Balance Sheet: Disadvantaged Social Groups in Hungary in 2007

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in Hungary in 2007

2007 – European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

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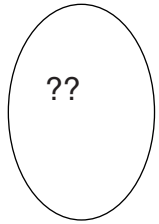
Edited by Magda Kovács Kósa and Andrea Pető



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Mrs. Magda Kósa Kovács

Preface
2007—The Year of Equal Opportunities for All

The great figures of Hungarian social policy, the men and women who inspired me to become a politician, endeavoured to identify and separate the various functions of social policy with a view to defining the strategic goals. It was the sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge, however, who convinced me that social policy should never be reduced to "poverty policy". In recent years, the concept of equal opportunities has received increasing emphasis both at the European level and in Hungary, offering new possibilities to both individuals and groups, based on individual effort and social support.

It was at the time of the political changes of 1989/90 that an equal opportunities strategy emerged as a priority in my work. It became a concrete task when thirty-three MPs on the left of Hungarian politics had to devise a social strategy for the future of society. Judit Csehák and I worked together on elaborating this programme, the realisation of which was given little chance after 1994. At the time, the debate was not about the levels of expenditure, but concerned our view that statutory benefits should not be done away with in the long term, even though the principle of individual entitlements—means-testing—could be an important means of restoring balance in the system in the short term. As time passed, the "poverty policy" that had been pushed aside was

seen in a new light; as the economic transition proceeded, so the gap between people who had prospered and social groups threatened with social exclusion widened. We knew that equal treatment was a prerequisite for preventing exclusion, and that people had to have similar life chances and opportunities if social integration was to be achieved. Since I became a member of the European Parliament, all of this has meant a new challenge in a different dimension. For this reason I felt that the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All would be a good occasion to restate our ideas and beliefs—perhaps now from a wider perspective but still keenly aware of the fate of individuals.

2007 is the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. Early on in my career, a leading politician told me that the sole purpose of celebratory or commemorative days, weeks or years is to anaesthetise the public's conscience. There is much truth in what he said. Even a tested politician feels a bitter taste when, having prepared for and anticipated the European Year of Workers' Mobility (2006), the celebratory year begins with the news that half of the old member states (Denmark, Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg, France, The Netherlands and Austria) are to extend their restrictions on workers from the new member states.

Words and actions—during the past three years (one year of happy innocence: the period of observer status, and then two years of EU membership) I have frequently compared and contrasted political statements with political actions, the decision-making commitment of various political groups and their willingness to act. The picture varies—and it is not always a favourable one. I would argue, and I can almost compellingly prove it in some fields, that the most obvious fault line of non-equal treatment (according to Orwell, the equal and the more equal) runs between the old and new member states. We have known in East Central Europe for a long time that discrimination, disadvantage and social exclusion are cumulative risks. This is, sadly, a regional historical feature.

I do not expect or believe that the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All will resolve all the problems facing Europe, our fractured and divided continent. I do not even know if we will manage to form a consensus on eradicating the discrimination that underlies the inequalities. Even so, the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All does allow or even compel us to examine ourselves. We must look at what is happening and what is going wrong. We should admit to our past mistakes and create at least a chance for opportunities in the not too distant future.

This was the motivation for this book. Political intent gave rise to the book, and experts have written it. It is intended not just for experts in the field but also for European politicians who are working—through their actions—for a social Europe.

As we were preparing for the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, we noticed how the various types of discrimination—the draft European Constitution mentions 17 different types—and the various forms of inequality are not of equal importance, weight or interest to the public. Indeed, in certain rather neglected areas, there are several time bombs.

For me personally, the biggest surprise was to see just how little European Union politicians and officials know about Roma in our region. They seemed to have learnt nothing from the case of the Zámoly Roma in Strasbourg in 2000, from the wall of separation in the Czech Republic, or from the mass migration of Slovakia's Roma seeking prosperity in the old member states. In spite of such news events, in the old member states—and particularly in France and Spain—a romantic picture of Roma, recalling the young Maxim Gorky, lives on: a free and nomadic people who do not want to settle or perform normal work—and who must therefore "be settled" and integrated into society—linguistically, socially and in terms of employment. Many times we have had to describe and explain at length how, in our region, the horrors of inequality and deprivation

collect at the bottom of society among the most impoverished inhabitants of the poorest regions—many of whom are Roma. And when the eyes of our partners in dialogue brighten with interest, their first comment is usually, "You mean, they're like our immigrants!"

The parallel is, of course, exaggerated and inaccurate, but we know that, seen from space, Europe is just a tiny blob—and that the average American high school student knows nothing about the old continent. An analysis of the historical differences in integration is not our most urgent task. On the other hand, raising awareness that equal opportunities, cohesion and social inclusion entail different priorities in the various member states, and that the distances to be covered and the obstacles facing us differ greatly—this would be a very beneficial outcome of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All.

There are, of course, political reasons for the cautious approach to national and ethnic minorities: for instance, if asked, the French would find it difficult to explain why France—after several decades—has still not ratified the European Charter for Minority Languages. The Spanish, in addition to the Basque problem, carry with them the ambitions of their linguistic minorities for equality, including the demands of the Catalans that their language be recognised in the European Parliament—a cause of some embarrassment to the president of the European Parliament, himself a Catalan. In the Baltic states, the situation of the Russians living there—who now form minorities—has become a matter of European concern, even though national politicians in all member states reject community interference in this area of policy. Of course, we are well acquainted with the underlying reasons; we know that the French made just one exception on the path to the equality of minority languages, but we also know that the special status of Alsace was a special condition of Franco-German reconciliation. Spain's minority problems, which the country has "suffered" for long decades, may reach a possible solu-

tion through the policies of a more tolerant government. The fate of the "Baltic Russians" will be resolved only in the course of a historical reconciliation. The problems faced by Roma in Europe bear merely a superficial resemblance to those listed above. Such problems are not just the concerns of an ethnic minority, but also involve complex social factors.

In light of the above, it is an achievement in itself that Roma have appeared—as a minority deserving special assistance and support—in the political rhetoric and decision-making of the European institutions. Since the EU enlargement, parliamentary documents have been drawn up. The twenty-four-member Hungarian delegation includes two Roma, both of whom are women. Lívia Járóka's proposal on Roma women received considerable attention from other MEPs—many of whom, however, realised the dramatic dimensions of the Roma time-bomb for the first time.

Reducing gender inequality remains a key issue of equal opportunities. Of course, even in Brussels, one cannot win in the popularity stakes (for honest politicians, this will never be a goal) by drawing attention to the rare but real cases where the equality of men is just as much a human right as is our equality—the equality of women. But if we are not fair in this, then we should not be surprised by the recurring flights of wit of those who are reluctant to support gender policy because they regard positive action as a "soft" form of discrimination. Thus, there is a nascent European consensus that when weighing up the legislative, executive, budgetary and human rights aspects of equal opportunities, one should at least tack on in parentheses gender equality and—it would seem—the equality of people with disabilities. Faced with objections that across-the-board action will not benefit groups dependent on two forms of support, we generally receive a rather confused response. Have we failed? I do not know. We have certainly made sure that even without a full list of disadvantaged groups (sometimes it is there, but more often it is absent) most EU documents

will now include the wording "and other socially and regionally disadvantaged groups."

Here I must mention an additional and growing fault line that is even more worrying to Europe than the impoverishment of groups struggling with social disadvantages. To say that Europe is ageing has become a cliché. It is an indisputable fact, and the trend is unlikely to be reversed in the foreseeable future. Less evident, however, is why this is making European decision-makers uneasy. Let us not be naïve; clearly, the agitation does not just stem from an anxiety about the fate of Europe's older people. A fall in the number of young people entering the jobs market sets limits on economic growth, while older people—many of whom are living longer—wish to see new social services, additional budgetary spending and a change in public attitudes. Reflecting the desire for growth and the humanitarian exigency, the demographic strategy incorporates what has become known as inter-generational solidarity, the significance of which will grow as the real value of pensions declines and as it becomes increasingly likely that older people will be unable to live in dignity without significant assistance from society. I hope that another European-regional volume will be published about and for them in the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All.

We have now arrived where we started. The new member states have brought greater poverty into the European Union; their progress will be even more difficult than before. Social polarisation has destroyed a rather mediocre quality of life which nevertheless provided a secure existence for many people. People nowadays only remember that there were no homeless, there was no unemployment, the Roma could work. We only understood later that we all had paid the price of this relative security, and unequality had survived state socialism.

I have no intention of playing the regional apologetics game in Brussels. But if people are to understand us, they must know who we are. They must know that European

policies are cutting away, with the sharpness of a surgeon's scalpel, at the fabric of our society. They need to know that the future desires of people and what they can bear at present, are not just shaped by the situation at hand and the real level of threat but by an expectation (derived from their own memories and the collective experience)—an expectation and a demand that nobody be left alone in sickness, in poverty, in adversity.

In our part of Europe, people still turn to the state, to government, and to local authorities when they need help. Civil society and the voluntary sector are still weak. In Brussels, the strongest lobby organisations represent older people—e.g. FERPA (Fédération Européenne des Retraités et Personnes Agées) and AGE (the European Older People's Platform)—or women. Other discriminated groups with lobby organisations in Brussels are people of different sexual orientation. Their ability to exert pressure is reflected in EU documents. The efforts of individual MEPs are often vital to the process of establishing equal opportunities: recognition of sexual diversity would not be where it is today without the effective campaigning of my fellow MEP, Michael Cashman. Demographic and labour market factors have turned the issue of older people into one of the most pressing concerns of European policy, but it is civil society organisations that have ensured that the human rights dimension is included in policy-making in this field. Without the mobilising efforts of AGE, the declaration on preventing violence against older people would not have received the necessary number of votes (almost four hundred!).

Politicians, decision makers, social policy experts and NGOs—the latter having the greatest future potential, may regard this book as an appeal for joint action and for mutual understanding. Our aim was not to add to the voluminous literature on disadvantaged social groups. Instead, we wanted to show that European policy-makers will only be excused for their mistakes and valued for their successes if

they base their decisions on a down-to-earth reality—and if they see, in this reality, unique and precious individual people.

The authors have devoted their lives to their work—some for a longer time, some (the younger ones) for a shorter time—so that they might go from the mainstream of society and politics to those groups in society who cannot change without outside help and who are the (potential) victims of tectonic shifts in Hungarian society. The book cannot mention every danger and every individual menaced by inhumanity. It is a selective publication, but the lessons are hopefully far reaching.

The Táncsics Foundation understood our purpose and offered its support. This book is an expression of our hope that, alongside the ceremonial speeches and award presentations, the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All will be above all a year of dutiful work, thereby receiving the public's attention and willingness to help.

All the best for the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All!

Budapest, September 4, 2006

Magda Kovács Kósa

Dávid Kardos

Equal Treatment and Equal Opportunities in European and Hungarian Law

This chapter explores the connections between equal treatment and equal opportunities in European and Hungarian law as part of a historical continuity.

EQUAL TREATMENT IN HUNGARIAN LAW

Prior to the political changes of 1989/90, the legal background of equal opportunities in Hungary was limited to employment and gender equality. According to the ideology of the communist state, poverty did not exist. (Income inequalities were indeed smaller under communism than they were after 1989.) The communist regime did not acknowledge the existence of disadvantaged social groups, or it did so only partially. There were no segregated schools, but in their records, teachers often placed the letter "C" by the names of pupils of Roma *(cigány)* descent. Meanwhile the public perceived people with disabilities merely as a group requiring special health services; such people were often "hidden away" in residential homes, out of the public's eye. The various nations in the Soviet camp lived in isolation from one other, and so migration in its usual sense was impossible.

