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Social Capital, Diversity and Trust in Hungary: Two Case Studies

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As a contribution to the Social Situation Report 2007, the Terms of Reference for this paper was to produce a short literature review on the experience of "the relationship between diversity and the level of trust in communities" in Hungary. The question to be addressed was "does an increased level of diversity lower the level of trust among the community citizens?"

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question of how far diversity in Hungary may be connected to levels of trust in communities. It focuses on various analyses of two phenomena: first, the attitudes to the, albeit small, increases in foreign born nationals living in Hungary, secondly, the debate on the increasing differentiation of education in Hungary and asks whether this is seen as influencing patterns of trust. Both topics have been the subject of widespread comment and debate in Hungary, although without much systematic study so far.

1. Relationship between diversity and trust in the community

This paper addresses the question of how far diversity in Hungary may be connected to levels of trust in communities. We were unable to find any academic studies which addressed the relationship between trust and diversity in the terms outlined in the guidelines. We have tried to piece together various data sources and connect them to two ongoing debates, which in our view, touch this relationship between trust and diversity.

The diversity of nationalities and trust focuses on what analysts have made of attitudes to the, albeit small, increases in foreign born nationals living in Hungary. The second debate that we look at focuses on the increasing differentiation of education in Hungary and asks whether this is seen as influencing patterns of trust. It includes both the new types of non-state education institutions and the secondly, the phenomena of educational segregation, whereby certain schools, particularly in rural settlements, are regarded as Roma only schools. Both topics have been the subject of widespread comment and debate in Hungary, although without much systematic study so far. There was one high profile report which investigated the state of small schools in the country and which was one of the first to offer hard empirical data to some of these discussions.¹ For the authors, one of their key motivations was to counter some of the myths about rural schools. In the report, there was detailed discussion about the complex causes and types of segregation and we will relate this to our question of trust and diversity.

As covered in the earlier report on minority integration, the actual numbers of foreign nationals in Hungary has never been very high. In relation to the total population, the numbers of foreigners are a little over 1%. In 2006, the Office of Nationality and Immigration believed that there were approximately 43,000 foreigners with residency permits and a further 80,000 foreigners having settlement permits.² Of this total, 60,000 were Romanian, 12,000 Ukrainian and 8,500 were Chinese nationals.³

The numbers of people applying for Hungarian nationality has risen in the past few years, from just under 4000 in 2002 to over 9000 in 2005. In 2006, the numbers were just over 6500. The vast

1 Unfortunately, this report is not yet available in English. The full text can be found at <http://www.sulinova.hu/cikk.php?sess=&alsite=32&rovat=119&alrovat=&cid=2161> and the name of the report is Kistelepülések kisiskolái

2 This means that they are in effect seeking to regularize informal residency. The Office of Immigration and Nationality issues settlement permits to those who have been 'residing continuously and legally in Hungary as a way of life for more than 3 years'

3 Statistics sourced from the Hungarian Office of Immigration and Nationality <http://www.bmbah.hu/statisztikak.php>

majority applying for Hungarian nationality comes from Romania. Polls on attitudes towards these groups have consistently showed extremely high rates of acceptance, with only 4% claiming that they would not accept Hungarians from outside the country moving permanently into Hungary.

If the numbers applying for residency permits is included, then it is clear that there are neither huge numbers nor significant increases in the number of foreigners. Nevertheless, as documented by newspapers and research centers, attitudes towards foreigners have been hardening and have been connected to a rise in popular radicalism. To give one example, in recent scandal, it was reported that the government had a secret strategy document that included the consideration that, in order to balance the personnel deficit, the numbers of foreign nationals might need to rise from 1% to 10%. The leak was seized upon by one of the smaller political parties which claimed that the government was planning to bring in 1 million Chinese people, something that, according to the party's spokesman would be "in fundamental conflict with the interests of the Hungarian nation and culture."⁴

