

# The Hungarian Diaspora in Sydney

## *Identity Consciousness and the Role of the Scout Movement*

**Kinga Constantinovits**

**Abstract:** Focusing on the Hungarian diaspora in Sydney, Australia, this paper finds that the key to preserving the Hungarian identity of emigrants and their descendants is maintaining and cultivating Hungarian traditions. Some institutions and organizations, such as Hungarian schools and the Hungarian Scout Association in Exeter, can help in this regard. To examine this topic, I conducted a pilot study asking the following questions: (1) What are the main elements of Hungarian identity in the diaspora? and (2) What is the main role that Hungarian scouts and other organizations play in preserving Hungarian identity? In the first part of the research, the most prominent people of the Hungarian diaspora in Sydney, Australia were interviewed. The interviews showed that Hungarian scouting plays a crucial role in the survival of Hungarian culture and community, which was reflected linguistically too. Subsequently, I conducted a questionnaire survey, whose results also confirmed that scouting is both an element of and a tool for Hungarian identity construction. Some key elements of identity, according to the respondents—language, culture, holidays, and community—are clearly included in scouting. The results also suggest that support for Hungarian emigrant organizations can be an effective way to maintain national identity. [constantinovits.kinga.katalin@hallgato.ppke.hu](mailto:constantinovits.kinga.katalin@hallgato.ppke.hu)

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**Biography:** Kinga Constantinovits is a PhD student of history at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, where she previously earned an MA in history and Central European studies. Her BA in history is from Eötvös Loránd University. In 2019 she spent half a year in Sydney researching the Hungarian community. Her research interests include the Hungarian community and identity in Australia, bi- and multilingualism, community identity and identity construction, language use, language attitudes, language attrition, emigration from Hungary in 1956, and communism in Hungary.

### Introduction

When distinguishing between “historical” or national minorities and diasporas, migration is the line of demarcation. The creation of diasporas is the result of migration, for whatever reason, while national minorities find themselves in a minority status as a result of changes to a country’s border (Herner-Kovács 2015).

The Greek term *diaspora* means dispersion. In the traditional sense, the term population dispersion is used. Hundreds of thousands of people left Hungary between 1940 and 1960, in three waves of emigration. The first of these comprised mostly soldiers, prisoners of war,



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civilians, state employees, professionals fleeing the approaching Soviet army who left in the final year of the end of World War II, 1944. (This wave also included primarily Jewish people who emigrated between 1940 and 1944, albeit not in great numbers.) The second wave corresponded overwhelmingly to middle-class citizens and democratic intellectuals who by 1948 faced persecution under the impending communist dictatorship. These two waves became unified over time and are known today as "the 1945 emigration." The third wave was triggered by the suppression of the 1956 revolution (Gazsó 2016: 19). These three emigration waves significantly increased the number of Hungarian diaspora communities. This study, however, will focus primarily on the diaspora community in Australia and on its subsequent, contemporary generations.

### **The History of the Hungarian emigration after World War II**

Between 1945 and 1951, the number of Hungarian emigrants comprising the first wave of emigration was 15,000. By 1960, however, the number of emigrants had doubled, according to comprehensive studies by Egon Kunz, who worked at the State Library of New South Wales Province. The social composition and education of those comprising the latter influx of emigrants was fundamentally different from those of the previous wave. Those who arrived after the 1956 revolution not only had to integrate into Australian society, but they also had to integrate into the already existing Hungarian community there if they wanted to avoid assimilation.

The ways in which Hungarian organizations developed in Australia after the war was influenced by several factors: their ties to Hungary, the influence of community organizers coming to the diaspora, and the political situation and attitude of the mother country toward the diaspora. The Hungarian People's Republic did not regard Hungarians in Australia as a major enemy, but they were kept under surveillance by agents and were categorized, as was common practice by regimes in other communist countries, in three categories that in Hungary comprised the so-called "system of three T's": *tiltott* (forbidden), *tűrt* (tolerated), and *támogatott* ([officially] supported). The Ministry of Interior operated a covert network of counterintelligence agents among émigré communities abroad, using tools of internal disruption and whispering propaganda. The maintenance of the Hungarian émigré communities was ensured by the arena of civil society organizations: primarily by Hungarian schools, Hungarian scouting, and folk-dance groups. For instance, in Adelaide the first Hungarian school was established in 1958 by a woman referred to in Hungarian-language records as Nagy Jánosné (Mrs. Ákos Nagy), and her aim was to maintain the identity of Hungarian emigrant families by teaching the Hungarian language and preserving Hungarian culture and traditions, especially folk dancing (Palotai et al. 2017).<sup>1</sup> In the life of emigrant families, the former Hungarian scouts also played a key role in identity from the

