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THEORETICAL STUDIES



Migration and Ecological Catastrophe: Two Examples of Contemporary Secular Apocalyptic Discourses

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“Did the chances grow for a possible zombie
apocalypse, now, with this flood of migrants?”
(*Anonymous question on the www.gyakorikerdesek.hu forum*)

Abstract. Until modernity, doomsday rhetoric had been confined to the religious realm, and its characteristic forms of language, style, and persuasive argumentation evolved to adapt to the very special topic and to best fulfil the needs of written and living oral discourses of the apocalyptic rhetors and their audiences (Borchardt, 1990; O’Leary, 1998). The end-of-the-world topic did not disappear but became once more popular in the twentieth century in all segments of modern culture, with prolific propagators already in politics, philosophy, science, and, above all: media (Barkun, 2003; Wojcik, 1997). Mass media doomsayers paved the way for the new generations of apocalyptic rhetors in the age of the Internet, where the digital agora offers a global audience with instant resonance (Cardone, 2007; Howard, 2012) and an almost infinite multitude of catastrophe topics and just as many means to preach their visions of the doom and salvation of humankind. The paper¹ will focus on the peculiar characteristics of Digital Doomsayers as regards their ways of persuasion assured by the hypermedia environment of the World Wide Web. Two series of examples will be given from two different environments: global warming and migration – highlighting how contemporary recombinant secular apocalyptic (motives to create apocalyptic) discourses are used by political actors and public characters in Hungarian-language mass media.

Keywords: apocalyptic rhetors, digital media apocalypticism, climate change, mass migration

1 This case study is part of a research line interested in contemporary apocalyptic mentalities initiated in the framework of the SEMEISTOS Research Group for the Study of Web Semiotics and Online Communication and the Workshop for the Study of Modern Mythologies (HU: MoMiMű – abbreviation for Modern Mitológiai Kutató Műhely); it is built upon the lecture entitled *Apocalyptic Rhetors on the Digital Agora* presented at the *Digital Agora: The 5th International Argumentor Conference on Argumentation and Rhetoric* organized at Partium Christian University in Oradea. The text serves also as a basis for the starting research project entitled “Migration, Radicalism, and Apocalyptic Discourses in Central-Eastern European Digital Media”.

1. Introduction

This essay is bridging an idea developed for a lecture delivered at the 2018 *Argumentor* Conference and a short research note presenting the heuristic phase of a started investigation concerning contemporary apocalyptic rhetors and their discourses in the digital environment of social media. While the initial idea that served as the basis of the abstract submitted to the conference organizers aimed at answering such questions as “why can one observe so many apocalyptic discourses in the on-line media/virtual space, even outside the religious realm?” and “who the apocalyptic rhetors of the World Wide Web might be?”, the prepared draft paper already went beyond these broad inquiries by identifying several types of contemporary digital apocalyptic discourses but at the same time narrowed its focus to only a couple of topics and their propagators in the Hungarian-language digital media, which exemplify these doom narratives.

The main aim of this writing is therefore to present the apocalyptic rhetoric of various media discourses predicting environmental, socio-demographic, or ethnic-cultural catastrophes through several examples. The initial question *Who are the apocalyptic rhetors?* is not directed at identifying individually the particular doomsayers but rather at drawing a general picture in the light of authority (ethos). While such narratives may come from anonymous commenters, star bloggers/vloggers, or traditional media journalists and represent personal convictions, individual opinions, un/official standpoints, or corporate declarations of civil organizations, political parties, and governmental institutions alike, they all have in common one characteristic: they use apocalyptic motives and apocalyptic language. Even more, as the examples will show, they use impending *doom* as persuasive argument in climate change and mass-migration-related discourses: relying more on emotional devices (pathos) than on logical argumentation. The most conspicuous feature of these rhetors seems to be fear mongering rather than awareness raising, which leads to a disturbing question: is fear mongering the aim of this new media apocalyptic?

Admitting that apocalyptic rhetoric traditionally belongs to the religious realm, where the Apocalypse, and apocalyptic in general – against all the terrifying imagery and menacing prophetic tones –, is intended as a reinforcing and consolatory message for the target crisis community and that this classical apocalypticism is continually (also increasingly) present in contemporary global culture, this investigation deliberately selected the sample texts and rhetors from typically non-religious discourses and environments of the Hungarian digital media. The scope of this selection is to highlight the analogies of recent apocalyptic topics with their religious counterparts and the persistence of apocalyptic language in secular discourses – a phenomenon termed earlier as “apocalypticizing rhetoric” (Hubbes, 2010). Also, a contrast is drawn between

the religious apocalypticism and today's climatic and migration doomsayers, with the latter biased towards raising fear and aversion in their audience.²

2. Apocalyptic Discourse: Religious Rhetoric and Authority

In our post-millennial era of relative prosperity, progress, and peace worldwide, it seems far-fetched to state that we live in apocalyptic times. Nonetheless, we are surrounded by voices which herald some impending doom that threaten to sweep away humankind or our civilization, our nation, our land, our way of life, that is: the world as we know it. Global warming will rise sea levels with cataclysmic consequences, peak oil will thrust back the developed world into the Middle Ages, the clash of civilizations will lead to the outbreak of the third world war with possible nuclear catastrophes, worldwide terrorism will destroy western economy, occult globalist elites will decimate humanity and enslave the remnant, mass migration will end European civilization, and the rise of authoritarian populist movements will break down democracy and European Union. Such narratives are not unusual, variants of them accompanied most of the past century,³ while others had been present even before that; still, the loudness, the urgency, the tone with which they are simultaneously prophesized by countless voices signal a deep sense of crisis, or as Barry Brummett (1991) proposes after Salmon (1983): a “sense of impending doom”. A crisis that is sensed but also propagated and maintained by and through mass media.

There is a *sense of an ending* (Kermode, 2000), which persists even after the millennial anxieties of the Y2K and 2012, a sense of crisis that needs to be pronounced and needs to be responded. This is an ideal rhetorical situation. Lloyd Bitzer (1969: 5–6) lists seven factors to be met so that rhetoric to be situational – the most important ones among them refer to the responsiveness of the discourse,

2 The traditional apocalyptic issue of salvation is either a secondary aspect or undefined or, contrarily, dependent on some urgent action.

3 In 1935, Hungarian thinker Béla Hamvas wrote in *Modern Apocalypse* – the first part of his *World Crisis* essay trilogy: “The world has always favoured such ideas that rise terror. People, especially masses like to be terrified. Crisis mentality today dangerously resembles mass hysteria. An excellent opportunity: to be afraid – to tell that societies are dissolving, are falling into poverty, terrible wars are threatening, peoples are raging against one another in full arms and armour, evil instigators are inciting the classes against each other, while the structure of churches and the states are disintegrating, morale becomes impertinent hypocrisy... These subjects are extremely unsettling topics for discussion and writing, but exactly for the same reason are very grateful. ‘The demise of the white race’, ‘the death hour of Europe’, ‘the agony of Christianity’, ‘economic collapse’, ‘production crisis’, ‘spiritual impoverishment’ – aren’t these all splendid topics for one could have a good and thorough shudder? Yet what is real in all this? Is there any crisis at all? Isn’t it an eternal thing? There is always crisis” (Hamvas, 1935/1983: 10 – author’s translation).

and these requirements seem to be even more important in the case of apocalyptic rhetoric situations. As Bitzer notes, it is the situation that calls discourse into existence – stating with a side hint to Winston Churchill, who kept looking for the “finest hours”, that crisis situations provide the ideal case (1969: 2). Apocalyptic discourses are indeed invoked by – real or perceived – crisis situations. Continuing with Bitzer’s ideas concerning the three constituents of the rhetorical situation: *exigence*, *audience*, and *constraints*, it comes clear that the core issue in all three aspects is persuasion: the *exigence*, a problem which gives rise to a situation to be solved by some action or decision of the *audience*, which may be constrained by the persuasive discourse of the rhetor(s) responding according to the(ir) own *constraints*. In such terms, the essence of the rhetorical situation is a persuasive discourse to convince the audience to be engaged in becoming the mediator of change, thus altering reality. In the last instance, it is performative speech act in John Austin’s (2005) terms, directed at transforming its audience and, through it, reality. Apocalyptic rhetoric⁴ is traditionally aimed at this purpose exactly. End Times arguments are meant to persuade audience to change – either themselves or the world or both. And this is what new media apocalyptic pursues as well.

Frank L. Borchardt (1990) emphasizes that apocalyptic – or, as he calls it: doomsday – rhetoric is a persuasive strategy for convincing the audience to take action to resolve the crisis or that the crisis is insignificant in a higher (divine) perspective. As he formulates: “(s)peculation about the end of things is (...) a discourse of persuasion and, like all such forms of discourse, it employs a strategy of persuasion – ‘a rhetoric’” (1990: 2). In Borchardt’s view, the apocalyptic discourse is about the rhetor, the storyteller, and about the storyteller’s community, specifically about a community in crisis, which is persuaded to spite the crisis by repudiating the world to be blamed for the crisis or, more importantly, by repudiating the evils causing the crisis. A rhetor – especially if reinforced by the claim of some inside knowledge and/or confirmation in experience – invoking the threat of an imminent catastrophe is “enough to command the attention of listeners and raise the speaker to the status of prophet” (1990: 18–19).

It is important to note that Borchardt presents the rhetoric of doomsday as narratives (mythologies) concerning the problematic of time and evil – contrasting the present messed up world (or events) with an ideal past and a desirable future: “(t)he threat of Doomsday raises the present out of the ordinary, demands or predicts as inevitable some imminent massive action to countervail the past

4 For a concise definition, I quote here an approach elaborated in one of my earlier studies: “apocalyptic rhetoric is a distinct form of pervasive discourse that uses metaphoric language and mythical narratives, built upon specific eschatologic[al] topoi, not only to explain the present state of affairs and answer the ultimate question of evil but with the role to convince its audience to revert their perspective through a cathartic metanoia and recognize that the era of their sufferings will end; and to persuade them by the unquestionable authority of divine revelation to firmly hold their stance or to take some decisive action” (Hubbes, 2017).

wickedness that led to the present mess, and promises a much better time to come, such as once prevailed before the past wickedness took hold” (1990: 19). In the same way, Stephen O’Leary (1998) explains that “arguing the apocalypse”, or millennial rhetoric relies on the issues (as he calls them: *topoi*) of time and evil, but he gives special attention to a third one: the topos of authority. He adds authority based on the consideration that “we do not accept epochal pronouncements from simply anyone who claims to have discovered the cosmic significance of evil or to have calculated the remaining duration of the cosmos”; nevertheless, he points out that “all mythic discourse, and not only that of eschatology and apocalypse, must present itself as authoritative, if it is to have any claim at all to our attention (to say nothing of our allegiance and obedience)” (1998: 51). Authority is the par excellence rhetor-related aspect in any persuasive discourse – and O’Leary relies on the three kinds of Weberian typology of legitimation (which he sees as “a catalogue of argumentative strategies employed by those who seek to achieve or maintain spiritual, as well as political, authority” – 1998: 52) in the case of religious (Christian) apocalyptic rhetoric: traditional, legal or rational, and charismatic authority. While for scriptural (Bible-based) religious-political apocalyptic eschatology traditional authority means an interpretive authorization over the sacred texts, legal or rational authority comes from trust in the validity of legal statute and in the rationally created rules, and charismatic authority is based on the power of personality. Opposed to O’Leary’s religious apocalypticism, in the case of secular apocalyptic(ist) rhetoric, the authority of the speaker is less traditional (since there are scarcely any ancient sacred texts to rely on and interpret), and rational and charismatic aspects of authority might seem more dominant. Still, regardless of its type, we can agree with O’Leary that authority, as an issue of legitimation, is central to apocalyptic rhetoric – and not only in the case of the religious discourses.

Authority, however, comes not only from the rhetor but from the text itself or, more exactly, from the tone of the message. Jacques Derrida (1982) spoke in the nineteen-eighties of an “apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy”, meaning a voice of unquestionable⁵ authority revealing the truth – and this tone can be heard today not only in philosophy (and religion) but ever louder in mass media and even more characteristically in (online) social media. This tone lends the speaker a gravity of undeniable authenticity in what it is to be stated, while it also brings in a sense of urgency regarding the revealed/envisioned imminent end and the implied call to wake as well.

5 However, Derrida is exactly questioning it together with Kant: to whose and what benefit: “What seductive or intimidating bonus? What social or political advantage? Do they want to cause fear? Do they want to cause pleasure? To whom and how? Do they want to terrify? To make one sing? To blackmail? ... To lure into a going-one-better in enjoyment? Is this contradictory? With a view to what interests, to what ends do they wish to come with these inflamed proclamations on the end to come or the end already accomplished?” (Derrida, 1982: 67)

Such a discourse always speaks in the voice of the categorical, exclusive (divine) revelation, that is, in the apocalyptic tone of the ultimate (concealed but quite exposed) single truth of the imminent end. The most characteristic is this feature from which the ancient genre itself got named: the tone of revelation (Gr. ‘apocalypsis’) – the unquestionable declaration of the divine reality revealed through visions, which answers to the humans lost in crisis since it is crisis – more exactly, the issue of evil rising in it – that organizes available (pre-existing) myths into the shape of a rhetoric of Doomsday (Borchardt, 1990) and invests this rhetoric (and its sayers) with the apocalyptic tone of prophetic urgency. The apocalyptic narrative transfers its power to the speaker: it both foretells an end to the crisis (and of the world with it) and promises the restoration of an (the) ideal order.

The prophets of the impending catastrophe thus speak with a paradoxical double aim and effect: their message dispels and mongers fear, envisions and subverts order at the same time. They use their apocalyptic tone, deploring the times in a loud jeremiad, criticizing the evils of the world and seeking the forces to blame with a paranoid style – all in order to awaken their target audience (cf. Derrida, 1982).⁶

In this respect of awakening, apocalyptic rhetoric strongly resembles the style and tone of conspiracism,⁷ which on its own terms uses an apocalypticizing voice – or, as several scholars have highlighted, conspiracy mentality and apocalypticism show strong intertwining (Barkun, 2003; Robertson, 2016). Present not only in conspiracist narratives but in politics, ideologies and increasingly in mass media as well, this apocalypticizing rhetoric continues the tradition of ancient religious apocalypticism and millenarianism. As pointed out in earlier studies (Hubbes, 2010, 2017): although they may often interfere, they differ in their ends. While conspiracism, paranoid politics, stigmatized knowledge, and secular variants of apocalyptic lack the transcendent dimension, containing little or no consolatory message promising some solution to the present hardships, they still bear an essential similarity to classical apocalypticism: “their revelatory nature by being in the possession of ultimate truth both aim to unveil reality”. This possession of the ultimate truth assures the speaker an unquestionable legitimation and authorizes the use of the apocalyptic tone.

6 “The end is soon, it is imminent, signifies the tone. I see it, I know it, I tell you it, now you know it, come. We are all going to die, we are going to disappear. And this death sentence, this stopping of death ... can only judge us. We are going to die, you and I, the others too, the goyim, the gentiles, and all the others, all those who do not share this secret with us, but they do not know it. It is as if they were already dead. We are the only ones in the world. I am the only one able to reveal to you the truth or the destination. I tell you it, I give it to you; come, let us be an instant, we who do not yet know who we are, an instant before the end the sole survivors, the only ones to stay awake—that will be even stronger. We shall be a sect; we shall form a species, a sex or gender, a race ... by ourselves alone; we shall give ourselves a name. ... They sleep, we stay awake” (Derrida, 1982: 68).

7 Or even rather conspirituality (see Ward & Voas, 2011; Robertson, 2016).

3. Persuasive Modes: Various Types of Apocalyptic Rhetoric

The apocalyptic tone, as an instrument of authority is much needed for the persuasion to be effective since, if we accept Bitzer's (1969) formulation of the rhetorical situation as best exemplified by crisis situations and also the idea that rhetoric in general is an art of words meant to change reality – as Michael Drout (2006) explains based on Austin's (2005 [1962]) speech acts theories –, then, on these terms, apocalyptic rhetoric is even more specifically an answer to crisis as a wake-up call aimed to persuade the audience to act and change (present) reality.

According to Barry Brummett (1991: 9), apocalyptic rhetoric refers “to the ways in which speakers and writers use apocalyptic themes, forms, arguments, and style to address and to persuade real people in their actual, lived situations”, aiming, on the one hand, to secure the adherence of the audience and then to move the already secured audience to accept further social and political commitments, while, on the other hand, to restore the (lost) sense of order of the audience and to urge them to actions and attitudes corresponding to the new vision of order. However, as Stephen O'Leary (1998) explains the tragic and comic frames⁸ of apocalyptic (millennial) rhetoric based on Kenneth Burke's attitudes towards history (Burke, 1937), we can state that the apocalyptic tone is not unitary. The speakers foretelling some impending catastrophe may adopt either a fatalistic, deterministic (rather passive) stance, or they may assume more active attitudes, either avertive (Wojcik, 2011) or subversive (Cardone, 2007) – depending on the unavoidability or avoidability of the envisioned doom. In this regard, the voice of the rhetors uses either a prophetic – warning-predictive – tone (“if you do not repent...”) or an irrefutable apocalyptic – revelatory – tone (“repent so that...”).

In the case of secular apocalyptic – in lack of religious conviction –, if the crisis is not immediately sensible or only vaguely glooming, an impassive or reluctant audience must be waken, must be persuaded that there IS a catastrophe threatening, and everyone must stand fast or take urgent action. David G. Robertson (2016), differentiating between apocalyptic vs millenarian eschatology in modern conspiracy narratives, emphasizes that in both cases the rhetors

8 “The tragic reading of Apocalypse naturally places great emphasis on the catastrophic events that usher in the End; but it should also be noted that the prediction of disaster is not exclusively the argumentative property of the tragic exegetes. One can speak of impending catastrophe and yet remain within the assumptions of the comic frame so long as the catastrophe is depicted as avoidable through human choice or simply as an episode that, however unfortunate, represents no rupture in the fabric of history. The comic version of the jeremiad might therefore exhibit some structural similarities to the tragic jeremiad that appears in apocalyptic argument; it may offer a list of present ills and predict catastrophe if humanity refuses to turn back to the path of righteousness. In the event that the warning is not heeded, the comic jeremiad will seek to interpret the resulting catastrophe in episodic terms, not as a final close but as a moral lesson from which future generations may draw instruction” (O'Leary, 1998: 83).

use a so-called “rolling prophecy”, in which the predictions and visions are being continually updated, reinterpreted, and replaced on a daily basis. This flexible procedure – identified as improvisational millennialism⁹ by Michael Barkun (2003), or recombinant apocalyptic by Dino Cardone (2007) – has got high persuasive power, allowing the prophet of the doom to use borrowings from unrelated sources, correlating them to present phenomena and topics of crisis, showing them as the “signs of the times”, while handling these subversive revelations as wake-up calls to their audience.

