

## Cultivating and Challenging Patronizing Images of Subcarpathian Rus

Pavlo Leno 

### ABSTRACT

The article compares the main trends in the visual imagery relating to Hungarian/Subcarpathian Rus which developed and dominated the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom and the First Czechoslovak Republic in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The research is based mainly on analysis of visual sources, primarily mass-circulation postcards and private photographs from the family archives of Transcarpathians. The latter were chosen because they provide an opportunity to “hear” the so-called unrepresented majority. This cannot be provided by written texts, whose authors are usually representatives of the elite classes. The set of sources analyzed makes it possible to single out the dominant image which was created by “external” authors: scholars, journalists and photographers, and tourists, who were mainly representatives of the titular nations of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It emphasized the pastoral and traditional nature of the local community, focusing on their conservative outlook and culture. This picturesque and colorful image was not wholly accurate. The second image comes from family photographs and shows the self-representation of the local population. It opposed the dominant pastoral image and proves that the processes of modernization and emancipation in the territory of the Carpathian Ruthenians continued consistently and irreversibly. Despite the existence of this alternative, it was the first image that was widely popular and used by the Czechoslovak authorities as a justification for the delay in granting the right of self-government to Subcarpathian Rus. During the time of Soviet power in Transcarpathia, the same image was used to criticize previous political regimes. This image still affects the way Transcarpathia is perceived in historical research, as well as the identification of its modern population.

**KEYWORDS:** Hungarian/Subcarpathian Rus, visualization, photographs, postcards, colonization, exoticization, modernization, emancipation

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Ass. Prof. Dr. Pavlo Leno, Uzhhorod National University, pavlo.len@uzhnu.edu.ua, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4196-6173>

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## Introduction

This study looks at the main visual images of Hungarian/Podkarpatská Rus which developed in the late nineteenth and especially in the first half of the twentieth century. The research is based on visual sources, primarily mass-circulation postcards and private photographs from the family archives of Transcarpathians. They make it possible to identify the “external” image of the region. This image was created by representatives of the titular nations of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and visualized their pastoral and conservative ideas about the region and its inhabitants. At the same time, there was an “internal” image, which reproduced the self-representations of the local population and showed that the processes of modernization and emancipation took place in the territory of the Carpathian Ruthenians consistently and irreversibly.

Transcarpathia is the westernmost region of Ukraine, bordering Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Poland. On the cultural map, it is located on the line of descent of Central and Eastern Europe. Over the past millennium, this territory has had at least 16 official or semi-official names, which testifies to its lack of subjectivity. This article uses the names Hungarian Rus or Upper Hungary to refer to the period when the region was part of the Kingdom of Hungary, and Subcarpathian Rus in relation to the Czechoslovak period of its history.

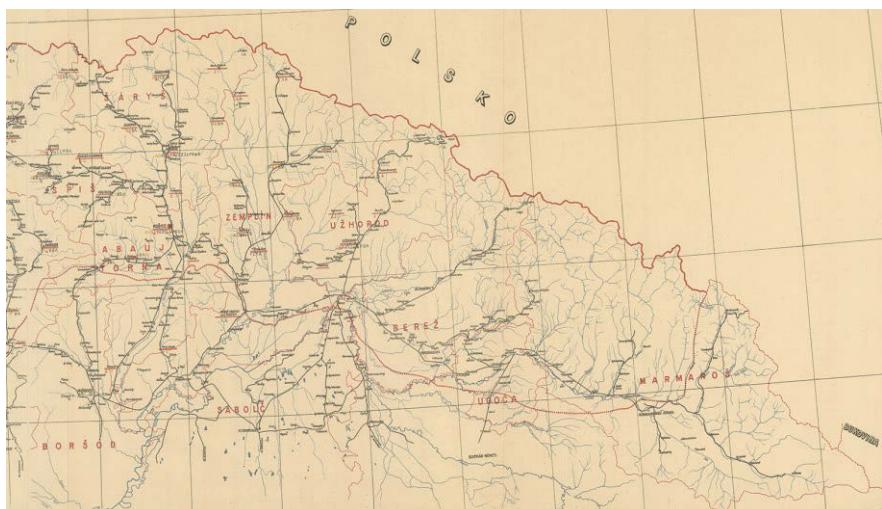


Fig. 1: Administrative map of Podkarpatská Rus, 1919/20. Cutout taken from: EDUARD BOUDA: Administratívna mapa Slovenska [Administrative Map of Slovakia] [approx. 1919/20], © Map Collection, Institute of History, Czech Academy of Sciences, sign. MAP A 2571. For a file in high resolution, see the online version of issue 4/2025 at [www.zfo-online.de](http://www.zfo-online.de).

At the end of the nineteenth century the region was a distant periphery of the Kingdom of Hungary. The territory was inhabited by Hungarians, Slovaks, Germans, Ruthenians (or Rusyns), Gypsies, Jews, and Romanians who defined their identity by religious affiliation.<sup>1</sup> A characteristic feature of the region during this period was the predominance of a rural population with a low level of education.<sup>2</sup> There were in particular many peasants—93 percent—among the local Ruthenians,<sup>3</sup> whose literacy in 1910 did not exceed 22 percent, with only 3.5 percent of women being literate.<sup>4</sup>

Following the era of Romanticism and the period of the “spring of nations,” local elites began to be active in the formation of national identities. Later, the region became the subject of close attention from academics, and the once little-known border area became “an excuse for fascinating research.”<sup>5</sup> A specific feature of these academic studies was that their authors usually paid attention only to the socially active part of the region’s population.

Another approach was demonstrated by the Soviet Marxist tradition, which used concepts of class struggle that elevated the role of the local “silent majority” to the level of an actor in historical events. However, it confined their role to being the social base of class and national liberation movements. A common Soviet thesis was that the population of Transcarpathia was subject to oppression by foreign exploiters, and the region itself had a colonial status in relation to the metropolis. This narrative did not cease to exist with the collapse of the USSR and is still periodically reproduced in publications.<sup>6</sup>

1 PAVLO-ROBERT MAGOCHII: *Pidkarpats’ka Rus’: Formuvannia natsional’noi samosvi-domosti* (1848–1948) [Subcarpathian Rus: Formation of National Identity (1848–1948)], 2nd ed., Uzhhorod 2021.

2 OLEH S. MAZUROK: *Mista Shidnoii Halychyny, Pivnichnoii Bukovyny i Zakarpattia u druhii polovyni XIX—na pochatku XX stolit’* (1848–1918 r.): *Etnosotsyal’ni ta ekonomichni aspekty. Tom 1: Etnosotsial’nyi rozvytok mist* [Cities of Eastern Galicia, Northern Bukovina, and Transcarpathia in the Second Half of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1848–1918): Ethnosocial and Economic Aspects. Volume 1: Ethno-Social Development of Cities], Uzhhorod 2012, p. 369.

3 MAGOCHII, p. 16.

4 IRYNA I. DATSKIV: *Profesiina osvita zhinok u Zakarpatti (1919–1939)* [Vocational Education of Women in Transcarpathia (1919–1939)], in: *Naukovyi Visnyk Uzhhorod’skoho natsional’noho universytetu, Seriia “Pedahohika: Sotsial’na robota”* 32 (2014). pp. 68–73.

5 IVAN LYSIAK-RUDNYTS’KYI: *Karpats’ka Ukrayina: Narod u poshukakh svoiei identychnosti* [Carpathian Ukraine: A People in Search of Its Identity], in: IVAN LYSIAK-RUDNYTS’KYI: *Istorychni ese, tom 1*, Kyiv 1994, pp. 451–452.

6 IVAN M. HRANCHAK (ed.): *Narysy istoriiz Zakarpattia v 2 tt.* [Essays on the History of Transcarpathia in 2 Volumes], Uzhhorod 1992, 1995; HANNA V. BOZHUK, VASYL’ V. PAL’OK: *Dokumenty Zakarpats’koho derzhavnoho oblasnoho arkhivu pro trudovu emi-hratsiu zakarpatsiv u SShA ta Kanadu* [Documents of the Transcarpathian State Regional Archives on the Labor Emigration of Transcarpathians to the United States and Canada], in: PAVLO P. CHUCHKA (ed.): *Ukrains’ki Karpaty: Materialy mizhnarodnoii naukovoii konferentsii “Ukrains’ki Karpaty: Etnos, istoriia, kul’tura”* (Uzhhorod, 26 serpnia – 1 veresnia 1991 r.), Uzhhorod 1992, pp. 77–86; MYKOLA VEHESH, CHILLA

The optics of such anti-colonial studies create a biased view of the events and phenomena of the epoch, leading to a false conception of the standard of living, social uplift, and relations between the local population and representatives of the titular ethnic groups. However, the approaches of classical post-colonial theory (Edward Said and others) or the concept of internal colonization (Alexander Etkind) also face applicational difficulties, since the study of relations between political centers (Budapest, Vienna, and Prague) and this region of the Carpathians is difficult to accommodate within the limits of their methodological framework. More about the discussions and nuances of applying the concepts of colonization to the internal politics of interwar Czechoslovakia can be found in the articles by Filip Herza.<sup>7</sup>

My article proposes to pay attention to Transcarpathia using the concept of contact zones formulated by Mary Louise Pratt,<sup>8</sup> which, it has recently been suggested, may be applied to (East) Central European regions.<sup>9</sup> The approach uses analytical categories that allow us to avoid the influence of overly teleological notions, the research of which is grounded in the concepts of the state, nation, or class. A contact zone is a social space where cultures meet, collide, and interact intensively in the context of asymmetric power relations. In her concept, Pratt focuses on the study of original written works (ethnographic and auto-ethnographic texts) arising in contact zones, but this approach can also be used for the analysis of other cultural forms or phenomena.<sup>10</sup> “Ethnographic texts” describe the territory and its inhabitants from the point of view of representatives of the authorities or the titular culture. As a result, hetero-images and

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FEDYNETS' (eds.): *Zakarpattia 1919–2009 rokiv: Istoryia, polityka, kul'tura* [Transcarpathia 1919–2009: History, Politics, Culture], Uzhhorod 2010.

