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Adaptation(s) to the Digital Society

Abstract

In this study, the author explores the influence of the digital space on social sciences, focusing on sociology, cultural anthropology, and social work. The central theme is how these disciplines find opportunities in the digital world while adapting to the digital society. Two main aspects are highlighted: the digital presence of these fields and the tools available within the digital space to achieve disciplinary goals.

While the digital space enhances knowledge access, it also leads to new forms of deprivation, brings new social problems into the digital sphere, which are not only location-shifting but also introduce new characteristics. Social scientists like sociologists and social workers play a crucial role in supporting marginalized groups, facilitating smoother access to information, and ensuring that digital platforms promote social inclusion. They can also contribute to decision-making processes by using data-driven strategies to benefit communities, emphasizing the positive aspects of the digital transformation.

This study highlights how digital technologies have expanded participatory methods, enhancing communication, collaboration, and goal-setting in both digital and in-person contexts. Additionally, the study investigates the potential of fintech solutions for community-based fundraising and resource mobilization, underscoring the growing reliance on digital tools for achieving social and economic goals. The findings indicate that, despite ethical and practical challenges, there are significant opportunities to advance digital social work, fostering greater community engagement and development through digital innovations. The paper concludes by emphasizing that the social sciences are still in the early stages of adapting to the digital space, presenting opportunities to refine practices and better serve professional goals in the evolving digital age.

Keywords

digital society, digital space, digital social work, fintech solutions, data-driven strategy

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1. Brief Introduction

In my study, I would focus on the trio of social sciences which are observe that society spending a significant amount of time in the digital space. More specifically, I will explore how sociology, cultural anthropology, and social work take advantage the opportunities provided by the digital space and how they should shift towards these possibilities. Overall, two major areas are identified: the presence in the digital space and the use of tools provided by the digital space for achieving disciplinary goals. However, we observe that we approach both aspects cautiously and uncertainly, while discussing that, along with society, problems have also moved into the digital sphere, with new issues emerging.

2. Boundaries and Development of the Digital Space

We have long argued that the internet has changed the world, and it is a sociological fact that it has brought change in many areas but I highlight just the knowledge production, interpersonal relationships, information flow, information bubbles, as well as the characteristics of behavior in the digital space and the social problems that arise there. It goes along with the changes, the role of information (and misinformation) has increased, the role of knowledge has been enhanced, but parallel to this, a new type of deprivation has also emerged, which concerns the various limitations of access to knowledge. The processes of the information society have broadened with the spread of the internet, and we capture increasingly diverse aspects or further problematize them (cf. Z. Karvalics 2021). Thus, we highlight two dimensions of the digital world that will be critically important for the digital social scientist: (1) the provision of information and data in the digital space, the strengthening of real-world helping activities through the use of the digital space, and helping on platforms, and (2) the social problems that have moved into the digital space, which not only have changed location but have also incorporated new characteristics (both beneficial and disadvantageous) and are volatile.

We do not wish to emphasize the unfavorable aspects of this changing world, as we see how information impacts the resources, cooperation, networkedness of communities and how it is play an important role on finding a critical voice, and ultimately social participation of communities. The role of sociologists, social workers or digital social consultants is not negligible: they aid the marginalized people and facilitate their integration, thus making the pathway to access

smoother, reducing information noise, and these social scientists can enter into decision-making processes by supporting data-based strategies, and ultimately utilizing the potentials available in the digital space for the benefit of communities.

The metaverse offers an authentic, attractive space full of opportunities for younger generations. For digital natives, it represents a currently developing, varied, „island-like" world that combines technologies of virtual and augmented reality for higher user experience. However, participation entails entering with a constructed (fictional) character, which also provides a chance for hiding or emerging.

2.1 The Digital Space as a New Field for Social Sciences

Research on the digital space is continuous from the outside and on the sidelines: we observe the study of social platforms, comments, information bubbles, we sense and describe the emerging issues, and utilize the society's accessibility: we deal with arising texts, and conduct surveys to reach those who are appearing in the digital sphere. Only recently has the problematic nature of researchers' entry been examined: what is the role of the digital research persona, where does the boundary of the digital space lie, and how does it differ from real social space in everyday digital practices?

The digital space is not merely technology or a communication tool; it is an environment where human (and culture) converges with the information space (cf: Dodge 2001). It is not just virtual reality, nor merely a collection of immaterial elements. The representations of culture appear in the form of entities manifested as characters and actions (cf. Jakobi 2007). We see the reactions and doubts of digital sociology in response to this.

Bauman repeatedly emphasized – even before the emergence of the virtual world – that we need to think differently about space: while modern individuals lived in a structured time, where there was an established past and a progressive, enduring future with a clear direction of progression but postmodern individuals no longer have these reference points (Bauman, 1999). Discussing postmodern life strategies, Bauman anticipated the experiences of individuals (and researchers) navigating the digital space: avoiding fixation is the cornerstone (Bauman, 1999). He makes this statement while mentioning elements that remain equally relevant today: the fluidity of rules, transience, rejection of responsibility, perpetual presentism, and the necessity of staying in motion. These factors were already crucial for understanding contemporary society, even before the digital space became integral to everyday life. However, as we see today, the evolution of digital space has amplified presentism, intensified transience, and fragmented future perspectives. The digital space is not only the stage for these phenomena but also a catalyst for them.

Moreover, digital space is difficult to delineate: links and hyperlinks continuously lead to new details (as cited by Landow in Nagy, 2016), formerly in a planned and conceptual manner, but today, under the influence of algorithms and artificial intelligence, with even fewer defined boundaries. This alone introduces a perspective in which networks, connections, and distances demand new interpretations.

Yet, alongside uncertainties, there are also opportunities. The foremost advantage of digital space is its research potential: Big Data studies, the use of large language models (LLM), and access to society through virtual spaces. Another opportunity lies in researchers' ability to

conduct real-time digital fieldwork, observe collective (or connective) actions and movements, analyze context-dependent texts, and study the dynamics of opinions.

It is essential to consider knowledge production, intertextuality, and reflexive practices, while also viewing digital space as a synergistic, dynamic, innovative, and inclusive space offering numerous possibilities. When we are discussing digital or virtual space, or examining distinctions between digital and electronic spheres, a crucial aspect emerges: has our activity simply shifted into a virtual environment, or has the digital world become an integrated part of our daily practices? Pink and their colleagues regard the former as a form of hybridity (Pink et al., 2022), however, many scholars go beyond viewing digital work as mere ICT-based communication or predictive modeling and even extend beyond social science research. Instead, they see integration into networks and relational structures as the future direction of development. The use of virtual space is currently unimaginable in the form that is beginning to take shape and which is in the long run, it may enable virtual characters (possibly avatars) to participate, develop, experience personality, and engage in social activities. This will necessitate changes in social science practice, requiring adaptation to virtual social practices that will become accessible following methodological advancements (Relinque-Medina & Álvarez-Pérez, 2024).

3. Digital Social Problems and Challenges

A significant part of society is engaged in the digital space: participating in different segments with varying levels of activity as well as while utilizing digital platforms, users encounter that space is simultaneously more liberated and more unregulated. Many social problems have migrated to the digital sphere, where they continue to expand: debates over self-presentation and representation, an abundance of comments, reactions to one another's opinions – these are widely familiar and have become an integral part of everyday life. Although not everyone has directly encountered explicit sexual or erotic content or violence, most are aware of their presence, just as they are of the various forms of online fraud. However, awareness often remains superficial, and only a small fraction of users possess sufficient knowledge of the risks, leading to a general lack of digital consciousness.

This uncertainty, combined with vague and fragmented knowledge about digital security, provides fertile ground for many problems. Cyber fraud, harassment, and the misuse of data and images are pervasive threats. Additionally, certain digital content and platforms reflect the adaptation of real-world crime into the virtual space – such as the illegal trade of drugs, organs, or weapons, the distribution of pedophilic content, or other activities on the dark web. Furthermore, a not negligible part of the feature of digital space is that how participants communicate, organize themselves, form groups, keep a distance from others, exclude them, and engage in verbal attacks or harm one another. This is a brief summary of how people treat freely, without restrictions, often facelessly, each other and their opinions in digital space, or engage with aspects of each other's lives in virtual sphere. The most striking consequence of this phenomenon as the digital space has become a sphere of performance-based self-presentation, exerting a profound impact on societal reference points and individual self-esteem.

Social problems have not merely transitioned into the digital space; they have also acquired new forms and tools, reshaping their nature and amplifying their effects.

4. Digital Social Sciences

4.1 Ethical Concerns and Uncertainty in the Digital Space

Beyond the uncharted digital territories and the uncertainties in digital platform usage, there are numerous ethical concerns also hinder progress in the digitalization of the social sciences. At every level, issues arise concerning privacy protection, the challenges of maintaining confidentiality, and occasionally emerge the difficulties in interpreting the relevant legal framework. Additionally, collecting and organizing data on vulnerable groups presents further ethical dilemmas. This issue becomes particularly sensitive in social science research focused on illegal or „gray zone" activities.

Beyond ethical concerns, social scientists also face ethical risks in their work. For instance, digital environments can lead to situations where some social workers, who use uncertainly the digital space, allow access to their personal content – in the absence of appropriate regulations and guidelines. This can „violate professional codes and risk self-disclosure towards clients with problems maintaining boundaries themselves" (Nordesjö, Scaramuzzino & Ulmestig, 2021).

The other side is equally complex: researchers and practitioners often gain access to sensitive personal data, yet full and informed consent must be obtained before usage. The difficulty in ensuring such informed consent frequently discourages researchers and professionals from even initiating studies. Even at the stage of reaching out to participants, challenges emerge, as traditional analytical categories — such as gender, ethnicity, and social class — shape research frameworks. However, categories such as disabilities or victimhood require careful handling, often necessitating their transformation into emic (insider-defined) concepts.

Ethical digital conduct, defining boundaries and responsibilities, presents challenges not only for social researchers but also for the target groups and clients involved. This adds an additional burden on professionals, who themselves are often still in the early stages of adapting to digital literacy and competence.

Digital social workers critically examine the impersonality of digital spaces. The anonymity of the digital space and the performance-based nature of self-representation are perceived as significant challenges, leading to questions about the authenticity of working with real experiences. For field social workers and anthropologists, the difficulty extends to relationship-building and establishing the foundations for collaboration. They recognize the need for new communication strategies (Lopez, 2015) and a redefinition of presence, perception of the other, and the dynamics of cooperation.

Although this issue extends far beyond its immediate implications, it is essential to note that legal scholars discuss the rights, violations, and ownership aspects of digital identity. As the metaverse develops, these concerns become increasingly tangible, even if individuals do not yet personally consider blockchain technology or NFTs (non-fungible tokens) in their daily lives (see Z. Karvalics & Nagy, 2017; Kőhidi, 2022). Digital identity is not merely subject to rights and suffer violations (cyberbullying, cyber fraud etc.) — it also emerges as an active participant in the digital world. It is both dependent and autonomous, shaped by algorithmically generated aspirations, preferences, consumption patterns, values, and responsibilities. These characteristics necessitate viewing digital identity as an independent entity and an active agent in the digital ecosystem.

4.2 Reconsidered and New Methods in Research

While the digital space is evolving dynamically, the social sciences are gradually catching up in terms of methodology. Researchers are beginning to adapt methodological tools that enhance the understanding of society, incorporating various information and communication technologies or adapting the capabilities of artificial intelligence.

Online data collection remains a convenient, effective, and widely accepted method within digital research. However, data mining techniques, language model adaptations, and text mining are steadily gaining traction.

Within this transformation, survey methodologies are also being reconsidered: (1) the methodological aspects of conducting surveys in digital spaces, such as how to formulate effective questions without the support of field interviewers; and (2) the challenges of working with unstructured data. The disciplinary ambitions of data science align with the social sciences' increasing reliance on interpretations derived from big data processing (see Kmetty, 2018). Traditional approaches are ineffective in handling unstructured datasets, on the contrary, they contain information from a source and in a quality that was not previously available, so the social sciences are renewing themselves, incorporating and adapting the tools that are already available, thus tools used in the field of data and text mining appear, primarily for recognizing patterns and trends in large amounts of data.

Additionally, sophisticated data visualizations and infographics are emerging as valuable tools for shaping opinions and enhancing comprehension, making social science knowledge more accessible and engaging.

4.3 Digital Fieldwork

For practitioners of digital anthropology, the discipline begins when anthropology designates digital technologies as subjects of study and when fieldwork takes place (also) within digital spaces. It is crucial to recognize that technologies — ranging from virtual reality to streaming services, social platforms to robotics, fake news to cyberbullying — simultaneously reflect the defining characteristics of digital space. While all digital interactions can ultimately be reduced to binary code, they also engage with both material and immaterial realities. The ethics and norms of digital spaces are evolving at a rapid pace, influencing everyday practices in the physical world. Yet, for a long time, digital culture remained an overlooked subject of study. Digital cultural spaces are inherently human constructs, and this has hindered digital fieldwork — historically, researchers have examined digital spaces from the perspective of the physical world, much like interviewing a traveler about their journey from the comfort of their home. However, because people actively shape digital culture, bring their existing cultural frameworks into online spaces, and later integrate these digital experiences into their offline lives, a new perspective is required.

Do the experiences of digital fieldwork differ from those of traditional fieldwork? The nature of field engagement differs: with proper connectivity, digital fieldwork can be conducted from anywhere, even from the comfort of home. The initial phase of arrival and adaptation may feel similar — challenging and full of uncertainties — raising fundamental questions such as: who

am I? what am I doing? where do the boundaries of ethical research lie? However, the ecstatic, immersive presence often associated with fieldwork (see Régi, 2016) may be absent, as may initiation rituals, the sense of communal experience, and the physical dimension of engagement. Nonetheless, the knowledge production process through presence still unfolds, following the same spiral of interpretation and experience. While Régi discusses field experiences in a different context, emphasizing access through personal experience (Régi, 2016. 307), when applied to digital fieldwork, this notion acquires an additional or altered meaning — one that speaks to the accessibility of digital content and the persistence of relationships. This reflection is valid, yet it ultimately echoes concerns inherent in all forms of fieldwork.

What fundamentally distinguishes digital fieldwork is the position of the participant observer, which can be described as self-representation (Zimmermann, Wehler & Kaspar, 2022). This concept encapsulates an individual's characterization, the presentation of their actual and aspirational self, and the practice of self-representation as both a methodological tool and a form of artistic expression.

5. Adapting the Opportunities of Digital Space to Participatory Methods

The digital space does not merely introduce new possibilities for research or facilitate communication; it also expands the scope of participatory methods. It enhances digital and in-person group organization, supports goal development and achievement, and enables resource generation.

5.1 Communication in and with the Field

With the advancement of information and communication technologies and the entry of younger social scientists into the field, the role of digital communication has significantly expanded. It has evolved beyond data management to encompass the flow of information and broader communication strategies. Maintaining contact with local actors, clients, community members, and networks of information — through direct messaging, digital interactions, and even memes — has become an integrated part of everyday practice. However, previously mentioned ethical concerns persist: where do the boundaries of ethical communication lie? How much access to personal spaces should be granted? How can boundary transgressions be prevented? And how can digital communication be effectively incorporated into everyday professional operations? While these questions remain unresolved, the prevalence of online communication continues to grow, facilitating interaction across spatial and temporal distances, both individually and in groups.

During participatory methods the information and communication technologies not only to improve communication efficiency but also to integrate digital tools that aid the communities in task- and time management. Digital resources also support goal-setting processes through visual representation tools such as posters and infographics, while an increasing number of applications facilitate collaborative teamwork. The implementation of participatory methods unfolds in multiple phases — planning and implementation — where digital tools create new opportunities for engagement, opening communication spaces both within and beyond the immediate field.

5.2 From Digital Social Work to Fintech

5.2.1 Digital Social Work in the Digital Space

Digital social work manifests in two primary ways within the digital space: first, as a service provider catering to the needs of clients through direct and indirect interactions; second, as an observational tool for professionals working with the digital-native generation, who mainly passively monitor social activities, digital creations, and interactions taking place online. The former one includes the development of digital platforms that bridge social connection gaps or expand the accessibility of services — primarily through algorithm-driven communication and, increasingly, the integration of large language models that enhance communication and mitigate feelings of isolation.

However, I see even greater potential in the latter. A well-trained social worker can transition into an active participant, utilizing the possibilities of the digital space to address emerging and expanding digital social issues with efficiency and effectiveness.

A digital social worker can engage in online counseling, establish groups, and facilitate group work. They can also become present in digital spaces frequented by their real-world clients, whether in virtual gaming environments, social platforms, or broader digital spaces where users interact and attempt to resolve their issues. This presence allows social workers to reclaim an active role in prevention efforts, knowledge dissemination, and assistance — employing both traditional social work skills and newly acquired digital competencies.

Digital social work entails a proactive approach to understanding and navigating the dynamics of the digital space, utilizing the opportunities provided by cyberspace. Digital social workers connect with individuals, comprehend local digital landscapes and norms, and participate in interactions. Through their presence, they foster safety, knowledge-sharing, and social connectivity, and they contribute to community activities. Importantly, this role is distinct from gamification; beyond using game-based tools, social workers in virtual spaces must operate independently while remaining anchored in their professional role, guided by ethical principles, and strategically engaging with the virtual segments most relevant to their target groups.

5.2.2 Utilization of Digital Space in Social Work

The use of digital space in social work primarily manifests in maintaining communication and providing information to local communities and individuals. This is an intuitive aspect of social work, as practitioners engage with digital tools to stay connected. Additionally, information gathering plays a crucial role, encompassing reading academic journals and articles, participating in forums, engaging in online communities, attending virtual conferences, and exploring information about the field.

A significant yet ethically complex aspect of digital social work is passive engagement on social platforms, where practitioners observe the digital lives of community members. While this provides valuable supplementary insights, it also raises critical ethical questions: is passive observation acceptable, and to what extent? How should acquired information be used? Should social workers actively investigate their clients' digital lives? What actions should be taken if

they encounter evidence of a client's vulnerability, abuse, or involvement in illegal activities? These ethical dilemmas generate ongoing discussions and lead to the sharing of best practices among professionals.

Upon closer examination of digital space utilization, two major areas can be distinguished (see Csoba & Diebel, 2021; Berzin et al. 2015): (1) the practical application of digital technologies across different target groups and (2) the monitoring of social services.

The first category includes practices that replace in-person client interactions with digital alternatives, such as virtual meetings, AI-powered services, and algorithm-driven support mechanisms. This also extends to crisis-response solutions that emerged during COVID-19, such as virtual counseling spaces, online group meetings, and social media-based communication channels.

However, fully professionalized technological solutions specifically designed for the social work profession have yet to emerge. Future developments — though met with skepticism by some — may include virtual reality-based consultations or professional avatars engaging in preventive interventions and counseling within the metaverse.

But on the one hand, the integration of the experiences of COVID-19 (cf. Csoba – Diebel, 2021; Pink et al., 2020), on the other hand, the digitalisation of welfare services (EC 2020) efforts, as well as the findings of organisations dealing with futures research, allow us to conclude that there will be place and opportunity for digitalisation and that representatives of the social care profession will not only be its sufferers or passive users, but also its active participants. I would like to point out that the professional use of virtual spaces with digitally accessible clients and target groups will be an expected development. (We will not mention the significant groups of digital laggards now, the digital divide can be the basis for another study.)

Furthermore, data-driven decision-making is expected to become an essential component of social work. The expansion of digital service offerings will increasingly rely on structured data collection, incorporating big data analysis, artificial intelligence, and traditional or participatory research methods. These approaches will reshape how social workers reach and engage with their client base.

Another critical area is community-driven fundraising. While traditional social work efforts focus on professional support within a community, digital solutions for community financing often reach beyond the immediate target group. Various methods, including crowdfunding and social investment initiatives, adapt digital platforms to secure resources for community projects and social initiatives. This shift necessitates a reevaluation of social work strategies, positioning digital tools as key facilitators in community development and financial sustainability.

5.2.3 Implementing Fintech Solutions for Achieving Community Goals

The realization of community goals often requires external support to foster development, stabilize socio-economic conditions, or introduce tools and opportunities that enhance everyday life. However, fundraising in the digital space increasingly faces trust-related challenges, such as fraud, deception, and misdirection. Despite the low levels of trust in both online donation systems and digital platforms, effective messaging, content development, and engagement strategies can still persuade donors to invest in initiatives that transform into sustainable capital or

long-term solutions for small communities (e.g., water purification systems or renewable energy installations).

Unlike traditional fundraising efforts that rely on expanding personal networks at a local level, digital financing solutions can reach a much broader audience. This is where fintech solutions become increasingly crucial in digital social work: they enable individuals who share common goals and values to connect and contribute to a cause, and while personal participation does not take place, they are still an active part of how a local (even distant, but local) problem is solved.

In today's interconnected world, multiple strategies exist for mobilizing financial support. Diverse causes — such as early childhood education, sexual health awareness, sustainable farming, small-scale business development, and technological access — can resonate with potential donors worldwide. For them, the results (and progress) can be tracked in real time from anywhere in the world. The challenge lies in defining clear, communicable, and documentable objectives with tangible social or environmental benefits that create long-term opportunities for local communities. Additionally, messaging strategies must be reconsidered to ensure visual and textual clarity, consistent feedback mechanisms, and incentives such as discounts, local engagement opportunities, or personalized acknowledgments for donors from locals.

By utilize digital space, social development projects can be realized in physical spaces. Beyond online donation campaigns, crowdfunding and peer-to-peer (P2P) lending models play an integral role. Crowdfunding involves targeted capital injections to address specific local challenges or support ideas, often offering transparency through personal connections, the implementation and the increase of locals' well-being become traceable. A digital social worker can contribute by providing expertise, maintaining a presence on crowdfunding platforms, and crafting compelling messages to attract financial support. Successful campaigns can strengthen communities and generate further opportunities for growth.

The community loan (peer-to-peer lending, P2P lending) follows a similar principle but differs in one key aspect: the funds provided must be repaid after the project's completion — sometimes with interest, sometimes in installments, depending on the agreement. The case on the center is support a livelihood development process. These means that projects funded through P2P lending must generate profit over time to enable repayment. In societies with higher levels of trust, this financing model is accessible and operable, although it remains underutilized in the social sector.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to present the current state of three social science disciplines — sociology, cultural anthropology, and social work — in adapting to the opportunities offered by the digital space and to identify the areas where initial attempts at adaptation have begun. It also explored how digital uncertainty and ethical concerns hinder these processes while, at the same time, pushing these disciplines to reconsider their professional practices under the influence of digital transformations.

Two primary perspectives emerge regarding the presence of the digital world: first, as a research and practice environment, and second, as a source of tools increasingly integrated into

professional activities. These include data collection and analysis, data visualization, communication strategies, and financing mechanisms for community projects.

The study sought to illustrate the expanding scope of digital social sciences and reinforce an underlying message: we are still in the early stages of this transition. There remains ample opportunity to define our place within the digital space and to further develop approaches that better serve our disciplinary goals.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my colleagues, Viktória Herczeg and Dr. Péter Miszlai, whose contributions to our digital social work (digital social consultant) curriculum development project provided invaluable inspiration for reflecting on the significance of digital fieldwork and forming the foundation of this study.

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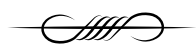
Who are worried about the future? An empirical investigation of the relationship between socio-demographic and socio-economic factors and different future worries of the adult population in Szeged



Abstract

Life in post-modern societies is exposed to a range of risks and challenges in different dimensions: people face environmental threats and societal risks at the same time. These issues contribute to rising uncertainty and concerns in the population. Our investigation aims to explore the level of worries about different potential risks in the future of both environmental and social nature. The survey was conducted in Szeged, Hungary in spring 2024 with a sample of 577 respondents representative by sex and age. People were asked to indicate the level of worries on a 0-10 scale about climate change, pandemics and epidemics, wars and armed conflicts, environmental pollution, widening gap between rich and poor, conflicts between different cultures, the rise of artificial intelligence, deepening inequalities between men and women, and overpopulation. The relationship with different socio-demographic and socio-economic factors has also been analysed. Our results suggest that the level of worries about environmental and social risks is significant in adult the population of Szeged. Women, elderly and people with lower socio-economic status tend to be more concerned.

Keywords
worries, global risk perception, environmental challenges, social risks

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Introduction

We are living in times of risks produced by modernity, modern lifestyle and human action. Ulrich Beck, a German sociologist, argued in 1986, in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster, that one of the main characteristics of postmodern societies is the exposure to risks arising from advanced modernisation processes. The risks posed by globalisation, industrial production and the omnipresence of consumption are characterised by the fact that they know no geographical or social boundaries (Beck 2003). What are the risks most threatening to societies? According to the latest Global Risk Report 2025(World Economic Forum, 2025) the key global risks include environmental risks – e.g. extreme weather events, climate change etc. –, societal polarization, geo-economic tensions, armed conflicts, technological acceleration, decline in health and well-being and others. Most threats have been and are empirically experienced by the population in Europe since among others hot summers are unbearable in many countries, many region have been exposed to floods or droughts (or both one after the other), wars and conflicts are just around by the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2022, and in 2020 a global pandemic of coronavirus disease swept across the world. These risks and experiences enhance anxiety in the population, worries are growing accordingly mental health is declining (Twenge 2000, Hicks 1996). However different social groups have different levels of worries. Socio-demographic and socio-economic factors play a crucial role in mental health and the level of worries (Rohrer et al. 2021).

Our investigation aims to explore the level of worries in some aspects, both in regard of environmental and social challenges, and to reveal the role of socio-demographic and socio-economic factors behind. We assume that the level of worries is significant in the total population and that gender, age, marital status, educational level, labour force status and income status are linked to it.

Data and methods

The data analysed is this paper were collected in spring 2024 in Szeged, the third largest city by population in Hungary. The representative sample by sex, age-group and residence of the adult population (18+ years) consisted of 577 respondents. The survey (Szeged 2024) included several questions regarding the life in Szeged, and attitudes in different aspects. Future worries have been investigated by the following question:

How worried are you about the future in regard of the following items? Please indicate on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means you are not at all worried and 10 means you are very worried.

The items listed represented different types of future risks. Some related to environmental dangers and other to social risks. The items were the following:

a. climate change
b. pandemics, epidemics
c. wars, armed conflicts
d. environmental pollution
e. widening gap between rich and poor
f. conflicts between different cultures
g. the rise of artificial intelligence
h. deepening inequalities between men and women
i. overpopulation

In our investigation we intend to give an overview on the level of concerns in the adult population of Szeged and to reveal the correlation between worries and socio-demographic and socio-economic factors. The analysis has been conducted with the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 20. For the exploration of the relationship between worries and socio-demographic and socio-economic factors independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA statistical methods have been applied. The statistical significance level for the tests was set at alpha=0.05.

Results

The top three concerns of the adult population in Szeged (Figure 1) include both environmental and social risks. People mostly worry about environmental pollution (mean: 7.6), followed by the worry about the widening gap between rich and poor (mean: 7.3), and the third worry in line is that about climate change (mean:7.0). The fourth concern is very close to the latter one, people are also highly worried about wars and armed conflicts in the future (mean: 6.9). The fear about conflicts between cultures, pandemics or epidemics and the rise of artificial intelligence converges around a total mean of 6 points. Overpopulation is less worrying for the population in Szeged (mean: 5.6). People have moderate concerns about the deepening inequalities between men and women (mean: 4.5). The standard deviation is lowest for the biggest concern of the people (std. dev.: 2.2), which means that there is rather a consent in the population about environmental pollution – and its consequences – being a real threat in the future. A considerable variation in ratings applies for the worries about the rise of artificial intelligence (std. dev.: 3.1) and overpopulation (std. dev.:3.2).

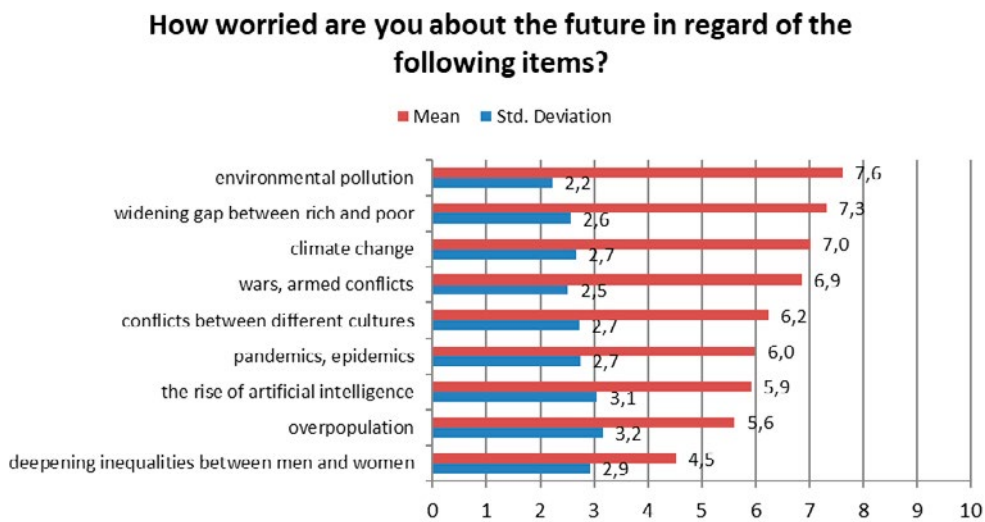

Figure 1. How worried are you about the future in regard of the following items? Note: Szeged 2024. Own work

The role of socio-demographic factors

As for socio-demographic factors we explored the relationship between the level of worries and gender, age, and marital status.

The level of concerns of men and women proved to be different for most items[1]. Based on the results we found evidence that women worry more about any future risk or threat than men (Figure 2). The order of the items based on the descending ratings of women more or less reflects the order of items based on the descending ratings of the total population. The mean rate of concerns is rather close to each other of men and women in case of environmental pollution (w: 7.84; m: 7.35), the widening gap between rich and poor (w: 7.53; m: 7.08) and climate change (w: 7.23; m: 6.77). The largest discrepancy (1.3) has been detected in the case of worries about the rise of artificial intelligence. Women seem to be more concerned about this development (mean: 6.54) than men (mean: 5.2). Also a remarkable difference (0.99) has been found for the worries about wars and armed conflicts between men and women. Men worry less about this threat (mean: 6.33) than women (mean: 7.32).

Age also correlates with some future worries, mostly those that relate to social risks[2]. A clear tendency reveals when comparing the rate of worries of three age groups: youth (18-35 years), middle-aged (36-64 years) and elderly (65+ years) (Figure 3). The elderly population worries most for the risks listed, except one item. The mean of worries of elderly about the widening gap between rich and poor reaches 8.0. The younger population is less worried in case of most items. The means of ratings of the middle-aged are close to that of the youth, just a little higher. There

[1] The independent samples t-test has been statistically significant ($p< 0.05$) for most of the items except for 'conflicts between different cultures' and 'overpopulation'.

[2] No significance ($p>0.05$) has been found in case of the following items: climate change, environmental pollution, rise of artificial intelligence, and conflicts between different cultures.

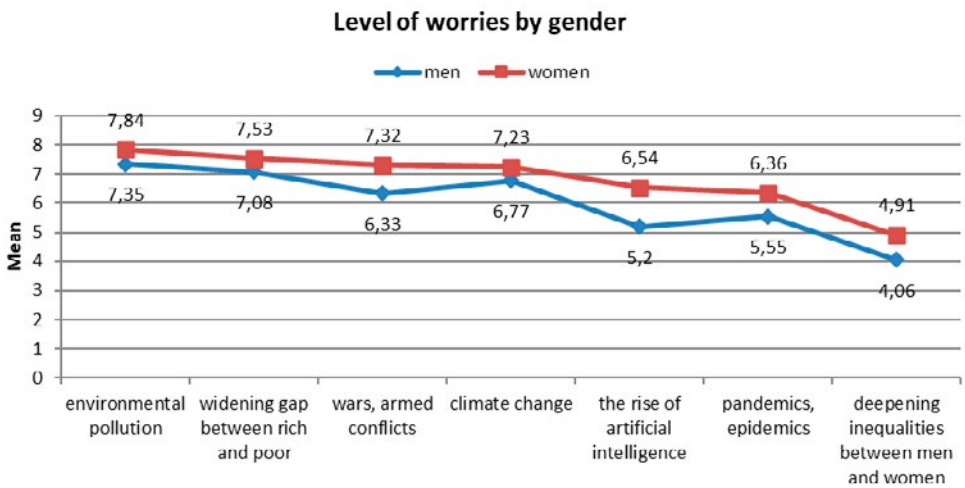

Figure 2. Level of worries by gender Note: Szeged 2024. Own work

is only one item where the tendency is the contrary. Overpopulation concerns younger people (mean: 6.1) more than the middle-aged (mean: 5.7) and the elderly (mean: 4.9).

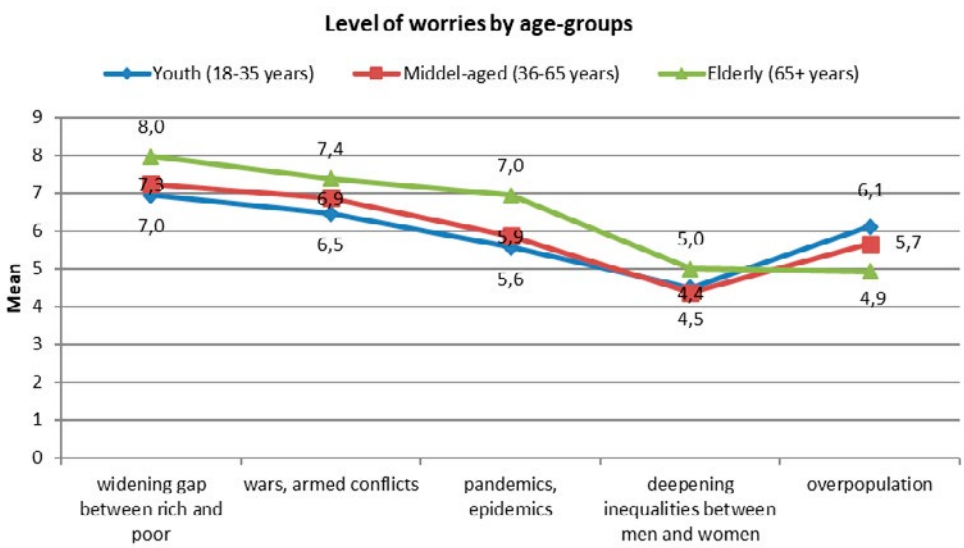

Figure 3.Level of worries by age-group. Note: Szeged 2024. Own work

Marital status shows a significant relationship with the rate of worries for three items (Figure 4): wars, armed conflicts, conflicts between different cultures and deepening inequalities between men and women. Single people are less concerned about wars and armed conflicts (mean: 6.4), widowed respondents however are the most worried about this risk (mean: 7.6).

The conflicts between different cultures concerns mostly divorced people (mean: 6.7), single are less worried about this (mean: 5.7). It is the married people who worry at least about deepening inequalities between men and women (mean: 4.2), and widows are the most concerned about it (mean: 5.7). It has to be noticed that marital status is strongly correlated with age, therefore the relationships found reflect partly the effect of age on the level of worries.

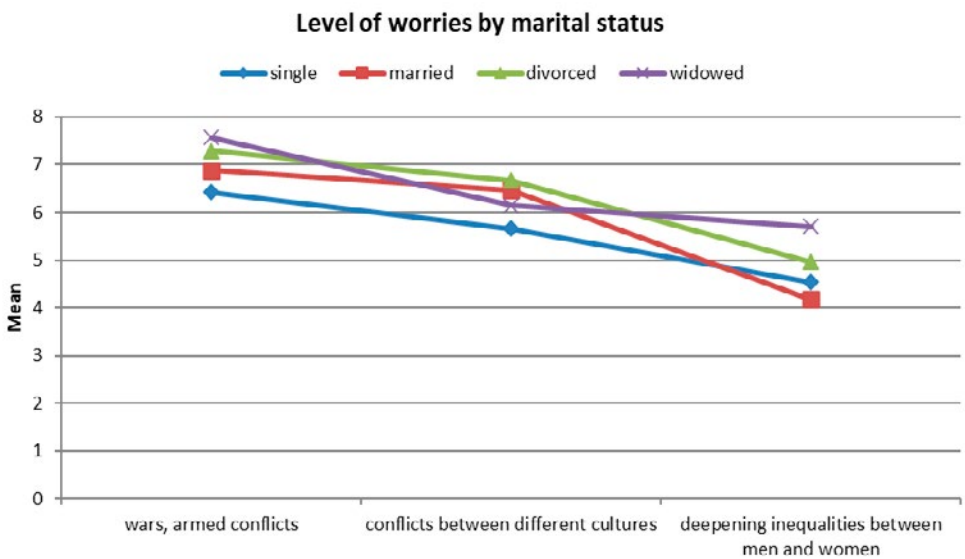

Figure 4. Level of worries by marital status. Note: Szeged 2024. Own work

The role of socio-economic factors

As for socio-economic factors we investigated the correlation between the level of worries and the level of education, labour force status and income status.

The level of education seems not to have an impact on the level of worries. Respondents have been grouped into three categories based on the level of education: 1. less than secondary education, 2. completed secondary education, 3. tertiary education. However the One-way ANOVA test hasn't revealed statistically significant differences between the mean worries of the categories for any item.

Labour force status[3] showed a statistically significant relationship with the level of worries in three cases: wars and armed conflicts, the widening gap between rich and poor and the deepening inequalities between men and women (Figure 5). When examining the means of worries of the four categories no clear tendency reveals. Again we assume that the effect of age is partly reflected in these results.

[3] The distribution of the categories was quite uneven. Employed people comprised 66.2%, students – who didn't work during their studies – 5.1%, retired people 24.2% and other unemployed just 4,5%.

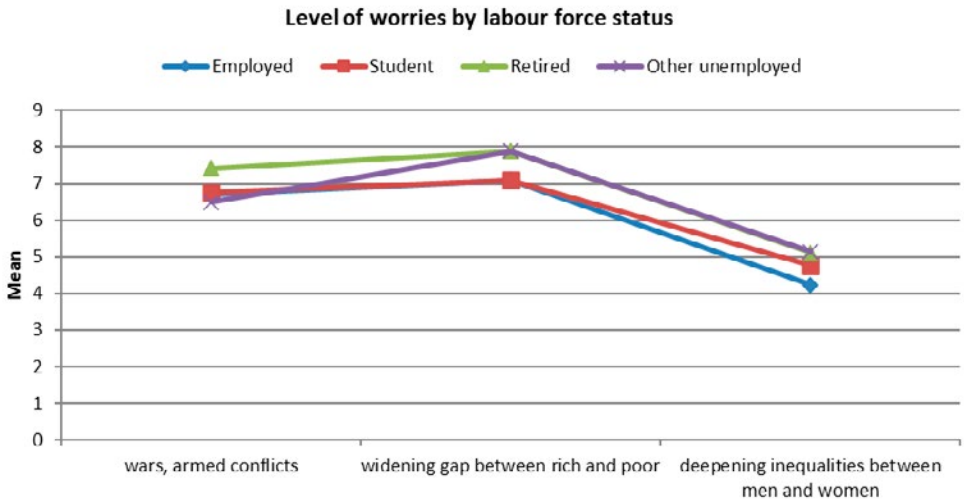

Figure 5. Level of worries by labour force status. Note: Szeged 2024. Own work

The income status of the households has been measured by a subjective classification of the respondent. The categories of income status were the following: 1. having financial problems, 2. Just getting by on the income, 3. Getting along well by allocation of income, 4. Without financial problems. The level of worries showed a significant variation for most items between the income categories (Figure 6). Not surprisingly those who had financial problems (mean: 8.1) or

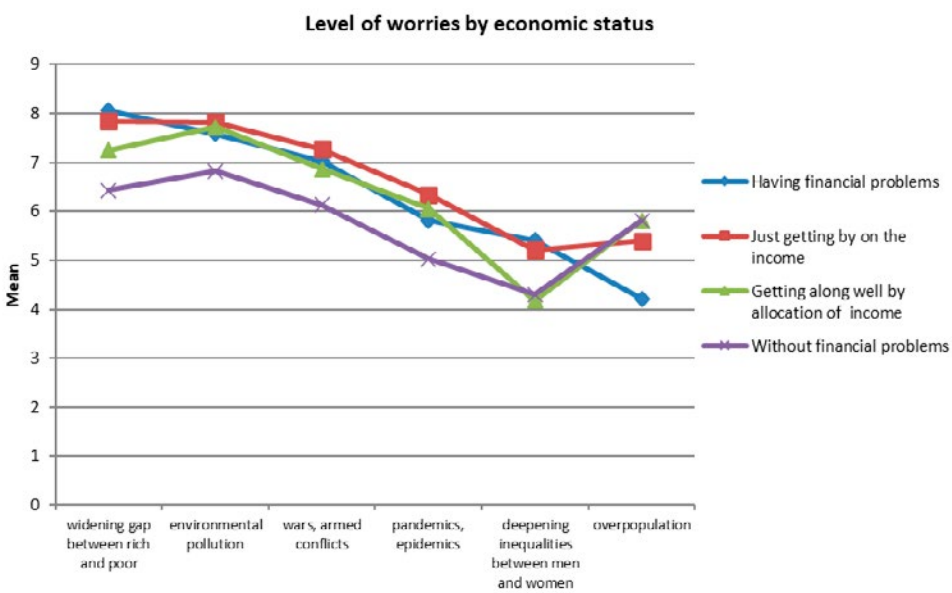

Figure 6. Level of worries by economic status. Note: Szeged 2024. Own work

were just getting by on their income (mean: 7.8) had the biggest concerns about the widening gap between rich and poor. People who indicated having no financial problems showed less worries for this issue (mean: 6.4). As for the concerns about environmental pollution, wars and armed conflicts, as well as pandemics or epidemics the three lower subjective income categories had similarly a higher rate of worries but people belonging to the upper income status group proved to have a lower rate of worries. The tendency is somewhat different in case of the worries for the deepening inequalities between men and women, as those who get along well by allocation of their income have a lower rate of worries similarly to those without financial problems. However concerns about overpopulation draws out a different pattern: the lowest subjective income category is at least worried about this issue while the highest subjective income category is the most worried in this regard.

Conclusion

People living in modern societies have to face a lot of risks, problems and threats in the future. The nature of these risks can be rather environmental – like climate change, environmental pollution, pandemics and epidemics – or social – like wars and conflicts, widening gaps between different social groups, and overpopulation. However there is a strong correlation between environmental challenges and social issues, since both have influence on the other one, they are in interaction. Anxiety about these issues is rising as people become aware of and experience different challenges: unbearably hot summers, smog alerts, terrorism, wars and conflict in Europe, the COVID-19 pandemic, rising role of artificial intelligence etc. In this study we intended to explore the level of worries about different potential risks and threats in the future in the adult population of Szeged and to reveal the relationship with socio-demographic and socio-economic factors.

Our results suggest that there are remarkable levels of worries in the adult population of Szeged in regard of almost all items listed, as the means exceed 5.0 on a 0-10 level scale, with a maximum of 7.6 for environmental pollution. This reflects the rising tendency of climate and eco-anxiety (Pikhala 2020, Kurt-Pikhala 2022). There was one issue that turned out to be moderately concerning for the total population, namely the deepening inequalities between men and women with a mean of 4.5. Although gender inequalities are a very important issue with a lot of evidence, it is less concerning for people in Szeged. This might be influenced by the list of risks, since environmental and other social risks listed are perceived more threatening in future life than gender inequalities. We also explored the relationship of the level of worries with socio-demographic and socio-economic factors. Our results suggest that women are generally more concerned about the future risks and threats than men in almost every aspect. This result is in line with the evidence on women having higher rates of mental health issues as for example depression or anxiety disorders (Piccinelli-Wilkinson 2000, MacLean et al. 2011). Two issues turned out to be much less worrying for men than for women: wars and armed conflicts and the rise of artificial intelligence. The first could be surprising, as in case of a war it is men who are more exposed to physical danger at the front. However literature gives evidence on women having higher rates of fears of crime and violence, which can be traced back on gender roles. In patriarchal societies women are socialised to believe that they are more vulnerable, and

also they are responsible for the well-being of their children and the elderly in the family, which enhances altruistic fear (Williams-Ghimire-Snedker 2018). Higher rate of worries in women towards the rise of artificial intelligence could also be explained by women having lower tolerance for uncertainty and unknown risks. Age is also linked to the level of worries. For most listed items a clear tendency revealed of elderly being more concerned than the middle-aged or the young people. This result is somewhat confusing as it is not the elderly but the young people of today who will have to cope with the dangers and threats in the future. There might be psychological reasons for the lower rate of worries of the youth, but this notion needs further investigation. Marital status turned out to be a relevant factor for three items, however no clear tendency revealed in this regard. We assume that age has a big impact on the relationship of marital status on the level of worries, as there is a strong correlation between the two factors.

Socio-economic factors play a rather smaller role in the level of worries due to our results. The level of education showed no relationship with the level of worries for any item. This suggests a significant finding, namely that awareness – which can be enhanced by education – has little or no effect on the level of worries about future risks. We need more research in this topic to evaluate this outcome. Throughout the analysis labour force status and income status have been investigated as other potential influencing socio-economic factors of the level of worries. Labour force status showed a correlation with the level of worries in three cases, however the tendency was not clear. Again these results may partly reflect the effect of age on worries. As for income status results suggested a relationship with worries for most items. People with favourable income status seem to be less worried, than the others. This might be explained by a higher tolerance for uncertainty of these people, since they don't have to be concerned about financial issues. There was however one exception: rate of worries about overpopulation which was the highest for people without financial problems and lowest for people having financial problems. A cautious assumption could be the differences in family planning, number of children in the households with distinct income statuses. However this assumption needs more investigation in the future.

Results of our research have to be interpreted with limitations as the data were cross-sectional and limited to the population of Szeged. Nevertheless we intend to continue this research to be able to analyse the changes in the level of worries over time. Since the changing world, the environment, the societies, the technology and other issues influence our worries for the future.

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Contradictions in the social perceptions of the distribution of wealth Performance principle or a fundamental social right?

Abstract

Unconditional basic income is a universal cash benefit which does not require a means test and is not linked to employment. Its universality and unconditionality distinguish it from the transfers in the current system of redistribution, which are subject to income and asset tests or willingness to work. There is a growing interest in basic income, yet the values and instinctive responses which its unconditionality and universality produce in people have not been fully explored. The aim of this study is to investigate the values which emerge in relation to unconditional basic income in Hungary in the comments section of YouTube videos on this topic. Our research applies a mixed-method approach; data collection, sentiment analysis, and the bag of words model were implemented using relevant pieces of software, while categorisation was carried out by manual coding. The results show that a negative attitude towards basic income is predominant, and the primary value pattern is related to the performance principle. Regarding the perception of the distribution of wealth generated in the labour market, the comments we examined emphasise performance-based distribution as opposed to the possibility of a fundamental right. In the value system of people social security is strongly linked to work.

Keywords

performance-based distribution, work-based society, text mining, computer-assisted text analysis, unconditional basic income

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Introduction

Economic and social transformations over the past few decades have substantially shaped the world of work. The development of telecommunications technology has affected global labour market developments. People have diverging attitudes towards technology related to Industry 4.0, which creates new jobs and improves workers' employment flexibility in some sectors but reduces the demand for human labour in others (Neumann et al. 2021, Narayanamurthy – Tortorella 2021, Grybauskas et al. 2022).

Alongside globalisation and technological progress, global events, such as the COVID19 pandemic and the following economic difficulties, are adding to economic uncertainty. Uncertainty is associated with increased stress and frustration, negatively affects selfconfidence, and reduces people's belief in their ability to exercise control over their own lives (Kalleberg 2009, Malleson – Calnitsky 2021).

In parallel with these processes, values and attitudes towards work are shaped at the societal level. For the younger generation, traditional work values are less important in their job search. While members of earlier generations remained loyal to a single job for almost their entire career, members of the younger generation may engage in job search three or more times during their career (Pérez-Pérez et al. 2018). Long-term commitments are increasingly replaced by flexible, short-term contracts, which are expected to be even more common in the future (Piątkowski 2020). Increasingly unpredictable career opportunities could lead to fluid career paths without clear boundaries, which puts pressure on the labour market (Starr-Glass 2019). In the labour market, there is growing emphasis on new skills and competences such as creativity, active learning, digital skills, knowledge sharing, complex problem solving, the ability to innovate, flexibility, proactive participation, or emotional intelligence (Starr-Glass 2019, Piątkowski 2020). In the future, the need to adapt to a globally changing labour market seems inevitable. Understanding how society responds and adapts to these challenges is therefore increasingly important.

Modern capitalist societies can be seen as meritocratic, performance-based societies (Aulenbacher – Grubner 2021). It could be interesting to examine people's attitudes towards

distribution as to whether the global transformation of work has brough about a discernible shift away from the preference for performance-based distribution. Unconditional basic income provides an opportunity to examine this as it represents a form of distribution which contradicts the current performance principle. Its universality and unconditionality also distinguish it from the benefits in the current redistribution system, which are subject to income and asset tests and require the willingness to work.

In the media and in political or everyday discourses, the COVID pandemic revived the debate on unconditional basic income (Laín – Merrill 2021). Despite the growing interest in this economic policy instrument, it has not been extensively explored what attitudes, instinctive reactions, and values people associate with unconditional and universal basic income. The study of values can help explain interesting social phenomena (Hitlin – Piliavin 2004).

In this study, we examine the range of attitudes towards unconditional basic income, focussing on the dominant values in the perception of the distribution of wealth generated in the labour market. When considering the perception of distribution, it is important to underline that there may be a link between the perception of distribution and actual trends in the labour market and distribution, but no clear conclusions can be drawn about the trends.

Today, digital data is increasingly important for understanding social processes. The computationally intensive analysis of large data sets allows social sciences to explore opinions and attitudes which are not accessible through traditional methods, either because the topic involves sensitive elements or because it is difficult to operationalise properly (Németh et al. 2020). The focus of this research is a difficult issue to examine because people do not have personal experience with basic income, which has not been introduced in Hungary. Therefore, by analysing the comments written in the YouTube comments section for Hungarian-language videos related to the topic, we would like to better understand the attitudes of the people who comment on this economic policy instrument.

In the first part of the paper, we summarise the possible interpretations of unconditional basic income, and then, based on empirical data we collected, we analyse the comments on the video-sharing platform to see what patterns of values can be identified among people who contribute to the discussion about this economic policy instrument.

Possible interpretations of unconditional basic income

Unconditional basic income is a cash benefit paid at regular intervals, which by its universality covers everyone, bypassing means tests and work requirements (Van Parijs 2004). Internationally, it is commonly featured in media coverage as well as economic and sociological discourse, with a debate about the feasibility of such an economic policy instrument. The debates unfold over four main questions (Gilbert et al. 2018):

Is a benefit such as basic income affordable?

The key question for a welfare benefit is whether it can be funded in the long term. The size of welfare programmes and the tax burden they impose determine the debate about welfare states (Tomka 2008). Proponents argue that despite its universality, unconditional basic income can

be funded by reducing administrative costs and bureaucratic burdens of existing social protection systems through abandoning means tests and willingness-to-work tests (Raventos 2007, Hirsch 2015). Thus, the question is whether the social consequences of welfare programmes should be judged positively or negatively, as this could indicate the extent to which it is worth bearing the burden of the potential economic consequences.

Is it a fundamental right for members of society?

The answer to this question is not self-evident, either. Sachs (2015) argues that the related social dilemma is characteristic of certain value systems, which, like in several Central European countries, is also present in Hungary. At the heart of the dilemma is the extent to which individuals are willing to bear costs for the benefit of the entire community, knowing that this could also improve the functioning of the economy. According to those who view basic income positively, beneficiaries are not stigmatised and can avoid being relegated to the status of claimants (Van Parijs 2004). Eliminating stigmatisation would allow for the dissolution of the categories for deserving and undeserving poverty, which has a degrading and demotivating effect for those who fall into the undeserving category. The right to protection can be claimed because it implies collectively valid and legally institutionalised guarantees which are independent of individuals' personal characteristics and merits (Castel 2005b).

The lift effect theory (Hradil 1995) may support the fear that unconditional basic income would not be effective in reducing inequalities, and the distinction between the deserving and undeserving would remain. According to Hradil, as overall welfare rises, the position of all social groups improves, which in fact results in no change in inequality. This view suggests that poverty cannot be completely eradicated by any universal benefit, but such a policy can reduce destitution by providing a life of material, intellectual, cultural, and political dignity (Artner 2014). As regards basic income, the question is whether individuals recognise any level of support as a fundamental right and, in light of the social dilemma, whether individuals are willing to bear costs for the sake of a generally higher standard of living and thus for the entire community or instead believe that everyone is responsible for their own prosperity.

Is it feasible to implement given the various related interests?