Positive discrimination was not alien to the communist legal system, but the benefits provided by "statist feminism" in effect deprived women of the opportunity to freely choose their life strategy. The system of quotas, which the communist regime hoped would increase women's participation in politics, backfired after 1989.[1]

Many years had to pass before the benefits could be adjusted to socially accepted actions and life situations, and were available to both men and women.

In the course of the round-table discussions of 1989, which prepared for the political transition, a very different aspect of human rights became the primary focus. Understandably, the negotiating parties were interested first and foremost in freedom of opinion and speech, as well as strong legal guarantees for personal freedoms. It was only as a result of the country's rapid economic transition that lawmakers became aware of the importance of problems relating to gender equality. The collapse of the inefficient branches of industry left more than a million people out of work. Those who were still in work or who managed to find new jobs saw their social provisions cut by the new owners of industry. From a situation of almost full employment, the female employment rate declined by almost forty percent. (This decline was interpreted by some as reflecting the wishes of women.) The thrust of legislation was therefore directed once again at employment as well as at offering protection for people who changed or lost their jobs. Such legislation targeted, in particular, women—the social group that was most at risk under the new circumstances. Consequently, numerous exemplary elements were incorporated into Hungarian law, such as job protection for pregnant women, benefits for women with small children or breastfeeding children, extra holidays, etc.

[1] Andrea Pető, „A magyarországi női politizálás rövid története és elméleti kérdései" [A Brief History of and Theoretical Issues of Women's Politics in Hungary], in *Nők a pályán. Közéleti tudnivalók politizáló nőknek*, ed. Márta Bonifert Szigeti (Budapest: Nők a Valódi Esélyegyenlőségért Alapítvány, 2003), 9–32.

The main aspects of the ban on discrimination were incorporated into Article 70/A of the amended Hungarian Constitution,[2] which states: "The Republic of Hungary shall ensure human and civil rights for everyone within its territory without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, creed, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." For a long time, however, this constitutional regulation was only actually applied by means of the Labour Code, which required evidence to be presented and permitted punitive measures.

For ten-twelve years prior to Hungary's accession to the European Union, the ban on discrimination had been present in several branches of Hungarian law, including the Civil Code,[3] the Labour Code,[4] the Public Education Act,[5] the Health Act,[6] as well as in several laws relating to certain groups, such as the Minorities Act[7] and the Disabled Persons Act.[8]

Although such legislation listed the ban on discrimination among the fundamental precepts, nevertheless the absence of a proper definition or sanctions[9] prevented the development of a culture of equal treatment in both judicial practice[10] and ordinary life.

In order to strengthen a culture of equal treatment, several legislative bills were submitted to the Hungarian Parliament. Finally, in 2003, comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation was adopted.[11] The Equal Treatment

[2] Act XX of 1949 on the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary.
[3] Sections 8 and 76 of Act IV of 1954.
[4] Section 5 of Act XXII of 1992.
[5] Section 4/A of Act LXXIX of 1993.
[6] Section 7 of Act CLIV of 1997.
[7] Section 3(5) of Act LXXVII of 1993.
[8] Section XXVI of 1998.
[9] With the exception of the Civil Code and the Labour Code, the legal regulations do not contain sanctions.
[10] A lack of cases meant that the courts had no experience concerning the ban on discrimination.
[11] Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities.

Act's general ban on discrimination reflects an awareness among lawmakers that, owing to social prejudice, specific laws protecting groups at risk are sometimes opposed or resisted by society. The act thus prohibits discrimination in all areas of life, giving particular emphasis to six sectors: employment, social security, health, housing, public administration, use of goods and services. These areas are subject to specific, more detailed regulations.

In accordance with European rules, the act regulates direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, and instruction to discriminate or harass. It also defines unlawful segregation and retribution.

In terms of its scope, however, the Hungarian legislation does not conform completely with the European Directives. In the areas they cover, the directives apply to all legal entities and private persons in both public and private realms. The Hungarian legislation, however, applies to private persons only under certain circumstances.[12] This is because the objective scope of Hungarian legislation is far wider than that of the European Directives.[13]

In line with the European Directives, the act permits, under Article 7(2), exemptions where they are reasonably justifiable. Moreover such exemptions are permitted even in cases of direct discrimination—where they are not permitted by the European Directives.

[12] Section 5 of Act CXXV of 2003: In addition to the entities listed in Article 4, the following persons shall observe the principle of equal treatment in respect of the relevant relationship: a) those who make a proposal to persons not previously selected to enter into contract or invite such persons to make an application; b) those who provide services or sell goods at their premises open to customers; c) self-employed persons, legal entities and organisations without a legal entity receiving state aid, in respect of their relationships established in the course of their utilisation of such state aid, from the time when the state aid is utilised until the competent authorities can audit the utilisation of the state aid in accordance with the applicable regulations; and d) employers in respect of employment relationships and persons entitled to give instructions in respect of other relationships aimed at employment and relationships directly related thereto.

[13] András Kristóf Kádár, "Diszkriminációellenes törvény: új intézmények a magyar jogrendszerben" [The Anti-Discrimination Law: New Institutions in the Hungarian Legal System], *Belügyi Szemle,* 2004, no. 2–3.

The act provides wide-ranging opportunities for the application of law and legal protection, since citizens whose rights are breached may seek legal remedy from the Equal Treatment Authority[14] or from the public agency responsible. However, such wide-ranging legal protection can have two negative effects. First, given their lack of expertise in the field of equal treatment, public agencies may make erroneous decisions. If such decisions are not then appealed, this could result in the development of bad practice, thereby obstructing court proceedings in the future. Second, it becomes impossible to monitor cases of equal treatment statistically. This prevents an analysis and evaluation of the data and the drawing of conclusions concerning the direction of future legislation.

Unfortunately, aside from examining individual complaints, the Equal Treatment Authority may only initiate an inquiry under very limited circumstances. Indeed, the authority can only initiate an inquiry if a petitioner proves that discrimination has taken place. Further, the act does not allow civil society organisations to petition the authority in public interest proceedings on behalf of certain groups.

To ensure that infringements of the law are exposed even when a violated party fails to initiate proceedings, the act does permit, for the sake of public interest, a lawsuit to be initiated, under the Civil Code or the Labour Code, by the public prosecutor, the equal treatment authority, a civil society organisation or an interest representation body.

Although the equal treatment authority was only recently established, nevertheless the number of complaints has risen rapidly.[15] This is particularly important, because

[14] When debating the Act on Equal Treatment, the Hungarian Parliament could not agree on the establishment of a national authority as foreseen by Article 13 of the Racial Equality Directive. Thus the act lays down merely the powers and independence of the authority, while authorising regulation of the authority to be carried out in a subsequent government decree. The Hungarian government adopted detailed rules relating to the authority and its proceedings in Government Decree No. 362/2004 (26 December) of 22 December 2004.

efforts to combat discrimination will only be effective if the law is properly enforced. It is unfortunate that the equal treatment authority operates with a staff of twelve, instead of a planned staff of fourty.[16] In light of the growing number of clients and the fact that the authority can impose individual fines of up to HUF 6 million, the authority seems to be understaffed.

Hungary and the other accession states joined the process in 2002. A Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM) was drafted in 2003. In accordance with the terms of the memorandum and the above-mentioned priorities, and having analysed the situation in Hungary, the Committee against Social Exclusion drafted the National Action Plan for the period of 2004 to 2006.

The European Commission evaluated the National Action Plans of the new member states in its Joint Report on Social Integration, which was based on the reports of independent national experts. In its 2005 report,[17] the commission concluded that, despite the community programme and the efforts of member states, many people were still living on the margins of society and that, consequently, Europe still faced many great challenges. Global competition, the effect of new technologies, and the aging of society will shape policy ideas in the long term. Meanwhile, weak economic growth, high unemployment and social inequality are problems that need to be resolved in the short term.

An informal meeting of EU heads of state and government, held at Hampton Court in October 2006, addressed the means of preserving European social protection systems in light of the challenges of globalisation and attempted to find solutions to such challenges. Supported by the commission, participants proposed a strengthening of measures aimed at economic growth, the creation of jobs, and enhanced co-ordination at the European level.

[15] The authority received 491 petitions in 2005 but 475 petitions in the first half of 2006—which suggests a doubling of the number of applications in just one year.

[16] By way of comparison: the parliamentary commissioner for civil rights and his deputy had a staff of 48 in 2005; the parliamentary commissioner for data protection had a staff of 42.

[17] Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Integration COM(2005), 14.

The European Parliament emphasised in its most recent report[18] on the European Social Model, which was adopted by a great majority,[19] that the social model, despite the lack of uniformity, is an important value in Europe; its preservation requires the restoration of balance between economic growth and social solidarity. The European Parliament has thus indicated that although it may agree with the commission on the need for a financial reform of social protection systems in light of demographic changes, globalisation, technological developments, and current unemployment and economic growth rates in the EU, this does not mean that millions of European citizens should be doomed to poverty and exclusion. The report also underlines the need for effective means of eliminating poverty traps, in order to avoid the long-term exclusion of certain social groups.

The European Parliament has further emphasised the consistent application of the principle of non-discrimination in social policy, as integration is a tangible form of social policy.

THE FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE AND HUNGARY'S NEW DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The adoption of the financial perspective hung over the European Union like the "sword of Damocles" after French and Dutch voters rejected the European Constitution. Many feared that divisions among the member states could imperil the functioning of the European Union. There was discord both in the council and among the various institutions. In the council, net contributor member states sought

[18] Proinsias De Rossa, and José Albino Silva Peneda (A6-0238/2006), *A European Social System for the Future.*

[19] The European Parliament adopted the report by 507 to 113 votes, with 42 abstentions.

to diminish the budget, while the new member states battled for an increase in overall funding, while seeking to ease conditions for the spending of funds. In opposition to the compromise adopted by the council during the British presidency (which replaced the Luxembourg compromise of 1.12 percent of GNI with a figure of 1.045 percent of GNI and introduced more flexible terms of funding management), the European Parliament wished to secure sufficient funding for a properly functional European Union. In the end, after an increase of 4 billion euros, the institutions signed an agreement fixing the main amounts of the financial perspective.

Accordingly, within the framework of the EU's cohesion policy, Hungary is to receive 22.4 billion euros between 2007 and 2013. Under the New Hungary Development Plan, these funds will be used primarily to increase employment, promote long-term growth, and implement public sector reform. A horizontal objective is regional and social cohesion.

Owing to domestic structural problems, the Hungarian government faces the dilemma of whether to spend EU funds in a more concentrated manner on fewer areas or to allocate resources in a proportionate manner in as many areas as possible.

In its present form, the New Hungary Development Plan seems to indicate that the Hungarian government wishes to concentrate resources on the economy, employment and restructuring. While such an approach is understandable, the resultant economic growth may fail to reach all sections of society. Indeed, it may deepen the existing chasm between rich and poor.

