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YOUTH AND CIVIL PARTICIPATION IN HUNGARY

Although Hungarian civil society had great opportunities after the political changes in 1990 for development and strengthening its positions in the social scenes, it is characterised by passivity and low rate of community participation.

This study aims to highlight the advantages of community participation for the younger generations. Then I will present what has characterized the civil sphere and young people's participation in communities since the 1990s.

THE ADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITIES

Taking part in communities can mean active participation in organised, formal communities and it involves informal self-organizations as well. Concerning the younger generation we can speak about non-formal communities in a higher proportion, therefore the forces attempting to organize the youth into a formal structure are very remarkable. Both organizations play an important role in the socialization of young people, but from the point of view of the chosen topic, formal organizations have greater importance. Taking part in formal organizations is not only beneficial for the individual but also for communities and for the whole society.

It can be ascertained that cooperation for common interest in formal communities can facilitate the ability to handle conflicts or to enforce one's interests and also contribute to acquire democratic attitudes and the need for consensus. In these communities the members of young generation can meet other people's opinion, they learn to listen to others and will be able to consider different aspects. These experiences can result in the increase of tolerance and empathy.

The participation in communities can contribute to the development or consolidation of solidarity, trust, initiative and responsibility. In these communities young people can experience the active (co-)operation as opposed to passive reception and also increase ability to enforce their interest. Obviously it is not a negligible aspect that participation in a community offers the security of the feeling of belonging somewhere and the opportunity to identify. (The identification patterns of a given community are highly important. E.g. in a deviant group this can direct young people towards a deviant career.)

The participation in youth organizations can help young people to find friends with similar interests, to contribute to positive changes in the community and develop their knowledge, skills, abilities and self-understanding. Moreover the participation can help them form an opinion and make it public, in addition their self-esteem and self-confidence might also increase (Bánszegi 2009).

The participation in formal communities plays a remarkable part in the development of young people's "civil-identity" (Glózer 2000). That is why we can refer to civil organizations as "schools of democracy" (Selle and Wollebaek, quoted by Nárai 2004). The results of a Norwegian research conducted in 1998 show that participation in communities strongly influences allegiance and has a positive effect on social relations and the development of trust, thus participation plays important role in creating social capital (Nárai 2004).

The membership of youth in organizational or formal communities has great importance, because young people who are in one of the most important stages of life from the point of view of the socialization process, can acquire the above skills and can gain experience, which might have a significant impact on their future life (Nárai 2004).

In many cases the only opportunity for young people to acquire democratic attitudes and patterns of democratic way of thinking or acting is through the membership in a formal community. Within the frames of education these skills often cannot be acquired and since most parents also lack such skills and way of thinking even families, that play one of the most important roles in socialization, are not capable to mediate them either.

TRENDS ABOUT THE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

We can state that members of younger generation principally seek individual ways for their individual success instead of collective acting forms. The researches of the '90s pointed out the lack of political interest and political inactivity of young people. They are characterized by political unconcern, social, political and communal passivity and rejection of formal organizations. According to researches the political interest and the demand on political activity varies even within the target age group. The younger the respondents were, the less they cared about politics. We can also appoint that the political sphere seems to be a distant, opaque world for young people, that they are not able to influence, believing that non-professional politics is ineffective, whereas they consider the prestige of professional politics so low that they do not want to engage themselves in the field (Gazsó and Laki 2004).

However, the lack of participation in communities generates the decrease of skills such as tolerance, empathy, cooperation and team work and have negative affects on the ability to enforce one's interest.

The report of "*Youth 2000*", "*Youth 2004*" and "*Youth 2008*" researches[1] conceive similar findings. The research data prove that the younger generation is characterized by low political and social activity. They have made the same statement concerning different dimensions, such as the participation in the elections or the membership in NGOs and political organizations (Laki, Bauer and Szabó 2001; Bauer and Szabó 2005; Bauer and Szabó 2009).

In relation to political activity a descending tendency can be observed in the 2008 research compared to the research carried out four years earlier. The 2008 research shows that only around one-third of the respondents would take part on an election due the time of the data collection (Bauer and Szabó 2009).

It cannot be overemphasized, that the passivity stated by the researches does not mean that certain factors could not make any change to activate larger groups. The typical unconcern of youth can be stirred by social, economical and political factors in a situate way. The young generation does not have the necessary behavioural patterns to respond to sudden shocks, partly because of their low rates of participation in communities. Young people do not have the ability to enforce their interest and also lack the forms of action with which they could express their opinion and influence actual events.