The moral notion that the increasing leisure time of a happy and productive population could pose a significant threat to the established order perpetuates in our society the view that work is a means of self-fulfilment (Graeber 2018). According to this approach, work is a moral value in itself, and those who are not willing to subject themselves to work discipline are not worthy of support. This system managerial feudalism, in which economic forces provide incentives, and people work more because their thinking is dominated by the idea that the desire for consumer pleasures can be satisfied by laborious work, as in Weberian thought. According to this view, work in the labour market is performed, beyond the gain of income, as a principled duty, so that productive and useful work is part of a human life which is considered meaningful (Weber 1930).

Opponents of a basic income argue that its unconditional nature would threaten the attitude that the desire for consumer pleasures can only be satisfied through hard work. They

argue that this benefit does not fit into the current operation of the welfare state, as workfare systems are paternalistic, link benefits to work, and stipulate that individuals must show a willingness to work in exchange for a welfare benefit (Standing 2012). However, the unconditional nature of basic income means that these conditions cannot be enforced. If basic income were to have the effect of reducing the number of workers, it would also have the effect of reducing consumption, thus impeding the growth rate of the economy (Baksay et al. 2017). This would result in capital migrating to more favourable investment areas (Artner 2014). The real threat of capital flight, which could jeopardise the efficiency of capital and profit-oriented production, is perceived by economic forces as well as policy and decision makers. In summary, there are multiple counter-interests in relation to the implementation of unconditional basic income.

Does it disincentivise work?

One of the most common fears about unconditional basic income is that it would reduce the motivation to work by separating income from labour market participation (Bergmann 2004). A fundamental element of work is to provide a living, but beyond guaranteeing income, work has several social aspects (Meyer 2017). According to these, work ensures social integration, structures human life, regulates daily routine across activity and leisure time, enables the maintenance of a social network, and creates a sense of security for the worker. Unconditional basic income could transform these norms by challenging the importance of work, which is why there is so much uncertainty surrounding the issue.

Nonetheless, the importance of work is maintained by people's intrinsic motivation, which acts as a compelling force on individuals, motivating them to act rather than to do nothing (Fromm 1941, Keynes 2017). Since the motivation to act is not based on basic physiological needs but a deeper impulse, namely the human will (Schopenhauer 1992), unconditional basic income would not easily influence internal factors besides removing the compulsory character of work and satisfying basic physiological needs. This is because it would not satisfy the desire to accumulate wealth and could hardly replace the psychological significance of work. On the one hand, unconditional basic income would enable the satisfaction of basic needs as opposed to the standard of living to which people have become accustomed (Beck 2000). On the other hand, it would free people from the constraints of work but not from meaningful work. Despite the fact that capitalism is based on labour, which provides an identity for the worker, Szelényi (2014) argues that there will always be people who would not have an incentive to work if an unconditional benefit were to be provided, which could function for them as a guaranteed unemployment benefit.

Unsurprisingly, one of the most common fears about unconditional basic income is that it would reduce the motivation to work (Bergmann 2004). This concern is based on the sharp contrast between the provision of a basic income as a fundamental right and the principle of performance-based distribution, which is considered to be the basis of modern capitalist societies (Aulenbacher – Grubner 2021). It is therefore important to examine people's attitudes towards distribution as to whether the global transformation of work has brough about a discernible shift away from the preference for performance-based distribution. Unconditional basic

income provides an opportunity to examine this as it represents a form of distribution which contradicts the current performance principle.

Media reporting, political party campaigns, pilot programmes of certain countries, and thus the vernacular interpretation of basic income endow the term with more diverse content and more flexibility as compared to Van Parijs' conceptual definition (2004) used in the literature. Even among the YouTube comments we analysed, it is not possible to determine the exact definition of basic income on which people form their opinions. We hypothesise that watching YouTube videos provides a relatively consistent insight into the application of basic income. Based on the above, the focus of this study is to examine people's comments to uncover their attitudes, instinctive reactions, and values associated with their understanding of the economic policy instrument.

Based on the above, the following research questions are formulated to better understand the attitude in society towards unconditional basic income:

What are the central concepts in the corpus of YouTube comments which underpin the understanding of unconditional basic income in society?

What is the perception of unconditional basic income in YouTube comments, which express the attitude of users on the analysed online platform towards this policy instrument?

What value patterns do users exhibit who compose YouTube comments on basic income?

Methods

Data collection

YouTube is one of the most popular video sharing platforms, with over 2 billion registered users (https://blog.youtube/press/). The importance of the site is demonstrated by the fact that content producers upload about 500 hours of new content to the platform every minute. Analysing the comments on videos, even if the user has not viewed the video in its entirety, can provide useful information on how the group of commenting users interprets unconditional basic income.

On social media platforms and video-sharing platforms, behavioural engagement is usually expressed symbolically by the individual, through likes, comments, or shares (Dubovi – Tabak 2021). Posting comments presupposes active interest at a higher level as compared to the role of a passive observer (Khan 2017). The ability to participate in the process of argumentation, which could occur by responding to other people's comments, making statements, and refuting or supporting claims, constitutes a form of cognitive engagement (Lucas et al. 2014). It is important to note that the opinions expressed by YouTube users cannot be considered representative of Hungarian society as a whole.

As part of the cross-sectional data collection, YouTube videos were listed on 2 January 2023. Searches were carried out for the Hungarian equivalents of the terms "*unconditional basic income*" and "*basic income*" in incognito mode, excluding search preferences associated with a specific user account. The researchers did not watch the videos as the research does not focus on the content of the videos. An objective sample was sought in order to determine the average user's perception of basic income, irrespective of political affiliation.

The final analysis included 32 videos produced over a long period of time, between 2013 and 2022. For each video, the available database included the following metadata: video identifier, comments associated with the videos, number of likes and date of publication for each comment.

The YouTube API (*Application Programming Interfaces*) enables the collection of comments, so such data is considered public, which means that it can be viewed without subscribing to the data source and without explicit permission from the author of the comment. Following the corresponding best practice (Reilly 2014), we do not publish the titles of the videos for privacy reasons, so no third party can trace back the source of any comment. Moreover, in the analysis we also avoid quoting comments verbatim and paraphrasing them. The data available does not contain personal information such as name, age, place of residence, or education, so the database uses only aggregated information and does not allow conclusions to be drawn on socio-demographic background. The innovative nature of the methodology applied in the research means that it does not follow the usual standard procedures for analysing the phenomena of reality. The thoughts, ideas, and attitudes on which this research is based can nonetheless be explored using such method.

The other source for the comments database was the social listening software SentiOne (https://sentione.com/), where we also conducted cross-sectional data collection by searching for the Hungarian equivalents of the terms "*unconditional basic income*" and "*basic income*" on 21 May 2022. This mention-based search engine performs searches on various online platforms (social media, blog, forum, website), from which it produces a database. Its results contain the terms as mentioned either by themselves or within contexts. The detailed results provided by technology enable a qualitative approach with detailed analysis and categorisation (Vancsó – Kmetty 2021).

Data collection from two sources, YouTube API and SentiOne, was necessary because the YouTube API provides a longer time span for accessing comments, while SentiOne only provides data going back three years. Despite this limitation, collecting data using the SentiOne software had the additional advantage of allowing the data to be interpreted in context.

Data cleaning and analysis

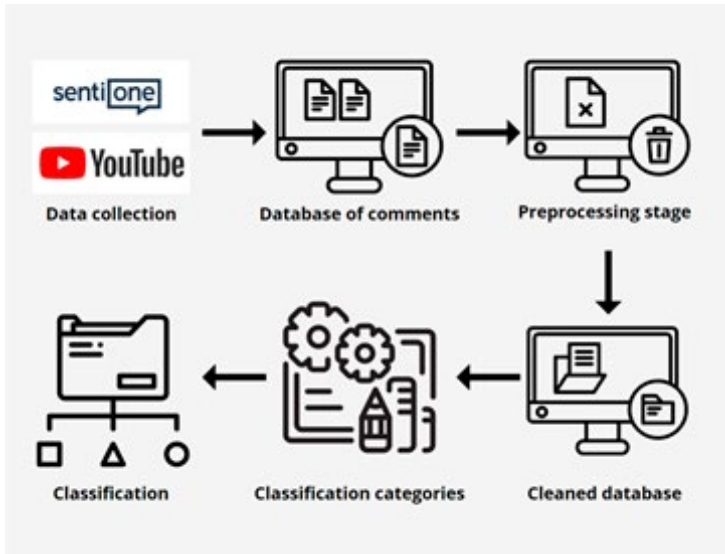
The comments obtained were used to produce our text corpus, which underwent several filters before the pre-processing phase. The following were removed from the database:

1. Duplicative comments.
2. Comments without explanation; comments consisting of emoticons; obscenities.
3. Comments about the video creator or the operation of the channel.

As a result, of the thousands of raw comments, 710 were included in the final database. The size of this dataset is irrelevant as to whether it constitutes Big Data; in deciding this question, the determining factor was the unstructured and non-standardised nature of the texts (Németh et al. 2020). The amount of information produced in the world is growing rapidly and is increasingly stored digitally. This digital data can be considered Big Data (Salganick 2017).

To facilitate data analysis, the pre-processing phase included the cleaning of the corpus (Németh et al. 2020, Mészáros – Sebők 2018). Three important pre-processing steps are necessary: the removal of stop words, tokenisation, and stemming (Mészáros – Sebők 2018,

Çoban et al. 2021). We performed the pre-processing steps using the toolkit called Magyarlánc (Zsibrita et al. 2013), which resulted in a cleaned database. We then developed the categories of classification for the analysis using the bag of words method, performed sentiment analysis, and finally categorised the collected comments according to the pre-defined classification. The process of data cleaning and analysis is illustrated in Figure 1.



1. Figure: From data collection to classification. Source: Author's own elaboration.

The most effective way to reveal the characteristics of a document is to examine the frequency of words and phrases (Mészáros – Sebők 2018). This is commonly carried out using the bag of words method. In this method, we analysed the frequency of each term within the available corpus. We identified the most frequent terms and combinations of terms, which we classified into five groups each based on negative and positive evaluations. By identifying the central concepts in the corpus based on the YouTube comments section, we sought to identify the terms which commenting users chose when interpreting unconditional basic income.

Platform users' position on unconditional basic income may provide interesting insight on this policy instrument. Sentiment analysis provides the tool to examine this by revealing the attitudes and polarity of opinions expressed by the author of the analysed text (Németh et al. 2020, Thelwall 2017). We conducted our analysis using the Hungarian Sentiment Lexicon, which contained the polarity of words (Szabó 2014). We used this procedure as a semi- supervised method, whereby we switched to manual coding when the machine could not automatically categorise the given text fragment due to colloquial phrases. The sentiment analysis of the corpus helps understand whether the acceptance or rejection of unconditional basic income is more dominant among commenting users and reveals the attitude of users on the examined online platform towards this economic policy instrument.

Based on the five groups each for negative and positive evaluation formed using the bag of words method and sentiment analysis, the comments were categorised using double-blind

coding. The main advantage of this approach is that the researcher's meaningful interpretation of the text, which can detect irony, slang, or indirect references, yields more valid results than automated coding (Mészáros – Sebők 2018). This identified the most frequent value patterns related to unconditional basic income on the YouTube platform.

Results

Central concepts in the examined YouTube comments section corpus

In our first research question, we sought to describe the concepts determining the interpretation of unconditional basic income in the examined YouTube comments. We analysed this by identifying the most frequent terms using the bag of words method. Due to the research topic, the most dominant term in the corpus is "basic income". In addition, three key dimensions can be identified. The first dimension relates to work, with "working", "money", "free", and "labour" as key concepts. These terms make clear reference to our current social order, in which work is central to individuals' lives. The next dimension is the moral category, with terms such as "human", "right", "need", "benefit", "societal", and "social", which, unlike the terms of the previous dimension, can refer to the moral and welfare aspects of unconditional basic income. The third dimension relates to large systems and includes the words "government", "state", and "capitalism", which suggest that the subject of unconditional basic income is difficult to separate from the interpretation of current economic and social conditions.

The frequency of occurrence of words and phrases illustrates the central concepts in the examined YouTube comments corpus. A list of terms can help classify individual comments and map the logic between them (Oláh 2021). The starting point for developing a word list was the approach developed by Gilbert (Gilbert et al. 2018), mentioned at the beginning of this paper. According to this approach, the debates on unconditional basic income unfold around four main aspects: funding, moral philosophy, feasibility, and motivation. Accordingly, the first category of our word list consists of terms related to the funding of the basic income (two dimensions: affordability and unaffordability).

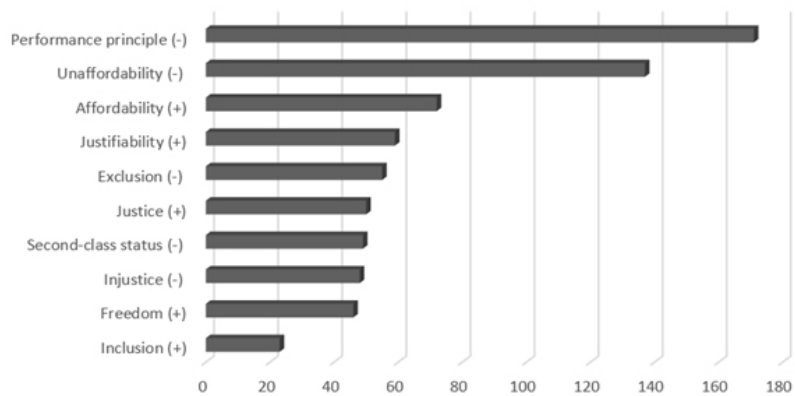
The second category comprises considerations of moral philosophy, primarily related to the unconditionality of the benefit (two dimensions: justice and injustice). We split the third pillar of Gilbert and colleagues' work, feasibility, into two parts, as we consider that this way the issue can be examined comprehensively. On the one hand, feasibility is related to universality (the dimensions of inclusion and exclusion). On the other hand, the arguments are also linked to subjective well-being (the dimensions of freedom and second-class status), which comprises the psychological and social consequences of implementation. For the fifth category, the focus is on the questions of motivation linked to the transformation of the normative system (the dimensions of justifiability and the performance principle). For each of the five categories, a distinction can be made between a positive and negative dimension, just as the theoretical framework also highlights the inherent dichotomy in the assessment of unconditional basic income. The keywords for each group (ten groups in total, five positive and five negative) were generated by examining the frequency of words and phrases and categorising the comments into these groups in subsequent stages of the research.

The polarity of these groups was determined by sentiment analysis, using the available lexicon (Szabó 2014). Of all comments, 65% were classified as negative, while 35% were positive.

We categorised the positive terms in connection with basic income into five groups: affordability, inclusion, justice, justifiability, and freedom. We also classified the negative features of unconditional basic income into five groups, which are the opposites of the positive features: unaffordability, exclusion, injustice, performance principle, and second-class status.

Value patterns in comments

The word lists described above formed the basis of the classification, whereby each comment was categorised into one of the five positive or five negative groups using manual coding. In doing so, we were interested in detecting dominant value patterns which characterise the writers of comments on unconditional basic income. Figure 2. shows the categories.



2. Figure: Dominant value patterns (number of comments). Source: Author's own elaboration.

As regards funding, the two extreme positions are affordability and unaffordability. Following the classification, the second and third most common values pertain to the issue of affordability, which appears to concern commenting users the most. A higher proportion of the analysed comments consider unconditional basic income to be unaffordable as opposed to fundable and feasible.

The most frequently mentioned aspect among commenting users is the performance principle, which does not appear to reconcile with the idea of a fundamental right. Among all the examined categories, the gap between the two ends of the spectrum is the largest with respect to the change in the normative system. Indeed, 24% (171 comments) make reference to the performance principle, which is in contrast to the 8% (59 comments) which can justify the existence of basic income.

There is also a fairly large difference between the two values of universality: among negative judgements regarding basic income, exclusion is the third most common value, while its opposite, inclusion, is the least common.

As for unconditionality, commenting users appear to support the two extremes in almost equal proportions, with justice mentioned in two more comments than injustice. The two poles

of subjective well-being are also close, with second-class status mentioned in only more three comments than freedom.

It is also striking in Figure 2 that positive value patterns (inclusion and freedom) emerge in a small proportion of comments. Among the positive arguments, feasibility has the highest support, well ahead of the other positive categories but still lagging the categories with a negative approach which were mentioned the most (unaffordability and the performance principle).

Discussion

Assessment of unconditional basic income

Of the analysed comments, 65% were negative and only 35% expressed support for a feature of this economic policy instrument. The reason why negative attitudes are almost twice as high as positive attitudes could be due to media coverage, which portrays novel and seemingly unpredictable topics as a risk to the idealised order of society (Kitzinger 2000). Unconditional basic income creates distrust among individuals. The feasibility of its implementation raises numerous questions, and the related discourse is full of doubts and unanswered questions. These questions relate to one of the most sensitive and crucial areas of human life, namely subsistence. People sense the strongest threat in relation the issue of existential vulnerability, as human nature constantly strives for subsistence (Policy Agenda 2018). Thus, the high proportion of negative value judgements appears to be a logical response in the comments.

The identification of the most frequently occurring terms also confirms that the comments focus on existential security. As regards the distribution of wealth, one may consider two types of distribution systems: the market system and redistribution by the welfare state (Örkény – Székelyi 2011). This dichotomy is also reflected in the analysis of frequently occurring terms. On the one hand, certain words symbolise the existence which can be achieved through the labour market (e.g. working and labour), and on the other hand, the need for a welfare contribution to ensure a livelihood also appears (e.g. benefit and social).

Forces affecting existential security: the normative system and funding

The classification reveals that the most frequent value patterns about unconditional basic income relate to the emphasis on the performance principle and to the unaffordability of the policy. These two negative value patterns are closely linked to existential security, which in turn explains their predominance.

In the context of the performance principle (the negative dimension of the normative system), comments closely associate work with value creation and a sense of vocation. Hungarian people are typically work-centred (Kapitány – Kapitány 2014), so recognition and success through labour play a primary role in their lives, as also emphasised in the comments. Therefore, a large percentage of the commenting users wish to think in terms of a work-based society, which they do not consider to be compatible with the potential loss of performance which may arise from unconditional basic income.

Kapitány and Kapitány (2014) see the possibility of exiting over-centralised system of work as a possible solution. This would increase the importance of self-reliance, whereby individuals can pursue their own goals through activities of their own choice, which would improve their performance and give them greater satisfaction. Self-employment is possible through farming or small entrepreneurial positions and by performing meaningful work. Regarding unconditional basic income, this freer form of work, which reflects a transformed concept of labour, is expressed in the group of values termed justifiability (the positive dimension of the normative system). Relatively few comments mentioned the justifiability of unconditional basic income because in the current economic and social system, a free concept of work appears distant. The reason is that market conditions and the functioning of the political system are not conducive to the freedom of labour (Kapitány – Kapitány 2014). Honneth (2009) points out that the trend of intellectual disengagement from the world of work is not in line with the general mood of the population, as a large section of the population still defines its social identity in terms of its role in the labour process. This is illustrated by the dominance of the performance principle over the justifiability.

In the intersection of interests

The fifth most frequently mentioned category is exclusion (the negative dimension of universality). Such comments are characterised by a strong scapegoating mechanism. This can be seen as a kind of mass psychological phenomenon, whereby precisely those individuals who suffer the most from social problems are named as the cause of the problems (Csoba 2011). This mechanism is generally not based on proven facts but rather on prejudices. Commenting users would strongly prefer excluding members of minority groups from unconditional basic income, including families with several children and those in public employment programmes, who are portrayed as undeserving of a universal benefit.

As the work-based society is an important determinant of public opinion, commenting users' primary concern with these groups is unemployment. The unemployed are attacked primarily because they are perceived by the rest of society as withdrawing from their social obligations by receiving social benefits and not engaging in the production of social value (Csoba 2011).

According to Castel, the feeling of ressentiment is a combination of envy and contempt (Castel 2005a). The fact that this feeling is fuelled by social inequality leads individuals to blame their own misfortune on the social hierarchy, either on the social group immediately below or the one immediately above them. The feeling of ressentiment triggers a strong frustration that develops defensive attitudes in individuals, which leads them to regard anything new as alien, to reject pluralism, and to refuse to tolerate such differences. Within the category of exclusion, commenting users identify the social group of immigrants as being directly below them and the affluent as being directly above them, who should not be entitled to a benefit such as basic income under any circumstances. High-income people are not considered to be in need of a universal benefit (Tanner 2015, Piachaud 2016). The desire to exclude immigrants may also have been reinforced by anti-immigrant political rhetoric. In Hungary, anti-immigrant rhetoric has been observed since 2010 (Dessewffy et al. 2018). In summary, the comments reflect the rejection of universality and the exclusion of certain groups more often than the attitude of inclusion.

In their study, Örkény and Székelyi (2010) reconstructed what people considered to be just and unjust, and what principles they chose when talking about a more just world. Typically, the most accepted principle of justice was found to be the individualist ideology (emphasis on individual performance and merit, the system is based on the principles of neutrality and equal opportunities), but egalitarianism was also relatively highly accepted (inequalities are reduced, the state becomes the normative regulator of social distribution, emphasis on collective institutional responsibility). The high level of support for work-based society emphasised earlier is confirmed in the analysis by Örkény and Székelyi (2010), with the ideology of individualist orientation considered as the most just principle. This emphasises individual performance and merit in the functioning of society. The close proximity of the two dimensions in the category of unconditionality is explained by the primacy of the individualist principle and the strong but not dominant position of the egalitarian principle. Within the dimension of injustice, the prevailing individualist principle of justice is apparent as its proponents emphasise that the system is based on the principles of neutrality and equal opportunities, whereby everyone has an equal chance of getting ahead. Rights cannot be guaranteed ab ovo, as this would only lead to a reduction in social contributions. As for the justice dimension, commenting users consider that redistribution by the welfare state is necessary. This can help avoid social exclusion, ensure the well-being of citizens, reduce social inequalities, and create conditions for a decent human life (Örkény – Székelyi 2011). The emphasis on these two principles within society makes it difficult to assess unconditional basic income from the perspective of justice.

The shackles of our thinking

In the comments, the two dimensions of the subjective well-being category, namely freedom and second-class status, were equally represented. Values related to freedom such as solidarity, trust, or positive thinking, cover positive changes in the subjective well-being of unconditional basic income. In contrast, second-class status emphasises the increasingly prevalent processes of dependency and polarisation. Second-class status is one of the least frequently mentioned negative dimensions. This may be due to the fact that individuals seek to satisfy their material needs for existential security first, and only after that can they identify higher needs (Inglehart – Flanagan 1987). People are more concerned with securing the material aspects of life, which is linked to affordability and the changing norms of employment, than with the formulation of higher needs, which are more difficult to identify.

Hungary shows signs of closed-mindedness (Keller 2009), with relatively little importance attached to civil and political liberties, low active political participation in people's daily lives, low tolerance of differences and consequently little trust in others, and little emphasis on self-actualisation values. As a result of these characteristics, the issue of freedom is more dominant than that of second-class status.

As regards subjective well-being, there is a conflict between the argument that basic income can guarantee a higher degree of freedom and the reasoning that dependence on state involvement would increase. According to the neoliberal criticism of welfare systems, increasing state involvement leads to a system which restricts individual freedom (Tomka 2008), both because

compulsory insurance is contrary to individual freedom of choice and because a system of large tax deductions and progressive taxes violates the right to property. Hayek (1978) argues that the welfare state undermines the efficient functioning of the market by taking away the wealth of the successful while prolonging the dependence of those in need. Hayek's interpretation shows similarities with the analysed comments which suggest that state intervention needs to be minimised in order not to reinforce dependence on the state.

Summary

In this study, we focussed on unconditional basic income, which nowadays receives increasingly widespread attention as economic and social processes shift. We sought to explore the values and opinions on this policy instrument in the comments section of YouTube videos on the topic. Our research used a mixed-method approach as the data collection and storage, sentiment analysis, and the bag of words method were implemented using relevant pieces of software, while categorisation was carried out by researchers' manual coding.

The identification of the most frequent words shows that the comments mostly focus on existential security and the world of work. This is the topic which concerns those who comment on the issue of basic income the most. Some words symbolise the existential security attainable in the labour market (working and labour), but others refer to the area of welfare (benefit and social).

In examining the comments, we were also interested in the perception of unconditional basic income and in the value patterns of users on the analysed online platform in relation to this policy instrument. As a result of the research, we classified positive terms regarding basic income into five groups: affordability, inclusion, justice, justifiability, and freedom. We also classified the negative features of unconditional basic income into five groups: unaffordability, exclusion, injustice, performance principle, and second-class status. Negative mentions were almost twice as common as positive ones. The groups were created to correspond to one dimension each of affordability, universality, unconditionality, normative system, and subjective well-being.

Funding is considered a central issue in the context of unconditional basic income, as both positive and negative values were mentioned in a significant proportion of comments. The importance of this category reflects the primacy of existential stability in people lives.

The impact of unconditional basic income on motivation to work is central not only in the literature but also in the comments. The greatest proportion of commenting users emphasise the performance principle. The gap between the two ends of the spectrum is the widest for the shifting normative system as compared to the other examined categories. The emphasis on the performance principle can be explained by the primary role of work-based recognition in people's lives. Although the effects of globalisation transform values and attitudes towards work at the societal level, the meritocratic, performance-based mindset, which is a feature of modern capitalist societies, remains the dominant value in the perceptions of distribution (Aulenbacher – Grubner 2021). In conclusion, the analysis of comments suggests that changing work values have not triggered a sharp shift away from the preference for performance-based distribution.

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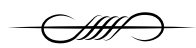
Practical testing of the Flow-based pedagogy model



Abstract

The main aim of the research presented in this paper is to understand students' reactions during lessons using the traditional and Flow-based pedagogical model. In order to improve students' flow state and knowledge, a pilot study is presented that presents the research results recorded in lessons designed at the Ludovika University of Public Service without and based on the Flow-based pedagogical model. The lessons were measured using the validated Dominek Learning Flow Questionnaire (Dominek 2023). In this study we aimed to present the results of the surveys of lessons without the Flow-based pedagogical model and lessons with the model (Dominek 2022).

Keywords

Flow-based pedagogical model, Dominek's Learning Flow Questionnaire, higher education, lessons

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Theoretical approach

Within the description of positive psychology, the PERMA model (happiness model) is associated with Martin Seligman (Seligman, 2011), which can be used as a basis for developing educational or developmental programmes. According to Martin Seligman, in his 2011 study, five different factors contributed to the experience of well-being: 1. positive emotions, 2. reflection, 3. relationships, 4. meaningful life, 5. achievement. Later, the PERMA model was expanded to include the vitality factor - now 6 factors contribute to the experience of well-being - and therefore the PERMA model was changed and from 2018 it will be called the PERMA + V model (Seligman, 2018). Positive psychology emphasises the joy of learning and development, self-esteem, the perception of success as a reward, the importance of striving for improvement, and curiosity. Human culture can only exist in community. It is through contact, communication and feedback with others that cultural phenomena unfold and survive. Often the vehicle of culture is the form of communication realised in the creation of symbols, colours, shapes and visual meanings that directly affect the subconscious of the individual. This is especially true when a group of individuals, through their experiences, be it a social campaign or the mass media, shape the quality of their thinking, their way of life and establish a set of values (Balatoni 2023; Jancsák 2020).

Flow emerged from positive psychology, the theory developed by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi and Martin Seligman (Seligman – Csíkszentmihályi 2000). According to Csíkszentmihályi, the person experiencing „flow" is so immersed in the activity that it becomes effortless, spontaneous and offers the pleasure of a „perfect experience". This is why he calls this experience „flow" (Csíkszentmihályi 2001). Most people expect flow or experience to come from a change in external circumstances, so we think our goals are beyond us. If we look for challenges, we can live the moment of experience. Flow, according to Csíkszentmihályi, can only be achieved when the achievement of such challenges creates new desires. There are many ways to achieve mind control, empirical research reports, but they all have one thing in common: they enable the joy of discovery. They increase the listener's ability to perform and experience a more complex state of consciousness. They can then reach a more advanced level of self, the development of which is the key to the stream experience. This is different from simple pleasure, because simple pleasure comes from fulfilling an expectation within us. True joy is different. According to Csíkszentmihályi, it is when we are able to go beyond our expectations and have an experience that we had not previously expected.

The Flow-based pedagogical model (Dominek 2022) focuses on the optimal experience and performance of learning based on flow theory. The model aims to organise the learning process so that learners reach the flow state as often as possible. This state occurs when learners are fully engaged, challenged and enjoying the learning activity. The model has six interrelated pillars to help learners achieve flow throughout the learning process:

1: Learning tasks should challenge learners according to their abilities. This helps to avoid boredom and anxiety and maintains interest and motivation.

2. Clear objectives and immediate feedback: Learners should be given clear objectives and continuous, immediate feedback. This helps them to know whether they are on the right track and how they can improve their performance.

3. Concentration and attention: Learning activities should have the full attention of the learner. Interactive and experiential learning methods help to maintain concentration.

4. A sense of control: learners should feel in control of the learning process. This increases their confidence and commitment to learning.

5. Loss of sense of time: In an optimal learning environment, learners are so immersed in tasks that they lose track of time. This is a key element for deeper learning.

6. Experience for its own sake: Learning activities should be enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding. Students learn not only for the external rewards, but also to enjoy the process of learning.

In summary, the model seeks to optimise the learning process by providing learners with challenging but achievable tasks, clear goals and immediate feedback. The model supports learners' focused attention, sense of control and enjoyment of learning, helping them to achieve and maintain a state of flow while learning.

Research

Developing competences is essential for the jobs of the 21st century (Barnucz 2022, Goldfárthné 2020), so we are conducting innovative research based on good practices among Ludovika University of Public Service students to develop these competences. The main objective of the research is to understand students' reactions to teaching using the traditional and flow-based pedagogical model and to propose pedagogical elements necessary to make the flow experience available in higher education. In order to improve the students' flow state and knowledge, I present in this paper a pilot research study that presents the research results recorded in the Ludovika University of Public Service, in lessons designed without and based on the Flow-based pedagogical model. Based on the research results, it is important to identify areas where the training can be improved and to determine what elements are necessary to ensure that students leave the class with the most positive experience possible. The research was carried out during the 2023/2024 academic year. The number of students who attended the class without the Flow-based pedagogical model was: n=53, while the number of students who attended the class with the Flow-based pedagogical model was: n=55.

Research question: Are lecturers at the selected university able to provide students with an enjoyable and challenging lesson according to their own methodology without using the Flow-based pedagogical model?

Methodology

The Flow-based pedagogical model was used for the research. This model is designed to create a flow experience and challenge while developing specific skills. I used Dominek's Learning Flow Questionnaire (DLFQ) (Dominek 2023) for the research. The DLFQ measures flow experience during learning activities. The aim of the questionnaire is to identify flow states

associated with learning and to understand the factors that contribute to an engaged and enjoyable learning experience. The DLFQ can measure the impact of different learning environments and methods on learners' flow experience and assess the extent to which a particular pedagogical method enhances this experience. Based on the results of the questionnaire, trainers can modify learning environments and methods to improve learners' flow experience. The questionnaire helps to identify factors that increase learner motivation during learning activities. In the questionnaire developed by Dominek, respondents were given 16 statements and asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire, consisting of 16 items, consisted of two factors: the immersion factor, which refers to the basic conditions for entering the flow zone, and the equilibrium factor, which summarises the phenomena accompanying the flow).

Results

1. In relation to the measurement of learning flow in university classes without the use of a Flow-based pedagogical model (N=53 students), the following results were obtained (Table 1): The research data show that in the case of classes without the knowledge of the Flow-based pedagogical model, the teacher was able to achieve an overall flow score of 62.05%, which means that the students' engagement in the lesson did not occur. The immersion factor produced a lower result than the balance factor, but neither reached 80%, which is the basis for continuous sustained flow presence.

	Database	**Average**	**Flow %**	**Standard deviation**
Immersion factor	without model 53 persons	24,4906	61,2265	7,97260
Balance factor	without model 53 persons	25,1509	62,87725	9,48561
Total	without model 53 persons	49,6415	62,05188	16,63880

Table 1: Outcome without a Flow-based pedagogical model in a public higher education institution.

2. The results of the university lessons based on the Flow-based pedagogical model (N= 53 students) are as follows (Table 2): The data show that in the case of the lessons based on the Flow-based pedagogical model, the teacher was able to achieve an overall flow score of 87.75%, which means that the students' involvement was present throughout the lesson, thus maintaining a sustained flow state throughout the lesson. The immersion factor produced a lower score than the balance factor.

	Database	Average	Flow %	Standard deviation
Immersion factor	with model 55 persons	35,6000	89	3,84402
Balance factor	with model 55 persons	34,6000	86,5	4,08152
Total	with model 55 persons	70,2000	87,75	6,79013

Table 2: Flow-based pedagogical model results for students in a state-maintained higher education institution in Hungary, measured in classroom sessions

Comparative analysis in the light of data

A comparison of the data shows higher Flow scores for lessons taught according to the Flow-based pedagogical model. A deeper analysis revealed the following results:

a) Comparison of lessons taught with and without the model:

When comparing lessons taught without the Flow-based pedagogical model and lessons taught according to the Flow-based pedagogical model, the significance is shown by retrieving the t-test (Tables 3, 4). It is clear that those who used the Flow-based pedagogical model achieved significantly better results. This result supports the usefulness of introducing a flow-based pedagogical model.

Group statistics

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
Immersion: with model	55	32,6000	5,31106	,71614
Immersion: without model	53	23,6117	7,21957	,71137
Balance: with model	55	32,6727	4,24724	,57270
Balance: without model	53	21,7087	9,01484	,88826
Total: with model	55	65,2727	8,28979	1,11779
Total: without model	53	45,3204	15,18592	1,49631

Table 3: Comparison of results with and without model 1.

Independent sample analysis

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
					Significance				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Immersion: Equal variances assumed	6,508	,012	8,128	156	<,001	<,001	8,98835	1,10582	6,80404	11,17266
Immersion: Equal variances were not assumed			8,905	140,645	<,001	<,001	8,98835	1,00941	6,99278	10,98392
Balance: Equal variances assumed	44,066	<,001	8,520	156	<,001	<,001	10,96399	1,28692	8,42196	13,50602
Balance: Equal variances were not assumed			10,374	154,122	<,001	<,001	10,96399	1,05688	8,87616	13,05182
Total: Equal variances assumed	25,958	<,001	9,042	156	<,001	<,001	19,95234	2,20656	15,59374	24,31094
Total: Equal variances were not assumed			10,683	155,900	<,001	<,001	19,95234	1,86773	16,26302	23,64166

Table 4: Comparison of results with and without model 2.

If we look at the overall scores, it is worth highlighting that there is a high difference of 20 points between the model and no model lessons.

b) Examining the difference between university students in relation to each other: no significance can be detected, so no difference between students (Table 5)

Group statistics

University	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standart error
NKE 1	55	33,0857	4,94898	,83653
NKE 2	53	31,7500	5,92830	1,32561
NKE 1	55	32,0857	4,46800	,75523
NKE 2	53	33,7000	3,71484	,83066
NKE 1	55	65,1714	8,49389	1,43573
NKE 2	53	65,4500	8,13359	1,81873

Table 5: Comparison of the difference between university students

Therefore, based on the student results above, differences between students in university classes do not affect the results.

Conclusion

Using a Flow-based pedagogical model, the classroom environment facilitates the balance between challenge and skill, a critical factor in flow. The results presented in university classrooms support the use of this model as a method for instructors to actively engage students, promoting deep immersion and sustained focus on tasks. The results show that the university classroom can be made experiential and challenging for students in many ways, using multiple modalities and activities to create creative learning experiences.

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The Growing Role of Churches in Social and Child Protection Services in Hungary

Abstract

This study examines the social and organizational dynamics of the increasing role of churches within Hungary's social and child protection service systems. The research is based on statistical data from the Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) and interviews with leaders of various religious and social organizations, highlighting the drivers and challenges of changes in provider structures. The findings indicate that major churches—primarily the Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran denominations—play a significant role in elder care, homeless services, and the maintenance of foster care networks. Meanwhile, support for special needs groups, such as individuals with disabilities or addictions, receives less church-based involvement. Although the growth rate has slowed in recent years, the 22 percent (social care services) and 30 percent (child protection services) presence of churches has remained steady.

Overall, the study offers insights into the growth dynamics and positioning of church-affiliated institutions within Hungary's social care system. The results point out that church-based providers, despite operating within a favorable regulatory and funding environment, increasingly face internal organizational limitations that constrain further expansion. In response, state policymakers are shifting toward smaller churches and religiously affiliated organizations, leading smaller denominations to find opportunities in service areas that other providers are less willing to explore.

Keywords

Church-based Social Services, Child Protection, Specialized Care, Religious Institutions, Hungarian Social Policy, Welfare Pluralism, Post-secularization, Community Cohesion, Social and Child Protection, Religious Providers

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Introduction

The issue of church-operated social services within the discourse of secularization suggests that religious institutions do not lose their significance in modern society; instead, they adopt new roles. This perspective, combined with the theory of welfare pluralism, may strengthen the role of religious communities in fostering social cohesion and providing choices, thereby enriching the interpretation of secularization. In the American context, Putnam's work (Putnam, 2010) demonstrates that religious communities generate significant social capital, contributing to community cohesion and social solidarity—an aspect particularly relevant to church-operated social services. Castles (2004) argues that church-based activities rooted in Christian values significantly contribute to social cohesion and community strengthening, a fundamental goal of welfare pluralism. Moreover, when churches become market participants within the service system, they must also focus on the efficiency and competitiveness of service provision. This shift, according to Tomka (1996), may, in the long term, weaken authentic religious identity and generate internal conflicts within the church between mission and practical engagement.

According to post-secularization theory, religious institutions do not vanish with modernity; rather, they adapt, assume new roles, and continue to influence public life, especially in areas like social care and child protection. Jürgen Habermas (2006, 2008) suggests that in modern societies, religion may take on new public roles that enrich the communal sphere and offer alternative responses to welfare challenges. Church-operated institutions' social services, in this sense, can be viewed as a post-secular phenomenon reflecting a new balance between religion and modern society. However, this duality brings challenges for churches, as service provision often entails administrative, specialized care, and professional standards that may be difficult for some religious organizations to reconcile with their mission.

In this framework, the secular engagement of religious institutions can be seen as a survival strategy, enabling them to maintain relevance in a modern, secular society. I believe this approach can be further refined by considering historical continuity, which helps distinguish today's church social roles from perceived power strategies. Churches historically provided social

services, regardless of their congregational size. Many such institutions follow centuries-old traditions of community and social services, meaning their current involvement is more a return to historical functions than a response to declining religiosity. Historically, churches were primary providers of social services long before the advent of state systems, serving not merely as gap-fillers but as active community organizers. This role dates back to the Middle Ages in Europe, when churches established hospitals and poorhouses, suggesting that church involvement is part of a historical process connected to the origins of the welfare system.

In post-socialist countries—including Hungary—the restoration of churches' public roles over the last three decades reflects a unique development. The period following the political transition enabled churches to restore this role, with the state transferring certain social services to religious providers. In Western Europe, this prominent realignment is absent; due to the continuity of service providers, significant church organizations still operate the largest social service systems. Post-secularization thus represents not simply a resurgence of religious actors but rather an expression of historical and social interconnections between religion and modern society, developing from different regional trajectories.

José Casanova (2006) points out that certain segments of religion transcend the private sphere and become community institutions, adopting new social roles, particularly in the social sector. Casanova argues that the communal role of religious institutions affirms that religion does not necessarily lose significance through secularization; instead, it assumes new forms, such as public service provision, community-building, and social functions. This direction highlights religion's socially beneficial activities, reinforcing pluralism and community solidarity. However, in assuming these roles, churches face the ongoing challenge of balancing religious identity with state-funded responsibilities. The principle of subsidiarity, central to Catholic social teaching (where smaller communities, like churches, should act where larger communities cannot), can lead to ethical dilemmas when state funding heavily influences social service provision. In the social sector, this raises the risk of diminishing the „spirituality" of churches as they function more like secular institutions.

Peter Berger (1999) writes about the relationship between religious pluralism and secularization, arguing that in modern societies, secularization does not necessarily mean the disappearance of religion; rather, it expands religious choices and roles, enhancing ideological freedom. According to Berger, pluralism fosters freedom of choice, allowing religious institutions to participate in public service provision in new forms. In secularization theory, the maintenance of church-operated social institutions appears as a pluralistic value, offering alternatives beyond the state system. This model is not unique to Hungary but is seen in other European countries as well. Therefore, it is worth questioning the genuine options available to service users when church providers deliver services under state funding without offering additional capacity—particularly in light of waiting lists and limited care options in certain types of institutions. Church-operated services can be especially important in rural and disadvantaged areas where state capacities are limited. Decentralized, church-affiliated institutions broaden service accessibility, fostering social system inclusivity and reducing social inequalities.

The role of churches in social care and child protection is an important and often debated topic worldwide, addressing the relationship between modern welfare systems and religious

communities. In Hungary, the presence of church-operated institutions has gradually increased since the political transition, with these institutions now significantly contributing to service provision. Legislative and funding changes, along with public policy goals in recent decades, have allowed churches to establish a stable position in Hungary's social care system.

Examining the role of church-based institutions in Hungarian social policy has garnered attention over the past few decades due to their growing presence and societal impact. Szilágyi's (2019) analyses highlight that legislative changes—particularly the 1997 Vatican Concordat and the 2011 Church Act—significantly influenced the expansion of church institutions and their role in social policy.

The aim of this research is to present church-based providers and actors, their growing presence, and the transformation of provider structures within specialized care and child protection. Through this lens, the study seeks to uncover the role of church providers in social care and how the involvement of various denominations has evolved in different forms and to varying extents. Churches' social involvement stems not only from historical and cultural traditions but also from public policy goals and the regulatory environment. Another aim of the research is therefore to contribute to understanding these influences by examining the complex structure, operations, and challenges of church-operated institutions in Hungary.

Data Sources of the Research

The primary data source for this research is the Social Sector Portal (SZÁP), operated by the National Institute of Social Policy. The SZÁP database includes records of social institutions granted operating licenses by the Ministry responsible for social policy under Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Services. Based on the issued licenses, the database enables the examination of provider structures and the regional distribution of institutional staff. Through SZÁP's institutional search function, I retrieved lists of institutions involved in specialized personal care and child protection services.

During the research, I categorized services by type to conduct targeted analyses on church-affiliated institutions serving various target groups. Currently, SZÁP distinguishes 22 service subtypes, which I grouped into five main categories based on target groups: homeless individuals, elderly persons, psychiatric patients, individuals with substance dependencies, and people with disabilities. By manually processing the institutional lists, I also categorized different religious providers by denomination, as SZÁP does not explicitly indicate religious affiliations.

The denominational classification was based on institution names and follows the categories established in the 2011 Act CCVI on Church Registration, creating a total of 16 denominational categories. Special attention was given to categorizing the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service, as SZÁP does not classify it as a religious provider. However, its operational structure demonstrates a close connection with the Catholic Church, and it is eligible for support reserved for recognized denominations. The differentiation between Catholic and Reformed Church organizational structures and levels also allowed for more precise analysis.

In analyzing the database, I considered the type and subtype of services, the regional location (territorial distribution), the start date of services (temporal scope), and the staffing and capacity of institutions. The reliability of the SZÁP database is primarily ensured through

state administrative inspections, as social and child protection institutions are regularly monitored. This oversight significantly enhances data accuracy, although classification ambiguities occasionally arise. For instance, the exact classification of institutions like Olajág Homes and the Human Services Center remains unclear. However, these instances are marginal and do not substantially skew the results. The classification of the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service poses a more complex issue: while its religious affiliations and access to church funding suggest its inclusion among church institutions, its association status does not necessarily fit this category, and SZÁP does not classify it as such. I decided to present its relevant data separately where applicable, given its Catholic ties and its evident alignment with the religious sphere, which closely relates to this study's focus. Another limitation of the database is that it cannot perform time-series queries and does not retain data on temporal changes. The database treats the issuance dates of licenses only as starting points, which do not always accurately reflect institutions' founding dates, as new licenses may have been issued due to legal or administrative changes. Nevertheless, I identified some correlations between licensing waves and legislative changes, providing a useful basis for analyzing the expansion strategies of religious providers.

The research interviews aimed to uncover the motivations and operational circumstances of religious providers. The interviewees included church social service experts and leaders representing the Greek Catholic, Reformed, Catholic, Lutheran, and Baptist Churches, as well as specialists from the Maltese Charity Service and other aid organizations. State administration representatives, including a former Secretary of State, a Deputy Secretary of State, and the head of a methodological center, also participated. These interviews provide supplementary information, with statistical data at the core of this analysis. In the future, I plan to explore the deeper interconnections of these qualitative findings and compare them with statistical data to gain a fuller understanding of the role of religious providers in Hungary's social care system.

The interviews conducted for this study followed a qualitative sampling method, utilizing semi-structured interviews to delve into the care management strategies of each denomination and the specificities of provider decision-making. Interviews typically lasted 1 to 1.5 hours and were conducted in person, with a dedicated question set on the expansion strategies of denominational providers. Participants were selected from decision-makers in churches with growing roles as providers, considering denominations with historical and social significance and representatives of major religious aid organizations. However, the generalizability of the results may be limited, as the sample is not representative but intentionally focused on providers with significant roles in institutional expansion. Thus, this study only shares supplemental information from the interviews related to institutional expansion aspects, which provide valuable context for analyzing SZÁP data.

Types of Providers and the Role of Churches in Specialized Social Care

Section 4 § (1) m) of Act III of 1993 (Szoctv.) identifies three types of providers for social services. However, the SZÁP database distinguishes a total of five provider types. State

providers include „the body designated by Government decree to carry out the state's provider duties, local governments, and associations of local governments." Church-based providers encompass recognized churches and internal ecclesiastical legal entities that, under Sections 9/D (5) and 9/F (1) of Act CCVI of 2011, have agreements for social, child welfare, or child protection services. For non-state providers, the law specifies private entrepreneurs, legal entities, individual companies, and certain foreign enterprises. The SZÁP database further differentiates by including separate categories for other non-state and nonprofit non-state providers. Thus, the database delineates state, municipal, church-based, other non-state, and nonprofit non-state providers.

At the time of the study, a total of 1,917 institutions held operating licenses within the field of specialized social care, with an approved capacity of 98,056 beds. Municipal providers represent the largest group, operating 504 institutions with a total of 25,812 beds. Following them are church-based providers, who manage 427 institutions with 23,813 beds, and central government providers, who operate 395 institutions with 25,425 beds. Other non-state providers operate 347 institutions with 13,410 beds, while nonprofit non-state providers manage 167 institutions with 5,339 beds. In terms of capacity, central government institutions tend to accommodate larger numbers, while nonprofit non-state providers operate smaller institutions, reflecting the differing strategies among provider types.

Church-based providers account for 22.3% of all institutions and 24.3% of all licensed beds, a proportion similar to that of municipal providers (26.3%) and central government providers (25.9%) in terms of bed capacity. These data indicate that church-based providers play a significant role in specialized social and child protection services, especially in terms of capacity, even surpassing municipal providers in the number of available beds.

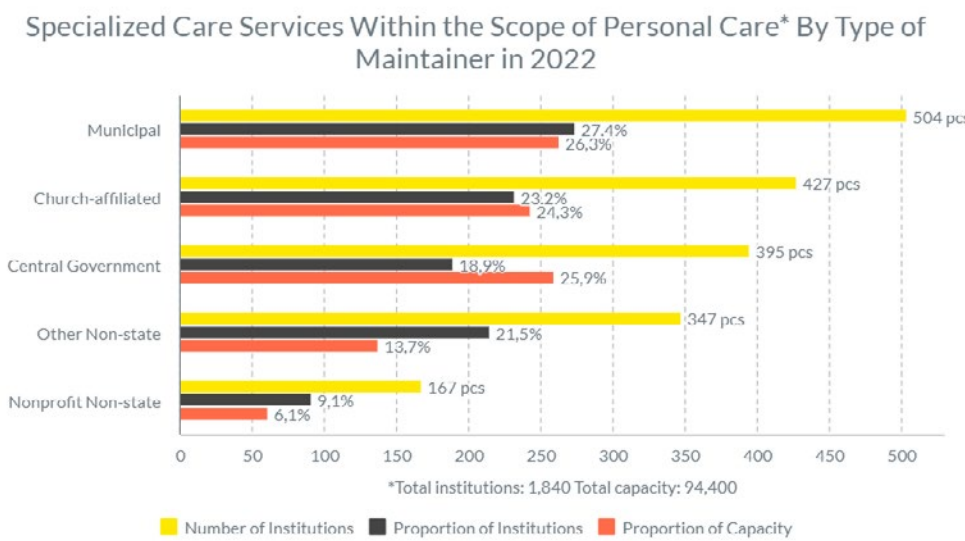


Figure 1. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

Types of Providers and Churches in Specialized Social Care

Act CXCII of 2012 significantly reshaped the structure of municipally-operated institutions by regulating the state takeover of certain specialized social and child protection institutions. As part of these changes, on January 1, 2013, 40 institutions for persons with disabilities, psychiatric patients, and individuals with substance dependencies, along with 137 child protection institutions, were transferred to state ownership. In 2014, an additional 15 integrated social and child protection institutions were handed over. This restructuring had a substantial impact on municipal sector capacity and provider structure, leading to greater centralization in the social care system. According to the 2022 SZÁP database, municipal providers operate 504 institutions, representing over one-quarter of all institutions.

Within the non-state provider category, a distinction is made between nonprofit and other non-state organizations. The nonprofit category includes nonprofit limited liability companies, while other non-state organizations are primarily composed of associations and foundations, such as the Hungarian Red Cross and the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service (MMSZ). Due to its unique status, the MMSZ plays a prominent role in the social care system: while formally registered as an association, it is eligible for church funding under an interstate agreement with the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and pursuant to Act CXL of 2010 (Article 5(1)), allowing it to receive normative and supplementary support allocated to church-operated institutions. The MMSZ operates an extensive network of institutions, with the number of institutions nearly doubling and bed capacity more than tripling since 2016; according to the SZÁP database, it currently manages 77 institutions with 4,295 beds.

When analyzing church-based providers, it is essential to consider that while the SZÁP database categorizes them under a single „church-based" label, this category actually encompasses a diverse array of legally and organizationally independent entities. Behind the seemingly homogeneous church category in statistical data are multiple denominations and organizational levels associated with various religious traditions and structures. During this research, I manually assigned each institution to denominational categories based on the Church Register specified in Act CCVI of 2011, resulting in 16 denominational subcategories. This detailed classification enables recognition of internal differences among churches, allowing for examination of the unique role and impact of each denomination. Church-based providers thus exhibit a more complex structure compared to the more unified organizational and legal frameworks of state or municipal providers. Below, I present a detailed overview of these denominational subcategories and their distribution.

Church-based providers account for 22.5% of all specialized social care institutions, with a total of 427 institutions and 23,146 beds. In terms of denominational distribution, the Reformed Church has the largest number of institutions (138) and beds (7,257), followed by the Catholic Church with 117 institutions and 6,594 beds. The Lutheran Church operates 66 institutions with 2,455 beds, and the Baptist Church participates with 33 institutions offering 1,675 beds. The diversity of church-operated institutions is reflected in the types of care provided and their geographical distribution, enabling broad support for various target groups while preserving religious and community values.

Number of Institutions and Capacity of Specialized Care Services Within the Scope of Personal Care by Denomination in 2022						
Denomination	**Number of Institutions (pcs)**	**Proportion of Institutions within Church-based Providers (%)**	**Proportion of Institutions within All Providers (%)**	**Capacity (persons)**	**Proportion of Capacity within Church-based Providers (%)**	**Proportion of Capacity within All Providers (%)**
Reformed	138	32,2%	7,2%	7257	31,4%	7,7%
Catholic	117	27,3%	6,1%	6594	28,5%	7,0%
Hungarian Maltese Charity Service	77	-	-	4295	-	-
Evangelical Lutheran	66	15,4%	3,5%	2455	10,6%	2,6%
Baptist	33	7,7%	1,7%	2204	9,5%	2,3%
Olajág Homes (Jewish)	16	3,7%	0,8%	1675	7,2%	1,8%
Greek Catholic	19	4,4%	1,0%	1052	4,5%	1,1%
Evangelical Methodist	8	1,9%	0,4%	468	2,0%	0,5%
Pentecostal	10	2,3%	0,5%	431	1,9%	0,5%
Serbian Orthodox	3	0,7%	0,2%	279	1,2%	0,3%
Jewish	5	1,2%	0,3%	245	1,1%	0,3%
Salvation Army	4	0,9%	0,2%	175	0,8%	0,2%

Adventist	3	0,7%	0,2%	92	0,4%	0,1%
Humanitarian	2	0,5%	0,1%	80	0,3%	0,1%
Nazarenes	1	0,2%	0,1%	75	0,3%	0,1%
Methodist	2	0,5%	0,1%	52	0,2%	0,1%
Constantinople Orthodox	1	0,2%	0,1%	12	0,1%	0,0%
Total	428	100,0%	22,50%	23.146	100,0%	24,5%

Table 1. Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

The Hungarian Maltese Charity Service (MMSZ) has an extensive network within the field of specialized social care, with a consistent increase in the number of its institutions in recent years. While in 2016, MMSZ operated 35 institutions with a capacity of 1,138 beds, by 2022, this expanded to 71 institutions with 3,991 beds. According to the SZÁP database, MMSZ now maintains 77 institutions with a total capacity of 4,295 beds, ranking it third among denominational providers, behind the Reformed and Catholic Churches and ahead of the Lutheran providers.