Differentiating between three – religious, secular (ideological), and improvisational – types of modern millennialism, Barkun (2003) identifies this latter form as a best manifestation of “stigmatized knowledge” (where the official rejection or un-acknowledgment of the given information is proof by itself of the authenticity of the alternative facts, that is, the truthfulness of the speaker’s message). While Barkun ties this type of narratives to conspiracist millennialism, elements or features of this recombinant (or bricolage) improvisation do characterize religious and even secular (political, ideological, scientific) apocalyptic rhetoric. The most prolific ground of such improvisational millennialist/apocalyptic discourses is offered by the social media, where the weak gatekeeping function enhances the widespread circulation of the most radical contents and forms of speech. The Internet is a welcoming home to subversive, recombinant apocalyptic ideas (Cardone, 2007) and self-legitimizing, exclusivist apocalyptic ritual deliberations (Howard, 2008, 2009), where the digital agora offers a global audience with instant resonance.

4. Modern Apocalyptic (Millennialist) Discourses

Greg Carey (1999) sees that, even more essentially than form and content, rhetoric is decisive for the persuasive power – that is: the function – of apocalyptic discourse, and particular combinations of form are configured deliberately to serve rhetorical ends. His statements regarding the genre of ancient Christian apocalypses (Carey, 1999: 11) are valid for modern forms of secular apocalypticism as well: the resources of apocalyptic discourse function as what the ancient rhetoricians called *topoi*, or flexible resources for persuasion. While many religion-specific apocalyptic *topoi*, such as heavenly and hellish visions, dialogues with angels, or judgment scenes, would certainly not work for modern secular apocalyptic, more universal motives, such as the (catastrophic) end, the downfall, the demise, the salvation, or even the supernatural intervention always offer reusable (adaptable and actualizable) flexible persuasive resources.

9 See exposition of millennialism in the next footnote.

One of these flexible resources of the apocalyptic rhetoric is millennialism (or millenarianism)¹⁰ – that is, a utopian, Edenic everlasting (thousand-year: millennium) realm governed by peace and divine order, coming to be realized at the end of times or very soon, in this present world. Central to millennialism is the chaos-cosmos dualism with the promise that the new “millennial” order will put an end once and for all to all evil in this world, offering a regeneration for the chosen community (be it the faithful, the nation, or humanity). This dualism (so characteristic for Manichaeism, and Gnostic thinking in general – see Culianu, 1992) surpasses the sphere of the religious and constitutes the base for modern ideologies (cf. Riedl, 2012 on Eric Voegelin’s (2000) concept of modernity as Gnosis), especially in politics, and the topos imports inevitably the apocalyptic tone along into the disenchanting secular. Norman Cohn (1970) also recognized this dualistic pattern of the popular eschatology characteristic of the mediaeval revolutionary millenarianism in the modern totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, such as Nazism and Communism, and pointed out the role of the *propheta* (the apocalyptic rhetor) in mobilizing masses. Richard Hofstadter (1964) identifies a “paranoid style” in American politics, linked with movements of suspicious discontent, especially with conspiracism mentality, describing the paranoid spokesman (our apocalyptic rhetor) as one who, on the barricades of civilization, constantly lives at the turning point of the last days and sees things in apocalyptic terms, envisioning the birth and death of entire worlds, political orders, and systems of human values. Based on Cohn’s and Hofstadter’s referred formulations, Barry Brummett (1991), Chip Berlet (1998), Stephen D. O’Leary (1998), or David G. Robertson (2016) all highlighted that the apocalyptic mentality and the alarmist-revelatory tone representing it have led to the proliferation of a specific political millenarianism (apocalypticism) in the contemporary American political imaginary – especially (but not only) in right-wing, religious, and conspiracist discourses. What they ascertain for their country can increasingly be observed in Europe and generally in the entire world – millennialist rhetoric can be found in Russian political thinking (Rowley, 1999), across Europe (Zúquete, 2007), in Israel (Brasher, 2006), and elsewhere alike.

On the other hand, as – among others – Mary Manjikian points out in her *Apocalypse and Post-Politics* (2012), secular apocalyptic rhetoric is present in scientifically-based public discourses as well; though, we may add, not without political connotation either. Most ecologist, environmentalist narratives regarding global warming or climate change in general do not lack some apocalyptic (under) tone (Howard 1998) –, and along the general endeavour to raise public awareness (“wake-up call”) they usually contain both severe accusations and urgent calls

10 So much so that in contemporary scholarship of apocalyptic studies the terms ‘millennialism’, or ‘chiliasm’ are often used (with or without specifying differentiation) as synonym for ‘apocalyptic’ (cf. Landes, 2006)

for action for the political-economic sphere. Several analysts (Killingsworth–Palmer, 1992; Hulme, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2010) have identified multiple contact points between environmental alarmism and apocalyptic rhetoric. Thus, Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer in their telltale Orwellian-titled¹¹ book *Ecospeak* (1992) describe alarmist scientific reports and mass media representations of ecological issues as apocalyptic rhetoric. Mike Hulme (2008) identifies in the ecological apocalypse discourses of fear two traditions: climate as judgment and climate as pathology. Foust and O’Shannon-Murphy (2009) speak of tragic apocalyptic framing in U.S. media coverage of global warming discourses. German researchers Methmann and Rothe (2012: 324) analyse the logic of apocalypse in global climate politics, which envision “a universal threat on a planetary scale, invoke humanity as a collective victim, anticipate the end of time, and draw on religious fantasmatic images”.

In recent years, both political and climatic apocalyptic narratives have grown in number in due relation to the recent crisis phenomena of severe weather cataclysms and massive waves of refugee/migrant illegal immigration into Europe and North America. In several cases, these narratives can merge into common flows of apocalyptic rhetoric, as de Haas (2008) and Bettini (2012) have shown for European discourses or Fiskio (2012) in American examples. The events of the last decade have brought climatic threats and immigration flows closer to the eastern part of Europe too. As the discourses of fear and the answers of angst and resentment have spread in the Central-Eastern European region, the rhetors of doom started raising their voice on all sides of the social and political spectrum. Visions of doom infiltrated into mass media, the more so into social media.

5. Apocalyptic Rhetoric and Motives in Online Titles and Contents

Being only at the beginning of the prospected research, at this phase of the investigations, I will only select titles and textual elements from three dozen articles covering the last five years’ period, collected from the Hungarian-language Internet sites that refer to current situations and phenomena in apocalyptic terms. At this stage, there is no possibility to enter into a deep discourse analysis of the texts and their adherent visual material. This chapter contains a rapid overview of the sample online content collected in the first two weeks of September 2018, at the very start of my investigation work. It also offers a presentation in (my own)

11 “Like *Newspeak*, the austere vocabulary of mind control in Orwell’s politicolinguistic fable 1984, *ecospeak* becomes a form of language and a way of framing arguments that stops thinking and inhibits social cooperation rather than extending thinking and promoting cooperation through communication.” (Killingsworth–Palmer, 1992: 9)

translation of the titles or key sentences of the Hungarian articles related to climatic and migration phenomena – highlighting motives and elements that allude to apocalypticism or that might signal the use of apocalyptic rhetoric, having in view the principles and characteristics described in the previous theoretical chapters. Most of the reviewed titles include variants of the word “apocalypse” because I performed the initial searches with the keywords: “apocalypse” (Hungarian: ‘apokalipszis’), “apocalyptic” ‘apokaliptikus’ completed with the key terms: “climate”/“climatic” ‘klíma’, “migrant” ‘migráns’, “immigrant” ‘bevándorló’, and “refugee” ‘menekült’. From the hundreds and thousands of correlated results, I have chosen only around forty materials which were relevant. Consequently, the findings of the short overview-analysis below will refer only to the texts themselves and the use of apocalyptic motives or apocalyptic rhetoric, without leading at this phase to any generalized conclusions regarding the identity or ideological/political backgrounds of the doomsayers – the authors of the texts and the publishing platforms. It is important to note that at this incipient stage I was not interested either in the authenticity, veracity, or accuracy of the content of the investigated materials.

First, I will present a couple of climate-related materials – which, to my surprise I have found only a few (with the mentioned keywords). An article titled “The Apocalypse May Come Here First Because of Water Scarcity” (“Itt jöhet el először az apokalipszis a vízhiány miatt”)¹² appeared in June 2018 in the *Origo* online magazine, with no author mentioned (as editorial article). Scrolling down, we find out that the “here” refers to India (and not to Hungary), and the article presents an official report¹³ concerning the present and prospected water-crisis together with the responding water management policies. While there is a severe threat indeed envisioned, the title clearly uses “apocalypse” as an alarm-word. Another article was published in 2016 on the *Ecolounge* ecologist website, with the title: “Climatic Apocalypse: Methane Emanating from the Melting Permafrost Turned Climatic Change to Turbo Level!” (Klíma-apokalipszis: Az olvadásnak indult permafrosztból kiáramló metán turbó fokozatra kapcsolja a klímaváltozást!)¹⁴ (no author, editorial article). The title explicitly links together climate and apocalypse, and the statement following the colon mark contains a threat emphasized with the use of an exclamation mark. The article itself, being written as in a science popularizing language (presenting the cases, processes, and consequences of permafrost melting as well as the resulting methane and carbon-dioxide emission), is naturally much more moderate than the title.

12 <http://www.origo.hu/gazdasag/20180618-itt-johet-el-eloszor-apokalipszis-vizhiany-miatt.html>.

13 <https://www.thestatesman.com/india/india-suffering-worst-water-crisis-history-niti-aayog-1502648573.html>. It is worth mentioning that this original NITI Aayog report, although presenting a severe situation, does not use apocalyptic language.

14 <http://ecolounge.hu/nagyvilag/klima-apokalipszis-az-olvadasnak-indult-permafrosztbol-avagy-a-fagyott-talajbol-kiaramlo-metan-turbo-fokozatra-kapcsolja-a-klimavaltozast>.

Another article from 2016 – in what later turned out to be a series of a dozen articles¹⁵ – concerning the climate topic is similarly fear mongering: “Climatic Apocalypse: Soon Tens of Millions of Climate Refugees Will Start Flooding” (“Klíma-apokalipszis: Hamarosan megindul a több tízmilliós klímamenekült áradat”).¹⁶ Here, beyond the generic title of the series (Climatic Apocalypse), the specific title is a threatening, grim prophecy, which is then elaborated in equally menacing terms even if the language of the article itself keeps a scientific, objective mode of exposition. This latter article already leads us to our next topic, namely: migration – the text presents the actual massive wave of migrants (partly) as a result of the climatic change catastrophes (severe droughts), and the consequent civil wars going on in the Middle East, and anticipates even greater floods of refugees in the wake of worsening climate plagues.

Reflecting also on the causes starting from climatic changes, a fine sensitive critical-analytical essay by Lajos András Kiss was published in three parts during the summer and fall of 2017 in the *Liget Műhely* literary journal’s online edition with the title: “Migration, Refugee Crisis, Population Exchange, Terrorism – How to Live in Times of Apocalypse?” (“Migráció, menekültválság, népességcsere, terrorizmus – Hogyan éljünk apokalipszis idején?”).¹⁷ The essay offers a professional overview and a lucid analysis as well as criticism of the latest speciality literature in social theory, economics, and politology regarding the issue of mass migration. Still, by the climax-like gradual enumeration of the migration-related phenomena and the following rhetorical question, the title suggests that the author considers (or at least wants to persuade his readers) that we are living in the end times of the apocalypse.

The following titles are examples of the “Migrant Apocalypse”. The first one (mentioned here first because its title’s message relates to the previous example) appeared in 2015 on the *Tutiblog.hu* political pamphlet blog with the title: “Advice for Survival in Case of Migrant-Apocalypse” (“Túlélési tanácsok migráns-apokalipszis esetére”). The article is a short satire directed against

15 As I found out later, there is a series of 14 similar articles (available here: <http://ecolounge.hu/kereses/klíma-apokalipszis>), with five titles containing the compound word “climatic-apocalypse” (“klíma-apokalipszis”) on the *Ecolounge* site, all of them reflecting on various aspects of climate change but using a grave tone of apocalyptic prophecy. Some of the more alarmist titles may be listed as follows: “The Climate-Apocalypse Seems Inevitable” (“Úgy tűnik, a klíma-apokalipszis elkerülhetetlen”); “Our Planet Will Be Uninhabitable Sooner than We Think!” (“Bolygónk hamarabb lesz lakhatatlan, mint gondolnánk!”); “Climatic-Apocalypse: Until 2025 Two-Thirds of the Earth’s Population Will Struggle with Water Scarcity” (“Klíma-apokalipszis: 2025-re a Föld lakóinak 2/3-a vízhiánnyal küzd majd”); “Climatic-Apocalypse: Will the Oceans and Seas of the World Be Dead?” (“Klíma-apokalipszis: Halottak lesznek a világ óceánjai és tengerei?”).

16 <http://ecolounge.hu/nagyvilag/klíma-apokalipszis-hamarosan-megindul-a-tobb-tizmillios-klímamenekult-aradat>.

17 <https://ligetmuhely.com/liget/migracio-menekultvalsag-nepesegcsere-terrorizmus-hogyan-eljünk-apokalipszis-idejen-1/-2/-3/>.

catastrophe-fan apocalypse believers, but at the same time derisively criticizing liberal attitudes towards migrants – thus, in the light of the article, the title uses the topos of apocalypse only ironically and for attracting attention. Another ironic title, of an article published on the website of the *Szabad Pécs* online news magazine by Attila Babos, uses a filmographic allusion: “Apocalypse Now: George Soros Was Proposed for the Peace Nobel Prize” (“Apokalipszis most: Soros Györgyöt Nobel-békedíjra javasolták”).¹⁸ This article verbally uses apocalyptic language – even paraphrasing the Book of Revelation: “the four horses are already whinnying, spitting fire, and pawing with their first hooves, their riders are already approaching them, and if everything goes on like this, we don’t have to wait too long for Armageddon either. The Apocalypse, however, has already come now... They have proposed George S.O.R.O.S for Nobel Peace Prize. The S.A.T.A.N. himself. (Did you count? Five letters both!)”¹⁹; and the style continues on, only to ridicule and satirize the prospected reactions of the pro-governmental media to the mentioned news.

Another article by Ágnes Szűcs, from 2016, published in the online edition of the *Vasárnapi Hírek* news magazine also plays with the same film-historical allusion to Ford Coppola’s cultic movie: “Apocalypse! Now?” (“Apokalipszis! Most?”).²⁰ Here, the exclamation mark after the word “Apocalypse” signifies the ostensive character of the exclamation, while the “Now?” as question suggests a painful puzzlement – and we can understand the apocalyptic reference from the topic elaborated in the article: a grave-toned presentation of the EU falling apart, caused partly by the dissensions over the issue of immigrants (and the severe political-economic crisis). The title “Apocalypse Today: Round Panorama Commitment” (“Apokalipszis ma: körpanorámás színvallás”)²¹ from the same year appeared on the *Máté Blog* (pertaining to the pro-governmental Civil Union Forum [Civil Összefogás Fóruma – CÖF]), and the article under it – with an eye on migration – regards the actual geopolitical situation (after Trump winning the US election) as a doom in preparation. One more actualizing title referring to the “now” is worth adding because it bears local connotations: “Szekler Apocalypse, Now” (“Székely apokalipszis, most”)²² appeared on the *Transindex* news portal. However, in contrast with its title, the article is not apocalyptic – on the contrary,

18 <http://szabadpecs.hu/2017/12/apokalipszis-most-soros-gyorgyot-nobel-bekedijra-javasoltak/>.

19 Original Hungarian: „A négy ló már felnyerített, tüzet prűszköl és kapar az első lábával, a lovasok már közelegnek hozzájuk, és ha így megy tovább, az Armageddonra sem kell sokat várni. Apokalipszis azonban már eljött, most... Nobel-békedíjra javasolták S.O.R.O.S. Györgyöt. Magát a S.Á.T.Á.N.-t (Öt betű mindkettő, számolták?).” This text ironically alludes to the demonizing governmental discourses, yet again with a paraphrase of the well-known phrase from the Apocalypse: the number of the Beast (Rev. 13: 16–18). Labelling the enemy as Antichrist is a usual device of apocalyptic rhetoric (cf. McGinn, 1994).

20 https://www.vasarnapihirek.hu/friss/apokalipszis._most.

21 <http://civilosszefogas.hu/apokalipszis-ma-korpanoramas-szinvallas/>.

22 <http://welemeney.transindex.ro/?cikk=26719>.

it criticizes the apocalyptic tone and suppositions of an article from a regional newspaper which – though not apocalyptic in its title: “Migrants in the Nyikó Region” (“Migránsok a Nyikómentén”)²³ – envisions a possible future apocalyptic scenario for the peaceful rural region.

With future prospectations, a 2016 article from the *Válasz.hu* news magazine titled in a telltale way: “Apocalyptic Vision” (“Apokaliptikus látomás”)²⁴ presents the statements of a UN (former EU) high official as an ordination with apocalyptic consequences for the future of the entire Europe. Another writing, also from 2016, from the blog *Ezatuti.blogstar.hu*, heralds in its title that “The Apocalypse Has Begun in Europe” (“Az apokalipszis elkezdődött Európában”)²⁵ – this article indeed uses apocalyptic language and tone²⁶ throughout, describing the arriving immigrants with their terror acts as hordes of the apocalypse and accusing the leaders of the West as agents of evil.

Europe’s doom is multiply present on the website of the sensationalist tabloid *Hihetetlen Magazin* (Unbelievable Magazine), which in March–June 2016 dedicated a special topical issue to the Apocalypse. While the articles are available in their entire lengths only in the printed issue, the online edition²⁷ contains the abstracts of them all. Without any deeper analysis at this point, I will list only some more remarkable titles prophesizing the doom of Europe as a consequence of the massive onslaught of migrant hordes:

- “Europe Is Washed Up? The Dark Side of Immigration” (“Európának befellegzett? A bevándorlás árnyoldala”);
- “Post-European Visions. What awaits Us if the EU Falls Apart?” (“Poszt-európai látomások. Mi várhat ránk, ha szétesik az EU?”);
- “A New Migration Period Is to Come. The Invasion of the Climatic Refugees Is on the Threshold” (“Újabb népvándorlás várható. Küszöbön a klímamenekültek inváziója”);
- “The Decline of Europe? The Background of the Migrant Crisis and Its Possible Causes” (“Európa hanyatlása? A migránsválság háttere és lehetséges okai”);
- “The Walls Are Crumbling Down... History Repeats Itself?” (“A falak ledőlnek... A történelem ismétli önmagát?”); completed by more general article titles such as:

23 <https://hargitanepe.eu/migransok-a-nyikomenten/>.

24 <http://heti-valasz.hu/vilag/apokaliptikus-latomas-121529>.