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<sup>1</sup> For the importance of Hungarian schools, see Vadász 2020.

beginning. I wish to highlight the positive relationship between the motherland and the diaspora, as the current Hungarian government is supporting them and their Hungarian identity in many ways.

### **Hungarian emigrant scouts**

Scouting is a global youth movement that builds friendships, experiences, and skills for life, shaping young people's futures as active citizens. More than 500 million young people and adults have joined and experienced the power of scouting's nonformal education since it was founded in 1907. Since then, the scouting movement has continued to grow and is now active in 172 national scout organizations worldwide. Today, over 57 million young people, supported by millions of dedicated volunteers, take part in scouting activities and events globally. (<https://www.scout.org/scout-movement>).

The Scouting movement also flourished in Hungary, but the situation changed after the communist takeover. On June 27, 1948, the Hungarian Scout Association was merged into the Communist Association of Hungarian Pioneers in Hungary, and scouting officially ceased to exist there, although it continued to exist among Hungarian émigrés. The scouts who had been forced to emigrate took their scouting knowledge, as well as their Hungarian cultural traditions and values, with them to various parts of the world. Many scout leaders from Hungary ended up in Australia, where they played a prominent role in establishing the Hungarian émigré community. The first Hungarian scout troop founded in Australia was Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Troop 30, in Sydney. Knowing their history, I found it to be worth researching the role that scouts play nowadays.

The Hungarian Scout Association in Exeter has five districts worldwide, one of them comprising Australia (i.e., the Hungarian diaspora there). It holds meetings every two years, and its members keep in regular contact with each other via online. There are common guidelines and patrol leader training camp. See more at <https://kmcssz.org/site>.

Ensuing from its general focus—factors contributing to the Hungarian community's Hungarian identity in Australia—this paper asks: what is the main role that Hungarian scouts play in preserving that identity? In order to answer these questions, I conducted semistructured interviews with the most prominent people of the Hungarian diaspora in Sydney.

### **The concept of identity**

The word *identity* can refer to self-identity, a sense of belonging, and/or self-awareness. Originating in the Latin *idem* (the same) and *identitás* (self-identity), it can be examined on an individual, intrapsychic level, interpersonal level, and on the level of social systems.

At the individual level, according to psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1963), personality is developed through an eight-stage order of psychosocial development. Stage five is the stage of identity and role confusion. While teenagers are searching for their personal identity and a sense of self, these

years (ages 12–18) provide an in-depth exploration of beliefs, goals, and values. This stage is essential in an emigrant family's life since it is the time when it is decided whether the teenagers will follow their parents' values and maintain the national traditions passed on to them as children.

At the societal level, social identity is "the individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972: 292). For emigrants, the main characteristics have been linked to minority group identity, which includes ethnicity, nationality, mother tongue, culture, and traditions. Obviously, language has a community-preserving role. Active use of the language has been correlated with the political and power structure of a community (Bartha: 2003). As long as the language and traditions are maintained, the internal cohesion and identity of the community are strong. As soon as the inner drive to maintain language and tradition has been weakened and so not nurtured, the identity of the community will have also been weakened. As for Australia, not only does the government of Hungary support efforts to maintain Hungarian language usage in the Hungarian community, but so does the Australian government. Since 1987, Australia has allowed university students to take a state-approved Hungarian-language exam (Palotai et al. 2017). Examining Hungarian-language education in the diaspora is key to analyzing Hungarian identity (see Palotai et al. 2019).

## **Identity research among the Hungarians in Australia**

### **Analyzing interviews**

It is very important to understand the situation and the problems of the members of the Australian Hungarian diaspora: how they themselves perceive their situation, and what factors contribute to the Hungarian community's Hungarian identity in Australia?

In my research I asked the following questions: 1. What are the main elements of Hungarian identity in the diaspora? 2. What is the main role that Hungarian scouts and other organizations play in preserving the Hungarian identity? To answer these questions, I undertook two attitude research investigations.