All Hungarian Christian churches operate under a decentralized model, with various organizational structures. The Catholic Church is organized into dioceses, each led by a bishop with independent decision-making authority within their area, following unique strategies for organizing and maintaining social services. Dioceses, monastic orders, and Catholic organizations all function within highly regulated legal frameworks; in the „Register of Recognized Churches and Internal Church Legal Entities" of 2012, 152 internal legal entities were recorded. In contrast, Protestant churches, such as the Reformed and Lutheran Churches, appear in the register as unified recognized churches. However, this does not imply a centralized structure. Protestant churches operate under a bottom-up organizational culture, with the establishment of social services generally requiring approval and support from local presbyteries and pastors.

In the Catholic Church's social care system, various organizational units participate, each with independent legal status and decision-making authority. This organizational diversity leads to a decentralized approach to managing and maintaining services, without centralized control over different units. For instance, dioceses oversee their institutions through the Catholic Caritas network, which provides 2,271 beds across 45 institutions as separate legal entities. Monastic orders play a significant role, with female orders operating 1,312 beds in 25 institutions and male orders managing 346 beds across 7 institutions, adhering to their distinct values and organizational principles. The Catholic Charity Service, supported by the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference (MKPK), operates 1,531 beds across 17 institutions, also as an independent legal entity. The Kolping movement similarly provides services aligned

with Catholic values, with 999 beds across 16 institutions. Smaller parish institutions offer 123 beds in 6 institutions, while MKPK operates a single institution with a total of 12 beds. Understanding this internal diversity is essential for comprehending the Catholic social care structure and governance, as these differences influence the organization of services and the flexibility of local decision-making.

Interviews with Protestant church providers indicate that the organizational structure reflects Protestant theological principles, granting high levels of local autonomy in social services. Within the Reformed Church, there are two main organizational units: the general Reformed provision with 5,308 beds across 100 institutions, and the nationally recognized Reformed Charity Service, which provides an additional 1,949 beds across 38 institutions. In the Lutheran Church, there appears to be even less organizational division according to the SZÁP database. However, in both Protestant churches, service organization methods emphasize autonomous, local decision-making.

Regarding types of specialized social care, church-based providers primarily focus on institutional care services, with 73% of church-operated institutions dedicated to nursing and care services. Transitional care institutions make up 12% of services, while residential homes, rehabilitation institutions, and supported housing programs cover the remaining 15%. Among all providers, church-based institutions constitute 27.1% of nursing and care services, with the remaining 56.6% provided by non-church entities. In transitional care services, church providers account for 14.4%, compared to 21.3% for non-church providers. Residential homes show a 13.4% church-operated share versus 9.2% non-church. The presence of church-based providers is thus most substantial in essential, long-term care services, where their community values and services provide a stable foundation for the target groups they serve.

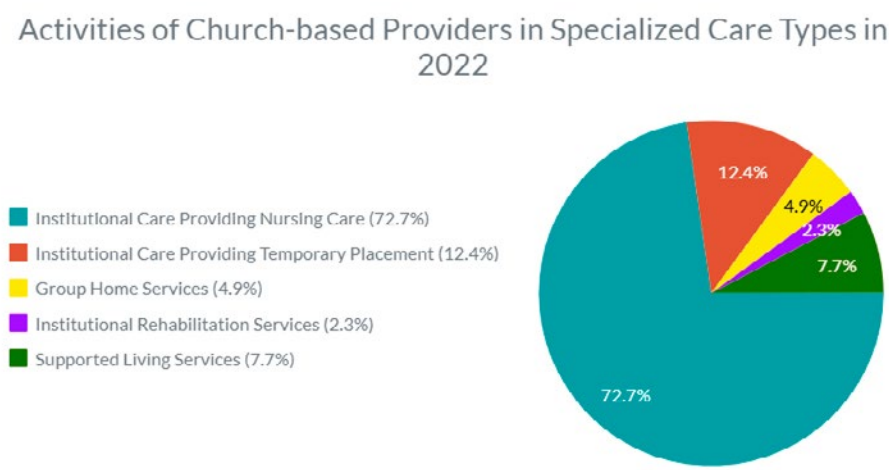


Figure 2. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

Proportion of Providers in Types of Specialized Social Care Services						
	Church-based Institution	**Proportion Within All Services**	**Proportion Within Church-based Institution**	**Non-Church-based Institution**	**Proportion Within Non-Church-based Institution**	**Total Institutions**
Institutional Care Providing Nursing	311	27,1%	72,7%	836	56,6%	1147
Institutional Care Providing Temporary Placement	53	14,4%	12,4%	315	21,3%	368
Group Home Services	21	13,4%	4,9%	136	9,2%	157
Institutional Rehabilitation Services	10	16,9%	2,3%	49	3,3%	59
Supported Living Services	33	19,1%	7,7%	140	9,5%	173
Total	428	22,5%	-	1476	77,5%	1904

Table 2. Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

Types of Providers and the Role of Churches in Child Protection Services

Section 5 § s) of Act XXXI of 1997 on Child Protection Services defines provider types for child protection services in alignment with the Social Services Act (Szoc.tv). According to the SZÁP database, a total of 1,370 operating licenses have been issued in the child protection sector, covering central governmental, non-state (including other and nonprofit), and church-based providers, with a total capacity of 28,993 beds.

Based on Act XXXI of 1997, the child protection system is organized according to provider types, creating a structure aligned with the social care system. The SZÁP database reflects the institutional composition and provider types within child protection services, illustrating the role and capacities of various provider models. The system encompasses 1,369 licensed service

providers delivering child protection services through various forms. The primary types of institutions include children's homes, external accommodations, foster care networks, and aftercare services, all aiming to provide comprehensive support to children and young people across different life situations and needs.

The extent of participation in child protection services varies by provider type. Church-based providers play a significant role, operating a total of 412 institutions, which represents a substantial part of the entire network. Church-operated institutions have a combined capacity of 20,627 beds, underscoring their considerable contribution to child protection services. In 2022, the total capacity of foster care networks was 20,069, with 19,317 of those beds managed by church-based providers.

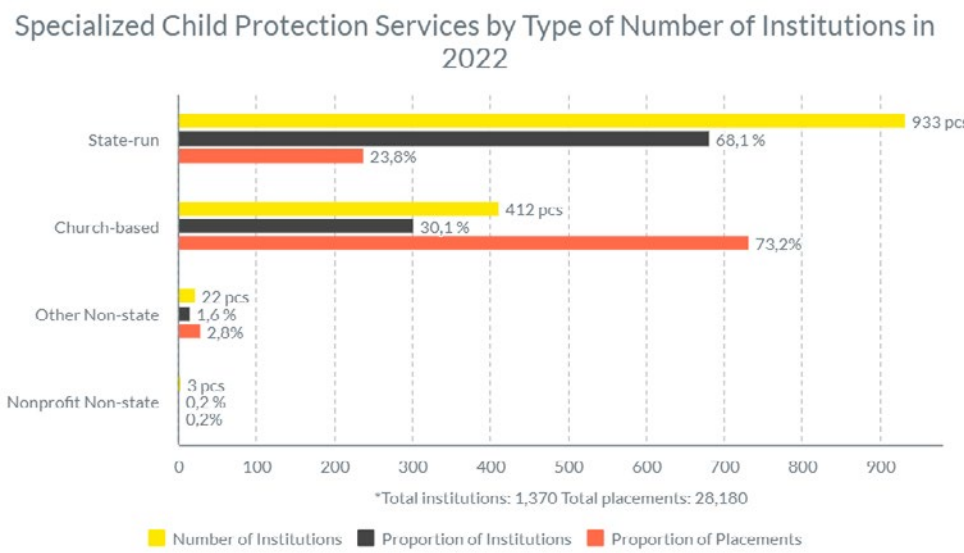


Figure 3. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

The number of institutions maintained by the central government is 933, providing a total of 6,705 beds, mainly in larger facilities such as children's homes and aftercare services. The significant difference in the ratio of beds to institutions is due to the high bed capacity required for foster care networks, most of which are operated by church-based providers.

Among non-state providers, there are two categories: „other non-state" and „nonprofit non-state" providers. „Other non-state" providers maintain 22 institutions with a capacity of 797 beds, while „nonprofit non-state" providers operate only 3 institutions with a mere 51 beds, indicating substantial capacity differences among non-state providers. The Hungarian Maltese Charity Service (MMSZ) is listed separately as an „other non-state" provider, managing 3 institutions with a total of 410 beds.

In child protection services, 73% of the available beds are provided by church-operated institutions, which make up 30% of all institutions. Central government institutions provide only 24% of the beds, while non-state providers have a minimal role, collectively offering just 848 beds.

Examining the denominational distribution within church-based child protection institutions reveals the varied involvement and capacities of different denominations. The Catholic Church is the largest church provider in child protection, with 9,500 beds across 266 institutions, securing a prominent position in the sector. The Saint Ágota Child Protection Service, a national organization operated by the Catholic Church, has been managing child protection services across 9 counties since July 1, 2020. Other Catholic-affiliated institutions include those under the Diocese of Szeged-Csanád, 7 institutions managed by women's religious orders, and 2 institutions overseen by the Kolping Educational and Social Institutional Provider Organization.

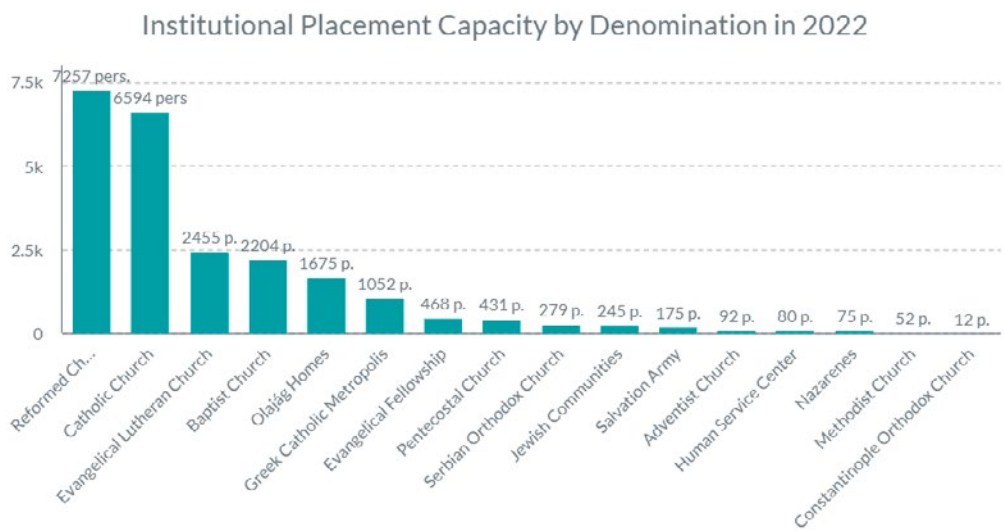


Figure 4. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

Reformed Church-based providers also play a significant role in child protection services, offering 4,318 beds across 56 institutions. The Greek Catholic Church maintains a smaller but stable presence with 79 institutions and 1,528 beds, while the Baptist Church operates 21 institutions with a total of 2,420 beds. The Lutheran Church participates with 11 institutions providing 269 beds, and the Hungarian Pentecostal Church, through the same number of institutions, offers 2,087 beds. These denominational distributions illustrate that each church contributes to the child protection system with varying capacities and roles, where community, religious values, and denominational characteristics significantly influence the structure and quality of care.

Number of Institutions and Placements in Child Protection Specialized Services by Denomination in 2022				
Denomination	**Number of Institutions (pcs)**	**Proportion of Institutions within All Institutions (%)**	**Placement Capacity (pers.)**	**Proportion of Placements within Total Capacity (%)**
Catholic Church	226	16,5	9500	33,7
Greek Catholic Church	79	5,8	1528	5,4
Reformed Church	56	4,1	4318	15,3
Baptist Church	21	1,5	2420	8,6
Evangelical Lutheran Church	11	0,8	269	1
Hungarian Pentecostal Church	11	0,8	2087	7,4
Jewish	3	0,2	47	0,2
Seventh-day Adventist Church	2	0,1	176	0,6
Faith Church	2	0,1	15	0,1
Other Church-based	1	0,1	267	0,9
Total	412	30,1	20.627	73.2

Table 3. Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

The Role of Church-Based Providers in Different Types of Specialized Care

Church-based providers primarily focus on elderly care and services for homeless individuals, while they play a smaller role in the care of individuals with disabilities, psychiatric conditions, and substance dependencies. This distribution clearly reflects the social focus of church-operated institutions, while central and municipal providers ensure broader services for groups with specialized needs.

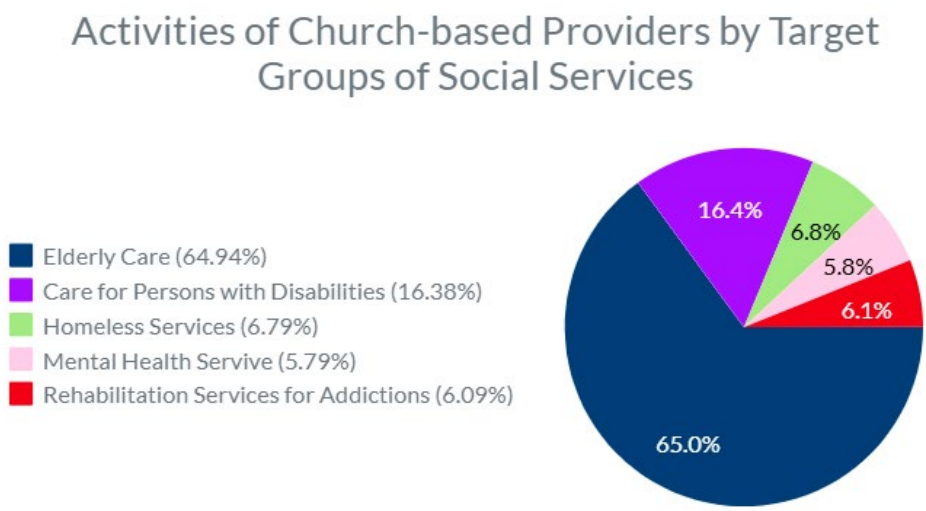


Figure 5. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

The types of care provided by various providers—elderly care, care for individuals with disabilities, substance abuse treatment, and psychiatric care—define the target groups and highlight the involvement of each provider type. Based on the number and proportion of available beds, it is evident that in elderly care, central government (36.2%) and municipal providers (36.7%) participate at nearly the same rate, while church-based providers supply 29.3% of all beds for this type of care. Non-state providers play a smaller role, contributing 13.3% of beds. This distribution indicates that state-run institutions remain the primary providers of elderly care. Among church-operated institutions, the largest target group is clearly the elderly, with 65% of church institutions focused on this group. The three largest Hungarian churches—the Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran Churches—play prominent roles, offering various care types, including nursing homes and transitional care facilities.

Among church-based providers in elderly care, the Catholic Church is the most dominant, maintaining 40% of church-run nursing homes, while the Reformed Church accounts for 25%

of these providers. Lutheran institutions represent 15% of church-based elderly care, with the remaining share divided among smaller denominations. Among these, the Baptist Church holds a 10% share, while the Pentecostal Church and other smaller denominations account for the remaining 10%.

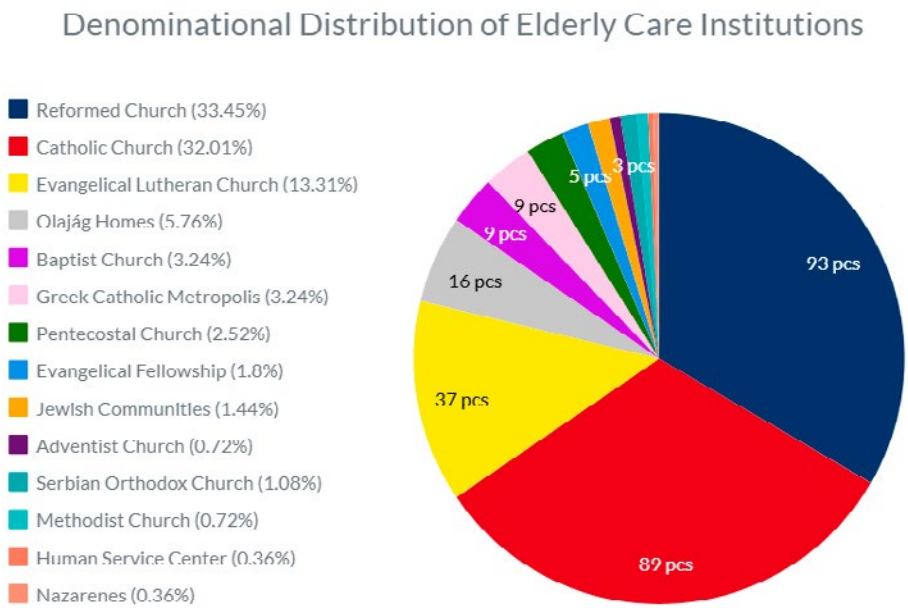


Figure 6. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

The number of placements in church-based institutions has increased by 41% since 2010. This growth contributed to the total number of placements in long-term residential care for the elderly reaching 52,154 by the end of 2019. The utilization rate of these institutions is high, with only 1,868 available placements.(KSH 2019)

In the care of individuals with disabilities, municipal providers demonstrate significant dominance, accounting for 36.6% of the available beds, followed by non-state organizations with 18.2% and the central government with 16.2%. Church-based providers have a smaller presence in this care type, representing 11.8% compared to other providers. However, within church-operated care services, institutions supporting individuals with disabilities rank second, comprising 16.4% of their focus. The Catholic Church plays a notable role, operating 50% of church-based facilities for individuals with disabilities, followed by the Reformed Church, which represents 30% of church-based providers in this area. The Lutheran Church provides 12% of such care, while the remaining 8% is managed by smaller denominations, including the Baptist and Pentecostal Churches.

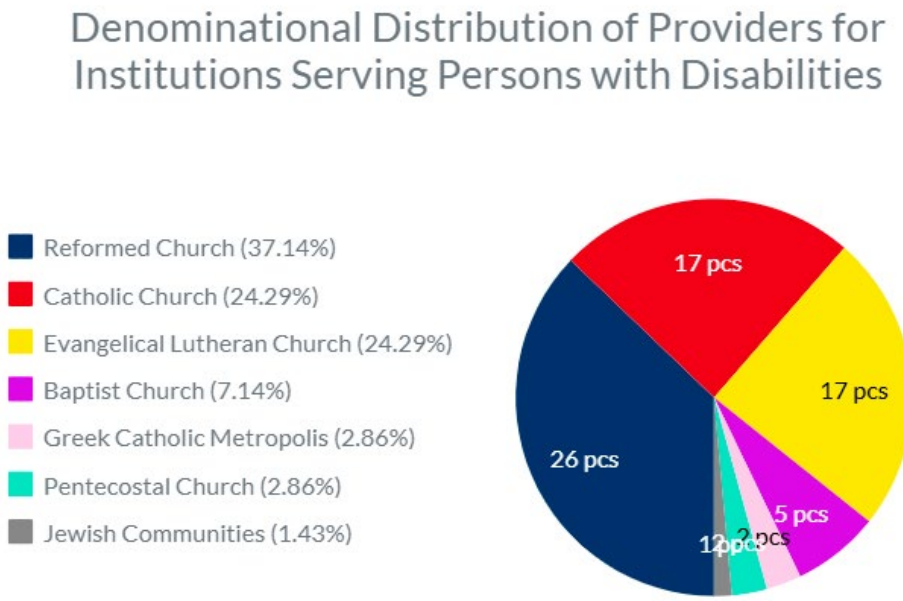
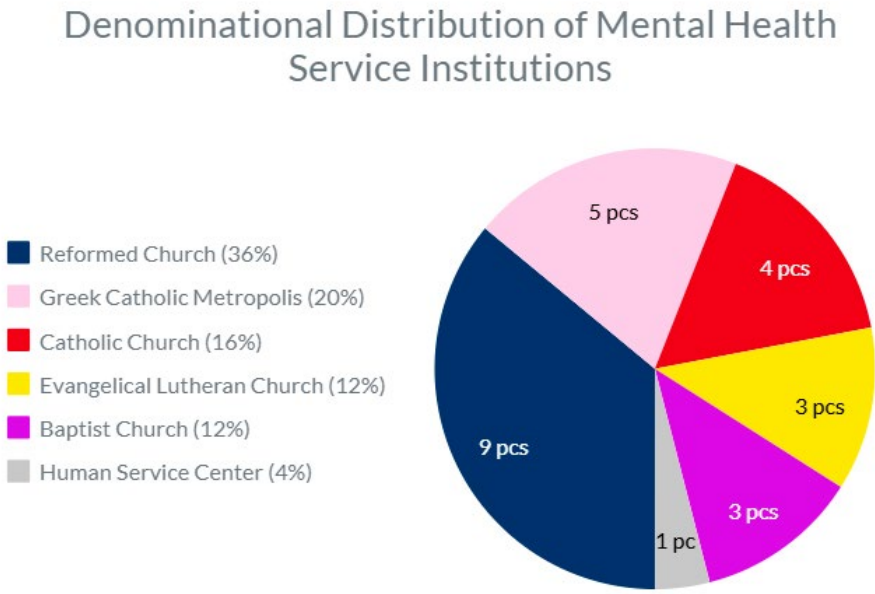


Figure 7. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

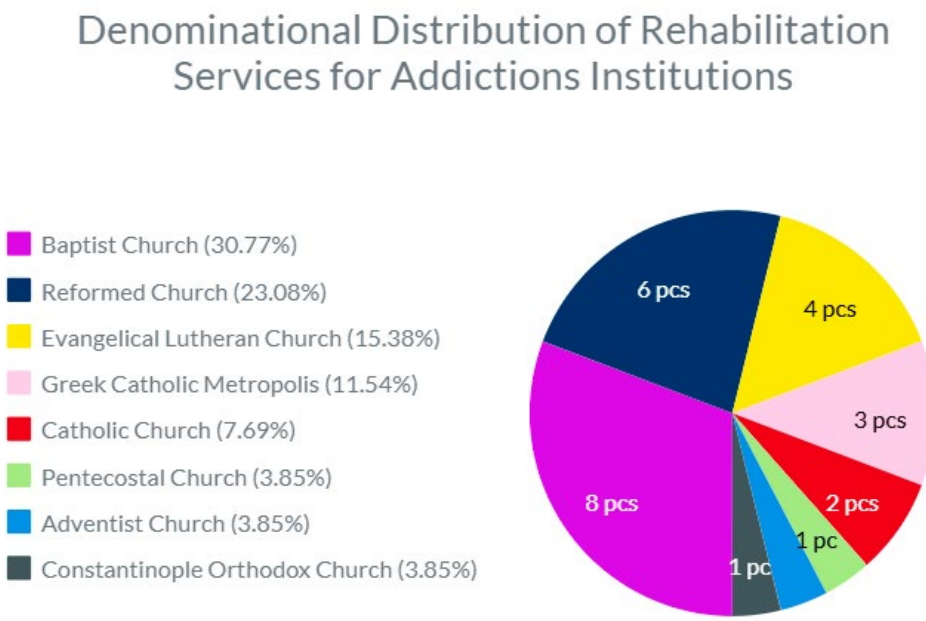
In homeless care, the central government plays a dominant role, providing 47.1% of available beds, while municipalities contribute 40.1%, and church-based providers account for 18.4% in this area. Among all church-operated institutions, homeless care ranks third, with 6.7% of church institutions offering services in this field. The distribution of church-based institutions in homeless care is particularly noteworthy. The Catholic Church maintains 35% of church-run homeless care facilities, followed by the Reformed Church with 25%. The Lutheran Church holds a 15% share, while the Baptist Church contributes 10%. The remaining 15% is provided by smaller denominations, including the Pentecostal Church and other religious communities.

In the care of psychiatric and substance abuse patients, central government providers dominate, with 54.0% of beds in psychiatric care and 61.8% in substance abuse care. Municipalities also have a strong presence, covering 53.9% of psychiatric care and 27.9% of substance abuse services. Church-based and other non-state providers have lower capacities in this segment, indicating that state and municipal structures play a central role in serving these specialized groups. Church involvement here is primarily supplementary and smaller in scale, with only 5.7% of church-operated institutions serving psychiatric patients and 6% serving individuals with substance abuse issues.

The Catholic Church holds the largest share of church-operated institutions for psychiatric patients, operating 45% of such facilities, followed by the Reformed Church with 30%. The Lutheran Church provides 10% of church-based psychiatric care, with the remaining 15% divided between the Baptist Church and smaller denominations, which generally offer complementary services in this area. In substance abuse care, the Catholic Church also leads, managing 40% of



Figures 8 and 9. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)



church-based institutions in this category, followed by the Reformed Church at 25%. The Lutheran Church holds a 10% share in substance abuse care, with the Baptist Church and smaller denominations making up the remaining 25%.

While church-based providers are actively involved across various care types, their role in serving certain target groups—such as individuals with disabilities, psychiatric, and substance abuse care—is less prominent than in elderly care or homeless services. This difference may stem partly from historical traditions and partly from differing values and mission goals among providers, which tend to prioritize support for the elderly and homeless populations. This raises the question of whether church-operated institutions align adequately with society's broader needs, particularly for complex and specialized target groups, whose care is typically dominated by state or municipal organizations.

Interviews with decision-makers from smaller churches suggest that the care types they undertake often represent their only opportunities for involvement in state-supported roles, as larger churches and state actors already cover more traditional care areas. Within this framework, smaller churches are exploring unique social roles, taking on responsibilities that other providers may avoid due to the specific expertise required and a lack of traditional foundations in those areas.

Temporal and Regional Indicators of Institutional Expansion by Church-Based Providers in Social Specialized Care

The development of church-operated institutions closely aligns with changes in the national social policy and legal environment, which unfolded in several phases. Initially, Act III of 1993 on Social Administration enabled church legal entities to take on provider roles in social services, sparking gradual growth in the 1990s. This was later reinforced through funding agreements between state and church actors.

Bernadett Szilágyi (2014) notes that, following the political transition, the regulation for church establishment was relatively flexible, with church involvement primarily supported through individual budget agreements related to the restitution of former church properties. The establishment of church-operated institutions became feasible due to Act III of 1993, which allowed church entities to maintain educational and social institutions. Later, the Vatican Agreement with the Apostolic See, followed by the Church Funding Act (Act CXXIV of 1997), brought fundamental changes for church-operated institutions. This international agreement defined the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Hungarian State, addressing the financing of public functions and creating new opportunities for church providers. Subsequently, other historical churches, such as the Reformed and Lutheran Churches, benefited from similar agreements.

The third major transformation occurred with the 2011 Church Act, which modified the range of churches eligible for funding while maintaining a multi-channel financing system. According to Szilágyi's analysis, this law established a new direction for church-operated institutions, providing long-term stability but also introducing new challenges. Changes in the number of operating licenses issued post-transition reflect that the establishment and takeover of church institutions largely adapted to new legal regulations.

During expert interviews, participants noted that sectoral difficulties, such as workforce shortages, similarly affect church-based institutions. One interviewee explained, "to address this issue, we began using our central structures to compensate for local workforce shortages." (Interviewee 12, Manuscript). The internal structures of church-based providers offer some flexibility to bridge structural and sectoral challenges and adapt to service needs. In many cases, local communities and charitable organizations participate in service provision, allowing for a division of institutional responsibilities at local, regional, or central levels.

Another interviewee highlighted regulatory incentives linked to waves of institutional transfers, which allowed for greater flexibility in resource acquisition beyond normative social service funding. They described the first wave as occurring between 2001 and 2004, during the first Fidesz government, when the Széchenyi Program provided opportunities to build new institutions with a capacity of 50 beds. Currently, the Reformed Church operates 80 institutions, 50 of which were built during this period, including elderly homes and other facilities in the Trans-Tisza region. The second wave, from 2008 to 2011, involved municipal takeovers, while the third wave, between 2015 and 2017, saw the state transfer 3,000 out of 30,000 beds, focusing on transferring existing capacities rather than establishing new institutions. (Interviewee 2, Manuscript)

The Reformed, Catholic, and Lutheran Churches played a prominent role in the dynamic expansion of social institutions, showing continuous growth from the early 2000s until 2016-17, after which a period of stagnation followed. During the same period, the Baptist Charity Service and smaller churches showed more modest growth. According to interviewees, following the expansion until 2017, churches have focused on optimizing and professionally developing existing

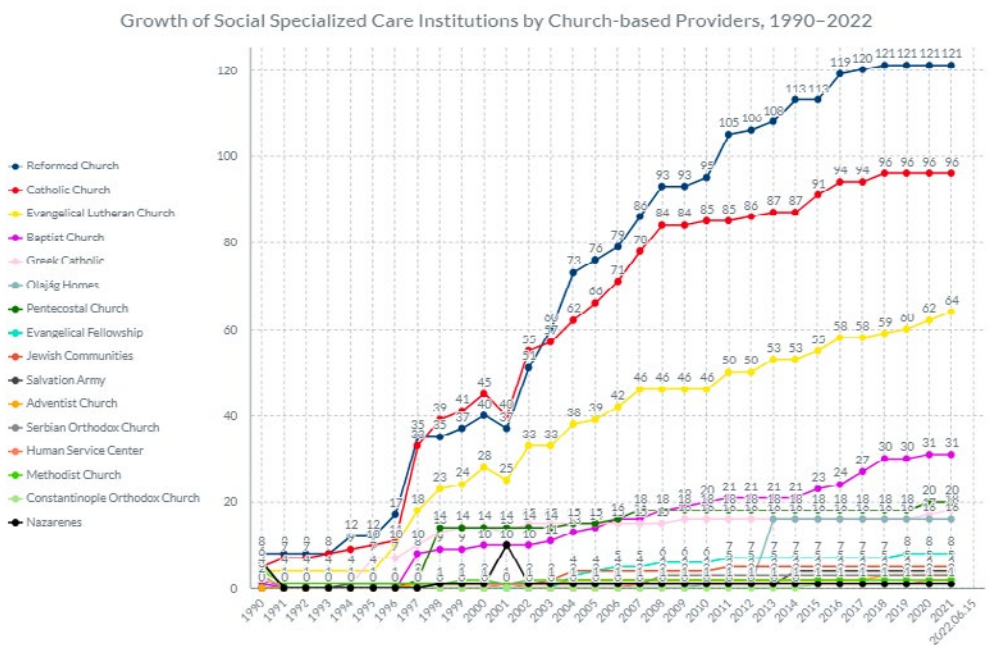


Figure 10. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

institutions. The past decade's political stability has supported predictability, yet providers now consider their organizational limits, with further expansion not being a priority. The strategic transfer of historically significant institutions—those held by churches before 1949 and important to local religious communities—has largely been completed. Church providers now also prioritize financial sustainability, mindful of potential changes in the political environment.

The government's intent to involve churches in service organization remains strong, as reflected in statements made after the 2022 elections. By 2017, when established churches were nearing their capacity limits and the number of transferred institutions began to decline, the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service (MMSZ) emerged as a new player. MMSZ operated 35 institutions with 1,138 beds in 2016, but by 2022, this had expanded to 71 institutions, largely in response to increased demand for basic services. These acquisitions were preceded by strategic decisions: "When such a request came—to possibly take over a residential institution from the state—we considered which institution in a given region would fit within our network. There might be a suitable institution, but if we don't have a Maltese institution nearby… then it's a big question. Another factor is whether there's a Maltese base, a foundation of services or a volunteer group we can rely on. For instance, if we have a well-functioning volunteer group, it would be beneficial to institutionalize it with some kind of specialized service that connects with our basic services." (Interviewee 12, Manuscript)

Church-based service organization differs from the county-based state administrative structure, resulting in a unique territorial organization. Understanding the territorial strategies of church providers requires examining the organizational units of denominations, which determine each church's territorial presence. For instance, the Catholic Church divides the country into 14 dioceses, while the Greek Catholic Church operates across three dioceses. The Lutheran Church has established three national church districts (Northern, Western, and Southern). This internal structure creates a distinctive territorial social care system that does not align with administrative boundaries, complicating county-level comparisons. The Lutheran Church demonstrates the broadest national coverage, followed by the Reformed Church.

The churches' internal, multi-level organizational structures enable services to be organized at various levels—local, regional (such as diocesan or district), and central (such as archdiocese or synod)—which can lead to parallel operational frameworks for providers. Decisions on which level a particular service type is implemented depend on care needs and local organizational capacities, offering significant flexibility for providers. Some churches are also connected to national charitable organizations, such as Catholic Caritas, which operates at the diocesan level in collaboration with the Catholic Charity Service, or the Reformed Church Aid, which operates a network of church-maintained institutions under the central direction of the Diaconal Office.

Temporal and Regional Indicators of Institutional Expansion by Church-Based Providers in Child Protection Services

Act XXVIII of 2020 has significantly strengthened the role of churches in social and child protection services. This legislation governs the transfer of licenses to church-based management, the operation of institutions with acquired licenses, and the transfer of ownership of certain state-owned properties

to churches. Based on this regulation, the MMSZ Association acquired ownership of 10 properties, the Lutheran Church received 7, and various Reformed Church parishes received 10 properties. Property ownership is critical in church financing, as highlighted in an interview with a representative from the Baptist Charity Service. Most Baptist-operated social institutions came under church management through municipal transfer; however, property ownership remained with the municipalities. This situation often leads to disputes, as the provider must cover maintenance costs for neglected properties while funding is frequently directed toward basic services and maintenance needs left unaddressed by the municipalities (Interviewee 11, Manuscript).

In child protection, there are currently 1,370 licensed institutions across five service types, with 412 operated by churches. The Catholic Church leads in church-operated child protection institutions, with 172 children's homes, 43 foster care networks, and 11 aftercare facilities with external placements. The Greek Catholic Church operates 70 children's homes and 9 foster care networks. The Reformed Church maintains 46 children's homes, 5 foster care networks, 4 aftercare homes, and 1 aftercare facility with external placements. The Baptist Church also participates in child protection services, managing 6 children's homes, 1 aftercare facility with external placement, and 14 foster care networks. Other churches are also involved in foster care networks: the Lutheran Church operates 10, the Jewish Community 3, the Pentecostal Church 11, and both the Adventist Church and the Faith Church each operate 2 foster care networks.

Child Protection Specialized Services by Denomination in 2022						
	Children's Home	**Aftercare in Child Protection Provided in External Placements**	**Foster Parent Network**	**Regional Child Protection Professional Services**	**Aftercare in Child Protection – Youth Adult's Home**	**Total**
Non-church-based	881	29	10	3	35	958
Catholic Church	172	11	43	0	0	226
Greek Catholic Metropolis	70	0	9	0	0	79
Reformed Church	46	1	5	0	4	56
Baptist Church	6	1	14	0	0	21
Evangelical Lutheran Church	0	1	10	0	0	11
Jewish Communities	0	0	3	0	0	3

Pentecostal Church	0	1	11	0	0	12
Adventist Church	0	0	2	0	0	2
Faith Church	0	0	2	0	0	2
Total Institutions	1175	44	109	3	39	1370
Total Church-based	294	15	99	0	4	412

Table 4. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

The development of child protection services follows a similar pattern to that of specialized personal care services, with particularly notable growth observed between 2010 and 2014. During this period, the Catholic Church's involvement expanded from 97 to 197 institutions, indicating a key presence in the maintenance of child protection services. A total of 5-6 churches actively participate in service organization, with the Catholic Church being especially prominent. According to the SZÁP database, church-operated child protection activities cover 9 counties, providing substantial territorial coverage for these providers.

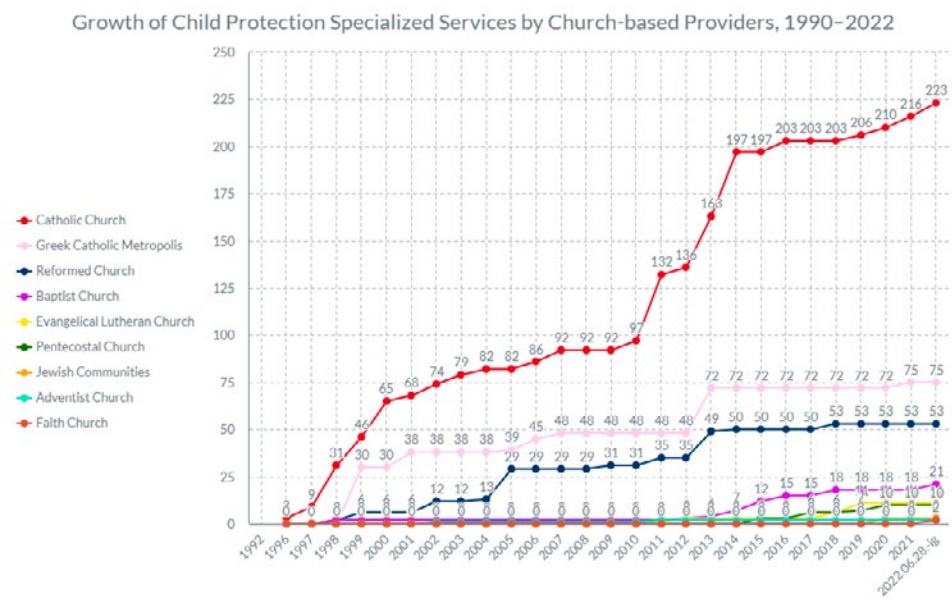


Figure 12. Source: Social Sector Portal (SZÁP) 2022, Self-Compiled (Downloaded on 2022.06.15)

This diversification has proven especially beneficial in better addressing local needs and increasing the range of social services. In social and child protection services, the expansion of church-operated institutions has also brought significant regional changes, particularly in rural areas, where they rely on local community resources and support. However, this shift doesn't always lead to greater diversity in care options, as it often involves transferring existing capacities rather than creating new ones, with church providers potentially mobilizing local community resources for service organization.

The sector's expansion has also faced challenges. Máté-Tóth – Szilágyi (2020) points out that the substantial increase in state funding and institutional takeovers by church-based providers may create new dependencies. Increasing state support may, in the long term, limit the autonomy of church institutions, as their sustainability increasingly relies on stable state funding. This dependency particularly affects larger historical churches, which, despite demonstrating flexibility in organizing internal structures and expanding their regional presence, remain closely tied to state funding policies.

The expansion of church-operated institutions has thus been shaped not only by changes in legal frameworks but also by the strength of local communities, historical traditions, and the continuous adjustments within the state support system. Over the past decades, the Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran Churches have played a key role in social and child protection services. Although the rate of expansion appears to be slowing, government intentions to transfer responsibility to church-based providers are unlikely to change, with new methods anticipated. Ensuring stable operation, rather than further expansion, remains a priority for church providers, maintaining their significant role in Hungary's social care system.

Summary

The research confirms that church-based providers have significantly expanded their presence in social and child protection services in Hungary over recent decades. According to records from the Social Sector Portal (SZÁP), church-operated social institutions account for 22% of services, while in child protection, this share exceeds 30%, with the Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran Churches holding the largest portions. Interviews conducted during the research also indicate that the structural flexibility of church actors and the support of local communities have played substantial roles in this growth.

The return of religion to public life does not indicate a religious revival, but rather that churches gain new legitimacy through their social functions, which are primarily grounded in their social and welfare services rather than their traditional religious authority (Rosta 2019). Religious communities are simultaneously attempting to regain social legitimacy and rebuild their institutional presence—often with the partnership (or political) support of the state (Máté-Tóth – Rosta 2022). However, extensive state funding of church institutions could create new dependencies in the long run (Máté-Tóth – Szilágyi 2020). This is especially relevant for the larger historical churches, where the sustainability of institutional autonomy may increasingly rely on the stability of state funding. Decision-makers among church providers are considering various strategies, with a key focus on the role of the local religious community and its leadership. A critical question is whether, if the current favorable funding environment changes

drastically, these institutions could secure alternative funding sources to maintain operations. The areas of care prioritized by church providers – such as elderly care and homeless services – reflect both traditional church missions and the potential for long-term stability, possibly supported by client contributions.

An imbalance may arise between societal needs and the competencies of church providers, highlighting the challenges churches face in meeting increasingly complex social care demands. The capabilities of church-based providers, their funding sources, and expertise may restrict their ability to support certain target groups.

The analysis results offer insights into the diversity of church-operated providers as a legal category, across care areas and denominational distribution. The Reformed, Catholic, and Lutheran Churches have played central roles in specialized social care, particularly in elderly care, disability care, and child protection services. While growth has slowed since 2017, maintaining stability remains a priority, ensuring the continued presence of church providers in Hungary's social care system.

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Social inequalities and vulnerability of Roma children in the protection system in Cluj County

Abstract

This study analyses the situation of Roma children separated from their parents and under the special protection measure of foster care in Cluj County, through a socio-demographic approach. Our research highlights the overrepresentation of Roma children in the child protection system. The results show that this disproportion is caused by factors such as extreme poverty, poor housing conditions, lack of education and structural discrimination. Approximately one third of the Roma families live in makeshift shacks with limited access to utilities and in conditions of severe overcrowding. The level of education of Roma parents is low and their access to the labour market is very limited. At the same time, institutionalized children show a high level of health problems, caused by poor living conditions and lack of medical care before the establishment of the protection measure. Our findings emphasize the need for integrated interventions to reduce the social inequalities that cause children to be separated from their families.

Keywords

children, Roma, foster care, poverty, social exclusion

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Introduction

This study, by exploring the family environment of children under the special protection measure of foster care in Cluj County, aims to present an overview of the situation of Roma in Cluj County, in relation to the non-Roma population and within a social category with low socio-economic status, affected by social exclusion. We started from the premise that the overwhelming majority of children separated from their parents come from families facing social problems (Stănculescu et al. 2016).

The special protection of foster care is an exceptional measure which in Romania can be established in the following cases: death of the parents, abandonment, abuse, neglect of the child, or in cases where the child cannot be left in the care of the parents for reasons not attributable to them. Placement may be ordered, in the order of the recommendations, with relatives of the child up to the 4th degree, with a person or family, with a professional maternal assistant or in a residential establishment. Children under 7 years of age cannot be placed in residential care, unless the child needs special care that cannot be provided in the family environment (LAW NO. 272/2004).

In Romania, the number of children under the special protection measure of foster care is constantly decreasing. Compared to 1990, when there were approximately 100 000 children in state care (Stănculescu et al. 2016), in 2023, there were 38337 children on record (ANDPCA 2024). The increased number since 1990 was mainly caused by the pro-birth policy and the economic decline in the 80s. In 2016, the number of children separated from their families, in relation to the population of children in the country, was within the average of the Central and Eastern European region (Stănculescu et al, 2016), six years later, the proportion of children separated from their families was below 2%, in relation to the population of children in Romania, except for Vaslui County, in 4 counties below 1%, including Cluj County (ANPDCA 2023).

In 2022, in Cluj County, according to the Activity Report of the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (2022), there were 818 children under the special protection measure of foster care, of which 347 were cared for in residential care, 471 in family care, 169 in the care of professional foster carers, 241 placed with relatives and 61 with families or persons.

Methodology

Our study is part of a larger research aimed at identifying and analyzing the risk factors that contributed to the separation of children from their families, to present the history and trajectory of children from the time of separation from their parents to the present and the prospects for reintegration in the natural family. In this article we present some socio-demographic characteristics of children by ethnicity (Roma/Non-Roma) and family of origin.

We used quantitative and qualitative methods, the information was collected from the children's files and from the answers of social workers responsible for the children's case, who provided clarifications and supplementary information where the file was incomplete.

We set out to cover as many cases as possible. We were able to build a database of 392 active cases as of 2022, representing 76% of the total target population. On-site, at the time of data collection, we only had access to the files of active beneficiaries. We would like to point out that there is a fluctuation of beneficiaries, children moving in and out of the system, as well as an 'internal movement' through change of placement.

Children placed with relatives, families or individuals are not the subject of this study, as their profile only partially fits the aspects we wish to analyse.

The results are representative at county level, for Cluj county.

Data processing and interpretation was done on each child individually, including siblings. Data were statistically processed in Excel and SPSS, using significance tests for correlations and associations between variables.

When analysing some indicators, such as those related to the living conditions of the families, the sample size differs, because we did not have information available on the parents of children in the adoption program (they have no contact with the natural family) or in the case of young people whose ultimate goal is socio-professional reintegration and do not wish to maintain ties with their families. In the case of separated parents, we followed the family situation of the parent who has a closer relationship with the institutionalized child.

For a better profiling of the study population, in the second phase of the empirical analysis, we used the hierarchical cluster analysis, i.e. Ward's method. The variables included in the ward analysis are those used in the first phase of the study, the qualitative ones transformed into dummy variables. The variables included in the hierarchical cluster are the following: family structure (0=single-parent family, 1=biparental family), living arrangement (0=unsegregated, 1=segregated), child's disability classification (1=not classified, 2=lightly classified, 3=medium classified, 4= accented classified, 5=severe classified), parents' health status (0=no health problems, 1=undiagnosed health problems, 2=diagnosed health problems, 3=disabled), educational level of mother/father (0=no education, 1=primary school, 2= secondary school, 3=vocational school, 4= high school without baccalaureate, 5=high school with baccalaureate, 6=post-secondary, 7 college), mother's/father's qualification (0=no qualification 1=qualification), source of income (0=no taxed earned income, 1=taxed earned income), income per household member.

Following the hierarchical cluster analysis (Ward's method), by analysing the dendrogram (see appendix 1) we grouped the analysed population into 5 clusters that we will interpret in the second part of the study.

Roma children in the child protection system

In Cluj County, the majority (50.8%) of children in state care belong to the Roma ethnic group, one out of three are Romanians (33.2%), 4.3% are Hungarians, 2.8% are of mixed ethnicity and 9.2% of undeclared ethnicity. Ethnicity was primarily noted as it appeared in the official documents in the files. Where this information was missing, we asked social workers to indicate ethnicity, also taking into account the opinion of the beneficiary. Some refused to answer, citing ethical reasons, especially in situations where even the beneficiaries refused to declare their ethnic identity.

Even though we used a multiple data collection method, we have a rate of 9.2% of children with undeclared ethnicity. The high number of non-responses to this question among (pre)adolescents (12-18 years old), as 61.1% come from this age group, also indicates an identity crisis, fear of stigma or even outrage in case of their association with Roma ethnicity, facts reported by case managers.

As a basis of comparison, at the 2021 national census, in Cluj County the ethnic composition was made up of Romanians, who form the majority with 71.9%, Hungarians with 11.6%, being the largest ethnic minority, followed by Roma with 2.6% (INSSE 2021). We may see that in the target population studied, Roma children placed under foster care are overrepresented compared to the ethnic composition of the country or county, regardless of whether we take into account the official data from Romania or sociological studies, which estimate that the number of Roma is at least double what the national statistics indicate (CACE et al. 2014; HORVÁTH 2017; VERES 2015). The official data are distorted due to the large number of people who are taken into account with undeclared ethnicity, for example within the census of 2021, their proportion was 13% (GHETAU 2023; VERES 2023). According to the study by Stănculescu et al. (2016), at national level, 10.3% of children in foster care were Roma, in the context of 31.3% of children with undeclared ethnicity. Even so, the proportion of Roma children in foster care was three times higher than their proportion in the total population, according to 2011 census data (Stănculescu et al. 2016).

The reasons why the proportion of the Roma population in our study is so high compared to the national level data can be multiple. Sociological studies (Cace et al. 2014; Duminică – Ivasciuc 2001, Emigh – Szelényi 2001; Raț 2012; Veres 2015, 2023; Vincze 2019) on Roma in Romania and Eastern Europe highlight the social inequalities, discrimination and social exclusion they face compared to the non-Roma population. We did not include children placed in extended families who, we assume, have more resources and, as such, their socio-demographic indicators also differ. The differences are due in part to the method of collecting and centralizing data at the national level. In the study conducted by Stănculescu et al. (2016), a high proportion of children with undeclared ethnicity was observed. We also observe that the proportion of Roma in Cluj County is almost similar to the national average, with an insignificant difference of -0.4% (2021 CENSUS).

In Romania, when the special protection measure is established, placement of the child in the extended family is considered, as far as possible, then with a professional maternal assistant and only lastly in a residential facility. Children under 7 years of age cannot be placed in residential units, unless they need special care that cannot be provided in a family environment (LAW NO. 272/2004). In our sample, 34.4% of the children were placed with professional foster carers, employed persons, who raise the children in their own family. Contrary to our hypotheses, we found no discrimination in where children were placed. We relied on studies (Veres 2024; Anghel – Fosztó 2022) which show a high degree of rejection of Roma ethnics by Romanian and Hungarian ethnics in Romania and particularly in Transylvania, as well as on the fact that there is a shortage of foster carers and therefore a prioritization of cases that can be assigned to foster carers is made. Hence, there is a rigorous selection in hiring, including the acceptance of minority children by the candidates.

The distribution of children according to the residence they or their parents had at the time of the establishment of the protection measure is uneven. Rural children are more at risk of separation from their parents - 51.5% come from rural areas, 60.4% of the county's population live in urban areas, according to INSSE (2022) - but there are also inequalities within the same type of locality. For example, 17.7% of institutionalized children come from six rural settlements,

whose inhabitants account for 2.9% of the population of Cluj County. In five of these settlements the proportion of Roma is much higher than the county average, ranging between 5.4% and 23.4%. The exception is one village, but there all institutionalized children are Roma, their families live isolated from the rest of the villagers.

In urban areas, in the municipalities of Turda and Câmpia-Turzii, two neighbouring former industrial towns that are physically close to each other, the proportion of children in state care is higher than the proportion of the county's population. On the outskirts of these localities, near the garbage dump and on the platforms of disused factories, families, mainly Roma, live in difficult conditions. In Cluj-Napoca, 38% of institutionalized children come from the segregated Pata-Rât community, representing 9.7% of all children separated from their parents. Overall, three out of five Roma families are physically segregated (61.5%), while 29.4% of non-Roma families are segregated. Irrespective of ethnicity, two thirds of those segregated (66.9%) live on the outskirts of the locality.

The formation of segregated areas on the outskirts of cities, with a predominantly young population marked by serious health problems, is closely linked to the process of deindustrialization (PETROVICI, 2019). Following the closure of industrial units and the loss of jobs, vulnerable communities, especially Roma, have faced an intensification of precariousness and poverty. In this context, many families have been forced, either by material constraints or public administration policies, to retreat to marginal areas where the cost of living is lower but which lack infrastructure and basic services. These areas are not only the result of economic dynamics, but also the expression of deeper mechanisms of political economy, which perpetuate social inequalities, segregation and structural racism by creating distinctions even among disadvantaged workers, placing Roma in a position of extreme marginalization (VINCZE-HOSSU 2014; VINCZE 2019).

The formation of the Pata-Rât area, composed of four communities, Rampa, Canton, Coastei and Dallas, each with a particular history, indicates the ways of marginalization of certain social groups, predominantly Roma (ADORJÁNI-ANTAL-TONK, 2023). The Rampa community is formed by Roma who settled on the edge of the city's forest and were relocated by the police in 2003 to the immediate vicinity of the landfill, where Roma families from other localities lived, earning their living from waste recycling activities (RAȚ 2013; VINCZE 2013).

The Cantonului and Coastei communities were formed as a result of evictions organized by the authorities: the Cantonului residents moved or were gradually relocated from various neighbourhoods of the city, while the Coastei community was born in 2010, when 76 families were forcibly relocated from Coastei Street by the authorities of the municipality of Cluj-Napoca (BĂDIȚĂ-VINCZE 2019).The oldest community, Dallas, is made up of individuals and families who moved out of the city due to their precarious economic situations (VINCZE 2013).

The housing situation of Roma families

According to EUROSTAT (2018), one in five Romanian citizens are affected by severe homelessness. State authorities through the Romanian Government Strategy for the inclusion of Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority for the period 2022-2027 (GOVERNMENT DECISION NO. 560/2022) highlight that 78% of Roma live in overcrowded housing and only 58% are owners, compared to 87%, the average for the country.

Analysing the factors that contributed to the separation of children from their families, poverty is invoked in 81.6% of the cases. Roma children's families are categorized as poor in a similar proportion as non-Roma, but the intensity is more serious, the inequalities are reflected in living conditions. Over the years, non-working families have accumulated capital, however modest, or inherited it from predecessors. This can be seen, for example, in the housing situation.

The majority of parents with children in foster care are faced with housing poverty, which is cited as a reason for the institution of foster care for three out of five children. Before the separation, significantly more Roma children and families lived in poor housing conditions (70.5%) compared to non-Roma (52.6%, $p \leq 0.001$). The data collected show significant inequalities in favour of Roma in terms of type of housing ($p \leq 0.001$), physical segregation ($p \leq 0.001$) and access to certain utilities and facilities.