This applies in particular to Roma, who since the political changes of 1989/90 have not benefited proportionately from Hungary's economic growth; on the contrary, they are the losers of the transition. Even now the situation of Roma in society, including its regional aspects, is difficult to cope with. For this reason, their inclusion in the process of social

cohesion is vital, because maintaining the status quo is not a sustainable financial option.

In addition to the conceptual problem, one should also mention that the section within the New Hungary Development Plan dealing with social cohesion and equal opportunities fails to precisely define the terms equal treatment, equal opportunities, and the ban on discrimination. Indeed, it treats them synonymously. As regards the three objectives listed in the section—a reduction in social inequality between women and men, an improvement in the situation of people living with disabilities, and a decline in the social exclusion of Roma—the Development Plan fails to distinguish between the special social circumstances of the above disadvantaged groups and the difficulties facing them as a result of discrimination. In light of such sloppiness and the Development Plan's uniform approach to diverse groups, it is questionable whether funds can be used in a targeted manner. A further potential weakness of the Development Plan is the lack of tangible objectives and completion dates—which makes it difficult to measure results.

REGULATION OF THE VARIOUS FIELDS:

The situation of Roma

With the enlargement of the European Union by ten new members, Roma became the largest minority in the EU. Roma live spread out across Europe, but particularly in the new member states, including Hungary. According to surveys, most Roma live on the margins of society. They suffer multiple disadvantages for several reasons: they live in impoverished regions where unemployment is high, standards of public services (education and health) are poor, and housing conditions are inappropriate. For such reasons, the level of education among the Roma population is lower than average, unemployment is far higher than average, and

healthcare provision is extremely poor (*The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*—European Commission, 2004). A further problem, affecting above all the new member states, is the placement of Roma children in special (remedial) classes or schools, which are normally reserved for children with learning difficulties *(European Anti-Discrimination Law Review)*.

With the accession of the new member states, a critical juncture was reached in EU legislation. There was a need to address the special problems of the ethnic minorities by altering the priorities and targeting resources more accurately. For decades, the directives relating to equal opportunities have made reference only to women and people with disabilities. In the past year, however, both at a conceptual level and in the framework decisions, Roma have been included wherever this had been appropriate. Having recognised that most Roma are unable to cope with such multiple disadvantages, the commission seeks to improve their situation by means of the EU.

Reflecting the complexity of the situation, the commission has formulated comprehensive recommendations[20] at European, national and civil society levels. For the reasons stated above, however, these recommendations will only have chance of being implemented if budgetary efforts are made during the period of 2007 to 2013.

People living with disabilities

In the European Union, 14.5 percent of the population in the old member states and 25 percent of the population in the new member states live with some kind of disability. In everyday life, disability can give rise to various forms of discrimination, particularly in the field of employment. In recognition of this problem, the Employment Directive

[20] Such recommendations are not legally binding, but they do demonstrate to other European institutions and member states how the commission wishes to deal with the problem and may serve as guidelines for future proposals.

(2000/78/EC) specifically addresses the situation of people living with disabilities. Under Article 5 of the directive, employers must take appropriate measures to enable people with disabilities to have access to, participate in, or advance in employment, or to undergo training, unless such measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer. At the same time, this burden cannot be regarded as disproportionate if it is sufficiently remedied by measures existing within the framework of the disability policy of the member state concerned. The directive also states that a member state is not permitted to reduce the previous level of protection. Finally, the directive provides for the taking of positive action in health and employment.

In order to raise awareness, the commission announced the European Year of People with Disabilities in 2003. In addition to raising awareness among European citizens and lawmakers, further priority objectives were to start a debate in society, to share good practices and strategies at national and European levels, and to support the formation of a network of NGOs.

In 2003, the European Council called on member states on several occasions to take measures to promote access to cultural and educational services for people with disabilities.

In addition, the commission launched a Community Action Programme for the period 2004–2010. The action programme aims to support the implementation and application of the employment directive, to disseminate the mainstreaming approach, and to enhance access to services, jobs and in the physical environment.

During the first phase of the action programme in 2004 and 2005, the focus was on improving working conditions, lifelong learning, the use of new IT, and increasing the employment rate among people with disabilities. During the second phase in 2006–2007, the key tasks are the proactive integration of people with disabilities into society and promoting their autonomy within society.

From our perspective, the most important question is whether or not the words "a barrier-free Europe for people with disabilities" are anything more than pious-sounding rhetoric. Almost any Hungarian traveller with a modicum of sensitivity towards the issue is astonished by the great number of people with disabilities he or she encounters at airports or in cafés, in the street or on public transport, in department stores and at museums. Access for people with disabilities has been improved substantially in the old member states, but it is still difficult to find employment for a visually handicapped translator in the EU institutions and agencies. And although there are MEPs with physical disabilities, information and communication access is still in its infancy even at the European Parliament.

Gender equality

The issue of gender equality arose in the course of the first European measures on equal opportunities. Gender equality is regulated by a whole series of directives, which have been required not just by social justice but also by economic necessity, since the principle of equal pay for the same work as well as programmes aimed at reconciling paid employment with family life, have led to an increase in the number of women in jobs, thereby stimulating economic growth.

Outside the world of work, the issue of gender equality has arisen in an increasing number of areas. In its most recent communication on a Gender Roadmap for 2006–2010, the Commission outlined *six priority areas* for EU action on gender equality:

- achieving equal economic independence for women and men;
- enhancing reconciliation of work, private and family life;
- promoting equal participation of men and women in decision-making;

- eradicating gender-based violence and trafficking;
- seliminating gender stereotypes in society;
- promoting gender equality outside the EU.

In addition to the roadmap, the commission's commitment to gender equality will be strengthened through the establishment of a European Gender Institute, a monitoring body.

The Gender Institute's function will be to support the efforts of the European Union and the member states to promote gender equality at the legal level and in practice. The institute will collect, analyse and supply research data as well as reliable and comparable information, which can then be used by European bodies and member states during the decision-making process. The Institute will also seek to encourage research and the exchange of experience, while elaborating measures facilitating the integration of gender equality into all community policies.

For its part, the European Parliament has repeatedly pointed out the inadequacy of the measures. In the view of MEPs, women are disproportionately affected by poverty, particularly where they belong to ethnic minorities. The European Parliament has pointed out that female poverty can lead to trafficking in women, prostitution, violence and exploitation.

Equal opportunities for women and men is perhaps the only segment of the complex web of inequalities where there are no real gaps in EU legislation, and where adjustment to EU law as it develops over time will be the real task in the future. Civil society organisations are stimulating progress in this field. The European Union's extremely high threshold tends to be penetrated by civil society initiatives compelling the implementation and application of existing EU regulations. One such initiative was the "abortion boat", designed to call attention to reproductive rights. Other initiatives include surveys of the situation of migrant women and a signature campaign before the FIFA World

Cup in Germany in the course of which tens of thousands of European citizens protested against human trafficking and prostitution.

SUMMARY

Preparations for the European Constitution have largely determined the European position on equal treatment. A real threat to the development of the law and an expansion of the European Union's powers would be its failure to respond to the resulting challenges in a tangible manner. By themselves, slogans will not be enough to reduce the European Union's democratic deficit. For this reason, the EU bears particular responsibility not only for drafting programmes, regulations and strategies but also for their implementation in the member states and for monitoring such implementation.

Regrettably, this cannot be said of equal treatment at the European level. In many places, there is an absence of comparable data. Further, there is no organisation with real powers to monitor the realisation of fundamental rights in the EU and the member states. At the same time, the member states themselves have to accept the monitoring process; they have to accept the right of the EU to interfere in national legislation where such concerns fundamental rights. A means of resolving the sometimes complex relations between member states and the EU must be found.

As regards the implementation of positive action on equal opportunities in the new member states, it is not enough to focus on social inclusion at the European level; the onus is on member states to realise programmes at a national level. Concerning support provided by the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund, it is the task and responsibility of member states to devote some of the resources to social cohesion—alongside economic competitiveness. Otherwise, the fractures in European society

will widen and the reintegration of certain marginalised and impoverished groups will become even more difficult.

In the new member states, in a majority of cases the difficulty is not securing constitutional or legal recognition of equal opportunities. Several issues of anti-discrimination or equal opportunities have increasingly become basic ideological issues. In our view the presence of differing and competing ideas about the future direction of Europe is a European phenomenon, because the breakdown of traditional families, the equality of children born out of wed-lock, civil partnerships for same-sex couples, and—particularly in East Central Europe—the rights of ethnic minorities, have been issues of contention for some time or have recently become sources of conceptual or ideological tension. Nevertheless, the European Union's equal opportunities programmes and the commitment of those who are responsible for implementing such programmes at a national level, are exemplary. The European Year of Equal Opportunities for All may help to ensure that the financial resources necessary for future progress are made available.

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Eszter Kósa

Groups Facing Social Exclusion in Hungary

INTRODUCTION

The papers in this volume are not scholarly analyses of the social groups affected by issues of equality and discrimination. The book is addressed to all decision-makers with an interest in the subject as well as civil society actors. In order to facilitate understanding, we have included a brief informative introductory chapter for readers who are less familiar with the issues or have little knowledge of conditions in Hungary. In this chapter, I examine the meaning of poverty in Hungary. Who are the Roma, how large is their community, and what are their living circumstances like? What problems are faced by people with disabilities? What are the main issues and objectives in the struggle for women's rights? What does the term "disadvantaged settlement" mean in Hungary? What is the nature of Hungary's immigration policy? How are families affected financially by the number of children? And most importantly: seventeen years after the collapse of communism, what role is played by civil society in creating equal opportunities and promoting the interests of disadvantaged groups? Our aim has been to answer such questions by employing the most recent data and analyses and by referring to newspaper reports.

Why these groups and not others?

In any discussion of equal opportunities, numerous groups facing a variety of disadvantages could be mentioned. In this volume, we do not examine groups that suffer discrimination because of their sexual orientation and practices, the elderly, or their religious affiliation. Instead, we have focused our attention on social groups whose marginalisation is clearly visible in the "sociological indicators" (below average income, education, employment, etc). Hungary's accession to the European Union has resulted in new opportunities for migration; we have therefore included immigrants as an important additional group.

The "odd one out" among the various groups covered in the book are children living in poverty, since we also separately examine poor people. In this particular case, it seemed appropriate to determine the subjects of our analysis based on their age, since the fate of younger generations is inexorably linked to inherited disadvantaged status. Indeed, one can predict with considerable certainty a child's life expectancy and adult social status (income, education, and housing) if one knows the place of birth (what kind of settlement, which region of the country), the occupation of the parents (if any), and the child's ethnic background (Roma or non-Roma). For this reason, equal opportunities have a vital role to play in ensuring that all people—particularly members of the younger generation—are given a real chance in life.

We should also mention the interviews that follow the various chapters in the book. The authors themselves proposed the interviewees. László Németh conducted six of the interviews, while Gábor Daróczi undertook the interview that follows his chapter. Our goal was to interview people who are members of the groups under examination and have experienced first-hand the events and changes described in the various chapters. The interviews were conducted following a preset schedule: the same questions were asked of everybody,

such as: how has Hungary's EU membership affected you personally? In our view, the chapters containing the authors' personal experiences/opinions and the subsequent interviews illuminate and render palpable the struggles of disadvantaged groups in Hungary.

