something passed on to us by the people who lived before. The adjective *hagyományos* means “traditional” and is often used to refer to the objects of this act in different contexts which I am going to discuss. Thus, the meaning of the Hungarian term is very similar to the English one used in the everyday context. However, it is hard to find a general interpretation of the word to characterize the local understanding. The interpretations can be diverse, causing disagreements among people, even though I did not witness any arguments among the craftsmen concerning the traditional features of the products. The complaints that I noticed are more about the quality of other products which are presented and sold together with their own. Different interpretations of traditional features can function next to each other.

Different understandings of tradition are not new in anthropology. A debate on the topic was initiated by Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) concept of invented traditions. This theory connects tradition with the changes of modernity, and the authors describe different inventions from the historical point of view, which always include the political aim as well. As stated by the paradigm of invented traditions, certain aspects of the past are highlighted and shown explicitly, objectifying the culture in a specific way (Otto 2007). My work is inspired by the objectification of tradition primarily not following this academic tradition, but in a very concrete way, in its literal sense, as a study of material objects. I agree with Hobsbawm and Ranger when they claim that traditions are constructed by people, and memories of old customs are used with new meanings. However, unlike historians writing on this topic, anthropologists present the phenomenon from the perspective of the natives (for example, Smith 1982, Keesing 1989, Akin 2004, 2013). They look less at the structure and the function of tradition, rather they emphasize the events in the lives of the natives and the narratives constructed upon these episodes of life. I find this micro perspective useful for my analysis, as it fits well with the ethnographic methodology. After conducting fieldwork among craftsmen, I feel competent to describe how they understand their work, more than seeing the phenomenon from a macro perspective. I keep this point of view even though my informants are speaking about structural changes in the socio-cultural system and historical events as well. I should take into consideration that they are telling the stories from their point of view and these should be understood as their narratives. An important work in the anthropology of tradition is Marshall Sahlins' (1999), who gives a culturalist answer to the question of invented traditions. Sahlins interprets traditions as reproductions of the culture; he says that these are rather reinvented on the existing cultural base than being invented. He argues that the roots of any constructed behavior should be in the culture in which context the human life is organized, and is lived: *"Built into perception, endemic in the grammar, working in the habitus (...)"* (Sahlins 1999:10). In the following chapters, I would like to borrow the culturalist view and present the traditional elements of Szekler handcraft embedded in the culture. At the same time, I am paying attention to the aspects which are new or renewed by the artists.

Exploring tradition through artefacts

In this part of my paper, I am going to present the theoretical background of the things shown in the catalogue. I am going to discuss certain sides of handcraft, and I am going to analyze them with the help of anthropological theories. Primarily, I use materiality studies and studies in material folklore which are relevant for my topic.

The object itself

Heidegger differentiates between three different types of things. Among these, the first type is understood as objects which is the closest to the everyday use of the word and my category. Also, every object is part of the third category of things which can be defined as a thing-in-itself, as the abstract concept of something (Heidegger 1967:6). He argues that our experience of things is determined by space and time. Both space and time exist outside of the things, and we can say that things divide the space. Here, I am more interested in time as something which determinates our notions about things. What is a true statement about something today, it will become false at another point of time (Heidegger 1967:19-31). The interpretation and the value attached to certain things might change with time as well, while the object itself can be the same.

In the field where I made my fieldwork, talking about traditional objects, it is a usual practice to look back in time and describe the old things. The objects of these memories are household appliances used before industrialization reached the area, created by the household members themselves or the craftsmen of that time. A typical example of these objects is the content of a dowry which is made of textiles for household use and clothing. The preparation of these was the duty of the woman while wood and other works requiring physical strengths were done by the man. Lajos Balázs (2016:125-141) is writing about the ritual process when the dowry is given to the groom's family. In the village he describes, this happened through a presentation of the goods to the community. Balázs interprets the procedure in parallel with the wedding of the bride. In this sense, the protected and personal becomes public for some time, after it changes place in the social order of the community. Today, this ritual is only present in retrospective writings, but some pieces of old dowries can be still in use.

As a result of the industrialization, the importance of handcraft activities decreased. In Hungary (and in Transylvania as well), these changes took place in the second half of the 19th century, resulting in huge differences between manual and industrial production. As handcrafted objects lost their previous functions, a movement of intellectuals started to work on their revivification. Thus, handcrafts became valued among artistic activities (Gazda 2008: 37-42). While analyzing these old objects, it is important to look into their biography. In ethnographic literature, it is stated that in the peasant household objects had different functions during their lifespan; the broken things were not thrown away but used with other functions or as parts of new tools (Gazda 2008:148-151). I experienced some of my older informants creating new household items from their old (but unused) textiles and selling them. Thus, these new-old objects are becoming commodities, and they are exchanged for money on the market. Kopytoff (1986) is analyzing the process of commoditization and claims that the objects' value can increase with the withdrawal from the market, what he calls singularization. In the case of my field, after industrialization, these products also went through a certain sacralization, when a new value was added to the old objects, so they regained the customers' interest in the market.

As old handcrafted objects became valued, the reproduction of these started to make sense as well. The replica prolongs the permanence of the past moment, but it can do this only imperfectly, as two things can not be identical in space and time. The replica is about regularity and time, returning to something known, and holding together the past and the present (Kubler 1970:71-72). Thus, reproducing certain old objects that have importance in the life of the community helps to create a link between specific moments of the past and present time. While the reproduced objects are chosen according to their historical significance, the excellence of the replica is based on the craftsman's skills in the technique. Thus, these reproductions are meant to be “better” than the original ones on the base of today’s technology, not exactly identical with the old things. The reproductions are made after museum objects or other items unearthed during excavations. Unlike these older things, the reproductions of the works of today's craftsmen are not valued but despised.

Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007:4) encourage anthropologists to look at the objects as meanings themselves, without always referring to something else through things. In this chapter, I attempted to see the thing itself. As it is shown in the catalogue, old objects can be in

use today, but at the same time, they are reminders of the past as well. The value of these things is based both on their functionality and their history.

Things as representations

Even though thus far, I presented objects as meanings in themselves, I state that representing something else is a characteristic of things, as my informants often connect elements of the local imagination with their crafts. The craftsmen explain symbolism represented by the objects as it is usually present in anthropological literature as well, explaining the local worldview (for example, Guss 1989). However, next to symbolic representations, Peirce (1974:CP 1.530-CP 1.564) also names two other types of significations. Icons and indexes differ from the symbols and each other in the way how the sign is connected to the object. The iconic representation is based on qualitative similarities between the representation and the representant; it is a simple depiction. These qualitative characteristics are the Peircean Firstness. The Peircean Secondness is about causality, as the sign is the outcome of the object. The index is based on this relatedness. In the case of the symbol, there is no ground for interpretation other than the interpretant's understanding. Therefore, the symbol relies on the Peircean Thirdness, on mediation. The icon is the simplest sign. Every index should also contain an icon, and every symbol is based on an icon and an index as well (Parmentier 1994:5-7). I am using these terms to grasp the diverse ways how a thing is communicating traditional and innovative features.