A third of Roma families (33.5%) live in makeshift buildings and 32.4% in small houses made of cheap materials, with rudimentary finishes and little comfort. In contrast, a higher proportion of non-Roma families live in small houses (32.8%) or in blocks of flats built before the 1990s (27%). 76.3% of all families living in makeshift buildings are Roma, 76.3% of whom are concentrated mainly on the outskirts of urban areas, while small houses with rudimentary finishes are more common in rural areas.

Roma dwellings are considerably smaller ($p \leq 0.001$) and more crowded: 65.5% have only one room, which is usually also the only room, compared to 44.4% for non-Roma. On average, Roma households contain 2.72 persons, compared to 2.32 for non-Roma.

We find differences ($p \leq 0.001$) with regard to access to toilets. Overall, only half of the households have indoor toilets. The difference is given by those who do not have any at all, with 21.3%, and the proportion of Roma households is twice as high.

As a result of poor housing conditions, a higher proportion of Roma families live in an environment that affects their health, in rooms with damaged roofs, mouldy walls or damaged floors (43.8%, $p \leq 0.001$) or without sufficient natural light (38%, $p \leq 0.001$).

Comfort is severely affected by lack of access to basic amenities and goods. Families of children in foster care, especially Roma children, face severe deprivation. In 2022, one in three Roma families had no access to electricity, almost three out of four were not connected to the water network, and sewerage and natural gas were available in even smaller proportions (22.5% and 15.7%). Essential household appliances such as a fridge or washing machine were found in less than half of households, and a mobile phone, vital for keeping in touch with children, was missing in one third of Roma families (Table 1).

Table 1.
Housing facilities and equipment

Housing facilities and equipment	Ethnicity			Asymp.
	Total	Roma	Non - Roma	Sig.
Electricity**	73,5%	64,3%	84,7%	p≤0,001
Water supply**	37,1%	27%	50,4%	p≤0,001
Sewage**	30,6%	22,5%	43,5%	p≤0,001
Households connected to Gas Grid *	20,9%	15,7 %	32,1%	p≤0,05

Central heating unit	13,1%	10,1%	17,9%	p≥0,05
Cable TV	34%	27,9%	41,8%	p≥0,05
TV set**	64,5%	54,7%	78,4%	p≤0,001
Fridge**	59,9%	46,9%	76,9%	p≤0,001
Washing machine**	67,9%	36,3%	50,6%	p≤0,001
Mobile phone	72,7%	66,5%	80,6%	p≥0,05

Observation * p ≤,0,05, ** p ≤0,001(Chi square test)
Source: Generated and data collected by the author

Because of unpaid bills or of the legal situation: they are not the owners of the real estate (only 19.3% are), the real estate, the shack is built without legal forms, the domicile is not identical with the residence (41.2%), some of the dwellings are connected to electricity illegally, from neighbours, with their consent. This practice can be either a form of mutual support or, in some cases, a form of exploitation, where those receiving electricity are forced to pay excessive tariffs.

According to the ETHOS Typology (FEANTSA 2024), a significant proportion of parents of children, especially Roma parents, can be categorized as homeless, including not only those who actually live on the streets or in homeless hostels, but also those who live in makeshift, overcrowded buildings, staying with friends, relatives or employers without paying rent. BREITNER (1999) suggests the use of the term 'homeless' to describe these people, given their survival-cantered lifestyles, time management and limited social relationships, which are generally similar to those of homeless people.

ADORJÁNI-ANTAL-TONK (2023) consider that people who live in precarious, degrading conditions, without prospects, gradually tire and become demoralized. VERES (2023) draws attention to the extreme vulnerability of families living in insecure, segregated communities with a majority Roma population in crisis situations, giving the example of the COVID pandemic period, when they were excluded from some vital aids for economic or political reasons.

The lack of minimally decent living conditions for parents affects not only the reintegration of children in the family, but also the maintenance of family ties, as parents cannot accommodate them even for the short term. Thus, children are deprived of privacy with family members (parents' visits are monitored, often even by the presence of an employee), they are deprived of contact with relatives, friends and members of the community they come from. All this gradually contributes to the alienation of the child.

Schooling and parental occupation

There are major inequalities in education in Romania. The participation of Roma children is significantly lower at all levels of education. In schools with a high number of Roma children, the quality of education is poorer, schools are overcrowded, and insufficiently equipped (CACE et al. 2014; DUMINICĂ-IVASCIUC 2010; STOICA-VAMSIEDEL 2012). The European Commission (2016) estimates that 27% of children learn in segregated schools. FRA (2014) points out that 31% of Roma ethnics are considered illiterate, most of them have dropped out of school citing economic reasons. In Cluj County, in 2011, the proportion of Roma out of school was

16.7%, of those with primary education 32%, of those with secondary education 36.7%. After this level, only a few continued their studies, 5% graduated vocational school, 6.6% high school, 0,3% post-secondary, and 1.3% university (VERES 2015.77-80).

The parents of institutionalized children make up a mass of people with even lower levels of schooling (Table 2 and Table 3), low qualification and very low employment rate on the labour market (Table 4).

The educational profile of parents, regardless of ethnicity, resembles that of the Roma population in the county in 2011 (see VERES, 2015), in the sense that the proportion of those who have not attended school is high and the proportion of those who have continued their education after secondary school is low. At the same time, in our sample we find major differences in the level of schooling of parents by ethnicity. Parents of Roma children have a lower level of education, the difference being more pronounced in the female population (for mothers $p \leq 0.001$, for fathers $p \leq 0.05$).

Just over half of Roma mothers (51.4%) have no schooling, and the number of those who have continued their education after secondary school is very low, 3.9%. Fathers had access to education in a higher proportion, but one in three is without education, which is three times higher than for non-Roma.

Table 2.
Educational attainment of mothers by ethnicity.

Ethnicity	Educational attainment						
	No formal education	Primary education	Middle school	Vocational education	High school	University	Information unavailable
Non - Roma	22,2%	20,0%	26,7%	11,9%	7,4%	0,7%	11,1%
Roma	51,4%	18,2%	19,9%	3,3%	0,6%	0,0%	6,6%
Not stated	20,0%	10,0%	40,0%	0,0%	16,9%	0,0%	13,3%
Total	37,,%	18,2%	24,3%	6,4%	4,7%	0,3%	9,0%

Source: Generated and data collected by the author

Table 3.
Fathers' educational level by ethnicity.

Ethnicity	Educational attainment						
	No formal education	Primary education	Middle school	Vocational education	High school	University	Information unavailable
Non - Roma	11,7%	14,9%	26,6%	24,5%	3,2%	2,2%	17%
Roma	33,1%	22%	18,1%	9,4%	0%	0%	17,3%

Not stated	23,5%	17,6%	41,2%	17,6%	0%	0%	0%
Total	23,9%	18,9%	23,1%	16%	1,2%%	0,8%	16%

Source: Generated and data collected by the author

The rate of unskilled Roma parents is extremely high, 87.3% for mothers, 74% for fathers, differences by ethnicity are only for fathers ($p \leq 0.001$). The qualifications of mothers are mainly in agriculture and trade, those of fathers in construction or agriculture. As a result of low levels of schooling and vocational training, parents' access to the labour market is very low, overall, less than a quarter of households (23.8%) have income from taxed work. Roma ethnics have more limited access (14.3%, $p \leq 0.000$) to legal employment (Table 4). Emigh – Szelényi (2001) shows that access to the labour market of the Roma population is also influenced by discrimination, not only by low educational attainment, the rate of the unemployed with similar education is higher than for other ethnic groups.

There are no major differences in terms of social income, most of them have received the state child allowance, a universal social right. The guaranteed minimum income and the family allowance, designed to prevent and combat social exclusion, was only accessed by 13%. Their access is limited by bureaucracy and the low educational level of those entitled, the lack of identity documents and the modest value of this social benefit (DANIEL 2019; RAȚ, 2012).

Table 4.
Source of household income by ethnicity.

Source of income	Ethnicity			Asymp. Sig.
	Total	Roma	Non - Roma	
Employment – with legal contract**	23,8%	14,3%	25,2%	p≤0,001
Employment – without legal contract**	10%	12,6%	8,1%	p≤0,001
Occasional work**	26,9%	21,4%	36,3%	p≤0,001
Material recycling**	5,2%	6%	5,2%	p≤0,001
Social benefits	47,9%	50%	44,4%	p≥0,05
Retirement pension	3,8	1,1%	7,4%	p≥0,05
Disability / sickness pension	13,2%	13,7%	12,6%	p≥0,05

Observation ** p ≤0,001(Chi square test)
Source: Generated and data collected by the author

In terms of income, Roma households have higher incomes, the median is 3000 Ron, for non-Roma households 2500 ron, but because Roma families are larger, their income per family member is lower, the median being 750 ron (151.80 Euro), compared to 1200 ron (242.91 Euro). The amounts are very modest, in 2022, in Romania, the gross minimum wage per economy (GOVERNMENT DECISION no. 1071/2021) was 2550 ron (516.19 Euro).

Even if fathers of Roma children are less educated, this is not reflected in their income. Therefore, below a certain level of schooling, the level of education does not significantly influence the income for the work done.

The information on the indebtedness of households is limited, the non-response rate is 47.4%. From the data obtained, there are no differences by ethnicity, on average, one in 4 families declared debts.

As a result of low incomes, the vast majority of families are living on the brink of subsistence, regardless of ethnicity. Their ability to meet essential expenses is extremely limited. Roma people find it more difficult to ensure their thermal comfort (Table 5). The payment of bills and heating are the most frequently paid services, but it should be borne in mind that the majority of households have electricity (26.5% have no electricity at all).

Table 5.
Ability of households to meet some categories of expenditure by ethnicity

Categories of expenses that families can afford	Ethnicity			Asymp. Sig.
	Total	Roma	Non - Roma	
Paying utility bills	52,6%	44,1%	61,9%	p≥0,05
Home heating*	56,4%	47,5%	64,9%	p≤0,05
Meat or fish consumption every two days	17%	13%	23,9%	p≥0,05
Unexpected expenses	6,4%	2,8%	11,9%	p≥0,05
Vacations	1,5%	1,1%	2,2%	p≥0,05

Observation * p ≤,0,05 (Chi square test)
Source: Generated and data collected by the author

Healt

When analysing the data on health status, we have to take into account the very limited access of parents to health services, most of them do not have health insurance and do not have the financial potential to pay for consultations, treatments or medicines. Among parents we found no significant differences by ethnicity, one in 5 parents have a diagnosis of a chronic disease. The number of diagnoses is very close to the number of disability classifications, from this we conclude that many parents only go to the doctor when they have severe symptoms. Roma people were classified as disabled in a smaller proportion (12.6%), compared to the non-Roma population (19.7%). Since Roma are more affected by severe deprivation, we do not consider their diagnoses, as a whole, to be less severe. Even under these conditions, the ratio of parents with documented disabilities is very high, regardless of ethnicity, in relation to the county population. According to the Annual Report of DGASPC Cluj, in 2022, in Cluj County there were 26 664 adults and 2287 children with a Certificate of Disability, i.e. 4.9% and 1.7% of the total population of the county, respectively.

In 14.8% of the cases of special protection through foster care, the child's disability was cited as a reason. There were no significant differences between ethnicities in the health status of the children, neither at the time of entry into the protection system nor afterwards. 46.5% of the children had a diagnosis of illness and 31.5% were classified as disabled at the time of data collection. The number of children with disabilities in special protection measures in centres and foster care is 17.7 times higher than for all the children in the county.

The data on the health status of parents are partly conclusive from a medical point of view, rather they implicitly reflect their social exclusion, their very limited ability to exercise their rights. For children, the increased number of diagnoses is due to better access to health services after entering the protection system, as well as to possible inherited health problems or health problems caused by poor living conditions and lack of medical care in the early stages of life.

Population profiling based on cluster analysis

For a more in-depth knowledge of the population studied, we made a classification of the institutionalized children included in the study, using the main variables of social background and social situation reflecting social status, family situation, financial situation and health-related vulnerabilities of parents (if any). The variables used in the cluster analysis are presented in the methodology chapter.

Based on the hierarchical cluster analysis carried out using the variables mentioned and studying the dendrogram (appendix 1), we identified five relevant clusters into which the included children were grouped. Next, we examine the ethnic distribution for each cluster. Associations between component variables and hierarchical clusters obtained are presented in Table 6.

Cluster 1: Families are characterized by a higher socio-economic status than the average of the children studied, with a higher degree of integration into society, with more educated parents, but with health problems/special needs (degree of disability). All parents live in a non-segregated environment (100%). In more than half of the families (51.9%), at least one parent has health problems, almost one in four (24.1%) is classified as having a degree of disability. The high number of adult diagnoses and disability classification may be influenced by the fact that in 35.4% of households there is at least one person legally employed, which gives them access to free health care services as insured or co-insured.

Due to better integration into the labour market and the presence of both parents in the family, social income for people with disabilities, the median income per household member (950 ron, 192.30 Euro) is 52% higher than the average of the five groups. About 59% of mothers have completed at least secondary school, and a slightly higher percentage of fathers (16.5%) have completed a vocational school.

Among the children we did not notice any major health problems, 16.5% are in grade, below the average of the five clusters.

Cluster 2: This is where most children with health problems fall, 47.4% are classified as disabled, one in four (25.5%) are classified as severely disabled.

The vast majority of children come from two-parent families (87.3%) who live segregated (68.2), but where there are fathers, they are more educated, in 19.7% of families there is a

father who has at least a vocational school degree. The majority of mothers (55.5%) are uneducated. Access to the labour market is the second highest (27.3%) of the five clusters, the median income of 643 ron (130.16 Euro) is close to the general median.

Cluster 3 is composed only of single-parent families living segregated. The parents' level of schooling is one of the lowest, most of the parents are out-of-school, only 2.6% of the mothers have continued their education after secondary school. None of the parents have qualifications and only in 5.3% of the households there is someone legally employed. The median income is 666 ron (134.81 Euro) per person, well below the average. The highest proportion of parents with health problems (52.6%), with and without a diagnosis, are in this cluster, but the rate of disability is lower, 10.5%. The number of children with disabilities (23.7%) is close to the population average of the five clusters.

Cluster 4: Composed exclusively of single-parent families that are not segregated, but with serious financial problems, where the average is 502 ron (101.61 Euro), the median per household is 0 ron. Only 8.5% of households have income from legal work. The majority of mothers (57.3%) are out-of-school, only 6% continued their education after secondary school. In this cluster parents reported the least health problems (29.1%), even among children the rate of children with disabilities is not above average (23.9%).

Cluster 5: It is made up exclusively of single-parent families living in segregated communities, with the lowest level of schooling of parents (72.7% of mothers and 90.9% of fathers have no education) and no access to the labour market (0%).

This cluster has the highest number of parents with undiagnosed health problems, most likely due to extremely limited access to health services. In contrast, the health status of children is better compared to the other clusters, with only 11.3% being classified as disabled.

The median income of these families is 600 ron (121.45 Euro), below the average of the five clusters.

Table 6.
Association between component variables and hierarchical clusters obtained

Variables		Cluster					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Family structure**	Single-parent family	1,3%	12,7%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	55,2%
	Two-parent family	98,7%	87,3%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	44,8%
	Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Residential segregation**	Non-segregated	100,0%	31,8%	0,0%	100,0%	0,0%	59,5%
	Segregated	0,0%	68,2%	100,0%	0,0%	100,0%	40,5%
	Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Disability classification of the child**	Not classified	83,5%	52,7%	76,3%	76,1%	88,6%	72,4%
	Mild disability	1,3%	0,9%	5,3%	2,6%	0,0%	1,8%
	Moderate disability	10,1%	15,5%	15,8%	4,3%	0,0%	9,3%
	Progressive disability	2,5%	5,5%	0,0%	4,3%	4,5%	3,9%
	Severe disability	2,5%	25,5%	2,6%	12,8%	6,8%	12,6%
	Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Parents' health status**	No health issues	48,1%	56,4%	47,4%	70,9%	61,4%	58,8%
	Health issues without a diagnosis	10,1%	10,0%	13,2%	5,1%	29,5%	11,1%
	Diagnosed health issues	17,7%	26,4%	28,9%	8,5%	2,3%	16,8%
	Health issues leading to disability status	24,1%	7,3%	10,5%	15,4%	6,8%	13,4%
	Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Educational attainment of mothers **	No formal education	30,4%	55,5%	57,9%	57,3%	72,7%	53,1%
	Primary education	10,1%	20,0%	21,1%	17,1%	11,4%	16,2%
	Middle school	45,6%	11,8%	18,4%	19,7%	11,4%	21,6%
	Vocational education	12,7%	8,2%	2,6%	1,7%	0,0%	5,7%
	High school without baccalaureate degree	1,3%	3,6%	0,0%	4,3%	4,5%	3,1%
	High school with baccalaureate degree	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	Post-secondary education	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	University	0,0%	0,9%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,3%
	Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Fathers' educational level**	No formal education	49,4%	50,0%	65,8%	74,4%	90,9%	63,4%
	Primary education	6,3%	15,5%	21,1%	9,4%	9,1%	11,6%
	Middle school	27,8%	13,6%	13,2%	10,3%	0,0%	13,9%
	Vocational education	16,5%	19,1%	0,0%	3,4%	0,0%	9,8%
	High school without baccalaureate degree	0,0%	0,9%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,3%
	High school with baccalaureate degree	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	1,7%	0,0%	0,5%
	Post-secondary education	0,0%	0,9%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,3%
	University	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,9%	0,0%	0,3%
	Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Mother's qualification**	No qualification	100,0%	81,8%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	94,3%
	With qualification	0,0%	18,2%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	5,7%
	Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Father's qualification**	No qualification	100%	80,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
	With qualification	0,0%	20,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%
	Total	100.0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Source of income**	Income from undeclared and untaxed work	64,6%	72,7%	94,7%	91,5%	100%	82%
	Income from formal / taxed employment	35,4%	27,3%	5,3%	8,5%	0,0%	18,0%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Income per household member**	Median	950 ron 192,30 euro	643 ron 130,16 euro	666 ron 134,81 euro	0 ron 0 euro	600 ron 121,45 euro	625 ron 126,51 euro
	Mean	1058 ron 214,17 euro	904 ron 182,99 euro	599 ron 121,25 euro	502 ron 101,61 euro	524 ron 106,70 euro	741 ron 150,00 euro

Obs. *p<0.05, **p<0.01 significance level (Chi square test)
Source: Generated and data collected by the author

Therefore, following the cluster analysis, based on family background, children entered the special protection foster care system according to the following vulnerabilities:

Children from two-parent families, with higher socio-economic status than the average of the families studied, but whose parents face diagnosed health problems.

Children with health problems from two-parent families, mostly segregated.

Children from single-parent families living segregated, parents with low educational level, with undiagnosed health problems.

Children from single-parent families, not physically segregated, no major health problems of parents, but very low labour market participation and severe financial problems.

Children from single-parent families, severely socially excluded, living in segregated households, with very low parental schooling, no access to the labour market and no access to health services.

The composition of the population by clusters is very different by ethnicity (p≤001). Roma people form the majority in clusters where the degree of segregation is high (Table 7).

Table 7.
Population distribution by ethnic clusters

Ethnicity	Cluster					Total	Asymp sig..
	1	2	3	4	5		
Non - Roma	51,9%	32,7%	23,7%	48,7%	22,7%	39,4%	
Roma	30,4%	62,7%	73,7%	46,2%	56,8%	51,5%	p≤001
Not stated	17,7%	4,5%	2,6%	5,1%	20,5%	9,0%	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Source: Generated and data collected by the author

Therefore, the distribution of the population by ethnic clusters shows that within a population with low socio-economic status, Roma are more affected by social exclusion.

In Cluster 3 with the lowest income households and most parents with a diagnosis, Roma children and families are present in an overwhelming proportion of 73.7% , Cluster 5 with the most marginalized population, where Roma form the majority, non-Roma are present in only 22.7% and the proportion of people with undeclared ethnicity is double the proportion of the total population studied. We assume that some of them are families of young people who refuse to declare their identity.

Only in cluster 2 we find Roma families who live segregated but are still connected to society to some extent through access to the labour market. However, this is also where most children with health problems come from.

Conclusions

More than half (50.8%) of the children in foster care in Cluj County are Roma, although according to the 2021 census, Roma officially represent only 2.6% of the county's population. This disproportion indicates an increased vulnerability of Roma families, generated by factors such as extreme poverty, poor housing conditions, lack of education and systemic discrimination.

A significant aspect is the reluctance of some teenagers to declare their ethnicity, especially those aged between 12 and 18. Approximately 61.1% of non-respondents to the ethnicity question come from this age group, suggesting an identity crisis and fear of stigmatization.

The reintegration of children into their biological family is often impossible due to the poor living conditions of their parents. One third (33.5%) of Roma families live in makeshift shacks without minimum living conditions, 65.5% of Roma families' dwellings have only one room, leading to severe overcrowding. Access to utilities is very low - only 27% have running water, 64.3% electricity, and some households use illegally obtained electricity.

These housing inequalities not only hinder the reintegration of children into their families, but also make it difficult to maintain relations with their parents, as they do not have the necessary conditions to accommodate them even in the short term. Moreover, the physical segregation of Roma families on the outskirts of localities, in isolated areas or near former industrial zones and rubbish dumps, exacerbates social exclusion and marginalization.

Another factor contributing to the over-representation of Roma children in the protection system is the extremely low level of education of their parents. 51.4% of Roma mothers, 33.1% of fathers, had no schooling. Only 3.9% of Roma mothers and 9.4% of fathers attended vocational school. Roma parents are extremely unlikely to continue their education after secondary school, which severely limits their employability. This lack of education results in very limited access to the labour market, with only 14.3% of Roma households having a taxed source of income from work. The lack of a stable source of income makes them more vulnerable to economic crises and reduces their ability to provide decent living conditions for their children.

Roma parents have very limited access to health care, as many are uninsured and cannot afford consultations or treatment. In addition, one in five parents suffers from a chronic illness, irrespective of ethnicity, but Roma parents are less likely than other parents to be classified as disabled, which indicates that they are unable to get their certificates for bureaucratic reasons.

For institutionalized children, 46.5% are diagnosed with a chronic disease and 31.5% of Roma children are classified as disabled. This reflects both better access to health services for children in the care system and possible inherited health problems caused by poor living conditions and lack of health care in the early stages of life.

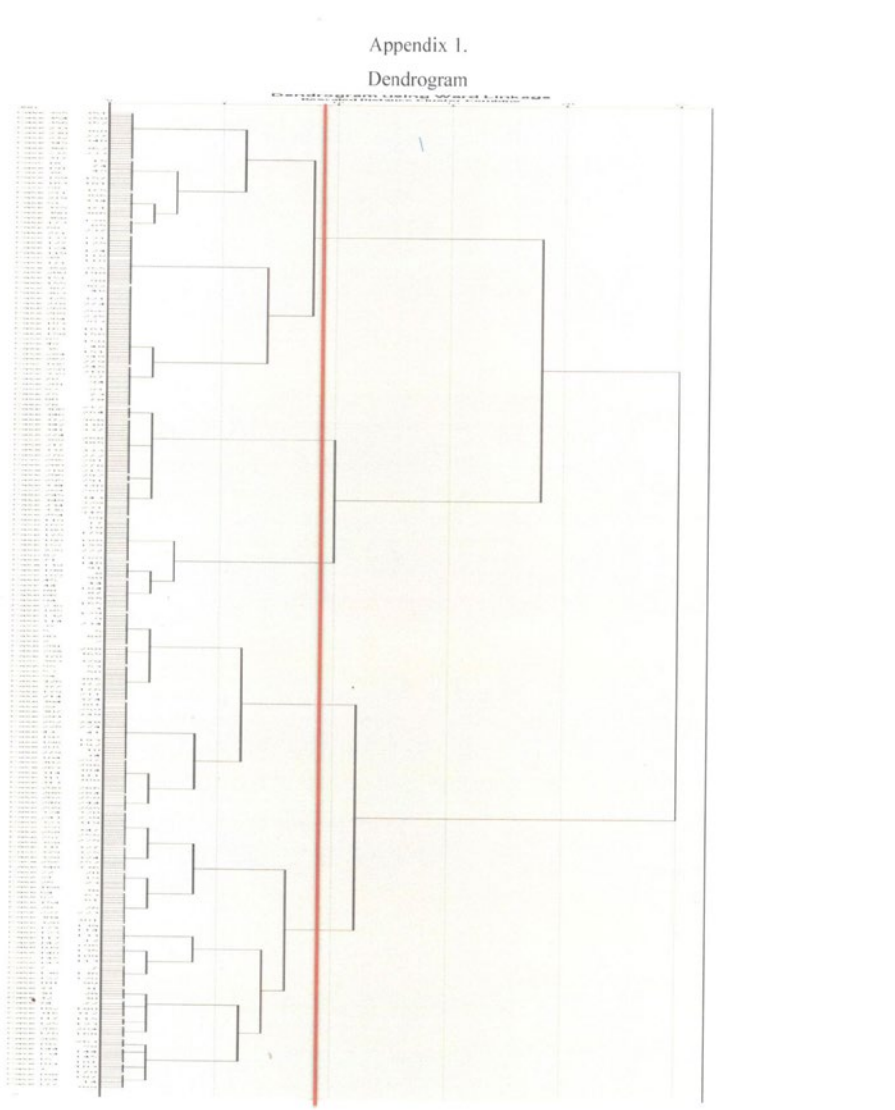
The cluster analysis of the population studied revealed five distinct groups, differentiated by socio-economic status, family structure, degree of segregation and access to the labour market. In two-parent families with a higher economic status, children end up in the special protection system mainly because of serious health problems of the parents. Children in two-parent families living in segregated environments are the most affected by health problems, almost half of them being classified as having a disability. Children in segregated single-parent families are most at risk of separation from their parents. These families are characterized by low levels of parental education, very low income and limited access to health services, which places them in

a situation of severe vulnerability.

The factors leading to separation are diverse. The analysis by ethnicity shows that for non-Roma children the main causes are health problems and disabilities, while for Roma children poverty and segregation dominate.

In conclusion, the over-representation of Roma children in the child protection system is a direct result of social inequalities. Poverty, lack of education, poor housing conditions and structural discrimination all contribute to the separation of children from their families.

Appendix 1.
Dendrogram



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Future Orientations and Social Value Perceptions of Roma Youth

Abstract

In 2023, a research project was launched within the framework of the University of Szeged IKIKK Research and Development Center for Supporting the Advancement of Roma and Disadvantaged Youth, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the world of Roma youth in the Southern Great Plain region of Hungary. The survey respondents had an average age of 15 years, and of the 311 participants, 197 identified themselves as being of Roma/Gypsy descent. In this study, we analyze the data from this subsample, presenting the deeper patterns of social value perceptions and future orientations.

Keywords

Roma youth, social values, future orientations

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Introduction

Based on nationality affiliation, mother tongue, and language used in family and friend circles, the Roma represent the most populous minority in Hungary. According to the 2022 census, 2.5% of respondents, totaling 209,909 individuals, identified themselves as Roma. In the Southern Great Plain region, comprising Bács-Kiskun, Békés, and Csongrád-Csanád counties, 18,001 people identified themselves as belonging to the Roma/Gypsy nationality during the 2022 census, of whom 4,740 indicated they speak Romani (Romani, Beás) in their family or community circles. According to the 2022 census data, the number of Roma (Gypsy) youth aged 10-19 living in the Southern Great Plain region was 2,723 (compared to 5,090 in 2011). In the region, 515 young people aged 10-19 had Romani as their mother tongue in 2022 (compared to 1,360 in 2011), while 628 young people aged 10-19 speak Romani in family or friend communities (compared to 1,592 in 2011).

Research emphasizes that the most vulnerable group with the greatest social exposure in Hungarian society is disadvantaged youth, a significant portion of which consists of Roma youth (Orsós 2015; Zolnay 2015; Bihari 2021; Trendl 2021; Varga – Csovcsis 2021; Forray 2022; Sánta 2024; Bocsi – Varga – Fehérvári 2024). The social difficulties affecting Roma communities have been examined by numerous international studies (e.g., Abubakar et al., 2015; Bhabha et al., 2017; Hepworth 2012, Hofmann 2019; Óhidy – Forray 2019) and domestic research (e.g., Elek 2022; Fejes – Szűcs 2018; Forray 2022; Kemény – Janky 2004; Kertesi – Kézdi 2006) in recent decades. Meaningful progress in the inclusion process of this ethnic group has been minimal (and in some areas regression has been observed; e.g., Kende et al., 2021).

In Hungary, the Roma/Gypsy minority population is estimated at 600,000-800,000 individuals (Bernát 2014; Hablicsek 2007; Pénzes – Tátrai – Pásztor 2018; Kapitány – Kapitány 2015). In the Southern Great Plain region, a total of 18,001 people identified themselves as Roma in the 2022 Hungarian census. Of this number, 8,249 (1.67% of the total population) were in Bács-Kiskun county, 3,562 (0.9% of the total population) in Csongrád-Csanád county, and 6,190 (2%) in Békés county (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2022). However, census data should be interpreted cautiously, as people may be sensitive to ethnic or cultural identification, which can influence how they respond to such questions. Therefore, we can assume that the number of people with Roma/Gypsy identity is higher in this region as well.

In the international literature, thinking about the future is typically referred to as future orientation (Bathó – Fejes 2013). Future orientation is an individual's ability and intention to plan and think ahead about future goals, opportunities, and challenges (Szabó et al. 2022). From a learner's perspective, future orientation means that the individual prepares for future challenges and opportunities and actively plans for the future (Seginer, 2009). However, in Piaget and Inhelder's (2004) view, future orientation is a cognitive schema organized according to causal relationships (cited by Szabó et al. 2022). Regarding this definition, Seginer (2019) emphasizes

that future orientation is an important developmental task for adolescents, as an individual's future perspective establishes the foundation for goal setting and planning. This finding implies that future orientation is a construct that can be developed and positively influences learning motivation.

A vision of the future is a conception of what goal or state is to be achieved in the future (Seginer 2009). Through this vision, an individual can set long-term goals and plans in terms of studies and career. Future vision is part of time perspective and future orientation (Váriné 2004).

For an individual to be future-oriented, they must hold the view that behavior performed in the present increases the likelihood that a future goal will be realized at some point in the future. Additionally, the goal to be achieved in the future must have incentive value and be valuable enough to engage in behavioral patterns. For a child/young person to learn in the present, they must believe that future academic success is a goal that is important enough to them, and that their behavior leads to future academic success (Brown – Jones 2004).

In the Hungarian literature, only a few works can be found that focus primarily on future orientation/vision (Szabó et al. 2022; Szalai 2008; Homoki 2010).

One of the most popular topics in which the future perceptions of Roma youth are addressed is related to impact studies of various talent development programs and life path analyses of students/participants in these programs. For example, studies have examined the Arany János Program for high school students (Fehérvári – Liskó 2016), institutions in the Roma Integration Program (Szalai 2008), and the Roma Student Colleges in higher education, which have an increasingly extensive literature (Farkas 2018; Forray 2014; 2022; Jancsák 2015; Trendl 2015). Life path analysis has also emerged outside of talent development programs (e.g., Varga 2017). Recurring themes included resilience and inclusion (Farkas 2018; Varga 2017), as well as exploring experiences of discrimination (Bhabha et al. 2017).

In terms of geographical relevance, the studies reviewed do not present a particularly diverse picture, as most research was conducted in Hungary. Only three English-language articles were identified related to the topic (Bhabha et al., 2017, Dimitrova et al. 2018; Roth – Sergiu-Lucian 2013) that examined samples outside Hungary, specifically in Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria. The low number of foreign studies is not surprising, considering that Hungary is at the forefront of research on Roma people, especially intellectuals, and publications by foreign authors in the international English-language literature have only appeared in the last decade. Examining the territorial distribution of domestic research, it can be established that several studies involved national samples; however, there are dominant counties in Hungary where more research has been conducted within the topic, e.g., Baranya County (e.g., Trendl 2015; Varga 2017). In terms of methodology, three main groups can be distinguished: works based on written questioning, works based on oral questioning, and works incorporating mixed methods.

Regarding future orientation, the results reported in the studies suggest a mixed picture, as in some, Roma students have more pessimistic plans for their future than their non-Roma peers (e.g., Szalai 2008), while in other cases, childhood future visions exceed later reality (e.g., Varga 2017); and last but not least, there are also studies where Roma youth paint an optimistic picture of the future in their responses (e.g., Farkas 2018; Fehérvári – Liskó 2016; Gulyás 2022; Jancsák 2016; Trendl 2015). This ambivalent picture likely emerged because different studies

involved different target groups. Where Roma youth had more positive future visions, they generally participated in some support program, which may be one reason for their positive outlook. Since literature related to thinking about the future also emphasizes that students' future orientation can be developed, it is likely that in these programs, efforts to develop future vision were central to the training (e.g., involving mentors). It can be said, therefore, that supportive programs (e.g., Tanoda, AJP, Roma Student Colleges) provide important mobility opportunities for disadvantaged youth, especially members of the Roma ethnic minority group; these initiatives place great emphasis on shaping future orientation. It would be worthwhile to extend the good practices used in these programs to the public education sphere as well, as an optimistic future vision contributes to school success (Bathó & Fejes, 2013) and later labor market success.

Research on values (Hankiss 1977, Rokeach 1969, 1973, 1979; Váriné 1987, Schwartz 1992, 2005; Varga 2003; Rezsohazy 2006, Gábor 2012) starts from the premise that social values are internal convictions that have emotional charge, motivate people's actions, stand in hierarchy with each other, and provide criteria for evaluating and directing actions. Values are guiding principles in a person's or a group's life and are generally central elements of belief systems (Schwartz 1992, 2005). The world of values changes dynamically across civilizational epochs and generations (Schwartz 1992; Inglehart 1997, 2000; Telesiene – Gross 2017; Halman et al., 2022; Kolarz et al. 2022).

Few works discuss the values of Roma groups in detail (Trásy 2023). Szakolczai's (1982) study compares the value systems of Roma and the overall Hungarian population in similar social situations. The research points out that although material goods are important to both groups, the Roma's value preference differs from that of the majority society at certain points. Roma value advancement and progress more highly, while those living in similar social strata strive less for a better life. According to Trásy (2023), values related to work, homeland, and freedom are less important to Roma, and the significance of conformist values is also lower compared to non-Roma.

Jancsák's (2015) research focused on how participation in the institutional environment and programs of the Szeged Christian Roma College influences the value system and social integration of Roma youth, as well as its impact on the labor market situation. The author concluded that among college students, universal values (e.g., inner harmony, love/happiness, family security) and post-material values (e.g., freedom, creativity, enjoyable life) show a strong presence compared to traditional values (e.g., politeness, religious faith, role of the nation, patriotism) and material values (e.g., wealth). The value preferences of Roma College residents differ from those of residents in other University of Szeged dormitories: they more strongly emphasize inner harmony, a peaceful world, creativity, and religious faith, while less preferring wealth and power.

Bocsi and Csokai's (2015) work mapped the work values of Roma youth among 15-29 year-olds. The study focused on understanding what work values 15-29 year-old Roma youth possess. The research showed that although participants place great emphasis on external motivation, their ethnic affiliation continues to influence their work perception. Based on this, further research and the development of strategies to promote the labor market integration of Roma youth are recommended.

Trásy (2023) conducted a questionnaire-based study in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County involving the Roma population to measure value preferences. According to the results, among

the post-material values, freedom and equality were most important to the surveyed Roma, and among universal values, family and health were most important. Material values, such as wealth, were less important to them. The study also revealed that Roma trust state institutions more than civil, church, or market organizations, feel safe in their own environment, but feel less able to influence the shaping of public affairs or their environment.

The mentioned studies demonstrated that at the center of Roma youth's value preferences are often such universal and post-material values as family, equality, and freedom. Additionally, traditional and material values may have less significance for them. The studies also indicated that Roma youth differ from the majority society in terms of certain values, which influences their daily decisions and social integration.

Methodological Notes

The aim of this study is to examine the views, value preferences, and future orientation of Roma/Gypsy youth in the Southern Great Plain region of Hungary.

Data collection was conducted using a paper-based self-completed questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on five main areas: demographic characteristics, educational situation, internal community world, social values, cultural traditions, and future plans/goals.

Data collection was mainly carried out in public education institutions in the spring of 2023. With the help of School District representatives, we contacted the schools and informed them in advance about the aims and process of the research. We requested consent forms from the institutions and from parents in the case of minor students to ensure the ethical and legal framework of data collection. All participants took part in the study anonymously and voluntarily, and the participants (and their legal representatives) were informed in advance about data protection rules. The questionnaires were completed during class time, and if participants did not understand something related to the questionnaire, we readily answered their questions and helped with interpretation. In addition to school locations, we also wanted to reach young people who could not be involved in institutional settings, for example, because some institutions declined to participate in the study, or because we wanted to reach so-called NEET youth (Sánta 2024). Therefore, with the help of recognized members of local Roma communities, we also visited residential areas with higher Roma population density to extend the data collection. The data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 25 software.

The selection of participants (n=322) was done through convenience sampling. The young people volunteered to participate in the study. All participants had a permanent or temporary address in one of the Southern Great Plain counties (Békés, Csongrád-Csanád, Bács-Kiskun). All participants were between 12 and 25 years old, with an average age of 15.4 years at the time of the study.

In terms of ethnic affiliation, the participants were grouped as follows: 81 indicated that they belong to the Oláh Roma group, 5 to the Beás Roma group, 111 to the Romungro group, 35 could not determine their ethnic affiliation, while an additional 90 indicated that they do not belong to any of these groups. In total, 197 individuals identified themselves as being of Roma/Gypsy descent, which accounts for 61.2% of all participants. In our analysis, we focus on the Roma population in our sample, incorporating the responses of non-Roma youth only for comparisons.

Among the limitations of the research, we identified that the non-representative sample and the use of Likert-scale questions limited the generalization of results (the closed questions necessarily did not examine the entire value dimension, only in relation to the 14 social values and 14 praxis values we highlighted). Our database containing a subsample of 197 individuals provides an opportunity to formulate certain conclusions and observe phenomena for the base population of 2,723 Roma/Gypsy youth aged 10-19 living in the Southern Great Plain.

Sample Characteristics

Nearly half of the participants (47.2%) are still in primary school, one-third (31.7%) attend vocational school, nearly one-fifth (19.3%) attend grammar school, while 2% do not participate in school education.

The respondents' parents have low educational attainment, with 10% of fathers and 13% of mothers having a secondary education. The proportion of parents with higher education is only 2.5% for both fathers and mothers.

Respondents have an average of 2 siblings.

The distribution of respondents' places of residence was as follows: 30.5% reside in Bács-Kiskun County, 13.7% in Békés County, and 55.8% in Csongrád-Csanád County.

Regarding residence type, the majority of respondents live in towns (41.6%), while a significant portion live in villages (32.5%). The proportion of those living in county seats is 17.7%, while the proportion of those living on farms is relatively lower at 6.2%.

Three-quarters of respondents live in houses, while one-quarter live in apartments. On average, participants live in three-room houses.

Among the respondents, the proportion of those living with their parents is 70%, while among those raised by a single parent, 12% live with their mother and 8% with their father. The proportion of those living with grandparents is 3%, with foster parents 1%, and with other relatives 2%.

We also examined the financial circumstances in which participants live ("Have you experienced that by the end of the month, your parents' money has completely run out?").

Two-thirds of respondents have had such experiences. Three percent of respondents indicated that their parents almost always run out of money by the end of the month, and another 14% said this occurs frequently. Twenty-two percent answered that this happens sometimes, and an additional 22% said that such situations occur rarely.

88.8% of participants have internet access at home, 46% have a tablet, laptop, or desktop computer. 95% of respondents have a smartphone, and 71.1% also have mobile internet access.

Research Results

Value Orientations

Our study results show that family security is the most important value for participants, rated with an average score of 4.84 on a 5-point Likert scale. This is closely followed by happiness and material well-being, both with a score of 4.8, indicating that individual well-being, emotional satisfaction, and material security are exceptionally important to people.

Freedom also received a very high score (4.78), suggesting that personal freedom and self-determination are also essential values for participants. Equality's score of 4.79 shows that social equality and justice are of great significance. An enjoyable life and true friendship both received ratings of 4.76, indicating that quality of life and human relationships are very important to participants.

Social order and public safety also play significant roles in participants' lives, with scores of 4.68 and 4.66, respectively. The rating for peace is 4.64, showing that participants value a peaceful and conflict-free life. The score of 4.61 for acceptance between people indicates that tolerance and acceptance are also important values.

The 4.59 rating for joy in work done suggests that satisfaction with work performed is important to participants. The true love score of 4.45 indicates that although important, it is less of a priority than the previous values. Respect for traditions received the lowest rating (4.23), suggesting that respecting traditions is less important to participants compared to other values.

The results of the study show that among participants, universal values (e.g., family security, happiness, equality, true friendship, peace) and post-material values (e.g., freedom, enjoyable life) are of paramount importance. Material well-being also enjoys high priority, while traditional values, especially respect for traditions, are less emphasized. The grouped list of all professed values in preference order is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 1. Value Preference Order

Preference Rank	Value	Value Group	Average Value on Five-Point Scale
1.	Family security	Universal	4.84
2.	Happiness	Universal	4.80
3.	Material well-being	Material	4.80
4.	Freedom	Post-material	4.78
5.	Equality	Post-material	4.79
6.	Pleasant enjoyable life	Post-material	4.76
7.	True friendship	Universal	4.76
8.	Social order	Traditional	4.68
9.	Public safety	Universal	4.66

Preference Rank	Value	Value Group	Average Value on Five-Point Scale
10.	Peace	Universal	4.64
11.	Acceptance of another person	Universal	4.61
12.	Joy of work completed	Traditional	4.59
13.	True love	Universal	4.45
14.	Respect for traditions	Traditional	4.23

In addition to professed values, we also examined praxis values, using a shortened version of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (cf. Járai et.al. 2015; Kiss 2015). In the results, the importance of close relationships stands out and is one of the most important praxis values among the Roma in the sample. This is followed by adaptability, stress management, perseverance, and purposefulness, which are also important. However, acting based on senses, strong self-esteem, and a sense of controlling one's life may be less emphasized in the sample.

Table 2. How True Are the Following Statements for You?

	Not True at All	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True	Almost Always True	SUM
I have close and secure relationships.	1	3	12	34	50	100
I think of myself as a strong person.	2	5	16	30	48	100
I work to achieve my goals.	0	7	9	38	47	100
Past successes give me confidence for new challenges.	0	2	16	42	41	100
I am able to adapt to changes.	0	4	15	42	40	100
Sometimes fate or God can help.	2	7	17	35	40	100
Coping with stress strengthens me.	0	5	26	37	32	100

	Not True at All	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True	Almost Always True	SUM
I am very purposeful.	1	3	19	46	31	100
I think clearly and concentrate when under pressure.	5	5	23	38	29	100
I feel I control my life.	1	11	21	40	27	100
I always act with my greatest effort, no matter what.	1	4	21	48	26	100
When things seem hopeless, I don't give up.	3	8	19	44	26	100
I must act based on my intuitions.	1	8	25	40	26	100

In examining cultural traditions as social values that determine lifestyle and way of life, we found that among the respondents, these are closer to professed values than to praxis values. The results showed that 46.2% of respondents' families follow Roma/Gypsy traditions, and these traditions are also important to the young respondents. In contrast, according to 14.7% of respondents, although their families maintain traditions, these are not important to them. They tend to participate passively in preserving traditions and do not attribute particular significance to them. Another group, 16.2% of respondents, does not maintain Roma traditions but shows interest in them. These participants would be open to learning more and possibly incorporating certain elements into their daily lives. Finally, 22.8% of respondents neither maintain nor are interested in Roma traditions. For them, these traditions have no significance, and they do not wish to participate in their preservation or rediscovery. Overall, the results suggest that the importance and preservation of Roma traditions are present to varying degrees in participants' families, where they are important to the majority, but there is a significant group that is not interested in them.

Further results show that only 37.1% of respondents speak the Roma/Gypsy language. This indicates that although the preservation and importance of traditions play a significant role in the lives of some participants, the use of the language is much less widespread. Based on the data, traditions are important and present in everyday life for nearly half of the participants, yet language use is much more limited, with only a smaller portion of participants actively speaking one of the Roma/Gypsy languages.

Future Orientations of Southern Great Plain Roma Youth

Study Plans

Based on the results, we found that very few (0.5%) participants do not wish to complete their basic education. The results suggest that vocational school qualifications are targeted by most, nearly half of the participants. However, one-third also want to obtain a high school diploma. Those who have not yet obtained a secondary education plan to do so by the age of 19 at the latest.

23% of respondents plan to obtain some form of higher education qualification.

This data suggests that a significant number of participants are committed to long-term learning and professional development. Furthermore, the diversity of learning goals indicates that participants have different career goals and seek different educational opportunities to achieve their goals. Nearly 10% of respondents also plan to study abroad. However, about one-fifth of respondents have not yet completed education and plan to do so at an average age of 17 years. This fact suggests that the possibility of early termination of the school life path is present among respondents, which can have serious consequences for labor market success and also poses the risk that from among them will come the replenishment of the circle of NEET youth.

Conceptions of Family Formation and Childbearing

Three-quarters of respondents reported having been in a relationship, starting their first relationship at an average age of 15 years. The study results showed that those participants who have not yet established a relationship plan to begin their first relationship at an average age of 17 years.

Those who plan to marry in the future wish to do so around the average age of 25 years (85 individuals).

Three-quarters of respondents plan to start a family, one-fifth are uncertain, and 4% do not plan to do so. Among young Roma, the average planned number of children is 1.7. Most respondents plan to have one or two children in the future.

Four individuals in the sample already had children, and one pregnant woman was also included in the sample. Participants with children were on average 18 years old when their first child was born. However, those who have not yet had children would like to have children in their late twenties, at an average age of 27 years.

Our results suggest that the family planning habits of Roma youth in our sample are similar to generational patterns observed in the modern socio-economic environment.

Plans for Establishing Independent Living

Two-thirds of respondents (68.26%) have independently visited some entertainment venue. They were on average 16 years old when they first participated in such an event. Those who do not yet go out for entertainment plan to go out independently for the first time at the age of 17.

Among the young people we studied, we found that those who had already moved out (7 individuals) had an average age of 17.8 years when they did so. In contrast, those who have not yet left their family residence, thus living with a parent/guardian, plan to move out at an average age of 22 years (in the case of 96 individuals).

We also asked participants when they would like to first work in a regular job, or if this has already happened, at what age it occurred. There were a total of 9 respondents who already had jobs, with their employment occurring at an average age of 18 years. Those who do not yet have full-time work experience plan to be on average 21 years old when they do.

We also asked when participants plan to independently acquire an apartment/house. Three participants indicated that they already own property. The others plan to achieve this goal by an average age of 25 years.

These data show that the phenomenon of adulthood being pushed to later ages, as well as the phenomenon of acceleration, has also appeared among Roma youth. Post-adolescent youth complete their studies at later ages, detach from the parental home later, and begin independent life, start a family, and have children at later ages than the parent generation.

Reviewing the data (since the sample is not representative, this is only a well-founded suspicion), the appearance of an element of what Kálmán Gábor called the "youth era change" in the early 2000s regarding Hungarian youth can be suggested among Roma youth as well, namely that this trend has occurred in all strata of domestic youth to this day, which is why we see that the planning and occurrence of life events in the young Roma generation are no longer determined by traditions and norms, but by mass media and peer groups, just as in the case of majority society youth.

Opinions on Achieving Goals

In our study, we examined participants' confidence in achieving goals in the near future. Respondents could rate how much they trust in achieving their goals on a 5-point Likert scale. One-quarter of respondents completely trust that they will achieve their goals, a further 42% of respondents marked the "rather yes" response, which shows that more than two-thirds of participants are optimistic about achieving their goals. One-third of respondents could not decide whether they would achieve their goals or not. Few thought they would not achieve their goals: only 2% of respondents answered rather not, and only 1.5% chose the not at all option. Overall, it can be said that most participants look optimistically at achieving their goals in the near future.

Summary

During the analysis of data from a questionnaire research conducted in the Southern Great Plain region of Hungary (Békés, Bács-Kiskun, and Csongrád-Csanád counties), we examined the opinions of 197 young people aged between 12 and 25 who identified themselves as Roma, Gypsy, or Romungro (hereinafter collectively: Roma). In the subsample, nearly half of the respondents (47.2%) study in primary school, one-third (31.7%) attend vocational school, nearly one-fifth (19.3%) attend grammar school, while 2% do not participate in school education.

Based on the analysis of the research data, we found that the preservation of Roma traditions and language is present to varying degrees among respondents. Commitment to traditions is present in some respondents, but more than half of the Roma youth involved in the study do not consider Roma traditions important or do not follow them at all. The data also show that the use of a Roma language (Beás, Lovári) is a less important praxis value among young people.

Universal values (such as family security, happiness, equality, true friendship, and peace) and other post-material values (such as freedom and enjoyment of life) are particularly important to Roma youth.

The phenomenon of adulthood being pushed to later ages has appeared in the young Roma generations. The planning of life events is less determined by traditions and norms. The youth phase is diversifying in their generation as well, with individual life paths being created. The path of life regulated by norms, as has happened in the majority society's youth cohorts over the last twenty years, is being replaced by a choice-based life path among the growing Roma generation as well, when life events and milestones are shaped according to the decisions of the individual. Behind this phenomenon, we see the increased penetration of globalization into the lifeworld of youth. With the increase in smartphone usage and internet access, the enhanced role of mass media in influencing decisions (and thus the relegation of traditions to the background) has appeared among Roma youth just as it has in the case of majority society youth in Hungary.

In the case of study plans, we found factors that reinforce the above-described phenomenon and are closely related to it. The expansion of the school youth phase is also appearing among Roma youth, which determines the planning of further life events. The proportion of those who do not wish to complete their basic education does not reach one percent of respondents, while half of the respondents plan to obtain vocational school qualifications, one-third a high school diploma, and nearly one-quarter higher education qualifications.

Regarding conceptions of family formation and childbearing, we found that more than two-thirds of the surveyed youth want to get married (definitely yes 46.7%; rather yes 31.5%). This is a significant proportion compared to the aspirations of youth cohorts in the majority society appearing in research. In the pattern of Roma youth's perceptions of relationship cohabitation, marriage and the traditional family model strongly exist. The respondents' intention to have children and start a family is also considered high (77%). However, the planned number of children among them is low (average value 1.7), although this is still higher than among non-Roma youth.

In all this, we see a value co-existence phenomenon, the survival of universal values across generations (family security, happiness) and the co-existence of postmodern post-material (pleasant, enjoyable life) and material (material well-being) values, which is reinforced by the fact that the average values of responses for every element of the value space included in the questionnaire are high (indicating importance above 4.4 on the five-point scale). An exception is respect for traditions, which with an average value of 4.2 came in last place in the value preference order. A deeper understanding of these patterns, specifically perceptions about Roma/Gypsy traditions, will be examined in the next phase of the research through personal and focus group interviews.

Among the limitations of the research, we identified that the non-representative sample and convenience sampling, as well as the use of Likert-scale questions, limited the generalization of results. Consequently, we plan to collect qualitative data and conduct a larger-scale study.

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Religion, secularization and social tensions

Abstract

In the study of the process of secularization, functional differentiation, which is a distinctive and even defining feature of modern societies, is particularly important. In this sense, different sectors of society (e.g. politics, economy, education) are becoming increasingly autonomous and no longer require religious legitimacy. According to Niklas Luhmann, who approaches sociology from the perspective of systems theory, social systems such as law, politics, and economics operate according to an autonomous logical mechanism. Two years after Luhmann's death in 1998, André Kieserling published his systems theory interpretation of the sociology of religion, which was itself a theoretical milestone. Religion, Kieserling suggests, is a functional subsystem of modern society, which, like all other subsystems, is shaped by autopoietic and meaning-rich communication. Religion purports to explain, without contradiction, the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent in everyday life. Faith becomes a personal end product the power of which rests in its uniqueness and intimacy. In modern society, religion has become a social subsystem, now so complex that a separate science, theology, has been built around it.

The systems theory of religion addresses important issues ranging from meaning and development to secularization, and it turns decades of sociological assumptions on their head. It offers a new vocabulary and a fresh philosophical and sociological approach to one of society's most fundamental phenomena.

Keywords

Niklas Luhmann's theory, secularization, functionalist approaches, religious pluralism, multiculturalism

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1. Secularization

1.1. The impact of secularization on the social roles of religion

Before delving into the theoretical questions, we would do well to pause and consider the increasing pace of secularization in postmodern society. We must ask, in other words, how this process has affected the roles of religion in society.

As a social process, secularization has transformed the relationship of modern and postmodern societies to religion, with religion playing an ever smaller role in private and public life, including within various institutional systems. The accelerating pace of secularization under the influence of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has had a significant impact on the role and function of religion in society.