In the first realm of research, I interviewed the most prominent people of the Hungarian diaspora in Australia. The interviewees play key social roles in Hungarian organizations in Sydney. For example, one of them is the head of the local Hungarian school, Hungarian School Sydney, while others are the leaders of the Hungarian scout troop in Sydney. They organize and manage Hungarian community life there, and their work in youth education is particularly important, as they are responsible for developing and maintaining the Hungarian identity of the next generation, alongside (and sometimes instead of) families.

Since I spent nine months in Sydney under a scholarship provided by the Hungarian state's Kőrösi Csoma Sándor diaspora program, the personal relationships I formed during my stay allowed for conversations with the aforementioned individuals to take place. I conducted

semistructured interviews with five respondents between February 2022 and March 2022. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded with the consent of the participants, resulting in a six-hour audio recording I then transcribed for analysis. The complete recorded material and more information on the participants are available in Constantinovits 2022, 107–123; 7–9, respectively.

The interview questions focused on the following topics: 1. The interviewee's role in the Hungarian community 2. Identity consciousness 3. The image of scouting and other Hungarian organizations 4. The relationship between the diaspora and the motherland 5. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Hungarian community 6. The future of Australia's Hungarian community.

### **Content Analysis in Qualitative Research**

The aim was to find common patterns across the data set. Since I have found similarities between interviewees' responses, I am going to analyze the answers to the questions in aggregate, highlighting the most important common elements.

#### **1. Identity consciousness**

I examined how the interviewees define their sense of identity. For example, I wanted to know how often and in what context Hungarian language is used in the Hungarian community. To sum up, the primary medium is the family, the second is scouting, and the third is friends, especially from the Hungarian school. Here are some quotes from the interviews:

*"I use the Hungarian language at home with my husband, in the Hungarian community, with some friends"* (Interviewee 1)

*"I use that language among family members. We switch to English, if someone, who doesn't speak Hungarian join to our conversation."* (Interviewee 1)

*"We feel emotionally closer when we communicate in Hungarian."* (Interviewee 2)

According to the interviewees the use of the Hungarian language is associated with people emotionally close to them. The interviewees actively use and cultivate the language. Australia is one of the world's most multicultural countries, and its Hungarian diaspora is not wanting in institutional opportunities to maintain the Hungarian language, for example, through classes at the school in Sydney.

The majority of the young Hungarian emigrants found it hard to integrate into society. According to social psychologist Ferenc Pataki, schoolchildren are inclined to adapt themselves to the majority culture around them, and averse as they are to being seen as outsiders; and this creates substantial challenges to immigrant families when it comes to maintaining their cultural identity. By adolescence, a child may be experiencing an identity crisis fraught with tension. One of my interviewees reported that Hungarian scouting was key to enduring this, since in that

organization they found themselves within the fold of a "majority," one with values and customs similar to those they grew up with at home.

*"[E]veryone speaks Hungarian and everyone eats salami bread and no one tells you what it is."* (Interviewee 2). Here, "salami bread" appears as an object representation of identity.

The language of communication in Hungarian scouting is exclusively Hungarian, and in Sydney, the Hungarian school plays a key role in providing scout leaders and the scout youth the requisite linguistic framework. Therefore, it is essential that the two organizations—the school and scouting—work closely together.

## **2. Image of scouting and other Hungarian organizations**

In this part, the questions were directed at the interviewees' perceptions of scouting. In what respect do they conceive of scouting as having a role in shaping and preserving Hungarian identity? How open are children to Hungarian culture? When kids use the Hungarian language, especially during a "Hungarian weekend," do the adults around them see any strengthening in their children's sense of Hungarian identity? The respondents emphasized the importance in scouting of the bonds of friendship and in being part of a community with similar values. For example:

*"Otherwise, you would go to local scouting abroad. The feeling is already there, the bond is there."* (Interviewee 1)

*"Hungarian identity comes after the friendship among the children."* (Interviewee 3)

The commemoration and celebration of Hungarian holidays—for example, Saint Stephen's Day and the October 23 anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956—are also key elements in preserving Hungarian culture, the respondents' answers suggested. The Hungarian school and scouting help to keep these traditions alive.