I will start with the presentation of some iconic representations, as these are close to the reproductions, where I finished my last chapter. It is usual for iconic representations that these illustrate classic topics of the local imagination, which can be recognized without explanations. Compared to the reproductions of certain objects, the depictions are more general and widespread topics. A good example of this could be the church of Csíksomlyó as a traditional pilgrimage site for locals and people coming from Hungary. This iconic representation is present on different souvenirs, especially around the day of the pilgrimage; handcrafts are only one of the possible ways to show it.

I found that the tree of life is a commonly used symbol among many crafts, with different visualizations and representations. Some of these are realistic images of a tree, others are composed of different flowers, birds and leaves in a stylized way. Vilmos Tánczos (2006), a Transylvanian ethnographer is writing about the tree among symbols which are not just representations of something, but they become the representants themselves, as magical or sacred depictions. He differentiates between diverse images of this plant (Tánczos 2006:296-302). Among them, I would like to mention the cosmic inverted tree which has its roots and branches upside down. Even if I have not found this exact image on the objects, the importance of the roots is always emphasized by my interlocutors (sometimes is objectified as well). People interested in tradition are working with the motivation to strengthen their roots, where they are coming from. Furthermore, another type, the anthropomorphic tree is an illustration of a person's destiny, the human microcosmos. In the narration of my informants, this representation is not necessarily separated from the tree of life or the three of the world which represents the source of life and the order of cosmos. Another representation of the tree mentioned by Tánczos is the family tree, which I also found enmeshed with the anthropomorphic illustration. For example, in the life tree representing a woman, her children are also depicted. The flowers as parts of the composition have their interpretations, which can vary as stated by Constantin (2011:13). Among the floral motifs, I am emphasizing the tulip which has multiple forms as a representation. First, it is considered a Hungarian symbol, but craftsmen who are often using it, differentiate between diverse forms of the tulip having different meanings as well. As a female motif, it can represent a virgin girl when it is closed, and a woman who already gave birth when it is open. The seeds symbolize her children, depicted to increase fertility (Tánczos 2006:284-285).

In the Peircean sense, semiosis can only be understood as a relation of the three elements: the representamen or sign, the object, and the interpretant. The sign only functions as a sign if it is understood as such, hence, a depiction should not necessarily be interpreted. Moreover, the interpretant has an active role in decoding the representation (Parmentier 1994:5-25). Some of my informants who are working with traditional furniture painting are using the symbols with the magical intention, while others just as decorations. In this sense, a tulip can be recognized as a simple depiction of the plant or can be associated with different meanings. Even if in general is a female symbol, it is possible to represent the Hungarian conquerors. Overall, all the objects with

the tulip motif are considered traditional, regardless of the intentions. As usual, the more widespread the motif is, the more possibilities it gives for diverse interpretations.

The rules about the use of motifs may vary among different crafts, some traditional artists are facing stricter rules than others. Woodcarving and furniture painting are based on certain rules of making the composition which are respected. Unlike the craftsmen creating these long-lasting objects, gingerbread makers are free to use whatever they prefer to decorate their products. The short life-span of the objects make the decoration less important. Similarly, people working with felt have freedom choosing the motifs without losing the respect of the community. However, here, the reason is different: even though felting is recognized as an old craft, it is not known if it was practiced in the region before the latest times. Not having old things to show directions, the creativity of the felted objects is accepted.

The colors also have symbolic interpretations. Traditional furniture painters associate certain primer colors to regions and towns; among these the blue and the brown are important. For decorations, more common are the use of the red, white and green which are the colors of the Hungarian national flag. Besides symbolism, some shades are considered traditional on the base of their origin, where the pigments are from. Objects colored with natural dyes are more respected than the ones painted with synthetic ones. The reason is that natural pigments were available before the industrial ones, so these resemble former times. For instance, some potters from Korond avoid using red on this base, but the wool dyed with plants is also a good example of traditional colors. In the Peircean framework, we can say that indexical representations play an important role in this signification, as the colors are made from certain ingredients, so there is a causal relationship between the object and the natural pigments. Besides colors, objects can have other indexical representations as well, which I am not going to describe here in detail since that would be another topic. Among these are people who are making things and are associated with their products, and the materials which are presented in the next chapter.

Raw materials

Even though this section is dedicated to materials, I find it arbitrary to delimit materials from products. It is so because the products of one process become the materials for the next one. Often, the different stages are not made by the same person; in this sense, today's craftsmanship is not based only on the household, but on the community as well. This is the case, for example, with the naturally dyed Szekler carpets presented in the catalogue. The raw material used by the craftsmen is wool received from the local shepherds. This wool is dirty: greasy, full of straw and sheep poop so it needs to be cleaned. The cleaning has more phases: first, the straw and other trash are removed from the wool, after this, the wool is washed several times. In the end, the dirt is selected again if it is necessary. Now the wool is ready for the next process which can be either spinning or dyeing. The thread is produced in a local workshop on three machines: the first one arranges the filaments of the wool, so it becomes organized, the second one makes the semi-spun thread and the third one makes the thread. The method of wool dyeing can happen before or after the thread is spun. This constitutes by the cooking of the plants together with some additional ingredients that provide the colorful painting liquid, in which the wool is dyed afterward. The product of all these processes is the colorful thread which, in this case, is woven into a carpet. It is hard to say where exactly the material becomes a product during this process. The dyed wool is the product of several procedures, while it is still the material for the weaving women.

The reason why I mention materials in a different section is that some of them are considered traditional. One interesting aspect is that usually, they do not have a high exchange value. In many cases, they are by-products of something which can be eaten, as it is the cornhusk, the straw or the wool. For example, today, shepherds give away wool which can be used for the carpets for free, as they would like to get rid of it. This same material is mentioned as having a high value in the past, and it is still valued among the older craftsmen. The same applies to hemp and flax threads used for some textiles which are not appreciated by others except some weaving women.