The concept of secularization itself can be interpreted in several ways. Essentially, it refers to the separation of religion from other spheres of society, most importantly politics, education, and the sciences. Max Weber, perhaps the single most prominent figure in the field of sociology to study this process, described secularization in terms of "disenchantment" (Entzauberung). Weber suggests that the world is becoming increasingly rational and increasingly understandable from the perspective of the sciences, while religious teachings are being pushed to the margins. Secularization thus refers not only to the decline in the influence of religious institutions; it also means the waning of religion as a social narrative and interpretative framework[1].

Émile Durkheim, another representative of the classical theory of secularization, also called attention to the waning role of religion, while the sciences and industrialization, he noted, were gaining ground in many spheres of life.

In the study of the process of secularization, functional differentiation, which is a distinctive and even defining feature of modern societies, is particularly important. In this sense, the different sectors of society sectors of society (e.g. politics, economy, education) are becoming increasingly autonomous and no longer require religious legitimacy. According to Niklas Luhmann, who approaches sociology from the perspective of systems theory, social systems such as law, politics, and economics operate according to an autonomous logical mechanism in which religion no longer plays a separate role.

[1] Berger 1967. 78–81.

The teachings of the Church unquestionably played a dominant role in social structures such as systems of government, education, and moral norms for centuries. As the process of secularization has progressed, however, these institutions have gradually lost their influence, especially in Western societies.

Perhaps the most significant event in this process was the separation of church and state,[2] which made it possible for political systems to function free of religious influence. This idea is one of the fundamental pillars of modern democracies. In principle, it is intended to ensure that government does not interfere in religious affairs and that churches and other religious groups do not influence decision making on the state level. The separation of church and state does not, however, mean that religion can be excluded from public life altogether, as the principle is based first and foremost on the clear division of powers and the common good.

Similarly, the sciences and scientific methodologies have become the guiding principle in educational systems. As religious festivals, rituals, and norms gradually became more a matter of personal preference than social (or even political) obligation, religious belief itself was increasingly a matter of personal choice and was relegated more and more to the private sphere.

In recent decades, however, several studies have suggested that secularization is not a uniform process and that it does not occur in all societies in the same way. Secularization, thus, has not meant the complete disappearance of religion from society, but merely a transformation of its functions and roles. While religion used to be the primary source of social norms and thus arguably could be understood as a centripetal force, today it has become dominated by pluralism and diversity. In modern societies, religion finds expression as a form of cultural identity rather than a binding belief system. In many cases, religious practices and systems of belief have lost their normative (centripetal) role and have become a matter of personal, individual choice. The decline in the influence of churches (broadly understood) does not necessarily mean the disappearance of faith, but rather has led merely to a transformation of how people experience faith in everyday life.[3]

Secularisation thus has had a complex and multifaceted impact on the roles of religion in society. While religion has come to play a strikingly smaller role than it used to in political, economic, and educational systems, it is nevertheless still present in various social spheres, if in different forms. It can therefore be concluded that secularization does not mean the disappearance of religion but only its transformation, especially in the areas of individual religious practice and community life. The relationship between religion and secular society will remain dynamic in the future, especially given the transformations brought about by globalization and cultural diversity.

[2] The most famous example of the separation of church and state was the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which stated that the state could not enact laws that promoted or hindered the practice of a religion. This principle ensures that all citizens are free to practice their religion, while guaranteeing the neutrality of the state in religious matters.

[3] Casanova 1994. 45–52.

1.2. Theories of secularization

Theories of secularization venture explanations from an array of perspectives as to how and why religion has come to play an ever-smaller role in the lives of individuals and society. Below, I examine these theories in more detail and offer several examples.

1.2.1. Classical theories of secularization

Classical theories of secularization constitute an important part of modern sociological thought. These theories attempt to describe, first and foremost, the process by which religion and its influence have gradually become increasingly marginalized. Fundamentally, they suggest that, as a result of modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and scientific progress, religion has lost much of its social weight and has become more a part of the private life of the individual, while so-called rational and science-based thinking has come to play an ever more prominent role[4]. Classical theories of secularization can be traced back to the writings of influential sociologists, such as Max Weber and Peter Berger.

1.2.1.1. Max Weber

Max Weber, one of the founders of German sociology and economics, is famous for his penetrating analysis of the interrelationship between modernity, religion, and capitalism. His theory of secularization is key to understanding the relationship between modernity and religion.

As noted above, Weber argued that secularization refers not simply to the decline of religion in society but also to the move away from religious worldviews brought about by modernization and the triumphs of rational thinking. According to Weber, religious worldviews were gradually losing their relevance as the advances of modernity led people to rely on rational approaches and scientific knowledge rather than religious explanations. Protestantism, Weber famously contended, and especially the Puritan work ethic played a key role in the development and spread of modern capitalism. In his milestone work *The* ***Protestant Ethic*** *and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber showed that Protestant religious values such as the "Beruf" or "vocation" ethic and Puritan thrift were essential contributing factors to the development of modern capitalism. As capitalism emerged, religious social foundations gradually faded, and economic activities were increasingly organized according to rational calculations and market logic. This process itself was one of the main drivers of secularization, as the rise of rational thinking called into question the role of religion in everyday life. Traditional religions, which had been called upon to give meaning to human life and order to human coexistence, lost much of their influence in the modern world. People were less and less inclined to see nature and human life as guided by divine intervention or transcendental forces and tended more to understand the laws of nature and human life according to scientific methods.

[4] Habermas 2008a. 93–96.

1.2.1.2. Peter Berger

American sociologist and religious scholar Peter Berger was another prominent representative of secularization theory. According to Berger, the driving force behind the process of secularization was the development of modern societies and in particular scientific and technological progress. With the advent of modernity, people increasingly embraced a secular outlook, and scientific explanations of natural phenomena and questions of social life gradually came to replace religious explanations. Berger contended that the secularization of modern societies has been accompanied by a growing pluralism of worldviews, and this has posed a challenge to religion. The emergence of religious pluralism, furthermore, has stimulated the process of relativization, and this in turn has weakened the social influence of religion.

In his earlier theoretical work, Berger emphasized the "privatization" of religion, by which he referred to the tendency towards the relegation of religion to the private sphere, while other areas of (public) life became increasingly secularized. Later, however, Berger realized that religions was not necessarily being completely marginalized to the private sphere and in many cases could even reenter the public sphere, for instance in the United States or in the countries of the global south[5].

1.2.2. Functionalist approaches

Functionalist theories of secularization examine how, with the emergence of new institutions, religion becomes increasingly peripheral in modern societies. These theories emphasize the differentiation of modern society, meaning the dominance of rational thought and the advances of the sciences, all of which contribute to the diminishing role of religion in society. As social life becomes increasingly specialized, religious institutions lose the importance they once enjoyed and are replaced by other spheres or institutions. This process can be described as **structural differentiation.** From a functionalist point of view, secularization is a kind of social evolution in the course of which secular institutions based on rational thought take over various functions which had once been the prerogative of religion.

1.2.2.1. Émile Durkheim

French sociologist Émile Durkheim was one of the most prominent figures of **functionalism. According to Durkheim,** the fundamental function of religion was to maintain social cohesion and reinforce community norms.

Durkheim examined religion not solely as a system of beliefs but also as a social institution that plays a vital role in social cohesion and the maintenance of moral order. In his system, religion was understood as a fundamentally collective phenomenon. It was not simply a matter of individual belief but also concerned unity among people at the community level. Religion's central role, Durkheim suggested, lay in the shared values, norms, and beliefs that hold society together. In other words, through shared rituals and symbols, it helps strengthen solidarity and unity between members of a community.

[5] Berger 1967.

In his 1912 book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Durkheim explained that religion is based on the distinction between the "sacred" and the "profane." The "sacred" are things to which the community attaches special meanings which are reinforced through ritual and ceremony. These rituals, thus, not only serve spiritual purposes. They also promote social stability and unity[6].

According to Durkheim, industrialization, scientific progress, and the gradual division of social life into increasingly distinct fields all contributed to the decline of religion's traditional role. Durkheim never suggested, however, that religion would disappear completely. Instead, he believed that certain functions of religion would be transformed and would continue to exist in secular forms. People would always need a common set of values and a collective consciousness. In secularized societies, he posited, these values would increasingly come from secular sources, such as notions of human rights, democracy, and scientific rationality. Durkheim was convinced that these principles could also be used to create the social unity that previously had been founded on religion.

1.2.2.2. Talcott Parsons

American sociologist Talcott Parsons, though not a figure who introduced a separate, comprehensive theory of secularization, nonetheless had notions concerning this process which can be inferred from his views on modernization and social differentiation. His best-known theoretical system is structuralist-functionalism, which considers the functioning, maintenance, and development of social systems. Secularization plays an important role in this. Parsons argued that modern societies are characterized by the emergence of increasingly distinct, differentiated social systems, a process in which different social institutions, including education, economics, and religion, become increasingly separate and specialized. This process is an integral part of modernization, and according to Parsons, the roles of religious institutions have also changed as a result of this differentiation.

According to Parsons, secularization essentially means a decline in the role and influence of religious institutions. Parsons did not interpret this process as, first and foremost, a decline of religion, but rather as a natural consequence of the structural transformation of society. In modern societies, certain functions which were once the prerogative of religion have been taken over by various specializations, and the traditional tasks of religious institutions, such as providing moral guidance or social care, are also being performed by other secular institutions. Parsons, thus, did not necessarily see secularization as a negative process. In his view, while it may have lost much of its direct social influence, religion could nonetheless continue to play a decisive role in the lives of individuals.

Parsons stresses that religious values and norms continue to play a role in society, albeit indirectly. Thus, he sees secularization as a transformation in which religious teachings and value systems are incorporated into the institutions and norms of modern society and thus continue to live on in them.

[6] Durkheim 1957.

1.2.3. Post-secularization theories

In the 1990s, classical theories of secularization began to come under increasing criticism as religious revivals and resurgent religious movements began to emerge all over the world. Post-secularization theories reassess the roles of religion in modern societies, especially in light of social changes of the late twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first. These theories are based on critical confrontation with the fact that theories of secularization which posited a decline in the prominence and place of religion have not always been borne out. Secularization may have had a strong impact on many Western societies, but religion continues to play important roles and, in some situations, has even gained new momentum. Representatives of post-secularization theories thus also use the prefix "post" to indicate that theories of the separation between the religious and secular spheres are being rethought, since religious practices, beliefs, and institutions—far from having declined or receded—in certain social contexts have gathered new strength and even taken on new forms.

1.2.3.1. Jürgen Habermas

Perhaps the most prominent figure of this rethinking of the theoretical framework of secularization (implied in the term post-secularization) was German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Habermas unquestionably believed that, since the Enlightenment, secularization has been one of the determining factors in the decline of the prominence and influence of religious beliefs and institutions. Religion, however, has not disappeared completely. Rather, it has rather been renewed, and modern societies must recognize that dialogue between citizens with secular beliefs and citizens who hold to religious faith must be placed on a new footing. Habermas pointed out that secular states do not need to exclude religion from public life altogether, but instead should provide opportunities for constructive dialogue between religious and secular views. According to Habermas, the "common language" is the language in which the secular citizen and the member of the religious fold can engage in debate. This is both a precondition for coexistence and also a guarantee of the integrity of democratic society. In the pluralistic world of modern democracies, each side must respect the other's position. In other words, those of religious faith must accept secular arguments in public debates, while the secular citizen must acknowledge that religious beliefs can be a legitimate source of moral and ethical discourse. This theory, thus, seeks neither to refute nor deny secularization. It offers, rather, an opportunity for a new form of coexistence and dialogue between religious and secular values. Habermas derives this view primarily from pluralism and democratic political culture, in which different worldviews must learn from one another and cooperate.

Habermas also warns that the maintenance of rigid boundaries between religious and secular worldviews can become a source of conflict[7].

1.2.3.2. Charles Taylor

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor offers a theory of post-secularization that explores the dynamic interaction between religion and modernity, with a particular focus on the specific role

[7] Habermas 2008b.

of religion in a secularized world. The central idea of Taylor's theory is that people in the secular world live within an "immanent framework," meaning that they see the world only in terms of natural, material reality and that divine or transcendent reality is less obvious to them. This framework, however, does not exclude religious belief. It merely offers a different perspective. According to Taylor, people still feel a longing for the transcendent, which opens the way to post-secularization. This in turn implies the emergence of new, more flexible forms of religion. Religious experience is understood more as subjective and personal, and often it is not bound to traditional institutions or dogmas. This shift is part of a broader cultural trend that emphasizes the importance of individuality and self-realization. Taylor envisions post-secular society as a world in which different religious and secular worldviews coexist peacefully[8].

1.3. The critique of theories of secularization[9]

Theories of secularization are strikingly varied and approach the decline of the role of religion from different perspectives. While classical theories have linked this process to modernization and the triumphs of rational thought, post-secular approaches offer a more nuanced picture of the position of religion in the global world today. Some criticize these approaches for allegedly overestimating the apparent resurgence of religion and ignoring the continued effects of secularization. Others contend that religion is present, but that its influence is still receding and the new forms it has taken are not as significant as before.

Secularization clearly is not a linear and universal process. It is, rather, a social, historical, and culturally context-dependent phenomenon. The more recent scholarship has increasingly acknowledged the complexity of this relationship and has focused on the dynamic links between religion and secularization.

The so-called "post-secular" theories point out that secularization does not necessarily mean the final decline of religion but only its survival in new forms. Habermas, the aforementioned German philosopher, argues that religion can continue to play an important role in modern societies, especially in public debates and moral discourses. Thus, in post-secular societies, religion can be reasserted, even if it takes on a new guise, different from the traditional forms it had previously taken.

This seems to be borne out in practice, as the process of secularization has not unfolded in the same way in all societies and cultures. While in Western societies and especially in the cultures of Europe the role of religion has declined significantly, in other regions, such as Africa, South America, and South Asia, it continues to play a prominent role. In many countries and particularly in the non-Western world, religion has claimed a stronger political role and is often closely linked to issues of national identity. This is true not only in the Islamic world, but also for other religious groups. One could think, for instance, of the political role of Hinduism in India.

[8] Taylor 2007.

[9] Due to space constraints, we cannot go into a detailed critical analysis of the theories of secularisation, so in this chapter we will focus only on the main lines.

1.4. The emergence of secularization in different cultural contexts

Research has shown that the process of secularization is not unfolding in the same way in different regions of the world. While in Western Europe the influence of religious institutions has declined significantly, religion remains strong in other regions, such as the Global South and Eastern Europe. Theories of secularization, thus, are not universally applicable, as different cultures and historical processes play significant and different roles in shaping the relationship between religion and society.

1.4.1. Western Europe

In Western Europe, a rapid and dramatic process of secularization began, and this process particularly gathered steam after the Second World War. Church attendance and religious beliefs declined dramatically, especially among members of the younger generations. The separation of church and state institutions and the rise of the welfare state also contributed to the marginalization of religion. Scientific and technological progress and the emphasis on individualism and cultural pluralism encouraged people to seek meaning and answers to their ethical and existential questions from sources other than religion.

1.4.2. Eastern Europe and Russia

In Eastern Europe, after the fall of communism, there was something of a religious revival, especially in Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism. After the collapse of the atheist ideologies of the socialist regimes, many people turned back to religion, although this attachment to religious belief and ceremony was in no small part cultural and not necessarily associated with deeply held religious belief. In Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church gained considerable political and social power and reasserted its importance as a defining part of Russian identity.

1.4.3. The United States

One can observe an interesting phenomenon in the case of the United States, which, unlike many Western European nations, has always had a strong religious vitality. Although secularization processes have been underway here too, churches still play a prominent social role, especially in evangelical and Protestant communities. The role of religion in the political sphere is also important. This distinctive feature of the American context is due in part to the American tradition of religious pluralism and religious freedom, which has allowed different religious groups to flourish and compete.

1.4.4. Latin America

In recent decades, a remarkable religious transformation has been underway in Latin America. Protestant movements and especially Pentecostalism have gained ground in this traditionally Catholic part of the world. This religious dynamism should not be misunderstood as

secularization. Rather, it is part of the pluralization of religious life and the emergence of new religious movements.

1.5. Perspectives for the future

The future course of secularization will depend on an array of factors, including global political and economic developments, technological progress, and the internal dynamics of societies. While religion may continue to play an increasingly marginal role in some areas, in other regions and communities a strong religious identity may remain dominant. Given the immense diversity of the cultures of the world and the rise of cultural pluralism, the relationship between religion and secularization will continue to change, and both tendencies (the tendency toward religious faith on the one hand and the tendency towards a more secular worldview on the other) will continue to be present in modern societies. However, we must always keep in mind that the relationship between religion, secularization, and modernity cannot be understood and described as a simple one-way process, because as the world becomes increasingly interconnected and globalized, the role of religion is likely to change and religion itself will adapt to new challenges. But religion will unquestionably remain an important part of human experience, particularly in the areas of personal identity and community building. In the future, the balance between religion and secularization will determine the role of religion in society. The relationship between religion and secular society will in all likelihood remain dynamic and diverse, and this relationship will assume different forms in different regions and cultures.

2. Religious pluralism

One of the most important cultural and philosophical issues for modern societies is religious pluralism, meaning the coexistence of and interaction among different religious traditions. Contemporary social phenomena, including globalization, migration, and modernization, have all contributed to the rise of religious pluralism, since religious and cultural differences have become an increasingly marked part of everyday social life. Globalization has led to more and more encounters among different religious traditions, creating new challenges for societies from the perspectives of tolerance, acceptance and peaceful coexistence.

The development of information technologies (in particular the spread of the internet) has greatly facilitated the spread of religious ideas, practices, and teachings, leading to increasingly pluralized religious communities.

Religious pluralism is both a de facto recognition of religious diversity and a framework that promotes dialogue and respect across denominational lines.

Religious pluralism also extends to deeper issues, however, such as the relativity of religious truths, the relationship between faith and morality, and the role of the secular state among religious communities.

2.1. The concept of religious pluralism and its theoretical foundations

The concept of religious pluralism is based on the principles of religious diversity and the peaceful coexistence of different religious beliefs. This concept is not limited to this, however. It also

implies mutual recognition of different religious traditions and acceptance of these traditions on an equal footing in society. Religious pluralism has taken various forms throughout history and has developed in different ways in different historical periods and civilizations.[10]

Although there have been many examples of religious pluralism in the history of civilization, arguably the real turning point came in the sixteenth century with the Reformation. Reformation thinkers challenged the authority of the Catholic Church, and several new denominations were created, aptly dubbed Protestant (i.e. in protest). Religious conflicts erupted across Europe, which in the long term contributed to the emergence of new forms of religious pluralism. The bloody conflicts were resolved by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, when, in a spirit of religious tolerance, the different denominations gradually recognized one another's right to exist. The first amendment to the constitution of the United States of America, which guarantees the right of religious freedom, offers a relatively recent landmark in the history of religious pluralism. The founding fathers themselves stressed the importance of the separation of church and state, and this furthered the emergence of a modern form of religious pluralism. The historical roots of the concept also go back to nineteenth-century philosophical and religious thought[11].

According to the British philosopher of religion John Hick, a prominent theorist of modern pluralism, religious pluralism is necessary if we seek to understand differences between religions not as absolute truths but as expressions of different perspectives. In other words, different religious traditions are different expressions of the same transcendent reality. According to Hick, all religions are thus directed towards the same transcendent reality, but they find form and expression in different ways in different cultural and historical contexts. Hick thus embraces the notion that no single religious tradition can stake a claim to absolute truth. Rather, each religious tradition is rooted in the diversity of human experience. Thus, one of the most important questions in this regard is whether religious truth is relative or absolute in nature. These questions have been the subject of much theological and philosophical reflection, especially in Western thought, where Christianity has played a dominant role for centuries[12].

Thus, in practice, religious pluralism means that a society or community accepts several different religions and ensures that they stand on an equal footing in society, without any single religion being exclusive. In this sense, religious pluralism is not simply a matter of tolerance but also implies the belief that all religions have the right to exist legitimately and each has its place in society, and each religion respects the beliefs, practices, and values of the others.

One of the most important philosophical challenges of religious pluralism is clearly the question of the relativity of truth. If several different religious traditions stake an exclusive claim to truth, how can they possibly engage in respectful dialogue with one another? It is precisely on this point that pluralism differs from syncretism, which seeks to blur the differences between religious traditions. According to the pluralist approach to religion, each religion reflects transcendent truth in its own way, even if the understandings of this truth sometimes differ in significant ways. Naturally, this view does not exclude the possibility of disputes and conflicts between different religious traditions.

[10] One of the most significant ancient examples of religious pluralism was the Roman Empire, whose expansion brought different peoples and religions under Roman rule. Roman rulers generally showed a high degree of tolerance for the religious customs of the peoples they conquered. The state supported many religious cults, and many new gods from different parts of the empire were introduced into the official Pantheon.

[11] Habermas 2006.

[12] Miller 2015.

2.2. Social impact and challenges

Religious pluralism obviously has many positive social effects, but it also presents a number of challenges. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges it raises is how to reconcile different religious traditions without infringing on identity and autonomy. Indeed, religious communities often seem to fear that pluralism undermines the specific characteristics and teachings of their faith, especially when coexistence requires compromises. Another difficulty for some religious groups is that pluralism is seen as leading to a kind of relativism that may weaken the strength and solidity of religious faith.

The issue of social and political integration is another major challenge of religious pluralism. Coexistence among different religious groups often depends on the political institutions that regulate the rights and opportunities of religious minorities. The achievement of religious pluralism therefore depends on the extent to which society and the state are able to develop policies that ensure equal rights and freedoms for religious communities. Religious pluralism unquestionably plays an important role in modern political systems, especially in democracies, where religious freedom is a fundamental human right.

In secularized states such as France and the United States, the challenge of pluralism is how to manage tensions among religious communities while ensuring individual religious freedom.[13] Religious freedom, after all, has come to be understood as a fundamental element of human rights, which means that the state must allow people to follow their religious beliefs freely and cannot interfere in religious practices as long as these practices do not infringe on the rights of others. Furthermore, religious freedom means not only the freedom to choose a religious belief but also the freedom to choose atheism.

In a secular society, the state should remain neutral in religious affairs as a matter of principle,[14] but religious communities often ask for special rights and recognition, which can cause controversy and even tension. From a practical point of view, religious pluralism simply means a guarantee of social tolerance and religious freedom. Today, however, religious pluralism faces new challenges, especially in societies where religious fanaticism, ethnic and religious conflicts, and tensions related to migration have intensified.

In summary, mutual respect and dialogue among different religions are arguably in the interests not only of religious communities but also of society as a whole. Pluralism, however, does not mean the elimination of religious differences, but their recognition and respect.

2.3. The future of religious pluralism

The future of religious pluralism is closely linked to the processes of globalization and the ensuring social changes. Maintaining interfaith dialogue and mutual respect will also be essential for peace in the societies of the future. However, this will require religious communities to

[13] This is referred to in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that *"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community, in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."*

[14] This also means that the state cannot take a position on theological issues. And neutrality means that the state does not give preference to any religion, but keeps an equal distance from all of them.

remain open to one another and ready to engage in dialogue. In a sense, religious pluralism can further social cohesion by creating opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding among different religious groups. It also contributes to the protection of human rights by enshrining respect for individual religious freedom as a fundamental value. However, pluralism can also present challenges, for example in the management of interreligious tensions or the need to maintain a balance between secular and religious views[15].

One of the great challenges of the future will be how different religions will cope with the growing effects of secularization and how they will be able to preserve their own identities in pluralistic societies.

3. Multiculturalism

Like religious pluralism, multiculturalism[16] is an important concept which also plays a significant but sometimes controversial role in modern societies. Both concepts are built on the recognition of diversity and the equality of different cultural and religious identities. In recent decades, as a consequence of globalization and migration, questions concerning the meanings, uses, and potential limitations of multiculturalism have been raised in an increasing number of countries and cultural contexts with an increasing sense of urgency, but the responses to these questions have varied. In the second half of the twentieth century, multiculturalism became an increasingly pressing issue, since, mainly as a result of international migration and the collapse for the most part of the colonial world, an increasing number of ethnic and cultural minorities emerged in Western societies. Multiculturalism, however, is not simply a social and political issue. It is also a philosophical one, raising complex problems of identity, pluralism, legal equality, and social cohesion[17].

3.1. The concept of multiculturalism and its theoretical background

The concept of multiculturalism refers to the peaceful coexistence and interaction of different cultural groups within a society, in which groups from different ethnic, religious, linguistic, and historical backgrounds seek to preserve their identities. The ways in which this concept takes political, social, and cultural form are the subject of considerable debate in public discourse and politics worldwide. At the theoretical level, the systems of the aforementioned Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor[18] and political scientist Will Kymlicka in particular have played an important role in defining multiculturalism. According to Taylor, cultural recognition is a fundamental aspect of human dignity, which ensures that individuals and communities alike can preserve their cultural identities. Kymlicka adds that the protection and recognition of minority cultures require various legal and political mechanisms.

[15] Habermas 2003.

[16] Multiculturalism, as a political and social ideal of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect between different cultural groups, became the dominant ideology in the Western world in the second half of the 20th century. In the 1960s, under the influence of the civil rights movements and globalisation processes, several countries, notably the United States, Canada and many European nations, began to introduce multicultural policies aimed at protecting the rights of minorities and promoting social diversity.

[17] Steger 2017.

[18] Taylor 1992.

3.1.1. Liberal multiculturalism

Theories of multiculturalism draw on a variety of philosophical and social science approaches. If we want to understand these approaches systematically, perhaps the first and most important among them is **liberal multiculturalism**, according to which the individual has the right to preserve his or her cultural identity and that the legal system should offer protections for cultural minorities to this end. This approach is based on the notion that in a democratic society people can come from different cultural, religious, ethnic and national backgrounds and that these differences are not only acceptable but desirable for the enrichment of society. Critics of this theory often argue that the emphasis placed on differences can increase segregation and that the alleged rights of minority communities can come into conflict with the interests of other groups in society.

3.1.2. Post-colonial multiculturalism

Postcolonial multiculturalism, another approach to the multifaceted concept of multiculturalism, focuses on the legacy of colonialism and the identity crises that came with this legacy. Postcolonial multiculturalism seeks to critically engage with the legacies of colonialism, with a particular focus on the cultural, economic, and political consequences of colonialism. As has been often discussed and thoroughly documented, the colonial powers exerted not only an economic but also a cultural influence, sometimes forcibly spreading their own languages, religions, and value systems. This long shadow of past is still visible today, particularly in the multicultural societies of the former colonies, where the coexistence of different ethnic and cultural groups remains fraught with tensions.

3.1.3. Critical multiculturalism

Finally, **critical multiculturalism adopts a more pragmatic approach by** focusing on power relations and inequalities. **In contrast to liberal multiculturalism, this theory does not simply call attention to the alleged virtues of multiculturalism as peaceful** coexistence of different cultural groups. It also examines the ways in which power imbalances are created between different cultural and ethnic groups within a society. This approach considers how social, economic and political systems affect different cultures, and it focuses on how inequalities can be dealt with to create a more just society.

3.2. The social impact of multiculturalism

The social effects of multiculturalism can be studied from different perspectives, including economic development, social cohesion, identity formation, and the transformation of political and legal structures. Multiculturalism also poses significant challenges for countries at the societal level. One major sociological question is simply whether cultural diversity promotes or hinders social cohesion. Some studies have suggested that multicultural societies may be at a higher risk

of social conflict because of the tensions that can arise from interactions among different groups. Other studies suggests that cultural diversity stimulates innovation and economic growth.

Whatever the case, the impact of multiculturalism on social cohesion is now a hotly debated issue. Some theoreticians contend that cultural diversity nurtures understanding and cooperation within society, while others believe that tensions and antagonisms between different groups create insecurity. With regards to economic impact, **cultural diversity** can have a stimulating effect on economic growth, particularly in industries in which innovation and creativity have an important role. At the same time, cultural differences and discrimination in the labor market can be significant obstacles. Cultural divisions can have a negative impact on labor efficiency from a social point of view if discrimination is not handled effectively.

One of the most important social effects of multiculturalism is the development of individual and community identities. Cultural diversity poses new challenges to traditional national identities, as different groups seek to preserve their own cultural values. On the one hand, a multicultural environment can have a positive impact, since it offers individuals the opportunity to develop a richer cultural self-image[19]. On the other hand, it can have a negative impact, as individuals may suffer an identity crisis and may be unable to find a balance between their cultural heritage and the norms required by the majority society. Finally, from the perspective of political and legal impacts, multicultural societies are particularly affected by major changes in the protection of human and minority rights. The same can be said of politics, where responses to the challenges posed by multiculturalism may vary from country to country. It is worth noting that efforts to reconcile minority cultural customs with notions of universal human rights can sometimes lead to conflict.

3.3. A critique of multiculturalism and the challenges it poses

While multiculturalism can be beneficial in some respects in a given society, it has also been made the subject of vigorous criticism. Some argue that it contributes to the fragmentation of society by isolating different cultural groups from one another. Others go further and contend that it can even lead to a weakening of the core values and norms of the majority society if it fails to create a shared platform for different groups. The examples of France and Germany have provoked particularly sharp criticism, where the integration of Muslim immigrants has been the subject of considerable social and political controversy. Some argue that these countries were not prepared to deal with the conflicts arising from cultural diversity in an appropriate way and that this may be the reason why assimilation models have failed. The most frequent criticisms are summarized below.

3.3.1. Social cohesion and the tensions of multiculturalism

The most common criticism of multiculturalism is that it threatens social cohesion. Critics argue that multiculturalism weakens efforts towards integration among different cultural groups and thus encourages the emergence of increasingly parallel societies, as newcomers are not always able to integrate into the majority society.

[19] Taylor 1992.

Ethnic segregation is becoming more and more evident in many Western European cities, and it is causing considerable tensions. Immigrant communities are often concentrated in neighborhoods where they can follow their own cultural traditions without having to maintain close links with local society. In the long term, this can erode mutual trust and increase the risk of ethnic conflict.

3.3.2. The crisis of national identity

Proponents of multiculturalism often contend that equal recognition of different cultural identities is important for minority groups. Others, however, perceive this as a potential threat to national identity, especially when the cultural values and norms of immigrants are fundamentally different from those of the host country. These kinds of clashes may arise, for example, between the values and traditions of Muslim communities and those of liberal democratic countries.

In Europe, on several occasions immigrant communities, taking advantage of multicultural policies, have used their own legal systems (notably religious courts) to settle issues which they have seen as belonging to their internal affairs. This practice, however, can come into conflict with the legal system of the given state and with liberal legal principles, especially when religious laws differ from international human rights laws.

3.3.3. Migration and integration

Multiculturalism is often linked to the politics of immigration, especially in countries that have received large numbers of immigrants. In these societies, the question of integration has become a central problem, as multiculturalism policies often have not placed adequate emphasis on adaptation to the host society and have not sufficiently encouraged immigrants to integrate.

The principle of multiculturalism and the politics on which it rests, although positive in the goals it has set, nevertheless faces serious challenges and criticisms today. The problems of integration, crises of national identity, and the weakening of social cohesion all suggest that multiculturalism alone is not sufficient for the successful coexistence of different cultural communities.

4. Religious fundamentalism and radicalism

Throughout history, religion has been an important cornerstone of many societies and cultures, and it has exerted a profound influence on the lives of individuals and on social norms. Religious fundamentalism and religious radicalism are phenomena which also look back on a long history but which have been at the center of academic, political, and public debate, particularly in recent decades. These two key terms (fundamentalism and radicalism) are easy to conflate (and are often conflated in the public discourse), but it is important to draw a clear distinction between them. In the discussion below, I describe the characteristics, differences, and similarities between religious fundamentalism and radicalism, as well as their social and political implications.

4.1. Definitions and characteristics of religious fundamentalism and radicalism

4.1.1. Religious fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalism is an ideological phenomenon that emphasizes rigid adherence to religious traditions and a return to the allegedly "original" interpretations of these traditions. The term gathered both meaning and strength in twentieth-century American Protestant communities, which built strongly on the Calvinist insistence on the centrality of the word of God, meaning actual reading of the Scriptures rather than reliance on (Catholic) interpretations of the Scriptures. The proponents of this approach to religion held to their understanding of a literal interpretation of the Bible and rejected liberal theological views. Later, the term came to be applied more widely to strands of thought in other religions, including Islam. Fundamentalists claim to have arrived at interpretations of religious texts and prescriptions independent of historical context, while rejecting the norms of the modern state, such as secularism and feminism. The original aim of any fundamentalism is to restore religion to its allegedly pure form, which generally means a return to (power relations of) the past. The followers of fundamentalisms are often isolated from mainstream society. Religious fundamentalism is not necessarily violent, but it does constitute a closed, dogmatic worldview that is difficult to reconcile with a pluralistic, democratic society[20].

4.1.2. Religious radicalism

Religious radicalism, as a radical strand of religious fundamentalism, is an extreme ideological tendency that advocates radical social or political change based on religious foundations. It often insists on the transformation of political systems and the rejection of established secular power. Religious radicalism frequently embraces the use of violence to achieve its goals and thus differs from fundamentalism, which adopts a more passive approach. Religious radical groups do not shy away from terrorist attacks, armed struggle, or other forms of violence. They often create a clear and distinct image of their alleged enemies, which can be religious minorities, political systems, and even adherents of other religious movements. Radicalism and fundamentalism share common ideological roots, but radicalism has much more ambitious aims and therefore takes a more active, confrontational approach. Members of these groups often feel threatened by what they perceive as social injustice, discrimination, or geopolitical situations, and they encourage radical action to break the status quo.

4.2. Social impacts, security challenges

4.2.1. Social impacts

Globalization, migration, multiculturalism, and the emergence of various forms of religious fundamentalism and radicalism are closely intertwined phenomena, all of which significant

[20] Bruce 2000.

impacts on modern societies. One could even go so far as to say that one is a consequence of the other, and thus they are causally linked and interact closely with one another.

Both religious fundamentalism and radicalism can have significant consequences for society. As a result of **globalization**, countries around the world are becoming increasingly interconnected economically, culturally, technologically, and politically. This creates opportunities for interaction among different religions, ideologies, and cultural identities, but it can also lead to serious tensions.

With the spread of globalization, many traditional societies feel that their identities, cultures, and religions are at risk. This can foster the spread of **religious fundamentalisms**, as globalization is often seen merely as another form of "Western hegemony." Some communities return to their religious roots as a counterreaction to preserve their identities and traditions. Fundamentalism can lead to polarization and, as cultural conflicts become increasingly intense, can even create sectarian wars, and radicalism can lead to political instability, terrorist attacks, and in extreme cases even civil wars[21].

Social and political instability often provides fertile soil for both fundamentalism and radicalism, so understanding and precisely defining how to deal with them is a pressing challenge for social scientists and policy makers. If we seek to develop effective strategies with which to counter extremist ideologies, we must be able to discern the differences between religious fundamentalism and religious radicalism.

4.2.2. Security challenges

Both fundamentalism and radicalism pose challenges for security policy. I offer below a discussion of some of these challenges, without claiming to be exhaustive.

4.2.2.1. Cultural and political tensions

Religious fundamentalism can often lead to political tensions, especially in some of the countries of the Middle East, where fundamentalist forces try to influence politics and education, which can lead to internal political and social tensions.

Religious fundamentalism is particularly likely to cause cultural tensions in societies in which different religious groups live alongside one another. In these societies, the strict religious norms demanded by fundamentalists may be difficult to reconcile with the norms of other religions and cultures and may call into question the viability of religious and cultural pluralism. In such circumstances, fundamentalist groups often perceive other religious communities or social strata that do not respect religious differences as enemies.

4.2.2.2. Terrorism

Religious radicalism includes movements or individuals who encourage extreme political or social change based on religious beliefs. Radicalism is not necessarily violent, but it often encourages actions in this direction.

[21] Booth –Dunne 2008.

Religious radicalism is often linked to terrorism, as radical groups such as the Islamic State or Al-Qaeda launch violent attacks in the name of religion. Their primary aim is to change the political system or impose religious dictates in place of secular political structures. These attacks are particularly threatening because they destabilize societies and pose a direct threat to both state and international security.

4.2.2.3. Migration and the refugee crisis

Migration and the refugee crisis are intertwined with questions of religious radicalism and fundamentalism. Migration has brought westward large numbers of people from other religious and cultural backgrounds, especially from conflict zones in the Islamic world, such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. These people are often fleeing religious persecution or civil war, where radicalism is common.

Fears of a rise in radicalism can often gather strength in societies which have welcomed refugees, as some radical groups (e.g. ISIS) have identified refugees as potential targets of manipulation in the service of their aims.

Conflicts ignited by religious radicalism in the Middle East have contributed significantly to the international refugee crisis. Millions of people have been displaced, causing a major migration crisis, particularly in Europe and other regions.

Fundamentalist regimes and groups usually persecute people who do not share their views. In many cases, this has triggered waves of refugees. For example, under the terror of the Islamic State (ISIS), many non-Muslims or Muslims whose attachment to their faith is regarded as insufficient by the regime have been forced to flee their homes[22].

4.2.2.4. The destabilization of the social order

Religious fundamentalist and radical movements often constitute a threat to national and regional stability, especially when a given group gains significant support in a given country. Armed uprisings and revolutions can then break out, destabilizing the country or region.

The fight against religious fundamentalism and radicalism presents many challenges, as both phenomena are deeply rooted in individual and community identities and are often linked to perceptions of social injustice, political oppression, and economic disadvantages.

Changes in global politics and the social environment have made religious fundamentalism and religious radicalism an increasingly important issue that can only be kept under control through internationally coordinated strategies.

Summary

In recent decades, the discipline of the sociology of religion has undergone significant changes due to global social and cultural shifts. One of the most obvious consequences of secularization has been the decline in the role of religious institutions. It was therefore particularly important to take a closer look at the changes at work in the depths of postmodern society and the ways

[22] Booth – Dunne 2008. 68–70

in which these various changes have been intertwined, with particular reference to religious pluralism, secularization, multiculturalism, and, finally, religious fundamentalism. The study of these trends and shifts reveals numerous challenges and causes for concerns, but there are also encouraging signs.

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The Challenges of the Pastoral Vocation in the Light of Historical and Social Changes

A Historical Overview of Unitarian Ministerial Duties

Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of Unitarian ministerial roles in the context of historical and social changes. The research employs sociological and historical methods to analyze the regulatory framework governing ministerial work, theological education, and the competencies required for fulfilling ministerial duties. Based on Blizzard's model, the ministerial role comprises three interconnected levels: traditional roles (preacher, teacher, liturgist), neo-traditional roles (pastoral care), and contemporary roles (community organizer, administrator). Findings indicate that while traditional roles remain strictly regulated, neo-traditional and contemporary roles allow for greater flexibility, enabling ministers to engage in a broader range of activities, including social services, cultural initiatives, and economic development. The study also highlights a shift in emphasis within ministerial roles, with increasing attention given to community-building, social work, and public engagement.

Keywords

Unitarian ministry, ministerial roles, historical changes, social engagement, theological education, institutional adaptation

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Introduction[1]

The present paper is part of a broader research project examining the roles of Unitarian ministers within a comprehensive framework. The aim of this research is to investigate the changes in role of Unitarian ministers over the past three decades. These canges in role can be understood as the result of a combination of social changes, environmental expectations, the needs of ecclesiastical institutions, and the evolving self-perception of ministers regarding their vocation (Siba 2016, Bálint 2023). The larger research employs sociological methodologies; however, in order to fully grasp the processes and manifestations of these changes, it must also rely on the methodologies of other social sciences, such as history, law, psychology, and theology. Understanding the extent and nature of these changes requires familiarity with the theological, historical, legal, organizational, and social contexts within which these developments have taken place, evolved, and continue to change.

Before delving into the topic, it is necessary to clarify some of the defining features of the Unitarian religious tradition.The Unitarian denomination is a product of the Reformation in Eastern Europe. Emerging in the 16th century within the Principality of Transylvania (Westtern part of Romania today), the movement with its centre in Cluj (Kolozsvár) is historically and theologically embedded in the Protestant tradition. It is often referred to as a branch of the Radical Reformation (Kovács 2017); however, due to its institutional consolidation in the 16th and 17th centuries, it followed a trajectory similar to that of other Protestant denominations in Transylvania. (Kovács 2021) The theological interpretation of Unitarian clergy roles traces back to the Western European Reformation, while the institutional framework of these roles closely mirrors that of other Hungarian and primarily Transylvanian Protestant denominations, particularly those of the Reformed Church. Although the social and political environment in Transylvania generally provided a similar framework for Protestant ministers of different denominations, the distinctly Unitarian understanding of the vocation, shaped by both theological and institutional factors, resulted in certain differences in pastoral roles compared to other denominations. Findings from an ongoing study about pastoral roles and theolgoical educations indicate that Unitarian ministers, in contrast to their counterparts in other denominations, tend to engage more actively in secular activities, particularly in social and community organization (Kató – Kiss – Bálint 2024).

This study examines only a small segment of this broader topic. Its objective is to explore the historical development of Unitarian clergy roles in light of institutional expectations, specifically focusing on the evolution of ecclesiastical regulations and theological education.

[1] The translation was assisted by ChatGPT-4o and revised for accuracy by the author.

A Brief Overview of the Unitarian Church

The Unitarian denomination emerged in Transylvania, but at various points in history, between the 16th and 18th centuries, congregations also existed in present-day Hungary, particularly in the Southern part (Baranya). The denomination, which suffered significant losses in the 17th and 19th centuries due to the religious policies of Protestant rulers and the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, experienced a major turning point with the issuance of the Edict of Tolerance in 1781 by Emperor Joseph II. The edict granted greater religious freedom to non-Catholic denominations within the Habsburg Empire. During this period, one-third of the church buildings were either rebuilt or newly constructed, educational institutions stabilized, and following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, opportunities arose for the developement of Unitarian communities in Hungary (Kovács 2021, Erdő 1986, Kedei 2002). As a result of 19th-century industrialization and urbanization, Unitarian communities also appeared outside their historical geographical context in industrial cities, particularly in Southern Transylvania as well as in larger cities all over the country (Hungary) where Unitarian presence had previously been minimal. The 20th century brought further significant changes. After Wolrd War I, due to the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, Transylvania, Banat and Partium were annexed to Romania (Pál 2011). This led to serious organizsational, administrative (end emotional) challenges for the Unitarian Church, leading by the mid-century to the split of the church body into two parts. This division was finalized with the complete institutional separation in 1968, when the Hungarian Unitarian Church was established (Pál 2010, Kovács 2021, Erdő 1986).

A major turning point came in 2012 when the institutional reunification of the Transylvanian and Hungarian Unitarian Churches restored the previous unity, forming the Hungarian Unitarian Church. Today, the majority of Unitarian church members reside in Romania, sepcifically in Trasylvania where 90% of the congregations are located. However, a significant Unitarian community also exists in Hungary. According to the 2021 Romanian census, 54% of the Unitarian population lived in rural areas and 46% in urban areas. In Hungary, the census recorded 6,552 individuals, primarily residing in urban environments (Bálint – Kiss 2024).

The Unitarian Church is organized into a three-leveled structure: mikro/local level (the parish), mezo/intermediate level (the church district in Romania or dioeces in Hungary), macro/upper level (the universal church). The church's current organizational system follows the synodal-presbyterian principle, meaning that each level has autonomous self-governance and legal personality. In Romania, there are six church districts, encompassing 114 main congregations and 41 associate ones (filia) (Petre 2022). In Hungary, the church diocese includes 11 main and one filial congregation. 96,2% of its members are ethnic Hungarians (Bálint – Kiss 2024).

At the core of Unitarian doctrine is the belief in the indivisible unity of God, explicitly rejecting the concept of the Trinity. Jesus is regarded as a prophet and teacher, and the faith emphasizes the immortality of the soul, respect for life and creation, the inherent goodness of humanity, and its potential for development. In theological matters, the Bible – interpreted through reason and conscience – serves as the final authority (Rezi 2009).

Methodology

In my research, I employ document analysis. First, I examine historical documents (ecclesiastical legal regulations and bylaws) (Tóth 1922, Uzoni – Kozma – Fosztó 2018, Mikó 1931, Mue 2012, 2014) to analyze the legal regulations governing the Unitarian ministerial vocation. Second, I assess the content and structural changes in pastoral training and their relevance to pastoral roles. Following this, I investigate how societal changes from the 19th to the 21st century have impacted pastoral roles. Finally, I focus on the extent to which the currently applicable legal frameworks allow Unitarian ministers to navigate and fulfill the increasingly prominent contemporary pastoral roles.

The Evolution of Pastoral Roles in the Context of the Reformation

The Reformation did not arise solely from a need of religious renewal but was the result of the convergence of economic, social, and political processes (Chadwick 2003). This historical context also led to a paradigm shift in the status of the clergy. Several key concepts emerge in this regard: desacralization, professionalization, the institution of the clerical family, and social mobility. Desacralization refers to the transformation of the clergy's role, which, in medieval perception, was distinct from the laity due to its sacramental status as a mediator of divine grace. The Reformation altered this perception, shifting the emphasis from the sacred dimension of the clergy to their preaching role. The ministers were percieved as interpreters of the Scripture. The Protestant clergy role was fundamentally shaped by Reformation theology, which emphasized the sole authority of Scripture. Within this framework, the primary responsibility of the Protestant minister became the competent interpretation of the Bible, through preaching and teaching. Consequently, the content of the profession, rather than its form, defined the minister's status (Siba 2020; Dixon 2003; Green 2003, Kampmann 2013). The concept of professionalization describes the process through which institutional structures were established to meet this new expectation. The effective fulfillment of the teaching and preaching roles required specialized knowledge, which in turn led to the formation of theological training institutions to prepare ministers systematically. The consolidation of ministerial education and its linkage to formal training resulted in the professionalization of the Protestant ministerial vocation (Kampmann 2013, Kaufmann 2003; Bálint 2023). This development, in turn, contributed to the legitimization of the status and the reinforcement of its social role (Swanson 2003).

A key factor in the reinterpretation of ministerial status was the minister's role within the community, which manifested in multiple dimensions. One primary source of legitimacy came from community integration. A crucial factor in redefining the minister's status was their role within the community, which had multiple dimensions. One source of legitimacy was the minister's integration into the community. In Lutheran thought, ministers were chosen and entrusted with their duties by the members of the congregation, who also had the power to recall them. However, this practice was only feasible in larger, urban communities, where the economic, political, and human resources necessary for self-governance were available. In rural congregations, the local landowner or ruling prince was responsible

for appointing ministers and ensuring their working conditions. This arrangement created a dual role for the minister—especially in the latter case: they were both a member of the community, serving its interests, and at the same time, a representative and intermediary of the ruling authority (Kampmann 2013, Krant – Nunn 2003). Another key aspect of community integration was the institution of the clerical family. Unlike their medieval Catholic counterparts, Protestant ministers were allowed to marry and have families. In the early sixteenth century, the marital status of clergy became a symbol of the Reformation. The establishment of the clerical family had several consequences: family members became part of local social networks, integrating into the congregation; the presence of a clerical family created additional material needs (e.g., the need for a study room for the minister, living expenses for family members); it sometimes became a source of conflict within the congregation. Finally, the clerical family facilitated social mobility over generations. Sons often followed in their fathers' ministerial footsteps, and through the marriage alliances of clerical wives, the clergy became increasingly integrated into the influential middle class (Kampmann 2013, Krant – Nunn 2003). Naturally, these processes unfolded in different forms across various regions of Europe. The spread of the Reformation and the process of confessionalization in Central and Eastern Europe occurred with a temporal delay compared to Western Europe. However, this period is marked by the emeregence of a new social class, primarily defined by its roles in preaching, teaching, pastoral care, community leadership, and administrative duties (Bálint 2023).

In defining pastoral roles, I base my approach on Samuel L. Blizzard's (1985) model. According to Blizzard these roles manifest on three levels: master role, integrative role, practitioner role. Blizzard uses the concept of the master role to describe the ministerial identity, reflecting both the beliefs and perceptions that ministers hold about their own vocation, as well as the public's expectations and interpretations of the ministerial role. Ministers approach and embody their master role differently, depending on their personal understanding and professional orientation. Their interactions with individuals and groups can also vary based on the objectives they prioritize in their pastoral work. Blizzard defines a minister's goal orientation in their professional work as the integrative role. This role represents what ministers seek to achieve in their interactions with people while fulfilling their vocation. It is less broad than the master role but serves as a guiding framework for the minister's engagement with church members, ecclesiastical institutions, community groups, and the wider public (Blizzard 1985.65). In other words, it reflects how the minister intends to fulfill their vocation. The integrative orientation enables a minister to focus their master role on specific pastoral objectives, such as evangelism, education, pastoral care, or community organizing (Blizzard 1985.51).

Finally, we arrive at the third level of roles defined in Blizzard's previously referenced study: the specific, so-called practitioner roles of ministers. He considers practitioner roles to be those publicly performed ministerial functions that shape how people perceive and construct their image of a minister (Blizzard 1985.51). Practitioner roles represent the practical ways in which the responsibilities assumed within the integrative role are carried out. These roles are less general and more specific in nature (Blizzard 1985.83). Blizzard categorizes them into three groups: traditional roles (which have biblical models): preacher, priest

(liturgist), and teacheré neo-traditional roles (which have a biblical foundation but are practiced with some ambiguity): pastor; contemporary roles (which are relatively new in church tradition and practice, with no clearly defined scriptural or ideological foundations): administrative and organizational roles (Blizzard 1985.83–85).

In the following sections of my study, I will examine the evolution of pastoral duties on two levels: through the lens of ecclesiastical regulations, focusing on the formal requirements of ministerial training; respectively at the level of environmental changes and specific contextual factors. I will analyze the extent to which these changes align with Blizzard's model on minister's practitional roles and how they reflect the shifting expectations and roles of the clergy.

The Historical Development of Unitarian Clerical Duties in the Light of Ecclesiastical Regulations

The duties of Unitarian ministers were framed by various ecclesiastical regulations. Until the first half of the 17th century, with the publication of the *Disciplina Ecclesiastica* in 1626 (Tóth 1922.15), there was no structured ecclesiastical regulation, known as a *church ordinance*, that systematically governed the operation of the church. Instead, the internal order of the church was maintained through ad hoc measures. For example, in 1579, the Synod convened in Cluj (Kolozsvár) issued prescriptions regarding the clergy. These regulations were primarily theological in nature, defining the direction of religious teachings, but also included stipulations regarding the appointment and transfer of ministers. One such directive stated: *"No minister shall dare to exchange his position or choose another place without the knowledge of the superintendent and the consistory."* (Jakab 1879. 241) The decrees of the 1601 Synod of Turda concerning ministers include: *1. The bishop shall have the authority to remove a minister or rector from their position and transfer them to another congregation where their service is needed. 2. No minister shall leave their congregation unless they have first received a lawful successor. 3. No minister shall hold multiple congregations at once if these congregations are capable of sustaining their own minister; likewise, no minister shall usurp the role of a schoolmaster.* (Tóth 1922.15)

These regulations were primarily concerned with the administrative, ecclesiastical governance, and disciplinary aspects of the clergy's life. According to several scholars, Unitarians relied on the *Canones Minores* (or later De Disciplina Ecclesiastica) compiled by György Gönczi, a Reformed minister from Debrecen, or on Melius Péter's *Canones Majores* Kénosi – Uzoni 2009, Tóth 1922). However, comparative studies of these regulations reveal that only about one-quarter of Unitarian laws are reflected in the aforementioned Reformed church rules (Molnár 2020, Kovács 2021). In 1626, the *Disciplina Ecclesiastica* Radeciana, issued under Valentinus Radeczky, bishop of the Unitarian Church (c. 1550–1632), became a universally applicable ecclesiastical ordinance for all congregations. This regulation defined doctrinal principles (marking the closure of the dogmatic system) and comprehensively addressed church life, including the duties of ministers in a detailed and structured manner. Key topics covered in the Disciplina Ecclesiastica Radeciana: Resolution of disputes, administration of the Lord's Supper and Baptism, adherence to dogmatic expectations, ministerial dress code and conduct,

upholding a moral life, avoiding drunkenness, sanctification of Sundays and formal requirements for weddings, liturgical practices (e.g., recitation of the Lord's Prayer), veneration of Jesus, appointments and changes of ministerial posts, prohibition of usury (Uzoni – Kozma – Fosztó 2018, Kovács 2021).

The *Disciplina* established a standardized set of doctrinal and ethical norms, consolidating ministerial duties and expectations in the Unitarian Church. This regulatory framework shaped the development of Unitarian clerical responsibilities for decades to come.

In 1694, during the episcopacy of Gergely Mihály Almási, the Disciplina was republished with some modifications. The chapter „On the General Duties of Those Who Hold the Clerical Office" followed the logic of the regulations issued during Valentin Radeczky's tenure, but with significant expansions. Notably, this revised version did not only regulate the minister's attire and conduct but extended these rules to their family members as well. Additionally, it provided a more detailed description of the minister's administrative responsibilities. Key new elements included: compulsory Sunday education for children from St. George's Day to St. Michael's Day; more extensive administrative obligations related to marriages, increasing the minister's responsibilities in overseeing these processes.The regulation also included the ministerial oath, in which the clergy committed to preaching the gospel, maintaining the expected moral conduct, embracing self-sacrifice, and pledging obedience to the church hierarchy (Uzoni – Kozma – Fosztó 2018).