The social research centre, TARKI, carries out regular public opinion polls on changing attitudes towards different nationals settling in Hungary. It regularly finds high and increasing rejection rates for incomers from Romania, Russia, China, and Afghanistan. According to one poll from 2006, one-third of Hungary's residents would not allow any asylum seekers to enter Hungary. The pollsters also asked whether respondents would accept asylum claims from a minority called the Pirez and two-thirds said that they would not. The problem was that there is no such minority. When the pollsters first carried out the survey in June 2006, the rejection rate towards the Pirezians was 59%, but by February 2007, this figure had increased to 68%. According to the polling center, these rejections rates were highest among far left-wingers, those with low schooling living in villages and pensioners.⁵

A majority believes that Hungary faces a large increase in the numbers of foreign nationals entering the country. The fact that these fears don't relate to the current numbers is obviously not the main problem. The low levels of trust in the government and the increasingly polarized nature of party politics in Hungary, means that there are those willing to accept (and those willing to suggest) that current problems are connected to external forces. Coupled with what a recent poll found to be a widespread disillusionment with the nature of 'the changes', then such imposed diversification of the population might exacerbate problems of trust, at least towards the government. It is more difficult to say whether it might also worsen trusting relations between individuals.

Our second example focuses on education. Since restrictions on private schools were lifted in 1990, the number of private kindergartens, schools, vocational training centers and universities has increased steadily. According to the Summary of Hungarian Education 2006, in the 2004/2005 academic year there were 105 religious kindergartens and 165 religious primary schools and 154 foundation run kindergartens and 70 primary schools.⁶

In terms of their relative positions, the foundations are located throughout the educational system, catering for very young children up to private universities. Many follow alternative educational philosophies such as Montessori, Waldorf, or Rogers.⁷ In terms of geographical location the "religious

4 See for instance, 'Hungarians still closed off to refugees – Poll', The Budapest Times, July 24th 2006 <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/index.php?do=article&id=1923>

5 See TARKI report at <http://www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2007/kitekint/20070308.html>. Endre Sík, from TARKI, said the simultaneous rise in far left trends and xenophobia could be due to fears of deteriorating economic conditions. This survey on attitudes to asylum seekers was conducted in early June which coincided with announcements of new economic austerity measures.

6 National Institute for Public Education, www.oki.hu/oldal.php?tipus=kiadvany&kod=Jelentes2006. According to the Summary report, foundations play an especially significant role in vocational training high schools (from the age of 14 or 16), with 126 such foundation run institutions, compared with only 23 religious and approximately 700 state ones. Our focus here will mainly be on the institutions catering for younger pupils on the grounds that these represent a longer term investment on the part of the parents.

7 <http://alternativiskola.lap.hu/>

schools are relatively well spread over the whole country and in different types of settlements (including small towns), whereas the foundation schools are heavily concentrated to Budapest or the biggest cities.”

As far as we could find there were no recent studies that linked the rise of private education to social exclusion, although the theme of personal advancement and social mobility is a key theme in the market promotion of these new institutions.⁸ At the same time, there is an ongoing debate about educational differentiation, increased social distance and some policy interventions upholding the importance of locality in determining school choice.

The Centre for Educational Policy Analysis recently published a report drawing attention to the situation of small schools in Hungary.⁹ Usually located in rural areas, the research was driven by the need to investigate some of the myths surrounding rural schools, for example, that they offer very low levels of education, and that they were very expensive to maintain, particularly so in the context of declining numbers of pupils.