7 FILIP HERZA: Colonial Exceptionalism: Post-Colonial Scholarship and Race in Czech and Slovak Historiography, in: *Slovenský Národopis / Slovak Ethnology* 68 (2020) 2, pp. 175–187; FILIP HERZA: Colonial Czechoslovakia? Overseas and Internal Colonization in the Interwar Czechoslovak Republic, in: *Interventions* 26 (2024), 2, pp. 338–361.

8 MARY LOUISE PRATT: Arts of the Contact Zone, in: *Profession* (1991), pp. 33–40.

9 MARTIN ROHDE, GUALTIERO BOAGLIO: Editorial/Editoriale, in: *Kontaktzonen in Zentraleuropa, Innsbruck—Wien* 2022 (Geschichte und Region / Storia e regione 31, 2), pp. 5–20. On Transcarpathia in particular, cf.: SEBASTIAN RAMISCH-PAUL: Mit “liebevoller Sorgfältigkeit und strenger Wissenschaftlichkeit”: Zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Uhors’ka Rus’/Podkarpatská Rus/Zakarpattja von der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis in die 1920er Jahre, in: ROHDE/BOAGLIO, *Kontaktzonen*, pp. 45–61.

10 The analysis of “Moscophilism” and “Magyaronism,” which, unlike “Ukrainophilism,” are mostly negatively characterized in Ukrainian scholarship, seems fruitful. For example, the concept of transculturation can be used to explain the phenomenon of “paganism,” which emerged in the process of indirect contact between Russia and Transcarpathia. Concepts such as “hybridity,” “collaboration,” and “parody” explain the popularity of “paganism” in Transcarpathia and, at the same time, the ironic attitude toward it in the Russian Empire.

stereotypes about a certain community are formed.<sup>11</sup> “Auto-ethnographic texts” are those in which conquered/colonized “others” describe themselves in ways that relate to the representations made of them by members of the titular culture.

Photographs are considered a primary source of this paper. Other cultural forms that can be used as ethnographic or auto-ethnographic texts (for example, artistic, scientific, and journalistic articles of the time) are used here as supplementary material. Thus, the most typical and common photographs that shaped a recognizable visual image of Transcarpathia may be described as “ethnographic texts.” They are discussed as tools for constructing common ethnographic images in recent publications by Martin Rohde, Herbert Justnik, and Ksenya Kiebzinski.<sup>12</sup> In the context of this paper, these are postcards, which became very popular at the end of the nineteenth century. They were found in private collections, in the form of separate photo albums dedicated to a specific settlement,<sup>13</sup> and in museum funds. In the interwar period, photos by professional photographers and amateur tourists were ubiquitous.<sup>14</sup> They appeared on the covers or in the texts of magazines and tourist guides,<sup>15</sup> in scientific monographs,<sup>16</sup> documentary reports, and individual photo albums, some of which

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11 EVA KREKOVIČOVÁ: *Mentálne obrazy, stereotypy a mýty vo folklóre a v politike* [Mental Images, Stereotypes, and Myths in Folklore and Politics], Bratislava 2005, pp. 7–19.

12 MARTIN ROHDE, HERBERT JUSTNIK: *Habsburg Imperial Image-Space: Negotiating Belonging through Photography*, in: *Euxenos* 14 (2024), pp. 44–75, <https://doi.org/10.55337/36/IIYH2750>; KSENYA KIEBUZINSKI: *Presenting the Carpathians: The Visual Economy of Juliusz Dutkiewicz’s Photographs*, *ibid.*, pp. 10–43, <https://doi.org/10.55337/36/DEER6791>.

13 OLEKSANDR VOLOSHYN: *Uzhhorod u starovynnii lystivtsi* [Uzhhorod on an Old Postcard], Uzhhorod 2003; OLEKSANDR VOLOSHYN: *Mukachevo u starovynnii lystivtsi* [Mukachevo on an Old Postcard], Uzhhorod 2006.

14 Over the past few years, the popular science periodical *Local History* (<https://local-history.org.ua/>, 2025-10-08) has published several dozen essays by Mykhailo Markovych about journalists, tourists, and photographers who traveled to Transcarpathia in the interwar period. These essays are accompanied by many of their photographs. Recently, this author presented his first book about Transcarpathia, which contains hundreds of photographs of the interwar period: MYKHAILO MARKOVYCH: *Vatra v Karpatakh: Reportazhi z mynuloho* [Bonfire in the Carpathians: Reports from the Past], Uzhhorod 2025.

15 Krupův průvodce Podkarpatskou Rusí [Krup’s Guide to Subcarpathian Rus], Praha—Vinohrady 1934; PETR ŠTĚPÁNEK: *Podkarpatská Rus v letech 1919–1939: Podkarpatská Rus Vás zve* [Subcarpathian Rus in 1919–1939: Subcarpathian Rus Invites You], Náchód 2008.

16 AMALIE KOŽMINOVÁ: *Podkarpatská Rus: Práce a život lidu po stránce kulturní, hospodářské a národopisné* [Subcarpathian Rus: Work and Life of the People in Cultural, Economic and Ethnographic Aspects], Praha 1922.

have been republished in modern times.<sup>17</sup> All ethnic groups are present in these photos, but the local Ruthenians, who, after the arrival of Soviet power in 1944, changed their ethnonym to Ukrainians, are the most common in the photographs.

Family photographs of Transcarpathians from the beginning of the twentieth century and the interwar period were chosen as auto-ethnographic texts. The fairly large number of private photographs indicates they can serve as a source for the visual self-presentations of the local population. Many of these photos were taken in the photo studios of the time, but there were also less formal ones taken outside of them. The authors were both professional photographers (employees or owners of photo salons) and amateurs. Although photography had not yet become the “Middle-brow Art” that Pierre Bourdieu spoke about,<sup>18</sup> compact film cameras were no longer uncommon among ordinary residents of the region in the 1930s.<sup>19</sup>

The main genres were individual and group portraits, primarily wedding, school, or just family portraits; there were also so-called tourist photos. It should be noted that the sources analyzed did not include family photos of local elites. They were deliberately not used, as the task was to show the visual self-presentations of ordinary residents of the region. In the selection process, preference was given to photos that can be attributed and that answer the questions: who is depicted in them, where, and when.

Surveys of local family archives have shown that the number of photos in family archives can vary from a few to several dozen, depending on how materially well-off people were, and partly on their ethnicity.<sup>20</sup> In particular, there were more photographs of titular ethnic group representatives, which at different times were the Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, and Ukrainian-Rusyns. At the same time, photographs were less common among the Romanians and seldom found among the local Roma or Wallachians.<sup>21</sup>

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- 17 LUKÁŠ BABKA, HANA OPLEŠTILOVÁ: *The Lost World of Subcarpathian Rus'* in the Photographs of Rudolf Hulka (1887–1961), Prague 2014; FLORIAN ZAPLETAL: *Mista i sela Zakarpattia* [Towns and Villages of Transcarpathia], Uzhhorod—Praha 2016.
- 18 PIERRE BOURDIEU, LUC BOLTANSKI, ROBERT CASTEL, JEAN-CLAUDE CHAMBOREDON: *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, Oxford 1998.
- 19 For most of the Transcarpathians of that time, photography was accessible thanks to the availability/presence of a multitude of private photo studios. However, in the second half of the 1930s, many ordinary residents of the region owned compact cameras, as evidenced by the collections of local museums and the memories of elderly inhabitants.
- 20 As an employee of the History Department of Uzhhorod National University, I am responsible for organizing students' ethnographic practice. One of the tasks that students perform during their annual ethnographic expeditions is to search for and research old photographs from family archives. Over the past decade, we have managed to find and archive hundreds of family photos from the 1890s to 1940s. Copies of these photographs are kept in the collections of our Laboratory of Ethnology, Local History and Folklore.
- 21 The Transcarpathian Wallachians are a community whose history has not been researched. There are several main versions of their origin. According to one, they are descen-

Photographs are understood as elements of a symbolic system and a method of communication. I have attempted to single out the non-verbal messages in them—connotative, according to Roland Barthes.<sup>22</sup> Although in a later work Barthes warned against the semantic analysis of photographs,<sup>23</sup> I believe his approach is suitable for the purpose of this research. In particular, it opens up opportunities for reflection on the social status of the participants, their family, social, professional or ritual and symbolic spheres of life. A modern version of the semiotic approach is demonstrated in the work of Ol'ga Boitsova,<sup>24</sup> who considers photography a kind of “language” used to convey visual messages. Photographs are artefacts of a particular culture, as well as a holistic text that requires a specific interpretation. They reflect social practices, themes and subjects of selective photography in the customs of external and internal visualization of the population of the region. The main role in this study is played not only by official (in particular, reporter's) but also by private (family) photographs. The latter have the information potential not only to reconstruct the history of everyday life, but also other events and phenomena of the period.