The change of regime put an end to many former youth organizations in Hungary and the nonprofit and civil organizations that continued to operate could only partly integrate and mobilize the younger generation. Although the number of youth organizations has been growing since 1995, their membership is gradually declining (Nagy and Székely 2008).

The various organizations and movements can mobilize and reach young people at such a low rate, that, based on the data of the "*Youth 2008*" research, only about one-tenth of the members of the 18-29 year old age-group took part on any events held by different organizations or movements, and only 6% of them were members of a youth organization (mainly religious, cultural or sports organizations). Characteristically, the membership rate in political organizations is even lower: approximately one percent of them are members of political organizations and about a quarter of them are familiar with a youth organization of some sort. We can observe that university students and graduates are overrepresented among the members. There is a gender-based difference as well: men are more likely to take part in organizations (Bauer and Szabó 2009).

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1   Countrywide researches with approximately 8000 respondents, which represent the 15-29 year old age group.

Similar results were found in a Hungarian research called "School and Society" conducted among high school students. The research was carried out by Eötvös Lóránd University[2] (Budapest) with the participation of the Department of Sociology on behalf of the University of Pécs. Some of the aims of the research were to survey the democracy image of secondary school students, and to examine how democracy works in schools, as well as to analyze the relation of young people to politics. The theoretical frame of the research was based on the well-known notion of political socialization. We treated political socialization as part of the process of socialization. Out of the main agents of the process (family, peer group, school, media) we focused on school in this research.

The data collection was carried out in five counties plus in the capital among 9th and 11th graders in secondary schools. The sample is representative to the type of school and to the grades. 5962 students filled in our questionnaire.

1. Table: Out of the following organizations which are the ones you would like to participate in or you currently participate in? (distribution shown in percentage)

Organizations	Would participate	Participate
charity	50.6	1.6
environmentalist	48.8	2.1
sports	46.7	13.8
preserving hungarian identity	37.0	2.4
human rights	34.4	1.0
traditionalist	24.5	2.7
counter-racist	22.7	1.8
student union	17.0	6.4
religious charity	12.8	1.9
political party	9.5	1.5

Despite the fact that relatively high level of activity potential was measured, there is a huge gap between the intended and the actual membership in organizations. Among the respondents 13.8% are members of a sport club and 6.4% are members of a student union. Other forms of organizational membership are negligible. On the contrary, the "desired" or intended participation rate is much higher: for example there are organizational forms, in which half of the students would love to participate. Charities, environmental organizations and sport clubs are the most popular among students. Characteristically, politics is the least popular field with young people; only the smallest proportion of students would want to be a member of a political party.

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2   Mihály Csákó was the leader of the "School and Society" research.

Besides the low rate of formal organizational membership, it is a noticeable tendency that young people spend less time in informal communities as well. The majority of schedule and leisure-time related researches do not differentiate various activities based on whether they are carried out alone or in a community, therefore in case of sports it is a factor that is impossible to ascertain. But there are still some detectable trends. According to the research data of "*Youth 2004*", 53% of young people stay at home at weekends too, and in 2008 the percentage of those young people who spend their spare time at home, mainly watching TV, increased further (Bauer and Szabó 2005, 2009).

The studies mentioned above also confirm that the younger generation spend most of their time on watching television or in front of the computer, and the time they spend with friends or acquaintances, with people from their own age group dropped to the second place. We can also establish that students are less willing to participate in communities and social events as their age increases.

A 2005 research conducted in Pécs also demonstrated the above findings. The 15-29 year old respondents spent most of their spare time watching TV, and the more free time they had, the more time they dedicated to television. Both this and the above "*Youth 2004*" research highlight the phenomenon that watching TV is such an important part of the lives of young people that for them it is no longer a leisure activity but almost a binding task. Among other reasons, it is because currently running series, reality shows, movies and contests are such an important aspect of everyday public discourse at school, that without knowing these it is more difficult for young people to integrate into the community (Kákai and Szabó 2005).