Tim Ingold (2000) argues that the material has an active role in the creation of the objects. In his view, the material and the craftsman build things together. In my field, I experienced that the specific craft of the villages is developed considering the characteristics of

the local resources. Thus, it is interesting to observe homogenous craft communities, as their professions are formed around local natural resources. It is an aspect of the materials that they formed the typical professions of the specific localities. For instance, a dialogic relation can be found between a type of wheat and the straw hat of Kőrispatak. Locals tell the story that the locally grown Einkorn wheat (*Triticum monococcum*) initiated the crafting of the straw hat. The straw of this species is more flexible therefore, it gives the possibility to create different crafts without being broken. However, today it is possible to cultivate a more productive type of wheat, but the straw of the Einkorn is still needed for the local crafts. As a result, a craft which was initiated by a local resource, it is influencing the choice over this resource today. While the material stayed the same, the objects made by it can be different today. As the demand for straw hats decreased, the locals started to create different figures and decorations. A similar story is about corn husk. Recently, the woven objects are sold next to decorations which give the possibility of more creative use of the material. Here I refer again to Ingold's (2000) argument about the active role of the material in the process of creation. Corn leaves with different imperfections were considered a disadvantage making the traditional weaved objects. However, when creating corn husk figures, these give inspiration. The artist uses colors and other imperfections as decorations, so the objects become colorful.

Looking at the traditional materials, there is a continuity in the utilization of certain kinds of natural resources. At the same time, the way how these are used became different in the last decades. The utilization of the local natural materials was connected to certain objects which are not needed anymore in everyday life. As the use of these became concentrated to a small number of craftsmen, and the materials are still present in high quantity, their exchange value decreased exceedingly. The reason why some materials are still appreciated is that certain qualities of them are recognized by the artists, which cannot be found among the commercial products. In this fashion, customers appreciate felted slippers and wool carpets. The other way of giving a value of the traditionally used materials is by creating a new type of product. While cornhusk and straw were connected to a technique which today is easily replicable by machines for a lower cost, creating different figures from these materials became a more appreciated work by the younger generation as well.

Techniques – Between objects and people

Unlike the everyday use of the word, Heidegger (1977) argues that the essence of technology lies in the process of bringing forth, which has more connections with the making of art than with today's productivity. This interpretation reflects the Greek roots of the word, as *techné* means the process of making art or craft. In this part of my paper, I write about *techné*, understood rather as technique than technology.

Techniques are crucial in understanding what handcraft means. If we consider the ready-made objects, it is obvious that complex machines are used, for example, to make the wood-work of the traditional painted furniture or to make many little beads of the same size. From this point of view, it is not possible to distinguish handcraft from other objects. In contrast, if handcraft is understood as an activity instead of an object, its meaning becomes clearer. While the furniture itself is not made by hand, furniture painting is surely a work which requires the skills of the hand. Similarly, while the beads are industrially produced, creating jewelry from them is a handcraft. Handcrafting in this sense is considered a traditional procedure, as it does not involve the power of electric machines, it is made similarly as it happened before the industrial revolution. I should also mention here that some machines which do not use electric power are considered traditional, for example, the floor loom and the spinning wheel, as these were parts of the peasant household (Kisné P. 2015:6). Furthermore, a process can be more or less traditional depending on how advanced the used technology is. For example, a carpet woven by naturally dyed thread is more traditional than the one which is made using the industrial dyes. However, using old technologies does not always seem to be the best option. For some craftsmen, it is not worth anymore to stay at the old techniques during some processes of the creation. Handcrafting is time-consuming and costly. To be able to sell their goods for a reasonable price the craftsmen involve different machines into the process. These are at different stages of automatization, like using electricity, engines, or sometimes computer technology as well. Technologies have an active role in the process, even though with technology the value of the object is decreased. Yet, there are machines which still have the reputation among the craftsmen. Those are the crafted machines which are built by their owners mostly using parts of old devices and the craftsman's skills. The appreciation is not based on the process of creation anymore but the craftsman's attitude towards the objects. As I presented earlier in my paper, reusing objects or parts of things

is an appreciated act in the traditional household (Gazda 2008:148-151). This might be one of the reasons why “handcrafted” machines have a status among the locals. The building of the machines is also connected to the astuteness of the craftsman, which characteristic will be presented in the next section of my study.

Techniques are that part of the handcraft where materiality can be observed in its process. Bruno Latour describes the cooperation between people and objects as a network of transformations. He emphasizes that the connections between them do not form a solid object, rather the different forces act together. He also claims that these connections can be observed in the workshops of the artisans (Latour 2005:63-86). Tim Ingold goes further saying that the relation between things should be rather seen as a meshwork than a network. He argues that life is possible because of the “leaking” of the things, which allows them to be enmeshed with each other (Ingold 2010). Thus, the material and the artist both influence each other during the process: the hands of the person weaving the corn husk are “taught” by the material to feel when it is necessary to complement the braid with new leaves. The hand slowly learns to cooperate with the braid. At the same time, the wood form gives the shape of the thing which is woven by the braid. The same thing happens during felting when the experienced hands can feel when the wool fibers are felted together. The other important body part is the eye which learns to recognize what is beautiful, or certain elements of the process which are not measurable in traditional techniques. The color of the fire indicating the temperature is one example of this, which the craftsmen should recognize when burning clay in the old type of kiln. Richard Sennett (2008) describes the process more in detail, arguing that during handcraft, the mind and the body connect, therefore it is more than a simple monotonous reproduction.

In his article about postcolonial societies, Roger Keesing argues that today, culture is understood through exhibited elements like folk dances, songs, clothing, and handicraft, while it is not lived anymore (Keesing 1989:23-24, 31-32). Going deeper into the process of creation, I aimed to show that using traditional techniques, the body of the artist works in connection with the materials and other objects. The work forms the human senses in a certain way. When the author claims that handcraft is a simplification of the cultural reality, he does not take into the account that objects are not only the bounded things, but they are enmeshed with people, at least during the process of creation (studying the connections between people and objects during their

everyday use would be possible as well but this is beyond the limits of this paper). I am not saying that the entire culture is reproduced through the traditional songs, clothing, dances, and handcraft, but it should be taken into consideration that all these activities require people as well who act in a certain way to reproduce these parts of the culture.

Characters and lifestyles

Next to the objects, on the other part of the handcraft, there are the people who create and who are created by their work. Unlike the replicas of the objects described a few pages before, it is not the aim of the traditional craftsmanship to reproduce some noted members of the community. Rather, certain characters and social roles are created through crafts. Some of the objects represent traditional personality types. Typically, they include a Szekler man and woman, but other characteristics can be attached to them as well. Marcsi's feltwork is inspired by a folktale about the power of the woman, her connections to the ground, and to the underworld. Her craft forms and represents the Wolf Woman of the folktales. Next to the iconic representation of this feltwork, an indexical connection can be found here as well. The hardship of the physical work which is required for felting helps the female artist to waken her power. The result of this effort is the felted object. While the Wolf Woman is not a well-known character, the strength of the woman seems like a general idea about the local characters. This indexical relation is similar to Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen's (2009:19-26) technology of imagination, as the technique gives rise to certain creative thoughts. Another characteristic of the Szeklers worth mentioning is their astuteness, which is something people commonly joke about. It is mostly related to the Szekler man rather than the woman. Some objects help to generate these imaginations if they are in the hands of the person with the typical characteristics.