### Hungarian Rus in Ethnographic and Auto-Ethnographic Texts (from the Nineteenth to the Beginning of the Twentieth Centuries)

During the period when the region was part of the Hungarian Kingdom (until 1918), the metropolis paid little attention to the development of this mountainous periphery. The possibilities of the social mobility of its population were limited, and therefore examples of Transcarpathians of that time with successful artistic, scientific, or teaching careers are to be found mainly outside the borders of Hungarian Rus. A relatively active political and literary life flourished among a small number of representatives of the local elite. The region's peripheral position, low educational level, and impoverished population were further complicated by its more than 200-year “disgraced” status.<sup>25</sup> In general,

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dants of people from Wallachia, which gave rise to modern Moldovans and Romanians. However, Transcarpathian Wallachians, although they speak a dialect of Romanian, are very different from Romanians or Moldovans in terms of external anthropological data and mentality. Another version is that the local Wallachians are descendants of the former province of the Roman Empire of Dacia or Moesia. On Wallachians of Zakarpattia, cf.: NALINI RATNAKAR: Vlachs of Ukraine: Who Are They? in: Ukrainer (2021-01-29), <https://www.ukrainer.net/en/vlachs-of-ukraine/> (2025-09-17).

22 ROLAND BARTHES: The Photographic Message, in: ROLAND BARTHES: Image—Music—Text, London 1977.

23 ROLAND BARTHES: *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York 1982, pp. 88–89.

24 OL'GA IU. BOITSOVA: *Liubitel'skie foto: Vizual'naia kul'tura povsednevnosti* [Amateur Photos: Visual Culture of Everyday Life], Sankt-Peterburg 2013.

25 After feudal rebellions and uprisings of the seventeenth century, Uzhhorod fell out of favor with the rulers of the Habsburg Empire and was considered a disgraced city. PETR SOVA: *Proshloe Uzhhoroda* [The Past of Uzhhorod], 2nd ed., Uzhhorod 1992, p. 308.

this region has remained little known to the general public for a long time, as even scientists did not show particular interest in it.

The first ethnographic references to the inhabitants of the region appeared in the work of the father of Slovak ethnography, Ján Čaplovič. His writings of the 1820s were characterized by superficial and tendentious analysis, and also by othering that emphasized the negative features of various ethnic groups of the kingdom's population (except Slovaks).<sup>26</sup> Čaplovič's conclusions were criticized by the local philosopher Vasyl Dovhovych, who in 1824 published an article with comments on his research methods and generalization.<sup>27</sup> This polemic did not continue, however, and in 1826 their contemporary Slavicist Pavel Josef Šafařík stated that "the Ruthenians [...] of Northern Hungary from the linguistic and historical point of view still remain 'terra incognita'."<sup>28</sup> This quote generally characterizes the level of perception of Upper Hungary among the intellectuals of the time.

Only in the 1870s did the first railway appear, connecting the largest city of the region Ungvár (Cz. Užhorod; Ukr. Uzhhorod) with Nyíregyháza (Ukr. Nyiired'haza), the administrative center of the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County in northeastern Hungary. From the 1880s on, balneological tourism began to develop, which contributed to the beginning of a "discovery" of Hungarian Rus<sup>29</sup> by the inhabitants of the kingdom. Several tourist routes appeared; guest houses, boarding houses, and tourist shelters were located near the mineral springs.<sup>30</sup> Tourists were attracted by the local nature and mountains, while representatives of the local population were not considered any kind of "highlight." These health-promoting tours awakened interest in the region, but the remoteness and high price of services meant they were affordable only to a limited range of tourists; in general, the region's "inclusion" in the mental maps of the broad strata of the kingdom was yet to come.

The same period marked the beginning of intense activity by the first famous photographer of this part of the Carpathians, Karol Diwald, the author of the photo albums "Central Carpathians" and "Photographs of the High Tatras" (1873), as well as "Eastern Carpathians" (1879).<sup>31</sup> The latter contains 32 photos with views of the major cities of Ungvár and Munkács (Cz. Mukačevo; Ukr. Mukachevo), mountain landscapes, and castles in the region. The author's special attention to nature is visible in the professionally shot photos. There are

26 JÁN ČAPLOVIČ. Etnographicke pozorovania z Uhorska [Ethnographic Observations from Hungary], in: VIERA URBANCOVÁ: Počiatky slovenskej etnografie, Bratislava 1970, pp. 326–331.

27 VASYL DOVHOVYCH: Zauvazhennia do etnografii iak nauky [Remarks on Ethnography as a Science], 2nd ed., Uzhhorod 2003.

28 MAGOCHII, p. 51.

29 MYKHAILO MARKOVYCH: Toi, shcho pershym sfotohrauvav Karpaty [The One Who First Photographed the Carpathians], in: Local History (2021), <https://localhistory.org.ua/texts/reportazhi/toi-shcho-pershym-sfotografuuvav-karpati/> (2023-08-24).

30 FEDIR SHANDOR: Turyzm [Tourism], in: VEHESH/FEDYNETS', pp. 69–70.

31 MARKOVYCH, Toi.

not many people in the photos; those who do appear usually look like strangers against the background of rocky mountains or dormant primeval forests. They include soldiers in uniform, men in modern suits, and occasionally city ladies in elegant dresses. Seemingly the only expressive photo with representatives of traditional culture is found in the album covering the Central Carpathians. It shows a group of locals in traditional clothing, around whom soldiers and men in modern costumes are sitting or standing. One gets the impression that the latter served as a kind of demarcation barrier between the Lemkos and the photographer.

It seems that the photographers of the time tried not to record or, if they did, minimized the presence of “peasants” in a scene, preferring people in modern clothes. Only from the 1860s on did an awareness appear that traditional clothing and other examples of material culture could prove the authenticity of certain people, no less than examples of oral folk art. Still, interest in the material artifacts and representatives of the so-called “folk types” (*Volkstypen*) of this part of Europe in the 1860s and 1880s rarely went beyond the boundaries of the community of professional ethnographers.<sup>32</sup>

A certain increase in the general public’s interest in local traditional culture is noticeable in connection with the Millennium, the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of Hungary. In May 1896, the Millennium Exhibition opened in Budapest and was visited by 6 million people.<sup>33</sup> Among its 260 thematic pavilions was the “Ethnographic Village” with 24 houses that symbolized the various ethnographic regions of the Hungarian Kingdom. One was a reconstruction of a house from the village of Alsóverecke (Cz. Nižní Verečky; Ukr. Нижній Ворота). It became a popular photo area for young ladies and gentlemen in Victorian-era costumes who showed an interest in local “exoticism.” The exhibition was created by professional ethnographer János Jankò, who spent several years traveling around the kingdom photographing and collecting information about various ethnographic groups, including Hungarians and Ruthenians of Hungarian Rus.<sup>34</sup> He was a model ethnographer who, in his photographs, tried

32 DOMINIK GUTMEYR, MANFRED PFAFFENTHALER: Co-Optation and Autonomy of the Photographic Object: On Ethnographic Photography in the Russian and Habsburg Empires, in: SIEGFRIED GRUBER, DOMINIK GUTMEYR et al. (eds.): From the Highlands to Hollywood: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Southeastern Europe, Zürich 2020, pp. 181–198.

33 MYKHAILO MARKOVYCH: “Selo Tysiacholittia”: Zvidky pokhodiat naidavnyshi fotohrafii Zakarpattia [“Village of the Millennium”: Where the Oldest Photographs of Transcarpathia Come from], in: Local History (2021), <https://localhistory.org.ua/texts/statti/selo-tisiacholittia-zvidki-pokhodiat-naidavnyshi-fotografiyi-zakarpattia/> (2023-08-24).