From the perspective of our topic, the 1614 regulation, titled "Order to Be Followed During the Examination of Congregations", is particularly significant. This regulation defined the procedures for the ecclesiastical visitation specifying the criteria by which a minister's service should be evaluated. The primary focus of the visitation was on doctrinal, theological, and liturgical matters. However, beyond these, the review also examined aspects of ministerial conduct, including: attire, personal behavior, sobriety, family life, financial management, ecclesiastical administration (Tóth 1922). This regulatory framework clearly highlights the administrative role of the minister, as their financial and organizational responsibilities were considered essential to their function. This order remained in effect until 1741 (Molnár 2002).

An important addition is that in the 16th and 17th centuries, church leadership was primarily concentrated in the hands of the clergy. The Synod consisted of ministers and schoolmasters, meaning that the governance of the church was carried out by the theologically educated elite, while the secular element was excluded from this process (Kovács 2010). Although by the 17th century there were instances—exclusively in cities—where certain tasks, mainly related to financial management, were performed by laypeople, this did not materialize in rural congregations. The structure of the church organization can be regarded as synodal-consistorial.

During this period, based on the above, pastoral roles can be categorized as follows: 1. Preaching and liturgical role (regulation of ceremonies and worship services). 2. Apologetic and teaching role (ensuring the transmission of doctrines and defending church teachings). 3. Pastoral role (striving to resolve conflicts and representing social justice). 4. Community and moral leader (regulating the behavior of the faithful and serving as a moral example). 5. Administrator (supervising the assets of the congregation and acting as an official). When comparing the ministerial roles of this period with Blizzard's model, we observe that—consistent with prior expectations—the regulation of traditional pastoral roles was the primary concern. Given that this was a time of doctrinal and institutional consolidation, the roles of preacher, priest, and teacher were central

to these regulations. The pastoral role was not so much focused on spiritual care but rather on maintaining and enforcing moral norms. Ministers were expected not only to conform doctrinally but also to lead exemplary lives and encourage others to do the same. However, the widespread practice of *pastors retention* in this period significantly limited their room for maneuver, as their official status did not necessarily provide protection against the power of congregation members and patrons, especially in rural communities. Finally, the administrative role gradually emerged and can be divided into two areas: management (oversight of movable and immovable property); official administration (handling marriages, keeping church registers, etc.)

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At the beginning of the 18th century, under Habsburg rule, the politically and religiously motivated pressure resulting from the state-supported Roman Catholic restoration efforts led to the unification of clerical and secular elements. In 1718, the church elected two chief lay presidents. Alongside the Generale Consistorium, presided over by the bishop, the Supremum Consistorium was established, led by the chief lay president. This period saw the consolidation of the role of laity in church governance. With the issuance of the Edict of Toleration in 1781, a new era began in the church's history, characterized by renewal and development. (Molnár 2002, Mikó 1931)

This period also marks a turning point regarding the work of ministers. The era between 1568 and 1778 was characterized by a unique practice that defined the position of ministers—their service, social, and economic status—known as pastor's retention (Tóth 1910). The essence of this practice was that ministers had to declare annually whether they would remain in the community, while the congregation had to decide whether to retain them. Its development was closely linked to the process of the Reformation in Transylvania and was connected to the transitional nature of doctrinal processes and the right of congregations to elect their pastors. However, from the perspective of our topic, what is particularly significant is how this practice influenced the social status of ministers and, consequently, their ability to fulfill their calling. Ferencz Egyed, a Unitarian minister from Homoródszentpál, highlighted its negative aspects in 1881: the pressure to conform, the need for constant adaptation, vulnerability, and job insecurity, all of which could even compromise the mission of the gospel. At times, the number of vacant pastoral positions was notably high. (Egyed 1881.128.)

*

The next period brought significant changes to church governance. By the late 18th century, a governing body composed of lay members, known as the presbyterium (board), emerged at the congregational level. In 1785, references appear regarding the regulation of presbyteries and the role of curators and wardens. However, the establishment of presbyteries was a long process throughout the church, and even by the mid-19th century, they were not yet universally adopted. (Kovács 2010, Tóth 1910)

Regarding the appointment of ministers, the period between 1778 and 1840 is known as the era of appointment by decree. This state-imposed change, based on a royal decree, abolished the pastor retention system and placed the authority of ministerial appointments under the Generale Consistorium and Synodale Consistorium. These higher church bodies, in turn, delegated the power of appointment to the bishop, who thus gained practically unlimited authority over

pastoral placements. This shift had two major consequences: 1. external intervention in the autonomy of congregational governance. 2. the consolidation of power within the church hierarchy, strengthening the authority of church leaders at the expense of local congregations' right to self-governance. (Tóth 1910)

This came to an end in 1840, when the Synod decreed that pastoral positions should be filled through a competitive application process. However, due to administrative difficulties (such as challenges in ensuring public transparency and the slow pace of bureaucratic procedures), after five years, a selection process based on elections was introduced. This system was later refined by the General Council of 1889, and with necessary updates, its fundamental principles remain in effect to this day.

By the end of this period, the synod-presbyterian system, based on the principle of representation, had already taken shape in a preliminary form and was fully established by the end of the century. On January 1, 1900, the Church Law regulating the authorities and administrative structure of the (Hungarian) Unitarian Church came into effect. This law assigned the curator (lay president) and the presbytery (board) the responsibility for overseeing and ensuring church financial management. The duties of ministers were primarily defined in the areas of spiritual leadership, religious services, pastoral care, moral education, and administration, with an expectation of exemplary conduct. I do not provide here a detailed discussion of Articles 55–106 of Section VI, as they follow the same framework as the currently applicable regulations, which I will elaborate on in detail later. (Tóth 1910, 1922)

The Organizational Regulations of the Unitarian Church of the People's Republic of Romania, adopted in 1923 and 1949, as well as the Fundamental Law of the Hungarian Unitarian Church and other legal provisions enacted in 1997, 2003, and 2012, respectively 2014 are based on early 20th-century prescriptions concerning pastoral responsibilities. These regulations did not introduce substantial changes in this regard. Differences primarily stem from state-imposed bureaucratic and administrative requirements. (Szabó 1998)

In summary, the synod-presbyterian church structure, established along representative principles, has maintained consistent expectations for ministers since the early 20th century. It appears that the core roles of the Protestant ministry, shaped by the Reformation, have remained unchanged: preacher, teacher, priest (liturgist), pastoral caregiver, administrator, and organizer. However, shifts in emphasis among these roles have already begun. Although not explicitly reflected in legal regulations, the 1857 expansion of ministerial training—which introduced practical subjects such as agriculture, horticulture, and public health—indicates that the roles defined as contemporary in Blizzard's model were increasingly integrating into ministerial work. At the same time, church regulations primarily define a broader legal framework, which delineates the scope of ministerial duties. Following a historical overview of ministerial training, I will examine these aspects in detail.

Historical Overview of Ministerial Training

Both the 1626 and 1694 editions of the Disciplina addressed the duties of pastoral candidates. Given that the professionalization of the ministry requires formal theological education, I will briefly summarize some key aspects of Unitarian ministerial training. The development of ministerial education can be divided into several phases. (Kovács 2019, Boros 1916)

The first phase spanned from 1566 to 1847, with training conducted at the academy in Cluj. The institution provided education not only for future ministers (togati) but also for students pursuing secular careers. Initially, the philosophy course lasted three years, but from 1794, it was extended to four years. Students preparing for the ministry or teaching received theological and practical training, including Hebrew, Greek, homiletics, liturgics, and church history. (Boros 1916) This system evolved slightly over time according to changing needs and the expertise of teachers, but its basic structure remained unchanged until the mid-19th century. (Boros 1916) Before assuming a ministerial position, candidates were required to teach for at least three years as lectors at a secondary school or as masters in a congregational school. Even after receiving an appointment, ministers had to pass an examination before the partial synod and the general council. (Kovács 2019, Boros 1916)

The second phase began with the 1845 Synod which decided to separate theological education from philosophical studies. As a result, becoming a minister required students to extend their philosophical studies by an additional two years of theological training.

The introduction of this specialized training marked an early step toward the professionalization of the ministry, and it was officially implemented in 1847. During this training, students studied dogmatics, ethics, homiletics, catechetics, liturgics ("priestly studies"), canon law, church history, biblical archaeology, and exegesis. (Boros 1916, Kovács 2019)

In 1857, a new chapter began in ministerial education, as the two-year theological course was extended by an additional year. Alongside the previous subjects, practical disciplines were introduced, including pedagogy, agricultural and horticultural studies, public health, and renewed emphasis on legal studies. Additionally, ministerial candidates had the opportunity to study English at the seminary. In 1859, the previous examination system—which required candidates to be tested before the partial Synod and General Council—was abolished. Instead, it was replaced by a comprehensive examination conducted by a specially designated committee. (Boros 1916, Kovács 2019)

In 1896, with the establishment of the Unitarian Theological Institute, theological education was completely separated from high school education. The independent institution was led by a dean, and the duration of studies was extended to four years. Candidates studied systematic theology, Old and New Testament biblical studies, and practical theology, while they could also attend philosophy, law, and pedagogy courses at Ferencz József University. (Boros 1916) From 1909 onward, practical ministerial training gained increasing importance. In 1915, the General Council elevated the institution to academic status, and by 1928, the duration of training was extended to five years. (Kovács 2019)

A major transformation occurred in 1949 with the state-imposed establishment of the University-Level Protestant Theological Institute by the Reformed, Unitarian, Saxon, and Hungarian Lutheran denominations. The institute operated with three divisions—Reformed, Unitarian, and Lutheran—and had seven departments: Old Testament Studies, New Testament Studies, General Church History, Religious Studies, Mission Studies, Romanian Language and Romanian Orthodox Church Literature, Russian Language and Russian Orthodox Church Literature (Kolumbán) Despite this institutional restructuring, Unitarian ministerial training continued in its traditional form and location at the Unitarian Academy for 12 more years. In 1959, the institute underwent further reorganization, leading to the dissolution of independent faculties and

the creation of the University-Level Unified Protestant Theological Institute in Cluj-Napoca. By 1962, the institution gained the right to offer doctoral programs. (Kovács 2019)

Following the 1989 regime change, the institute received accreditation in 2011 for master's level education under the Bologna higher education system. This reform established a two-stage ministerial training model, consisting of undergraduate university education and master's-level training. The education is offered in three specializations: Reformed, Unitarian, and Lutheran. The curriculum includes traditional theological subjects: Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, Practical Theology, Church History. Additionally, new disciplines such as missionary practice, ecumenism, canon law, legal studies, and modern and classical languages (Hungarian, Romanian, Latin, and modern foreign languages) have been incorporated. Each specialization includes: Seminars (Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, Church History) and practical courses (Homiletics, Catechetics, Poimenics, Church Music) (Kovács 2022) Currently, ministerial education follows a content-centered model, where the curriculum and teaching methods are shaped primarily by the internal scientific logic of the discipline and the relationships between theological fields. (Kató – Kiss – Bálint 2024)

The evolution of the various stages of ministerial training clearly illustrates the process through which theological education transitioned from philosophical instruction to professional vocational training. In the first phase, education provided the competencies necessary for preaching, teaching, and liturgical duties, placing a strong emphasis on dogmatics, theology, and apologetics. Pastoral care gained prominence only from the mid-19th century, while the organizational, administrative, and leadership roles also became increasingly significant after that period. The need for change emerged as a response to both ecclesiastical realities and broader societal transformations. However, despite the structural and content-related modifications outlined above, ministerial training today is still fundamentally based on the 18th-century educational model. It continues to focus primarily on preaching, liturgical, teaching, and pastoral competencies, while skills essential for contemporary church leadership—such as administrative management, institutional representation, group dynamics, and communication—remain underemphasized. Nevertheless, some shifts in this area are observable. (Kató – Kiss – Bálint 2024)

The Changing Social Environment and Ministerial Roles

Given that the challenges of earlier periods were primarily centered on dogmatic and (religious) political issues, I will briefly summarize the church's responses to the social changes of the late 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. In terms of ministerial training, I have already mentioned the introduction of economic and horticultural, health subjects in the mid 19th century. Additionally, local church-led initiatives reflect the church's role in social organization. These efforts are evident in village development (cooperatives), public education (folk high schools), and cultural activities. The execution of these socio-cultural and economic development projects has largely been entrusted to ministers. The topic is best illustrated through the activities of József Ürmössy and Ferenc Balázs, as well as the ministers who gathered around them and participated in these community-building efforts. (Bálint 2023)

In response to social changes, ecclesiastical authorities have issued various recommendations regarding ministerial duties. The 1912 General Council highlights the need for clergy to

engage more deeply in community life, particularly in countering secularization. The General Council emphasized the importance of organizing religious evening gatherings during the winter months, utilizing quiet evenings as an opportunity for moral and spiritual enrichment. Consequently, the mandatory implementation of winter religious evening programs was proposed. The Church Representative Council also encouraged ministers to actively engage in the social lives of their congregants and to provide moral, social, and educational instruction. The council praised the efforts of ministers who organized reading and religious evening programs, often with the help of teachers and lay members, noting that those who neglected this duty failed in their pastoral responsibilities. (Tóth 1921. 11–12.) This broad ministerial engagement was particularly characteristic of the interwar period, during which ministers took on multiple roles beyond traditional clerical duties. Ministers acted as economic organizers, community leaders, and cultural facilitators, serving as: administrators of agricultural and credit cooperatives (e.g., Hangya, dairy cooperatives, machinery associations), presidents of local church organizations (e.g., Dávid Ferenc Society), choir directors and private educators, members of cooperative boards and food supply commissioners. These expanded roles highlight the increasing social, economic, and cultural responsibilities placed upon ministers during this era. (Balázs 2013, Somai 2007, Bálint 2023)

The establishment of the state socialist system led to the complete dismantling of church communities' infrastructure. It abolished their social organizations and independent economic structures, significantly limiting both the church's socialization capacity and its financial stability and institutional functioning. Parallel to this, a systematic campaign of anti-religious ideology and church suppression was launched at both theoretical and practical levels. The Department of Religious Affairs, headquartered in Bucharest, along with its regional inspectors, exerted strict control over all aspects of church life, particularly in the early period. This included constant surveillance of worship services, scrutiny of ministers' activities, and direct interventions in church operations. (Pál 2021, Kovács 2021, Bálint 2023) This era was marked by a clear restriction and transformation of church activities, leading to the decline of key ministerial roles. Many traditional church functions essentially withered away, and this directly affected the role of ministers. During this time, ministerial duties became highly restricted, focusing only on: religious services and sacraments, family visits and religious instruction, church administration. These functions were severely constrained by the state. While the broader scope of ministerial work had expanded in earlier periods, state socialism forced a dramatic narrowing of pastoral activities, reducing the church's social integration and influence. (Pál 2021, Oláh 2020)

The political, economic, and social changes after 1989 brought significant transformations to the life of religious denominations in Romania. Churches gained greater freedom to strengthen their internal mission work and organizational operations. The strict marginalization of religion in society ended, allowing churches to re-enter public spaces and participate in state institutions. This shift enabled them to assume broader social roles, beyond the previously restricted internal church activities. (Bálint 2023) Within this new framework, churches expanded their liturgical functions and strengthened their faith-based and moral education initiatives, including: spiritual groups, Bible studies, and parish religious education, missionary activities such as religious publishing, pilgrimages, and large-scale community events, additionally, churches were able

to reestablish church-based social organizations, such as: youth associations, Women's unions. The growing demand for religious services, coupled with previous decades of state-imposed institutional downsizing, prompted human resource development within denominations. This included: significant expansion of ministerial training programs, the establishment of church music (cantor) training, the introduction of religious teacher education. These efforts led to substantial institutional and organizational growth, marking a new era of religious and ministerial engagement in Romanian society. (Bálint 2023)

Beyond their traditional ecclesiastical structures, churches have extended their presence into various social subsystems, actively engaging in multiple areas of public life. Education: religious education in schools, university chaplaincy programs; Social and healthcare services: establishment of nursing homes, orphanages, hospital chaplaincy, and prison chaplaincy; Cultural and community life: organizing cultural events, involvement in media, publishing books; civil society: participation in associations, foundations, and non-governmental organizations; political sphere: engagement in policy-making and public discourse. These developments highlight the church's evolving role as a social actor, adapting to contemporary needs and challenges. (Kiss 2017)

Ministers have found themselves in a range of new roles, transitioning from preachers confined within church walls to central figures in community life. Due to the economic and cultural globalization processes, the social conditions defining the life of Transylvanian Hungarians have changed, bringing new societal challenges to churches as well. One clear indicator of this shift is the transformation of ministerial duties. Ministers often demonstrate greater adaptability than the institutional church, as religious institutions tend to respond more slowly to change. This is partly because one of the fundamental missions of the church is to preserve tradition, which makes it more cautious toward transformation. (Bálint 2023) As a result, a growing gap has emerged between: the tasks expected of ministers by the church vs. the actual challenges they face in daily ministry; the theological training provided to ministers vs. the real-life demands of pastoral service. (Kató – Kiss – Bálint 2023) In the final section of the study, I will examine the institutional framework and current regulations governing ministerial work and explore the opportunities they provide for new initiatives.

Current Ecclesiastical Regulations Regarding Ministerial Roles

The rights and duties of Unitarian ministers are defined in the currently valid Fundamental Law and Organizational and Operational Regulations.[2] These regulations establish the normative framework set by the church as an institution concerning ministerial service[3]. Since this section of the study focuses on congregational ministry, I will limit my analysis to the relevant legal provisions.

[2] The Church Fundamental Law (Alaptörvény, MUE 2012) of the Hungarian Unitarian Church, adopted on June 28, 2012, came into effect on June 30, 2012. Additionally, the Organizational and Operational Regulations (OOR, Szervezeti és Működési Szabályzat), adopted on June 30, 2012, underwent modifications on June 28, 2014, which came into force on the same day.

[3] 56. § Within the Church, congregational ministers and ministers assigned to non-congregational duties perform their service. (SzMSz 2014)

The Fundamental Law outlines the church's mission in the following key areas: religious life, charitable service, education and upbringing, public culture, social responsibility[4]. As the designated representative of the church within a specific congregation, the minister is expected to carry out their duties in alignment with these objectives. (MUE 2014)

The congregational minister fulfills two primary roles: as a religious leader, they guide the faith and moral life of the congregation, while as an administrator, they are responsible for the management and financial affairs of the parish. The minister is regarded as a moral role model for the community, whose personal life and service must be in harmony. Expected Ministerial Image: the regulations do not separate professional and private life; rather, they present the minister as a role model for the community. Expectations for Ministers: their personal life must align with their service and be characterized by: religiosity, fraternal love, self-devotion, the practice of Christian virtues. (MUE 2014)

Section 59 provides a detailed regulation of ministerial responsibilities, which are divided into four main areas: 1. Leading worship services and ceremonies – following liturgical rules, preparing couples for marriage, and instructing converts. 2. Pastoral care – visiting families and the sick, providing assistance to those in need. 3. Religious and moral education – organizing religion classes, confirmation programs, youth activities, and Bible study sessions. 4. Parish administration – managing representation, administration, finances, and organizational duties within the congregation.

Additional community and social involvement: ministers may participate in other areas of church service, such as charity work, cultural activities, heritage preservation, media engagement, and community service. However, these are not mandatory but rather recommended roles. The church encourages ministers to actively shape congregational life, either as initiators or supporters of various community efforts. (MUE 2014)

Ministers are encouraged to engage professionally in various church-related fields, including: Charitable service and social work, public education, cultural heritage preservation, and monument protection, publishing and media activities, other forms of social responsibility and community service. However, the regulations do not impose an obligation to perform these tasks. Instead, ministers are expected to participate according to their capabilities and opportunities. They should take on a role as an initiator, organizer, and leader, or at the very least, as an active participant and motivator in the overall life of the congregation. (MUE 2014)

The above regulations establish clear ministerial responsibilities while also providing a flexible framework that allows ministers to adapt to contemporary challenges and engage in broader social and community activities based on their individual abilities and competencies. Ministerial roles can be categorized into two main structures: 1. religious specialist – including the

[4] "The Hungarian Unitarian Church is part of the universal Christian Church, a community of love made up of followers of Jesus who seek to live out the Kingdom of God. The monotheistic, Unitarian Christianity, which traces its origins to the teachings of Jesus and his direct disciples, took on an institutional church form during the Reformation era and has continued to develop while embracing the progressive values of history. Its mission is to serve God and humanity and to build communal life. Its foundational text is the Bible. The Hungarian Unitarian Church proclaims: the oneness of God, the importance of following Jesus' example and teachings, reverence for the created world, life, and family, the inherent goodness of humanity, individual responsibility, and salvation through character, eternal life, the significance of faith, reason, and conscience. The church proclaims and practices: freedom of conscience and religion, openness to understanding religious and ideological diversity, interdenominational tolerance and social justice. Areas of mission: the Hungarian Unitarian Church carries out its mission in the fields of: religious life, charitable service, education and upbringing, public culture, social responsibility" (CFL 2012. 2.)

roles of preacher, teacher, liturgist, and pastoral caregiver. 2. administrator-official – covering organizational, financial, and administrative duties within the church. Beyond these core roles, ministers may take on expanded responsibilities in social, community, and public engagement. The traditional ministerial roles are clearly regulated and less flexible, ensuring consistency in worship, teaching, and pastoral care. The contemporary or modern roles offer greater flexibility, allowing for individual adaptation in social services, cultural initiatives, and community leadership. This dual structure ensures that ministers can fulfill their traditional duties while also responding dynamically to the evolving needs of the church and society. (MUE 2014)

As previously argued, the core role structure of the Protestant ministerial vocation has remained unchanged: preacher, teacher, priest (liturgist), pastor, administrator-official, organizer. However, significant changes have occurred in the emphasis placed on these roles and in the nature of their fulfillment. While traditional, well-defined roles remain essential, there has been a notable increase in the importance of what Blizard refers to as contemporary ministerial roles. These emerging roles reshape the scope and practice of ministerial work, reflecting the evolving social, cultural, and institutional expectations placed upon clergy. The outcome of a pilot study examining contemporary ministerial roles confirms the previously stated claim. The study highlights how Unitarian ministers in the Turda area engage in a broad range of activities beyond traditional pastoral duties, responding to local needs and ministerial initiatives. (Bálint 2023) Data was collected from 12 ministers, aged 30 to 50+, many of whom hold additional degrees (e.g., psychology, sociology, economics) or specialized training (e.g., grant writing, psychodrama). Their additional expertise is typically used within their ministerial work rather than as an independent profession. The ministers engage in a wide range of activities, categorized as: social and charitable work – providing medical supplies, assisting disadvantaged groups, organizing donations, and distributing aid packages; cultural and educational activities – organizing cultural excursions, running theater groups, folk dance groups, choirs, and offering community lectures; economic initiatives – developing local tourism, writing grants, and income-generating activities. These findings suggest that ministers actively contribute to community-building, cultural preservation, and identity strengthening (both religious and national), alongside their institutionally expected roles. (Bálint 2023)

Summary

This paper begins with the premise that several factors influence changes in ministerial roles: the evolution of church organization, social processes, and the minister's vocational identity. The research primarily focuses on the first factor, examining changes in Unitarian ministerial roles by analyzing the legal framework that regulates ministerial work and status, as well as the competencies that can be acquired during ministerial training. According to the Blizzards model, the ministerial vocation consists of multiple interconnected roles: traditional roles (preacher, teacher, liturgist), neo-traditional roles (pastoral care), and contemporary roles (community organizer, administrator). It can be observed that institutionally expected ministerial roles tend to follow social changes, which, to varying degrees of success, are also reflected in the content and structure of ministerial education. Ministers, in their local congregations, adapt more quickly to

the new needs brought about by societal changes, while the church, as a traditional institution, tends to respond more slowly and rigidly. However, the legal framework governing Unitarian ministerial activities provides some flexibility for ministers to address contemporary challenges within their own scope of work. While traditional ministerial roles (preacher, liturgist, teacher) remain highly regulated, neo-traditional (pastoral care) and contemporary (community organization) roles allow for greater flexibility, offering ministers more room for initiative. As a result, ministers engage in a wide range of activities across different fields. It seems evident that a shift in emphasis can be observed in ministerial roles. In addition to traditional responsibilities, community building, social work, and social responsibility have gained increasing importance. However, ministerial training has yet to fully equip ministers with the necessary competencies for these expanded roles. Although the institutional framework does not explicitly restrict these developments, its structure may inadvertently hinder their implementation.

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Narrowing windows – A metaphor for the Hungarian collective nervous system

Abstract

According to Lakoff and Ricoeur's concept of *conceptual* and *living metaphor,* these poetic images are not only part of everyday language use, but are in fact crucial for conceptualisation, world-understanding, understanding and interpretation. The following paper places the collective identity traits of Hungarian society within this metaphorical framework and links István Bibó's concept of Hungarian communal hysteria to the diagnosis of complex postural stress disorder. The aim of this line of thought is to contribute to a more complex understanding of the collective nervous system through a new metaphor.

Keywords

chronic traumatization, C-PTSD, collective identity, threatened identity, exclusive victimhood

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The following paper draws parallels between the Hungarian socio-psychological forms of collective threat experience and the concept of chronic traumatisation. The linking of the two, quite different processes is done in the metaphorical space, i.e. the aim is not to establish a one-to-one or a cause-and-effect correspondence, but to unfold the analogy through the conceptual system of the identifier and the identified, which allows to illustrate certain characteristics of Hungarian social functioning, such as the distinctive collective sense of victimhood or the fixed and persistent state of fear. In this identification, István Bibó's concept of community hysteria (originally also used in a figurative sense) and the neurological mechanisms of complex post-traumatic syndrome (C-PTSD) and chronic traumatisation are analogous, but the concept of Lakoff's conceptual metaphor, according to which metaphor is a form of interpreting the world, also plays a key role.

In our earlier work, my colleagues and I (Szilárdi et al., 2022) have already proposed a thought experiment in which we applied a psychopathological diagnose, borderline personality disorder (BPD), to the East-Central European, and within it the Hungarian, collective identity traits. Of course, we did not intend to claim that there are more BPD persons in Hungarian society, nor that the region can be concretely defined by a diagnostic category; we merely tried to present a new attempt at an interpretation that could be used to understand the Hungarian social functioning.

As before, the fact that the conceptualisation between the individual and the collective is not at all alien to the social sciences and humanities can be a point of reference: the application of the models used by personality psychology to the collective field is in fact quite common, for example in the case of concepts such as grief work, identity, victimhood or even trauma.

Although the concept of *community hysteria* will be explained later, it is important to point out here that Bibó did not draw the peculiar Hungarian collective character in the 1940s from a medical psychiatric point of view, but from a social science approach, from a historical perspective, and for this he used a popular diagnostic term of the beginning of the last century, which at that time was spreading in public discourse as a representative concept symbolizing pathological functioning. In this context, it is also worth opening a window of reflection on the question of how, just as the terms hysteria became popular in the 1920s, depression in the 1980s, bipolar in the 2000s, and then narcissistic, borderline (or even 'psychopath') in the 2000s, and In recent years, the term *trauma* has become an all-encompassing concept in everyday discourse, which very often functions as an interpretative/explanatory starting point behind psychological maladaptive functioning (and, it should be added, precisely because of its prevalence in the discursive space, it can also very often relativise some of the consequences of psychological dysfunction).

It is therefore essential to emphasise at the outset, in relation to complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD)[1], that, unlike "mere" post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), we are dealing with a new diagnostic category (2022), the first step in interpreting which is to rigorously distinguish between the concepts of *trauma* (T) and *traumatisation* (t).

[1] The diagnosis of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD) is officially published in the 11th edition of the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Statistical Classification of Diseases (BNO-11). The BNO-11 was published in 2018 and came into force on 1 January 2022, making C-PTSD an officially recognised diagnosis in international medical practice (World Health Organization (2018): International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision (ICD-11).

Trauma and/or traumatisation?

Trauma (in the psychological sense) can be described as an acute condition that occurs as a consequence of some unexpected event and causes an immediate emotional shock that can lead to a disorganization of the psyche (Bakó, 1992). From a diagnostic point of view, such a single traumatic event or the result of a short period of extreme stress can be the classic post-traumatic stress disorder, whose symptoms have been quite well established in the literature (cf. Victor et al., 2006).[2]

Traumatisation, on the other hand, can be identified as a much slower process, triggered not by a single dramatic stimulus but by a cumulative effect of harmful (and not necessarily extreme) stressors over a longer interval (Van der Kolk 2011). Such prolonged stressful situations, over which the person has no perceived emotional control (e.g. repeated abuse, imprisonment, vulnerability, or prolonged exposure to seemingly milder humiliation, inconsistent behaviour, etc.) can result in what is known as complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD).

This distinction is necessary because the words trauma and traumatisation are often confused in both everyday and former professional language, the main reason being that the literature has recently used the word traumatisation to refer not only to the process of experiencing trauma but also to the consequences of stressors over a longer period of time. Because of this linguistic confusion, I will use the term chronic traumatisation in the remainder of the paper, where I will discuss the relational system of C-PTSD.

Specific features of the region

A vast amount of literature on the specificities of the Central and Eastern European region has been produced over the last century, including approaches that see the difference with "Western" societies in the different historical paths (e.g. Hobsbawm 1992; Romsics 1998; Dieckhoff 2002; Schöpflin 2003; etc.), or from the notion of the nation or the theory of divergent nationalisms and its critical reception (Kohn-Plamenatz, 1973 cited in Kántor, 2000; Smith 2004; Hutchinson-Smith 1994; Anderson 2006; Zimmer, 2003; Hoppenbrowers, 2002 etc.), or even in the liminal geopolitical status of the region (e.g. Konrád, 1989; Máté-Tóth, 2019; Máté-Tóth-Balassa, 2022).

It is very likely that the totality of these approaches, as well as their narrow critical reception and further development, is also correct, i.e. the liminality of geographic location and the historical continuities of these areas: namely, the status of being wedged between empires, the anchoring of a national rather than a nation-state path, and the anchoring of an ethno-linguistic rather than a civic values-centred national identity, left strong traces in the collective self-determination and reactionary capacity of the region, and the resulting communal climate has hardened into a particular shape in this part of Europe, certainly in Hungary as well. As reported in Hungarian research, the construction of Hungarian national identity is dominated by shared experiences of loss and national grievances, an emotional state of threat coupled with a marked sense of victimhood, and unelaborated historical losses result in a specific arrangement of collective emotions (cf. Fülöp 2012; László 2013; Mészáros 2018; Szilárdi 2017, etc.).

[2] (1) memory intrusions, re-living, panic; (2) avoidance, numbing, (3) physical and mental distress, anxiety, panic and constant alertness

Collectiive trauma theories

In recent decades, the thematisation of historical shocks has brought with it the discussion of social theories of trauma from a psychological perspective, with the most prominent points being the development of fixed and stuck states of identity across generations, or the persistent fear caused by collective losses. (Given that a radical separation of the concepts of trauma and traumatisation had not yet appeared in diagnostics at that time, the theories referred to do not, by definition, reflect the distinction between the unexpected and the dramatic, and the cumulative distress series).

Just as the functioning and essence of a group is not the simple sum of its members, and the losses of a community cannot be described by the mere sum of personal traumas, therefore the differences are usually formulated by these authors as a specific feature of the collective as compared with the individual. Kai Erikson (1995), for example, argues that social traumas do not break through psychological barriers with sudden and brutal force, but rather seep slowly and imperceptibly into the consciousness of the community, and in the process, the relationships between members and ultimately the sense of community itself are eroded.

Hans Jürgen Wirth argues that traumatic experience(s) bring with them repression not only at the level of the individual but also at the level of the group, while at the same time mobilising projective mechanisms in the social field that can, in extreme cases, assume paranoid dimensions (Wirth, cited in Pfitzner 2008).

From a different perspective, J. C. Alexander (2004) speaks of the sociocultural construction of negative historical events when he emphasises the socially mediated attribution of trauma, i.e. he conceives of trauma *as a gap* between the event and its representation. Accordingly, he argues that social representation itself is constructed by cultural coercion, and that this ultimately means telling a new story for the community. [3]

Erős (2007) identifies the narrative deficit following trauma as a barrier to collective processing, and argues that this stalemate is repeated until new forms of representation emerge, but in his line of thought he separates the category of *national wounds* from the experience of *collective trauma*, and the reason for this separation is that, although both processes can cause identity trauma, the latter is the one that poses a persistent and fundamental threat to existence, which has a strong negative impact on the self-definition of several generations.

Reason for using metaphor

Already through these few examples, it can be seen that the social psychological processing of the collective extension of the concept of trauma is becoming more and more nuanced, and that this is becoming more and more emphasized not only in theoretical but also in empirical approaches (cf. Cairns et al., 2003; Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Vollhardt 2012; Fülöp et al, etc,) However, when looking at the diagnosis, context, neuroscientific dimensions and process of C-PTSD, the relevant analogy is still unresolved, although this kind of mind game can be very illustrative in understanding social functioning, if only because some features of the cited

[3] The link between trauma and storytelling in clinical practice is also emphasised by Pennebaker (1995), whose experiments have shown that an increase in the coherence of the narrative has a major impact on the processing of loss, and thus on physical and mental health.

collective trauma theories are actually more similar to the (temporally later) concept of chronic traumatisation.

The question may arise, of course, whether it makes sense to delve further into this already complex issue, since if the schemas of collective trauma are already sufficiently elaborated, what need is there to validate a new pathology or neurological mechanism in the social context? The answer to this question is multifaceted.

On the one hand, in the creation of a metaphor, there is a mapping of two conceptual schemes, one for the identifier and the other for the identified role, in two fields which are distant from each other. However, in terms of this linkage, we can build more strongly on Riceur's (1975) concept of the living metaphor and Lakoff's conceptual metaphor (Lakoff – Johnson 2003), according to which these poetic images are not only part of or enriching acts of everyday language use, but are in fact crucial for conceptualization, world-understanding, comprehension and interpretation. In this sense, therefore, the creation of a new metaphor promotes a more complex understanding, so that similarity as a fact should be sufficient reason to sketch a thought experiment, especially if it deepens our interpretation of the phenomenon. In my view, the mechanisms and symptoms of C-PTSD bear a strong resemblance to features of the Hungarian social climate, and as a result, this approach is more effective in explaining the social reality around us than other distant identifiers that can be linked to it. Thus, in what follows I will attempt to identify the identifying role in the neurological process and symptoms of chronic traumatisation, the identified role in Hungarian social functioning (in Bibó's terms, community hysteria), and finally to make claims about the "collective nervous system" of Hungarian society.

Chronic traumatisation and neurochemical cascade as identifier

In general, the nervous system responds to threatening stimuli by alarm, and the associated natural neurochemical cascade aims to restore the body's homeostasis. In this process, brain function switches to sympathetic nervous mode (to facilitate the immediate decision to flee or attack) and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis is activated, with a slower but more sustained response to cope with stress (Mogyorósy-Révész 2019).

However, if the effect of distress is prolonged or recurrent (chronic traumatisation), the above cascade mechanism is prolonged, the equilibrium state is upset, there are significant and persistent changes in both cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses, and these changes are now also detectable in the structural features of the brain (Heim et al., 2000; Perry 2004; Wilson et al., 2011). This is a brief summary of the pathology of C-PTSD.

Under the influence of such prolonged crisis or cumulative stress, two main types of anomalies in emotion regulation emerge: the *hypoactivational* dissociative pattern (derealization, blocking, derealization, depersonalization), in which negative emotion is removed and/or diminished, and the *hyperactivational* reaction set, in which the predominance of negative emotion completely overwhelms and frames the person's perception. In C-PTSD, these two patterns often oscillate in rapid succession, the reason being that when the level of perceived threat becomes intolerable, the hypoactivation phase comes to the fore, and then as the perception of

negative stimulus decreases, the hyperactivation phase kicks in to give the body the opportunity to cope with the stress (Perry 2004).

In sum, the explanation behind the biphasic roller coaster that results from rapid alternation (Corrigan – Fisher – Nutt 2011) lies in the nervous system's ongoing attempt to restore regulation, in which, although both mechanisms are adaptive, the rapid alternation and co-presence of extreme responses still exhibit maladaptive effects (Mogyorósy-Révész 2019).

Part and consequence of this effect is that the window of tolerance to stressors narrows, i.e., incoming stimuli are more likely to be labeled as "threatening" and the responses to them have a lasting and significant impact on neurological functioning (Ogden – Pain – Fischer 2006), and ultimately the nervous system becomes organized around the triggered experience. This is therefore a significant difference from the classical diagnosis of PTSD.

The resulting symptoms of C-PTSD include a tendency to problem focus, negative self-image, blaming, inconsistency, self-rejection, selective memory, learned hypervigilance (heightened alertness), and a sense of threat (Van der Kolk 2020).

For the subsequent validation of the conceptual metaphor, three nodes in the neurological cluster of complex PTSD are worth highlighting: (a) the concepts of a narrowed tolerance window and induced emotion regulation disorders, (b) the persistent alterations in brain structure and neural function, and, in relation to this, (c) the symptom cluster.

Community hysteria as identified

István Bibó introduces a philosophical, yet rather nuanced approach to the social psychological character of the region. He argues that the historical memories of the presence of foreign power and the nationalist reaction to resist it in the Eastern European region have led to a juxtaposition of the concepts of democracy and nationalism, the advantage of the social order of the Western states has become irrecoverable, and, more importantly, the attempts to overcome the disadvantage - due to the absence or 'alienation' of state institutions - have been met with no other option than the assertion of a system of cultural symbols.

In the harmonious development of nations, the key to the Bibó's idea is the balance between democratism and nationalism, the disruption of which can lead to serious disturbances. One such disturbance or consequence is the state of fear for existence or the politicisation of culture, or, in the apt term applied to social processes, the concept of communal hysteria. In Bibó's concept of communal hysteria, the collective state of mind is derived from shared historical experiences and patterns of memory:

"It does not make much sense, however, to call immediately community hysteria any political feeling more intense than the average (...) It is more legitimate to consider as hysterical the persistent states of fear, as Ferrero describes them, which are the result of the great historical shocks of communities, e.g. These tend to manifest themselves in the constant fear of conspiracies, revolutions, invasions, coalitions and the violent persecution of perceived or real political opponents. But the real, great communal hysteria is when it is combined with all its characteristic symptoms: the community's detachment from reality, its inability to solve the problems life has given up, its insecure and exaggerated sense of self-worth, and its unrealistic and disproportionate reactions to the influences of the world around it." Bibó 1990. 371.

Bibó stresses that communal hysteria is passed on from generation to generation, another generation may live through the experience itself, another may evaluate it, and finally another generation may react hysterically. As for the peculiarly "distorted Hungarian character", he mentions here, above all, the selective processing of information, unrealistic territorial attachment, the fixation and the transformation of fear into motives resulting from the uncertainty of national boundaries, and the presence of strong ambivalent feelings of self-blame and self-aggrandisement as elements of the peculiarly Hungarian hysteria.

According to Bibó's way of thinking, the communal mental faculty is very similar to the individual psychic faculty, but it is also very different from it, because in it individual mental states are summarized and organized. Hence, the unfolding set of reactions becomes much more complex than at the individual level, and intentionality, community explanations and community goal-setting play a very important role. Thus, in fact, to understand the community character, it is not only the historical causes and processes that need to be taken into account, but also the political and ideological constructions in which the experience of loss has become a consensus in the social power field.

Narrative psychological rhymes

As a sort of interjection, as a bridging element in the distance between the identifier and the identified, we can refer to the fact that these ideas are not at all alien to the school and reception of narrative social psychology.[4] László – following precisely the ideas of Bibó (2005, 2011, 2012) – points out that in the construction of group identity, and more precisely in the evaluations of historical events preserved in collective memory, there are characteristic emotional patterns that are organised in a way that is similar to the individual life course (and identity). In other words, in the case of groups, we can speak of historical trajectories and the emotions associated with them, as in the case of individual trajectories. In the representations of collective memory, specific, repetitive models and strategies of emotional coping, specific to the group, can be found, and more importantly, the elements stored in these are strongly related to the construction of collective identity.

In their modelling studies of the patterns of organisation of historical representations, László, Ehmann and Imre (2002), for example, found that the type of scenario in which events take a positive turn does not occur at all in Hungarian historical events.[5] The Hungarian collective memory records the reconstruction after the Tatar invasion as the last reparation event, after which reflections on peaceful periods are underrepresented. The results may be explained by the fact that even temporary positive turns in national memory, which abounds in historical setbacks, basically induce disappointment and anger, and their evaluation is thus shifted in a negative direction (Fülöp 2010; László 2013, etc.). The pattern of group emotions resulting from the Hungarian historical trajectory and the collective national identity construction that can be unfolded from it thus suggest that Bibó's ideas are still valid after all these years, and that the "Hungarian communal psychological make-up" can now be justified by empirical results.

[4] one of the central claims of narrative psychology is that the psychological questions of individual life history raise the problem of the sequences of group history.

[5] only three of the four basic themes were found in Hungarian folklore narratives. Of the event themes "we only won", "we only lost", "we won but eventually lost" and "we lost but eventually won", the narrative of the type "we lost but eventually won"

The aetiology, cascade and symptoms of the "Hungarian collective nervous system"

If we try to validate the neurological mechanisms of chronic traumatisation in the social field, it is worth looking for similarities with the aetiological conditions and symptoms of C-PTSD, without falling into the hybris of a full correspondence, in which case the metaphor's degree of freedom would be compromised and the associative gap would be replaced by a didactic approach.

The causes of complex PTSD are thus identified in the clinical literature as being the result of prolonged stressful situations in which the individual feels a persistent lack of control over his or her situation, feels that he or she has lost the right to self-determination, or believes that he or she is unable to escape from the situation or does not currently see a way out.

In the case of Hungarian society, this conditionality can be found in the region-specific, geo-cultural characteristics and historical perspective outlined earlier. The prolonged lack of autonomy, the uncertainties of national borders, the fear of hegemony, the struggles for independence, the experience of a permanent state of prey status between empires, the historical representation of the delay in the wake of divergent national development and the experience of loss linked to Hungarian history constitute the interval in which chronic distress persists for a long time, and as a result of which the window of tolerance in the collective nervous system narrows.

In individual pathology, the person who has suffered a series of chronic distress experiences intense fear even after he has moved away from the situation. In a collective sense, this symptom is also shown in narrative studies of the last decade: texts that form the Hungarian national identity (history books, folklore narratives) bear the mark of a marked sense of victimhood and threat that capture the historical situation of about 250 years ago.[6]

This brings us to the issue of structural change: one of the consequences of C-PTSD is that prolonged stressors can cause permanent structural changes in the brain. The counterpart of this structural change is a set of reactions and patterns of emotion embedded in the collective self-definition, which continues to have an effect in the contemporary present, even though the conditions of the time (such as lack of national autonomy and self-determination) no longer exist. Experiences of loss, such as the Trianon Peace Treaty, Habsburg or Soviet oppression, for example, are not only reflected in the reawakening of national discourses after the regime change (cf. Niedermüller 1996; Bodó 1999), but are also plastic in contemporary rhetoric, if we look at political enemy formation, fear-mongering or intolerance towards external groups (e.g. Mészáros – Szabó 2018; Szilárdi et al. 2022).

Both qualitative and quantitative data from Hungarian researches over the past decade show a self-representation that reveals elements of unelaborated cumulative traumatisation: overwhelmed by grievances, fearful and suspicious reactions towards external groups, passivity, avoidance of responsibility, one-sided, biased perspectives and extreme emotional reactions;

[6] Several Hungarian studies show this result, for example, Szalai and László (2008) show that Hungarians appear as weak agents, i.e. passive and coerced participants in historical self-representation. Concerning the dimensions of evaluation (László and Csertő 2011), the theses of intergroup bias were confirmed at the verbal level. Further studies have focused on the analysis of the role of narrative internal perspective in identity construction (Tóth, Vincze and László, 2006), the measurement of intensionality and the emotional patterns of the historical trajectory (Fülöp 2010). The related results all imply the concept of identity threat.

and stagnation in processing the pain and losses suffered (Braham – Kovács 2015; Fülöp – Kővágó – Benza – Kovács – Kelenhegyi 2016; Szilárdi 2017)

As for the succession of hypo- and hyperactivation processes: the threat experience paralyses on the one hand and provokes an exaggerated emotional response on the other. The resulting ripple effect can almost too easily be likened to Bibó's concept of community hysteria: the social entrenchment and overdetermination of alien power, the oscillation of self-blame and self-reinvention, the blaming of the perpetrator, depressive dynamics, emotional instability and victim perspective all resemble the mechanisms and symptoms of C-PTSD.

Finally, Bibó's argument that intentionality and communal explanations will play a very important role in the latter is strongly emphasized in the separation of the concepts of individual and collective hysteria. This element is perhaps most evident in the acts of power agentiality employing moral panics (Cohen 2002) and securitisation (Buzan et al. 1998). The logic of action of political actors who effectively use the tool of fearmongering and populist discourse entails a phobic rejection (cf. cleavage) of foreign groups (Mettan 2017). And the question of the reality of enemy images (namely, whether they are perceived or real) in this interpretative framework does not merely belong to the realm of power/political manipulation, but also becomes a question of the narrowed window of tolerance, i.e., very simply put, it is not a question of whether there will be an enemy, but of who will be one. Consequently, we also have to take into account the question of whether persistent patterns of fear have the further consequence that, after a certain period of time, not only external groups pose a threat, but also those that were originally part of the internal group, but which, because of ideological, ideological or any other differences, are labelled as 'threatening', i.e. the consequence of the narrowed tolerance window is also extreme polarisation within society.

Summary

In our previous work, we applied the symptom cluster of borderline personality disorder as an experiment to the reaction patterns of Hungarian society, but at that time the new diagnosis of C-PTSD was not yet clear, which - not incidentally - was not yet available because the distinction between BPD and complex post-traumatic stress disorder was a challenge for clinical psychology and psychiatry, precisely because of the symptomatic overlap of the two diagnoses.

So, what might be the significance of linking C-PTSD and Hungarian community hysteria in the contemporary present? Can such a comparison hold any novelty? In recent decades, a number of pertinent theoretical, historical and empirical approaches have been developed on the collective identity, national losses, historical and emotional dynamics of Hungarian society, thematizing and justifying the schemas of self and out-group, the presence of a marked sense of victimhood and the experience of threat.

However, in my view, if we relate these findings to the metaphorical space of the circumstances, functioning and symptoms of the onset of C-PTSD, the logic of the collective 'action and reaction set' becomes more understandable. Indeed, the analogy not only provides a descriptive and synthesizing insight into the historical causes and consequences, but can also provide a broader perspective on the mechanisms of identity construction. In addition to demonstrating the heightened sensitivity of this society to threats, thus making it possible to understand the success

of the manipulation attempts of the various ideological sides, it also shows the discursive logic of the agents of power at the time, which already treats the presence of (selected) external groups or threatening persons with a lower level of sensitivity, anxiety and hypervigilance.

If Bibó captured the social constitution in the metaphor of communal hysteria, the "political and discursive nervous system" of Hungarian society can be seen in the image of complex PTSD, both in terms of oscillation and aversion towards foreign groups, and in terms of the sensitivity of the heightened sense of fear. For this reason, we cannot rule out the possibility that Bibo might find the identification of the metaphor in the community C-PTSD today, but this is of course only a playful suggestion.

However, the applicability of the C-PTSD metaphor may have a more serious dimension if we consider not only the clinical picture but also its collective, social therapeutic proposals for the future. Since the recovery of maladaptive functioning should be validated at different levels of social publicity, it is certainly worth creating a trans- or at least interdisciplinary context that can act in educational, artistic, symbolic action and discursive fields of power. In the case of emotional stability, the 'restoration' of the window of tolerance, it is worth listening to the theorists of collective trauma cited above, that new forms of representation must be incorporated into the process of processing a state of persistent threat, so that, as we have argued in our previous work (2022), corrective narratives of the causes of wounding and their retelling may prove crucial to healing.

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Online threat groups' activities with a focus on states' public sector in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict

Abstract

This paper attempts to investigate some aspects of state threat groups from the online sphere, based on certain conceptual considerations regarding hybrid challenges and some additional remarks on the online space, which is gaining more and more attention in the 21st century. As for the empirical investigation the Russo-Ukrainian conflict is examined to explore and describe the possible characteristics of online groups' activities against the public sector of states involved, from a quantitative approach. The overview of the conceptual elements and some methodological remarks are followed by the introduction of the results, which – besides others – imply that attempts to disrupt the capabilities, and attack forms of distributed denial of service can be acknowledged as identical patterns in the investigated sector, although certain specific elements can also be discovered. It appears that disinformation activities and website damage are less frequent however the higher occurrence of cyber espionage can be recognized as a specific characteristic of online threat in public sphere. The examination of relations among online threat groups and the targeted states has revealed that the activities evolve a connected structure, in which significant differences can be observed both in the case of the online threat groups and the countries. As for the former participants, the results highlight the notable presence of pro-Russian online threat groups. In the final section the research outcomes are summarised and potential for further research directions are outlined.

Keywords

online threat actors, hybrid conflicts, empirical analysis, Russo-Ukrainian conflict, cyber sphere

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1. Introduction

In this study attempts have been made to reveal some aspects of threat groups from the online sphere. The investigation seemed worth to be based on an overview of certain conceptual considerations regarding hybrid challenges and some additional remarks on the online sphere, which are gaining more and more attention in the 21st century. The example of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict is examined in order to explore and describe possible characteristics of online groups' activities against the public sector of states involved, from a quantitative approach. Some methodological remarks are followed by the introduction of the results of the data analyses in different sections, overviewing the composition and characteristics, similarities and inner differences of the online activities of threat groups. The paper is closed with summarising the research outcomes and outlining possible directions for further research.

2. Research problem

The presence and activities of various groups and seem to be a remarkable aspect is contemporary conflicts, and can be interpreted through the concept of hybrid conflicts. This type of challenge can be understood as a form of conflict in which – besides the regular forces of the opposing parties – different activities of certain irregular forces (even being on both sides) can play an important role, highlighting a the a kind of speciality of this conflict form. The activities of irregular forces draw the attention to the importance of various groups, non-state actors, which participate in hybrid warfare in a partly specific way, and these have also been emphasized in other related approaches – e.g. the generational interpretation of warfare (e.g. Somkuti 2012., Kiss 2016), furthermore their increasing significance is also noted with the challenges brought by the new millennium (see e.g. Farkas 2020: 16.). Specifically in the case of the hybrid approach, the involvement of different groups, communities and non-state actors is not primarily due to the disproportion of superiority – as it is the case in asymmetric warfare – but precisely because the actor with the greater power tries to realize its will through other, non- – or rather not exclusively – armed means. In accordance, the reliance on civilian methods – in contrast to military force – proves to be the most significant, which is also reflected in the relatively low loss indicators of hybrid conflicts, while in addition to appropriate military force, a number of other dimensions – related to the information, diplomatic, economic, etc. spheres – play a

prominent role. This complexity and diversity of hybrid conflicts (Bekkers – Meessen – Lasscche 2018.) essentially makes it necessary to successfully coordinate these diverse methods and procedures, which presupposes also the central role of the state – although in a different form than in the case of traditional regular conflicts (Resperger 2018.).

	Traditional warfare	**Hybrid conflict**
Method	collision of regular forces	regular and irregular forces opposing regular and/or irregular forces
Actors	state(s) – state(s)	state(s); non state actors – state(s)
Military and civil methods	4:1	1:4
Casualties ratio (dead/ wounded)	1:3	1:2,3
Main strategic dimension	regular military force	regular, and irregular military force, information, diplomacy, economy, media
The main leader in the conflict	state	state

Table 1.: Some characteristics of warfare types. Source: translated and edited by the author based on Resperger 2018. 85–86., Resperger 2021.

Hybrid conflicts therefore require high-level coordination and synchronization among different segments and actors, such as the military, political, economic, social, informational, and infrastructural areas (Kiss 2019), between which the process of realizing interests happens through a framework of various cross- and mutual effects (see e. g. Balogh 2022). In a partly different approach, hybrid threats can be seen as an even more extensive and complex phenomenon (Richterová 2015.) where the national system, the government sphere, the international dimension, critical infrastructures, financial processes and markets, the media, the research and scientific sphere, the field of education and civil society can all be targeted by opposing parties with different types of resources. It is also worth mentioning a model (Giannopoulos – Smith – Theocharidou 2021.) that distinguishes a toolbox of forty possible elements in relation to hybrid threats, which can be applied against up to thirteen different segments of the state to be attacked. In addition to the military and defense sectors,

the concept mentions – besides others – the forms of critical infrastructure, cyberspace, the economy, the social dimension, and public administration. This highly complex character of the hybrid approach plays an inevitable from the perspective that it can also be interpreted as a kind of shift compared to traditional military opposition in the sense that it is located between the end points of the spectrum of war and peace in certain level (Balogh 2023.). Furthermore this position can even change in parallel with the progress and evolvement of the conflict, more or less moving away from military-centered, predominantly hierarchical solutions towards a much more complex structure based on multiple interconnections of forces and means (Schmid 2019.).

