Folk costumes

What are folk costumes?

Nowadays we see them as funny clothes nobody wears anymore, apart from folk dancers in their performances. It is very comfortable, although tight in some parts. I wonder, who would choose wearing something like that today?

Even if they wanted to, where would they buy it?

My region's folk costumes were not bought. They were made and each person was part of their costume. They were weaved from fibers grown in my humble Turopolje, shaped from threads which changed fingers and hands of hardworking people who grew and harvested flax and hemp, soaked them and processed, spun on distaffs and spinning wheels, weaved on looms, sewed, made pleats... Each piece was imbued with care and effort.

Folk costumes were created long time ago when people had everything they needed within reach of their hands, hardworking hands which nourished and shaped that treasure by making *gače* (linen pants), *rubače* (shirts), *lajbeki* (vests), *škrlaki* (hats), *čohe* (coats), *opanki* (traditional leather shoes), *kikle* (skirts), *pisanke* (red underskirts with pleats), *oplečki* (shirts with wide sleeves) *rupci* (scarves), *kožuni* (sheepskins) and *paculice* (caps).

In the same way, these hands inherited and cultivated fields and forests, creeks and paths. Everything was giving life and receiving it back.

In those times even houses were built from what was found in the surroundings. My little Turopolje is a fertile plain which was mostly wooded long ago. You would need two good oaks and a lot of work to build a house. In short, our little Turopolje gave people, its keepers and good masters, everything they needed.

Men's costumes used to be much simpler, with white pants, a white shirt and a black vest. Their costumes didn't say much about them; men had no need for such expression. Their clothes served primarily for everyday toil. Women worked hard as well, but they knowingly used their costumes to show their skillfulness. Their wealth could be discerned from their costumes, just like their marital status. Small details could tell if the woman was a widow or grieving. Folk costumes could speak without uttering a single word.

My region's folk costumes are rarely seen today and they are very valuable, but not only for the money that is hard to attain. The real value is in appreciating the heritage and the immense effort put into each clothing item. The simple, modest, combination of white, black and red fabric speaks of the heritage worth perserving.

Our costumes are seen with eyes, but felt in the heart.

Tonka Majdak, 6.a