25 <https://ezatuti.blogstar.hu/2016/07/25/az-apokalipszis-elkezdodott-europaban/28905/>.

26 E.g. “...as the result of the wrong answer given to the (issue) of migration, it now strongly seems that Europe – at least its western part – is doomed” („...a migrációra adott rossz válasz eredményeként most erősen úgy látszik, hogy Európának – de legalábbis annak nyugati részének – befellegzett...”).

27 http://www.hihetetlenmagazin.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=177&Itemid=1.

– “Golden Age or Apocalypse? Ancient Prophecies about the Fall of the 21st-Century World” (“Aranykor vagy apokalipszis? Ósi jóslatok a 21. századi világ összeomlásáról”);

– “We Are Living in the End Times! Has the Judgment Day Come?” (“Az utolsó időköt éljük! Eljött a végítélet?”);

– “Last Judgment or New Possibility? Voluntarily Accepted Dictatorship” (“Végítélet vagy új lehetőség? Önként vállalt diktatúra”) and so on, yet many more similar titles.

These titles can bear an apocalyptic tone just by themselves, even in such an incomplete listing, but the articles usually continue in the same language and prophetic fervour assisted on the website with catastrophe illustrations, photos of nuclear explosions, flaming flags and crumbling cities, drought-stricken lands, waves of tsunami, black masses of immigrants, zombie attack scenes from blockbuster movies, or collages from apocalyptic paintings and natural disasters. It is a perfect example of apocalyptic rhetoric, of fear-mongering doomsaying.

6. Conclusions

From this short overview of some two dozens of titles, we cannot draw far-reaching conclusions. Still, we can observe that, on the one hand, they represent a (growing?) lively interest in the issues of climatic and migration crises, while they link the respective topics to apocalyptic topoi, primarily by using the variants of the word “apocalypse” and related expressions, on the other hand. Also, we can sense that the rhetors – if not using these terms with irony or sarcasm – deliberately exploit them to raise awareness, to wake up their audience, to subvert, to accuse, to induce fear, that is, with a prophetic, an apocalyptic (or at least apocalypticizing) tone. The most characteristic is the grim, alarming-terrifying, revelatory voice of this apocalyptic rhetoric identifiable in the titles and also in the articles themselves. This concise overview with rapid interpretations offers a promising basis for further, deeper rhetorical and critical analysis of the texts and their visual illustrations, as the continuation of the initiated research aims to reveal and understand the flowing apocalyptic discourses and the ideologies beneath them.

These titles and articles circulating in the online social media concerning some impending climatic or demographic catastrophe or political, cultural decline project the threatening image of the end (of the world as we know it) and reveal more general (subversive) discourses and attitudinal trends of the contemporary society that shed light on the anxieties of our unsettled world, full of doubts and mistrust and curious end-time expectations.

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RESEARCH – CASE STUDIES



Strengthening Connections between Young Migrants and the Sending Local Society: Policy Recommendations

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Abstract. This paper presents a few the empirical antecedents and the conclusions of the YOUMIG research carried out in Sfântu Gheorghe (Covasna County, Romania). Similar analyses were prepared in six settlements in the Danube region: Burgas (Bulgaria), Graz (Austria), Kanjiža (Serbia), Maribor (Slovenia), Rača District of Bratislava (Slovakia), and Szeged (Hungary). Despite the fact that approximately 3.6 million Romanians live abroad and 47% of Romanian young people aged between 16 and 35 years plan to spend abroad shorter or longer periods, Romania does not have a migration and a diaspora policy. The reasons of migration can be classified in three main categories: economic (wages, labour market perspectives, general welfare), educational (acquiring new knowledge), and institutional (corruption, company policy). The main reasons of returning are family, home, and health. The study presents empirical research on youth migration in Romania and in Sfântu Gheorghe as well as conclusions of the YOUMIG interviews, focus-group discussions, and statistical analyses. Finally, it formulates interviewees' and experts' recommendations on strengthening connections between young migrants and the sending local society.

Keywords: youth migration, YOUMIG project, Romania

1. Introduction

This analysis on youth migration was developed in the framework of “YOUMIG – Improving institutional capacities and fostering cooperation to tackle the impacts of transnational youth migration”. YOUMIG is a strategic project funded by the European Union’s Danube Transnational Programme (Project code: DTP1-1-161-4.1).

The analysis was prepared within the YOUMIG activity “Local status quo analysis of youth migration with involvement of stakeholders”, coordinated by

the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, with inputs from several project partners of the YOUMIG consortium.

Similar analyses were prepared in seven settlements in the Danube region: Burgas (Bulgaria), Graz (Austria), Kanjiža (Serbia), Maribor (Slovenia), Rača District of Bratislava (Slovakia), Sfântu Gheorghe (Covasna County, Romania), and Szeged (Hungary). Nineteen partners from eight countries participated in the project. The author of the present study worked seven months on one phase of the project.

The initial report was organized in eight chapters. After the introduction, a brief methodology of the investigation followed. The next part was a general presentation of the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe, with a special focus on local development. The fourth chapter described the migratory processes and related phenomena from a quantitative perspective, relying on available statistical and survey data on the national and local level. The time span of this analysis is the 1990–2016 period. A municipality-level population projection provided by the INFOSTAT – a partner of the project – was also included in the chapter. The next sections focused on the results of our qualitative investigation based on interviews with institutional actors and young migrants and on focus groups and migration forums. The sixth chapter concentrated on the characteristics of youth migration, with some typical migrant biographies based on these sources. The seventh part presented the major policy challenges the local authorities had to face and their policies concerning the effects of youth migration. The last section contained the concluding remarks and recommendations.

The present paper presents a few of the empirical antecedents and the conclusions of the initial YOUMIG report after a short methodological chapter. Although the actuality of the topic does not need to be explained, the results of an international study conducted in 2015 shows the specificity of the problem. Despite the fact that approximately 3.6 million Romanians live abroad and 47% of Romanian young people aged between 16 and 35 years plans to spend abroad shorter or longer periods (some of them are even overrepresented among migrants such as those with a low level of education, university students, city dwellers), Romania does not have a migration and diaspora policy. The reasons of migration can be classified into three main categories: economic (wages, labour market perspectives, general welfare), educational (acquiring new knowledge), and institutional, system-specific (corruption, company policy). The main reasons of return are family, home, and health. On the one hand, these indicate the significance of primary relations, but, on the other hand, they reveal that there are no other competitive pull factors. “The high challenges migration has on [the] development of the country: population decline, aging, crisis in labour supply in different areas (constructions, tourism, domestic care etc.), inconsistent development, left behind children, high human suffering for those going abroad

in unknown situations” (Sandu, 2018: 4). In order to handle these challenges, decentralization and cooperation of institutions is needed, but in the absence of national initiatives the author will analyse local possibilities and formulate recommendations.

2. Methods

A complex qualitative research activity was carried out in Sfântu Gheorghe. First, we conducted interviews with institutional actors (e.g. leaders or employees of institutions engaged in tackling the effects of youth migration). The total number of interviews with institutional actors was seven. We succeeded to conduct interviews with the director of the local Labour Office, the director of the local department of Babeş–Bolyai University, who was also a former county councillor, the mayor of the municipality, the director of Mikó Imre High School, who is a local councillor too, the director of the Community Assistance office of local public administration, the manager of Flamingo Jobs Agency, and the director of Néri Szent Fülöp School (the school for Roma pupils).

In a subsequent phase, we carried out 10 narrative-biographic interviews with young migrants. Focus-group interviews were also conducted, centred around the experiences of young people with migration, paying special attention to the administrative aspects of the migration process (i.e. their contacts with the local (and other level) administration, the problems they encountered, their opinion about the policies employed by the relevant authorities, etc.). Our goal was to obtain information that can be useful for local decision makers, policy makers, and stakeholders. In our focus group, there were present nine young people under 40 years. The majority of them are returned migrants – the shortest period spent abroad was one and a half years and the longest more than ten years. There is a diversity of receiving countries: the United Kingdom, the United States, Hungary, Dubai, Austria, France, the Netherlands, Greece, and Germany.

During the research, the author faced three main types of challenges: statistical, methodological, and policy-related problems. The most difficult statistical challenge was that it was almost impossible to find reliable data on local level. The methodological problems referred to the unilateral and ideological approaches of some local stakeholders regarding the migration of youth and finding the proper distance for the author in analysing the stakeholders’ points of view. Among the policy-based challenges, the decreasing number of the young age-group should be emphasized.

3. Empirical Research Preceding the YOUMIG Project

There were numerous international projects focused on migration in the last decades. “However, relatively few of them brought into focus the age factor, and dealt specifically with the reasons, motors and consequences of youth migration” (Fassmann et al., 2018: 65). According to the results, young people are the most affected age-group of the phenomenon.

In the following paragraphs, we will briefly present in chronological order some international studies which compared the migratory patterns of different societies, including Romania, followed by regional-level surveys concerning youth migration. The EDUMIGROM, SEEMIG, YMOBILITY, and MOVE projects can be enumerated between the international empirical antecedents of YOUMIG.

3.1. International Studies Focusing on Youth Migration

The EDUMIGROM project included nine European countries and was realized between 2008 and 2011. The project explored “how existing educational systems, policies, practices, and experiences in markedly different welfare regimes contribute to these processes of ‘minoritisation’” (Szalai, 2011: 1). The project focused on interethnic inequality related to the Roma minority and on the role of school and policy in the future of multicultural societies. Therefore, it can serve as a starting point for YOUMIG to a certain extent only – it was an international comparison of ethnic differences in the education of urban youth.

The SEEMIG project was implemented between 2012 and 2014 almost in the same countries and settlements (also Sfântu Gheorghe was involved) as in YOUMIG, and hence the latter can be considered a follow-up project of the former one.

The main goal of SEEMIG was to better understand long-term South-East European migratory and demographic processes, their effects on labour markets, national and regional economies and, based on enhanced empirical evidence, to empower public administrations. Several types of scientific outputs – new, coherent, transnational data-base, pilot surveys, population projections, historical country profiles – aimed to help local, regional and national authorities and other stakeholders to conceptualize and implement strategies concerning migration management. (Fassmann et al., 2018: 65)

Some project results – the country report (Kiss, 2013), the historical analysis (Horváth–Kiss, 2013), and the local strategy proposal (Barna, 2014) – offer information for the reconstruction of migratory trends and policies of the former period.

The YMOBILITY project was realized in nine countries between 2015 and 2018.

The key focus is on how different types of youth mobility contribute to stocks of lifelong skills and competences in different regions; it pays particular attention to the extent and nature of return migration, including the significance of “urban drift” amongst returnees. The project combines a review of existing policy initiatives, in both destination and origin regions, with a number of original regional case studies that involves a range of stakeholders, especially young people. (<http://www.ymobility.eu/project-objectives/>)

According to the survey results, while in other countries better-educated youth are more inclined to migrate, in Romania, the reverse is widespread because/ since it is easier to find a job for a lower- than a higher-skilled person. “Based on migration experiences of youth, seven types were distinguished. Almost half of youth can be characterized as high probability potential migrants and a low share of returnees was recorded in connection with societal dissatisfaction” (Sandu et al., 2017). Twenty in-depth interviews and eight follow-up interviews were realized with Romanian young migrants (aged 18–35) in the London area. One of the authors’ conclusion was that migration is “a strategy to accomplish or ‘accelerate’ rather than delay professional transitions and independent living, although these are only partially achieved” (Morosanu et al., 2017).

The MOVE project, similarly to YMOBILITY, was implemented between 2015 and 2018 in six countries and was “going to provide a comprehensive analysis of youth migration in Europe by creation of an integrated quantitative database on European youth mobility (with regard to different forms, conditions and constrains of mobility) and by a number of qualitative case studies” (Fassmann et al., 2018: 69). On the webpage of the project, there are policy recommendations and info graphics, but there are no available research reports and publications (www.move-project.eu).

According to the results of several international research projects, “the ‘work-related issues’ seem to be the number one reason everywhere, followed by the categories ‘personal ambitions’ and ‘education’ in second and third place. However, and this can be encouraging for the South European countries, the great majority of their young emigrants would like to return; 12% of them in 5 years, 13% in about 10 years and 46% ‘hope’ to go back in the future” (Fassmann et al., 2018: 67). Romanian qualitative and quantitative research results have shown that similar reasons and problems can be confirmed, but the proportion of returnees is lower (Sandu, 2018).

Although Romania was not included in the Re-Turn project, which was implemented in seven European countries between 2011 and 2014, we think it is important to mention it because of its contributions.

The results proved the existence of the phenomenon called the “return of failure”, it is true for only about one third of the cases; most migrants return successfully. The return is not so much driven by dissatisfaction with life or economic problems, but mostly by private reasons, e.g. reuniting with family or friends. A remarkable finding is that 40% of the returnees accepted – and nearly the same share of potential would be returnees willing to accept – worse working conditions in favour of an improved social life. According to the classification scheme of the Re-Turn project, most of the returned emigrants are a mixture of the “conservative type” and the “family and emotional return type”, while one out of ten of them can be considered an innovator (“return of innovation” – Cerase, 1974). Nevertheless, almost half of the returnees suffer from labour market reintegration problems and 10% of them are even unemployed. (Fassmann et al., 2018: 68)

It is hard to estimate the proportion of failed returns in Romania, but the phenomenon of problematic re-integration on the local labour market exists. “If returnees are independent or self-employed, they can expect higher wages than non-migrants, which definitely makes a temporary migration more attractive than a permanent stay in the host country” (Martin–Radu, 2011, qtd by Smoliner et al., 2012: 26).

Although it is difficult to apply qualitative methods in measuring the proportion of innovators among returned migrants, the survey planned for the next phase of the project is expected to provide information in this regard. However, there are only a few young people who invest their accumulated capital not only in real estate but also in setting up their own businesses. Based on the Re-Turn project results, authors formulated four main policy implications:

- 1). attracting high-skilled return migration (offering reintegration assistance, offering access to special social services, giving permission to earn premium interest rates or hold convertible foreign currency accounts, encouraging migrants to seek representation in institutional structures, or establishing systems of information and cultural outreach to expatriate communities),
- 2). removing obstacles to return,
- 3). creating framework conditions that help returnees to realize their potential (origin countries should: deal with the topic of the recognition of qualifications and experience acquired abroad, install effective migration programmes, which promote brain circulation, and engage high-skilled nationals in diasporas, through virtual or temporary

return), 4). formulating a regional development strategy based on a wider and better skills basis. (Smoliner et al., 2012: 63–64)

3.2. Regional Surveys concerning Youth Migration

The majority of the following regional surveys referred to ethnic Hungarian youth. Because of the ethnic composition of the city, it is more relevant to start from these ones than from similar studies representative of Romania at the national level.

One of the authors who analysed the Romanian youth studies after the regime change distinguished three main periods in it: the first one between 1990 and 2001, the second, being the richest period from the point of view of youth studies, was between 2001 and 2009, and the third after 2008 (Ercsei, 2017).

In 2001, 2008, and 2013, three similar comparative surveys were conducted among Hungarian youth from Transylvania. The first one focused on youth aged 18–29 (N = 1,598), and the other two on 18–35-year-old people (N = 1,202 and N = 1,238). According to the results of the survey from 2001, 32% of youth planned to work abroad, men and respondents from urban settlements were overrepresented among those who aspired to migrate. 79% of them marked Hungary as their target country. The other 21% chose Germany, the United States, Canada, and other countries (Bálint–Demeter, 2002: 204).

Between 2008 and 2013, a significant change can be observed regarding migratory experiences and the potential of youth. While in 2008 one third of the respondents planned to work abroad, in 2013, 43% of them considered going abroad. Younger respondents were increasingly affected by migration. 51% of those aged 18–29 planned to become a labour migrant. Concerning the receiving countries, in 2008, 39% of them mentioned Hungary as target place, in 2013, only 27%, while 51% of them chose Germany and Austria, and one third of them preferred the United Kingdom. “Hungary fell to the third position, followed by the United States, Italy and Spain” (Barna–Kiss, 2013: 99).

Table 1. *Plans of Hungarian youth from Transylvania to work abroad and their target countries*

18–29-year-old people	2001	2008	2013
Proportion of those who plan to work abroad (%)	41.3	38	51,2
Target countries %			
Hungary	75	39	27
Germany, Austria	25	43	51
The United Kingdom, Ireland, Scotland	2	18	32
The United States, Canada	14	15	11

Source: Barna–Kiss (2013: 51, 53)

In 2015, 1,000 Hungarian young people aged 15–29 from Transylvania were surveyed in the study named GeneZYs 2015. Respondents were asked about their migratory experiences and their plans regarding definitive emigration. Only 13.5% of Transylvanian young people had experiences in studying abroad and 25.4% in labour migration. The majority of them did not plan to emigrate definitively (Papp Z. et al., 2017: 227).

In 2016, 2,000 Hungarian respondents aged 15–29 from Transylvania were surveyed in the study called Mozaik 2016. 47% of them would work in Hungary and 57% of them in other countries in Europe. 36% of them planned to become a labour migrant for a few years, 40% for a few months, 22% planned to live abroad, and 19% to study in a foreign country. In a multiple response question, 81% of those who planned migration would do it for a better living, 52% in order to accumulate experiences, 52% because of their carrier, 40% in order to enhance language skills, 37% due to the lack of opportunities at home, and 27% because of worse financial conditions at home (Mozaik 2016 Research Report, 2017).

Young people who graduated from high schools between 2004 and 2013 in Sfântu Gheorghe were surveyed in 2014 (coordinated by Kiss and Barna) about their future plans. 10% of them lived abroad at the moment of the study. 72% of them planned to stay at home (76% of Hungarians and 63% of Romanians). These results differ from those of the survey realized in the SEEMIG project: three-quarters of high school students in their last year were thinking about emigration, and almost a third of them planned to search for a job abroad (Solyom–Bálint, 2018).

Finally, we would like to mention a local survey carried out among high school students from Covasna County in 2016. The database contains 537 cases, 45.3% of whom were studying in Sfântu Gheorghe. More than one third of the students (39.1%) belonged to theoretical high schools, 43.4% of them to technical high schools, and 17.5% of them to vocational high schools (arts, theology, pedagogy, sports). 21.4% of the respondents studied in Romanian language. 35.6% of those who planned to work after high school graduation would have done it abroad, 30.8% of the latter would have chosen Hungary, 29.7% Germany, and 22.5% the United Kingdom. Significant differences could be observed between the ethnic groups: 41% of Hungarians and 20% of Romanians planned to work abroad. They specified similar reasons for leaving to the respondents from the above mentioned surveys: better living standards and higher wage levels (Telegdy et al., 2018).