34 The online collection of the Hungarian Ethnographic Museum has 456 photographs by this ethnographer, several dozen of which feature the Transcarpathia of the time: Photograph collection: <https://collection.neprajz.hu/neprajz.06.10.php?af=&bm=1> (2025-10-08).

to record not the beauty of nature or mountains, but typical phenomena and manifestations of folk culture.<sup>35</sup>

The ethnographic exhibition indicated a certain interest in traditional Ruthenian culture, but another event caused a much greater and unexpected resonance. In honor of the Millennium, a commemorative plaque and an obelisk were unveiled in July 1896 at the Veretsky Pass (Hung. Verecke-hágó; Ukr. Verets'kyi pereval) in Upper Hungary (now Transcarpathia). According to legend, it was here in the ninth century that Hungarian nomads saw their new homeland for the first time. After the unveiling of the monument, a generous banquet was held for guests in the nearby village of Alsóverecke. However, these celebrations were overshadowed by the local Ruthenian population's poverty, the level of which shocked the journalists and officials present.<sup>36</sup> In a similar vein, local Ruthenians were presented in the German-language encyclopedia *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild* in 1900. Here, mostly acculturated Hungarians with a Slavic family background presented their paternalistic view on the region. Užhorod's mayor, Mihály Fincicky, wrote about Ruthenians living in the Ung county, that this "highly submissive flock of people [Völkchen]" would be "still as poor today as they were then."<sup>37</sup>

The government decided to launch a "Ruthenian" campaign with the aim of economic transformation. The impulse came from the economist Edmund Egan, who published a well-known memorandum on the relations between Ruthenians and Jews.<sup>38</sup> Sympathizing with the Ruthenians, he at the same time demonstrated a patronizing tone and uses alienating vocabulary. His description depicts the Ruthenians as "dark, pious, God-fearing, humble, obedient, kind, honest, polite, hardworking."<sup>39</sup> In general, his work leaves the impression that virtuous Ruthenians are capable of little without external help and protection. He contrasts the Ruthenians with the local Jews, whom he calls not by their ethnonym, but exclusively "merchants" and accuses them of greed, deception, and usury.

35 For an overview of the history of Hungarian ethnography, cf.: LÁSZLÓ KÓSA: *A magyar néprajz tudománytörténete* [History of Hungarian Ethnology], Budapest 1989.

36 IVANNA I. SKYBA: Pytannia Verets'koho perevalu v konteksti suchasnykh ukraiins'ko-ukrains'kykh vidnosyn [The Issue of the Veretsky Pass in the Context of Modern Ukrainian-Hungarian Relations], in: *Ukraiins'ka hunharystyka* 1 (2019), pp. 100–110, here p. 102.

37 Quoted after: SEBASTIAN RAMISCH-PAUL: *Fremde Peripherie—Peripherie der Unsicherheit? Sicherheitsdiskurse über die tschechoslowakische Provinz Podkarpatská Rus (1918–1938)*, Marburg 2021, p. 84. For a broader analysis of the image of today's Zakarpattia in this publication, cf. pp. 84–86.

38 E. EHAN: *Hospodářský stav rusínských venkovanů v Uhrách / Ekonomychnie polozhenie rus'kykh selian v Uhorschchyny* [The Economic Situation of Ruthenian Peasants in Hungary], Praha 1922.

39 Ibid., pp. 76–92.

Egan's work led to a program of economic transformation, but in 1901 he died under mysterious circumstances. Gradually, the Ruthenian problem disappeared from the news and public discussions. Around this period, postcards from Hungarian Rus became popular. These images showed that the photographers were not primarily interested in the wild mountains but in the civilized cities and towns of the region. Although urban residents made up no more than 17 percent of its population, the postcards gave the false impression that Hungarian Rus was a fairly urbanized region. Streets and squares of populated areas were depicted, with the help of collaged photographs, as more modern than they actually were (Fig. 2). In particular, airships or airplanes often appeared above the cities' main buildings, although the first airport would not appear here until much later, in 1929.<sup>40</sup>



Fig. 2: City Hall in the center of Munkács, postcard, 1910. Printed by K. J. (Budapest). From the private collection of Oleksandr Voloshyn

Since the photographers were primarily interested in urban structures, people in these shots are usually in the middle or background. As a result, their faces are lost in the details, and it is difficult to see their emotions. In these rather static pictures, there are people of different ages and genders, mostly in modern clothes. It is quite difficult to determine their ethnic or religious affiliation by visual observation, although the urban settlements of the region were distinguished by multiculturalism and a multi-religious community.

Photographers of that period did not often take pictures in the countryside. Peasants in their traditional (Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian, or Slovak)

40 SERHII FEDAKA: *Narysy z istoriïi Uzhhoroda* [Essays on the History of Uzhhorod], Uzhhorod 2010, p. 199.

clothing were photographed mainly on the streets of cities. But even there, they rarely became the main object of photographs, instead being modestly huddled somewhere on the edges of the scene. In general, these images created the impression that progress touched the urban population, while it did not affect the rural residents: on the streets of modern towns, they look like an anachronism, which photographers try not to capture. Such a vision correlates with the theme of the “Millennium Exhibition” mentioned above. The latter’s ethnographic exposition personified the kingdom’s past, but not its present or future. In multinational and multi-ethnic formations of the type of the Habsburg Empire, which included the Kingdom of Hungary, the concept of cultural heritage for the most part rarely covered the artistic and historical monuments of all ethnic groups and national minorities. In the formation of a holistic image of the state, priority was given to the culture of the titular nation, while at the same time the exclusion of certain aspects of the culture of national minorities from it played an important role.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to the postcards, which formed the “official” image of the region and its inhabitants, other sources from that time show that modernization took place not only in the urban space of Hungarian Rus. At the end of the nineteenth century, a village priest named Iuryi Zhatkovych, the author of a synthetic essay on the Ruthenians of Hungary, noted that “a civilization that already uses the railway and the telegraph will soon completely erase the features that distinguish one people from another.”<sup>42</sup> The acceleration of these changes occurred as a result of the labor migration of Carpathian Ruthenians to the USA or Canada, the first wave of which occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These processes were not uniformly manifested in the region: in the poorer mountainous areas, the tradition of making and wearing homespun clothing persisted longer. However, even among the highlanders, the wearing of factory clothes was not uncommon, as Egan stated in his memorandum. In addition to clothing, changes appeared in the interiors of rural houses. In particular, the range of furniture was expanded; agricultural machinery diversified; and new kitchen seasonings and cooking technologies appeared, which affected the diet of the peasant population.<sup>43</sup>

41 EWA MANIKOWSKA: Building the Cultural Heritage of a Nation: The Photo Archive of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Monuments at the Twilight of the Russian Empire, in: COSTANZA CARAFFA (ed.): Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History, Berlin—München 2011, pp. 279–288, here p. 280.

42 IURYI ZHATKOVYCH: Etnohraficheskiy ocherk uhro-russkykh [Ethnographic Sketch of the Ugro-Rusins], 2nd ed., Uzhhorod 2007, p. 62.

43 MYKHAILO ALMASHY: Romochevtsia: Istoryko-ethnografichniy narys [Romochevtsia: A Historical and Ethnographic Essay], Uzhhorod 1999; PETRO KUTSKIR, FEDIR RUBISH: Lavky: Istoriiko-ethnografichne doslidzhennia [Lavky: A Historical and Ethnographic Study], Uzhhorod 2012; VASYL' KOTSAN: Spohady i vidomosty pro nyzynne selo Lokhovo Mukachiv's'koho raionu Zakarpats'koi oblasti: Rukopys zapsyanyi i uporiadkovanyi 1974–1977 rr. M. I. Parlagom [Memoirs and Information about the Lowland Village of Lokhovo, Mukachevo District, Transcarpathian Region: Manuscript Record-

More significant modernizing transformations caused by the increase in the population's educational level or even by a certain degree of women's emancipation occurred in the subsequent, Czechoslovakian period. Still, family photos taken on the eve of World War I were much more modern in the appearance of the peasants than is suggested by postcards. The most common genre of that period was portrait photos taken in honor of a wedding. They were made in a photo studio and varied depending on the backdrop, the skill of the photographers, and the then-accepted iconographic canon for weddings. Among the notable typical conventions (Fig. 3) are a flower in the man's hand as a sign of love, a prayer book, and a white handkerchief as symbols of virginity held by the girl, the groom's hand resting on the bride's shoulder, and so on.

These photos are evidence of "temporary immunity from reality" and, according to Peter Burke, show a social illusion, not social reality.<sup>44</sup> Such portraits are indeed not a reflection of objective reality but rather of people's self-presentation. However, even they have certain traits of individuality, since the participants could at least influence the choice of time and clothing for the pictures. In these unique photo-representations, it is noticeable that the villagers are oriented towards urban culture, and try to distance themselves from the heritage of their ancestors through modern clothes and some other elements, especially wedding rings.

Similar tendencies began to manifest themselves at the end of the nineteenth century, when first-wave workers (the so-called "Americantoshi"<sup>45</sup>) refused to wear their old clothes after returning home from working in the United States. They stood out in the crowd with manufactured clothes, which were usually dark in color and contrasted sharply with the traditional, much lighter outfits of the majority.<sup>46</sup>

Wedding photos demonstrate the slow but inevitable process of displacing home-woven clothes from the everyday life of the local population when the traditional ceremonial dress for a weekend or holiday was replaced by factory-made clothes without ethnic identifying features. The fashion for photographs at weddings (as well as at christening parties and first communions, to which Bourdieu drew attention<sup>47</sup>), meant the inclusion of photography in rites of transition. This was something new for the traditional wedding ritual, which was gradually losing its ethnographic authenticity.

ed and Compiled in 1974–1977 by M. I. Parlag], in: Naukovyj zbirnyk Zakarpats'koho muzeju narodnojj arkitektury ta pobutu, Uzhhorod 4 (2018), pp. 359–409, here p. 365; ROMAN TODER: "Vysoka" kukhnja abo v horakh iistymut' dobre: Pro zakarpats'ku horians'ku hastronomiu [Haute Cuisine or How to Eat Well in the Mountains: On Transcarpathian Highland Gastronomy], Kyiv 2020.