Keesing argues that the indigenous people are alienated from their own culture, and they sell it according to the tourists' expectations. A similar argument was made by Comaroff & Comaroff (2009) who analyze the tradition in connection to the market economy. Silverman (2012) goes further saying that even though working for tourists is an exploitation of the culture, without this possibility the situation would be even worse. It is a fact that among the Szekler craftsmen, satisfying the expectations of the customers is always part of the traditional

craftsmanship. Among the clients are the tourists from Hungary, who consider Szeklerland a traditional region where they can find authentic experiences. However, in my field, I found that traditional craftsmanship rather helps people to live a life which is closer to the ones lived by their grandparents than exploits the culture by the market economy. There is also a general feeling of superiority towards Hungarians living in the motherland. Instead of being alienated from their work, Szeklers feel that the Westerners are alienated from their past and they do not know who they really are. On the contrary to the above-mentioned arguments, my informants are happy that they can make a living by producing something connected to their culture. In addition, some of them are glad to do it instead of a regular job. My informants who left other jobs – accounting, bank, cultural organization, different industries – to work with handcraft were complaining about the inflexibility, the lack of freedom and independence at their previous workplaces. For others, it was never tempting to enter the regular job market. Even if I can recognize the patterns which make craftsmanship an attractive profession, it would be a generalization to talk about as a typical favorable option. Some people found this opportunity as a way out of unemployment and not being able to find other jobs. Even those who chose their profession by favor, face several difficulties that are mostly related to the economic part of the work. The individual entrepreneurship (which is a common way to practice craftsmanship within the legal framework) often has expenses which exceed the capacities of a handcraft-based workshop. Adapting to the requirements of the market economy pushes people to familiarize themselves with a business-minded approach. As a result, only some craftsmen can be present on the market.

Still, one of the benefits of craftsmanship is its compatibility with the traditional agrarian lifestyle, which is not always true about a regular job. In Szeklerland, about 30 years ago, it was still usual that every household had its own livestock. Some of my informants still have them, and also some agricultural area to supply the animals and themselves (see also Constantin 2011:21). With the flexibility of the handcraft work, one can work the land and take care of the animals whenever it is needed. The livestock supports the different crafts with materials giving independence for the craftsman. Another advantage of handcraft compared to a regular job is that family members can work together or help each other. In the case of traditional pottery – especially in Korond – the family members share the work according to gender roles. Usually, the man is throwing while the woman is painting the ceramics, however, the family business

always runs under the name of the man, the head of the family. In this case, the gender roles are stable and formal, observable in many families. Yet, also other ways of cooperation among the family members can be found. Sometimes family members are working with different kinds of crafts, only cooperating on craft fairs. Also, the different corn husk products are made by the members of the same family where everyone has his/her specialization. But even when family members have professions other than handcraft, it is usual that they give a helping hand when it is needed. The craftsmen can even rely on them with some specific parts of the work. What is common among the different cases is that the family means a context of the work and shared responsibilities.

Among people and generations

Elina Härkönen, Maria Huhmarniemi and Timo Jokela (2018:9) claim that traditional handcraft can make connections between generations as it facilitates intergenerational dialogue, where participation is natural and familiar. In the case of Kyrgyz felt making, intergenerational communication is created through an informal, experience-based learning pattern, where the older and experienced women involve the youngsters into their work (Bunn 2011:508). In my field, I found the most cooperation among different generations within the family. However, even though people belonging to younger and older age groups are sharing parts of their responsibilities, they are rarely doing the same works. It is usual that the younger generation is choosing another craft or starts practicing some kind of art, even finishing art studies. Many of the graduated youngsters are not living in Szeklerland anymore, therefore I was not able to meet them. I met two young artists who are coming from well-known ceramist families. Moving home after they finished their studies, they are both helping in the workshop of the family, and they are also creating in their own styles. They learnt to work with clay in the family and developed their skills during secondary and higher education. Compared to the parents' crafts, their works are more innovative, and they emphasize individual composition instead of reproduction. However, the use of traditional motifs is present in both artists' works, and they both create objects inspired by folk tales. One of them, although decorating differently, remains close to the traditional

ceramics, while the other artist creates individual compositions using different materials and elements.

It is a fact that the skills of today's craftsmen were more common among the people of the preindustrial society. Craftsmen from those past days have recognition among nowadays traditional artists, not necessarily because of their crafts, but mainly because of their personal experiences. This generation, who are today in their 80's or late 70's learnt handcraft within the framework of the family, directly handed down from one generation to another. Some of them – especially the ones living in isolated villages, who did not have other possibilities to work, or had enough free time – continued doing this work. A typical example of this, a weaving woman in her 80's explained to me how her mother was teaching her and her sisters, so they have learnt every handcraft that was needed in a household. As a usual practice satisfying the needs of the household, this habit corresponds to the social behavior what Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983:2-3) name as *custom*, being an organic part of the social life. However, this woman (just like the other older craftsmen I met) does not craft today with the same motivation. After she prepared her dowry and got married, she was doing the same crafts for other girls in the village, as a work to earn money. Later, she started to sell her products and organize activities for tourists coming from Western countries. Besides the clothes for household need, in the last twenty years, she was also weaving textiles for folk costumes for the local folkdance group. While usually she is using her own patterns and creativity, for this work she was following the drawings of a local ethnographer who gave her the old designs. Thus, the socio-cultural context and the aim of her work significantly changed during these years. However, I see the continuity in her habits. Bourdieu defines the term *habitus* as the “*durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations*” (Bourdieu 1977:78). In this sense, the habitus is not determined by strategic planning of the future, but it is an outcome of the past practices without being a simple repetition of these (Bourdieu 1977:72-74). I find the term adequate to describe the work of this older woman, since she adapted her skills to the needs of the changing conditions, while her practices are based on crafts learnt in her childhood. During the interview, she also mentioned that precise work is more important for her than great progress. Later, as the discussion progressed, she recalled the way how her mother was teaching her different crafts in her childhood when punctuality was more important than the progress.

Continuities and discontinuities

A study about tradition in an Eastern-European context shows that in the case of Lithuanian national identity, we should look back to the first interpretation of the Latin *tradition*. This emphasizes more the act of handing down, instead of describing what is handed down, where the action is more important than the content (Roepstorff – Simoniukstyte 2006:186-187). Similarly, Estellie Smith (1982) suggests that we should characterize culture by continuity instead of talking about tradition and change. The latter are only components of the sociocultural system, while cultures exist through continuity. This continuity has a sociocultural reality as it keeps together the sociocultural system, and it is constructed in a specific way, from the point of view of the present. In the construction, the past seems more monotonous than the present, as the changes are not that visible on the long-term, and individual events become the characteristic of groups. *“Thus, somewhat paradoxically, it is only by making new what has been carried over from the past that we have a present with a future”* (Smith 1982: 134). This continuity is the validation of the socioculture connected to the requirements of the era. On the contrary, Richard Handler (1984) argues against the inevitable continuity of the culture. In his view, continuity is just as dependent on the perspective as the terms of *tradition* and *change*, and sociocultures can be characterized both by continuity and by discontinuity. Unlike Smith, he emphasizes discontinuity, and he argues that thinking about the renaissance of a culture as continuity is misleading; this is rather a new entity. However, both authors argue for the use of verbs instead of nouns.