As one can notice from the above mentioned surveys, an increasing proportion of young people is affected by migration.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Migratory Trends within the Local Society

In the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe: emigration is the most important migratory trend, immigration characterizes the situation only to a limited extent, and newcomers are mainly internal migrants, Romanian citizens from the rural surroundings. Among the emigrants, one can identify short-term migrants – this type is characteristic of Roma migrants, too –, long-term migrants, most of them aiming to earn a living through labour migration, while a smaller group studies and works abroad at the same time. There are also return migrants, but it is hard to estimate their proportions (according to the opinions of institutional actors, 20–25% of young migrants return). The survey planned for the next phase of the project is expected to provide more information in this regard.

Although the origins of the present demographic situation are embedded in the political and economic processes of the socialist era, and the legacy of this period can still be felt in the current processes, the case study focuses only on the changes that happened after 1989. Major changes occurred both on a national level and on a local level; the number of inhabitants decreased mainly because of emigration. The most difficult part of analysing the migratory trends was that it was almost impossible to find reliable data on the local level. One of the problems is that the Statistical Institute collected data from the local public administration but published only aggregated data on the national, regional, and NUTS3 levels. Another problem is the reliability of data, especially those regarding migration. For instance, less than 10% of emigrants registered by Eurostat appear in Romanian statistics, but information about the basic demographic characteristics of the population is also hard to find and to trust. The population of the town decreased by more than 5,000 inhabitants between the last two censuses. Further changes may be found in the target group as the proportion of young generations aged 15–19 decreased by 52.2% in ten years and the proportion of those aged between 20–24 years by 34.9%. Given the dominant role of emigration, all projection scenarios assume a serious decrease in the population by 2035.

As one can notice also from the surveys mentioned in previous empirical research, an increasing proportion of young people are affected by migration. A significant part of youth plans to become a labour migrant, and their preferred destination countries have changed in the last one and a half decades. While at the beginning of the period they preferred Hungary as a receiving country, in the past decade, they would rather go to Germany and to the United Kingdom. Another difference compared to the last decades is that labour migrants nowadays are helped at the beginning by their networks abroad, and so they usually do not have to find a job, accommodation, etc. alone.

Due to the fact that migration became a widespread strategy in the last decade, young people often reach their destination places helped by their networks abroad; the approach of Lee according to which “migrants often have a lack of knowledge about the area of destination, which results in an element of ignorance or even mystery about this area”, can be partially characteristic of the studied population (Lee, 1966, qtd by Fassmann et al., 2018: 22). Some of them have a picture about their prospective conditions before arriving, but their migration “takes place despite unfavourable conditions in cities of destination as economically rational choice for individual migrants” (Harris–Todaro, 1970, qtd by Fassmann et al., 2018: 22).

Migration and Development

“So far there is no uniform opinion on how migration and development affect each other but it is widely recognized that there is no unidirectional impact and that the developmental consequences of emigration are context-specific” (Fassmann et al., 2018: 54).

Sfântu Gheorghe is a small town located in one of the smallest and poorest counties in the central part of Romania. It can be characterized by a weak economic situation (low level of wages and of added values, the local economy is dominated by processing industry, which does not need labourers with a high level of education, etc.). One of the most important strengths of the town is its calm atmosphere and the cultural events, which can serve as relatively attractive factors for young people, families, and returning migrants.

The town has to invest in the stimulation of local entrepreneurship – this is important both from the perspective of the development of a dynamic economic sector and from the perspective of diminishing the migration trend of young people moving to other communities. Solutions in this domain are diverse and they consist of business incubators, co-working places, stimulation of start-ups, development of a community centre of carriers, etc. Investment in the development of entrepreneurial spirit at the local level is essential. Big investments are necessary and important, but small businesses based on local entrepreneurship can induce a diversification of the economy and at the same time reduce dependence on the public sector or one single investor.

The development of higher education in Sfântu Gheorghe is a welcomed step in the growth of competitiveness of the municipality, but it is necessary for the administration to develop policies proactively, not only to keep young people in the community but also to attract talent and to enhance relations with diasporas which can support local development.

The opening of a new extension of Sapientia University could enhance the attractiveness of the municipality both for young people (in order to continue

their studies) and for investors attracted by qualified labour force. The supply of a highly-educated workforce influences the attractiveness of the town for investors. But the local department of the Babeş–Bolyai University is expected to be closed in the next few years because of a lack of students, which can reduce the attractiveness of the municipality both for young people and investors.

The dialogue between the business sector and educational institutions should be enhanced, the programmes of high schools and technical colleges should be based more on the demands of the labour market, and long-term collaborations between local companies and schools could facilitate the integration of graduated students on the labour market.

There is a relatively developed network of NGOs in the town, which offers diverse social services, with the majority of organizations offering these services at least on the municipal level. In this context, cooperation between the public and non-profit sector would be opportune and can become an important factor in achieving the proposed objectives regarding the access and quality of social services.

Regarding the emigration of youth, most institutional actors enumerated many more disadvantages than advantages from the point of view of the town. They do not believe that more than a few of them will return. Some of the institutional actors consider the lack of Romanian-language competence as one of the push factors for youth because young people, it seems, do not feel prepared enough for the Romanian labour market. The interviewed young migrants experienced also the advantages of spending some time abroad, and most of them think their experiences are useful from the perspective of the town, too. They perceive the improvement of their foreign language skills, meeting new people and cultures, accumulating financial capital, work and studying experiences, learning new habits and ideas – the “social remittances” too – as positive aspects of emigration (Elezaj et al., 2012, qtd by Fassmann et al., 2018: 38). One of the items listed as social remittances may be a more open behaviour toward diversity in the long term as contacts with “otherness” can help in the deconstruction of prejudices.

According to the cited literature, the players involved in the migration process (institutional actors, sending surroundings, etc.) should revise their former image about migration as:

[E]migration can nowadays be perceived as a chance to relieve labour markets by offering work and income somewhere, and this can lead to poverty reduction (e.g. by target earning or remittances). Other potentials for emigration countries are the improvement of skills and the transfer of knowledge and investments. (...) A growing number of governments have been recognizing that their diaspora can contribute to the development of their home countries through remittances, financial investments, as well as through transfer of knowledge and skills.” (Fassmann et al., 2018: 57, 60)

By analysing the Hungarian diaspora policy after 2010, Herner Kovács concluded that:

[T]he international toolkit of diaspora politics offers a range of possibilities for homeland governments to reach and engage their diaspora. Based on the characteristic features of the diaspora, Hungarian diaspora politics managed to define its primary goals: the integration of the “diaspora individual” into the diaspora community and its organization; enhanced connection to Hungary from the side of the diaspora; strengthening the national identity of the diaspora; exploitation of the economic, professional potential of the diaspora as well as their ability to improve the image of Hungary abroad; and finding, “identifying” and reaching the members of the newest diaspora. (Herner Kovács, 2014: 67)

Regarding encouraging return migration, Galgóczi et al. (2016; qtd by Fassmann et al., 2018: 36) formulated that concrete, diverse actions are needed in the fields of housing, childcare, and labour market. The long-term priorities of the programmes which facilitate return migration usually are: housing support policies, especially for families with children, developing child care provisions, raising the standards of employer–employee relations, changing the tax and social benefit systems to support families, lessening bureaucratic obstacles for launching and running businesses, etc.

Major Policy Challenges

Besides attracting investors, according to the institutional interviewees’ opinions, more state support for entrants and employers may also improve the chances of young migrants coming home. They also pointed out that the synchronization of state-run databases (such as of healthcare, education, employment agencies, etc.) is a must if they want to follow the lives of migrants. The mentioned needs – state support and a unified database system – generally belong to the remit of the national level, but scholarships can be allocated also by the municipality (from external, project-based funds), and cooperation and data exchange depend on the involved institutions on the local level, which is possible to engage without any national initiatives.

According to institutional interviewees, strengthening local patriotism (initiated/realized by schools) is the key. For those who have already migrated, the thematic events detailed in the following part (recommended pilot projects) could serve as a step in building and strengthening the network with their hometown. Another necessary step would be the improvement of the Romanian language education. As the majority of the Sfântu Gheorghe population is Hungarian,

during their student years, they barely face situations where the knowledge of Romanian is needed. But when they enter the job market this soon becomes a huge disadvantage, to which they may respond with migration – either to Hungary or other countries where speaking/learning English or German is enough.

Young migrant interviewees who were thinking of returning somehow mentioned, however, that they had other priorities as well: their return would depend also on what circumstances they found in their native country. These circumstances concerned financial possibilities (salaries), the general quality and standards of living, and job opportunities.

The interviewees named many development aspects in their native country, including the strength of the IT sector, increasing salaries, the presence of electronic services, public security, and the cityscape of their native town. The corrupt political system, the bureaucratic system, and the attitude of citizens were mentioned as factors hindering the development of the native country.

The migrant interviewees faced different types of problems after returning to Romania. The problems they mentioned can be classified into four main types:

1. administrative challenges, which include communication problems with the authorities, bureaucratic processes, attitudes of authorities, and problems regarding naturalization;
2. poor infrastructure;
3. problems of the labour market;
4. challenges regarding mentality.

The present study discusses the first and the third problem. Some of the needs suggested by young migrants can be handled by local policies, while others would require measures belonging to national competences.

4.2. Young Migrants' Recommendations for Administrative Challenges

Regarding a user-friendlier administration, the young interviewees advised that easy communication practices based on phone or e-mail should be adopted in Romanian administrative systems. The interviewees recommended a more predictable administrative system based on new technologies, skilled and motivated employees and representatives characterized by a trustful, positive attitude toward citizens, organizations, and companies, and simplified processes.

Some interviewees recommended an urgent development regarding technologies used by authorities and a more positive attitude toward citizens. They think that the financial authorities' role is not only to punish but also to inform the stakeholders. So, not only negative but also positive incentives have to be used. They enumerated examples from western societies where different authorities (consumer protection office, financial office) informed their clients at

the first visit. So, they suggested the development of a user-friendly administration both regarding technologies and attitudes.

According to the interviewees' experience, Hungarian does not have to be an official language, it just has to be possible to use it in the communication with institutions.

The interviewees' recommendations regarding tax exceptions and streamlined bureaucratic procedures for investments correspond to some of the policy measures existing in other sending countries, for instance, those mentioned by Jonkers as "permanent return programmes (encouraging permanent return of highly skilled migrants to their home country by providing tax cuts, attractive research facilities or bonus payments)" (Jonkers, 2008, qtd by Fassmann et al., 2018: 61).

4.3. Policy Measures Recommended by Young Migrants in Order to Enhance Integration in the Local Labour Market

They recommended initiating a programme which would send 18–19 year olds abroad for one or two years in order to facilitate a change in mentality. This idea could be helped by local scholarships offered by representatives of the public and private sectors.

Certain types of Erasmus+ programmes offer opportunities to study abroad and provide job opportunities for a certain period, while people can accumulate experiences and capital in order to set up their own businesses at home, but they are not well-known by the target groups. The advocacy services recommended in the final part of the chapter could spread these types of information, too, as well as those concerning Start-Up programmes, etc.

The Romanian government could encourage its potential entrepreneurs by supporting the tax-free first months offer for recently set up businesses. The municipality can only reduce its own taxes for starting enterprises, which is not a sufficient condition for facilitating local economy.

A diversification of jobs would be needed in the local labour market because in Sfântu Gheorghe only a few sectors dominate the local economy. And a qualified and flexible work force would also be needed, which is prepared for and is open to changes. Although the level of tax rates per se is not sufficient as an attraction, local policies could try to attract economic investors through their own tools such as reduced taxes, for instance.

Concerning the local labour market, the interviewees recommend enhancing the competence-based labour market. Some interviewees mentioned appreciation by employers abroad as a good practice, while at home there is no tradition of appreciating the employees' performance. Some of them perceive the lack of appreciation as a historical heritage from the former socialist system. Some

interviewees recommended employers *to think and plan for longer term* and to appreciate their employees' performances regarding both wages and promotions.

The local strategy of YOUMIG – similarly to that of the RE-Turn project – should aim at “introducing joint strategies to promote remigration as a source of innovative enterprise development; and developing and implementing services needed to support potential migrants in their wish to return” (Fassmann et al., 2018: 68).

4.4. Present Practices at the Local Level

The local public administration initiated the so-called *Come Home* programme, which had not become very popular until 2018 because of its strict criteria and disadvantageous conditions. Compared to the six sites occupied by young families in the last few years, in 2018, eight new building sites were allocated to new candidates. The decision makers should revise their concept about the mentioned programme in order to achieve measurable results. The criteria have to be modified: the size of home-building plots offered should be revised based on a real estate market analysis and/or consultation of experts (according to the interviewees, the target population perceives it necessary to double it at least or rather triple the size of the 300 square meters), more diversity in home designs is needed (the candidates could choose from three plans in the last few years, and starting from 2018 there are four available house plans), and the rules of selling the house should be more permissive (the candidates needed to have all the documentations in one year; they had to finish the building in two years. They were allowed to buy the land after ten years after finishing the building.).

The municipality tries to attract young people home through infrastructural and cultural investments. Economic investments, attraction of employers, diversification of local economy, and a more competitive labour market supply would be needed in order to offer competitive wages and jobs for young people.

The elite high schools are also partners to the municipality in its objective to attract young people home. Their main tool in the process is enhancing the local identity through extracurricular cultural programmes. In one of the elite schools, the process is started in primary classes with folk dancing and continues by personal development activities implemented by form masters. They also organize excursions with Romanian students and run a multilingual school magazine, thus creating opportunities for Hungarian young people to improve their Romanian language skills, which is essential if they want to work in Romania. They try to introduce more and more a competence-based education, to encourage talent management activities, to differentiate groups by the pupils' capabilities, to organize workgroups where students can combine and implement their knowledge of natural sciences, etc. In addition, they maintain a “folk club”

to cultivate traditions and strengthen local patriotism. All the enumerated activities aim to enhance students' skills in order to become a flexible workforce and to build ties to their hometown. Despite the aforementioned endeavours, the talented students with good academic results generally do not return to Sfântu Gheorghe according to the alumni statistics of the last decades.

Most of the interviewees feel attracted not only by their families and friends but also by certain aspects of the local municipality. According to some interviewees' opinions, the cultural programmes of the town can function as attractions for returning migrants. Probably mainly, but not exclusively, the more educated middle class can be targeted by cultural events, while the relatively wide range (compared to other small towns) of programmes offered by local festivals may attract other strata, too.

The municipality decided not to privatize any public services. Therefore, it remains the biggest employer in Sfântu Gheorghe, providing job opportunities for many with lower education levels and a poor background to make sure they do not become unemployed and possible emigrants later on.

4.5. Recommended Pilot Projects

Similarly to certain similar projects, in the case of YOUMIG, "the overall objective of the strategies should be developing the diversity of the local economy, support a flexible, family-friendly labour market, and all strategies that are suitable to improve the image and self-confidence of the region as a whole" (Fassmann et al., 2018: 6).

The areas of interventions identified by the authors of the Re-Turn project in their Toolkit in order to support the reintegration of returned migrants would be useful to be adopted also in the case of Sfântu Gheorghe. They established three main areas of intervention: **re-attract** (PR strategy improving the image of the home region, e.g. postcards or photo calendars as reminders from home), **re-integrate** (commuters' day, job portal, recognition of qualifications, re-integration training courses, etc.), **re-employ** (supporting entrepreneurs in the employment of returnees or supporting returnees who are planning to start their own business), and general aims (ambassador, hotline, website) (Schmidtchen, 2012).

Finally, starting from the challenges and needs formulated by the stakeholders (migrants and involved institutions) and from good practices in other societies, the study recommends three pilot projects which aim to reintegrate young migrants into the local economy and two pilots (one of them can be handled in a parallel, special project) which help them in their reintegration into the local community/society.

Reintegration in the Local Economy

During the reintegration process, returnees face administrative challenges as in connection with the recognition of their certificates, recognition of their time spent in work abroad, tax and health-care issues, etc. A *consultancy service* offered by the local public administration office or an NGO would help their connections to the labour market. Their families and personal network usually cannot fulfil the role of proper information sources, help in administrative steps, or legal advice. A department of the local public administration office would be able to assume this role with the appropriate resources. The implementation of the service could be possible through a frequently updated webpage with information about the necessary steps, the documents available in Romanian and Hungarian languages, links to the authorities' websites where the migrants should be referred to, and an employee who can personally help the target group with information. The sepsinet.ro webpage initiated during the SEEMIG project could be modified in order to function as an information platform. The municipality may attract the necessary financial support for the mentioned activities from local, national, and EU-level administrative projects. The feasibility depends also on the continuity of activities and on informed and motivated human resources. The implementation of this recommendation started in 2018.

Another pilot project dealing with the effects of youth migration could be similar to a project which aimed at integrating migrants into the Georgian labour market. The mentioned example started from mapping the competences of returnees and the needs of potential employers. On the one hand, the project offered the returned migrants “vocational training, technical retraining and psychological support to adapt their competences to the local labour market needs, and offered them job placement and business development assistance” (Institute for Economic Research Ljubljana, 2017: 27). On the other hand, the partners of the project “also elaborated recommendations for employers and policymakers regarding the reintegration of qualified (return) migrants into the Georgian economy” (id.: 27).

A database which helps to link the demand and supply of the labour market would be helpful, and measures of reintegration through personalized trainings – mentoring and tutoring activities – and psychological support of adaptation could contribute to attracting back skilled workers. The feasibility of the project depends on the target groups and institutions. Information should reach young people. This process can face the difficulty that they are often not registered as leavers and returners. The employers should be sensitized in order to have an open, positive attitude to collaborating in the mapping and training processes. They should put efforts in forming their mentoring and tutoring systems. There is no tradition of psychological support in the country, wherefore probably civil

organizations will play an important role in this part if they receive project-based financial subsidies/allocations in this regard from local/national/international sponsors. Thus, the success of the process requires collaboration and efforts from young people, local institutions and employers, and new mechanisms should be introduced, but if the involved partners understand the essence of long-term planning they will be motivated not only by project-based support. The host partner of the pilot project may be the local Labour Office.

Regarding pilot projects focusing on both returned migrants and emigrants, one should take into consideration an initiative of *facilitating entrepreneurship* among migrants in order to invest their incomes not only in real estate at home but also in *setting up businesses, investing in the local economy, and saving financial capital*. The mentioned facilitation should start by surveying the present situation, characteristics, needs, and plans of the target populations. Online and offline information campaigns and training programmes would also be useful about start-ups, administrative issues, business coaching, etc. The challenges of the project consist in finding and involving the host organization and its partners (NGOs of entrepreneurs, Labour Office, incubator house, chamber of commerce, and financial institutions who are able to offer financial tools like micro-credit, loans for housing, mutual investment funds, pension and child education savings schemes, etc.) in reaching the target populations, realizing the business coaching and the follow-up of new entrepreneurs, attracting financial tools for the project, and achieving the proper indicators of success in the short, middle, and long term.