The role of civil society in creating equal opportunities

Hungary, and Eastern Europe in general, saw a boom in the number of civil society organisations after the collapse of communism and the adoption of legislation permitting the establishment of foundations and associations (the legal regulation applying to the Soros Foundation served as a precedent in this field). Thousands of voluntary and civil society organisations were created in the early 1990s. Hungary's change of political regime was accompanied by profound changes in society: the difference between the lowest income group (lower decile) and the highest income group (upper decile) increased rapidly, large numbers of people became unemployed, whole regions fell behind other more developed regions, mass deep poverty and homelessness appeared. Most of the new civil society organisations were created to "remedy" these phenomena and to represent or assist groups affected detrimentally by the changes.

Since the mid-1990s, however, the influence of civil society and its ability to influence the political elite have gradually weakened. In the words of Ferenc Miszlivetz, "civil society in Hungary has fallen on its knees."[1] Although the number of civil society organisations in Hungary is statistically above the European average,[2] nevertheless their ability to influence public life is disproportionately small. This is also

[1] Ferenc Miszlivetz, "Why should we reinvent Central Europe?", in *Reinventing Central Europe*, December 13, 2005, www.talaljuk_ki.hu.

[2] The number of registered non-profit organizations in Hungary on December 31, 2005 was 74,909. Source: *KSH Gyorstájékoztató* [Interim Report of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office], no. 29, February 21, 2006.

true of organisations seeking to promote equal opportunities for the most disadvantaged groups—a consequence of the apathy and disillusionment affecting much of society, which has replaced the initial enthusiasm. I remember how in the winter of 1990 the sight of homeless people sleeping at railway stations—a new phenomenon at the time—provoked a strong sense of solidarity among ordinary people. When a public figure (a well-known comedian) called for a public solution to be found, he received widespread support and considerable media publicity. (As a result, Budapest's "first homeless people" were found lodgings at a communist pioneer camp, which had just lost its function.) Homelessness is no longer a topic of discussion. The commercial television channels are unlikely to broadcast a report about it. Homeless people have indeed become an everyday phenomenon—even though we may still be unaccustomed to it. In the public mind, the idea that "they have themselves to blame" or "it has nothing to do with me" is more and more common. (At least, this is the impression given by the mainstream media.) Organisations that assist and support homeless people do not occupy the top positions on the list of donations received.[3] As the majority of people have become indifferent to what is happening in society and disappointed with the country's democratic institutions and political elite, so fewer and fewer are concerned about society's disadvantaged groups—and support for civil society organisations involved in such areas has also declined. (An interesting piece of data concerns two television shows—broadcast almost concurrently—in which people could take part by sending text messages at a higher than normal fee. In one of the shows—a reality show—

[3] For instance, Hungarian tax authority data show that in 2005 the one-percent tax donations made by individual tax-payers resulted in revenues of HUF 1,573,040 for the Hajléktalanokért Közalapítvány [Foundation for the Homeless] and HUF 18,609,927 for the Állatbarát Alapítvány [Animal-Lovers Foundation]. Source: *Beneficiary civil society organisations,* July 25, 2006, www.apeh.hu.

viewers could vote for people to become residents of a house fitted out with cameras. In the other show—a charity show broadcast on public television—viewers could support charity organisations in the same manner. Viewers of the first programme spent ten times more money than viewers of the second.)

These are obviously general trends, yet there are, at the same time, some encouraging signs. Organisations protesting the segregation of Roma children at school and civil volunteers preventing the eviction of indebted families during the winter months, have received wide publicity and commensurate public support in recent years. Thus, equal opportunities represent both a challenge and an opportunity for civil society.

PEOPLE IN POVERTY AND CHILD POVERTY

Poverty since the change of political regime[4]

The percentage of people in poverty increased after the political changes of 1989/90. Since then, the groups most affected by poverty have been children aged under 14 (particularly children under 3 years) and children in families with many children, as well as single parents and their families. A significant change is the ever wider gap between sections of society: the incidence of poverty is particularly high among the unemployed, casual and unskilled workers, Roma, and people living in northern or eastern Hungary or in rural areas throughout Hungary.

In nominal terms, between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s, a large section of the population fell into poverty (from 410,000 in 1987 to 1,197,000 in 1996). Between

[4] Péter Mózer, Társadalmunk jövedelmi-munkaerő-piaci helyzete. A szegénység alakulása [The Income and Labour Market Situation of Our Society. The Development of Poverty], *Esély*, no. 4 (2006): 101–121.

2000 and 2005, the share of people in poverty remained almost constant.

Sixty-nine percent of those classified as poor based on income are multiply deprived. This means that they have several disadvantages: place of residence (disadvantaged region and village), lack of education, long-term unemployment. These social phenomena are examined in greater detail elsewhere in this book. In his chapter, Péter Mózer writes about poverty as experienced by the young residents of a girls' home.

CHILDREN IN POVERTY[5]

Data of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office show that, in 2004, one in five (19 percent) of 2.2 million children in Hungary were living in poverty.[6] It is particularly important to examine the situation of families with three or more children, because 45 percent of children in poverty are from such large families.

Among poor households with children, one in four lacks an indoor toilet or bathroom, one in five has no running water, and one in two heats with traditional fuels (such as wood or coal). Poor housing is a feature of life for both children and adults in poverty.

On the whole, it seems most people in poverty are able to obtain what they need to survive. A majority of poor children, including Roma children, have access to the basic needs of life—three meals a day, warm winter clothing, and their own bed. Even so, at least 25,000 children lack even such basic requirements. In addition to such fundamental deficiencies, there are also other major problem areas, such as the poverty among Roma, which prevents their social

[5] *Gyermekszegénység elleni nemzeti program* [National Action Programme on Child Poverty] (Budapest: Child Programme Office, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, March 2006), 43–62.

[6] The poverty line in 2004 was HUF 46,000 per month, approx. EUR 184.

integration—a complete absence of books, their own shoes, summer holidays, etc.

Marginalisation is already evident even among children of primary school age. One quarter of poor children of school age—almost 100,000 children—do not take part in school trips. Two-thirds of them (300,000 children or more) have no access to sports facilities and an even larger share have no access to a computer—and the figures are most alarming among Roma children. The saddest aspect, however, is that poor children inevitably miss out on the opportunities provided by schools for an extra fee, such as additional language lessons. And yet such opportunities would be particularly useful in preparing them for adult life.

In his chapter, László Németh looks at the issue of child poverty by following the development of three typical but very different children since the late 1980s.

ROMA

In 2003, the number of people belonging to the Roma minority was estimated at 600,000, or almost 6 percent of the total population.[7]

Labour market situation

According to the Roma national survey of 1971[8] the male employment rate among Roma of working age (aged 15–59) differed only slightly from the employment rate among non-Roma. In industrial areas of the country, Roma males enjoyed full employment—and slightly less than full

[7] István Kemény, and Béla Janky, „A 2003. évi cigány felmérésről. Népesedési, nyelvhasználati és nemzetiségi adatok" [The 2003 Roma Survey. Demographic, Language Use and Ethnic Data], *Beszélő* (October 2003): 64–77.

[8] The first representative survey of Roma in Hungary was conducted in 1971. For more details see: István Kemény, Béla Janky, and Gabriella Lengyel, *A magyarországi cigányság, 1971–2003* [Roma in Hungary 1971–2003] (Budapest: Gondolat, 2004).

employment in agricultural areas. Employment rates began to fall in the late 1980s, a process that accelerated in the 1990s.

The deteriorating employment situation of the Roma minority underwent a dramatic change. In 2003 the employment rate (40 hours/week) among Roma men (aged 15–74) was only 16, among Roma women 10 percent (employment rate of the total population: 56 and 44%).[9] Poor education and place of residence largely explain the disappointing labour market situation of Roma. The Roma share of the population is highest in areas where whole industrial branches (heavy industry and mining) were laid to waste by the economic transition. Discrimination is another probable factor, although its effect is difficult to measure.

Just eight percent of employed Roma are white-collar workers or members of the uniformed services. In 2003,[10] the average net monthly income of Roma in full-time work was HUF 61,000.[11]

Education

Education levels among the Roma population have always been far lower than among the general population. This is still true today, although recent data do indicate a slight improvement. In 1971, 87 percent of Roma did not have eight grades of education, 12 percent had completed eight grades, and a very small percentage had completed secondary or higher education. By 1993, the share of those with no education had fallen to 9 percent, while 46 percent—as against the earlier figure of 12 percent—had completed eight grades of education. The share of Roma with secondary or higher education was virtually unchanged.[12] According to the 2001 census data, among the population as a whole, 8 percent of males and 14 percent of females do not have eight grades of education; among the Roma population, the corresponding ratios were 31 percent and 48 percent.[13]

[9] János Zolnay, *Munkaerőpiac* [Labour market] (Budapest: Roma Sajtóközpont, 2004). Research summary. www.ciberom.hu.

[10] Ibid.

[11] This is approximately EUR 245.

Social situation

The Roma minority is disproportionately affected by the various social disadvantages, whose effects are reinforcing. Low education levels and residence in deprived regions are directly linked with long-term unemployment, poverty, poor housing and poor health. Additional and interrelated problems are prejudice, discrimination and segregation. The most spectacular manifestations of the complete social exclusion of Roma are the isolated Roma settlements (rural and urban ghettos) as well as school segregation. In his 2001 report, the Minority Ombudsman[14] concluded that segregation in schools caused by residential segregation cannot be understood merely as a spontaneous process. Local governments actively and intentionally attempt to "coordinate" the segregation of Roma in public schooling. An established means of segregating Roma students within schools is to assign them to substandard school buildings or facilities. Another common method is the placement of Roma children in so-called correctional special classes. Roma children are frequently exempted from certain acade-

[12] Titanilla Fiáth, *A magyarországi roma népesség általános iskolai oktatása* [Primary Education for the Roma Population in Hungary] (Budapest: Delphoi Consulting, 2000), 8.

[13] László Hablicsek ed., *Kísérleti számítások a roma lakosság területi jellemzőinek alakulására és 2021-ig történő előrebecslésére* [Projected figures for the spatial features of the Roma population until 2021] (Budapest: Active Society Foundation, 2005), 15.

[14] With the adoption of Act LXXVII of 1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, Hungary became the first country in the region after the collapse of communism to introduce special minority legislation addressing the problems of the minorities, thereby also establishing the office of minority ombudsman.

mic subjects or are classified as private students.[15] The effects of segregated or substandard education on the subsequent chances of Roma in the labour market and their life chances in general are self-evident.

Gábor Daróczi describes a case of educational segregation in Hungary in his chapter.

WOMEN

Labour market situation

Prior to the 1990s, the female employment rate in Hungary was high; indeed, it was higher than in Western European countries. In certain age groups, more than 90 percent of women were in work in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s, but since then there has been a decline. Meanwhile in Western Europe female employment rates have risen steadily.[16] The high rate in the 1970s and 1980s was due both to communist emancipatory ideology and to the imperative nature of the "dual-earner family model". Childcare facilities were well established and available free of charge. From the late 1980s, however, there was a fall in the female employment rate—an inevitable consequence of the loss of one and a half million jobs in the Hungarian economy within several years. The period also saw the closure of many nurseries and some kindergartens, making it harder for women to take on work. A related development—since women were increasingly required to choose between a career or family—was an increase in the age of women at the birth of their first child.