Looking at the objects from a chronological perspective, in my field, I find it possible to describe both cases of continuity and discontinuity. Before starting any discussion on this topic, I should mention that my observations are mostly based on the explanations of my informants and some ethnographic literature on the topic, not on long-term fieldwork. Despite this, I would like to describe a few cases which highlight the change and persistence of traditional crafts in the different socio-cultural settings. In terms of socio-cultural change, it is important to mention the period of communism which brought remarkable changes in the organization of the craftsmanship. In this period, craftsmanship was practiced within the framework of local

cooperatives, as individual entrepreneurship was not allowed in that system. The craftsmen's work in the cooperatives was significantly different from the labor of a peasant man and woman who are described as models for today's artisans. The challenges of this type of work are described in a volume about craft cooperatives (Grimes & Milgram 2000), which I found similar to the ones experienced by my informants. Working in cooperatives, craftsmen have to adjust to the expectations of the global market. However, their products still have to represent the local traditions. Adaptations to the market require changes in the design and organization of the work. This is not a straightforward process, and it takes time. The work becomes more standardized, but it also gives financial stability for the employees (see also Constantin 2011:18-24). As it is described by my informant who was working in the local cooperative, the craftsmen had to change their habits to meet the requirements of this job, as the fixed working hours were not compatible with peasant lifestyle. At the same time, the continuity of the craft was ensured by the cooperatives. As cooperatives were established considering the local strengths, the work itself was not far from the familiar crafts. In the area that I studied, these were mostly pottery and weaving. Thus, families working with pottery since generations continued their tradition in this framework. Localities doing a specific craft kept their specializations. Furthermore, my informant who learnt pottery in the cooperative, today is still using the same motifs working in his own workshop.

However, discontinuity is not always interpreted as negative. On the contrary, a custom which already died out and became reinvented can be even more valuable than a continuous one, like the natural dyeing with plants, for example. According to the historical materials, this technique was in use in Szeklerland before, but little information was preserved until today (Szócs 2017: 604-605). My informant, Etelka, has learnt her profession from different museum, ethnographic and other professional materials, as she could not find a master to teach her. Being an artist who succeeded to renew a tradition, her work is highly respected (about her work see Szócs 2017). Today, she is cooperating with weaving women, creating mostly carpets, which were usually woven by the industrial yarn before she started her activities. However, the carpets made by the wool she dyed are valued more than other Szekler carpets. This is shown not just in the exchange value of the products, but her threads are present at different exhibitions in Romania and Hungary as well. The naturally dyed wool is considered traditional and appreciated because it evokes an old technique, not on the base of its continuity.

The use of folk costumes in the area demonstrates certain changes and reinventions of tradition. During the first part of the 20th century, as urban fashion replaced the peasant clothing, local intellectuals started to promote the traditional Szekler clothing. They established etiquette of the clothing which allowed and even promoted certain modifications and rejected others. When the movement started, people of some localities still wore these clothes as the peasant clothing, and they continued to do it. In other parts of the region, the tradition was renewed (Gazda 1998:174-185). In some towns of Hargita County, the traditional cloth decorated with red-black stripes became used on important festivities. The *rokolya* (woman's skirt) and in some cases also other woven parts of the clothing today are made with stripes of different colors instead of the red-black bands used until recently. Even though, the bands of red-black color became the symbol of Szeklers, today, people interested in traditional clothing do not accept them anymore. Ethnographers and craftsmen claim that the striping of the *rokolya* should be more colorful, just as the old skirts were. In the past, *rokolya*-s were woven according to strict rules which were supposed to represent the owner's origin and wealth (Kissné P. 2015). Another case of changes in folk dresses in anthropological literature was analyzed by Hendrickson (1995:182-192). Describing the changes in the traditional clothing of Maya throughout a decade of her visits, she names different “inventions” in the style and connects these with certain happenings in the social life of the Maya. Some of the changes she observed were becoming trends in the community, which she tries to associate with transformations of the socio-cultural life. Similarly, this might be the case with the folk costume of the Szeklers as well. Today, the red-black bands are associated with the industrial production of the clothing, which is less valued than the handcraft. Handcraft allows producing clothing in different colors which connect the tradition of today with the old skirts. The important change is that the colors of today's clothes do not always represent the same things what they meant a few hundred years ago according to ethnographic findings. Today, the individual style is more emphasized than before, as the design of the folk dress is chosen by its owner. The former meanings of the stripes are still taken into consideration, but this is rather free choice than the rule of the community. However, the changes of Szekler costumes do not seem to happen as often and as quick as it is the case with the traje (Maya clothing), likewise the Szeklers do not wear their traditional clothes as frequently as Maya people do.

Furthermore, I will also mention some other clothes that are not considered traditional but their design contains some traditional elements. They were introduced in the 20th century, as the Szekler clothing did not suit the lifestyle anymore (Gazda 1998: 182-183). Crafting these clothes, changes are created consciously and regularly, according to the demand of the market. As my informant who has a business in the sector described, these clothes became more popular recently, which she connects with the characteristics of her products that express the identity of people who are wearing them.

Looking at continuities and discontinuities of tradition, I found different variations in the way how traditional objects were presented at different times. Moreover, continuity is not always emphasized by the craftsmen, but recreating something which is (almost) lost has a great value. In this sense, tradition is renewed time-to-time, whenever people find something new helping them to connect with the past. My experience with traditional handcraft is that these connections are more important than creating continuity.

Perspectives on tradition

In their edited volume, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) concentrate on the creation/invention of different traditions. The authors make a difference between tradition and custom, saying that tradition is a fixed ritual, while the custom of the traditional societies is more flexible, it is changing with the everyday life of the community. When looking at the objects, I can distinguish things made according to a fixed traditional design and things where the creativity and the personality of the artist are expressed. On one occasion, at the traditional craft fair, I experienced a contradiction of different interpretations. I was in the company of Éva, a woman who is decorating eggs. As she was also selling the equipment for the craft, a customer came who was interested in the traditional egg painting. She bought some tools and took photos of the eggs to save the motifs. Éva recommended her favorite eggs which are more densely decorated with traditional motifs than the usual ones. The customer did not take pictures of these, *“I like the traditional ones,”* she said. Éva replied: *“But these are traditional.”* Even though we could agree that Éva followed rather the custom, while her customer a fixed tradition, it should

be noted that Éva is a craftswoman who is painting eggs for commercial use. Other locals do this every year as usual practice of the Easter ritual. Unlike Éva, her client is decorating for the needs of her household, like most of the people paint eggs around Easter. From this point of view, Éva does not fit into the framework of the local custom. Thus, I find it hard to distinguish between tradition and custom in this case. Something that looks like a (re)invented tradition from one side it is like a custom if we change the perspective.