At the moment of the study, several similar initiatives were launched: for instance, one by a bank in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania and with the League of Romanian Students Abroad in order to attract young people back and to support their entrepreneurial activities. The *Be an Entrepreneur at Home* programme offers trainings and professional consultancy for at least 200 people, and it will support 22 business plans with a “kick-off” capital of 40,000 Euros (<http://antrepreneuracasa.ro/>).

Reintegration in the Local Society

In a relatively populated and developed village from the neighbouring county, the mayor and his civil partners have initiated to organize thematic meetings once a year for high-skilled people who originate from that village. Their aim is to remain in contact with their former inhabitants, to inform each other about their work, carrier, plans, etc., and to mobilize them in special cases to contribute with their knowledge, networks, etc. to local development. Similar initiatives could have a positive effect on the local identity of the leavers and on the cultural, economic, and other programmes at the local level. As the host of the initiatives, an NGO or a department of the local public administration office would be able

to organize events and to communicate with their migrants. The challenges of similar initiatives may be the lack of proper communication and timing of the events, the gap between the needs and willingness of the target group and the initiators, but these problems have to be treated by mapping stakeholders' expectations at the beginning.

Regarding Roma migrants, multiple activities would be needed, which were partially started by social NGOs who work with vulnerable groups. Young Roma people usually migrate to Hungary, Germany, and Austria as seasonal labourers in agriculture. They could be helped by basic German-language trainings and workshops for enhancing their time- and money-management skills. Due to their negative experiences and disadvantages, mediation services would also be needed in childcare and those related to the labour market. The feasibility of the pilot project does not only depend on social NGOs but also on whether the proper information reaches the target group and on the willingness and steadiness of young Roma people to participate. The community assistance office of the local public administration can also support the training process of developing the financial literacy of marginalized groups. There is a special programme ongoing in the town parallel with the YOUMIG project, which aims to enhance the capacities of and cooperation among actors with a stake in the labour market participation of the Roma in order to better exploit their economic potential. The RARE project (Changing Discourses, Changing Practices: The Roma as Human Resources) is also an interregional one and can address and integrate the recommendations of the YOUMIG project concerning Roma people.

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Positioning Women in Informal Cross-Border Transportation: The Boda-Boda Industry at the Uganda–Kenya Border

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Abstract. Informal modes of transportation have taken over the transportation sector in most developing countries. In the borderlands, informal cross-border transportation is common, especially with the presence of porous borders. In Uganda, the informal transport sector began as an informal cross-border mode of transportation, commonly known as the boda-boda at the Uganda–Kenya border. Today, the boda-boda is the most popular form of informal transportation used countrywide; however, the industry has been dominated by men, and the position of women has not been portrayed vividly, a case similar to most countries that use informal modes of transportation. This paper, based on an ethnographic research, is aimed at revealing the position of women in the boda-boda industry, more specifically how the women have boosted the growth of the industry at the Uganda–Kenya border in Busia District. The paper also portrays the culture in Busia and how it has impacted women’s usage of the boda-boda, and it gives a reflection on how the physical design of the boda-boda is limiting to the women.

Keywords: boda-boda, women, border, informal cross-border transportation

Background

Effective transportation supports daily interactions and exchanges of both material and immaterial cultures, thus a necessity for human survival. At border points, where movement is paramount, an effective mode of transportation is a prerequisite; however, in the developing world, governments have left gaps within the formal transportation sector, making way for an informal transportation sector to emerge (Cervero, 2000). The boda-boda at the Uganda–Kenya border has dominated the informal transport sector as the popular mode of transportation used. The boda-boda refers to both bicycle and motorcycle used to transfer both individuals and commodities for hire (Howe, 2002; Mutiso–Behrens, 2011). An

informal transport sector, as described by Cervero (2000), is characterized by little or no government regulations, the entry or exit of the operators not being regulated, having no scheduled timetable, and fares being determined by the market forces of demand and supply. In the developing world, the informal transport sector is often gendered (Peters, 2013), and women are often attached to it (Uteng, 2011).

The boda-boda industry in Uganda began in the early 1960s at the Uganda–Kenya border, currently Busia District (Mutiso–Behrens, 2011), and was popularized in the 1970s, when the border was temporarily closed by the then Ugandan president, Idi Amin Dada. The industry acquired its name from the corruption of the English word border-border (Ochieng–Egessa, 2003): men with bicycles used to situate themselves on the Ugandan side of the border and called out “border–border” for passengers willing to be transferred to the Kenyan side of the border, and it was from this process that the term boda-boda was developed. In 1994, motorcycles joined the industry as a new form of boda-boda (Malmberg-Calvo, 1994), almost replacing the bicycle. Today, the industry has spread to the different regions of Uganda, and the term boda-boda has spread across the Ugandan borders to the nearby borderland communities. The industry employs a vast number of male youths; however, the current number of the boda-boda operators nationwide is yet to be specified.

The industry is considered to be male-dominated (Malmberg-Calvo, 1994; Howe, 2002; Mutiso–Behrens, 2011), and the position of women in the industry has very scanty representation in the current literature. In a study conducted by Nyachieu (2013) in the Kenyan suburb of Kitengela, she revealed that only 4% of women were involved as boda-boda operators. She then attributed the low number of women in the industry to the fact that the boda-boda riding business is a dangerous and risky affair, and therefore most women shy away from it (Nyachieu, 2013). Nonetheless, as emphasized by some scholars, the issue of women in transportation has to be delved into in order to promote gender equity (Duchene, 2011; Uteng, 2011; Peters, 2013). This paper, therefore, focuses on the position of women in the boda-boda industry and their contribution to the existence of an industry that is known to favour men.

Methodology

The study was based on an ethnographic research design and lasted a period of three months: June, July, and August of 2015. Participant observation, life histories, and ethnographic interviews were used as data collection methods. The study area was Busia Municipality at the Uganda–Kenya border, and it was informed by the boda-boda operators and the women within the borderland.

Women and Culture of Busia

The Busia borderland gathered a vast number of ethnicities; however, the cultural dynamics were primarily those of the Basamia ethnic group since they were the natives of Busia (Nzita–Niwampa, 1997). The culture has evolved over time due to the movement of individuals and interactions that occur as exchanges are made. However, the patriarchal trait of the culture was still dominant: women normally handled affairs in the domestic sphere, and the men dominated the public sphere. According to Peters (2013), existing gender inequalities in divisions of labour have assigned societal roles for both men and women, defining the female as a “home-maker” with the primary responsibility of “reproductive” caretaking tasks. Law (1999) states that attention to the gender division of labour and activities is chiefly useful in helping us to understand travel demand.

At the time of the study, it was common to find women at work with their children, especially those who were employed in shops along the border highway, because society still held them as the child-nurturing gender. This was also common with women who vended food, who sometimes had their children tied onto their backs or walking along with them. This strengthens an argument forwarded by Law (1999) when he stated that gender divisions of labour in particular places are shifting in response to social and economic restructuring. Peters (2013) also states that today more women also act as breadwinners yet still have the reproductive and caretaking tasks. Cross-border trade was the main economic activity (Ochieng–Egessa, 2003) in the area, and it was mostly informal; the trade fuelled cross-border transportation, while the reverse was also true, and women were engaged in it.

Women were culturally assigned to buy foodstuffs from the markets, which sometimes meant moving across the border since they were the gender responsible for meal preparation. The process of mobility in search for household supplies is perhaps the reason why the mobility rate of women was higher compared to that of the men. As asserted by Mutiso and Behrens (2011), women are the main users of the boda-boda mostly because the boda-boda gives them a reliable mode of transportation and also provides a faster route in the congested traffic, but, as is the case of Busia borderland, the boda-boda is the only available mode of transport that allows easy movement within the municipality and across the border. Women have been noted to take on shorter but rather indirect routes as compared to men who take longer yet direct routes (Peters, 2013) – this is argued because of the domestic tasks assigned to the female gender (Uteng, 2011). Law (1999) argues that journeys made by women are made in gendered spaces, which may include markets, hospitals, and children’s schools.

Although women were the main customers of the boda-boda industry (Ochieng–Egessa, 2003), they were not represented, their interests and views

were not considered when drafting policies that impacted the boda-boda industry because the committee that made decisions or policies was comprised by male participants who were responsible for constructing relationships between the boda-boda operators and the society by protecting the interests of both the operators and the members of society. Duchene (2011) states that women's NGOs presented "women's agenda 21" at the 1992 world summit, which was then followed by campaigns on all fronts for equal rights of women to participate in decision-making processes. She further goes on to say that the issue of taking account of gender in transport is a fairly recent one.

Women in Busia were culturally forbidden from operating the boda-boda (Ochieng-Egessa, 2003) because they were traditionally tagged as soft-bodied persons, and the boda-boda was attributed to masculinity since it required physical energy to propel, especially the bicycle. The cultural stereotyping that defined who operated the boda-boda positioned women in Busia in the rear seat of the boda-boda and the men at the forefront as the operators. Because of this cultural norm, women were left fully dependable on men for their transportation needs; especially in cases where a bicycle/motorcycle was available in a homestead, women were expected to wait for men to transport them. As a result, the industry economically boosted more men than women. Men were the only existing operators within the society, and this was the case for the rest of the country (Howe, 2002; Mutiso-Behrens, 2011) save for the very rare notable cases of female operators in Kampala (Okudi, 2013).

Women earned some income by getting involved in activities that contributed directly to supporting the daily life of the male operators as they worked at the border: for instance, they prepared meals which they sold to the boda-boda operators. Duchene (2011) argues that in all countries women have limited access to transport-related occupations because of the social norms, especially in developing countries. Peters (2013) confirms the argument by asserting that women are less likely to find employment in urban transport and that cultural reservations are often cited as a major challenge preventing women from accessing bicycles and learning how to ride, especially in Africa. He goes on and asserts that these reservations are highly local and vary in accordance to ethnic communities (Peters, 2013).

Women are reported to have limited access to individual means of transportation – for instance, motor vehicles (Peters, 2013) –, and in developing countries the women in the outskirts of major towns or capital cities normally walk long distances with heavy loads on their heads because they cannot afford motorized transport (Peters, 2013). At the border, in Busia, women have access to the cheapest form of non-motorized transportation, but the culture prohibits them from riding the boda-boda yet allows them to drive expensive motorized vehicles, which is a far-fetched reality to the majority. Evans (2013) argues that

the boda-boda offers affordable transport to the poor and is more efficient than cars in terms of fuel, space, and maintenance.

Women and the Physical Design of the Boda-Boda

The physical design of the boda-boda is limiting to women in Busia. Despite women being the major customers of the industry, in all its evolution, the boda-boda is yet to evolve into a transportation mode designed with women's interests put into consideration. The design of the boda-boda favours the transport of male passengers: it is designed in a way that a passenger is required to sit with both legs apart and facing the operator, which makes the operator able to balance the boda-boda better, and it is also a safer sitting position for the passenger. However, it becomes limiting for the women who are culturally nurtured and socialized to sit with both their legs locked together. The culture is evolving and now some women can boldly sit on the boda-boda with their legs apart, which is especially a result in the shifting cultural dynamics of dress code. Women who choose to wear trousers can easily sit with their legs apart and are more comfortable compared to those who wear skirts and dresses.



Some boda-boda bicycles have been transformed to include a provision for the passenger to hold on to



Source: Birungi, B. 2015, fieldwork collection, Busia border town

Figure 1. A bicycle and motorcycle used for boda-boda at the border

One of the female informants had this to say about her experience with using the boda-boda:

I fear a boda-boda because I do not know where to hold on to while am seated on it. It can also be embarrassing; when I sit on it, I have to be very conscient of where and how I position my legs, otherwise everyone will see; it's best to wear trousers while using it; the risk with long skirts and dresses is that they can get stuck inside the wheel, causing an accident. (female informant at the border)

Preference was made to women who dressed in trousers and sat on the boda-boda with their legs apart as compared to women who wore skirts or dresses and sat with their legs apart. The length of the skirt and dress was also examined in determining which woman showed cultural disrespect towards herself on the boda-boda: the skirts or dresses which were below the knee and did not expose the woman's thighs were preferred to those that were above the knees. So, the women who wore skirts or dresses and were still culturally bound to the norm that women ought to sit with their legs locked together preferred to sit on the boda-boda with both their legs on one side, which was normally either to the right if the boda-boda was on the right side of the road or to the left if it was on the left side of the road. This sitting position was more risky because it became difficult for the operator to balance and the passenger could easily fall off. It should also be noted that whichever dress code and sitting position was adopted women were still subjected to social criticism. For example, if a woman dressed in trousers and sat with both legs apart, she was criticized for showing off her underwear or no underwear, and if she chose to wear skirts or dresses she was criticized for exposing her thighs.

Policy documents, such as Article 13 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948 qtd in Uteng, 2011: 8), declare that everyone has the freedom of movement within the borders of each state. Houseman (1979) suggests that there is a connection between individual freedom and mobility, where a high level of mobility implies a high level of freedom of choice to travel, which is a prerequisite for the ability to decide on what activities to participate in. Kaufmann (2002) in his argument about social fluidification argues that the question of analysis should be who has access to which relevant technology and the degree of freedom afforded by the usage of this technology. With reference to the case of women in Busia, the main technology used for mobility, which is the boda-boda, does not afford women an equal degree of freedom of mobility as it does to men because of the cultural norms attached to it and the physical design of the boda-boda.

As representatives of the gender assigned to the domestic sphere together with the nurturing of children, women in the borderland use the boda-boda

especially to have themselves transported together with their children and their commodities from markets across the border. This is risky because the boda-boda, especially the bicycle, is designed to carry only one passenger at a time (Ochieng-Egessa, 2003) and is yet to evolve into a design that can securely transport women travelling with their children and commodities on one boda-boda. In such cases, it is advisable to use more than one boda-boda, but women in the borderland risk their lives together with the lives of their children by using one in order to cut down on the expenses associated with hiring a second boda-boda.

While some boda-bodas, especially the bicycle, incorporated handles into their design, where a passenger could hold on to, most boda-bodas lacked these handles. Passengers normally try to balance themselves by holding onto the operator or holding onto the seat. This design of the boda-boda puts both female and male passengers at a risk, but the greatest risk falls on the women who at most times need to balance themselves since they normally carry their children and handbags on the boda-boda. Women who hold on to the operator while being transported are also socially criticized, and some operators reported that this made them feel uncomfortable. Men who also hold on to the operator are also socially criticized to a certain extent.

Borrowing an example from Asia, bicycles used for transporting people have been transformed and designed to cater to the needs of the passengers. An extra wheel and a carrier have been attached to the bicycle design, expanding it in size and making it more spacious for passengers in general and more favourable for female passengers. Perhaps the narrow roads within the Ugandan borderland would be a hindrance to this transformation to the boda-boda design, which was strategically kept narrow and light to grant easy passage through the narrow pathways in the porous border.

Women's Involvement within the Industry

The impact of women in daily transportation should not only be restricted to the "journey-to-work" or the mode of transportation used, but a consideration to the contribution of women to the existence of daily transportation is also of importance. Apart from being the main customers of the industry, women in the borderland are involved in the industry in other ways, for instance, their daily contribution to the life of the transporters. Take, for instance, the women who prepare meals for the transporters or the women who vend around the stages of operation or those who hire their bicycles to be used as boda-boda. On a daily basis, these women pull the strings that make it possible for the transporters to do their job.

Dwelling on the case of women who prepare meals for the transporters in the borderland, some women have set up mini-kitchens to sell food to boda-boda

operators; these mini-kitchens mostly offer some shade from an umbrella or a plastic structure under which there are two or more cooking stoves fuelled by either charcoal or wood, plus a bench where customers can sit. These women sell their food at a very low price and their target customers are the boda-boda operators. Some women, however, rent rooms that they have transformed into cooking and eating spaces, but these rooms lack proper ventilation required for a kitchen. The women who rent rooms charge their customers a bit higher compared to those that set up umbrellas or plastic along the road side. In the evenings and throughout the night, a number of women set up mini-kitchens along the border highway, which only have charcoal cooking stoves and a metal grill or a large wok, and these women sell food and tea to the transporters who work during the night and also to the people in transit.

In some countries, for example, Mexico, and in some parts of Asia, governments reserved spaces for women along the transit routes and at bus stops to set up mini-kitchens and eating places in a way to promote and empower women (Uteng, 2011). In Uganda, the government has not yet implemented a strategy to support such women, and at the border the highway on the Ugandan side is further congested, especially in the evenings by the mini-kitchens set along the road.

The following is a tale of a woman who vends food at the border:

I am a single mother with two children, and I have made a living by selling cooked groundnuts and yellow bananas to the boda-boda operators. I came to do my business at the border because of the vast number of boda-boda operators in Busia. I find the operators at their respective stages of operation, and that's where I sell to them; others stop me when am walking as they are riding and they buy from me. Surely, if the operators in Busia were removed, my business would collapse because they are my main customers; my other customers are in Kenya across the border, and I walk freely across the border to sell especially my ripe bananas. I sell the groundnuts ranging from 300 ugshs to 500 ugshs, and at 1000 ugshs the customer gets a full cup. I sell groundnuts with my big sister, and we sell them according to the season; currently, it is the groundnut season, but when it is over, we vend ripe bananas or sugarcanes. The sugarcanes and groundnuts have seasons, but the ripe bananas are always available, they have no season. But we do not carry the sugar canes because the sugar canes are heavy, we sell them in our compound at home. This business has enabled me to become independent and provide for my children; I can also afford to rent a house. (research informant in Busia)

The above passage is a tale of a woman who vends groundnuts, ripe bananas, and sugarcanes to the boda-boda operators. She claims that her business is largely

dependent on the presence of the operators in the borderland, and, just like her, many other women have been attracted to do business at the border and target mainly the boda-boda operators.

Saving SACCO's, as an initiative to economically boost the boda-boda operators, has also benefited some women in Busia. Women participated in these saving schemes, especially in the top most saving scheme that was by then held by the NRM boda-boda association. During the time of the research, very few women were participating in the SACCO, but many more women were being encouraged to participate. A saving SACCO works in a merry-go-round system: normally, the participants agree on an amount of money to deposit in the SACCO either on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. The participants then randomly choose numbers that position them in turns to receive the whole sum of money that has been pulled from all the participants either on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. The women who participate in SACCO's are able to get an economic boost to set up small businesses, which are mainly small stalls where they would sell vegetables.

As mentioned in the previous section, women in Busia are forbidden to ride a bicycle, let alone operating a boda-boda; therefore, women who own bicycles have invested in the industry by hiring them out to men to be used as boda-boda. Nyachieu (2013) noted that women hired out up to 30% of the bicycles used as boda-boda in Busia. Women came to own bicycles by either inheritance or by purchasing them, the latter being practised by financially stable women, especially those involved in cross-border trade. Many operators joined the industry with no boda-boda of their own and had to hire one at least until they could afford their own boda-boda (Malmberg-Calvo, 1994). The price of hiring out a boda-boda ranged from stage to stage; the operators at the border stage rented the bicycle at a higher price compared to the operators who were far from the border because it is believed that the operators at the border make more money compared to those far from the border. It is also difficult to hire out a motorcycle to be used as boda-boda; the operators claim it is expensive since there are not many customers within the municipality for the motorcycle.