15 Szilvia S. Kállai, *A szabadság ára a szegregáció* [The Price of Freedom and Segregation] (Budapest: Roma Sajtóközpont, 2005). Research summary. www.ciberom.hu.

16 Mrs. Tibor Pongrácz, "A család és a munka szerepe a nők életében" [The Role of Family and Work in Women's Lives], in Ildikó Nagy, Mrs. Tibor Pongrácz and István György Tóth eds., *Szerepváltozások. Jelentés a nők és férfiak helyzetéről 2001* (Budapest: TARKI–Ministry of Social and Family Affairs, 2001), 30.

In 2005 the current female employment rates in Hungary were in the 15–64 age group 51 percent, the male employment rates 63.1 percent. In the ten new member states employment rates among women were 50.7, and in the whole European Union 56.3 percent.[17]

Education

In higher education, female students now outnumber male students. Even so, although women account for 37 percent of PhD graduates, nevertheless just 13.7 percent of university lecturers are women (2003). Moreover, women account for just 3.5 percent of the members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences—whose leading bodies are the almost exclusive domain of men.[18] In academic life, women tend to be working in the less prestigious fields of research, where conditions and pay are relatively poor.

Social situation

In recent years and decades, society's acceptance of feminism and the social situation of women as a whole have improved in Hungary—but circumstances are far from satisfactory. Positive developments are the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Authority and the Ministry of Equal Opportunities[19] and the appointment of female politicians to authoritative positions. (In early 2007, women occupied such posts as Minister of Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Speaker of Parliament.) Numerous civil society organisations concerned with equal opportunities for women are operating in

17 Új Magyarország Fejlesztési Terv [New Hungary Development Plan], 2006, 17. Economic and social analysis paper. www.nfh.hu .

18 Eszter Papp and Dóra Groó, "A jövő tudós női. A nők helyzete a magyar tudományban" [Female Scientists of the Future. Women in Hungarian Science], *Magyar Tudomány*, no. 11 (2005): 1450.

19 At the end of 2006, the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities was merged with the Ministry of Labour.

Hungary,[20] and women's studies are now being taught at several of the country's universities.[21] Women have a growing presence in the professions and among middle and senior management. More than one-quarter of women are managers, professionals, experts or civil servants.[22]

At the same time, women typically receive between 10 and 20 percent less pay for the same work in the same position.[23] Although in breach of the law, potential employers often ask young women responding to job advertisements whether or not they plan to have children. Meanwhile, mothers with young children are frequently discriminated against at work.[24] Despite an increase in numbers, women are still under-represented in high-prestige jobs. Female politicians are a rarity, and conservative women politicians tend to reinforce the traditional image of women. Instead of family life, many women graduates in their thirties are choosing to remain single. One reason for this is that fewer and fewer women are prepared to accept the traditional subservient role in a male-dominated relationship. Today, men as well as women may go on childcare leave, but few fathers take advantage of this possibility, in part because they are better paid and in part because this would be incompatible with their traditional role.[25] Andrea Pető describes, in her chapter, the story of a women's civil society organisation in the post-transition period.

[20] A detailed list may be downloaded from www.mona-hungary.org .

[21] See Andrea Pető ed., *A társadalmi nemek oktatása Magyarországon* [Social Gender Studies in Hungary] (Budapest: Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2006).

[22] Source: "Társadalmi helyzetképek, 2003" [Social Reports, 2003], *KSH Hírlevél,* no. 4 (2005).

[23] A 2002 Eurostat survey of the current twenty-five EU member states, in "GDP és kereset" [GDP and Income], *HVG,* no. 6 (June 2005).

[24] See Zsuzsanna Molnár, "Állásinterjú – Hazudj, ha nő vagy!" [Job Interview – If You're a Woman, Tell a Lie!] *FigyelőNet,* January 7, 2005.

[25] Dóra Herczeg, "XXI. századi nőkórkép" [Clinical Picture of Women in the 21st Century], *Magyar Hírlap,* November 6–7, 2004.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES[26]

At the time of the 2001 census, there were 577,000 people with disabilities in Hungary—5.7 percent of the total population. Compared with the census data for 1990, the number and percentage of people with disabilities have risen. The increases may be explained by a greater willingness to admit to disability and a more accurate definition of disability.

Labour market

In terms of economic activity, employment, a significant difference between people with disabilities and people without disabilities could be observed as early as 1990. While only 16.6 percent of people with disabilities was employed, it was 44.6 among the rest of the society. This difference had grown by 2001, when the employment rate was 9 percent among people with disabilities, and 38.8 percent among those without disablities. It is clear that the post-transition decline in employment was felt hardest by people with disabilities.[27]

Education

People with intellectual disabilities comprise a substantial share of people with disabilities (almost 10 percent in 2001), and this should be taken into account when evaluating data on education. Despite this discrepancy, people with disabilities are clearly more poorly educated than people without disabilities, although in the eleven years after 1989/90 the trend of people getting higher education affected them as well. In 1990 50 percent of people with disabilities, aged

[26] Katalin Tausz and Miklós Lakatos, A fogyatékos emberek helyzete [The Situation of People with Disabilities], *Statisztikai Szemle,* no. 4 (2004): 370–391.

[27] *Ibid.,* Table 11, 378.

seven or older, had less than 8 grades, and only 9.7 percent had 8 grades. (Among people without disabilities this rate was 30.6 and 17 percent.) In 2001 31.6 percent of people with disabilities, aged seven or older, had less than 8 grades, and only 14.3 percent had 8 grades. (Among people without disabilities this was 19.3 and 23.3 percent.)[28]

Social situation

Relatively few people with disabilities (8 percent in 2001) are in residential care. People have a better chance of integration if they remain in the community. On the other hand, research on the circumstances of families caring for children with serious or multiple disabilities[29] had indicated that in such cases the whole family is subject to social marginalisation and exclusion. Although they do not differ from the Hungarian average in terms of the sociological indicators before the birth of the child, three quarters of such families live below the poverty line. The research concludes that in addition to the financial difficulties, the greatest problem is social isolation. This is partly because the families are not assisted in providing care during the day, so they have to stay at home, but another reason is that neighbours and the wider community often view such families with pity or disdain. Parents of children with serious or multiple disabilities have a higher incidence of alcohol-related and psychological problems. Marriages often end in divorce after the birth of a child with disabilities.[30]

The chapter by György Könczei presents Hungarian and European legal and regulatory developments in the field of the rights of people with disabilities.

[28] *Ibid.*, Table 10, 377.

[29] János Bass ed., *Jelentés a súlyosan-halmozottan fogyatékos embereket nevelő családok életkörülményeiről* [Report on the living conditions of families caring for children with serious or multiple disabilities] (Budapest: Hand in Hand Foundation, 2004), 7–8 and 90.

[30] *Ibid.*, 59–60.

PEOPLE LIVING IN DISADVANTAGED REGIONS AND SETTLEMENTS

Since 2001, regions have been classified as socially and economically disadvantaged if their complex deprivation index is at least 7.5 percent lower than the national average. Each Hungarian county has small regions classified as socially and economically disadvantaged. In the southern and eastern counties, such disadvantaged regions are common.[31] In 2004, almost one in three people in Hungary lived in disadvantaged settlements.

In her chapter, Ágnes Herpainé Márkus tells the story of a local initiative in a disadvantaged small region.

Key features of disadvantaged settlements[32]

Most of Hungary's disadvantaged small regions are grouped together, so that conditions in neighbouring settlements are similarly poor. Thus, the only escape for local people is to move away. However, the "flight" of the most able and talented makes the situation even worse. Transport isolation and a deficient public transport system prevent any contact with more developed areas; people cannot commute to school and work. Marginalised, disadvantaged regions typically lack jobs and businesses. This also affects education, because even if a region offers secondary and vocational education, it may lack the economic foundation that would indicate the priorities of education and training. Such regions have a higher than average number of multiply disadvantaged, often Roma, communities.

[31] *Az Országos Területfejlesztési Koncepció felülvizsgálata* [A review of the national regional development strategy] (Budapest: Analysis and Appraisal Office of the Regional Development Department, VÁTI Public Benefit Company, September 2004), 62.

[32] Tamás Híves and R. Katalin Forray: *A leszakadás regionális dimenziói* [Regional aspects of marginalisation] (Budapest: Hungarian Institute for Educational Research, 2003), 76–78.

IMMIGRANTS[33]

Immigration is no new phenomenon in Hungary, but the post-1989 political transition brought immense changes after years of a tightly controlled border under communism. At present, immigrants account for just 1.5-2.0 percent of the country's total population; most immigrants are ethnic Hungarians from neighbouring countries. They come from areas that were detached from Hungary under the terms of the Trianon peace treaty after World War I. The largest ethnic Hungarian minority lives in Transylvania, a part of Romania. Most immigrants to Hungary come from Transylvania, usually seeking work, study opportunities or settlement in Hungary. Non-Europeans account for one in ten immigrants. Asylum-seekers comprise just a small percentage of immigrants; their number has fallen since the late 1990s.

Immigration is mainly linked to income- or employment-related regional migration; it often involves seasonal or casual work. Family member migration and family unification migration are less common. Immigrants are socially and economically better off than the local population, owing primarily to differences in age structure (the immigrant population has a higher ratio of people of working age) as well as better education. These advantages are reflected in the labour market, where immigrants do better than non-immigrants. Illegal immigrants in Hungary are typically "in transit", heading for another destination country. Although they may undertake seasonal or casual work, they rarely settle in Hungary.

Endre Sík writes about immigrants in his chapter, which tells the story of a Hungarian NGO for migrants and refugees.

[33] András Kováts and Endre Sik, *Hungarian Immigration Policy*. Manuscript.

Hungarian immigration policy

Although the legal and instructional framework of immigration policy was established relatively recently over the past two decades, it still reflects the particular features of the immigrant population and migration trends. Even today, the conceptual foundations of a comprehensive and unified immigration policy are absent. In Hungary, the public discourse concerning foreigners focuses on the minority issue and the ethnic Hungarians who live outside the country. It is not surprising, therefore, that the legal and institutional structures relating to immigration overlap with those concerning minority issues. Debates in Hungary about immigration usually arise in the context of Hungary's declining population numbers, protection of the country's borders, and security. The other factor most often mentioned in connection with immigration policy is labour market migration and its effect on the domestic labour market. Labour market migration tends to be subject to restrictions, which are further strengthened by the current labour market situation. Yet, in those areas of the economy where immigrant labour produces added value, thereby strengthening economic development, there is no evidence of a detrimental effect on the legal employment rate of the local non-immigrant population. The participation of immigrants in society is so neglected that there are no legal regulations in this field.

Experts believe that immigration trends in Hungary are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. For this reason, restrictions on people who currently reside in Hungary temporarily or who wish to settle in the country are unjustified. The current low level of immigrant participation in society could definitely be raised by a comprehensive and effective immigration policy.

HOW DOES HUNGARY'S EU MEMBERSHIP AFFECT ALL OF THIS?

The essence of the Lisbon objectives is to establish a globally competitive economy in Europe while ensuring environmental sustainability and social cohesion. The notion of social cohesion (social inclusion and integration) affords a new approach to poverty, poor education, cultural exclusion, unemployment, disability and other social disadvantages—issues which until now were addressed separately through various subsystems (social, health, education and employment policies, etc.).