44 PETER BURKE: *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence (Picturing History)*, London 2001, p. 28.

45 Transcarpathian slang word for people who returned from working in the United States or Canada.

46 KOTSAN, p. 378.

47 BOURDIEU/BOLTANSKI/CASTEL/CHAMBOREDON.



Fig. 3: Photo dated 1914-03-20. The religious marriage of Polan' Kurta, born in 1897 in the village of Cserlenő (Cz. Čerlenovo; Ukr. Chervenovo), and Mykhailo Striabko, born in 1889 in the village of Ignéc (Cz. Zniacjovo; Ukr. Zniatsevo). Photo from the Yakovchuk family archive

In the oldest photos found in the family archives, the peasants were photographed in modern clothes. Men usually chose factory suits or military uniforms for the photos, which is not surprising, since for the inhabitants of the valley (southern) part of the region, military service was evidence of a certain

social uplift. In traditional societies, to which the rural population of Hungarian Rus belonged at the time, women usually joined in civilizational changes later. However, the photo posted here shows that even in Hungarian Rus, some Ruthenian peasant women could afford to dress in clothes other than home-made ones for the photographer's studio, although their neck ornaments still testify to the preservation of the old traditions.

It should be added that there were not too many such “modern” peasants who were not afraid of the camera at that time, but their number grew steadily in the following decades. These peasants, unlike their conservative parents, believed that the money spent on a photographer was not just unnecessary fun, but something more important.

### Official “Images” of Subcarpathian Rus during the Czechoslovak Period (1919–1939)

After World War I, the territory of the Carpathian Ruthenians became part of the First Czechoslovak Republic according to the Saint-Germain Peace Treaty signed in September 1919 and the Treaty of Trianon, signed in June 1920.<sup>48</sup> Soviet and modern Ukrainian historical narratives about the Czechoslovakian period included the thesis that economic relations between Prague and Subcarpathian Rus resembled colonial exploitation.<sup>49</sup> Some facts do lead to such conclusions,<sup>50</sup> but in general, the state invested much more in the region than it received back.<sup>51</sup> The government deliberately made significant financial investments to counteract the economic backwardness of the region, which had been neglected for centuries. At that time, average Czechs and Slovaks did not know the region or had mistaken ideas about it. Almost a hundred years after Pavel Josef Šafařík described it as “terra incognita,” the region remained unknown and undiscovered. In 1922, the ethnographer Amalie Kožmínová wrote that “these people and their life were almost unknown in our country [...] Part of our state was an ‘unknown continent,’ a mystery that almost no one knew.”<sup>52</sup> This superficial knowledge and supercilious attitude is demonstrated by Jaroslav Hašek in his famous novel, first published in 1921, about the adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk during World War I. The author depicts local

48 MAGOCHI, pp. 164–168; IGNÁC ROMSICS: *A trianoni békészerződés* [The Treaty of Trianon], Budapest 2002.

49 MARIAN TOKAR: *Hospodars'ka polityka chekhoslovats'koi vlady ta problemy sotsial'-noho rozvytku* [The Economic Policy of the Czechoslovak Government and the Problems of Social Development], in: VEHESH/FEDYNETS', pp. 63–67, here p. 63.

50 GEOFFREY BROWN: *The Czechoslovak Orient: Carpathian Ruthenia as an Imagined Colonial Space*. PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2016.

51 TODER, p. 111.

52 KOŽMINOVÁ, p. 1.

Ruthenians as down-to-earth people who were inherently slavish.<sup>53</sup> Such ideas corresponded to century-old stereotypes: Ján Čaplovčík wrote about them in a similar tone in the 1820s.

Various institutions<sup>54</sup> engaged in the research and collection of ethnographic material were called upon to fill gaps in the knowledge. These institutions<sup>55</sup> specifically focused on the study of the traditional way of life, and therefore it is not surprising that researchers tried to record cultural phenomena not covered by the processes of modernization and transformation. It is worth noting that the search for and recording of “old traditions” took place against the backdrop of significant changes in Subcarpathian Rus after it became part of the First Czechoslovak Republic. On the pages of official publications, government officials were justifiably proud of the progressive achievements they had initiated in the region in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>56</sup> All this emphasized the actual absence of such changes under the previous Hungarian regime.

The results of these studies and primarily their visual material created the impression that Subcarpathian Rus and its population were in a kind of “time capsule.” This image gradually became popular among Czechoslovak citizens, thanks to the development of summer and winter tourism. In the interwar period, the network of highways and railways expanded in the region, an airport was built in the largest city of Užhorod and many new hotels and boarding houses appeared.<sup>57</sup>

Many guidebooks were published, describing in detail how to get from Prague or other cities to the easternmost part of Subcarpathian Rus. In these publications, the following metaphors are used to describe Subcarpathian Rus:

53 JAROSLAV HAŠEK: *The Good Soldier Švejk and his Fortunes in the World War*, Suffolk 1974, pp. 595–597.

54 ANNA ZELENKOVÁ: Folkloristické a etnologické výskumy podporované Sborom pro výzkum Slovenska a Podkarpatské Rusi v Praze v medzivojnovom období [Folkloristic and Ethnological Research Supported by the Committee for Research into Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia in Prague in the Interwar Period], in: *Slovenský Národopis* 68 (2020), 1, pp. 84–98; MICHAL KALAVSKÝ: *Dejiny slovenskej etnológie* [The History of Slovak Ethnology]. Vol. I: Osobnosti [Personalities], Bratislava 1999, pp. 62–63; JÁN PODOLÁK: *Etnológia na Slovensku v 20. storočí—Etapy jej vývoja* [Ethnology in Slovakia in the 20th Century—Stages of Its Development], in: *Etnologija Actualis Slovaca* 3 (2003), pp. 9–58.

55 In particular, in 1919, the State Institute of Folk Songs in the Czechoslovak Republic was established in Prague, and among other things studied the population of Subcarpathian Rus. In 1928, the Commission for Research of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus was established at the Slavic Institute in Prague in order to finance ethnographic research and the publication of its results. The Commission for the Study of Carpathian and Balkan Pastoralism and the Šafařík Scientific Society also supported ethnographic research in Subcarpathian Rus.

56 JAROSLAV ZATLOUKAL (ed.): *Podkarpatská Rus*, Bratislava 1936; JAROMÍR MUSIL (ed.): *Technické práce v zemi Podkarpatské 1919–1933* [Technical Works in the Country of Subcarpathian Ruthenia 1919–1933], Užhorod 1933.

57 SHANDOR, pp. 69–72.

“Subcarpathian Davos,” “little Switzerland,” “Park of Europe,” “Carpathian Babylon,” “land of bears,” and other similar names. The guides make comparisons with other countries and continents, showing a tendency to exoticize the region and its inhabitants. Tourists were attracted by the advertised healthy lifestyle and by the idyllic pastoral way of life of the local population. The dominant themes are the pristine (paradisical) purity of the land and nature and the authenticity of the traditional culture of its population:

“[...] if in the pre-war years, Breton folklore festivals attracted thousands of tourists from Europe, then our local folklore can compete with them in its picturesqueness!<sup>58</sup> [...] mountains, meadows, dense forests, people—everything here is undistorted and untouched, which very quickly brings back a lust for life!<sup>59</sup> [...] can the land possibly offer tourists more?! [...] all kinds of tourist attractions are concentrated here: fauna, flora, sports, nature and folklore! [...] Subcarpathian Rus awaits you every spring with meadows of snowdrops, crocuses and anemones, geraniums, primroses, heather, daffodils, rhododendrons and dozens of other wonderful flowers, which the Lord himself planted here in unlimited quantities [...].”<sup>60</sup>

The text of the guides is illustrated with visual materials. From the 1920s to the beginning of the 1940s, many professional photographers and journalists who worked in the genre of documentary photography traveled through this region. Among the more famous were Bohumil Vavroušek, M. Štadler, Rudolf Hůlka, Florian Zapletal, and Jiří Král.<sup>61</sup> Their photos appeared as postcards, on the covers of magazines, in the texts of tourist publications, or in separate albums.<sup>62</sup> Each of the photo artists had his own style and compositional preferences but all of them were united by their interest in rural residents in folk clothes, as well as traditional folk and sacral architectures.