From this industry, women have built up their livelihoods; however, the space occupied by the operators is threatened by state policies, negative social perceptions and interpretations regarding the operators (Etukuri, 2015), unfriendly traffic regulations, and poorly designed roads (Ochieng-Egessa, 2003), which all coincide to threaten the existence of the industry. Scholars presented the experiences of the operators from a male perspective, as the beneficiaries from the existence of the industry and victims of the threats that befall the industry (Howe, 2002; Kisaalita-Sentongo-Kibalama, 2007; Goodfellow-Titeca, 2012). However, the direct and indirect participation of women in the industry, especially in Busia, is scantily represented, yet their livelihood is also equally threatened by the existing threats the operators are facing. For instance, the unsafe, poorly designed

roads that lack lightings affect the operators, especially those who ride at night, but this has put women at an even greater risk because they can easily fall victims to sexual harassment, especially in the unsafe pathways locally known as *panya* routes, which are used by most boda-boda operators while crossing the border in fear of passing through the formal customs border point.

The developed world is resorting to non-motorized transport as a way of conserving energy and the environment – in countries like the Netherlands (Peters, 2013) bicycles have become part of the urban cultures, and by creating a safe riding environment people are encouraged to ride (Peters, 2013). In South Africa, there are campaigns to encourage non-motorized transport. Meanwhile, in Busia, non-motorized transport already exists, and the government policies and poor road designs accompanied by a non-safe riding environment (Ochieng–Egessa, 2003) are slowly destroying the cheapest, environmentally friendly mode of transport. The effect will leave a great number of male youths unemployed, and the women in the borderland will suffer the most because they will have then to walk long distances through the porous borders with heavy loads on their heads on a daily basis.

Conclusions

To conclude, the position of women as customers in the informal cross-border transportation network was majorly visible for they were culturally forbidden to ride the boda-boda as operators. Women were also positioned as indirect contributors to the daily life of the operators by selling them food. Some women also hired out their bicycles to be used by the operators as boda-bodas. Although women were involved in the industry, their needs were not catered for or represented by the boda-boda industry, especially in the design of the boda-boda. The government has not yet implemented any strategies to help these women at the border, although it has assisted the operators with financial incentives, especially the NRM boda-boda association.

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RESEARCH NOTES



Online Manipulation in Inspirational Messages: A Case Study

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Abstract. In September 2018 in Germany, you can find outdoor, therefore offline advertisements for an online service provider: Facebook. The main message of the campaign is that Facebook is fighting against “fakeness”: against fake accounts and fake news. This is only one example for the relevance of “fakelessness” and credibility nowadays. This paper copes with online manipulation, drawing on the example of a case study on Hungarian motivational messages. Inspirational messages (as well as fake news, pseudo-scientific texts) often show clear signs of deceptive nature, still they are shared by many users on Facebook. What could be the reason for this? The paper tries to answer the question by analysing the characteristics of inspirational messages.

Keywords: influencers, online manipulation, inspirational messages

1. Influencers and Manipulation

Online influencers have a genuine relationship with their audiences and know how to build human connections on a level that brands cannot achieve through traditional forms of advertising.¹ Their reach magnitude can be small or large, influencing a tight-knit community of aficionados (micro-influencers) or talking to the world masses (those with celebrity status) (Pellicer, 2018). Macro- and micro-celebrities with many social media followers also act as opinion leaders (Marwick–Boyd, 2010; Senft, 2008), which can be quite profitable for them: marketers increasingly often contact online opinion leaders to make subtle or express reference to a product or service in consideration of financial support or

1 In influencer marketing, two further categories are used in addition to influencers based on their relationship and financial arrangements with the company: brand ambassadors and brand advocates. In short: brand ambassadors are always paid and are hired for long-term collaborations. They often appear on branded materials and are the face of the company on their advertising. Brand advocates are the most passionate and loyal customers, but they can also be the employees, partners, or shareholders of a company (Pellicer, 2018).

certain products (or product samples). This is the simplified description of the technique called influencer marketing. Influence, persuasion, and manipulation are three strongly interrelated concepts.

Presenting the extensive literature of verbal and visual manipulation is beyond the scope and intent of this paper; so, only a few defining elements are outlined here. Manipulation is a type of influence aimed at influencing others' ideas, opinion, emotions, and behaviour (cf. Van Dijk, 2006). Anett Árvay writes that “communicators try to create a standpoint or opinion in the audience that is favourable to them or to change (or strengthen) the opinion of the audience in a given topic” (Árvay, 2007: 2). István Zentai terms manipulation those instances of influencing “where the target person is unaware of being influenced but ultimately gives the intended reaction” (Zentai, 1998: 14). Eszter Bárházi (2008: 445), however, argues that “this definition ignores the [...] situation where the target person is aware of being influenced and still reacts as intended by the influencer”. This controversy is eliminated in István Síklaki's definition: “successful manipulation [...] creates a paradox situation in which the manipulator achieves its goal whether you give credit to him or not” (Síklaki, 1994: 129). While persuasion is a two-way process, manipulation – as it is based on a manipulative intent – seems more unidirectional.

My perception is that the authors (or specialized sharers) of online motivational text-image messages manipulate their audience and forge the identity of a wise, reliable, and experienced media or person in the eye of their audience.

2. Narrative Images and Storytelling

The simplification of producing, editing, and distributing pictures has also changed their role. Traditionally, pictures were treated as illustrations to texts or as a kind of decoration (e.g. product shots, stills) which represents an ideal world. However, today's fierce fight for consumers' attention requires new types of visual content. The so-called storytelling pictures (including graphics, photos, and videos) build on the visual narrative. This shift of perspective is reflected in the collections of stock photo agencies (such as GettyImages or Shutterstock) which used to prefer standard, neutral, and therefore widely usable pictures. Today, those pictures become so-called *swipe-stopping images*, which look realistic and authentic. In addition, a “good” picture catches the eye, it is easily remembered, emotionally touching, more than the optical repetition of the text and reflects something more than what is evident, that is, it tells a story (Baldoni, 2011).

So, how could we define the concept of visual storytelling? It is the telling of stories in a visual format (image, video, infographic, presentation, meme, or other format based on visuality) through the mass media (typically in social media but

also in print media), primarily in a way that triggers emotional reactions. It often serves marketing purposes, in which case the visual story is built around a brand and the related offers (in terms of use for marketing purposes, cf. Walter–Gioglio, 2015). As opposed to advertisements based on generalities, the speciality and difficulty of storytelling marketing is that it focuses on a single specific example (so, it should be carefully selected) and appeals to emotions instead of reason.

A good (impressive) story, whether visual or verbal, uses the following five building blocks: 1. Hero: the story must have a character with imperfections who the audience can identify with. 2. Conflict: if the outcome corresponds to what is expected, the story is boring and banal (e.g. a diligent student from a decent and supportive background becomes a successful adult); however, if the outcome is achieved through struggles and difficulties, the story becomes exciting (e.g. a poor individual works hard and becomes rich; the hero fights for love). 3. Impulsivity: as mentioned before, the story will have a lasting effect if it can provoke (positive or negative) emotions from the audience. 4. Potential virality: simple enough to be remembered but interesting enough to be shared with others. 5. Meaningful essence: it is important that the core message, the purpose, the intended effect of the story is clear (e.g. a joke exerts its effect through the punch line, a moral story through the lesson; Bergström, 2009: 14–74; Gallo, 2016).
Criteria for narrative images: 1. authenticity; 2. uniqueness (i.e. focus on special moments instead of stereotypical situations); 3. involvement of various senses; 4. use of archetypes (common patterns, roles) such as the warrior, the healer, the seducer, the magician, the protector, etc. (Sammer–Heppel, 2015).

3. Motivational Messages

Today, motivational messages combining images and texts represent a significant portion of content shared on Facebook. Typically, these image-text combinations comprise a quotation and an appropriate picture, and their declared aim is to inspire contemplation in the reader or provide spiritual support for them (and thus propagate content in social media).

I assume that 1) due to their virality, the messages empower sharers to influence and manipulate the audience; 2) this aim is achieved through verbal and visual story-telling, as suggested by collections of tips for creating online content. These hypotheses are tested in this study.

My argument is that the authors of online motivational messages forge an influencer identity for themselves – based on the large number of reactions and shares –, and they benefit from this role not only in the online world but also beyond, translating this advantage to specific (financial and influence power) gains.



Figure 1. Examples of motivational messages

3.1. Questionnaire Survey

In order to prove the hypotheses, first, a questionnaire survey was conducted among people sharing motivational messages.

The survey was open from December 2017 to March 2018 and received 183 responses. Data cleaning (deleting irrelevant and trolling answers) left us with a total of 127 valid response forms. All of the respondents were quite active social media users (so-called heavy users, cf. Tófalvy 2017). Based on the answers to the question “What do you usually do with motivational messages?”, they typically only read, like, share, and comment on the messages (in this order, cf. Veszelszki, 2018). So, passive content consumption is the most common activity, followed by predefined communication activities, and the rarest one is making comments which require active contribution. Many respondents wrote that they save the images (as paradoxical as it may sound, the following content management method is a real one: “If I like it, I share it with myself, without others seeing it!”).

Regarding manipulation, the source and credibility of the message could be very important. A large majority of respondents said that they did not care about the source, only the nice/inspiring/etc. thought; nearly a quarter of them preferred posters sharing their own thoughts to quotes from well-known people. Some noted that they accepted quotes from people “who have achieved something in life and their experience can be inspiring for others”.

A respondent called attention to the “uselessness” of motivational posts (“It may be that many people are inspired by these thoughts, but it is much easier to push the ‘like’ button than to live by these words. Sometimes I have the impression that these shares are faked. We may agree with the thoughts, but we find it difficult to associate with them”). Nevertheless, the responses suggest that inspirational messages have played an important role in several respondents’ lives: they helped in a concrete workplace problem,² raised new aspects for dealing with difficulties (grief, break-up),³ encouraged the respondent to change his or her lifestyle,⁴ or brought quick relief in a situation.⁵ The messages can offer encouragement⁶ or, due to their general nature, can help overcome the feeling of loneliness.⁷

I was curious to know what the respondents thought about the (actual) purpose of the authors of image-text messages. Most of the answers stated that the aim is to bring a problem or the sharer into focus. Others thought that the actual purpose is to give food for thought, to inspire, to cheer up, and to help. But some respondents believed that the authors try to solve their problems by creating (self-)encouraging messages and expressing their emotions through them. According to less common but still existing opinions, the real purpose is marketing, influencing, and money making (like baiting).

This is related to the question of how respondents perceive the identity of the authors of motivational messages. The vast majority of the respondents perceive them as optimistic, cheerful, romantic, educated and intelligent, humorous, and understanding people (about a virtually unknown person). Some noted, however, that the authors of the messages do not necessarily have personality traits in common and that they were unable to form an opinion about the authors.

Now that we have an insight into the opinion of people sharing motivational messages, we can move on to give a closer look at the messages themselves. In order to clarify the questions left open, I conducted a content analysis.

2 The story of a respondent: “The situation has changed in my workplace, and the managers began to compare workers. Soon enough, everyone had a sinking feeling that they were not good enough. After a while, everyone was afraid of getting fired. And then, one day a quote from Einstein popped up on my screen saying: If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. This didn’t solve my problem but did change my attitude.”

3 “Helps me look at the problem from another angle, from a better perspective.”

4 “I started doing workout because of it”; “It gave me strength when I didn’t want to go to the gym”.

5 “I stopped crying”; “I was down in the dumps but it made me feel better”.

6 “I gave up my dreams to listen to the national anthem from the top step of the podium because I made no progress in training. But Katinka and many others managed to get back in the game. So, I should be able to do, too!!”

7 “Especially on All Saints’ Day I can feel that I’m not the only one who has lost her parents.”; “It makes me feel I’m not alone”.

3.2. Content Analysis

Guidelines suggest that the success of online images, shared by many users in social media, is based on storytelling. To check this assumption, I conducted an empirical examination using content analysis as a method. The image-text combinations for the analysis were collected from popular Facebook pages. The selected pages had at least 10,000 likes (some with over 250,000 followers). I collected altogether 100 picture quotes with a high number of shares and reactions (more than 1,000 in total). Images which contained text (quotation) in the description but not on the image itself were not included in the sample. “Facebook Kitsch” images with only phatic expressions on them (such as have a nice day, good night, sweet dreams, etc.) were also disregarded.

In most of the cases, the image (depicting persons, landscapes, or everyday objects) served only as background for the text. None of the typical characteristics of narrative images (authenticity, uniqueness, the involvement of various senses, use of archetypes) were dominant in these images: all of them were completely average that fit to almost any situation in life.

A quarter of the sample was about love, another quarter about knowing ourselves and others; the third biggest category was struggle with difficulties, while several messages were built on the metaphor “life is a journey”. This sample contained only a few religious messages. None of the special cases (like infidelity, divorce, grief, childbirth) appeared in the examined messages, which rather contained generalities. The use of archetypes is the only characteristic that appeared visibly in the analysed images: the adorable little child, the cute animal, the sentimental film character. Emotional collages often included hearts and smileys in support of the message. Highly emotional images can also be considered as an indicator of manipulative intent.

After looking at the general characteristics of narrative images, I examined whether the main components of storytelling (hero, conflict, impulsivity, potential virality, and meaningful essence) are present in the messages. The latter two were always present as the examined messages were widely spread over the Internet. In 28 instances, the image-text combination was clearly emotional. Only 3 out of the 100 messages had an actual hero character (e.g. a mother looking after her disabled grown-up child at the age of 101), and only 4 depicted a conflict between an expected and an unexpected situation. This suggests that the wisdom messages were successful among certain consumers not because of their uniqueness, which is a key element in storytelling, but because of their general applicability to every situation and person.

Reference handling was also considered an important aspect as making or not making reference to the source can be a means of manipulation: on the one hand, reference to a person lends their authority to the message, while, on the other hand,

if no reference is made to the author, the authenticity of the quote becomes even more difficult to verify; also, if the poster creates the impression that he/she is the author of the quotation, it is a form of manipulation (as the poster looks smarter than he/she is). In 60 of the 100 messages, the author remained unidentifiable, 20 messages referred to a famous person, and another 20 messages featured the text as the poster's "own" thoughts. In the two latter cases, the author was named. The name of the posting website, as it has a marketing value, appeared on 54 images. The veracity and original source of such messages are difficult, if not impossible, to check (and many users do not even try to check the correctness of alleged quotations). This asymmetry in information, which could well be regarded as a manipulative strategy, puts the user sharing the text into a dominant or even opinion-leading position.

Finally, the analysis looked at the argument techniques of deception. 26 texts contained context-independent fallacies. Instances include mistranslation: the following text which was translated from English to Hungarian and is now translated back literally: *There is always a little truth behind every "Just kidding". A little "I don't know" behind every knowledge. A little "I don't care" behind every emotion. And a little "It's ok" behind every pain.* The first sentence was translated well, but then the translator could not follow the logic of the sentences and mixed up the hidden feelings and the uttered words. Parts of the texts were characterized by pleonasm (e.g. *The people you think of before you go to bed and after you get up are very close to your heart.*). Exclusivity and permissible opposites are contrasted in the following example: *Men think they choose women but almost always women choose men.* And, although it is not a flaw in the argument but a stylistic fault, mixed metaphors also appeared many times in the texts (e.g. *They say it is easy to forget your problems when the weather is good. But a cool breeze is enough to blow reality back to our faces.*).

4. Conclusions

The study is primarily concerned with two hypotheses and set out to test them by means of a survey and content analysis.

The experts of online content production always underline that verbal and visual storytelling are key to success. This examination, however, shows that posting verbal and visual banalities online can also be an effective strategy with a viral outcome under certain circumstances or in a specific target group. Data showed that banality and generality are key to the success of motivational messages, which clearly breaches a fundamental principle of creating online content. This is evidently a novelty in web content creation.

Motivational messages, that is, the inspirational image-text combinations shared in social media with an unexpectedly big impact, manipulate viewers

(primarily by making both the authors and sharers look highly compassionate and/or intelligent, granting them influence and benefits beyond the social media: e.g. they publish books and give expensive motivational speeches). This content production method is significant as the high number of shares gives information power to the poster person. The poster thus becomes an opinion leader (influencer) who may use this power to influence the thoughts, opinions, emotions, and behaviour of others in a way that the target person is not aware of the influence (cf. Falyuna, 2016). Influencing through motivational messages is probably not so dangerous as pseudoscientific messages and fake news (Aczél, 2017; Brodnig, 2017; Falyuna, 2017; Veszelszki, 2017) and has a smaller negative individual, physical, mental, financial, and social impact, but it is still suitable for identity forging by the poster. This hypothesis has been proven.

Hungarian sociologists and cultural anthropologists Ágnes Kapitány and Gábor Kapitány also reflected on this phenomenon saying: as the consequence of the overly individualistic mindset of our age, the individual is increasingly directed from the outside. They recognized that individualization will lead to a situation where the “‘inner-directed’ morals-driven individual is increasingly replaced by the masses of individuals who are dominantly characterised by adaptation (...) by the uncritical following of economic powers and the media which uses advertisements and other manipulative methods. This results the paradox that while individuals are becoming more and more ‘individualised’” (Kapitány–Kapitány, 2013: 118) they are also becoming more and more vulnerable and dependent.

Online knowledge is not always reliable: the author, the sources, and the recency are often unknown, and the information is often uncontrolled, which means that anyone can publish anything. There can be misleading, pseudo-scientific, and sometimes outright harmful views on the Internet, which inadvertent readers can easily take for granted. The sources of knowledge have changed, and so Internet users have to develop a critical mind, a skill for the critical evaluation of information as part of their new media competence.

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Sapiophile: University Teachers as Vloggers

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Abstract. The *Sapiophile* video blog¹ was launched on 24 October 2016 by the PR team of the Miercurea Ciuc campus of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania. The vlog appeared on the Faculty's YouTube channel² and was promoted on the Facebook social networking site. The vlog has already reached its second season, and there were presented more than 16 episodes.³ Four university teachers present on a monthly basis in 5–10-minute videos scientific topics in a science-promoting way. This vlog opened a new chapter in the University's branding and PR strategy and reached great popularity among students, among alumni, among the local society but also in the Hungarian mass media and public discourse of Transylvania. This paper, as part of a wider research, will present and analyse the *Sapiophile* vlog as a case study. Beyond the quantifiable parameters (the purpose of the vlog, the list of the presented topics, the technical design, the number of likes, comments, views, shares), it also seeks a qualitative focus through an interview with the director and cameraman of the vlog. Our research questions are: how do digital content consumers become digital content creators? Why does a user of Generation X or Y become a vlogger, which is a typical behaviour for members of Generation Z? Why does a university teacher start vlogging? What are the topics in this digital experiment? What is the vlog's reception among different generations, within and outside the academia? What goals can be identified behind vlog producing? How and when does this digital opening come to fruition? Of course, what kind of damages, barriers, and challenges can there be?