The chapters discussed above demonstrate the cumulative nature of social disadvantages. They appear in combination and reinforce each other—a process that leads to the social exclusion of individuals and groups. The Lisbon principles and the incorporation of social inclusion as a fundamental value and political goal, offer the new Member States, including Hungary, additional means of approaching the issue. The recent reform of the Structural and Cohesion Funds, the major instruments of EU assistance policy, reflects the needs of new Member States and provides more space for social inclusion programmes (such as measures to combat the residential segregation of Roma, the renovation of residential care homes, and other complex developments).

The principles and the means are in place; the question now is how to make proper use of them. The member states are required to elaborate development strategies and national development plans. They can decide themselves how to spend the domestic financial resources supplemented by EU funds. In the course of the seven-year budgetary and development cycle that begins in 2007—the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, it is imperative that we all do our utmost to achieve the inclusion of disadvantaged social groups.

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People in Poverty

Péter Mózer

Towards Another World...

This study explores the chances in life of young people in custodial state care[1] and the changing function of such state care in social policy and in the justice system. To facilitate understanding, I also describe—from the aspect of poverty—the main social, economic and social policy developments in Hungary since the political changes of 1989/90.

I have first-hand knowledge of custodial care for young people, since I was a member of staff at the Girls' Home in Rákospalota from 1986 until 1990. It was a definitive period in my life and working career, not only because, at the age of 21, it was my first "serious" job, but also because what I experienced and the attitudes of other staff at the home have greatly influenced my professional outlook ever since.

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Under communism in the pre-1990 period, Hungarian society was excessively bureaucratic and inflexible. Central government was rather like a "cap" on society, exercising

[1] Girls' Home No. 4, run by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. The home was opened in Rákospalota, Budapest more than a hundred years ago, as one of the first institutions of its type.

control in all areas of life. The regime guaranteed a rather low "repressed" standard of living to its citizens, with low wages but also cheap and widely accessible public goods (such as "free" health, education, and housing etc.). The state distributed such public goods by means of a system of subsidies. The first crack in the system came with the reforms of the "New Economic Mechanism" in 1968, which smuggled several market elements into the economy and began to unravel the system of subsidies, replacing it to some extent with benefit payments. Largely in consequence of market-based features (the second economy) and a reduction in price subsidies, existing non-income differentials or inequalities in society (relating to social goods such as automobiles, housing, vacations, healthcare, and consumer goods) took on a new financial dimension. The political changes of 1989/90 removed the "cap" from society, permitting "repressed structures" (Zsuzsa Ferge) to come to the surface. Indeed, the post-transition period saw immense changes in Hungarian society, encompassing the country's economy and social structure as well as the ideological, political and civil spheres. The changes naturally also affected the social policy subsystem. The effects of change greatly influenced the opportunities and relative mobility of individuals in society.

Economic, political, cultural and social forms of capital—as the principal factors determining the structure of society—forced apart the old macrostructures, establishing a new structure in which such forms of capital were concentrated in the hands of an old/new dominant elite, while most people in society experienced only the burdens or negative aspects of the transition. Under such circumstances, opportunities for integration among groups that were already disadvantaged (in terms of employment, housing and livelihood) declined, as the cultural and income inequalities increased and a broad section of society became marginalised following drastic reductions in social policy provisions. In addition to these economic and social developments, Hungary also faced challenges similar to those of other European Union countries, such as demographic change, poorer and fragile households, increasing poverty, reduced fertility, as well as accelerated and more individualistic lifestyles. We live in a world where, in the face of risks of global proportion—including civilisational and natural risks, risks relating to skills and training, poverty risks and health risks—the individual, the family and the community are increasingly powerless, as social bonds have weakened in all European societies. The classical patterns of social class no longer characterise modern societies. In lieu of such patterns, we now speak, on the one hand, of different lifestyles, strategies, and diverse social milieus, and on the other hand, of the "civilisation volcano"[2]—to use Ulrich Beck's expression.[3]

Because of the increase of risk, there is a greater incidence of "social vulnerability", with negative social trends such as low employment rates with high dependency rates *(the employment trend)* and the challenges of an ageing society *(the demographic trend)*. The relative numbers of elderly people and of young people of school age are increasing, and there is also a far weaker relationship between production, employment and income. Moreover, a growing proportion of the resources of those who are in work must now be spent on those who have stopped working and on people who will never work—or who will only do so intermittently.

[2] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992), 30.

[3] Ulrich Beck is a German sociologist. He researches the connections between risk and environment. Since 1992 he has been professor for sociology and director of the Institute for Sociology of Munich University. He is the British Journal of Sociology professor at the London School of Economics. He also works for *La Repubblica* and *Die Zeit*.

SOME DATA ABOUT THE GIRLS' HOME FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS

The Rákospalota girls' home is a home for juvenile offenders, which means that a girl can only enter the home after a *court sentence*. Under Article 118(1) of the Hungarian Criminal Code[4] courts can impose such sentences on juvenile offenders—aged between 14 and 17[5]—whose circumstances are such that they require state care. Custodial care in a home for young offenders is the only criminal sentence that is applicable exclusively to juvenile offenders; it can be imposed for any form of criminal offence.

According to the law in force (Article 108 of the Criminal Code), the principal *aim* when sentencing young offenders is that "the juvenile offender should develop in the right direction and become a useful member of society." Over the years, the wording of this requirement has not changed in the slightest, indicating its flexibility since the terms "right direction" and "useful member of society" have certainly acquired different meanings in different contexts. Under the present capitalist system, they mean something different from what they did under communism. Prior to 1990, being without employment was not considered to be "the right direction", but this is no longer true today. Indeed, unemployed people tend now to be viewed by society as victims of economic change.

It seems lawmakers also perceived the limited meaning of such terms, as they attempted—by means of a lesser regulation[6]—to define the objectives more precisely. The more

[4] Act IV of 1978 on the Criminal Code.

[5] Under the provisions of the Criminal Code, "a juvenile offender is someone who, on committing an offence, is between 14 and 17 years old" [Section 107(1) of the Criminal Code]. Nevertheless, the rules governing the operation of homes for young offenders expand the potential age group: Ministry of Welfare Decree 30/1997 (October 11) NM states "a juvenile is someone who is between 14 and 18 years old." This means, in effect, that an offender sent to Rákospalota must be between 14 and 17 years old, but that the girl can stay there until her nineteenth birthday.

[6] Section 23(1) of Ministry of Welfare Decree 30/1997 (October 11) NM.

precise definition reads as follows: "The aim of custodial care for juvenile offenders is to promote the social integration of juveniles and, with this in mind, to mitigate their socialisation problems, to improve their emotional state, to develop their education and vocational skills, to secure their acceptance of basic ethical norms, and to prepare them for a healthful lifestyle. In custodial care for juvenile offenders, particular attention should be given to the dangers of alcohol and drugs as well as to the problems of sexual life." In non-legal speech, this amounts to the objective of re-socialisation, based on the three basic elements of social education, academic education and vocational training, thereby increasing a young person's chances of social integration (enabling him or her to live a free and full life in society). This, in a word, is the goal of custodial care for young offenders.

Until the early 1990s, homes for young offenders were organised around both work and study. Today the primary emphasis is on education. Since 1997, the legal rules applying to homes and their management have been more numerous and more detailed. By way of illustration, such legal rules comprised just 10 sections of a ministerial decree[7] until 1997 but 58 sections[8] thereafter. The changes have tended to lead to improvements in standards. By way of example, the pre-1997 regulations contained few guidelines about the placement of young offenders into the home and their treatment during the initial days and weeks. At the time, such decisions were made by managers and staff at the homes without the guidance of legislation. Under such circumstances, an obvious danger was that the management would only formulate rules in areas they considered important.

[7] Ministry of Education Decree 6/1980 (June 24) OM on the Probation Officer Supervision of Juveniles, Custodial Care, and Procedural Rules.

[8] Ministry of Welfare Decree 30/1997 (October 11) NM on Rules in Homes for Juvenile Offenders.

CRIMINAL CONDUCT

A characteristic and internationally acknowledged indicator of the level of crime is the number of criminal offences. Data collected by the chief prosecutor's office show that there has been little change over the years in the types of crime committed by young offenders in Hungary. In each year surveyed, the main offence category has been crimes against property. Nevertheless, there have been some minor changes. For instance, the proportion of traffic offences has declined, while the proportion of public order offences has increased.

The principal motives of, or reasons for, crime are financial gain, temporary money shortages, and bad company. The average median age of young offenders on entry to the home is 16-17, while their average level of education is low (6–8 grades). Such indicators (level of education, average median age) have remained almost constant for many years.[9] The social circumstances of girls coming to the home are also unchanged. The social milieu is none other than deep poverty.

As far as violent crime is concerned, a notable change since the late 1980s is the increase in extreme brutality and "unjustified" aggression.[10]

The purpose and social function of punishment

It is interesting—and in our case important—to consider the social function of institutions such as homes for young offenders. *Concerning social function, a crucial issue is where to place the institutional emphasis: on punishment or on*

[9] Katalin Gonosz, *A javítóintézetekben nevelkedő fiatalok munkaerő-piaci esélyei* [The job prospects of young people in custodial care] (manuscript, Budapest, 2000).

[10] A comment by András Szim, deputy director of the Rákospalota Home for Young Offenders (who has worked at the home since 1984 and has been its deputy director since 1993).

(re)socialisation. It is both, in my view. On the other hand, its primary function is not so evident: is it to break up "bad company", or to compensate for various disadvantages (thereby providing an opportunity for integration), or to put offenders "on ice", removing them from circulation (thereby protecting society at large).

In terms of objectives, socialisation would seem to be more important than the "complete removal" of "troublemakers" from society. However, the fact that the home for young offenders is the final stage in a *judicial* procedure contradicts this. Punishment entails a restriction of rights[11]—or as Nils Christie,[12] the well-known Norwegian criminologist, has said: "Imposing punishment within the institution of law means the inflicting of pain, intended as pain." The most essential feature of punishment is that the subject perceives his or her punishment as something negative, as inflicting pain or a disadvantage. Punishment's social function is, firstly, to draw the boundary between "good" or "acceptable" models of behaviour and "bad" or "unacceptable" forms. Secondly, "criminal law should protect society from crime just as it also protects those accused of crime from the direct indignation of society".[13] The third function relates to social hierarchy, since crime and punishment policy is an excellent means of holding in check, or controlling certain easily identifiable social groups.[14] Thus, our criminal and sociological knowledge of punishment casts somewhat of a shadow over the aforementioned noble-minded goals.

Refocusing on the basic issue, in terms of providing opportunities, a crucial issue is whether, acting in coopera-

[11] Section 37 of the Criminal Code: "Punishment is a restriction of rights under law due to a criminal offence. The aim of punishment is to prevent the offender from committing another offence for the sake of protecting society."

[12] Nils Christie, *Limits to Pain* (Oxford: Martin Robertson Company, 1981).

[13] István Bibó, *Válogatott tanulmányok*, vol. 1, *1935–1944* [Selected papers, vol. 1, 1935–1944] (Budapest: Magvető, 1986).

[14] Loic Wacquant, *Les prisons de la misère* (Paris: Éditions Liber-Raisons d'agir, 1999).

tion with other social welfare institutions, *homes for young offenders are capable—together with their social function and performing a balancing act between social policy (protection of minors) and criminal justice—of offering the young people sentenced there the prospect of a future, or whether this will remain merely a symbolic or theoretical objective*.