### **Quantitative Linguistic Analysis on the Research**

Quantitative linguistics or so-called statistical linguistics is based on the study of the presence-absence opposition of a certain linguistic phenomenon in the structure of language without taking into consideration the frequency of the phenomenon. In order to estimate the relative frequencies of the phenomena, quantitative analysis should be applied.

In addition to the thematic, content analysis of the interviews, I also considered it important to examine the wording and linguistic patterns, as these reveal a lot about the interviewees' attitudes and opinions, as well as their underlying conceptual frameworks. To explore this, I conducted a quantitative analysis using the SketchEngine program. <https://www.sketchengine.eu/> SketchEngine is a free corpus-based lexical analysis tool that examines the frequency and typical occurrences of words, phrases, and contexts in a given corpus of text, providing grammatical analysis. It can be examined partly within the corpus itself and partly in comparison with the reference corpus Hungarian Web 2012 (huTenTen12), which reflects average Hungarian usage.



The two diagrams show the collocations of the words "culture" and "language" side by side, detailing the most common nouns, adjectives, and verbs associated with the word in the minds of the interviewees; i.e. the conceptual framework in which they are embedded. The collocations of "culture" speak for themselves: *ápol* (cultivate) and *magyar* (Hungarian). Not surprisingly, "Hungarian" is also the most frequently associated word with the word *nyelv* (language), but it is accompanied by *idegen* (foreign, i.e. English). The (Hungarian) language is associated with the word *tanít* (teach) and *tanul* (learn), thus the Hungarian language is not spontaneously acquired but consciously taught. The word *kell* (should) is also prominent, suggesting that the interviewees feel obliged to be engaged with the language; for example, to teach it.

### **Identity survey research among Hungarians in Sydney**

According to Palotai et al. (2019) the key factor in preserving language and culture among students is motivation. In order to examine identity and the motivation factors, I conducted a pilot survey based on identity questions (both closed- and open-ended) and focused on components needed for contributing to the Hungarian community's identity. I set a lower age limit for completing the questionnaire (at least fourteen years old, the youngest respondent being fifteen) because the literature suggests that the development of a sense of identity comes after adolescence.

Thirty respondents filled in my questionnaire, the majority of them either attending the Hungarian school, Hungarian scouts, or both (Constantinovits 2022: 69).

Moreover, I applied the Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 5) in evaluating the responses. The questionnaire was intended as a pilot, to be modified based on my experience and the results.

The questions were designed with regard to the following:

external factors that influence the maintenance of Hungarian identity consciousness: place of birth, Hungarian education, scouting, Hungarian communities, frequency of visits home, the use of the Hungarian language

internal motivation factors that affect the maintenance of Hungarian identity consciousness: one's attitude toward scouting, one's perspective on the cultivation of language and culture, and the frequency with which national holidays are commemorated, the extent of bilingualism

In addition, I asked respondents to define in their own words what being Hungarian means to them.

70% of the participants are scouts, of those 57% attend Hungarian school regularly and only eight people (27%) participate in both.

I asked them if they were scouts. Blue: yes, brown: no.



Figure 3. Proportions of scouts among respondents.  
Source: own research

### National Holidays

This part of the research is based on the widely accepted view that culture is organically linked to the community. Among Hungarian holidays, March 15 (the anniversary of the 1848 revolution) and August 20 (St. Stephen's Day; i.e., the anniversary of the crowning of King Stephen in 1000) were the most popular, and October 23 was also mentioned, due to the large influx of refugees following the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Heroes' Day (May 31) was not among the given options, but it was also noted by several people. The fact that Heroes' Day, which is not a public holiday in Hungary, is considered important by the Hungarian diaspora is a significant finding.

