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GIFT AND GIFT-GIVING IN IZVORU CRIȘULUI
GIFTING IN RITUALS RELATED TO LIFE EVENTS, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS
ON WEDDINGS

ABSTRACT

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PhD Thesis Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Context of Fieldwork Selection	4
1.2. Formulation of Research Questions	5
1.3. Research Techniques and Methods	6
2. Explanation of Terms	11
2.1. Marriage and Family	11
2.2. Gift, Giving	13
3. Research History	16
4. Izvoru Crişului – Field Presentation	23
4.1. Izvoru Crişului – Geographical Position, Village Map, and Demographic	24
4.2. Izvoru Crişului – Historical Data	25
4.3. Izvoru Crişului – Social and Economic Data up to the 20th Century	28
4.4. Izvoru Crişului – Craft Workshops and Trade	29
4.5. Izvoru Crişului – Crafts and the Current Economic Situation	35
4.6. Who Are the Inhabitants of Izvoru Crişului? Attitudes, Mentalities, Identity	38
5. Occasions/Events of Gift-Giving in Izvoru Crişului	44
5.1. Customs and Gifts on Major Life Events	45
5.1.1. Baptism	45
5.1.2. Confirmation	50
5.1.3. First Meeting, Courtship	55
5.1.4. Marriage Proposal	59
5.1.5. Engagement	60
5.1.6. Wedding	63
5.1.7. Death, Funeral	71
5.2. Other Events	75
5.2.1. Graduation	75
5.2.2. Military Draft	77
5.2.3. Visiting the Baby and Offering Food	78
5.2.4. Birthdays and Name Days	80
6. Criteria for Choosing a Partner, Marriage and Family Model in Izvoru Crişului	82
6.1. Choosing a Partner, Marriage	82
6.2. Family	89

7. Case Studies	94
7.1. The Case of Mihály (Annók) Piroška and Mihály (Pál) János	95
7.1.1. Family Situation, Life Before Marriage	95
7.1.2. Courtship, Elopement	99
7.1.3. Marriage, Wedding	101
7.1.4. Presentation of Gifts	104
7.1.5. Beginning of Family Life	105
7.2. The Case of Korpos (Pál) Éva and Korpos (Jankó) Ferenc	109
7.2.1. Family Situation, Life Before Marriage	109
7.2.2. Courtship	113
7.2.3. Proposal and Engagement	114
7.2.4. Wedding	117
7.2.5. Presentation of Gifts	123
7.2.6. Beginning of Family Life	128
7.3. The Case of Péntek (Csákó) Zita and Péntek (Császár) István	131
7.3.1. Family Situation, Life Before Marriage	131
7.3.2. Courtship	133
7.3.3. Proposal and Engagement	135
7.3.4. Wedding	137
7.3.5. Presentation of Gifts	139
7.3.6. Beginning of Family Life	143
8. Changes in the Custom of Giving and Types of Gifts from 1960 to Present	145
8.1. Gifts in the 1960s	145
8.2. Gifts in the 1980s	148
8.3. Gifts in the Early 2000s	150
9. Analysis of Wedding Gift Practices in Izvoru Crișului	155
9.1. The Gift as a Prerequisite for Marriage	156
9.2. The Gift as a Symbol of Agreement	160
9.3. The Gift in the Network of Kinship, Godparents, Neighbors, and Friends	163
9.4. Gift-Giving and the Gift Logbook	168
9.5. Inheritance as Gift	177
9.6. Parental Gift as Investment and Security	185
9.7. The Gift and Reciprocity	188
9.8. The Gift as Household Acquisition, Kitchen Setup	193

9.9. The Gift as Symbolic Capital and Women as Creators of Prosperity	196
10. Conclusions	205
11. Interviewed Individuals	211
12. Bibliography	212
13. Video Annex	228
14. Photo Annex	229
15. Documentary Annex	251