The answer may be divided into two parts: the first part concerns changes in the law—in particular changes having an effect on policies within homes, the second part relates to the external environment, the changing relationships between homes for young offenders and other social, child welfare and criminal justice institutions.

Legal changes. The importance of changes in the law is underlined by the fact that the legal regulations come from the outside (Parliament, government ministries), embodying expectations formulated by a whole series of professional and political communities and thus containing elements supported by the broader community. The post-transition period saw the drafting and adoption of legislation "re-evaluating" the aforementioned guarantee elements as well as certain actions. We witnessed the manifestation of notions such as human dignity, use of one's own clothes, free worship, pocket money, minority identity and awareness, a duty to inform, and the announcement and publication of house rules.

As democratisation proceeded, actions that had been prohibited under communism (such as soliciting prostitution and posing a danger to the public through idleness) were legalised. A further consequence of the "(more) relaxed atmosphere" was a drastic reduction, in the mid-1990s, of the number of girls placed in the Rákospalota home for young offenders. This decline reflected the increased use of sanctions that did not require incarceration (such as release on parole, suspended sentences, and community labour). In many respects this was a welcome development. However, since changes in the law also legalised prostitution—a type of crime whose usual punishment in the case of juveniles had been custodial care—a negative consequence was that many vulnerable young girls dropped out of the net. In their case, the likelihood of a change in lifestyle was reduced, which was particularly unfortunate in light of the rapid increase in prostitution rates.

When *interpreting the changes*, it is worth looking at the entrance procedure, rules governing life in the home (rights, duties, opportunities), release and post-release procedures, and the external network of relationships.

The entrance procedure and life in a home for young offenders

As far as rules governed by legislation are concerned, 1997 marked a watershed, for since then there has been a constant increase in the number of legal regulations.[15] As a result, there are now *detailed legal provisions concerning the need to inform (and the information that must be provided) when a young person enters a home*. First, the young offender must be informed about the house rules (types of reward and punishment) and about her rights (concerning use of her own clothes, free worship, pocket money, etc.) and her duties (to adhere to the house rules, to attend classes). Second, when a new young offender arrives, the home must inform the following institutions: the court, the local government notary, the child welfare agency, the juvenile's legal representative, the probation officer, and the competent body of the Ministry of Interior. It remains somewhat unclear which body of the Ministry of Interior lawmakers were thinking of. Indeed, it is a bit of a puzzle why state bodies concerned with public administration and public security should receive such information.

An important change having an effect on the (re)socialisation of young offenders is that girls with young children

[15] This is the already cited Ministry of Welfare Decree 30/1997 (October 11) NM on Rules in Homes for Juvenile Offenders.

can keep their children and look after them in the home—subject to the permission of the home's director.

Release

Another important change transforming homes for young offenders came in 1995 when *the period of care in a home for young offenders changed from the previous indefinite term to a definite term of between one and three years* [Section 118(2) of the Criminal Code].

Until 1995, the courts did *not* determine how long a young offender was to stay in a home. At the time the law in force merely determined the shortest term (1 year) and that a young offender should be released from the home by his or her nineteenth birthday. *Within this legal term, the actual term spent in the home depended on the conduct of the young offender*. Further, in exceptional cases, a court could also provide for an extension of the term after the young offender's nineteenth birthday and until the end of the school year, if this would enable her to complete her studies. The provision in effect ignored the will of the courts and the principle of proportionate punishment, since the young offender's term of incarceration was not linked with the degree of "social danger" represented by the original offence. This constituted a change in comparison with the pre-1995 situation—when the objective of socialisation had taken preference over the logic of punishment. The switch to fixed terms shifted the priority to punishment: the socialisation problems of a girl and the presence or absence of adequate means of dealing with such problems were no longer the primary consideration. The single criterion for determining how long she would spend at the home was the original offence committed.

The external network of relationships. After 1995 the crime and punishment rationale seems to have prevailed. In light of this it is rather odd that the Child Welfare Act of 1997[16] states the following: "A part of the child welfare system is the provision of state care to juveniles placed under custodial care by the courts or in pre-trail detention." This legal provision clearly indicates that homes for young offenders are officially part of the welfare system rather than the criminal justice system. Still, the above legal declaration was not followed by substantive changes in the legal regulations relating to the external relationships of homes for young offenders. The former structure remained in place, so that homes for young offenders continued to be under the supervision and direct control of the Ministry of Social Affairs, while their professional supervision continued to be carried out by the Ministry of Justice and the prosecutor's office. Of course, homes for young offenders can also make use of social services as well as the assistance of NGOs or, where possible, they can also seek the cooperation of the young offender's parents, guardian or other relative. However, such contacts tend to be theoretical possibilities. Moreover, the child welfare authorities and probation service are the bodies that will offer support to offenders after their release. It is true that both institutions—particularly the probation service—have undergone great changes. Indeed, during the post-transition period, there were attempts to prioritise the (re)socialisation function, with the probation service receiving a central role—which was itself undergoing structural, organisational, operational and administrative reforms. But little of this was realised in practice. There were several interdependent factors at play. Social and economic changes clearly worked against positive reforms. Secondly, changes in the education system produced new structures unable to cope with social and cultural differences or reduce existing social inequalities. Thirdly, the expanded system of social services and benefits was dysfunctional. Monetary benefits designed to mitigate

[16] Act XXXI of 1997 on Child Protection and Child Welfare.

poverty are worth so little that recipients need to work in order to secure a livelihood, but they are prohibited from doing so or can only work part time. This means that many drift into uncertain and illegal employment in the unofficial, grey economy.

As regards basic social services, the institutions relevant to our topic were created in such rapid succession—child education advisors [1968],[17] family assistance officers [from 1990], child welfare services [1997]—that a considerable amount of overlapping was inevitable. These institutions did not have the time to find their place in the overall system of social services; they were simply "tacked on" to the existing system. The resulting social policy system could not fulfil its social protection function, since it was not constructed in the form of a network. (Perhaps rather simplistically, some have described the social net as a thinly-woven construction full of holes and incapable of improving the situation of people in [deep] poverty.) In my work, I have often encountered dysfunctional operational structures—which seem to be far more common than functional operational structures. Typical disfunctions include (or have included) the following:

A lack of co-operation between institutions. In the early 1990s, the child welfare authority temporarily placed a young girl in state care without requesting information from the relevant educational institution (kindergarten) or social policy institutions (child education advisor, family assistant).

The sluggishness of the justice system. One case indicative of the general state of affairs was that of a single young woman bringing up a child and her own siblings, who was incarcerated in 1995 for an offence committed in 1992. In the

[17] Child education advisors represent an old institution in Hungary, but after 1990 there was substantial overlapping with the new family assistance services. In some cases, this led to professional rivalry, tension and instability.

end, she spent five to six years "in limbo". Obviously, in such cases, an offender's chances of integration are reduced.

An additional problem concerned the fact that in many places (particularly in rural areas) the social services prescribed by law were never actually established.

The story of one young offender under my supervision well illustrates this point. Mária had already been in state care before she came to the home for young offenders. She spent two years at the home in Rákospalota. After her release, since she was a happy, vivacious young woman, she quickly found a partner and—as this was the early 1990s—she also easily found a job. The couple married, and two children were born. Mária's life was stable and relatively prosperous: her family, apartment and work filled her with pride. Divorce destroyed the idyll. As a single mother with two children, she found it difficult to maintain her previous standard of living. The "oxygen" around her ran out as most of her contacts she knew through her husband disappeared. She lived in a small town—by now it was the mid to late 1990s—but there were no social services assisting her as a single mother. Indeed, the child welfare officer proposed that her children should be taken into state care, because Mária was leaving the children on their own—this was true since Mária's job as a cleaner involved unusual working hours in the early morning and late at night.

This brief account draws attention to the fragile possibilities of a young woman who clearly had considerable energy and drive. A private life conflict became an all-encompassing one because of the absence of social services and benefits that would have protected her from financial ruin. Even today, there is no system of institutions (or what there is, exists only on paper) that would help mothers to take on jobs while also providing professional care for their children. On the contrary, the current system of social policy and child welfare services thrusts the whole impossible burden on to the mother, while declaring her to be at fault.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR A DIFFERENT LIFE?

At the level of the individual, it can mean the change "brought on" by adolescence in all its complexity, alongside changes in the surrounding environment as well as the development of deviant forms of behaviour. "Youth is the stage in life associated with the greatest sense of romance, nostalgia and positive feelings. It means a desire for freedom, self-realisation, and breaking out of the mould. It is a period of once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. As soon as we move on from the mystical contemplation of our youth and begin to see things as they really are, a wholly different world takes shape before us. Indeed, the autonomy of youth is just a mirage—particularly in the case of disadvantaged and marginalised young people. The implacable laws of society impose great limits on the room for manoeuvre. Family background and financial status determine to an excessive degree a young person's chances of upward mobility."[18]

Adolescence—"the spring awakening"—also entails another, different story. Some young people start to become "different" and to "stand out" in society. As many have documented, when a dominant group encounters behaviour that differs from its own cultural and ideological rules and norms, its reaction is to label such behaviour as deviant and to categorise groups or individuals exhibiting such behaviour negatively.

Just who will become deviant seems to be the result of a combination of processes that can be described in terms of multiple and complex factors, and where the final definition—the final dot on the "i"—is made by society through the justice system. This may well be true, but in my view two other factors must also be considered. The first are *chance factors*, while the second is *the different manner by which social status is defined by various social institutions*. The

[18] Gonosz, *A javítóintézetekben nevelkedő fiatalok*, 62.

former can mean many different things, such as not being caught, the presence of a good friend, a good marriage, etc. I would argue that such things are not purely accidental but have quasi-intentional aspects. Consider, for example, marriage as a non-institutional but actually functioning[19] situation in which opportunities are created. Of course, chance factors (such as being in the right place, love, and good looks) do play a part, but if marriage is to constitute a lasting relationship and to raise status (a husband of higher social status, a family with resources), then more will be required than mere chance. A part will also be played by other factors—alongside the socialisation disadvantage—such as role-playing ability, "middle-class" forms of behaviour, means of dealing with conflict, ability to work and study (a prerequisite of which is a prior positive learning experience)—all of which make upward mobility possible.

The different manner by which social status is defined by various social institutions is closely linked to certain social determinants. By way of illustration, there are a series of widely available statistical data which show that a large proportion of the prisoner population is poorly educated. Indeed, the data[20] indicate that almost one in two convicted young offenders have no primary education—and the same is true of about three in four of adult offenders. Such data have remained stubbornly constant for decades, while the population as a whole has undergone great changes in this field. If a person is poorly educated, this also means low social status, that is, poverty. If we discount the unscientific conclusion that both poverty and criminal conduct stem from the same root problems in individual personalities, then we can hardly avoid examining the social aspects. We can say, somewhat euphemistically, that the institutions of social

[19] While on the staff of the home for young offenders, I witnessed several times how marriage could provide an "escape channel" serving as a means of integration.