Therefore NGOs that provide meaningful leisure opportunities for young people are of great importance. Those young people who lack the financial resources and cannot afford the different market opportunities of spending free time and the trendy forms of entertainment do not have much chance to do useful leisure activities. The recreational activities offered by civil organizations may play a role in preventing crime, drug abuse or unhealthy behaviour, because they offer meaningful and entertaining activities. With the help of these organizations young people can not only learn how to spend their leisure time in a useful way, they might have a positive effect on organizing their schedule, which they can also benefit from, even in adult age.

CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS IN HUNGARY

In Hungary, the development of civil society has had several sudden stops. The process of achieving middle class status was set back in the beginning of

the Turkish dominion. In consequence the conditions of strengthening civil organizations emerged late in our country.

Also both World Wars were breakpoints in the development of civil society, and later, during the Communist regime, even the operation of previously established non-governmental organizations was eliminated. The terms that made possible for civil organizations to develop and to strengthen did only appear with the change in regime in 1989 (Pavluska 1999).

Since the change in regime not only the number of nonprofit organizations has increased at a significant rate, but also their social and economic role. In spite of the booming development from the change in regime, and the positive trends ever since, a strong, unified nonprofit sector could not be achieved in Hungary until now.

According to the data of the Central Statistics Office (KSH), 64 925 organizations operated in Hungary in 2008. Three-fifths of these worked as joint non-profit social organizations, while two-fifths of them operated in forms of foundations. More than 15% of all non-profit organizations function as leisure or hobby organizations, while 10-15% of them are active in the field of education, sports, and culture (*Statistical Review* 2009).

YOUTH CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS

Naturally the membership in civil society organizations is not only important regarding the youth, but the unique and specific characteristic of concerns for youth makes it a prominently important task. They can be characterized by a lower ability to enforce their interests than older people since they have significantly less experience in this area. They prefer informal communities opposed to formal organizations, and compared to the older age groups they can be characterized by higher rates of social, political, and communal passivity.

The interpretation of youth participation has very wide frames. On one hand it can include different programs run or advertised by an organization on the other hand it is possible that young people are involved in decision-making processes as well. Civil organizations might also help young people to contribute actively to the development of their settlement by taking part in the preparation of communal decisions or in the actual decision-making process.

All participation forms have significant positive implications concerning the young generation as well as the whole society.

It is difficult to find accurate information about the number of youth civil organizations operating in our country, because the classification of organizations is based on the activity not on the target group.

According to the data published by the „*Youth 2004*" research and the Central Statistics Office in 2005, 4 percent (2061) of the nonprofit organizations are youth organizations. It can be ascertained that the average income of youth organizations is significantly lower than the average income in the civilian sector. In comparison to the 17 million HUF average, these organizations have an average income of just 7.5 million HUF. Youth organizations typically function in the form of foundations or associations (Nagy and Székely 2008). According to the analysis of the regional youth in the Southern Transdanubia region, in *Baranya* County 10.8%, in *Somogy* County 16.8% and in *Tolna* County 8.4% of social organizations work for aims related to children, young people or students (Makkos, Kátai, Patai and Horváth 2005).

The distribution of youth organizations in the country shows a great variety on regional and subregional level as well. Unfortunately, the typical trend is that small, underdeveloped areas with poorer municipalities host the lowest number of youth organizations, even though in these settlements there would be a great need for the social development of young people, and for the increasing the power of municipalities to keep the young generation within their zone.

More than one third of the organizations (37%) operate in the Central Hungarian region, mostly in the capital. The remaining organizations are approximately equally distributed throughout other regions.

2. table: The regional distribution of Youth NGO

Region	1995	2000	2005
Central Hungary	36%	36%	37%
Central Transdanubia	9%	8%	8%
Western Transdanubia	9%	8%	8%
Southern Transdanubia	8%	9%	9%
Northern Hungary	9%	11%	11%
Northern Great Plain	12%	13%	13%
Southern Great Plain	17%	16%	14%

Source: Nagy and Székely (2008: 133)

The vast majority of organizations are operating in cities, while only one-fifth (22%) can be related to the activities of small towns. 'Ordinary cities' are highly relevant among the cities, and their number outweighs those operating in county towns and in the capital (Nagy and Székely 2008).

SUMMARY

We can state that young people choose individual ways to aim their personal success instead of collective acting forms. The lack of participation in communities leads to the decrease of tolerance and empathy, and reduces the ability to enforce interests or to cooperate and act together for the reason of the common aim.

From the aspect of socialization it would be important for the youth to take part in various communities, but the non-profit and civil organizations could only partly integrate and mobilize the younger generation.

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