Keywords: video blog, vlog, vlogger branding, content creation

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- 1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmbtZ1wI4RI&list=PLrEwikByefyVr8B4L-ANBP_b80ac5uKyY
 - 2 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLR8MRI3-20apjxIHESL1ZA>
 - 3 At the time of the analysis, in February and March 2018.

1. Introduction

The video blogs started to appear in the virtuality in the last decade and have gained much attention worldwide thanks to YouTube. Even if the history of vlogging is a very short one, the statistical number of dynamic growth since 2005 is very impressive. According to the statistics provided by the *Mefeedia*, the number of vlogs was a few hundred in 2005 but already more than twenty thousand two years later (see *Figure 1*; Gao et al., 2010: 4).

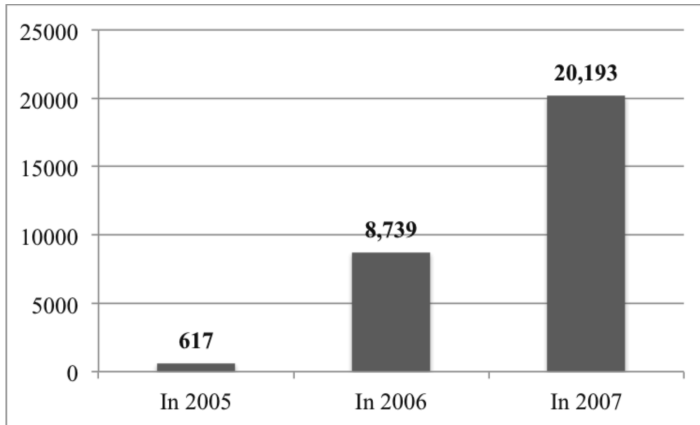


Figure 1. *The increasing number of the video blogs (Mefeedia 2007)*

In 2016 in Miercurea Ciuc, Romania, the PR team of a small and young university⁴ started a new project: launched a vlog on YouTube but disseminated it mainly on the University's Facebook page.⁵ This vlog was something very new and very unusual in many aspects and had a lot of very positive feedbacks from the first moment. This is definitely not a common vlog but still has the character of a vlog, in which university teachers act as vloggers and discuss scientific topics in a less scientific way. Since its start, there have been more than 15 episodes, and we think we can already make a first analysis of the vlog, its vloggers, and the impact as well.

2. Theoretical Framework or a Short Vlog History

Blogging was “invented” in the second half of the 90s, and since then it has integrated as a “quickly spreading passion” in the Internet users' lives (Gao et al., 2010: 2). Previously, blogging was basically a *textual activity*, but since the text is only one aspect of the communication and understanding (Hoem, 2005;

⁴ Founded in 2001.

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/sapientiacsikszereda/videos/335485493701038/>.

Gao et al., 2010) in the process of content creation other aspects emerged as well. As a result of this changing process of the blog becoming more audio-visualized, different types of blogs can be found nowadays; in each type, the content may vary, and also there are differences regarding the ways of how it is presented or written (Gao et al., 2010). Thus, we can find for example a lot of *photoblogs*,⁶ *artlogs*,⁷ *sketchblogs*,⁸ *audio blogs*,⁹ and *video blogs (vlogs)* (Gao et al., 2010: 2).

User-generated videos started to become more and more popular, and *video blogging* became the new way of blogging. The video blogs are blogs, however, not in a textual form any more but in video (Molyneaux et al., 2007) – they are motion picture blogs (Bodoky 2008). Video blogging, shortened as *vlogging*, is a form of blogging, a user-generated form of online communication (Molyneaux et al., 2007: 1). Similar to the blogs, the vlogs are a “new form of online publishing” (Molyneaux et al., 2007: 1), effective means of disseminating information. Vlogs can be recorded at any time, and everyone who has got Internet access and a simple camera is able to create and share an audio-visual content (Molyneaux et al., 2007).

Table 1. *Differences between IPTV, Internet Video, and Vlogging (Gao et al., 2010: 7)*

	IPTV	Internet Video	Video Blog (vlog)
Content	TV programmes, movies	Movies, TV programmes, news, partially user-generated video	Mainly user-generated video in talk-radio format
Length	Long clips or live stream	Long clips or live stream, partially short clips	Short clips (3–5 minutes)
Video Format	MPEG 2/4, H.264 (with HD)	Windows Media, Real, Quick Time, Flash, and others	Mostly flash (often with LD)
Video Quality	“Broadcast” TV Quality, Controlled QoS	Best effort quality, QoS not guaranteed	Often low-quality, no QoS
Content Organization	EPGs by timeline or topic category order	Often by topic category, by view times/upload date, etc.	As dated entry in reverse chronological order
Users	Known customers with known IP and locations	Any user (generally unknown)	Any user (generally unknown)

6 Blogs containing only photos.

7 Online platforms for art sharing.

8 Blogs that contain a portfolio of sketches.

9 Podcasts.

	IPTV	Internet Video	Video Blog (vlog)
Footprint	Local (limited operator coverage)	Potentially supranational or worldwide	Potentially supranational or worldwide
Receiver Device	Set-box with a TV display	PC and mobile devices	Mobile devices and PC
Producing	Professional filmmaking tools for filmmakers	Advanced editing tools for service providers	Simple-to-use editing tools for common users
Transmission	Broadband network with CDN support	Internet access, often using P2P transmission	Internet access, possibly using P2P transmission
Delivery Form	Video-on-demand, live broadcast, delayed live	Video-on-demand, partially live broadcast	Video-on-demand
Interactivity	Programme selection, few interaction	(Sometimes) voting or ranking, with little interaction	Commenting or hyperlinking, social interaction
Searchability	Metadata/EPG search	Metadata/caption-based, partially content-based search	Metadata search, XML-based aggregation
RSS Support	No	Partially yes	Yes
Reliability	Stable	Subject to connection	Subject to connection
Security	Users are authenticated and protected	Unsafe	Unsafe
Copyright	Protected video	Often unprotected	Mostly unprotected
Other Services	EPGs, onsite support	Low-quality on-demand services, generally no support	Generally no support

The authors of the majority of the blogs are usually individuals who present a personal theme (Nardi et al., 2004). With the vlogs, a new revolution arrived in multimedia usage (Gao et al., 2010). Vlogs are conversational videos, where a person speaks “in the form of a talking-head”, similarly to people making conversation on Skype (Biel–Gatica-Perez, 2010: 3): they sit or stand in front of a camera and speak about something. Vlogs may have multiple purposes: media for social commentary, alternative newscasts but also creative outlets or personal online diaries (Molyneaux et al., 2007).

The *life cycle* of a vlog can have a couple of stages: filming and recording phase – firstly, a video is created and edited, usually by an amateur vlogger. The

next one is the post-recording process when the video is edited. In the third phase, the video is distributed in the virtual sphere: the online delivery. After this point, other people (in the vlogosphere or in other circles) can watch it and give feedback (Kim, 2017).

According to a USA study (2007), in vlogs, there appears a single participant (Molyneaux et al., 2007, 2008), and that person is usually a man (58%) or a woman (33%). In those cases when the vlogger was not alone, the secondary participants were also male. Research data show that the majority (61%) of the vloggers are adults, aged between 20 and 50. About one third (36%) were younger, and the average age of the vloggers was 23 (in the case of men) and 21 (in the case of women) years old (Molyneaux et. al., 2007: 4). We could say the average vlogger is a 23-year-old man, who is vlogging usually by himself. A Romanian study speaks about an average age of 17 years (Bajkó, 2015).

With respect to their content, there are many types of vlogs. One can find beauty vlogs, lifestyle, food, or culture vlogs, while others are dedicated to travelling, motivation, cars, sports, education, and a lot of other topics.

Table 2. *Some vlog types*¹⁰

	Vlog type	Main goal
1	Product review	Giving facts about products
2	Prank and Comedy	Humour
3	Beauty/Fashion/Fitness	Giving advice
4	Education/Tutorials	To teach something
5	Lifestyle vlog	Video diary on a person's life
6	Gamer	Presenting games, gaming lifestyle, gaming products
7	Movie/TV/Book Reviews	Presenting a movie, a book
8	Travel	Documenting and sharing a personal journey
9	Pop Culture/Gossips	Commenting on the latest celebrity controversies and news
10	Click Baits	To get users to click on a video

3. Methodology

The first Sapiophile video appeared on 25 October 2016 and the most recent one¹¹ on 14 February 2018: in total, 15 videos. These 15 videos are our primary material which will be analysed. We created a statistical database from all the

10 Source: Vlog Like a Pro webpage (<http://vloglikepro.com/10-different-popular-types-vlogs>).

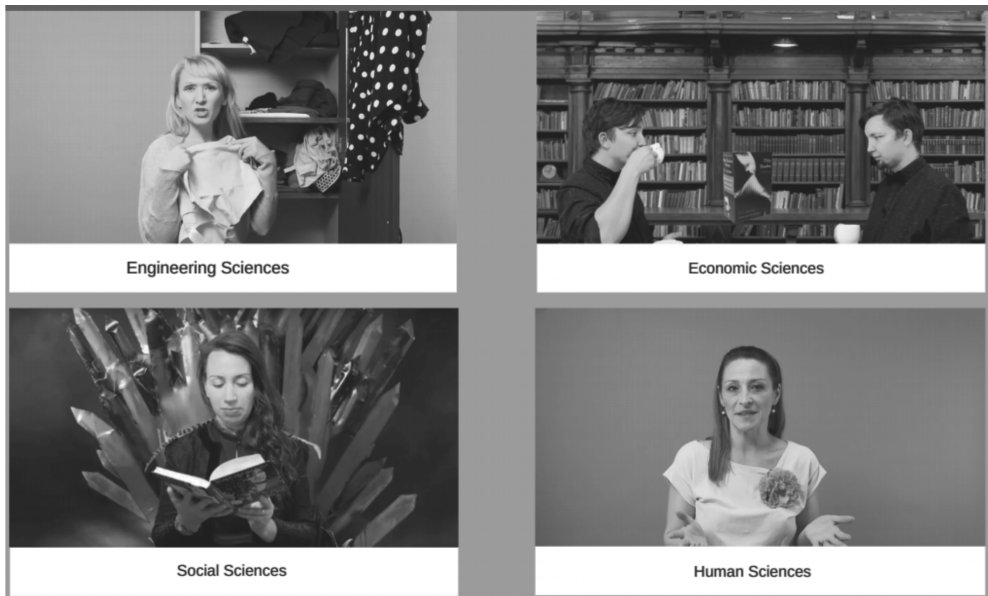
11 At the time of the research (March 2018).

topics, number of likes, number of shares, and comments. Also, we made a short media analysis: what was the reception from the local and regional media.

Our research questions are: 1. Who are the target group of the vlog? 2. How can the vlog be characterized? 3. What can be said from a statistical point of view about the vlog? 4. What are the more popular topics? 5. What manifest and latent goals can be identified behind the vlog?

4. Sapiophile – Branded Online Video Series

The name *Sapiophile* refers to the concept used to identify a person who is attracted to intelligent people. In addition, it refers also to the name of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, used as “Sapi” by students. Ildikó Köllő, a young colleague in the PR team, who is a professional filmmaker, had the idea of making a vlog (Szócs, 2018). The idea was to try out a new and trendy communications form (Szócs, 2018) and find a very good possibility to open towards Generation Z. The PR team and the Dean’s Office supported the idea since it was a very low-budget project. The Faculty had already had a TV studio and a lot of technical equipment. They decided to make short, 5-minute films on scientific topics in a science-popularizing style. The vlog has already had 2 seasons, and during this time four teachers (see *Picture 1*) from different scientific domains were presented as vloggers.



Picture 1. *Four vloggers, four scientific domains*

Among the manifest goals of the vlog, we can count (1) promoting Sapientia University and emphasizing the benefits of choosing as getting a degree there, (2) promoting fields of science which can be accessible for students at the University even beyond the campaign period (early summer, before the university admission), (3) producing and presenting scientific information and content in a less formal way, (4) attracting the attention of teenagers, (5) bringing topics and important matters to public opinion through scientific approach, or (6) showing the expertise of the university staff to people outside the university. There can be found a few latent goals as well: (7) to gain a positive public opinion about the University at the local and regional level, (8) attempt to open to the non-academic community, (9) gain more popularity for the scientists and academics of the University even outside the academic sphere, or (10) help the University become a more active actor in the online sphere as well.

The topics of the vlog vary according to the vloggers' fields of science and scientific interests. The economist presents episodes on how to make (financial) plans that can be fulfilled or how to make pledges to ourselves that we will keep, or s/he speaks about the Black Friday phenomenon and explains the average salary as well. The microbiologist, who represents the engineering sciences, presents very trendy topics: the environmental-friendly way of dressing or cleaning methods. In other episodes, she presents researches which do not have high importance, but we can laugh about their results. On 14 February 2017, an episode was delivered about the chemistry of love, and a lot of people spent 7 minutes with this video on Valentine's Day, reaching high popularity. The third vlogger from the Department of Human Sciences always presents something regarding language or literature: how to learn a new language or how to learn for and pass an exam in Hungarian language and literature or what is slam poetry. The domain of the social sciences offers various topics for a large audience: the Facebook topic is very popular, but changes regarding gender roles, especially female roles, were also followed by many people. Relationship questions also offer topics that preoccupy the majority of the people.

The *Sapiophile* vlog initially could not be designed to gain a "classical" vlog popularity since neither the topics nor the vloggers are "typical" to the vlogosphere. Furthermore, since the vlog's language is Hungarian, it cannot become as famous as an English-language vlog. In Hungary, the most popular vloggers have got more than 100,000 subscribers, and their videos reach a number of views between 500,000 and 900,000 (Demeter, 2017); so, this is the maximum that a Hungarian vlog could achieve. In this context, the *Sapiophile* vlog can show good numbers, and even a few episodes from the second season have reached or almost reached a number of 50,000 views (see *Table 3*), which is a threshold number in the vlogosphere. The episode which analyses Facebook and gives some tips for more conscious use has reached more than 64,000 views (see *Table 3*).

Table 3. *Statistics regarding the Sapiophile vlog*

	Topic	Field of Science	Length	Views on Facebook	Views on YouTube	Likes	Comments	Shares
0101	Purposeful Planning	Ec.	05:26	12,000	1,395	193	7	91
0102	Environmentally-Friendly Dressing	Eng.	08:12	23,000	1,523	308	8	281
0103	Black Friday	Ec.	08:20	13,000	773	195	2	106
0104	Environmentally-Friendly Detergents	Eng.	09:12	25,000	1,780	297	8	251
0105	New Year's Resolutions	Ec.	07:14	26,000	815	293	6	156
0106	The Chemistry of Love	Eng.	07:12	28,000	522	391	1	172
0107	Funny Researches	Eng.	07:12	33,000	506	352	1	126
0108	The Average Salary	Ec.	08:06	25,000	399	209	1	108
0201	Tips for Learning a Language	Human	07:19	33,000	936	424	13	222
0202	Last-Minute Tips for Graduation Exam	Human	09:19	49,000	478	433	16	322
0203	Facebook	Social	08:41	64,000	495	764	24	346
0204	The Hungarian Language's Day	Human	08:30	25,000	1,046	327	10	178
0205	Female Roles	Social	10:40	39,000	182	509	39	162
0206	Slam Poetry	Human	10:01	23,000	116	312	5	76
0207	Couple Relationship Challenges	Social	08:50	24,000	372	547	13	174

Beyond the measureable numbers, an important achievement of the vlog is its impact on the local and regional mass media. After delivering a new episode, the important media organs are taking over the video and publish it on their own sites either without any further additions or with detailed (positive) criticism. At the beginning, the first two vloggers were also invited to a TV programme¹² to present the vlog, and an online newspaper also published an interview with them.¹³

If we want to compare the *Sapiophile* vlog to the vlogs in general, we have to conclude that *Sapiophile* is a vlog, of course, but a little bit different from the mainstream vlogs. First of all, the topics which are presented here are not mainstream vlog topics (see *Table 2*) since the university teachers do not give tips regarding e.g. make-up, or they do not share their private lives. The topics – and, thanks to this, the content – of the vlog are much more restricted: in vlogs, people can talk about almost anything in any way; the university teachers, however, have to try to keep to a certain scientific question or approach. According to the literature, the majority of the vloggers make their own videos in an amateur or semi-amateur way. In the case of the *Sapiophile* vlog, the video is a professional product made by a professional filmmaker who not only records and cuts the film but also adds a lot of funny contents to the final video.

12 <http://csik.sapientia.ro/hu/hirek/az-aktualis-musorban-a-sapiophile-videoblog-szereploi>.

13 <https://liget.ro/studio/egyetemi-vloggerek-kamera-elott-az-oktatok>.



Picture 2. Hungarian headlines about the vlog in the regional online media

While vlog production and consumption is characteristic rather of Generation Z, the vloggers of the *Sapiophile* belong to generations X and Y. Meanwhile, vloggers are usually men; yet, in our case, women are in majority. Although we can identify as a main goal the promotion of the University among members of the younger generation, we cannot specify a strict target group who they are trying to communicate with. We could say the videos speak to almost everybody of any age-group.

Table 4. The *Sapiophile* vlog compared to mainstream blogs

Characteristic of Vlogs		<i>Sapiophile</i> Vlog
Mainstream vlog topics	TOPIC	Non-mainstream vlog topics
Anything	CONTENT	Scientific topics explained simply
Spectacular, eye-catching	VISUALITY	Very spectacular, eye-catching
Usually amateur	PRODUCTION	Professional
Personal space, usually home	SCENE, DECOR	A studio
Generation Z	TARGET GROUP	There is no specific target-group focus
Mainly males of Generation Z	VLOGGER	Members of generations Y and X (3 females, 1 male)

Characteristic of Vlogs		<i>Sapiophile</i> Vlog
Not required	EXPERTISE	Requirement, expert in a field of science
Casual	VLOGGER'S OUTLOOK	Office/casual
Skype-style, talking head, showing personality	VERBAL EXPRESSION FORMS	Scenario-like, very plain
Live speech, showing personality	NON-VERBAL EXPRESSION FORMS	Sobriety
Showing personality	HUMOUR	Sobriety

Despite the fact that usually the vlog is a “publicly private content” (Bajkó, 2015), in the *Sapiophile* videos, the private life of the vloggers remains hidden in most of the cases. This can be said about the verbal and non-verbal forms of expression as well: even if these videos are not quite academic lectures, the vloggers are much more formal than vloggers usually are. Sobriety is a very important characteristic of *Sapiophile*. However, humour is important as well: even if the university teachers cannot make fool of themselves, thanks to the cut, the videos are very funny, and many people give positive feedbacks on what a good laugh they had at it.