Photographs from this period become more dynamic: people are recorded in motion, during conversations or ritual activities, often at work in the field or near the house. Their emotional faces are shown in close-up, which was rare in photographs of the previous period. Mountains are also in the frame, but they usually serve as a background. They inspire photographers with their freshness, but they are no longer as “wild” as they were with Karol Diwald. They are shown as “civilized” due to the activities of people and the presence of livestock in the open fields, which complement the visual narratives, creating an overall impression of harmony and idyllic life in nature.

Attractive adults or children dressed in traditional clothes and often barefoot are an indispensable element of most pictures (Fig. 4). Most of the pictures depicted Ruthenians, although other ethnic groups were also seen in the photo-

58 KONST. DRAVECKII: *Razvitie turistiky na Podk. Rusi* [Development of Tourism in Subcarpathian Rus], in: EDMUND C. BACHINSKI (ed.): *Podkarpatskaia Rus' za gody 1919–1936*, 3rd ed., Uzhhorod 2014, pp. 184–188, here p. 188.

59 Krupův průvodce, p. 5.

60 ŠTĚPÁNEK, p. 3.

61 Cf. Martin Rohde's paper in this issue, on Hůlka in particular, and Markovych's series of articles mentioned in footnote 14.

62 BABKA/OPLEŠTILOVÁ; ZAPLETAL.

graphs and were no less exotic. They are recorded going about their everyday life, during religious or family holidays, or on visits to pubs or fairs. Common photo subjects are men or women smoking a pipe or riding a horse.



Fig. 4: Three generations of peasants from the village of Volovoje (Hung. Ökörmező; Ukr. Myzhhyr'ia), photo from 1920. Author: Florian Zapletal. From the private archive of Mykola Mushynka

Quite often the photos feature local people with a mug of beer, which has a deeper meaning than it might seem at first glance. Subcarpathian Rus was not thought of as a beer culture. However, thanks to beer, local residents were involved in a common culture with the Czechs, and in this way, a kind of cultural bridge was built between them. Such content is found in tourist guides, which served the purpose of attracting tourists. However, it is also to be found in photos that were not printed in the guidebooks. In particular, the well-known American journalist Margaret Bourke-White documented the Hutsuls<sup>63</sup> of Jasina, where women drank beer on an equal basis with men.<sup>64</sup> The stress on the fact that they were drinking this seemingly masculine drink was obviously intended to emphasize the exoticism and otherness of the subjects in the frame. Beer is often found in private photographs, which may testify to signs of self-colonization, a manifestation of loyalty to the titular culture, and even modernity (Fig. 11).

Cities were the focus of these photographers much less often than villages and mountains. But even photos of urban areas feature picturesque villagers in traditional clothes, not townspeople. They appear seemingly quite naturally in the streets, fairs, or bazaars in the center of Užhorod or other cities of the region, even if beggars happen to be the focus. The photographs also capture people in modern clothing whose ethnicity cannot be guessed, except for men of Jewish origin who are often distinguishable by their hairstyles and beards. Purchased (factory) clothing, as a sign of modernity, no longer separates modern townspeople from archaic peasants, as was the case before World War I, but attests to the multicultural nature of the region. A distinctive feature of the photographs is the emphasis on ethnic and religious differences, as well as those moments that confirm the exotic nature of local ethnic groups.

Examples of exoticization and otherness can be seen not only in visual materials but also in the fiction of the time. For example, here is a quotation from a famous Czech novel by Ivan Olbracht about simple and sincere local people who live in poverty but at the same time in harmonious unity with nature and their neighbors:

“They do not know religious hatred, and if a Ruthenian mocks a Jew who does not eat bacon, eats his dinner wearing a hat, and burns needlessly expensive candles on a Friday night, he mocks without malice and not out of an evil heart. And if a Jew looks down on a Ruthenian because he prays to a hideously executed person and

63 Ethnographic subgroup to be found in the East of Podkarpatská Rus; cf. Martin Rohde's paper in this issue for a detailed coverage on their representation in Czechoslovakia and Poland.

64 ROSANA BIS' MAK: Zakarpattia u zhurnaly LIFE: Margaret Burk-Vait ta Vyl'iam Vendyver [Transcarpathia in the Magazine LIFE: Margaret Bourke-White and William Wendover], in: Varosh (2013), <https://varosh.com.ua/kultura/zakarpattyia-u-zhurnaly-life-margaret-burkvajt-ta-vilyam-vendiver/> (2023-08-24).

considers a woman (imagine, a woman!) standing on a crescent moon to be a deity, this contempt is only abstract.”<sup>65</sup>

The writer portrays a fairly tolerant society in Subcarpathian Rus, although in real life there could be manifestations of everyday antisemitism, as recalled by elderly inhabitants.<sup>66</sup> Olbracht's literary works, as well as the fictional and documentary films to which he was a contributor,<sup>67</sup> are characterized by an anti-colonial character. In particular, the author portrays the Czechs as colonizers, which is not surprising given his sympathy for left-wing views. At the same time, with his insightful descriptions of the mountains, culture, and mentality of Ruthenians, the author further contributed to their exoticization in the eyes of readers or viewers.<sup>68</sup>

In general, the literary works and visual sources of the time, which may be considered to a certain extent ethnographic works about Subcarpathian Rus and its inhabitants, present the image of a homely mountainous region rich in nature. The emphasis is on sincerity, noble poverty, and Diogenesian minimalism, on the pastoral character of the local people, the colorfulness of their life, authentic traditional culture, and archaic and conservative worldviews. All of this was supposed to create a sense of calm and contemplative aesthetic pleasure for tourists.

This image contributed to the tourist attractiveness of the region, but at the same time suited certain political interests of the country's leadership. As the ethnologist Ján Podolák put it, at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s a situation arose when it was convenient to present Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus as “a

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65 IVAN OLBRACHT: *Nikola Šuhaj loupežník* [Nikola Shuhai, the Robber], Praha 1955, pp. 24–25.

66 Not only writers, but also scholars have concluded that there was no antisemitism in Transcarpathia. In particular, RAZ SEGAL: *Genocide in the Carpathians: War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence, 1914–1945*, Stanford 2016, writes about the friendly relations between local Jews and Ruthenians. However, samples of local autoethnographic texts from the late nineteenth century (in particular ZHATKOVYCH, pp. 135–137), or the memories of today's elderly inhabitants about the interwar period, suggest that relations between them were far from idyllic. Although there were never any anti-Jewish pogroms, negative stereotypes and prejudices were not uncommon. Relations between the representatives of these very different cultures were marked by considerable variability, ranging from occasional friendly contacts to more common cases of distancing.

67 BOHDAN SHUMYLOVYCH, JAGODA WIERZEJSKA: *Ideolohizatsiia Karpat v mizhvoennii Pol'shchi ta radianskii Ukrainsi* [Ideologization of the Carpathians in Interwar Poland and Soviet Ukraine], in *Tsentr mis'koi istorii* (2018), <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=0-bR6Er9ukM&t=5951s&pp=ygUf0YjRg9C80LjQu9C-0LLQuNGHINCx0L7Qs9C00LDQvQ%3D%3D> (2023-08-24).

68 This also applies to such journalists as the previously mentioned Florian Zapletal, who criticized the Czechoslovak authorities' policy toward Subcarpathian Rus. However, his photographs also emphasized the traditional culture of the locals.

reservation of backward economic and social relations.”<sup>69</sup> The Slovak scholar was probably exaggerating, since the quoted article was published during the communist regime, and his conclusions should be therefore understood as conditioned by ideology. Still, it is worth noting that in the interwar period it was indeed beneficial for the central government to maintain the archaic image of the Ruthenian community by delaying the granting of the autonomy promised in 1920 until the end of 1938. The main reason was voiced in a speech in 1924 by pro-government deputy Jaromír Nečas: “the Carpathian Ruthenians [...] are not yet mature enough to govern themselves.”<sup>70</sup>



Fig. 5:  
Meeting of the  
governor of Subcar-  
pathian Rus at the  
opening of the bridge  
across the Uh (Hung.  
Ung; Ukr. Uzh;) river  
in 1937. Funds of the  
Municipal Institution  
“Transcarpathian  
Museum of Folk  
Architecture and Life”  
of the Transcarpathian  
Regional Council,  
3934/29

69 JÁN PODOLÁK: Desať rokov slovenského národopisu (1945–1955) [Ten Years of Slovak Ethnography (1945–1955)], in: Slovenský Národopis 4 (1955), pp. 421–448, here p. 425.

70 MAGOCHII, p. 329.

Evidence of the exoticization of the local population and the desire to present it as more traditional can be seen not only in tourist photo journalism and the public doubts of MPs about the political maturity of the local population. It is also evidenced by photos from official events, which show that children or women in traditional dress were organized to meet high-ranking officials. The governor of Subcarpathian Rus, Konstantin Hrabar, who arrived at the opening of the bridge in 1938, was probably met by fancy dress performers, as their clothes are not completely authentic (Fig. 5). The theatricality of this performance was clear even to him—the governor was of local origin, so he knew perfectly well what traditional women's folk costumes should have looked like.