In the context of the everyday experiences of Szeklers, I found it difficult to delimit traditional objects from the ones they consider rather new. Traditional products can be sold together with the other manufactured goods, and a thing representing a tradition for someone can mean the opposite to another person. Trying to find traces of tradition, I met different interpretations. I will give an overview of the diversity of understandings and try to find a common line between them. In the way the craftsmen present their work from the perspective of tradition, I found many variations between the different standpoints. To display the diversity, I am going to mention a few positions shortly:

- Kinga does not consider her work traditional, only her technique, but she looks at tradition with respect.
- Domi likes to combine traditional elements creating something new.
- Zoli bácsi is a traditional craftsman who believes in the continuity of his craft; he is inspired by ethnographic books.
- Another woodcarver is using both traditional and new techniques and motifs, as he learnt; he prefers the traditional ones even if he is not sure about their meaning.
- For Tünde, it is not important to do something traditional; she feels free to use different motifs, including traditional ones.
- Bertó does not want to do anything with tradition, but her works are still considered traditional on the base of the motifs she is using.
- Marcsi does not think that her work is traditional, but she is interested in the life of the previous generations.
- Another furniture painter likes to combine traditional elements and nowadays functionality, that the objects would be used today.

- For Gizi néni, who belongs to the older generation, it is important to create the way she learnt in her childhood.
- “*We should not follow our ancestors, but what was followed by our ancestors.*” (Klára is inspired by a Hungarian author).

The examples could go on, but I think that these already demonstrated the point that everyone has his/her view. As a common idea, it can be established that among Szeklers, a tradition or a traditional element is always something from the past or a reminder of former times. It is also a shared belief that these traditional elements should have a use today. Thus, the old elements are enmeshed with the new ones creating something which can evoke the old times, while they exist and are used (or admired) today. I will not go more into the definition of tradition as a local term, as I think a further explanation would be a generalization. Instead, I will discuss how the different elements are used, looking at the cases when change or tradition is emphasized by the locals.

Ingold and Hallam (2007:1-6) distinguish innovation and improvisation as two readings of creativity. According to them, innovation is a backward understanding of creativity which considers the new product, while improvisation is a forward reading which sees the creative process. In their understanding, keeping a tradition alive is a creative process, as it requires improvisation to adapt to the changing situations. I find this interpretation useful, as it involves more than one perspective. Looking at the objects, some artists are using traditional elements only to create something new, while the aim of other craftsmen is to reproduce tradition or something known as traditional. On one hand, despite their (and my) interest in materiality, among some older informants, I found that their prototype for the term *tradition* is an oral tradition, which requires the direct interaction of the participants. This might be a more innovative use of the given elements allowing a free application of the community's general knowledge. On the other hand, the use of ethnographic collections is popular among the craftsmen of the area in the search for traditional objects, motifs, etc. They reproduce the finds according to certain rules, taking into account the original context of the work as well, seeing tradition in a more objectified way. Not just ethnographic writings but ethnographers themselves influence the work of the artists. As Linnekin (1991) points out in her article about the anthropologists' responsibility, creating theories about people's tradition has its impact on the

people themselves. In my field, the presence of the local ethnographers following the institutional traditions of national ethnology is influential. According to the aim of the craftsmen, the reputation of ethnographic influence is not straightforward either. Artisans working on the revitalization of certain traditions express the need for ethnographic guidance which would restrict the way how the traditional elements are used by other craftsmen. Others, who are rather inspired by these, would like to walk their way, seeing ethnographers only to collect data.

Despite the intentions of the craftsman to create something traditional or innovative, involuntary changes will take place. Smith names four reasons for the non-replicability of the past: imperfect information, the uniqueness of every event, rational change in strategies and cultural drift (Smith 1982:128). In this sense, the imagination about the former times is always influenced by the present situation. Just like Sepik inhabitants, Szeklers also need money as they are living in a globalized, interconnected world (Silverman 2012:111-112), which makes impossible to reproduce an old object with all the characteristics. As my friend expressed, he might be able to make handcraft in the same way how it was done in the past, but he would hardly find someone willing to pay for it. In contrast, I also encountered cases when breaking with the tradition is a challenge. I met two artists, both educated in art, who have struggles in this context. For one artist it took some time to create her own style that is not influenced by traditional motifs. However, there is still a demand for decorations with the older elements. My other informant, coming from an artisan family, struggles to be appreciated with her works among artists. Therefore, the intentions of the craftsmen together with the involuntary, situational factors form the handcraft having its traditional and innovative characteristics.

Yet, where Ingold and Hallam talk about a creative process (improvisation) and a creative product (innovation), I found more to look at. In the previous chapters, I mentioned certain ways to look at the objects, as innovative or traditional products, but mostly these two are enmeshed. Furthermore, not just the objects are the products of the technique as a process, but the people are also created through this. As I described in my paper, old objects in use, motifs, materials, techniques, people or their roles can all represent a tradition which is considered worthy to appreciate and/or to maintain. The result of a traditional technique can be an object which meets the requirements of contemporary life, as it is often in the blacksmith's workshop. But through the technique, the craftsman might develop skills similar to his/her ancestor's, while decorating

his objects differently. It is possible to keep the traditional material and create certain objects using different techniques as well. Furthermore, people who gained their knowledge in the past create objects following their experiences from the past for different customers or in a different way. Old objects also influence the new ones, and so on. All these elements are enmeshed, therefore, it would be a generalization to simplify the whole into a process and a product. While some parts will intentionally or unintentionally follow tradition, others have to be adapted and some rejected if they are not considered important. This is not to claim that the traditional and the new are always present to the same extent in handcraft. I do not think it is worth to measure in what degree the theoretical concepts can be found in a given context. I rather described certain ways how these are present and understood in a given situation.

Planning the catalogue

Working with the craftsmen, I often heard that there is a problem with the objects if they are found only in the museums. To be more specific, the issue is that the traditional objects in the museums have already lost their important functional characteristics. This matter is discussed as well by Richard Handler (1984:62) who argues that people interact differently with a museum artefact compared to a thing in everyday use. On the other hand, my informants adore the material culture presented at the exhibitions of traditional handcraft. For instance, it happened during my fieldwork that I spent the afternoon with a craftsman browsing a catalogue about the latest exhibition she participated at. Thus, the product of my thesis is motivated by the demand to exhibit the objects including innovative elements to create a new function of the things.