5. Final Remarks

Even if the *Sapiophile* is not a usual vlog, it is still a vlog. The vlog project gains a very important reputation for the University, which could not be achieved by any other means before. The vloggers who appear in the episodes are not celebs and do not want to become ones either; still, the videos – besides the fact that the institutional branding was accomplished – help the teachers to become more popular not only in the academic sphere but also among students. These videos also helped the University to connect with other institutions and researchers, since a virtual product can go beyond geographical boundaries.

The impact of the vlog, however, cannot be decided at the present moment since the time period is too short, and such impact is hard to measure. An important impact could be if high school teachers would integrate in their lessons once in a while a video when discussing a certain topic or when a first-year university student says that he/she chooses this university because of the vlog episodes. But at this moment, at this first look, we can already conclude that this vlog idea was very unusual for a university; however, but we are positive that a lot of other universities are fuming about not having them the idea.

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Young Children’s Digital Practices in the European Context: Insights from Romania

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Abstract. The present research note is aimed at exploring the impact of the digital world on the online and offline practices of young children aged 4–8. The empirical research¹ was carried out from March 2017 to August 2018 in three locations in Romania: Cluj-Napoca, Miercurea Nirajului, and Sfântu Gheorghe. Based on the results of a previous investigation carried out in the same locations during the period of 2015–2016, the exploratory qualitative research has concluded that young children have a low level of digital literacy due to their parents’ and educators’ lack of ICT knowledge and skills. Issues like online privacy and security are rarely of adults’ concern: they worry more about their children’s eyesight and social isolation.

Keywords: digital literacy, digital practices, young children, Romania

1. Research Background

Today, we live in a media-rich digital age (Deuze, 2017) – in a social context that creates new rituals and routines (Gagyí, 2017; Galera-Matsumoto-Poveda, 2016). The bulk of Internet-use research has targeted young people because they spend most of their time on the web (Prievara, 2018), but since 2012 the spread of smartphones has turned the attention of researchers towards children (Bakó–Tóké, 2017; Courage, 2017; Hobbs, 2017; Marsh et al., 2018). Children live in an increasingly digitized and mediated environment, and so their daily connection to communication technology is organic (Tóké, 2017).

Researchers divided the Internet into generational groups: Generation X (1960–1979), Generation Y (1980 to 1995), and the “digital native” Generation Z (1996–2009). The “alpha generation” of those born after 2010 is the target group of our research, including 4–8 year olds – children born between 2010 and 2014. Our previous research – *Digital and Multimodal Practices among Romanian Children* (2015–2016) – had the following conclusions:

1 Research funded by Sapientia Foundation – Institute for Research Programmes.

– There is a plethora of digital tools in the environment of children, both traditional and new media. Young children usually spend about an hour using digital devices in the proximity of their parents. It was uncommon for kindergarten children to use digital devices on their own, without parental supervision. School children use their digital devices in their own room and on a daily basis, often for hours.

– Children are keen on using tablets and their parents' smartphones. The scope of their activities is narrow as they are most often watching cartoons on YouTube or playing games downloaded from Google Play. The favourite device of school children is the tablet, their favourite platform is YouTube, while their favourite games are Minecraft, Angry Birds, Crossy Road, and GTA.

– Parents appreciate interactive online spaces and digital devices as learning and information-seeking tools, but they are worried that their children spend too little time outdoors and fail to develop their social competences if lured by digital devices.

– The digital competence of kindergarten children is low: their activities are mainly driven by intuition, trial-and-error, and imitation. They learn easily simple tasks like launching cartoons or starting games. However, their media consumption habits are driven mainly by entertainment purposes. They find their favourite games, songs, and cartoons but do not know more sophisticated applications such as digital drawing programs.

– Most parents are basic and passive users of ICTs, do not have high or medium-level digital competences, and as a result the mediation of children's digital activities is primarily solved by using restrictive instead of proactive strategies. Children are not prepared for Internet security and data protection issues. Due to the lack of digital competences, children are at risk of cyberbullying and data theft, as well as their parents and teachers.

2. The Digital World: Opportunities and Challenges

Digital culture offers many opportunities for children, parents, and teachers to learn by playing or to play creatively (Hrubos, 2017; Marsh et al., 2018): they can improve their language skills, geographic and historical knowledge, watch educational films, or learn to count and to code.

Digital culture not only offers opportunities but also widens digital gaps and inequalities if the child lives in a disadvantaged economic and cultural environment or “information poverty” (Rab–Z. Karvalics, 2017: 71). Schools should be the spaces of bridging the gap, but they are not prepared for it. István Polónyi's sceptical essay (2017) directly questions the impact of the digital switchover on education, and others are sceptical of the “push-button” pedagogies:

changing attitudes is a long process (Bakó–Tőkés, 2018; Blau-Hameiri, 2016; Buda, 2017; Koltay, 2017; Kontovourki et al., 2017; Pempek-Lauricella, 2017). Although toddlers navigate easily in the maze of intuitive, interactive applications, family members' help is often needed, especially of the mother and the older brother, when something goes wrong, is not user friendly, or does not work. No matter how intuitive an application is, it is easier to use it if the child accesses it in his or her native language. Only ten percent of popular applications for children are available in Hungarian, while in the Netherlands this proportion is 50%. The development of communication skills in general and of digital skills in particular is more effective when using one's native language (Sari et al., 2017).

The *Salvați Copiii* child protection NGO in Bucharest recommends the following educational mobile applications for children: Big Brain, Wild Web Woods, Excursie la Roma (A Trip to Rome), Criminal Investigation, Club Penguin, Minimax TV Games, Safety Land, NetSmartKidz, KidsComJrGames, WebonautsInternetAcademy, and Jester (Salvați Copiii, 2016).

3. Digital Competences: What Should We Evaluate?

There is no generally accepted, unified view of digital competences today, but an evaluation grid can be developed based on the European Union framework (Nyikes, 2017). The elements of such competence measurement can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. *Digital competences framework (Nyikes, 2017: 325)*

Competence areas	Digital competences
1. Information	1.1. Browsing: search and filter information 1.2. Evaluation of information 1.3. Storing and retrieving information
2. Communication	2.1. The impact of technology 2.2. Data content and sharing 2.3. Participation in the online society 2.4. The use of digital channels 2.5. Netiquette 2.6. Managing digital identity
3. Content	3.1. Developing content 3.2. Integration and reuse of content 3.3. Copyright and permissions 3.4. Programming skills
4. Security	4.1. Data protection tools 4.2. Personal data, protection of digital identity 4.3. Security awareness

Competence areas	Digital competences
5. Problem solving	5.1. Solving technical problems 5.2. Identifying user needs and solutions 5.3. Digital device usage information 5.4. Identifying shortcomings of digital competence
6. Knowledge sharing	6.1. Transfer of personal experience 6.2. Transfer of acquired knowledge 6.3. Knowledge transfer via personal example

Nyikes (2017) defines the system of digital competences as digital intelligence, suggesting that new media presupposes the existence of complex knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Kis-Toth et al., 2017). When it comes to educating young children, experts focus on the issue of communication, security, and knowledge transfer (Courage, 2017; Livingstone et al., 2017; Mihai et al., 2018; Monteiro et al., 2016; Vaala–Jordan, 2017). However, there is little systematic research done on the digital knowledge, skills, and attitudes suitable for very young users: what should be taught to them and how?

Romania has the lowest level of digital literacy among European Union countries, as shown in the table below, highlighting Romania, Hungary (a neighbouring country), Estonia (the most digitally advanced post-communist European country), and Denmark – the most advanced EU country according to the Digital Economy and Society Index (2018):

Table 2. *Digital competences in four European Union countries (rank in parenthesis)*

Criteria (% of the population)	RO	HU	EE	DK	EU
Internet users	61% (28)	76% (20)	86% (8)	95% (2)	81%
At least basic digital skills	22% (28)	50% (21)	60% (10)	71% (5)	57%

Source: compiled by the author, based on DESI (2018) country reports.
Note: RO – Romania, HU – Hungary, EE – Estonia, DK – Denmark,
EU – European Union average score.

Children learn by playing, and therefore we can assess their skills' development by watching them during gaming, but this entails ethical and methodological issues (Marsh et al., 2017; Neumann-Neumann, 2017; Tőkés, 2016). Their main digital toy is the tablet, but researchers point out that devices and applications alone are not enough to satisfy a child's creativity needs. Marsh et al. (2017) noted that children and adolescents prefer a vast array of applications and digital platforms. This is a serious task for application developers, parents, and educators as it is not easy to produce quality content to suit diversified needs and age-groups (Bihari, 2018; Eslava et al., 2016; Troseth et al., 2017; Uhls-Robbs, 2017).

Digital gaming is undergoing major changes today: on the one hand, more and more young children have access to online content at home – mainly on a tablet or on their parents' smartphones; on the other hand, online and offline spaces are often intertwined, blurred during the process of gaming (Kontovourki et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2016).

Experts highlight new avenues for digital literacy development: Livingstone and Third (2017) emphasize the importance of children's rights, Kucirkova and Flewitt (2018) appreciate personalized digital reading tools, while Sakr, Connelly, and Wild (2018) bet on the creative use of digital images.

4. Research Methodology

The present research is a qualitative exploratory study as our main goal was to deepen our understanding and to observe the changes that took place after our previous investigation (2015–2016).

Research Question

The present research aims at exploring the impact of our digitizing world on the online and offline, real and virtual practices of young children.

Sampling

As young children are a very vulnerable target group, the preparation of the research imposed special attention both methodologically and ethically. While sampling mainly middle-class families, we aimed at reaching occupational diversity: office workers, teachers, healthcare professionals, entrepreneurs, lawmakers, and hairdressers. Our respondents were mainly mothers as they are the main care takers of young children. Ethical principles were also enforced: parents were asked for a written consent to use their children's data for scientific purposes.

The subjects of the research are 4–8 year olds, their parents and teachers. During the research period, the following subjects were under scrutiny, using semi-structured interview and observation:

- 16 kindergarten children aged 4 to 6 and their parents,
- 8 elementary school children aged 7 and 8 and their parents, and
- 11 teachers.

The research was conducted in three locations in Romania: Cluj-Napoca, Miercurea Nirajului, and Sfântu Gheorghe.

5. Main Research Results

5.1. Opportunities and Challenges

The Use of Traditional and Digital Media Devices

The daily routine of 4–8 year olds inevitably includes both traditional and digital media usage. However, the spread of digital devices and activities has not displaced television, which remains an important medium for young children. They watch cartoons on children’s channels, especially on Minimax and M2. They also watch Cartoon Network, Boomerang, and JimJam. Children enjoy the colourful cartoons on the big screen, but most of the time television is a secondary medium, a background of other activities of the child. Children use the television to get prepared in the morning or to rest after pre-school and school programmes. If the family owns a smart TV, parents generally do not use the Internet on the television.

Children no longer sit at a computer or laptop: these larger digital devices are usually for parents. The most commonly used digital device for children is the tablet, which is given as a gift from parents or relatives. It is a handy digital tool, fit for the child’s body size, easy to carry, and easier to operate with the child’s digital skills. Compared to the previous research (2015–2016), however, we have noted a change: children are increasingly using parents’ smartphones. Low-end tablets purchased two-three years ago were broken. Parents did not purchase new or more powerful ones: instead, they give their own smartphones to the child. Kindergarten children do not own a smartphone, but some school children have one: parents purchase a phone in order to follow his/her daily activities.

Popular Digital Activities: How Do They Develop Children’s Digital Competences?

The most popular digital activities of the children under scrutiny were watching YouTube videos and playing games downloaded from Google Play. Playing is more common for kindergarten children than for grades 0 and 1, and the digital activity of pre-school children consists mainly in watching cartoons.

Children in grades 0 and 1 also enjoyed DIY YouTube videos, where children showcase their various activities and encourage viewers to try them out. Kids also love to take pictures and make videos of themselves that they enjoy watching over and over again. Photos are taken primarily with the parents’ smartphones and often deleted later by the parents. Digital activities are dominated by watching YouTube videos.

Watching educational videos is also among children’s digital activities. However, it is not organically integrated in their daily routine neither at school

nor at home, as it is presented in the European literature, encouraging playful learning or creative entertainment (Brand–Content, 2016; Marsh et al., 2018). There is a significant gap between Romania and countries with a more developed digital culture (as shown in *Table 2*): the root cause is primarily the attitude of adults, who need a much greater effort to catch up, but also the fact that there are fewer educational materials and applications in the languages of the Eastern European countries (Sari et al., 2017).

Online/Offline Skills and the Personal Development of 4–8 Year Olds

In the everyday life of the alpha-generation children, there is a mix of online and offline activities. Sometimes, kids watch a cartoon on YouTube while role-playing the same action offline with their toys. Online activities are limited to half an hour–one hour by parents since they try to move their kids towards offline activities.

Children learn by imitation and role modelling. Many parents mentioned that their children were playing with their friends or siblings a YouTube cartoon scene or searching for online content related to the parent's occupation and collecting information about their favourite adult activity. In many cases, parents' interest becomes an area of interest for the children (cooking, car repair, football, hairdressing, manicure, etc.).

There is an exhaustive list of digital game formats from analogue to traditional games (Marsh et al., 2016). The authors distinguish between 16 different types of digital games, from which we have found three types often played by the children we studied: role playing (talking kittens or pets, dress-up games), motion games (played with X-Box or Play Station: dancing, sports), or fantasy games (open-world Minecraft, where the child decides what goals to follow).

There are playful games combining objects and actions for fun and enjoyment. There are rule-based games where kids can use the opportunities provided by the rules to achieve results and gain experience (racing, overcoming obstacles, strategy games). For children aged four to eight, playing is mainly performed offline, and digital games are a small addition to the repository of play facilities. This is also due to the fact that parents do not support the spread of online play as they have no knowledge of useful toys, and they consider digital games to be useless and harmful.

Online Risks and Parental Mediation

Parents and teachers have highlighted that the moderate online activity of young children is due to parental control. The interviewed parents reported, without exception, about limiting the children's screen time and the nature of the content

they consume. Most parents thought it was not necessary to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Internet at such an early age, and instead they would encourage their children to read.

Parents do not consider young children's online activity very dangerous as their children are generally supervised. Among the potential online dangers, they mentioned harmful content as children cannot select and evaluate what is appropriate for them. Restrictions on screen time were considered important in order to protect their children's physical and mental health.

The danger of physical and mental health is an important issue. Using digital devices confines children to the room, and a lack of mobility causes long-term health damage. The other real threat is the mental burden as the child is completely absorbed by the speed, loudness, and colour of the digital world, and they are so excited that normal reality seems boring. Parents emphasized that when their little kids spend more time with tablets or smartphones, they are more irritable or too excited, and sometimes even disturbed. They were scared, and they had nightmares when playing aggressive games or watching scary cartoons.

Livingstone et al. (2017) distinguished two main forms of parental mediation: restrictive and permissive. In the surveyed group, parents were particularly restrictive, considering that children do not need it since school will make digital skill development compulsory anyway.

5.2. Digital Competences of Parents

Parents are Aware that Digital Activities Are a Source of Danger

In our target group, parents (mostly mothers) are passive users on a basic or intermediate level of digital literacy. They use mobile devices on a daily basis. However, many people have indicated that although they have a smartphone at home, they do not use their smart functions because it is too complicated. They are aware of their own user needs and have adequate digital competencies to perform the usual online activities. They are aware that digital activities are a source of danger and can handle a great deal of net security issues.

Parents have little knowledge of how their children can protect themselves from unexpected online dangers, how to filter content that endangers children, or what technical solutions could prevent such hazards. They have medium-level knowledge of information search and communication functions, but many have indicated they are unable to find content for children. Therefore, they mainly allow their children to consume content recommended by others as trustworthy (teachers, other parents, relatives, older kids).

When it comes to social networking sites, Facebook is regularly visited, though there is a declarative criticism of it. Their children are not allowed to use Facebook

nor do they commonly browse its news feed. The platform is usually limited to sharing family pictures. They are not content creators: parents use digital devices for entertainment purposes mainly.

6. Conclusions

To summarize, we will compare the results of the 2017–2018 research to the results of 2015–2016, highlighting the points where trends have changed over the last two years. The environment and target group we are looking at is the same, and so it offers the benefits of longitudinal testing. Eight of the children examined at the first stage of the study were included in this data collection phase, and we specifically asked the parents about how they experienced the change in the last two years.

– Digital media devices continue to be largely present in the kids' lives, but there was an interesting change since the previously purchased tablets started to break down, which parents did not replace with new ones. Instead, old tablets were replaced by the used smartphones of the parents, which were received with satisfaction by children. If the parent replaced his smartphone, the still working but non-telephony device was passed on to the children as these devices were suitable for children's digital activities. They could be connected to a Wi-Fi Internet, cartoon movies could be played on them, and they had the advantageous properties of tablet PCs. These smartphones are not used by children to make phone calls – they do not carry them, but they can play with them at home. Kids often ask for their parents' smartphone because they are faster and better to play on.

– The duration of the digital activity of children is unchanged, 4–8 year olds continue to watch YouTube movies or watch downloaded games for half an hour or an hour a day. There is a difference between the digital practices of pre-school and classroom children and the 1st-grade children who can read and write. The ability to read and write has resulted in the autonomy of digital activities; so, children in the first grade are already engaged in digital activities in their own intimacy.

– The range of digital activities carried by children aged 4–8 is still limited as they are still most often looking at a movie on YouTube or playing games downloaded from Google Play. Sometimes they create home-made videos, but these are not among their daily activities.

– As in recent years, parents have also highlighted the potential of digital space for information acquisition and learning, but their use is considered premature for pre-school children. In their view, the development of digital skills must be preceded by learning to read. At this age, they say, young children learn from each other what they are interested in.

– There has been no development in children’s digital competences over the past two years: a low level of digital competence was characteristic of the children under investigation. The small number of digital activities carried out are mainly for entertainment purposes. Kids find their favourite games, songs, and cartoons, but they cannot use more sophisticated applications (such as digital drawing programs). Compared with the recent data collection, we have not found a change in parents’ digital competences in the target audience currently being studied. Most parents were basic and passive users of digital devices. As a result, parents used restrictive rather than proactive mediation strategies to deal with their children’s digital activities.

– Parents’ digital skills are related to their occupation, and even more so when using their computers and the Internet during their daily work. Parents who work on a daily basis with digital devices have a higher level of digital competence and, accordingly, are more actively involved in shaping their children’s digital experience

Regarding European early childhood digital culture (Marsh et al., 2017), Romanian young children under scrutiny are lagging behind, but this is primarily the result of the combined effect of their micro- and the macro-environment, which could be changed by the joint efforts of the school and the family.

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