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In my doctoral dissertation, I focused on a Transylvanian Hungarian village whose name resonates with many. This is a settlement that has held a prominent position in the discovery of Hungarian folk art. In my thesis, I did not primarily examine the folk art of Izvoru Crişului or its trading lifestyle; instead, I delved into a underlying social phenomenon, that is, gift-giving. I was particularly interested in how the community norms of gift-giving related to transitional rites, especially those associated with marriage, have endured in Izvoru Crişului to the present day. At the same time, I was curious about how these norms have changed over time and what these changes reveal about the local society and how they shape it. Therefore, my work explores the society of Izvoru Crişului, a Hungarian village in Transylvania, through a social action – gift-giving. I examined not only the occasions for gift-giving but also the gifts themselves, their composition, and their changes. Subsequently, I aimed to make key observations about gift-giving without claiming completeness and to explore the meanings and functions with which it is endowed. Gift-giving can be analyzed in diverse ways, and it serves as an invisible thread connecting the members of a given society. I hope to provide a comprehensive overview of gift-giving in Izvoru Crişului and its socially, economically, and psychologically significant aspects. In the spirit of this, the following were my observations, considered as the results of the present research:

1. The interactions of gift-giving permeate various stages and celebrations of human life and become particularly significant and distinctive during these moments. The individual within the community takes on the roles of both the gift recipient and the gift giver throughout their life.
2. I distinguish various types of gift-giving in Izvoru Crişului based on how voluntary and selfless they are or how saturated they are with interest. I found that gift-giving at weddings, especially involving monetary gifts and elaborate hospitality, is driven by conscious interests that strictly expect reciprocation and entail a sense of "indebtedness."
3. The customs and manners of gift-giving in Izvoru Crişului adhere to the current local social norms. These norms, the unwritten rules of the community, continually evolve due to the impact of global economic and social changes.
4. During wedding ceremonies, numerous reciprocal gift-giving actions take place, each serving various purposes. One of these is the creation of a social institution (e.g., marriage) through the provision and presentation of gifts (e.g., dowry). Thus, a gift can serve to establish an agreement and collaboration between the two parties, resulting in the formation

of new social and economic relationships. As I indicated in my thesis, not only tangible gifts but also transient, non-durable gifts, such as offering food and drinks (i.e., hospitality), and human gestures, such as showing respect, can be means of agreement and harmony.

5. The constant and transient gifts associated with marriage during the wedding ceremony are in constant motion, establishing a continuous give-and-take relationship. It was observed that relatives assisting in organizing the wedding receive continuous remuneration for their ongoing assistance, and after the wedding, the newlywed couple and their family assume a reciprocal position towards them. Therefore, it can be stated that through gift-giving, the relationship between members of society strengthens due to the obligations associated with gift-giving, which, in turn, can shape and reorganize the relationship among community members.
6. Inviting outsiders, acquaintances, friends, and those less frequently seen from the surrounding countryside or beyond the country to the wedding typically occurs to maintain and strengthen the relationship, not solely due to expectations and interests related to gift-giving. The invitation to a wedding or other life event is a gesture aimed at forging a closer bond between the inviter and the invitee.
7. The economic aspects of gifts are quite strong in the case of Izvoru Crişului . The home built and furnished for the young couple, along with all its tools, lays the economic foundation for cohabitation. The numerous kitchen and household items seek to satisfy a basic human need: nourishment. Furthermore, the substantial sum of money given as a gift during the wedding speech contributes to creating better financial conditions. Therefore, the exchange of gifts and the act of gift-giving play a role as promoters of economic and financial development in this case.
8. Gifts also support the act of remembering, especially old, inherited objects proving valuable in Izvoru Crişului , to which community members feel nostalgic. Each item appears in the living room as a museum piece, connecting the owner or even the entire family to memories of grandparents, great-grandparents, and stories about the family tree. Therefore, beyond remembrance, these items also play a role in reinforcing, sustaining, and expressing identity.
9. The type, quantity, and composition of gifted items depend on the local society's economic situation, life strategies, and cultural influences from above. Izvoru Crişului 's society proves receptive due to its lifestyle, economic structure, and its location by the road, which conveys a sense of openness. Gifted items constantly change, adapting to current trends, with Izvoru Crişului 's girls and women being the main moderators.