The active use of ethnographic elements and the folklorization of such events are usually characteristic of the Soviet space, but it is clear that interwar Czechoslovakia was no exception in this regard. The purpose of such costumed performances was to demonstrate the provincialism of the local population, but at the same time it was evidence of the commercial success of the active popularization of visual images of local peasant culture.<sup>71</sup>

Examples of exoticization can be seen in various advertising images that were not related to the development of tourism. A poster from 1927 that advertised an industrial exhibition in Užhorod was interesting in this regard (Fig. 6). It was a remarkable event that was taking place for the first time in the history of the traditionally agrarian region, evidence of gradual internal modernization. The poster shows samples of industrial production, but its central figure is a girl in a Hutsul costume. The choice of a girlish image to advertise industry, which was represented mainly by men in Subcarpathian Rus at that time, does not seem random and creates the impression of something superficial and not very serious. For the community of the region at that time, the idea that it consisted of not only men but also women was strange.<sup>72</sup> Even in the 1920s, the main role of local women was considered to be household chores and housekeeping—women were not “visible” in the conservative patriarchal society of the region. Significant changes in the status and roles of women occurred only in the next decade. However, even in the 1920s, it would have been more logical to illustrate the modernization initiatives of the authorities with the image of a modern woman. Thus, the use of a traditional rather than a modern female image to visualize the region can be seen as another indication of the objectification of the local population. The use of the Hutsul image also has a more prosaic explanation. It reflects the growing tourist interest and demand for traditional images and souvenir exoticism at the time.

71 HALYNA BONDARENKO, TINA POLEK: Problemy radians'kosti v suchasnomu naukovo-mu dyskursi [The Problem of Sovietization in Contemporary Scientific Discourse], in: *Narodna tvorchyst ta etnologiya* (2016), 5, pp. 102–108, here p. 107.

72 MARIIA KHYMYNETS': Organizovane zhivotstvo Karpats'koi Ukraïny (1919–1939) [Organized Women of Carpathian Ukraine (1919–1939)], in: PAVLO CHUCHKA (ed.): Ukrains'ki Karpaty: Materiały mizhnarodnoi naukovoii konferentsii “Ukrains'ky Karpaty: Etnos, istoriia, kul'tura,” 26 serpnia – 1 veresnia, Uzhhorod 1993, pp. 500–513, here p. 500.



Fig. 6: Advertising poster in honor of the First Industrial Exhibition in Užhorod in 1927. From the private collection of Oleksandr Voloshyn

In general, unlike the Hungarian period, the Czechoslovak era was characterized by a keen interest in local ethnic culture. This is evident in the content of photographs and postcards, as well as samples of fiction or texts in tourist guides. However, the visual and textual images produced during this period only partially reflected reality, as ethnographers, photographers, and tourists who came to Subcarpathian Rus focused on examples of traditional culture, trying not to record the facts of modernization. In contrast, ethnographic scenes and clothing often appeared to be “staged” by photographers.<sup>73</sup> As a result, they formed an image of the region that was vivid, but overly one-sided and exotic, which did not prevent it from becoming dominant in the public consciousness.

Certainly, not all texts produced such stereotypes. Exceptions included the 1922 book by Amalie Kožmínová and the 1939 report by Bourke-White, which noted the social and economic problems of the inhabitants of the region. However, they did not become a model of the dominant vision of Subcarpathian Rus, and the photographs of picturesque peasants taken by these authors attracted attention through their authenticity and again drew attention to their traditional way of life. Bourke-White was characterized by excessive interventionism (interference in the frame)<sup>74</sup> when working with the camera and the participants of the shooting. This is believed to be typical of most photographers of Subcarpathian and Hungarian Rus at the time.

### Visual Self-Presentations of the Local Population in the Interwar Period

In contrast to external representations, internal ones (auto-ethnographic texts) reflect a qualitatively different picture and indicate that the local peasant community continued to modernize itself. First of all, the change in the peasants' attitude toward education was notable. Back at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was considered a sufficient level of literacy if a person knew how to read and write, and the most necessary subjects were knowledge of the Bible, catechism, and prayers.<sup>75</sup> The main way to understand the world was to think by analogy, where the main role was played not by the knowledge acquired in educational institutions, but by the life experience of the individual.

The 1920s, however, witnessed the secularization of education and an increase in the number of secondary and higher education students, including women. The dark rooms of the village school, where children of all ages listened to the teacher, a role played by the village clerk, were replaced by bright

<sup>73</sup> HERBERT JUSTNIK (ed.): *Gestellt: Fotografie als Werkzeug in der Habsburgermonarchie*, Wien 2014. This is partially confirmed by oral history sources. In the author's field research, old photographs were taken and shown to the interviewed people. For example, inhabitants of the village of Nevickoje (Hung. Neviczke; Ukr. Nevits'ke), who are now over 90 years old, when viewing Rudolf Hůlka's photographs taken in their village in the 1920s, stated that not all residents wore traditional authentic clothing, and that their families had stopped wearing it long before Hůlka's visit.

<sup>74</sup> BURKE, p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> ZHATKOVYCH, p. 75.

classrooms with desks and professional teachers, and later by vocational courses, colleges and universities. Education was becoming secular, which was reflected particularly in the expansion of opportunities and professions that children of the longtime farmers, shepherds, and woodcutters could pursue.

Formal evidence of these transformations can be found in a comparison of collective school photographs from different decades. The practice of such photographs became widespread in the interwar period. These photos show representatives of different nationalities and genders. This indicates the formation of new group identities, which also influenced the leveling of the traditional worldview of the region. It is striking that in the 1930s, girls no longer wear traditional headscarves, and factory clothes are gradually replacing homemade ones. Graduates of vocational schools or special courses (Fig. 7) look even more modern: beekeeping, wickerwork, woodworking, etc. In such photographs, it is difficult to find examples of traditional culture, which were an obligatory element of the “external” version of the way in which the locals were visualized.



Fig. 7: Teenagers in a group photo after completing a crafts course in April 1934 in Sevluš (Hung. Nagyszőlős; Ukr. Vynohradiv). Author's archive

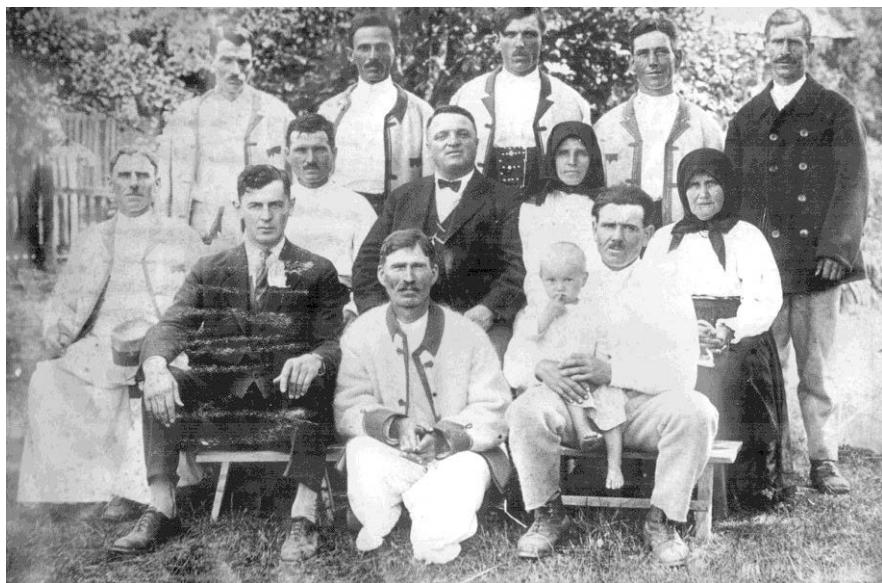


Fig. 8: A 1936 wedding photo from the village of Drahovo (Hung. Kövesliget; Ukr. Drahovo). Funds of the Municipal Institution “Transcarpathian Museum of Folk Architecture and Life” of the Transcarpathian Regional Council, 14067/1073



Fig. 9: A 1936 wedding photo from the village of Lince (Hung. Ungeztenyés; Ukr. Lintsi). Funds of the Municipal Institution “Transcarpathian Museum of Folk Architecture and Life” of the Transcarpathian Regional Council, 3934/10

A diverse range of conclusions about the differences between ethnographic and auto-ethnographic images is demonstrated by wedding photographs, which are most often found in family archives of the 1920s and 1930s. They reflect the heterogeneity of the economic and cultural development of the region's population. Evidence of more traditional variants can be seen mainly in mountainous settlements, while wealthier (valley) villages could boast of a much more fashionable look for young couples and guests. In group wedding photos, there are often examples of both traditional costumes and factory clothes (Fig. 8). However, other photos show the newlyweds wearing modern attire and supporting a more fashionable wedding format (Fig. 9). Other differences can be noticed as well. The first is a frontal static composition. This demonstrates the solemnity of the event and represents several generations of relatives who show their emotions rather sparingly. The second, where in addition to the newlyweds, there are guests or even random participants, is full of dynamism and emotions.