When working with a publication about Alutiiq heritage, James Clifford (2004) emphasizes the importance of the natives' voice next to the archaeologists' and of the anthropologists'. He applauds the project of *Looking Both Ways* because it shows the perspectives of the Alutiiq people living today in Alaska. I also follow the preceding argument by encouraging the cooperation between the insiders and the outsiders of the culture while presenting the locals' point of view in the catalogue I am not doing anything new. In Szeklerland (and about Szekler handcraft), exhibitions are made by locals/with the locals, and these have

significance in the confined context. The handcraft I am working with has been displayed on several occasions. Even the local craft fairs are considered as exhibitions among some craftsmen because the artisans do not usually have considerable sales. Exhibitions of the traditional handcraft are organized regularly. From an anthropological perspective, all these present the topic from the insider's point of view. The contribution of my product will be to introduce the outsider's perspective. The main characteristic of my catalogue is that I aim to present objects outside of their original context to a public which is not familiar with the Eastern European handcraft in general.

Heidegger states that our experience of things also depends on the space where they can be found (1967:19-31). Handler says that the context of the objects can change our interpretation of them (1984:62). Thus, my presentation takes it into account that the objects in their original context can be understood as part of the local identity. The things I am writing about evoke nostalgia, as they might be related to memories from the personal past. These things can mediate between the present and the memories from the past by arousing feelings (Angé & Berliner 2015:8-10). But it is possible to evoke these feelings only among the locals. Many of the traditional characteristics presented here are known not just among craftsmen, but also among locals in general, as these involve a general imagination about the old times. Moreover, these objects play a role (even though, sometimes only aesthetic) in the life of the community today as well. Bringing them out of the context means that one needs to clarify what is the importance of the objects for a specific group of people and how can it be understood. In the texts of the catalogue, I often clarify certain aspects of the things even if it would not be necessary when presenting them to locals. For instance, in the local context, it would be worthless to describe the use of decorated eggs, while I found it necessary to do in my catalogue.

At the same time, presenting the collected material outside of its original context also takes a different function. My experience is, that exhibitions and publications on the topic are important to the craftsmen because they see them as a result of their work. After an event, the craftsmen and the artists are strengthened in confidence about the value of their profession, and their importance in the life of a smaller or bigger community. This catalogue was not created for the craftsmen themselves. (Although it would be beneficial to create a similar product for them too, that would need to be written in Hungarian, displaying partially different characteristics.)

Instead, I aim to take the material out of this community and make it accessible to a new public. In this case, the function of the product would be to broaden the public of Szekler traditional crafts and arts. I find this work important, as most of my interlocutors do not have the possibility and the language skills to present their work outside of the Hungarian speaking communities.

The way I demonstrate the material is also different from the way it is presented in its usual context. Typically, the works of one craftsman or maybe the crafts of a couple of people are shown together. Unlike the presentations concentrating on the skills of these craftsmen, I choose to emphasize the different aspects of the objects and craftsmanship. In the catalogue, I display some characteristics I found important among the local artists who consider the traditional features of their work. A more comprehensive collection of the common motifs, techniques are left out from the catalogue. Instead, I chose to create interpretations of their traditional and innovative use. Susan Pearce (2003:202-203) developed a framework for understanding collections; to name the works similar to mine, she is using the term systematic collections, saying that these are created through an interaction between humans and objects. More specifically, the idea of the classification gives rise to the product, but this idea is inspired by the external world. Andrew Moutu (2007:98-101) argues for a similar dialogic relation in his article published in the volume *Thinking Through Things*. In his view, the classification does not precede but comes together, and it is bound up with the act of collecting. Juxtaposing things this way has a crucial role in my product as well. Each topic in the catalogue has been formed by juxtaposing different objects and fieldwork experiences which present similar characteristics of the craftsmen's work and imagination. I constructed this concept by putting together the collected material and some anthropological literature.

At the same time, collecting objects and exhibiting these in some form is a classic way to present things. Since the Renaissance, it has been a practice to build collections to show the diversity of our world and to systematize it. Even though these collections were made according to the ideology of the respective era, which lost its actuality today, the idea of collecting is still influential, and it is built upon the early practices (Schulz 2003). My collection as such and the catalogue based on this is inspired by the disciplinary traditions. Even the objects which I am presenting are collected and exhibited on other occasions as well, in a different setting.

Conclusion

In this study, I have chosen to describe handcraft and handcrafting using a framework which touches upon the different sides of its materiality, the technique, and the people who participate in the process. The meanings are created involving both humans and the material culture which surrounds them. When looking at techniques, the way how they are enmeshed becomes most visible. Despite their interconnection, I am writing about each of these elements, to show how these relate to something borrowed from the past, and/or becomes valuable today. To understand the meaning of handcraft in the local context, one should consider the activity rather than handmade objects. Handcrafting as such is related to tradition, as the techniques resemble the ways how objects could be created in the past. The topic is also connected to the appreciation of the old things, and the identity of a group. Sometimes, sustainability or self-expression can be valued by the artists as well, but these are rather presented through examples from the past. Referring to the old things is central for traditional handcraft, but this can be done in multiple ways. It is possible to preserve old objects, but the replicas of things from the past can prolong their existence in time and space. However, the replica does not reproduce the thing itself, but it imitates the characteristics which are considered crucial by the craftsmen. A more innovative way is to use some elements of the objects from the past creating something new. Looking at the human aspects, handcrafting might be a way to maintain certain characteristics of people which are valued by the community. Just like the old objects, elderly craftsmen are also appreciated, as they experienced a certain way of life and work that is hardly accessible today.

While tradition is understood as something that comes from the past days, from the ancestors of the people, this is always presented within the framework of contemporary life. Being rooted in the past is a central characteristic of traditional handcraft while having a value in the present is essential for being appreciated today in the life of the community. Thus, old objects are used with a new function, or they are recreated according to the requirements of our times. As the craftsmen are living in a world that is different from the past, they should also adapt their work to this life. It is inevitable for them to create marketable products. Integrating into the community of artists and creating work which is appreciated as an art piece might be another possibility, but I had limited opportunities to explore this question during my research.