10. The gifting of kitchen utensils in modern times reveals that Izvoru Crişului 's societal thinking about gender roles is still tied to traditional norms. It reflects the idea that women are responsible for the home, leading the household and preparing food for the family—embodying the role of a caring, homemaker. On the other hand, various sets needed for drinking and eating are linked to hospitality, offering, and sharing. These gifts are primarily associated with occasions that generate and support mutual hosting, organizing encounters, celebrations, and events. However, these types of items often accumulate, resulting in excess, remaining as gift items until the next gifting occasion.
11. Gift-giving and the items received also serve as tools of social representation. The quality, nature, and composition of the gift can carry prestige value. Generous gifts from parents, presenting a furnished home to the public, serve not only as a statement to the community but also reinforce the self-esteem and self-worth of the parents and their children, earning them social recognition. Thus, representative gifts can establish social status, representing the family's capabilities, talents, and diligence through the showcased home and its amenities.
12. In the last thirty years, a noticeable change has occurred where rituals related to life events—especially marriage—and the associated gift-giving have become more individualized. This means that the manner of hosting events, such as the offered foods, menu, decor, colors, and style during weddings, aims to represent and express the tastes and mindset of the new couple. More space is given to individual decisions during gift-giving as well. If a gift-giver chooses an item instead of money, they try to select something that corresponds to the recipient's personality. The composition and aesthetic arrangement of gifts often express the giver's style, turning the act of gift-giving into a form of self-expression.
13. As mentioned multiple times in my thesis, there is competition observed among families. When I inquired about the reasons for increasingly elaborate celebrations for various events (not just those related to marriage, but also for events like confirmation, graduation, 18th birthdays, interior design, etc.), several participants pointed out a kind of competition among Izvoru Crişului families, particularly among women. The intention behind generous and high-quality hospitality is to impress guests, leading them to have a favorable opinion of the host. This can be related to the deep psychology of gift-giving, especially concerning an individual's self-esteem and self-positioning within the community. It is also observable that some families occasionally try to outdo each other. Participants mentioned sibling rivalry, especially in interior design, hospitality, and gift-giving. While some view this

competition negatively as a source of envy, my personal observation suggests that among competing families, there is familial bond, love, attachment, active relationships, and communication. They trust each other, so they are not ill-wishers to each other. The competition among them is more community-building and reinforcing, motivating them for further development (especially financially and socially). Therefore, the psychological aspects of gift-giving should not be neglected, and future research might benefit from a sociopsychological perspective.

14. Summing up the entire thesis, one might question why the description of the lifestyle and occupation of the people of Izvoru Crişului played such a prominent role. I explain this by understanding the community's historical narrative, livelihood strategies, entrepreneurial and commercial attitudes, inclination towards mobilization, and psychology, as they provide a better context for the examined topic. We realize that the creation, reproduction, and assurance of gifts function as driving forces in all these aspects. For example, in several narratives, it is mentioned that some individuals started selling goods in Hungary, possibly even at a young age, to earn money to buy certain elements of the dowry. Many work diligently in the workshop day and night, on weekdays, or holidays, while simultaneously selling along the road, not just to make ends meet but to cover the costs of participating in celebrations. One of my interviewees from Inaktelki mentioned in 2016 that during the entire summer, almost every weekend involved attending confirmations, engagement ceremonies, or weddings. This imposed a financial burden on her and her family, which they couldn't cover with their existing occupations (farming, sheep farming, and sheep trading), so she had to find additional work in the city. Therefore, it can be seen that the obligations associated with gift-giving often influence individual and family decisions and life organization. In Izvoru Crişului, an interesting phenomenon is also noticeable: the market entry of crafted souvenirs and tourist gift items, which are mostly generated from the income derived from these items, creates a new type of gift, essentially turning the revenue from crafted gifts back into gifts of a different nature.