Milyen magyar ünnepeket szoktál megtartani? Többet is be lehet jelölni.  
30 válasz

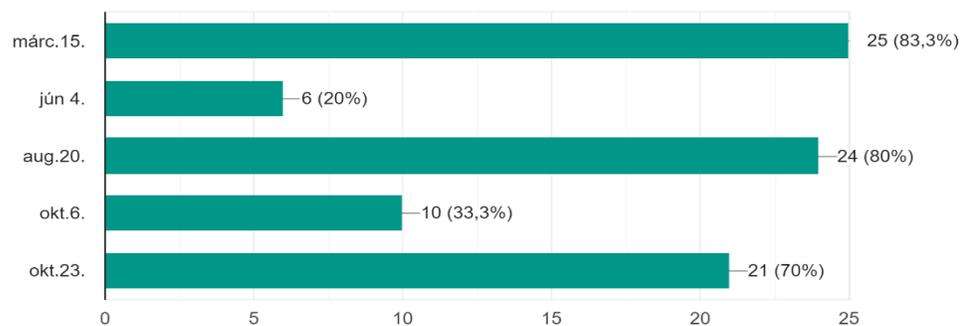


Figure 17. The importance of Hungarian holidays among the Australian Hungarian diaspora.  
Source: own research

The Saint Stephen's Day is usually organized by the scouts, which explains the higher participation rate (80%). March 15 is usually held by the Hungarian School Sydney with the assistance of scouts. In summary, the preservation of such elements of Hungarian culture has become essential in maintaining the Hungarian community.

In the questionnaire, I asked respondents what being Hungarian meant to them, thus managing to obtain a more comprehensive and clearer picture of their sense of cultural identity. I posed this as an open-ended question and identified and summarized the items in the answers afterward.

Typically, the elements appeared as closely intertwined and interdependent with one another in the participants' responses.

Respondents mentioned the following elements of identity:

- language culture
- holidays (especially October 23 and Heroes' Day)
- folk dancing
- Hungarian community (i.e., participation in)
- possession of a Hungarian passport
- family, parents, children, grandparents, community, friends

### **Survey results and further research**

We may draw the following conclusions from the respondents' answers to the questionnaire: The cultural identity of the Hungarian emigrant community in Sydney is based primarily on its members' preservation of the Hungarian language; observance of Hungarian holidays; attending a Hungarian school, Hungarian scouting, or both; and participation in Hungarian folk dancing. These are the key platforms on which they preserve their Hungarian identity, buttressed by the associated strong, overlapping emotional bonds among family and friends.

### **Conclusions**

I asked the following questions in my research: 1. What are the main elements of Hungarian identity in the diaspora? 2. What is the main role that Hungarian scouts and other organizations play in preserving Hungarian identity?

To answer these questions, I carried out two attitude research investigations. First, I interviewed some of the most prominent people of the Hungarian diaspora (e.g., scout leaders, director of the Hungarian school) via Zoom I made and then transcribed a six-hour recording in agreement with the participants. I undertook content analysis of the interviews using SketchEngine software. The interviews revealed the current situation of the Hungarian community in Australia and the role of scouting in the life of the community. The results obtained from my analysis demonstrated the importance for the interviewees of active language use, formal study, and the cultivation of Hungarian culture, which was reflected linguistically in the collocations linked to language and culture.

In the second part of my research, I conducted a pilot questionnaire survey among the young adult people of the Hungarian emigrant community in Sydney. As with the first phase of the research, the results confirmed that scouting is both an element of and a tool for Hungarian identity construction. The main elements of cultural identity highlighted in the responses (e.g., language, holidays, community bonding) were clearly included in scouting. The Hungarian Scout Association in Exeteris has put great emphasis on cultivating Hungarian identity—for example,

by observing major Hungarian holidays while creating a scout-values–based community of friends that can last a lifetime.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, I will continue my research as follows:

1. A questionnaire targeting the older generation, and another for children.
2. In addition to Hungarians from Sydney, including Hungarians from other major Australian cities.
3. Considering the dual identity and the language switch, next time the language of the questionnaire should be bilingual, and responding in English should also be allowed.

The research results indicate that organized support for Australia’s Hungarian diaspora is vital to reinforcing its ability to preserve Hungarian identity and to counter the effects of assimilation. One effective means of doing so is by ensuring the continued presence of local Hungarian scout movements and schools. Support from the motherland, Hungary, has been and should continue to be central to this support, as seen, for example in the simplified procedure the Hungarian state implemented in 2010 to achieve Hungarian citizenship and in the state-funded Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program. The Balassi Institute’s Hungarian Culture & Language Studies program plays an important role as a resource of soft power to shape the second, third, and fourth generation of immigrants (Kantek et al. 2021). The Hungarian Scout Association in Exeter likewise has a crucial role in organizing, maintaining, and preserving the cultural identity of Hungarian emigrants.

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