In this paper, I showed how the past can be present in traditional handcraft. I support the view which looks at the old and new elements complementing each other in different ways. While I am not able to decide if practices which are claimed traditional are rather invented or authentic, I can describe certain ways what tradition means today and the way how the old elements meet innovations and improvisatory practices. In my understanding, tradition connects the bounded local culture of the older times with the values of today's globalized world. I found possibilities to present certain aspects of this through the material culture. Just like some old, appreciated people of the community, objects can connect the past with the present being material bodies which exist for a longer period. Nevertheless, written history and ethnographic findings have an important role in creating traditional handcraft. Some craftsmen chose to follow certain old ways in creation with the purpose to evoke the past through their crafts. Others use only the traditional elements while they aim to innovate. At the same time, everything cannot be controlled by the artists, because they are influenced by contemporary life and by their existing habits as well. As my informant phrases: *"We might not even realize it but everything we learnt we incorporate it into our lives"* (Klára Barabás). The knowledge about the past and the culture becomes incorporated, as people live and create through it. Looking at Szekler handcraft, continuities and discontinuities also work next to each other. I suggested in my paper, that looking at connections might be more productive in this case, as continuity is not as appreciated as it is claimed in anthropological literature, but the reconnection with the past is also valued.

I designed my product in this framework, with the purpose to create a new function for something showing certain characteristics of the people I worked with and ensure a life according to their values and principles. The product is based on the material culture which is often presented for the public. The aim of this catalogue is to bring the material out of its usual context and present it in a different setting, adapting the ways of how things are shown.

In anthropological literature, traditional handcraft is often presented through the objects and theories of materiality connected to the things. Writing about the objects, I have found literature directly related to my topic analyzing different perspectives of material existence. This is not the case when it comes to the human efforts playing an active role in the technical part of the process, and in general, little has been written about the craftsman as such. I see further possibilities in this direction, considering that anthropologists are equipped to see people and

share their perspectives. As research questions, studying the dialog between people and the material environment, seeing both the influences on humans and their agency could have interesting outcomes.

Összegzés (Summary in Hungarian)

Dolgozatomban a hagyomány mibenlétének kérdését járom körül a székely kézművesség empirikus példáján keresztül. Elemzésem egy kétszer két hónapos terepmunkán alapszik, amelyre 2018-ban került sor, valamint néhány más látogatáson, 2019-ben. Ennek során az interjú, a résztvevő megfigyelés valamint a tárgyak és képek értelmezésének módszerét használtam, miközben kézműves mesterekkel és művészekkel beszélgettem és dolgoztam együtt. A terepmunkán gyűjtött anyag kiegészül egyéb tapasztalatokkal is, mivel a terep egyben az a hely is, amelyet szülőföldemként nevezek meg. Ennek okán, gyakran találtam magam olyan helyzetben, ahol nem volt egyértelmű, hogyan vonjam meg a határt a magánélet és a terepmunka között. Dolgozatomban külön kitérek az otthon végzett terepmunka kérdésére.

A munka része egy katalógus, amely képek, interjúrészletek valamint rövidebb leírások révén mutatja be a kérdés különböző megközelítéseit. Ehhez kapcsolódik egy írott dolgozat, amely a releváns elméleti megközelítéseket boncolgatja. Mivel a téma empirikus magját a kézművesség jelenti, ezt több szempontból is elemzem. Elsőként a régi tárgyak értékével és ezek megítélésével foglalkozom, közülük említek néhányat, amelyek ma is a kézművesek használatában állnak. Nem csak maguk a régi tárgyak, hanem ezek replikációi is elterjedtek. A mesterek, akikkel találkoztam gyakran készítik el bizonyos tárgyi leletek másolatait, leginkább úgy, hogy ezt hozzáigazítják a kor igényeihez. Továbbá leginkább nem a tárgyak önmagukban idézik a régi kor szellemét, hanem ezek díszítményei, amelyeknek interjúalanyaim rendszerint szimbolikus jelentőséget tulajdonítanak. Tipikus szimbólum például az életfa, amelyet különböző megjelenítési formákban is alkalmaznak. Továbbgondolva a díszítményeket nem csupán szimbólumok, hanem a Peirce-i elméleti keretben értelmezett ikonok és indexek is jelen vannak a megjelenítési formákban. Ezek közül említem meg a természetes pigmentek jelentőségét, amelyek külön figyelmet kapnak, mint hagyományos színek. A tárgyak alapanyagával egy külön fejezetben foglalkozom, részletezve, ahogyan több hagyományos kézműves mesterség is olcsón elérhető melléktermékek feldolgozásán alapul. Az alapanyagok után az előállítás technikai oldalát részletezem. Az antropológus számára talán ez a legtöbbet ígérő része a kézművességnek, mivel itt lehet megfigyelni, ahogyan a tárgyi illetve az emberi erők találkoznak. A technika elsajátítása során az emberi érzékek hozzáalakulnak a mesterség elvárásaihoz, a minél esztétikusabb kivitelezés érdekében. Fontos megjegyezni, hogy a

kézművesség nem feltétlenül jelenti a gépi erő mellőzését, inkább arról van szó, hogy az elkészítés meghatározott mozzanatai kézzel történnek. A kézművességről szóló utolsó két fejezetben a munka emberi oldalára térek ki. Először az érintett karaktereket és szerepeket tárgyalom, ahogyan az ember alkot, és amilyenné az alkotás alakítja őt. A tipikusan megjelenő női és férfi karakterek mellett, a kézművességben fontos szerepet jut a családi munkamegosztásnak, amelynek néhol hagyományos keretei vannak. Ezt követően néhány olyan kézműves és művész munkájára térek ki, akiknek valamilyen közösségi elismerésben van részük. Néhányan közülük kézműves családok leszármazottai, akik fiatal művészként érvényesülnek ma. Talán náluk is nagyobb elismerés övezi azoknak az idős mestereknek a munkáját, akik egy régebbi (sokak által áhított) környezetben sajátították el mesterségüket, és ma is ezzel foglalkoznak.

A hagyomány elméleti megközelítéseire érve elsőként a kontinuitás kérdését vizsgálom meg. Az általam vizsgált terepen a kontinuitás kérdése kevésbé hangsúlyos, amelyet bizonyít, hogy a feledésbe merült hagyomány újraélesztése elismeréssel társul. Emellett, a székelyruha-készítés egy trendjét mutatom be, amely a hagyomány újraértelmezésének egy példája. A hagyomány mibenléte kapcsán releváns megközelítési módnak találok ennek találkozását az innovatív elemekkel. Bár adatközlőim a hagyományt leginkább a régivel azonosítják, megjegyzik, hogy ezek új módon kerülnek felhasználásra. A régivel teljesen megegyező kézművesség és kézműves tárgy nem kívánatos, mivel ennek kivitelezése nem illeszkedik a mai piaci viszonyokhoz. Több mester nem is tűzi ki célul valamilyen hagyomány újratemtését, inkább a hagyományos elemek újrafelhasználására törekszik.

Az általam kivitelezett katalógus a székely kézművességnek ezen oldalait mutatja be a nagyközönség számára elérhető módon. Célja, hogy keretet teremtse a székely kézműves termékek befogadására azok megszokott környezetén kívül. Ennek megfelelően lett összeállítva a katalógus, amely értelmezési keretet nyújt a tárgyakkal a kívülállók számára.

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