Fig. 10:  
Girls from the village  
of Egreš (Hung.  
Szőlősegrész; Ukr.  
Oleshnyk). Photo from  
1930 or 1931.  
Author's archive

The photographs below date from the first half of the 1930s and include the author's relatives (paternal grandparents) (Fig. 10–11). These photographs do not belong to the common wedding genre, but represent a new phenomenon whereby photos are taken as a keepsake without reference to any important event in the family's life. Such photos are no longer rare in the family archives of Transcarpathians. They represent the generation that was born in the 1900s and 1910s, i.e., during the Hungarian period. These are fairly typical representatives of rural youth who received or completed their school education during Czechoslovak rule. Many of them managed to visit other countries before the outbreak of World War II: some studied in Budapest or Prague, others worked in France, Belgium, the United States, etc.

The photographs show that people "self-identify" with modernity not only through modern clothing, but also by demonstrating other "codes of modernity." For example, the photo of the girls wearing factory dresses (Fig. 10) shows that they are familiar with the services of hairdressers and manicurists and use cosmetics. Although the style of the dresses is similar, there are differences in the details and colors. There is a noticeable absence of traditional neck jewelry, while wristwatches are on display. This is another sign of modernization, as representatives of traditional agrarian societies did not understand the system of counting by hours or minutes, but were guided in their economic activities and lives by the solar phases. By this time, the emancipation of women in Subcarpathian Ruthenia had reached a relatively significant level. In the early 1920s, the local patriarchal tradition was for girls to receive only primary education. It was believed that girls were supposed to get married and did not need extra education. However, in the next decade, the peasant society of the region underwent serious ideological changes. Many girls received special secondary education (in particular, at the Mukačevo Trade Academy) and even European university education. We learn about this from memoirs in particular.<sup>76</sup> For example, on the eve of World War II, local women sought equal representation with men in nominating deputies to representative institutions. Such events do not quite correspond to the image of a conservative region promoted by the tourist publications of the time.

In Fig. 11, the boys are dressed modernly and even with a pretense of style. They smoke cigarettes, not the authentic carved pipes which were favored by professional photographers who contributed to the formation and popularization of the "external" archaic image of the region and its inhabitants. The men wear modern hairstyles and have clean-shaven faces, which distinguishes them from their more traditional contemporaries. Only one person in the photo has a small mustache, but it is a testament to the fashion of the mid-1930s and has nothing to do with the traditional peasant mustache, which is an age-old initiation sign.

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76 MARYIA KEDIULYCH-KHYMNETS': *Vidlunnia buremnykh rokiv: Spohady* [Echoes of Turbulent Years: Memories], New York—Uzhhorod 2011.



Fig. 11: Men from the village of Egesh. Photo from 1936. Author's archive

It has already been noted that the modernization of traditional society in visual sources is recorded primarily through changes in such a marker of traditional culture as clothing. However, visual images of the 1930s show the opposite process—a growing interest in some elements of traditional clothing. We are talking about the embroidered shirt, which young people consciously combined with factory clothes, such as pants or skirts, as the following photos demonstrate (Fig. 12–13). This emphasized and manifested the regional (ethnographic) and even national identity of a certain part of the Ruthenian society.



Fig. 12: Petro Veresh from the village of Egesh 1938. Author's archive



Fig. 13: The family of brothers Il'ko and Pavlo Vashchysyn in Chust (Hung. Huszt; Ukr. Khust) 1938. Private archive of R. Vashchysyn

The family photo (Fig. 13) shows a traditional embroidered shirt on one of the men, although this rather successful entrepreneur could afford a completely factory-made outfit. There are many similar photographs in the Vashchyshyn family archive that demonstrate the conscious use of elements of traditional and modern clothing. Men wore authentic shirts under their suits, while women wore clothes stylized in the folk tradition, when modern style and fabric were combined with folk embroidery.

Such items in the photographs show the emergence of new group identities and, above all, the successful development of the Ukrainian national project in the region. At the same time, the influence and certain preservation of folk traditions, in which people saw the roots of their identity, should not be dismissed. In particular, such elements as the “embroidered shirt” were adapted to a more modern style and factory clothing. It also shows a difference in the relationship with the authorities. At the beginning of the twentieth century, loyalty to the Hungarian authorities was demonstrated by the use of clothing without ethnic features, linguistic assimilation, and dissociation from one's ethnic roots. In the interwar period, on the contrary, the tolerant policy of the Czechoslovak authorities meant it became possible to freely demonstrate belonging to a non-titular nation.

It is important to note that modernization changes are noticeable not only in the external facets of everyday life and material culture, which often reflect only the influence of urban culture on the countryside. There were also significant changes in worldview. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was noted that Ruthenians respected the crafts and occupations of their ancestors, such as farming, sheep farming, and logging, and at the same time considered trade to be an undignified activity.<sup>77</sup> The biographies of the men and women in the last four photographs are evidence of the obsolescence of this quote. They mastered professions that their parents did not know and had the opportunity to explore the world outside of Subcarpathian Rus, even if it meant hard work in the mines of Belgium or France. The story of the family posing in front of their own shop with a personalized sign is particularly interesting (see fig. 13). The brothers Il'ko and Pavlo Vashchyshyn, one of whom received his higher education in Prague, opened a store of “mixed and colonial goods” and even a bookstore in Chust.

In fact, even at the end of the 1930s emancipated people were a minority of the region's population. But behind the new dress codes, behaviors, hairstyles, and cosmetics that gradually became commonplace among young people was a significant expansion of the social and professional roles of the inhabitants of the region. Ordinary peasants of the region were no longer only farmers, shepherds, or woodcutters, but also railroad workers, office workers, private shop owners, accountants, and so on. It is almost impossible to find such stories in the visualization formed by “external” tourists, scholars, writers, or photogra-

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<sup>77</sup> ZHATKOVYCH, p. 67.

phers, but they are present in the photo testimonies presented by ordinary residents of the region.

## Conclusion

Photographic sources of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries as ethnographic and auto-ethnographic texts provide an opportunity to analyze the main visual stereotypes and counter-types of the territory and population of Hungarian/Subcarpathian Rus.

They form several generalizing images. The better known and more popular one represents the “external” vision, while the “internal” one reflects the attempts of the local population to adjust the dominant visual narrative by presenting their own vision of themselves and their surroundings. This second line emerged as a result of the influence of modernization changes in the early twentieth century and especially in the interwar period. In particular, trying to conform to contemporary fashion and responding to qualitative changes in life, local residents reproduced a rather modern visual image in their photographic representations. It contradicted the one produced by external observers, who were paradoxically responsible not only for popularizing the traditionalist image of local residents, but also for progressive changes in their lives.

In the Kingdom of Hungary, the traditional culture of the Carpathian Ruthenians and other ethnic groups of the region was associated with the historical past of the state, which was dominated by the culture of the titular nation. As a result, they are not often found in photographic sources of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The primary focus of postcards was on cities, where photographers emphasized the modernity of the townspeople and emphasized the separation of their inhabitants from traditional culture.

Unlike the Hungarian period, the Czech period was marked by the popularization of traditional features of the local population. Thanks to ethnographers, photographers, writers, and eventually tourists, there spread the image of a pastoral, exotic Subcarpathian Rus, which was not much affected by civilizational progress and where sincere mountain shepherds and valley farmers lived.

In these “external” images of the Hungarian and especially Czech periods, there are examples of exoticization and objectification of the population of Hungarian/Subcarpathian Rus. The patronizing Hungarian attitude toward the local population stemmed from centuries of political domination. In the case of Czechoslovakia, exoticization and archaization resulted from the meeting of the most developed industrial part of the former Habsburg Empire with the possibly most backward.

It is obvious that in the territory of Hungarian/Subcarpathian Rus at that time one could find both representatives of the traditional worldview, who were not much affected by progress and cultural and societal modernizations, and people with modern education and ways of thinking and living. In the “internal” auto-ethnographic texts of the local population, there is an image that significantly

corrects and sometimes even changes the aforementioned popular stereotypes. They demonstrate not only the formal assimilation of visual codes of modernity, but also actually conform to them.

Despite the existence of this alternative “internal” image, the traditionalist image dominated among the general public and even abroad, due to many factors. This mountainous region has always been a remote and exotic periphery in relation to any political centers. But perhaps the most important reason, especially in the interwar period, was political. It was convenient for external rulers to ignore or overlook the evidence of modernizing changes that were taking place in society in this territory. The cultivation of the image of a pastoral society contributed to politically motivated claims that Carpathian Rusyns were not ready to receive the right to autonomous governance. In this case, the political interests of the Czech authorities coincided with economic ones—the popularization of local traditional culture benefited the development of the tourism industry.

The visual image of a traditional and pastoral land formed in the interwar period was used by the Soviet government, which established itself in the region after 1944. It emphasized that the previous political regimes did not want to develop the region's industry and cultivated a de facto colonial type of governance.

Traditionalist stereotypes about interwar Transcarpathia still define the vision and understanding of that period by local historians and even influence the self-reflection of contemporary Transcarpathians. In doing so, they contribute to the establishment of a kind of postcolonial nostalgia, as the Czechoslovak period is considered to have been the best period of the region's history.

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