Some consider hybrid threats as a kind of novel approach to contemporary conflicts (see e. g. Kiss – Somodi 2019.) which might not be a surprise in the light of the important and also emphasized role of the online sphere through the rich information development in the new millennium (Haig – Várhegyi 2005, 54–76., Haig 2018). The environment that is increasingly interconnected with info-communication networks as a major characteristic of the 21st century (Farkas 2020) largely facilitates the realization of a certain specific aspect of hybrid threats; cyberspace attacks (Farkas 2018).

Accordingly online sphere – which is extremely complex in itself – proves to be an increasingly important element in the conflicts of the new millennium (Haig – Kovács 2008. 61–69.), which complexity can be considered significant both externally and internally. As for the latter aspect it can generally be said that cyberspace is a multidimensional and multi-actor phenomenon. The developing digital solutions and processes of economic life, the online networks of e-commerce and the corporate sphere, the rise of digital procedures in public administration and politics, the ever-widening development of e-governance systems and opportunities, the spread of various and diverse technological elements in many areas of social life (Internet of Things), the IT systems of public services and various community supply systems, the digital elements of critical infrastructure, and of course the various conflict forms in the cyber sector explore an internally rather structured and diverse online space (Kovács 2015. 26–80., Amin et. al. 2024.). This multidimensional virtual area of the online sphere also contains numerous actors, often characterized by different motivations and modes of action. Various economic interest groups operate in an organized and coordinated way to exploit financial opportunities through online frameworks of the economy. Technology service firms – in addition to providing the basic structures that significantly affect the functioning of the digital world – also act oriented by profit-making aspects. Behind the motivations of states and governments the objective of geopolitical and international interest and goals can often be discovered, while cybercriminal groups act with predominantly financial motives, and various hacker groups typically act with ideological motives to promote the rights of certain groups. Similarly to the latter, terrorist organizations may also make efforts to promote and implement their own interests and values in various – often hidden – segments of the online world (Kovács 2015. 169–203.).

From another approach the internal diversity of cyberspace can be interpreted as having an impact on many – perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that essentially all – areas relevant to security. Based on the sectoral approach of the classical Copenhagen school (Buzan – Waever – de Wilde 1998.), it can also be said that the informational sector – which is identified besides the military, political, economic, social and environmental areas – has gained impact on the actions of essentially all other security sectors. Again with the IT development of the new

millennium and the increasingly widespread penetration of the digital world, this informational area is no longer only one sector among the others, but a diffuse sphere that is connected to and permeates the other security sectors, which can even modify the traditional spatial processes and trends (Farkas – Kelemen 2023.).

Based on the considerations above, in the followings – through the current example of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict[1] – we attempt to explore and describe the patterns and characteristics of the attacks in the online sphere against the public sector of the states, investigating the composition of the actors involved and the relationships among them.

3. Methodological background

The empirical findings of the investigation are based on secondary analysis method. The data analyses were carried out on a complex database by the collecting and organizing online available information and data, applying a quantitative approach. After identifying and filtering the relevant sources related to the research focus of public sector, besides introducing the basic patterns, during the data analyses we also try to put the results into context to a certain extent with cases related to other segments of the states' functioning which – although with content and scope limitations – might offer the opportunity to explore some specific patterns and characteristics. In the course of data analysis fundamental statistical methods were applied complemented with some basic methods of network analysis. In accordance the results of the data analyses are illustrated in graphical forms and tables.

4. Data analyses

4.1. General patterns

Considering the classification of attacks in the total of twenty-six different categories, a rather concentrated distribution can be seen. In the case of nine sectors the rates do not reach one percent, and in another eleven categories, shares lower than five percent can be measured. The proportion of the info-communication sector and the media is both around six percent – 6,7% and 6,5% respectively –, while targets related to production capacities/manufacturing account for five percent of the attacks. Slightly more than one tenth (10,9%) of the actions affect actors in the financial sector, similarly to the transportation area (16%). In the period of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict examined here between 2022 and 2023 the largest share of the attacks from the online sphere – more than a quarter; 26.9% – were directed toward the public sphere, exceeding the next category with one tenth share. The public sector can therefore be considered dominant in terms of the online activities of the attacking groups, and if we also take into consideration the share of the other two highest areas, more than half of the attacks (53,9%) can be covered. That is, three target areas with the highest proportion of all sectors prove to be rather dominant.

[1] For a wider and more detailed examination of the cyber aspects in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict see e.g. Lewis 2022., Mueller et. al. 2023., Balogh 2024., Balogh 2025.

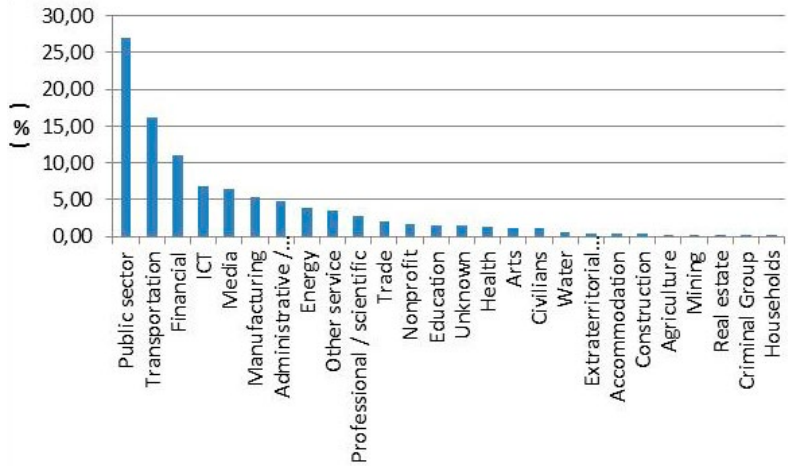


Figure 1.: Composition of the sectors. Source: edited by the author

Even more notable disproportions can be observed in the case of the effects of the attacks. Actions in the online sphere typically play a role in disrupting the targeted sectors: nearly nine-tenth of attacks fall into this category. For the remaining part attacks affecting data and disinformation can be seen in relatively higher values – 6,1% and 3,9% respectively –, and attacks aimed at destruction can be found one percent of cases. The combined proportion of actions representing an unknown form of effect and the other category barely exceeds one percent (0,86% and 0,37% respectively), which also indicates that effect form of online attacks is not destruction, but mainly the disruption of the functioning of the affected segment.

	(%)
Disruption	87,62
Data	6,08
Disinformation	3,93
Destruction	1,14
Unknown	0,86
Other	0,37

Table 2.: Distribution of the effect forms. Source: edited by the author

The attack types seems to be in accordance with the typical pattern of the form of impact, as the majority of the actions – more than four fifth; 86 percent to be precise – are DDoS attacks, representing the mechanism of overload applied to the targeted online system. The attack vector of hacking and publication, and the defacement method against websites appear at a rate of nearly three percent (2,9% and 2,8% respectively). In the case of less than two percent of the online actions (1,7%) the form of the attack cannot be identified, and malware attacks, information operations implemented through virtual capabilities, and phishing represent an even lower share, but still slightly exceeding one percent (14% and both 1,14%). The proportions of the remaining attack types also are essentially responsible for the rather fragmented distribution pattern, with eight attack types – typically based on various forms of cyber intelligence and data abuse – occurring at rates below one percent, similarly to the negligible cases of data loss.

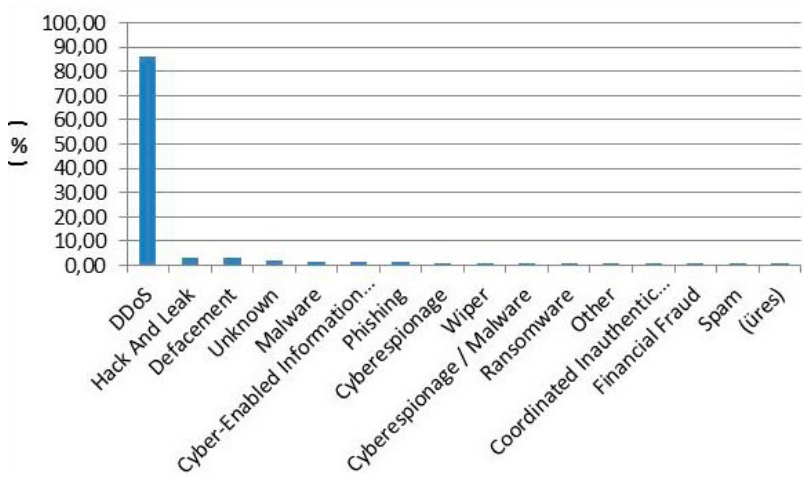


Figure 2.: Distribution of attack types. Source: edited by the author

4.2. Characteristics of public sector attacks

Based on the investigated patterns the attacks targeting the public sector can be considered fundamentally similar to the actions against all other areas. Both threat events against the public sector and attacks related to other segments are typically – and dominantly – aimed at disrupting the operation of the given area, as nearly nine-tenth of the online actions in both categories can be characterized by this form. The distribution of the remaining one-tenth of the total proportion of the additional impact types can also be considered mostly similar in the case of the two categories – however it should also be noted that the share of disinformation-type operations proves to be somewhat lower in the case of the public sector[2]. So it seems that attacks against the public sector reflect – or rather illustrate more clearly – the patterns typical of the entire population, as

[2] The composition of the two categories can only be considered significantly different at an alpha value of 0,1 instead of the traditional alpha=0,05 decision level, when examining the occurrence of impact forms (p=0,076).

the dominance of attacks involving disruption can be considered fundamental, and in the case of most other effect forms, there cannot be explored remarkable difference along the compared categories.

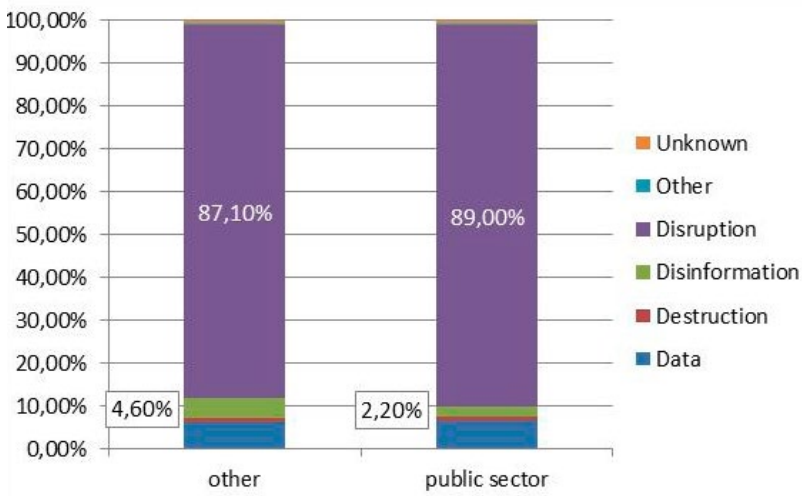


Figure 3.: Comparison of effect forms. Source: edited by the author

A specific feature of online actions against the public sector rather reveals in terms of the attack types. The distribution of attack forms against the public sector and other areas can be considered similar in that sense that DDoS overload attacks – which account for the most remarkable proportion overall – appear as the most common type in both groups, and there is no significant difference in the case of this form. At the same time, it can be stated that cyber espionage in general and in its specific form can be considered a particular characteristic of operations against the public sector. While cyber espionage can be measured as a form of attack in only half a percent of cyber attacks against other sectors, in the group of operations against public sector targets it is statistically significantly higher; nearly one and a half percent. The former, almost three times higher proportion, also appears in the case of cyber espionage attack forms implemented through malicious programs: almost one percent of operations against the public sector fall into this specific attack type, while in the case of other target areas the same proportion is a quarter of that; only 0,2 percent. The comparison of the various attack vectors also shows that – in contrast to the former – attacks involving website defacement can be considered to be less typical in the case of activities against the public sector. In the latter case the proportion of this attack form does not reach one and a half percent, while in the other category of attack area website defacement occurs at a rate more than twice as high – almost three and a half percent. So it can be highlighted that among the online attacks targeting the public sector – in addition to the dominance of distributed denial-of-service campaign – cyber espionage can be identified as a specific, more remarkable attack form, furthermore the low occurrence of actions ending in website damage might also be worth emphasizing, which overall pattern can be considered a statistically significant difference (p=0,001).

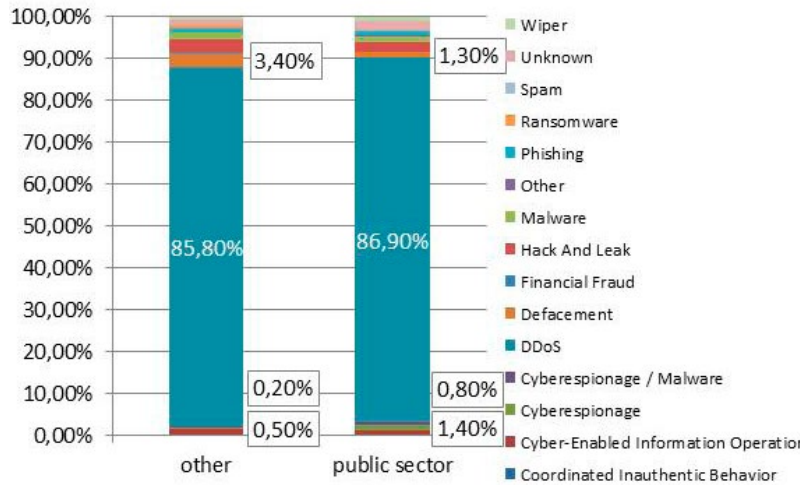


Figure 4.: Comparison of attack types. Source: edited by the author

Online activities in the public sector can be linked to a total of seventy attributed threat groups, which are targeting a total of forty-seven countries. A simple overview of the attacks shows that NoName057(16) group – aligned to the Russian side in the conflict – can be considered to be the most prominent among the groups behind the operations, and seems to be responsible for more than half (55,4%) of all the attacks. Another nearly one-tenth (9,73%) of the online activities can be attributed to the People's CyberArmy group – which has a similar profile as the former –, and it can also be stated that among the groups reaching a share of one percent – twelve ones in total – we can typically find organizations with activities in the interests of Russia, while groups participating on the Ukrainian side are represented by the Anonymous group and the IT Army of Ukraine.

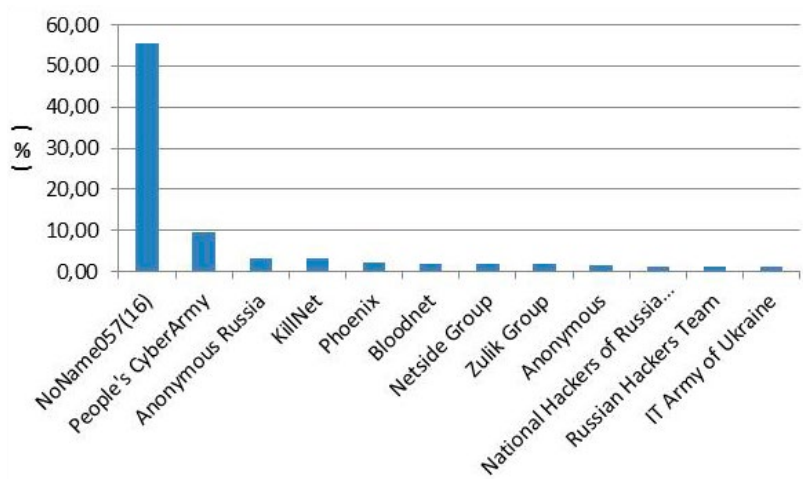


Figure 5.: Main online threat groups. Source: edited by the author

Among the forty-seven countries affected by the attacks via the virtual sphere Ukraine has the highest proportion (16,1%), and Russia is only in the fourth place with 4,7 percent, preceded by Poland with a rate exceeding ten percent (13,9%) and Germany with a share of almost five percent. In the case of the Czech Republic a rate exceeding four percent can be measured, while the United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden can be characterized by values around three percent. An approximate two percent rate appears in the case of nine countries, and the same number is five for the one percent share value. It can therefore be considered indicative that during the period of the Russian-Ukrainian war examined here, online attacks in the public sphere were far from exclusively directing against targets in Russia and Ukraine – these attacks accounted for a bit more than a quarter of the threat events (20,8%) – but mainly targeted the affected sectors of several other countries (!).

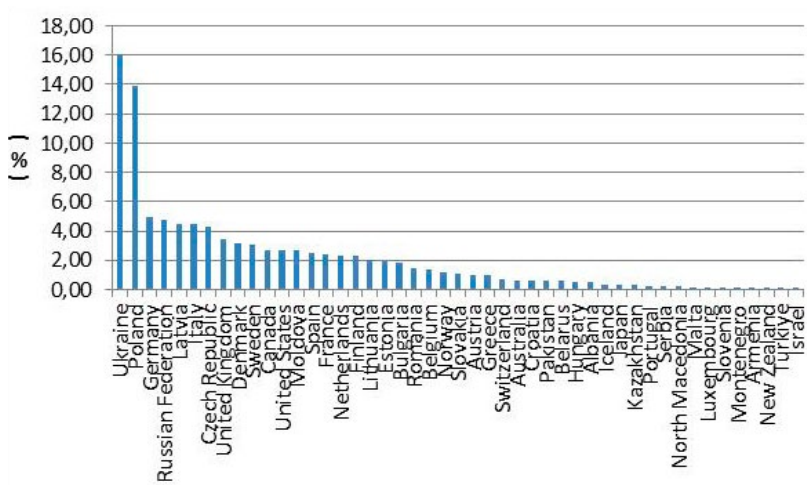


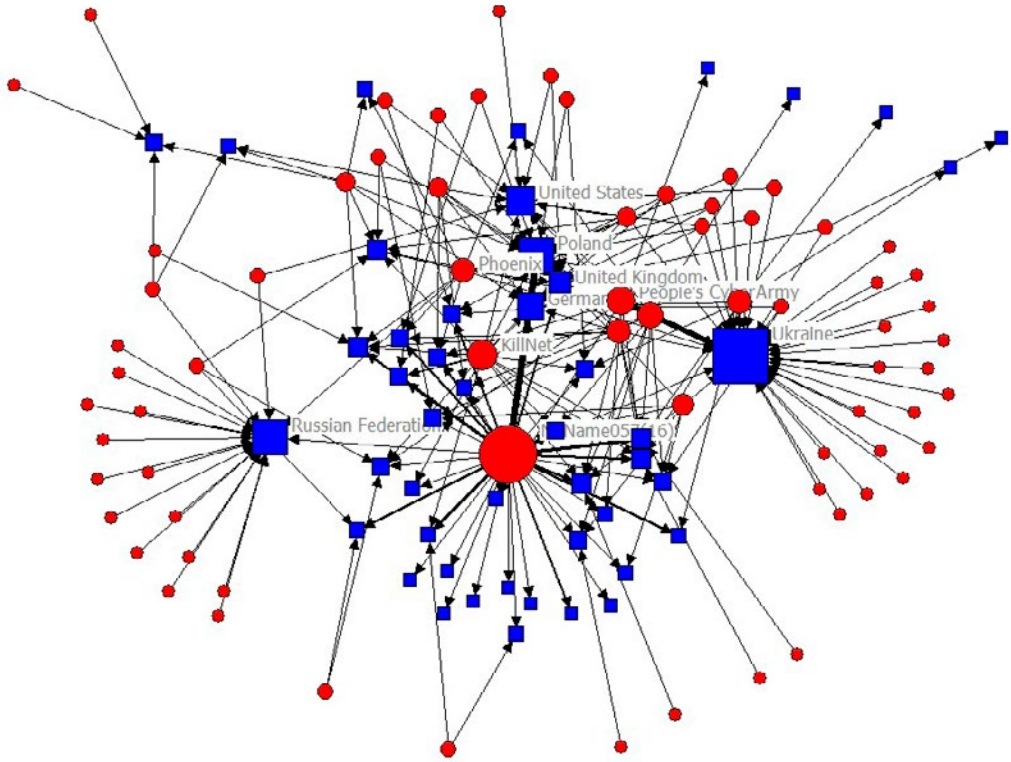
Figure 6.: Composition of the countries involved. Source: edited by the author

4.3. Network pattern of the online activities

The actions attributed to the groups above evolve an integrated structure as a whole, i.e. all those involved in the online attacks against the public sector of the countries are connected – at least indirectly. However, this former statement does not mean that the network of the attacks vie the virtual world contains uniform relations or actors with equal weight; in fact, rather remarkable differences can be explored in the case of both types of network elements. It can be emphasized that we can identify an attacking actor as the most notable element – at least certainly one – of the structure, as we find the pro-Russian hacker group NoName057(16) occupying a central position both in the graph and at the top of the statistics of the degree values among the other groups. This hacktivist group – which dominantly relies on distributed denial of service attacks in its activities – seems to be linked with the majority – thirty-six in total – of the targeted countries in the entire network, and investigating its diverse connections it can also be added that this threat actor has a certain

Eastern European focus, as its more strength ties are primarily directed towards Poland, the Czech Republic, and Latvia. However, the network evolving around the dominant attacker of course includes Ukraine as well, which country can be considered the other noteworthy node in the overall structure. On the one hand it is characterized with the highest degree value among the targeted states. On the other hand Ukraine appears to be the target of several less remarkable groups – a total of thirty-four cyber actors have some kind of attack vector pointing towards Ukraine –, but the significance of its location is also well illustrated by the fact that hacker groups that can be considered more notable – in addition to the previously mentioned NoName057(16), the collective of Phoenix, Anonymus Russia, Netside Group, Zulik Group – have some kind of connectedness with Ukraine, furthermore another worth-to-be-mentioned actor is the also Russian-linked People's Cyber Army, which proves to be Ukraine's only adversary that attacked it with several actions and multiple ties. The other main actor in the conflict, Russia, has been targeted by remarkably fewer – only eighteen – and less dominant online threat groups – apart from the aforementioned NoName057(16) hacker group and the Phoenix hacktivists, who have attacked certain Dagestan targets or carried out a defacement attacks against the websites of federal institutions in ad hoc actions. A further group can also be identified in the network, which is also worth briefly mentioning. In the upper and horizontally middle segment of the graph we can find the United Kingdom, Germany and Poland in essentially the same position, as well as the United States of America in a rather similar position, close to the formers. The position of these four countries in the structure – and what is equivalent here, the group of online threat actors opposing them – therefore shows significant similarities, and it might not be neglected that in these countries we can recognize – at least in part – the group of the most significant supporters of Ukraine. Of course, this sub-network proves to be a much diverse segment within the entire graph, and basically the similar network position comes from the fact that the online groups targeting these countries partially overlap each other – for example, there is more overlap between the threat groups of Poland and Germany than between the online adversaries of Poland and France, although a level of overlap is not negligible in the latter case as well. This illustrates the rather detailed and complex picture by the online aspect of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that reflects the open kinetic dimension with its wider range of opposing participants in the conflict. Therefore we cannot speak about a purely two-fold structure in which Russia and Ukraine are opposing each other in the online space – even with the intervention of some other proxy groups –, but rather the Russo-Ukrainian confrontation in the virtual sphere seems evolve along several different dimensions.

Contrary to the former one, the network of the online activities against sectors other than the public sphere is somewhat larger, as in the latter case more than a hundred online threat groups have been carrying out attacks against a total of fifty-three states. The expansion of the network is therefore more significant with regard to the groups posing online challenge. That is, in the case of the activities affecting the public sector the network proves to be therefore smaller and more coherent, while in the other category it seems to be larger, but at the same time more fragmented, as a –also rather small – grouping of online actors remains outside the greater structure that includes the dominant majority of the nodes. Perhaps partly due to this structural pattern, the network centralization of online attacks against the public sector is higher (4,72%) than the



Graph 1.: The network of the actors involved. Source: edited by the author
Legend: (red) circle: online threat group; (blue) square: country

value measured in the case of the structure of attacks in the other categories (2,99%), so in this case the centralization and concentration of ties among the actors is somewhat less remarkable. The network of the public sector is therefore a more centralized and also less dense one, implying that a smaller proportion of possible connections are present in the network. In the other category, however, the network turns out to be somewhat more dense, but at the same time more significant differences can be measured in this case: the standard deviation value of the mean is almost twice as high compared to the case of the graph of the public sector. That is, based on the comparison of the activities of online threat groups it can be stated that campaigns against the public sector evolve into a smaller, more centralized and less dense network, which is organized around a few clearly identifiable actors.

	public sector	**other**
nodes	117	160
countries	47	53

online threat groups	70	107
number of attacks	875	2380
network centralization (%)	4,72	2,99
density	0,0606	0,0896
standard deviation (density)	1,1683	2,2695

Table 3.: Some statistics of the networks. Source: edited by the author

Investigating the countries targeted by the different online activities a rather clear pattern (R^2=0,8105) can be revealed considering the position of states within the networks, which suggests that countries being among the most frequented ones in the case of the attacks against the public sector also can be found with a higher frequency in the other category of threat segment[3]. And of course, this relation can also be interpreted from the opposite direction, that is, countries affected more by operations in the category of other sectors also have higher values regarding the public sphere. The pattern explore might be explained to certain extent by the presence of two highly affected countries. One of these is – of course – Ukraine, however the other is not Russia, but Poland (!), which therefore proves to be the second most popular target, regardless of the investigated sector. It is also worth mentioning that Russia seems to have a relatively more significant status and is located in a higher position in the case of the attacks against other sectors.

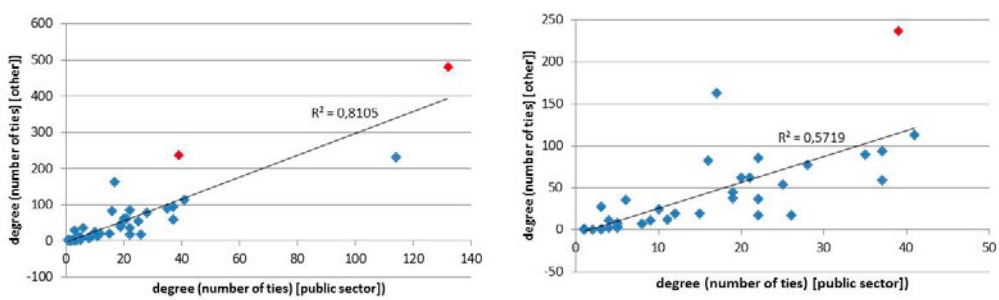


Figure 7.: Scatter of the positions of the countries (left) [Ukraine excluded (right)]. Source: edited by the author

The pattern observed in the case of the countries also reveals regarding the online threat groups, with an even more crystallized – and rather polarized – form (R^2=0,9808). Essentially it can be acknowledged that no matter which sector is considered, a dominant position can be found in the case of one single actor. That is; the hacker group known as NoName057(16)

[3] The pattern proves to remain essentially the same even if we exclude Ukraine and Poland as outliers.

–mentioned also above – is not only the main actor in the online attacks affecting the public sector, but can also be characterized with outstanding activity in attacks against other areas. In light of the relatively large number of online threat groups this dominant position should be emphasized, however it is also worth mentioning that an additional player can also be identified (People's CyberArmy) which is characterized by remarkable activity in comparison to other online groups. This hacktivist group – aligned also with Russia – therefore also stands out from the other threat groups in both investigated categories. Again – just as it could be seen above regarding the countries – if these two dominant actors are removed, the original pattern – reflecting that groups that are more active in one sector tend to have a also higher number of ties in the other sector – also can be seen (R^2=0,6772).

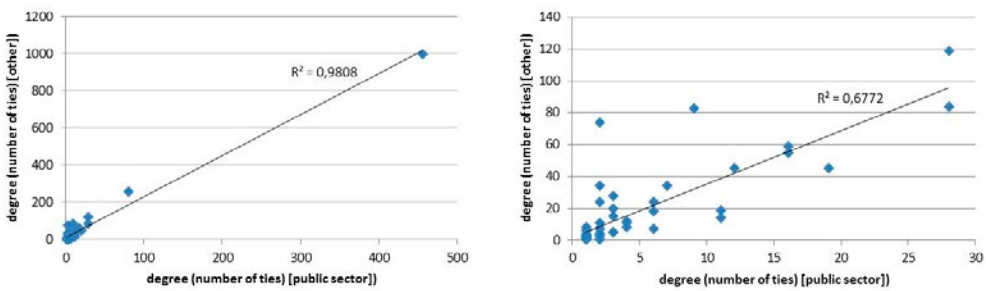


Figure 8.: Scatter of the positions of the online threat groups (left) [Main groups excluded (right)]. Source: edited by the author

Investigating the composition of the most remarkable participants[4] in the different sectors, the concentration of the ties proves to be rather remarkable in the case of the online threat groups – in accordance the dominance of the NoName057(16) hacker group can therefore be confirmed again. Furthermore the pattern is similar also among the other significant groups, as the next three positions in the ranking are also occupied by the same groups in both investigated segments. These are the People's CyberArmy, Anonymous Russia and KillNet. As for the ranking in the public sector two additional groups were included, of which the Netside Group could also be found in the other category containing larger number of groups. In this aspect it is also worth mentioning that the IT Army of Ukraine proves to be also among the groups in the upper three-quarter range – predominantly aligned with Russia – in this sector.

As for the countries, the group of states covering at least the half of the cumulative share of the ties also seems stable and consistent, although in this case the differences among the rankings are a bit larger. Ukraine can be found at the top in both segments, Poland is also located at some of the remaining steps of the virtual podium in both categories, while Russia is not outstanding in the ranking of the public sector, although in the other category it is already in second place. A further state that is included in the fifty percent range in both categories is Germany, which can be characterized by the third highest share of ties in the distribution regarding the public sector. The composition of the list with the participants of higher share values might

[4] Based on the distribution of ties (proportions). The one-quartile and tertile boundaries needed to be excluded due to the level of concentration in the case of online groups, thus the three-quartile range seemed appropriate to apply.

illustrate the dominance of certain online threat actors and also provides a more detailed overview of some subtle differences.

#	public sector	other	public sector	other
1	**NoName057(16)**	**NoName057(16)**	**Ukraine**	**Ukraine**
2	**People's CyberArmy**	**People's CyberArmy**	**Poland**	**Russian Federation**
3	**Anonymous Russia**	**Anonymous Russia**	**Germany**	**Poland**
4	**KillNet**	**KillNet**	**Russian Federation**	Lithuania
5	Phoenix	IT Army of Ukraine	Italy	**Germany**
6	**Netside Group**	Anonymous Italia	Latvia	
7		**Netside Group**	Czech Republic	
8		Bloodnet		
Σ%	76,16%	75,87%	52,92%	53,79%

Table 4.: Composition of the main groups and countries. Source: edited by the author

5. Summary

Above we have explored empirically some aspect of threat groups of states from the online sphere. The investigation was based on an overview of some conceptual considerations regarding hybrid challenges thought to be relevant when trying to interpret the increasingly complex conflicts in the new millennium, and some additional remarks on the online sphere as well, which has also been gaining more and more attention in the 21st century.

An investigation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict for the period between 2022 and 2023. has been carried out applying quantitative data analyses based on relevant data sources. In the light of the research results online attacks against the states' public sector – which is the segment with the highest proportion in general – prove to be essentially similar to the other sectors. The dominance of attempts to disrupt the capabilities and the attack form of distributed denial of service can be acknowledged as identical patterns in both categories, although certain specificities can also be discovered. Disinformation activities seem to be less frequent in the case of actions against the public sector, furthermore website damage is also less widespread, however, the higher occurrence of cyber espionage can be recognized as a specific characteristic of online

threat in public sphere. The examination of relations among the online threat groups and the targeted states has shown that the activities evolve a connected structure, in which, however, rather significant differences can be explored both in the case of the online threat groups and the countries involved. As for the former participants, the dominance of typically pro-Russian online threat actors – foremost the NoName057(16) and People's CyberArmy groups – could be emphasized, which also proves to be a fundamental pattern in the case of attacks against other segment, where, however, among the groups characterized with a more notable share we can already find the IT Army of Ukraine group. Among the countries, Ukraine – and, to a certain degree surprisingly – Poland can be located in the highest positions, Russia proves to be the second most frequent target only in the case of attacks against other sectors. In both types of participants and the investigated sectors the rankings of the positions seems to be generally similar, although the structure of the networks is partly different: in the case of the public sector the overall online activities can be linked to a smaller number of online threat groups resulting a more centralized pattern.

The research results and the different possible shortcomings of this study imply several further possible directions for the continuation of the investigation. On the one hand, it would be worthwhile to extend the data analyses to examine multiple sectors, which would allow further potentially illustrative comparisons. Differentiation based on the forms of activities and attacks could also be considered a potential research direction which would lead to a more thorough interpretation how online activities are organized, and a more detailed analysis of the relationships among the different types of actors in the online sphere could also prove to be fruitful. These directions provide orientation for the further phase of our research.

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What Makes a Good Foster Parent? Exploring the Value System of Foster Caregivers

Abstract

This study investigates the value system inherent in foster parenting to clarify the perceived importance of various characteristics attributed to a „good foster parent." Utilizing a quantitative approach, foster parents were asked to rate fourteen predefined traits, categorized into moral expectations, practical skills, and given attributes. The findings largely confirmed the initial hypothesis that moral values would be rated highest, while attributes like strictness or religious practice would show more varied responses. Notably, practical aspects such as the willingness to seek and accept help, and viewing foster care as a vocation, were also ranked among the most crucial characteristics. Conversely, self-sacrifice was deemed relatively less important than anticipated. The study reveals that the perceived importance of these values is predominantly personality-dependent, showing minimal correlation with socio-cultural backgrounds or specific aspects of the foster parents' careers, apart from minor links between altruism and education level, and vocational commitment with long-term fostering plans. These insights carry significant implications for the recruitment, training, and support of foster parents.

Keywords

Foster Care, Foster Parents, Value System, Child Welfare, Parenting Qualities, Moral Values, Professional Development in Fostering, Hungary

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1. Introduction

The role of foster parents is pivotal within the child welfare system, offering essential care and stability to children unable to reside with their biological families. A thorough understanding of the values and characteristics that constitute a „good foster parent" is fundamental for effective recruitment, targeted training programs, and ultimately, ensuring positive developmental outcomes for children in care (cf. Sevita Blog, 2024.; Johnson 2005). This study aims to explore the value system of foster caregivers, seeking to elucidate the perceived importance of various traits and attributes central to the foster parenting role in the Hungarian context. It is posited that values, mediated through attitudes, significantly influence actions and are therefore reflected in the day-to-day practice of foster care. Rather than relying on self-assessment, this research employed a methodology wherein participants rated the applicability of a list of value-laden characteristics to the abstract construct of an „ideal good foster parent".

The existing international literature underscores various qualities such as stability, empathy, patience, and the ability to work within a team as crucial for foster parents (Johnson 2004; Delfabbro et. al. 2010). Research in Hungary has also highlighted the complexities and specific needs within the national child protection system (see Kothencz J., *Róluk… értük… I*; Kothencz J., *Nevelőszülők Magyarországon*). This study seeks to build upon this by examining how Hungarian foster parents specifically prioritize these and other values, contributing to a deeper understanding that can inform national child welfare strategies.

2. Materials and Methods

To investigate the value system of foster parents, a quantitative research design was implemented. Participants were provided with a list of fourteen distinct characteristics and were tasked with evaluating their respective importance to the conceptual model of a „good foster parent". These characteristics were pre-categorized by the researchers into three distinct groups to facilitate analysis.

The first group comprised seven traits representing highly valued moral expectations within the foster care context. These included: a stable value system, adherence to moral norms, fairness/justice, helpfulness, self-sacrifice, social sensitivity, and a genuine love for children.

The second group encompassed four characteristics framed as practical skills and attitudes: „dares and knows how to ask for help," „dares and knows how to accept help," „considers foster parenting a profession/vocation," and „is continuously engaged in self-improvement and training".

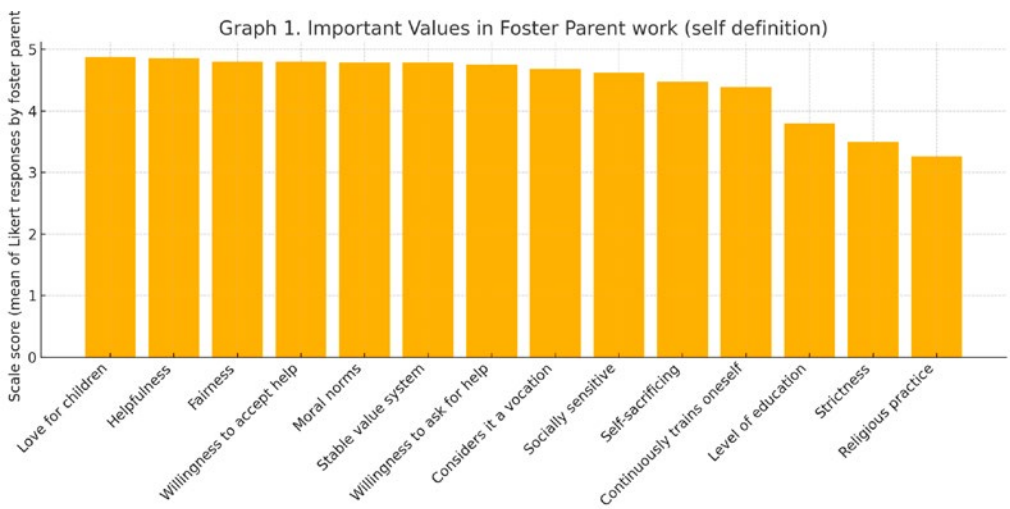
The third group consisted of three characteristics viewed more as given attributes rather than explicit expectations, although they could be considered as such from certain perspectives. These were: strictness, level of formal education (schooling), and engagement in religious practice. The challenges related to children with special needs, which can intersect with these

perceived desirable qualities, have also been explored in other work by the author (Kothencz 2024).

The primary hypothesis was that this tripartite structure would be mirrored in the respondents' evaluations, with the first group (moral expectations) anticipated to receive the highest importance ratings, and the third group (given attributes) expected to demonstrate the most significant divergence in perceived importance among respondents.

3. Results

The study's initial expectations were largely substantiated by the data. Characteristics within the third group (level of education, strictness, religious practice) indeed exhibited the greatest variability in opinion among the surveyed foster parents, while those in the first group (moral values) were, as predicted, rated the highest in importance. However, the analysis also revealed two unexpected deviations from the initial hypothesis. Firstly, behaviors related to seeking and accepting help, along with the perception of foster parenting as a vocation (from the second group), were elevated by respondents into the cluster of most important characteristics. Secondly, the characteristic of „self-sacrifice" was considered relatively less directive or central than the researchers had anticipated.



Source: own editing based on Nevelőszülők 2024.

Overall, the average scores for the evaluated characteristics were notably high, indicating that a significant majority of foster caregivers attribute outstanding importance to humanistic values in their work. (Original document reference: 1. Scores: „Love for children" 4.88, „Helpfulness" 4.86, „Fairness" 4.80, „Willingness to accept help" 4.80, „Moral norms" 4.79, „Stable value system" 4.79, „Willingness to ask for help" 4.75, „Considers it a vocation" 4.68, „Socially sensitive" 4.62, „Self-sacrificing" 4.47, „Continuously trains oneself" 4.39, „Level of education" 3.80, „Strictness" 3.50, „Religious practice" 3.26).

Eleven of the fourteen characteristics were rated with a high degree of similarity by the respondent foster parents, and the distribution of their responses typically followed a J-distribution

pattern. In contrast, the perceived importance of level of education, strictness, and religious practice was not as uniformly endorsed across the foster parent community. The distribution of responses for these three items showed a discernible shift towards a normal (bell-curve) distribution, and they were collectively considered the least important among the fourteen characteristics presented.

A further analysis focused on respondents who either negated („not at all characteristic" or „rather not characteristic") or relativized („both yes and no") the importance of the seven most highly rated characteristics (love for children, helpfulness, fairness, willingness to ask for and accept help, moral norms, stable value system). These constituted relatively small segments, ranging from 13 to 49 individuals for each characteristic. For traits such as „professional commitment (vocation)" and „social sensitivity," this group comprised approximately 92-95 individuals. For „self-sacrifice" and „continuous training," the number of such respondents was nearly 200 (specifically, 179–182 individuals). Regarding the three most divisive traits (level of education, strictness, religious practice), several hundred respondents (ranging from 486 to 705 individuals) did not rate them as highly important.

An examination was conducted for all fourteen properties to determine if these two opinion groups (those rating a property highly vs. those not) exhibited significant differences in terms of key social characteristics. It was anticipated, even without precise calculations, that the importance of education would be more strongly emphasized by more educated individuals, the importance of religious practice by those who actively practice a religion, and the willingness to seek and accept help by those who themselves tend to seek and accept help. However, there were no pre-existing hypotheses regarding potential social or professional distinctions underlying the preference for humanistic-moral values.

The findings strongly suggest that the degree to which an individual considers upbringing-ethical values to be important is almost entirely personality-dependent. The evaluation of foster parent characteristics did not show any substantial correlation with the socio-cultural backgrounds of the respondents or with characteristics related to their foster care careers. Only two correlations of note were identified:

Altruism (self-sacrifice) demonstrated a relationship with the level of education: individuals with lower formal educational attainment (those who had not completed secondary school) considered this trait less important than those who had completed secondary school or possessed higher education degrees.

The importance of a sense of vocation (professional commitment) was most significantly emphasized by foster parents who envisioned themselves fostering for a period exceeding ten years.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the value priorities of Hungarian foster parents, highlighting a strong emphasis on core humanistic and moral values. The high ranking of attributes like love for children, helpfulness, fairness, and a stable value system resonates with international literature identifying desirable qualities in foster caregivers (Delfabbro et. al. 2010, n.d.; Sevita Blog, 2024.).

A particularly noteworthy finding is the „elevation" of practical aspects such as the willingness to seek and accept help, and viewing foster parenting as a vocation, into the top tier of important traits. This may reflect an increasing awareness of the complexities of the fostering role and the necessity of support and professional identity (Justice Resource Institute, n.d.). Indeed, the quality of collaboration with the foster care system and child welfare workers is crucial for foster parents' motivation and satisfaction (Zanani 2024; Gouveia et al. 2021).

The relatively lower, though still acknowledged, importance attributed to „self-sacrifice" could indicate a nuanced understanding of sustainable caregiving. This perspective values the well-being of the foster parent as integral to providing stable, long-term care, moving away from a model potentially based on complete self-abnegation.

Perhaps the most striking outcome is the predominantly personality-dependent nature of these value attributions, with minimal correlation to socio-demographic or specific career-related variables. This suggests that intrinsic personal qualities, shaped possibly by life experiences more than formal qualifications or specific training alone, are primary determinants of what foster parents deem essential for their demanding role. This has considerable implications for recruitment and selection processes, suggesting that exploring candidates' underlying value orientations and inherent personality traits could be highly beneficial. While training is vital (Thompson 2019, initial predispositions may play a more significant role in value alignment.

The varied views on the importance of formal education, strictness, and religious practice also warrant attention. While these are not dismissed, their lower and more diverse ratings suggest they are not universally seen as core prerequisites for „good" foster parenting, allowing for a broader range of individuals to potentially fill the role effectively. The specific context of Hungarian foster care, with its own historical and cultural specificities, further enriches these findings (Kothencz 2007a).

5. Conclusions

This study successfully identified a distinct hierarchy of values that Hungarian foster parents perceive as crucial for effective and „good" foster care. Paramount among these are core moral attributes and a profound child-centeredness, which are complemented by practical abilities related to help-seeking and a professional commitment to the fostering role. The significant finding that these value preferences appear to be largely personality-dependent, rather than strongly tied to socio-cultural or professional backgrounds, underscores the nuanced complexity of defining, identifying, and nurturing „good" foster parents.

These findings have clear implications for policy and practice within the Hungarian child welfare system, particularly in the areas of recruitment, selection, and ongoing support for foster families. While continuous training and professional development are essential, identifying individuals with inherently aligned value systems and personality traits during the recruitment phase could be a key factor in ensuring long-term placement stability and positive outcomes for children in care. Further research focusing on the development and validation of tools to assess these personality-dependent value orientations could be beneficial.

Future research could beneficially delve deeper into these personality dimensions and explore methodologies for assessing value orientations in prospective foster parents within the

Hungarian context. Longitudinal studies investigating how different value profiles among foster parents correlate with child well-being, placement success rates, and foster parent retention would also provide valuable contributions to the field.

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Flowers Growing in the Shadow: Stories of the Second Generation Born after the Holocaust in Southwest Transdanubia

An Unconventional Review of Iván Zádori's „Második" Monograph on Judaica Culture and History

Abstract

Iván Zádori's book traces the life-histories and memories of nearly sixty members of Southwest Transdanubia's Jewish second generation—those born between 1945 and 1965 to Holocaust survivors. Using an oral-history approach, the book reveals how these "children of survivors" negotiated Jewish identity, community life, and the legacies of trauma in postwar rural Hungary. Spanning childhood through to the present, Zádori interweaves personal narratives with regional history, highlighting both the singularity of Transdanubian experience and its resonance with broader debates on memory, identity, and intergenerational trauma. This review situates Második within national and international Holocaust scholarship, underscoring its methodological rigor, narrative richness, and contribution to understanding how memory and identity are co-constructed across generations.

Keywords

Holocaust memory; second generation; oral history; Jewish identity; Southwest Transdanubia

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Introduction

The Holocaust's immediate aftermath and its imprint on subsequent generations have long preoccupied historians, sociologists, and cultural scholars. Processing collective trauma, reconstructing identity, and transmitting memory are urgent both for survivors and their descendants. Seminal works – Eva Hoffmann's *After Such Knowledge*[1] and the volume edited by Kovács and Braham[2] – demonstrate how the Holocaust shaped identity, politics, and memory across decades. In the early twenty-first century, as firsthand witnesses pass away, preserving their stories and understanding transgenerational trauma becomes ever more critical.

Iván Zádori's book makes an original contribution by focusing on the Jewish second generation in Southwest Transdanubia. Through nearly sixty in-depth interviews, conducted with individuals born between 1945 and 1965, Zádori reconstructs how "children of survivors" experienced Jewish identity, family, community, and religious practice in rural Hungary—contexts often overlooked in urban-centered Holocaust studies. His use of oral history enriches the historiography by foregrounding subjective memory and individual agency within broader structural forces.

Origins, Family and Childhood (Chapters 2–5)

The opening chapters explore family backgrounds and childhoods fractured by the Holocaust. Interviewees recount how survivors struggled to rebuild family ties, transmit Jewish traditions, or – alternatively – silence the past. Some grandparents and parents endeavored to revive religious customs; others adopted silence as a protective strategy. School experiences, early encounters with antisemitism, and the ambivalence of a majority society that

[1] Hoffmann 2004

[2] Braham – Kovács 2015.

"knew" about Jewish origins but often refrained from open hostility are vividly portrayed. Zádori shows how these early experiences shaped self-understanding and identity formation, echoing Hoffmann's findings on post-trauma silence and memory.[3]

Youth, Friendship, Marriage and Family Formation (Chapters 7–8)

Entering adolescence and young adulthood, the second generation navigated religious, cultural, and social identities in majority-Christian contexts. Many forged friendships beyond the Jewish community; mixed marriages became common, accelerating assimilation yet rarely provoking overt conflict. Zádori's narratives parallel Barry Chazan's work on informal Jewish education.[4] While religious literacy remained patchy, communal gatherings – holiday celebrations, synagogue visits – offered occasional reinforcement of identity.

Christian Holidays, Literacy and Prayer (Chapters 9–10)

Chapters 9 and 10 investigate how Christian holidays, literacy, and prayer shaped Jewish identity. Zádori demonstrates that exposure to majority-Christian practices often diluted distinctively Jewish traditions, particularly in small villages lacking institutional support. Yet reading and selective religious practice – where accessible – provided junctions for identity construction, resonating with Sylvia Barack Fishman's studies of mixed families.[5]

Jewish Life in Adulthood and Third-Generation Religious Education (Chapters 11–13)

Adulthood brought new challenges: reconciling work obligations with religious observance, raising children with Jewish traditions, and negotiating Israel's emergence. Many interviewees maintained only episodic community ties; their children's religious education ranged from intensive transmission efforts to minimal exposure. Zádori's findings align with Elliot Dorff's analyses of modern Jewish social ethics[6] and with Harold Kushner's guidance on religious education in interfaith families.[7]

Community Institutions and Synagogues (Chapters 14–15)

The book next examines institutional life—local congregations, synagogues, and community centers. Zádori reconstructs how these bodies functioned (or failed to) in the decades after 1945. Despite resource constraints, they served as vital identity anchors. His account parallels Steven

[3] Hoffmann 2004.

[4] Chazan 2003.

[5] Fishman 2004.

[6] Dorff 2002.

[7] Kushner 1999.

Cohen and Arnold Eisen's studies of American Jewish community life[8] and Riv-Ellen Prell's work on small-group religious movements.[9]

Restart, Return and Conversion (Chapter 16)

Chapter 16 explores later-life "returns" to Judaism and conversion stories. Some descendants, divorced from religious practice in youth, experienced renewed interest in adulthood; others formally converted. Zádori captures conversion as both personal and communal phenomenon, reflecting broader trends documented by Anita Diamant[10] and Norman Lamm.[11]

Generational Traumas (Chapter 17)

Transgenerational trauma is the focus of Chapter 17. Zádori shows how the fear of recurrence, inherited anxiety, and the moral imperative to remember persisted into the second and third generations. These narratives resonate with Dori Laub and Nanette Auerhahn's probing of Holocaust culture ethics[12] and Hoffmann's reflections on post-traumatic memory.[13]

Contemporary Jewish Life, Turning Points and the Future (Chapters 18–20)

The final chapters address present-day identity, critical life events, and future hopes. Interviewees share how they sustain Jewish life amid Hungary's changing political and social landscape, drawing on cultural practices, community activism, and transnational connections with Israel. Zádori's thematic treatment recalls Alan Dershowitz's inquiries into the American Jewish future[14] and Ari Goldman's studies of contemporary practice.[15]

Conclusion

„Második" offers an invaluable, richly textured portrait of Southwest Transdanubia's Jewish second generation. By centering oral histories, Zádori bridges personal narrative and regional history, contributing both to Holocaust memory studies and to understanding how communities – and their descendants – rebuild identity after atrocity. His work complements and extends international scholarship, demonstrating that even in Hungary's rural districts, the interplay of silence, transmission, and renewal shapes collective memory and communal resilience.

[8] Cohen – Eisen 2000.

[9] Prell 1989.

[10] Diamant 1998.

[11] Lamm 1998.

[12] Laub – Auerhahn 2017.

[13] Hoffmann 2004.

[14] Dershowitz 1997.

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Interaction - Representations I-III Social history and epidemics in the Carpathian Basin [1]

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Imre Pászka's *Együtthatás - reprezentációk* Volumes *I, II and III*, the result of a huge research work that took several years, is, as the title suggests, a continuation of an ongoing work, first published in volume I. The first two volumes have already been reviewed in Hungarian in the journal Erdélyi Társadalom (Veres 2020, 2021), but about the three volumes together, especially the recently published third volume (Pászka 2024), can be read here. A second, revised edition of the first volume was also published in 2020. The three-volume work paints a more complete and complex picture of the social history of modern Hungary and Transylvania, with a special focus on natural changes and epidemics.

The volumes analysed here represent an important stage in the author's work, which was preceded by his MTA (HAS) doctoral thesis (Pászka 2007), and in which he sought to apply the findings in the volumes of *Interaction - Representations*. As we pointed out in the first

[1] Pászka Imre: *Együtthatás – reprezentációk* I-II-III. See Pászka (2019, 2020, 2024).

volume, the writing of these volumes is the result of a very labour-intensive undertaking. The volumes examine, in chronological order, the environmental changes and epidemiological crises of the Carpathian Basin and their demographic impact. The first volume focuses on the first phase of the medieval 'Little Ice Age', ending with the Turkish occupation in Hungary, while the second volume analyses the epidemiological crisis, especially the plague epidemics, which occurred during the last period of the Principality of Transylvania and the subsequent Austrian rule in the 18th and 19th centuries. The third volume examines the circumstances, course and demographic impact of the cholera epidemics in 19th-century Hungary and Transylvania in the 19th century.

But the first volume is much more than that. Like the environmental and demographic changes of the "Little Ice Age". Here we can learn important details about the impact of climate change on medieval society in the Carpathian Basin, the peculiarities of the Little Ice Age, which, according to current research, covers a period of 500 years, roughly 1300–1880. More important and interesting was the analysis of human, 'anthropogenic' factors, written in a historical-sociological perspective. Imre Pászka placed special emphasis, quite rightly, on analysing both the situation in Hungary and Transylvania, which had considerable differences in topography and politics within the Turkish occupation and the Habsburg Empire. This modal separation is maintained in the second and third volumes, even though the Principality of Transylvania was incorporated into the same Austrian Empire as Hungary with the end of the Turkish occupation in the 18th century. But this did not constitute a 'unification' until 1867, as Transylvania had a separate government, the Gubernium, governed by other decrees, and we read in the book that the administrative and military measures to try to deal with the plague were specifically focused on Transylvania for the plague epidemic that was raging only there, and did not enforce the provisions with some kind of uniform set of instructions for the whole empire.