Within that study there was an interesting section on the importance of small schools as builders or holders of local social capital. The argument was that whilst local schools do play an important role in community relations, the danger was that this would be overstated with the result that it was very hard to debate reforms aimed at raising educational quality. In the absence of other public institutions and other independent private and civic actors,

“the existence of the institutes of primary education becomes a “question of life and death” for the settlements, which according to the authors of this study, results in “an obstinate and often irrational attachment to the institution”¹⁰

One of the key findings was that, in terms of educational value added, small rural schools fared no better nor worse than their urban counterpart, in some cases even performing better. Nevertheless, across Hungary there has been a clear pattern of increasing segregation within schools and between schools. The authors quoted from a previous research study that found “whenever the number of Roma students went up in any particular school, this was always accompanied by a gradual decline in the number of non-Roma students, with the growing probability that the institution would become a “ghetto school”.¹¹ Parents of non-Roma children regard “the spectacular rise of Roma students ..as a sign of a decline in quality and – especially when it comes to the parents with a higher level of education – as a powerful motive to take their children to another school.”¹² Figures from the last main census in 2001 showed that 23% of pupils in small villages commute to schools in nearby towns or larger villages.

The report did discuss many of the educational measures that have been brought in to counter the segregation of schools. There is not enough space to go into to all the measures and their impacts, save to say that the Hungarian government is regularly commended in international reviews for its legislative and policy initiatives, yet criticized at home for the lack of real impact. The greater integration of the Roma minority into education, the economy, and into wider public and political life in Hungary is a

8 For some earlier studies on social capital and education see Dimitrina Mihaylova, *Social Capital in Central and Eastern Europe: A critical assessment and literature review*, Policy Study series for the Center for Policy Studies, 2004, available at <http://cps.ceu.hu/polstud.php>

9 Kistelepülések kisiskolái

10 *ibid* p.45

11 *ibid* p.34

12 *ibid* “The willingness to enroll their children in a nearby school largely correlated with the parents’ level of schooling, in the case of the single-school villages, 37 per cent of the parents of commuting children have university or college education, and 20 per cent are skilled workers.

vast and ongoing work.¹³ In some ways, one finding of this report was that if diversity is considered co-ethnic education, then significant numbers of parents in areas of high numbers of Roma, sought less diversity for their children. The ability to commute to another school might well increase their confidence in the educational system. At the same time, does the rejection of the local Roma school per se have any profound influence on, from what polls regularly attest are the widely held negative views concerning the Roma minority?

In the previous system, save for the various political, cultural and sporting elites, there was less opportunity to select school places. Increasing numbers of private and religious educational providers in Hungary reflects the development of the free market and the numbers willing to pay for education. Whilst there might not be so much fear that this is a sign of increasingly disconnected social groups, a recent government action might have an important influence on schooling, at least for those with lower disposable incomes.

In summer 2006, the Ministry of Education announced that local schools containing both primary and secondary institutions would not be allowed to impose secondary level entrance exams on those in the primary school. Later in the year, the Ministry announced that for the 2007/2008 year, catchment areas for schools would have to be redrawn to ensure that not more than 25% of those coming from the most socially and economically deprived backgrounds would be placed in one school. At a policy level, this re-iteration of the privilege of locality echoes the approach of the Magdolna project where the free market, for want of a better scapegoat, is held to be undermining social cohesion and therefore, appropriate public policies should intervene.

Neither debate over increases in foreigners nor increasing educational differentiation was framed in terms of trust and diversity. However, the impact of these real and not so real changes was discussed in terms of social cohesion and the value of belonging to a group sharing certain common values. Cohesion on its own though might not be seen as so important that it can override other values such as free choice, economic growth or the pressing need to rejuvenate a run-down part of town. The Magdolna project might not have resulted in changes to the neighborhood that were to everyone's liking, but, at least in the eyes of some of its supporters, this was offset through proper consultation and ensuring that the benefits of development were shared and accessible.

13 See for example the various analyses of public opinion collected in the following report. Annotated bibliography on Roma issues in Hungary, focusing on the period between 1998-2006, prepared as background material for the workshop 'Roma in Hungary: Socio-economic Status, Human Rights Protection, and Migratory Dynamics', held at CEU, September 20, 2006 <http://cps.ceu.hu/reports.php>