The understanding of the concepts and methods of the second and third volumes can be understood starting from the first volume. Thus the central term of analysis, *interaction,* is presented here. Pászka defines this as the juxtaposition of different climatic, geological, biological, epidemiological events in a given space and time, mostly local, less often on a larger scale. At the same time, interaction refers to both nature and man acting and interacting with each other. While geological, biological and epidemiological factors are episodic, climatic and anthropogenic factors are constant, despite following different regularities. Man adapts to the natural environment, shaping it through his actions, but the same cannot be said of nature. Although the creator of the algorithm seems to have adapted the conditions of our earth to the sustainability of man's physical and cognitive capacities (see: weather of the seasons = climate) (Pászka 2019. 9.; Veres 2021.).

In the following, we will review the contents of each volume, with a brief evaluation, and some aspects and additions that the author of these lines finds interesting.

Imre Pászka (2020) *Interaction - Representations* Volume I. also requires an interdisciplinary approach to review. As we read in the introduction, "the writing of the volume [...] constantly required crossing interdisciplinary boundaries and involved many uncertainties." We agree with the author that this was a very labour-intensive undertaking, even if he was able to rely on Antal Réthly's rich data archive for the sources of information on the evolution of climatic conditions in Hungary and Transylvania.

Pászka's work entitled *Interaction - Representations I.* examines the methodological and theoretical framework of social science research, with a special focus on the problem of representation. The author emphasises the need for dialogue between scientific discourses, while also presenting his own interdisciplinary approach (Coman 2009, Hankiss 1999, Mair 2009). One of the main aims of the thesis is to explore the dynamics of representation and how social reality is constructed in different discourses. One of the important commitments of the book is to analyse the concept of representation from the perspectives of several disciplines, in particular sociology, philosophy and communication theory. This approach is particularly valuable as it addresses a central issue in the social sciences. The author also presents the problem of representation in the context of social construction, linguistic meaning-making and power relations. The text occasionally refers to external sources and theoretical antecedents without explaining them in detail, which makes it difficult to understand for those who have no prior knowledge of the subject. However, the length of the three volumes has rightly led the author to keep his explanations brief in places.

Based on a more thorough analysis of Volume I, we can make a few specific observations and assessments. Following the foreword, several short chapters provide information on the framework for discussing the phenomena covered in the book, the spatio-temporal context, the indicators of cooling trends, the sources of research and the analytical aspects and concepts. In this section, we learn that the chronology of the volume deviates from the usual historical logic because the author has used the relative chronology used by climatologists.

The central concept of the book is the *interaction, which* the author defines as the combination of different climatic, geological, biological, epidemiological events in a given space and time, mostly local, less often on a larger scale. At the same time, however, interaction also implies, as I have written, that both nature and man are active, interacting with each other. While geological, biological and epidemiological factors are episodic, climatic and anthropogenic factors are constant, despite following different regularities. Man adapts to the natural environment, shaping it through his actions, whereas the same cannot be said of nature. Although the creator of the algorithm seems to have adapted the conditions of our earth to the sustainability of man's physical and cognitive capacities (see: weather of the seasons = climate).

The author, citing the meteorological encyclopaedia, defines the Little Ice Age as "a decline in the Earth's temperature, which occurred over a certain area and time in Europe, North America, Russia, China, and, according to recent research, in the Arctic ice cores" (Pászka 2020. 9). The author focused on the Carpathian Basin in the Little Ice Age, placing each factor in a broader context. She examines the European perspective in terms of climate, the European and Eurasian (Cha-list) perspective in terms of epidemics (plague, cholera), and explains the geopolitical exposure of the Carpathian Basin, which influenced subsistence, in the introduction of epidemics: the Crimean Tatars 14. In the 19th century, the British spread the plague from India by sea, and the Russian tsarist army spread the Indian plague from Persia to Europe by land.

After the preface and introduction, the volume is structurally divided into six chapters. Each chapter concentrates on subsistence, but illuminates different aspects of it, starting with geological factors, continuing with biological factors, and then discussing climate. Then, in chapter four, he discusses nutrition, and continues with anthropogenic factors, which are discussed in separate subchapters for Hungary and Transylvania.

In the subsection on *the Aspects of the analysis*, you can find out the logic behind the analyses.

Here we can read the author's dilemmas about framing the analysis of events and happenings in terms of their causes or consequences. In the end, he chose the solution of dividing the triggers and their consequences along the broader and narrower notions of subsistence, including in the analysis only those dysfunctions that, in the author's words, "affect almost all elements of the broader, extended content of subsistence" (Pászka 2020. 29–30). Whenever a situation was observed that was damaging some of the basic elements of subsistence, in such cases he sought to 'assess the situation', although it is the dramatic representation of the narrative situation that is most characteristic of the volume. Thus, in my reading, the meaning of the various disasters was interpreted in terms of the magnitude of the situations affecting different social groups, the spatial and temporal distribution of their intensity, and their recurrence and permanence.

The first volume, regardless of the author's intentions, was highly topical at the time of its publication in two respects. Firstly, although the author did not intend the volume to fit into the global warming discourse, it nevertheless provides social scientists with a wealth of insights into the evolution of climate factors and their relevance to changes in human lifestyles and the organisation of society. On the other hand, it also contributes to the understanding of the social and economic problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, thus offering insights into the social context of previous epidemics and epidemiological crises in the wider region, and to the understanding of social responses to constraints.

In the first chapter, the author analysed the geological factors, focusing on the climatic changes caused by volcanic eruptions and the social consequences, such as increased mortality and drought-induced famine. This chapter may be of interest to hydrologists and geologists, who will be able to judge how much new information and data can be added to the historical sources for the study of these events. For the social scientist not familiar with the subject, almost everything is new. In particular, the reader may find it novel that volcanic eruptions in relatively remote areas, such as Greenland, Iceland or the Indonesian islands, caused climate change and cooling over such large areas that the inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin also felt the effects, and according to the author, tens of thousands of people in parts of Hungary and Transylvania even starved to death (Pászka 2020. 50).

Among the crises caused by biological factors, the author analyses the phenomenon of locust epidemics and the damage they caused, which led to famine, giving a spatial and temporal overview of the period under study. The author draws on many sources and gives a sense of the magnitude of the phenomenon, although it is not clear to the reader how these actually affected demographic conditions.

The third chapter deals with the impacts of climate change. This is perhaps the most promising chapter in the book. We learn that the combined effects of cooling and the plague epidemic have led to the demographic consequences of large numbers of deaths, leading to a significant population decline. The author's overview of the social problems caused by climate change is not confined to the Carpathian Basin, but is also examined from a European perspective. Climate change has caused not only cooling, but also drought in many cases. As the author has pointed out, despite the lack of information, the two main hydrometeorological disasters - wet and dry natural disasters - caused a variety of livelihood disruptions, but with significant differences in space, time and intensity. While in the north-west of Europe and in the Central

European region, it was mainly the wet seasons that caused problems, in the Carpathian Basin the devastating effects of drought were more prominent (Pászka 2020. 82.).

The crises of the 14th century, including malnutrition, malnutrition, disease, and the demographic losses generated by them, as described in the book, affected more the poor (without land, industry, supplies, etc.) part of the urban population, while there is no clear data on the losses of the rural population, mainly due to floods. As a result, the urban population in Western European regions has declined by 5-10 % on average, while the losses in rural areas cannot be quantified.

The fourth chapter deals with nutrition. If the reader missed the social science approach in the previous chapters, it is more prominent in this one. Here, the quantitative and qualitative evolution of agricultural crops/products necessary for nutrition was examined, including new contexts than before, including the evolution of food crop yields, since this is how the spatial and temporal evolution and variations of abundance and scarcity were judged and qualified in the texts (Pászka 2019. 211.). Overall, the author's assessment is that in Hungary and Transylvania in the 15th-19th centuries, famine and starvation could be considered as a temporary phenomenon, which occasionally developed but was not permanent. From a social-historical point of view, it is an important contribution to the local specificity of the food culture related to the way of life, as long as the main food products were the same throughout the Carpathian Basin, their occurrence and scarcity varied. And, in particular, they were used in different ways, depending on local conditions, to make up for basic food shortages. For example, in Szeklerland (1717, 1718): hair, acorns, various roots, straw and polyves of lime, beech and potted trees were ground together to make scones or bread. In even poorer situations, for example in the counties of Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa and Maramures/Máramaros (1790), the poorest classes also made bread from roots, corn cobs and sawdust. The Romanians of Salaj/Silágyság (1817) baked bread from a mixture of acorns, pigs' tears, sea-balls, hemp seeds and wood shavings. In Szolnok (1790), under the specific conditions of the Great Plain, bread was baked from the inside of reeds (benzele, sás) (Pászka 2020. 222–23.). The author sheds light on why the consumption of bread was at the centre of the population's eating habits. In his view (using the writings of Aymard, Montanari as sources), the bread-centred diet was 'based on the liturgy of the Western Latin Church, which continued the Greco-Roman heritage in times of scarcity and famine. (Pászka 2020. 224.). We can also learn important facts about the spread of maize consumption, the 'eating of porridge': maize dishes were not commonplace in the daily diet of the population, as ethnographic descriptions have so far suggested. In fact, these maize dishes played a greater role in the diet of certain regional, ethno-cultural groups, but this cannot be generalised either for Transylvania or for the ethnic groups of Hungary as a whole. Although, according to the author, the spread of *malai, malé and puliszka* in other regions of Hungary was encouraged by serf-owning landlords, the cultivation of maize became established in Transylvania in the 1700s and 1720s. As a foodstuff, it played an important role in the diet of the poorer serfs of the county. In the better-off villages of Transylvanian Saxons and Szeklerland, and among the urban population, it was less frequently used as food, and was sold more as animal feed (ibid., 2019. 237.). We also learn that in 18th century Hungary, the Austrian imperial institutions, especially the army, encouraged the spread of potato cultivation, thus helping to reduce hunger and promote a healthier diet. In the 1720s, American-born peppers, followed by beans and pumpkins, also

appeared. This also shows the reader that the ingredients of the main dishes of today's traditional Hungarian cuisine can be traced back only 250-300 years.

In the fifth and sixth chapters, the socio-historical approach becomes even more prevalent. Here, Imre Pászka examines the human, "anthropogenic" factors related to subsistence. While chapter five analyses the situation in Hungary, the final chapter focuses on the situation in Transylvania. If one were to question the author's choice of two separate parts of the Carpathian Basin, which are otherwise united by the Hungarian crown, one would understand this on reading the book. The author's Transylvanian origins and his professional interest in Transylvanian and Romanian society and sociology, which he maintained throughout his academic career, may have played a role in identifying these differences.

In the chapter dealing with the situation in Hungary, we can read in detail how the composition of the population of the Turkish occupied territories changed as a result of the spontaneous and forced migration processes that developed after the Battle of Mohács, based mainly on the results of historical research (Z. Dávid, A. Molnár, L. Szita, etc.). Moreover, we can also read how these population movements indirectly affected other areas (under Austrian rule) in the Northern parts of Hungarian Kingdom or in the Partium and Transylvanian regions.

The last chapter examines the "anthropogenic" factors of subsistence in Transylvania, which mainly include social, demographic, economic and political-power factors. From a sociologist's point of view, the chapter starts with a too long historical overview, especially concerning the formation of the Principality of Transylvania, and it is also difficult to judge whether Pászka's writing contains new elements and approaches compared to previous historical works. In the sub-chapter entitled *Principality - the struggle against the extension of the occupation*, we read a historical analysis, with military and diplomatic contributions, of how the gradual extension of the Turkish occupation of the Principality of Transylvania to the eastern part of the Tisza Lowlands (Alföld) and the Partium region took place in the second half of the 17th century. After the fall of Nagyvárad/Oradea, the Turkish rule extended to the mountainous parts of Partium (Zaránd, Kraszna, Central Szolnok counties), and afterwards the Turks tried to collect taxes in the western part of historical Transylvania, in the counties of Kolozs/Cluj and Doboka/Dăbâca. In describing the transformation of Kolozsvár/Cluj city, into a fortress, the author also provides a number of social history data, including the attitudes and changes in the way of life of the local population. In this way, the reader who is not interested in 'traditional' historical aspects may feel that the direction of the book 'returns' to its previous interdisciplinary direction. It is interesting to note that although it is known that Debrecen paid taxes in three directions during the Turkish occupation, according to the data published in Imre Pászka's book, the primary reason for the taxes seems to have been the connection to Transylvania: 'Debrecen, for example, paid taxes to the Transylvanian prince 3200 forints, to the sultan 2000 forints and to the Hungarian king of Vienna, in Bratislava, 1000 forints' (Pászka 2020. 358.).

The book details the development of religious pluralism in Transylvania and the early modern manifestations of religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Analysing the dynamics of ethnic/linguistic/religious or religious exclusion, the author describes the various solutions in several Transylvanian cities (Brasov/Brassó, Sibiu/Nagyszeben, Baia Mare/Nagybánya, Ocna Sibiului/Vízakna, Orastie/Szászváros, Hunedoara/Vajdahunyad, etc.), in addition to Cluj/Kolozsvár, noting that the 'everyday necessity of life, the need for cooperation and discernment in the

conduct of the affairs of the municipalities, encouraged the introduction of a parity system'. (ibid.: 376). The author's comments on the evolution of the number and ethnic composition of the Transylvanian population in the 18th century and the related migratory movements, although restrained, should have been omitted for reasons of space. In this form, based mainly on the work and estimates of Jancsó, the picture is somewhat simplistic. It would also have been advisable to use some other sources of contemporary data (e.g. Acsádi 1896) or more recent literature (Őri 2001; Veres 2002, 2006), since the real scale of the sporadic sources referring to migratory movements is not easy to contextualise in a way that gives a picture of the real scale.

In the sub-chapter on internal and external population movements, the author writes in more detail about migration phenomena that have been mentioned so far, but about which few details are known. These include the nobility, serfs and urban craftsmen who, because of the Turkish conquest, settled from the Hungarian Alföld and southern regions of medieval Hungary to the smaller and larger towns of Partium and Transylvania, which belonged to the Principality, and whose integration, according to Pászka, caused many tensions and disrupted the customary law of the 'localities'.

The final sub-chapters of the very extensive chapter, which focuses on the "anthropogenic" factors of Transylvania, deal with the historical-social relations of Transylvanian Szeklerland in the centuries of the Principality and the 18th century, when the former rights and privileges of Szekler society were transformed and partly abolished. The author analyses the internal relations of the contemporary Szeklerland society in many aspects, based on novel original source material. The internal division of the apparently 'homogeneous' Székely society and the discussion of the spread of serfdom are extremely instructive. We can also learn that the Székely society was not only vertically/systemically, but also territorially, seat by seat, very differentiated, both in terms of lifestyle and the organization and development of social relations. The book is especially recommended for readers interested in the past of Szeklers. (see also Veres 2020)

One of the strengths of the volume is that it draws on a wide range of literature, including both classical and contemporary social scientists. In interpreting the notion of representation, the author takes into account not only sociological dimensions but also philosophical and communication theory dimensions. This allows for a complex analysis of the concept, but at the same time the work is sometimes too theoretical, which may make it difficult to apply it to empirical research. In terms of methodological approach, the author draws on the interpretative social science tradition, with a particular focus on hermeneutic and discourse analysis methods. However, the text does not always go into detail on their practical feedback, sometimes leaving the reader to find the link between theory and empiricism.

Overall, the significance of the first volume is that it provides an interdisciplinary approach to scientific analysis and reflection to understand the real scale and causes of population catastrophes that contribute to the understanding of the social history and historical demographic processes of the past centuries

The second volume is structured into seven chapters. The initial two chapters explore the phenomenon and manifestations of epidemics, with a particular focus on the plague, both in Europe and worldwide. The author then turns to the plague epidemics in the Carpathian Basin, followed by a description of the situation in Hungary in the 17th and 18th centuries. For readers from Transylvania, the fifth and sixth chapters of the second volume contain more interesting

information. In the fifth chapter (Pestis in the Transylvanian Carpathian Bend), he examines in detail events in Transylvania, but already at the end of the fourth chapter we learn that 'in Transylvania, as in all previous plague epidemics throughout the continent, the usual, established order of everyday life in the settlements, especially in the towns, is disrupted, and the free spirit of the people prevails in their behaviour (Pászka 2020. 193.). For his analysis of the conditions in Transylvania, he used the data from Mihály Cserei's Historia (Cserei 1983), expanding it considerably, since Cserei's work only shows the epidemics of the years 1708–1711. In the second volume, the author analyses, in addition to Cserei's sources, other, mainly administrative, data from the reports drawn up by the magistrates of the various towns at the beginning of the 18th century, which reported the losses of the plague to the governorate. These in-depth analyses provide a great deal of detail that can be used to understand other aspects of the social history of Transylvania (see also Veres 2021).

During the first two decades of the 18th century, the author estimates the combined losses due to epidemics and military conflicts at approximately 300,000 in Hungary and 200,000 in Transylvania. By analyzing tax censuses from 1720–1920 and refining population statistics from Acsádi (1896), the author concludes that the total population of Hungary and Transylvania declined by approximately 10% and 20%, respectively (see Őri 2001; Veres 2002). Examining the partial data, the author highlights that certain micro-regions may have lost up to half their population within a few years, particularly between 1717 and 1719. However, as the majority of deaths were among young children, with fewer adult casualties, the number of families and households declined to a lesser extent. Over a longer period (1700–1725), natural reproduction helped mitigate these severe mortality losses. Consequently, census data collected at later intervals do not always reflect the full extent of population loss, as early church and tax censuses primarily recorded household numbers rather than individual deaths. In many cases, epidemics did not completely wipe out entire households but rather affected only a portion of their members.

The author also challenges the longstanding perception that disease control regulations emerged simultaneously with Austrian rule. Instead, he emphasizes that early measures were largely ineffective and only improved gradually through a process of learning from previous failures. The first notable set of effective regulations appeared in the Decree of Charles III (1724), later refined under Maria Theresa in the General Normativum (1770).There were also plague epidemics in Transylvania in the middle and second half of the 18th century, but according to the sources analysed by the author, they did not cover the whole province and did not affect as large a part of the population as the epidemics of the early 18th century. In 1738, for example, the number of plague victims in Transylvania, according to one of the sources analysed by the author, was 41 622 in 23 administrative units and 501 municipalities (another source reported far fewer victims), the most affected area being the south-western part, today's Hunedoara/Hunyad, Alba/Fehér county, the city and county of Sibiu/Szeben and ScaunulAries/Aranyosszék near Turda.

Into mid 18. century, the Transylvanian military command and the Brasov city council issued decrees prohibiting the entry of "foreigners" from outside the province. Despite these efforts, a severe plague epidemic struck Brasov (Brassó) between 1755 and 1756, leading to the complete isolation of the city and the entire Burzenland (Barcaság) region from the rest of Transylvania. Pászka suggests that the blockade did not result in catastrophic consequences

comparable to similar events in Europe, as Austrian military and legal authorities ensured food supplies to the quarantined areas. In August 1762, authorities once again closed the southeastern Transylvanian border, imposing a twelve-day quarantine (a precursor to modern standstill measures) on individuals waiting to enter the Turnu Roșu (Vöröstorony) gorge. Prior to this, the Brasov city authorities were instructed to monitor more closely the movements of shepherds and Orthodox monks (kalugyers) from Wallachia, who frequently used concealed mountain paths for crossing the border.From the summary of the chapter, we learn that Transylvania was mostly exposed to a major plague threat only when "the magnitude of the epidemic in the neighbouring countries, under Turkish dominance, exceeded the local scale" (ibid.: 268). However, during the 18th century, the responsibility for combating the outbreak of the plague fell to the authorities in south-eastern Transylvania (Brasov/Brassó, Bârsa region/Barcaság, Treiscaune/Háromszék, Ciuc/Csík- és Gheorgheni/ Gyergszék). However, the author finds that the Habsburg military bureaucracy failed to eliminate the back-and-forth between the passes, hidden paths and traps of the Carpathians and its role in the 'reintroduction' of the plague in the case of those who engaged in smuggling salt and other products, vagrancy, robbery or transhumant herding. (ibid.: 261). In addition, traders, transporters, etc., who used legal local passes and crossings, were more often than the authorities would have liked, and the leniency of the local border guard 'plájos', who were commissioned by the Austrian authorities before the later Romanian border regiments were established, was also tried to be controlled and broken by severe punishments. The special value of the book is that the exploration of the plague developments in Szeklerland in the 18th century is largely based on the author's own research, including the fieldwork of the surgeons of the Szekler border regiments during the epidemic. These are mainly based on independent research in the archives of Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda and Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy, which adds to the value of the volumes. (see also Veres 2021).

All in all, the social history of the management of plague epidemics is an important contribution to the book, which is made available to posterity. It also helps us to understand why, despite the high mortality associated with the epidemics, the population of Hungary and Transylvania was able to grow at a moderate but significant rate in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In Volume III of Imre Pászka's book, he makes a professional and interdisciplinary study of the cholera epidemics in the Carpathian Basin in the 19th century. Placing these epidemics in a broader environmental, socio-political and economic context, the book provides a comprehensive historical and sociological analysis of epidemics, public health responses and social reactions to crises. The volume serves as the concluding part of a series examining the relationship between climate, survival strategies and epidemics, building on previous discussions of plague and environmental difficulties.

The book is divided into a number of well-structured sections, each covering a different aspect of the cholera epidemics in the region. The introductory chapter sets the conceptual framework, defining key concepts and methods. The chapter places cholera in the context of the environmental and climatic conditions of the Little Ice Age and explores the factors that contributed to the spread of epidemics, including poor sanitation, increased mobility and socio-political instability. Pászka provides a detailed historiographical overview, compares past and current research on the topic, and discusses the challenges of interpreting archival records, many of which have been shaped by political biases and administrative constraints.

The first major chapter, entitled From *Endemic Foci to Pandemic*, presents a comprehensive history of cholera, tracing its origins from its endemic presence in the Bengal region to its emergence as a pandemic. The book examines the different routes of transmission, highlighting both maritime and land-based trade networks, and discusses the geopolitical implications of the spread of the disease. Here, Pászka effectively integrates the findings of economic history and epidemiology, showing how trade expansion and military campaigns played a crucial role in the spread of pathogens.

In the following chapters the author deals with the actual epidemics in Hungary and Transylvania, such as Cholera in Hungary in 1831/32 (Cholera in Hungary, 1831/32) and Cholera in Transylvania in 1831/32 and 1836. These sections provide a detailed chronological account of how the disease spread in urban and rural settings, the measures ordered by local and imperial authorities, and the public reaction to both the disease and government interventions. Of particular interest in the case of Cluj Napoca is the detailed description of the crisis management and the civilian mobilisation to buy food supplies. But perhaps even more important, and so important in subsequent sociological analyses, are the city-region differences. According to the summary results of the 1932 cholera epidemic, the outcome of the epidemic in Cluj-Napoca and the five counties of northern Transylvania was radically different: while in Cluj-Napoca 'only' 18 % of the infected died, in the counties 59 % of the infected died during the cholera epidemic (Pászka 2024. 190).

One of the strengths of the book is the meticulous use of archival sources, including government reports, contemporary medical treatises and newspaper articles, which are prominent in these chapters and help to reconstruct the lived experiences of those affected.

Of particular interest is the chapter on "The War of Independence and Cholera in 1848/49", which examines the intertwining of politics, administration and public health in the context of the Revolution and the Civil War. Pászka argues that the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence disrupted public health measures, which exacerbated the spread of cholera. The military movements of Habsburg and Russian forces, as well as poor sanitary conditions in refugee camps and besieged cities, contributed to high mortality rates. This section provides a particularly convincing discussion of how war and epidemic crises reinforced each other, showing the vulnerability of societies under multiple simultaneous pressures.

The book continues with case studies of later epidemics, such as Cholera in Hungary in 1866 (Kolera Magyarországon 1866) and The 1872/73 cholera epidemic in Hungary (Az 1872/73 évi kolerajárvány Magyarországon). These chapters examine how public health policy evolved over time, highlighting the shift from traditional quarantine methods to more systematic sanitary measures, including improved water management and medical response. However, as Pászka points out, administrative inefficiency and public distrust have often undermined these efforts. The book also details the socio-economic consequences of cholera, such as disruption of trade, displacement of populations and deepening social inequalities.

One of the most interesting aspects of Interaction - Representations III is the examination of contemporary medical debates on the nature of cholera. In the chapter on Cholera Contagious/Non-Contagious Dilemmas, Cures (A fertőző/nem fertőző vita és kezelések), Pászka examines the conflicting theories on the spread of cholera. He contrasts the early contagious approach with emerging scientific explanations, such as the role of contaminated water, which was later

confirmed by the discoveries of John Snow and Robert Koch. The book also details the various medical treatments tried during the epidemics, from herbal remedies to more experimental approaches, some of which were rooted in superstition rather than science.

The final chapters assess the long-term impact of cholera epidemics on public health infrastructure and perceptions of the disease. Epidemic Prevention and International Cooperation after 1873 provides insights into the wider European context, showing how cholera influenced the development of modern public health policies, including the establishment of international health conferences and early attempts at global disease surveillance. Pászka argues that these developments laid the foundations for later 20th century efforts to combat pandemics through international cooperation.

Despite its many strengths, weaknesses can be found, although they fall far short of strengths. The depth of the archival research, while impressive, is sometimes overly dense in the presentation and illustration of statistical data, which detracts from the readability of the book and may be a challenge for readers unfamiliar with historical demography. In addition, the thematic structure of the book, while logical, at times seems fragmented, making it difficult to follow a coherent, consistent narrative across the different case studies. A clearer comparative framework between the different outbreaks and regions could have strengthened the overall coherence of the work, although this may have had some limitations, as not all regions can be described in the same way, in terms of semantic points and with the same depth.

All in all, Interaction - Representations III is a fundamental contribution to the field of historical sociology, but also to the field of medical history and epidemiology. Its meticulous research and analytical rigour make it an invaluable resource for historians, sociologists and public health professionals interested in the long-term interaction of epidemics and society. Although its scholarly style may be challenging for the general audience, the book's insights into historical and contemporary responses to epidemics provide key lessons for understanding modern health crises. Pászka's work highlights the importance of a historical perspective in the design of effective public health policies and highlights the enduring impact of past pandemics on contemporary epidemic management strategies.

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The book is also a niche from the point of view that the works of Western authors on climate history extend as far as the Oder River, while Imre Pászka's work sought to cover the Carpathian Basin, which has been less known abroad. Another important contribution is that this work is the first to present the Balkan epidemic situation in a broad sense in Hungarian and Transylvanian terms. Similarly, the Chinese Cha list on the origin of the plague and its correlations with the Mediterranean, Italian cities. This suggests that in the spread of the plague, its development into a pandemic, it was the agents of international long-distance, sea and land trade that played a prominent role, rather than warfare.

As the concluding chapter of the third volume confirms, the writing of the volume(s) is the result of a long, decade-long effort, in which the author had to draw on a wide range of interdisciplinary knowledge to adequately address the issues. In the book, the author has made a conscious effort to retain the vocabulary and designations of the original, contemporary sources, which undoubtedly has its advantages, but can also have its disadvantages. Readers with a

knowledge of history will find the many texts, accounts and letter extracts from the 17th and 18th centuries interesting and inspiring, and they may stimulate the researcher to further research. On the other hand, it is a drawback that readers who are not familiar with history and the old language may not always understand or may find the relevant parts of the book difficult to follow and read. Some of the concepts and terms he uses today may be considered pejorative and confusing to some readers. That said, we can only recommend it to all readers, laymen and researchers alike, interested in modern social relations.

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Revealing the truth about the West through war (Review)

Emmanuel Todd, avec la collaboration de Baptiste Touverey

La défaite de l'occident, Paris, Gallimard, 2023

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The distinctiveness of this book is manifested in its being a *mélange* of theoretically framed and journalistic discourse. *On one hand*, the book demonstrates its grounding in the theoretical problems of social sciences (for instance, it immediately mentions the intention to correct Max Weber's thinking regarding the relationship between economic rationality and Protestantism). *On the other hand*, the author strongly aims to address current trends in Europe, America, and ongoing wars—about which he presents a series of polemical and sharp claims.

In other words, the book is a synthesis of sophisticated theoretical articulations and various, almost declarative, statements that serve the aforementioned *polemical* nature—for example, the type of sentence that points to the fact that the CIA funded the French edition of John Rawls's famous book can certainly be understood in light of such an endeavour (here arises the perennial question of how much this compromises the given work; behind many works are various financiers, sometimes with a significant arsenal of power). Of course, behind this, we actually see the paradigm of a certain type of regression that is demonstrated in relation to the position of the West. In this specific case, we identify the emerging gap between the normative projections of a political philosopher regarding the organization of justice and the real configuration of justice that arises in a world marked by inequalities.

The author unequivocally aims to guide his readers toward interpreting the present: he simply starts from the premise that the (particularly) Russian-Ukrainian war constellation has opened an exceptional perspective regarding the historical trajectories of the West. Right now, we are at a moment where we can critically recapitulate the failure of the Western project. This can explain why, on its horizon, there are emerging all those states (with demographic and other potentials) that can be at least indirectly connected to the Russian-Ukrainian war. For example, let us mention the case of Scandinavian countries, which have shown strong subordination to American strategic interests—Todd's reflections revolve around this phenomenon.

In addition, the fact that the book at the beginning enumerates the various „surprises" (Todd) that have come to the surface on the occasion of this war is in fact an expression of Todd's efforts to shed light on the current situation. Or the fact that he presents different projections that can hardly be theoretically verified, such as the expected commonality between Russia and Germany (despite the current divergence) due to the similarity of the fertility rate, can also be observed in the context of the sharpening of attitudes.

Finally, Todd does not fail to comment on almost any episode of today. For example, he makes an assessment of why women-politicians in the Scandinavian and Baltic countries have shown such intense belligerence, even pointing to the „feminist dimension" (Todd) of Western bellicist engagement — confronting the assessment of one Ronald Inglehart who claimed that the willingness to make war sacrifices is constantly waning due to the „feminisation of society" (Todd) *(„déclin général de l'intérêt pour la chose militaire dans le monde occidental à la féminisation de la société"*). Or he makes a declarative decision about whether there is a popular phrase of *deep state* or not (the author makes a negative decision here).

Thus, in the book we read theoretical positions (which are otherwise supported by numerous data), but also polemical claims that dissolve academic frameworks and open the possibility for intervention in debates centred on the present. In the form of such interventions, the author of this book, for example, defended the position that the real stake of the eruption of war is the subjugation of Germany, that is, the old geopolitical imperative that America cannot afford too close an alliance between Germany and Russia — in this book we get a lot of material as Todd explains it. He is, of course, not the only author who thematized the „fall" of the West in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, because we note various similar interventions — but Todd's undertaking is one of the most ambitious.

Todd, otherwise the author of significant books with a provocative charge, as a young scientist became known for becoming a prophet *ante litteram* regarding the collapse of the USSR

based on the analysis of infant mortality (*La Chute Finale*, 1976) — this fact gains significance if we consider that until the end of the eighties of the 20th century, there was widespread belief in the permanent stability of the Soviet regime. (Todd also in this book presents several hypotheses regarding the key importance of infant mortality, more precisely, he registers various intriguing „*correlations"* regarding infant mortality, such as in relation to corruption, or the effects of education). Finally, Todd, as we can read about him in various biographies,[1] is the grandson of Paul Nizan, that is, the important philosopher and writer who died in the war — at least some know him on the basis of a significant article by Jean-Paul Sartre regarding his death.

However, the Hungarian reader will also notice a more incidental hint that develops in the discussion about the kind of affectivity displayed by various politicians who have ventured into the world and become actors in the American power infrastructure (Victoria Nuland, Anthony Blinken, etc.) toward the places tied to their family lineages: his Jewish great-grandfather, Oblatt Lajos, lived in Budapest. The connection between memory and affectivity is particularly emphasized. Moreover, Todd adds that he shaped the main thesis about the dissolution of the Soviet Union while traveling to Budapest and simultaneously searching for his ancestors. Hungary (as well as the politics of its prime minister) appears multiple times in the book, though this occurs within the framework of discussions about Eastern and Central Europe, where the author addresses a theme that also applies to this region: the „fragility of the middle class" (Todd). Although, it is worth mentioning that Todd particularly emphasizes the „exceptionalism" („Hungarian exception", Todd) of Hungary in terms of the „originality" of its religious articulation, and he specifically highlights the intriguing relationship between Catholicism and Calvinism in this country (especially the question of significant figures in Hungarian history who emerged from Calvinism). While discussing the modes of Russophobia, he also thematizes the fact that, despite the 1956 uprising, there is no Russophobia in Hungary.

Todd is often associated with Peter Laslett, who was his mentor at Cambridge regarding the thesis titled *Seven Peasant Communities in Pre-Industrial Europe*. Laslett—let us recall his famous book, which weighs the losses and gains of the Industrial Revolution: *The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age*—clearly had an influence on Todd. The emphasis by the author of *The Defeat of the West* on the ultimate significance of family structure, on the „patrilineal principle" (Todd), bears the marks of these influences. It is more than symptomatic that Todd's arguments about the „lonely West", which unsuccessfully waits for other countries to join it in condemning the aggression by Putin's Russia, further affirm this core thesis. In other words, many countries in the world follow the logic of the aforementioned principle—this is then at least one serious reason that prevents various non-Western countries from showing solidarity with the West, which imposes interventions regarding sexuality and promotes transsexuality under the banner of an imaginary progressiveness.

However, Todd does not stop at these observations: he adds that globalization, glorified by America under the leadership of Bill Clinton, is in fact a cunning mechanism of „economic exploitation" (Todd)—this deters non-Western countries from aligning with the West, which is competing (in vain) to disseminate economic sanctions. For Todd, who could be classified in many respects as a conservative, it can be said here that he is radical in the sense of emphatically highlighting the historical significance of „economic exploitation. Moreover, he sees lines

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmanuel_Todd.

connecting pre-1914 colonization and the machinery of globalization: although he does not cite Marxist authors, he references the founding figure of literature on imperialism, namely John Hobson.

Todd unequivocally makes it known that he draws elements of his approach based on an anthropological perspective, or as he puts it, through the „eye of an anthropologist". He expects anthropology to show sensitivity to the constitutive differences of the world—it is no coincidence that in his numerous critiques of the West, the accusation arises that, unlike America after World War II, which knew how to respect these differences, today's America (which should be the leading agent of the West) is no longer capable of doing so. It now deliberately seeks uniformity as an expression of superiority. But this reveals its weakness rather than its strength. The same America was expected to steer historical processes, but it is gradually losing its grip.

The Defeat of the West: after the dystopian predictions of Oswald Spengler in the second decade of the 20th century, it is difficult to shake the impression that any similar negative projection, at least in part, bears the stamp of the German's prophetic vision. However, Todd does not follow any cyclical pattern regarding the erosion of the West but introduces a dialectical move concerning Protestantism. He offers a picture in which the West becomes involved in its own defeat by gradually destroying its religious foundation—losing its epistemological bearings, failing to recognize the deep tendencies of the world, and ultimately, as the repeatedly mentioned war and the alignments of various states in the world convincingly show, becoming „isolated". Or, as Todd puts it: it can no longer „represent" the entire world, even though this is its fundamental ambition.

Todd is keen to show that, despite the West's self-understanding, its essence is not exhausted in the affirmation of liberalism. The fact that, for example, a (militaristic) Japan has become an integral part of the Western hemisphere is symptomatic.

The regression of the West is typically explained by either internal or external reasons. In summary, Todd leans more toward internal reasons. One of his key concepts in his various arguments is „zero". Thus, he speaks of a „state of religion that is zero" (*état religieux zéro*), „Protestantism that is zero" (*protestantisme zéro*), and „morality that is zero" (*moralité zéro*). It hardly needs to be added that all of this is an extremely negative assessment that opens a *horror vacui* for the West.

It is worth mentioning that Todd also frequently uses the term „neoliberalism"—the fact that he equates the state of „neoliberalism" with despiritualization justifies the comment that his phrase „liberal oligarchy" can be understood as a situation in which liberalism transforms into neoliberalism (one of Todd's characteristic moves is when he labels the Ukrainian constellation as a „synthesis between Sovietism and neoliberalism" (Todd).

Incidentally, it is at this point that we see Todd's moves engaging with Weber, more precisely introducing innovations in relation to his well-known narrative. Protestantism is indeed of crucial importance for the emergence of the West, but it has completely emptied itself, says Todd. That is, the arc of the rise and decline of Protestantism coincides with the rise and fall (defeat) of the West. Thus, an interpretation is outlined that, at one significant point, is identical to Hegel's explanation: Germany, due to the influence of the Protestant principle, was one of the states promoting universality in modernity. But it enters a regressive phase, as does the West as a whole.

Namely, Todd distinguishes different stages of religious dynamics, but his ultimate assessment is that, despite all today's rituals and invocations, Protestantism as the spiritual axis of the West is part of the past. More precisely, he operates with a three-part scheme regarding religion: „active", „zombie", and „zero" phases. He definitively writes the obituary for Protestantism („death of Protestantism", Todd), indicating that Todd diagnoses an „irreversibility" that has occurred. This assessment of his is strongly emphasized in the case of America as well; moreover, Todd delivers a verdict on the generally mistaken policies of Donald Trump, starting from his protectionism in economic policy to his policies toward Israel. Trump 1.0 did not convince Todd that Protestantism could overcome its „zero state". As for Trump 2.0, he could not comment on it in this book. That is, his pessimism regarding religious reconstitution is uncompromising in nature.

Todd's explanation always interprets Protestantism alongside education—an equally significant component in his explanations. The fact that the decline of America is reinforced by weaknesses in the proportion of engineers in that country, especially in relation to Russia, or the „overrepresentation of Asians" in the American system, the decline of WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant) culture, demonstrates Todd's intentions.

Somewhat unexpectedly, Todd recognizes several relevant parallels between the dynamics of Protestantism and „communism" (this is an imprecise term used by Todd, which should refer to *real socialism*). Regarding the relationship between communism and Protestantism toward education, he speaks *per analogiam* of their „obsession" (Todd). The focus on education produces a middle class[2] that is a source of fear and experiences constant discomfort in existing society—Todd does not offer any apotheosis of the middle class, which our era, in various forms, eagerly places at the forefront as an expression of desirable reality fabrication.

Todd's *non*-economic explanation regarding the fall of the Soviet Union (we are familiar with such explanations: there was not enough market rationality, there was no competition promoting rationality, etc.) highlights the emergence on the social scene of an „upper educated middle class" as an extraordinarily significant factor in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Educational processes, namely, inevitably create patterns of hierarchy between different types of education that are in tension with communist principles. Finally, what Todd calls a mere „dream" of today's Western thought—that an enlightened and self-reflective Russian middle class (which is morally appalled by the horrors of war and fears impoverishment) will eliminate Putin's regime, which is stuck in aggression—shows his clear distance from any idealization of the middle class. On the contrary, this class (and its upper echelon) has accepted his regime—moreover, Putin's disciplining of the oligarchy, which at one point felt omnipotent, prevents it from acting as an autonomous factor.

Furthermore, Todd emphasizes the fact that Protestantism widely opened the doors to the principle of equality, namely, considering the fact that everyone must be literate to have free access to the Bible. The realization of literacy is simply a prerequisite for Protestantism. However, here we encounter the presented parallel with „communism", which also places a strong emphasis on mass education as a guarantee of emancipation. This produces the fact that, despite all differences, both Protestantism and communism become entangled in similar contradictions.

[2] Todd also speaks of „educational underdevelopment" and, in an extended historical reflection, illustrates this with the example of the „overrepresentation of Jews" (Todd) within certain segments of the middle class.

Protestantism is both a religious. transformation that enables the expansion of nation-states, it is also the meeting point of „sexual puritanism" (Todd).

At the same time, Todd notes the presence and germ of primordial inequality and authoritarianism in Protestantism. He has in mind the fact that with the logic of predestination the established inequality between people is legitimized in advance. In addition, the seeds of authoritarianism can be found in the same framework — this allows Todd to recognize the hidden authoritarianism already in the very beginnings of the West. In the light of this explanation, he reaches the point that he shows the social configuration of Germany historically through the prism of authoritarian Protestantism: he claims that those parts of Germany that were influenced by Protestantism to a greater extent accepted Nazism. More precisely, Nazism occurs to a greater extent where Protestantism passes into a „zombie" phase — according to Todd's diagnosis, Protestantism reaches its regressive phase in the period between 1880 and 1930.

In conclusion, let's note the negative dialectic in the very Protestantism that made the West famous: namely, if Protestantism is the source of rising economic rationality, and the foundation for the „unbound Prometheus" (Landes), authoritarianism shines in all these phenomena — it is disguised in different ways, but inevitably returns to the scene.

Along with religious emptying, we must mention another term that has a strategic significance for Todd: *nihilism*. It is a term that has been vibrating at least since the end of the 18th century, but it was made famous by the German Nietzsche and the Russians in the 19th century. Interestingly, Todd's main source seems to be Russian nihilism after all.

As for the term itself, he treats it in two ways:

a) tendency towards „destruction" — here we understand the relevance attributed to war in this book; in it, nihilism comes to a special expression,

b) the destruction of the relevance of „truth", which is now losing support as a landmark.

Todd places these meanings of nihilism in the West's relations with Russia in the current war and identifies forms of nihilism in the „anti-Russian" position. Moreover, analyzing Ukrainian politics and social configuration, he comes to the same conclusion. Todd is, among other things, a defender of the nation-state, and he views with a great deal of suspicion European trends that contribute to the disintegration of the nation — the term „European nihilism" testifies to this.

But there are also some other situations when one operates with nihilism: for example, Todd and the American unreserved acceptance of Israel's policy is characterized by the functioning of nihilism. However, it seems that he concentrates his observations to a significant extent on the „zero" situation and complete nihilism in the sphere of sexuality: transgender orientation, which implies the possibility of interference in genetic determinations and in general the subordination of sexuality to the preferential structures of the subject, is for him the crowning act of nihilism. In any case, nihilism also has clear cognitive consequences: the self-blinding of the West, as well as another assessment of Todd, namely, „the incompetence of Western elites" is a consequence of this.

Of course, one could have expected that many interpreters would receive Todd's book with uneasiness and that he would receive the epithet of an intellectual who is an undisguised Western helper of the Russian president. Todd is certainly under the influence of wrong self-reflection: in certain places, as if looking for an alibi for his assessments, he explicitly claims that he acts only as a „researcher" who does not impose his assessments, but only collects material

that he considers important. *Defeat of the West* does not correspond to this self-understanding: this book would never have come to life without precisely such acts of judgment, which go far beyond the position of „researcher" who refrains from evaluations.

Pace Todd, this is a book that is organized on the basis of performative acts of judgments that are possibly accompanied by materials for research. Is it, for example, Todd's strong opposition to the European turn in Maastricht due to the course towards the weakening of the matrix of the nation really only a selection of material? Is the thematization of the euro as the embodiment of European nihilism just an expression of neutral research? Is agreeing with John Mearsheimer and his „realism", which (along with Jeffrey Sachs, an economist, once known as a strategist of the post-socialist transition) established himself as the most lethal critic of American foreign policy, just a selection of research material?

By the way, Todd hardly criticizes Russian social constellations at all. The only thing he analyses are the negative trajectories of the Russian demographic situation (in some interviews he even expresses admiration for certain effects of the Russian regime). For him, today is actually the place of a colossal confrontation between the „liberal oligarchy" (Todd) of the West, which is increasingly bothered by the uncertainty and contingencies of democracy, and the "authoritarian democracy" of Russia, which balances authoritarianism and democracy, but always with the goal of the superiority of authoritarianism. From Todd's perspective, the liberal platitude about populism is of little value: his critical addressees are Western elites who are the subject of renewed criticism, and the hint of populism is only an expression of their weaknesses. In a situation where Protestantism is brought to the „zero" situation, the meritocratic dynamic is doomed, and liberalism necessarily passes into the phase of oligarchy: America is a protoexample of this. After all, the „anthropological eye" of Todd could not be indifferent to the well-known research of Angus Deaton, which shows the degree of increase in the mortality of Americans between the ages of 45 and 54.

The position of Germany in Todd's considerations is interesting. We have already seen that it is given importance due to the importance of Protestantism for the West. In today's view, the characterization of Germany as a „machine society" (*société-machine*) stands out. Among the numerous analyzes of Germany's political and economic trajectories (social mobility, fertility rate, economic reforms during Schroeder's time, etc.), there is an assessment that illuminates the meaning of the metaphor of machine: German society functions without the „symbolic" horizons of the nation. Its apparent „economic power" without which it cannot do is without national boldness and nationally formulated goals (weakening in terms of the symbolic sphere is not only Todd's diagnosis; he uses different standard terms anyway such as atomization, etc.).

Here, Todd reaches for the division between „active" and „inert" nations: accordingly, Germany becomes the leader of Europe, but when it is only an „inert nation" (although it should be added here that for Todd, Russia does not stand out from the ranks of „inert" nations either; with this assessment, he explains Putin's emphasized caution regarding the mass mobilization of Russians). He also calls Angela Merkel's 2015 move to open the door to migrants simply „German hubris" (*"hubris allemande").*

But, despite numerous criticisms of German policy, and despite allusions to its hypocrisy, or considering the fact that Germany was powerless in terms of subordinating Europe to America, the reader in some places has the impression that some potentials of overcoming the finalized

state of nihilism are vibrating in Germany. Thus, Germany is still „semi-patrilineal" (with Japan), it is not individualistic like the Anglo-Saxon sphere, that is, it enables mediation between the level of individuality and communality. But whether this is enough to transcend „German hubris" that never ceases to exist, remains a question.

To conclude: Todd's unconventional actions are destined to achieve success, which is, of course, always a burden. Following his use of the term nihilism, we could qualify him as an anthropologist with Nietzsche's stamp. The author's large radius of movement, which ranges from various theoretical claims to polemical reflections on daily intellectual turmoil, makes him a candidate for an important witness of the epoch. In other words, *Defeat of the West* is predestined to be a bestseller. The book belongs to the series of those achievements that start from the fact that war is a special moment of catharsis and when the social sciences have to be extremely strained.

MEGJELENT!

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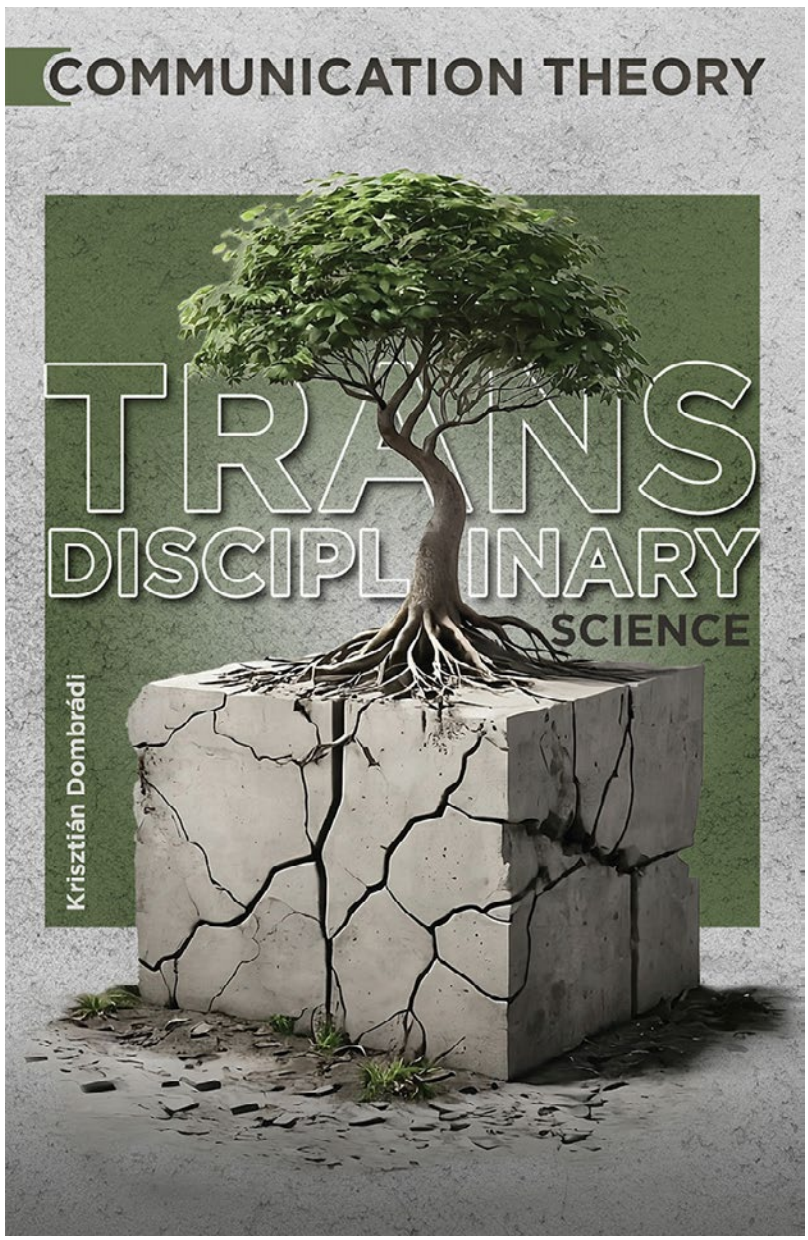

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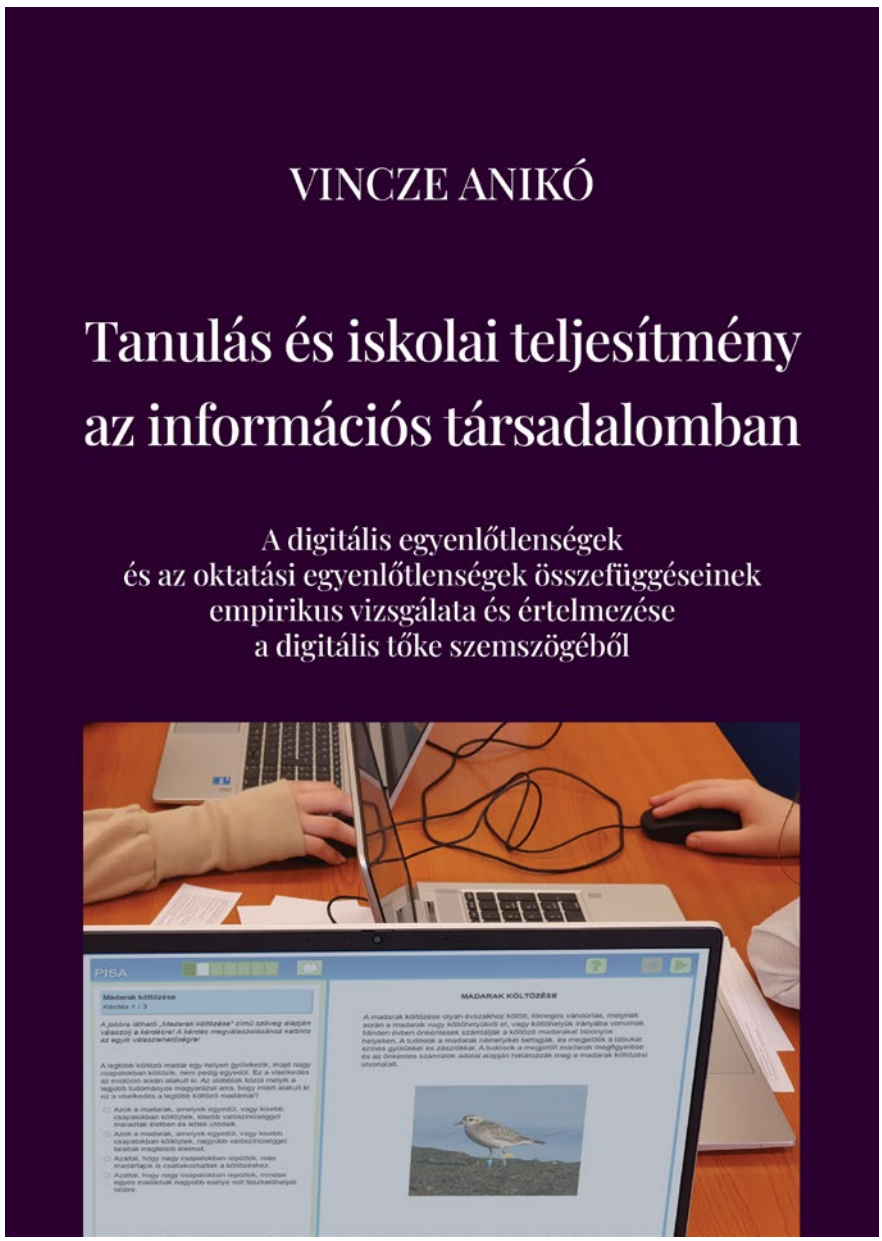

MEGJELENT!

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