[20] *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv 2003* [Hungarian statistical yearbook 2003] (Budapest: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2004).

control (law enforcement and the judiciary) operate in a rather selective manner when making decisions. Although their behaviour may not constitute conscious selectivity, nevertheless under the laws of sociology and social psychology, family status and background do certainly matter. That is to say, the outcome of a case may well be influenced by the clothing, language use, conduct, and general appearance of the accused. Thus, an adult or young person who is considered to be middle-class or upper-class may receive a different judgement than does a person coming from an impoverished family. Of course, it is also true that such "prejudice" is favoured by social value judgements, the structure of society, inter-generational aspects, the reproduction of existing structures and patterns, because as Katalin Gönczöl has stated: "In its tangible individual manifestation, all deviant behaviour—including criminal acts—is linked with a personality; on the other hand, as a mass social phenomenon, it is the product of implacable social laws." Nevertheless, in my view, both aspects are needed in order to "produce" the statistics we have.[21]

What do poverty and the provision of opportunities mean for a young offender sent to the home in Rákospalota?

Unfortunately, the young people sent to Rákospalota know through their own experience what it means to live in poverty. Many new arrivals come from rural settlements—often from households on the edge of such settlements. Their parents are poorly educated and must struggle just to secure the most unpopular work in the locality. (Girls from other family backgrounds comprise a negligible share of the overall group.) A lack of basic essentials and future prospects, as well as a sense of timelessness where there is both too much time and too little time—all of this is for

[21] Katalin Gönczöl, *Bűnös szegények* [The guilty poor] (Budapest: KJK, 1991).

them a part of daily life (alongside violence, prejudice and exclusion). They are not a reserve force in the labour market. Nor are they consumers that have to be tempted and convinced about this and that. The state of the economy does not depend upon them, for they are marginalised in the education system, having been pushed out of it (or having never even entered it). They are young people who are not present in the official labour market and exist from day to day. We may call them "people in difficulties", people living below the subsistence level, an underclass, the deprived, the poor, the pauperised, "people who do not fit in", the impoverished, loafers, those who have nothing. Such words define a phenomenon or emphasise a feature whose essence and fundamental characteristic is a life that—to cite Castel—"remains simply one of the many forms of being abandoned and of social death".[22] For example, what opportunities did Hungarian society in the late 1980s offer to the "Rákospalota" girl—a pick-pocket—who lived with her grandmother and goats in an adobe dwelling on an isolated farmstead outside Szeged? Or what are the chances in life—and now we are in the present—of a young offender from Budapest who comes to Rákospalota aged sixteen with just two grades of education?

While isolation does occur in large cities, it must be possible to successfully adapt there. But what does this mean? A case in point is that of a Roma girl from Budapest who could not speak Hungarian until she was twelve-thirteen years old. Since she did not attend school and had an extended family and a wide range of contacts, the fact that she could not speak Hungarian was not initially a problem. It was only after her arrival in Rákospalota that she encountered a milieu in which a good knowledge of Hungarian was indispensable to daily life. When she arrived at the home, she already spoke a little Hungarian, but language difficul-

[22] Robert Castel, *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale, une chronique du salariat* (Paris: Edition Gallimard, 1999), 35.

ties arose constantly in her everyday communication and particularly in school lessons (although she was fifteen years old, she was in the fifth or sixth grade of "corrective remedial school"). When she was released, however, she spoke Hungarian well.

What do equal opportunities mean for young offenders?

Well, the answer is: virtually nothing, or just constant frustration. In many cases, a deep chasm exists between majority society and the young girls sent to the home for young offenders. I am thinking here not just of the inevitable social consequences of poverty (such as low income, poor schooling, bad job prospects, etc.). With such disadvantages, it is impossible to live an ordinary life "without showing symptoms". The girls, however, exhibit the characteristics of a dual phenomenon—of both living in poverty and "being in state care" (ways of speaking, dress, behaviour). It is impossible to be in deep poverty without the outside world noticing. By way of example, on arrival at the home, one girl held a knife and fork and ate from a dish for the first time in her life. At home with her family, she had eaten from a common pot using a spoon. All of this is then "crowned" by the detrimental aspects and features of custodial care.

For a society to be balanced and workable, there must be mechanisms for assigning various tasks and functions. There must also be institutionalised channels, compelling individuals to perform the tasks that stem from their roles. This, in turn, requires consensus-based rules of conduct, moral guidelines and sanctions—which assist individuals in selecting the various roles and in accomplishing the various tasks. What we need are social escalators that return the "lost sheep" to the herd. If one wants to ensure that even those who breach the norms have access to channels of mobility, it is not enough to establish a home for offenders

and operate it like some kind of "quick fix". What is also needed is a well organised system of social services. Without such a system, failure is almost guaranteed.

To fully comprehend the deep social roots of the process, one must also have knowledge of Hungary's education system and labour market—both before and after the political transition. A great amount of material has already been published about the social function of schools. Most writers on the subject (such as Bourdieu, Bernstein, Becker, Willis, Andor and Ferge) have argued that the social function of schools is to pass on (to "indoctrinate") the prevailing values and norms of the middle class. To cite Bourdieu's words: "...school teaching material and the culture of the ruling class, the indoctrination of cultural knowledge and ideological penetration, teacher authority and political power are »in the final analysis« the same thing."[23] What this means in practice is that schools have a "hidden agenda" whose aim is to "teach" institutional and power-based norms. Where schools fulfil such (latent and manifest) functions, children whose parental culture and status harmonise with the values and norms mediated by society will be at an advantage. This is one side of the coin.

The other side of the coin is that a school can be—or should be—an "escape" and mobilisation channel. In this sense, schools—and the education system as a whole—comprise a secondary socialisation arena, dispelling myths about the reproduction of poverty and thereby creating opportunities for the next generation.

Research in recent years[24] *has shown that greater differentiation within the Hungarian school system has been accom-*

[23] Pierre Bourdieu, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (Sage, 1990).

[24] For a useful summary of recent research findings, see Judit Lannert, "Továbbhaladás a magyar iskolarendszerben" [Headway in the Hungarian education system], in Tamás Kolosi, István György Tóth and György Vukovich, *Társadalmi Riport, 2000* (Budapest: TÁRKI, 2000), 205–222, and F. Gazsó and L. Laki, *Fiatalok az új kapitalizmusban* [Young people in the new capitalism] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2004), 123–149.

panied by an increase in inequalities of opportunity. Indeed, empirical findings suggest that the new, restructured education system conserves—and from the secondary level upwards, increases—the relative disadvantage of deprived social groups. As a student advances through school his or her chances are determined increasingly by social determinants as well as individual abilities and teachers' efforts (manifested in inequalities of teaching). We may therefore refer to the presence of "dual influencing factors", or variables, where one dimension of inequality is *parental education* (above all the father's). According to research, selection by the family—in addition to selection by school—is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, owing to these two forms of selection, we may still receive the same data for the social composition of the various types of school even if we go back thirty years.

The other "variable" is the *type of settlement*. Examining school entrance procedure by type of settlement (from "no entrance exam" to "entrance exam"), we find significant differences between the entrance procedures of rural and urban schools. The same phenomenon is observed if we inquire into the presence or absence of various special classes. Schools in rural areas rarely have special or extra-curricular classes. Differences between urban and rural schools arise in other areas too, demonstrating that the selection process starts in secondary school and strengthens in higher education.

Social and cultural inequality is also indicated by the greater than 20 percent difference in knowledge levels between children of parents with the poorest education and children of parents with the best education. Since the difference in knowledge levels in western European countries is no greater than 10 percent, the large difference in Hungary cannot be accounted for by differences in intellectual abilities. This reminds us that teachers can influence social and structural inequalities as well as the manner in which inequalities of access to knowledge goods are transformed into inequalities of teaching. Experience in Hungary is rather discouraging in this area too, for when grading students, many teachers ignore students' skills and abilities and concentrate instead on whether or not students meet school norms, adopt the school culture, and have the "right" attitudes towards learning. (I ignore, here, possible ethnically based prejudices among teachers.) According to surveys, the failure to complete primary education also has a social dimension, for the statistics show that one in seven children of parents with eight grades of education or less (as many as one in three in some rural areas) are unsuccessful in primary education.

The catching-up process observable in Hungary from the 1970s onwards among people living in poverty—a process that also affected girls coming to Rákospalota—entailed greater access to primary education among broad social groups. This also gave them greater access to employment opportunities. The catching-up process came to an abrupt halt with the collapse of communism and the subsequent political changes. Paradoxically, the demise of this social group came just when it appeared to be ridding itself of its educational handicap.

In the post-transition years, a whole series of social changes had a direct effect on the education system. Children from poorly educated families in particular had few opportunities of acquiring "usable" knowledge.

Almost all the girls coming to the home for young offenders were at least one grade behind in their education. Indeed, most of them had not even completed eight grades of education, and some of them had merely four grades of education—having dropped out of formal education some years previously (thus becoming "private students" or "unprovided for"). School, as a milieu, proved unable to socialise such children; as disadvantaged students they found it difficult to fit in. Such difficulties are clearly related to social disadvantages rather than student abilities. Since there was often a discrepancy between the cultural-socialisation background and the education system, many young offenders turned out to have knowledge levels below

what was stated in their school reports. Their disadvantaged situation and their status at school had caused them to experience a whole series of failures, which lowered their motivation for education and learning. In light of such factors, the girls clearly lacked the knowledge and skills that were needed in the job market. Firstly, their level of education was insufficient; secondly—and this was a direct outcome of the switch to a market economy—educational qualifications by themselves were not enough: the girls needed to have additional supplementary knowledge and skills to secure even the simplest jobs, with such knowledge and skills "compensating" for disadvantages stemming from prejudice and their lack of educational qualifications. "The difference between the situation 15 years ago and the current situation is that at that time jobs were available for those wishing to work, irrespective of their educational qualifications and vocational skills. Today, the fact that a person wants to work is not enough: young people who fail to complete primary education and who have no marketable skills have no chance, in the long term, of finding jobs in the official economy. When comparing the two situations, one should also note that nowadays it is not enough to have educational qualifications and vocational skills. The young people of today also need to know concepts and notions that were unknown in education and in everyday life just ten years ago; unless they have such knowledge, they cannot find work or hold on to their jobs."[25]

A consequence of the switch to a market economy was the abolition of compulsory employment. One should note that hidden unemployment (unemployment inside the factory gates) existed even under communism, but companies had ignored overstaffing problems since labour costs were artificially low (low wages, no direct taxation). The status quo collapsed between 1990 and 1993 when about one and a half million people lost their jobs. Overt unemployment and

[25] Gonosz, *A javítóintézetekben nevelkedő fiatalok*, 5.

inactivity among people of working age became widespread phenomena.

An often repeated truth is that paid employment not only secures livelihoods but also constitutes an integration channel and an important part of the social fabric. A person's place in society depends primarily on work and its prestige. An individual's place in the employment structure indicates, therefore, significance and influence in the immediate environment—the environment of both the individual and the family. And the reverse is also true: unemployment (unless it is for culturally accepted reasons such as looking after one's children) implies exclusion from the social fabric and isolation in the narrower community.

Neither Hungary's people nor its government was prepared for this dramatic but lasting change. The new market economy became divided into three parts, with a thriving but narrow section at the top (above all the upper regions of public administration, multinational companies and their suppliers, and the new service economy) and with most people in jobs that provided a low standard of living without the old job security. The third sector was the "sub-economy"—founded on a mixture of natural economy, unofficial employment and social benefits. It constituted a different world of malnutrition, deprivation, deficiency diseases, and various types of deviance. It is from this milieu that our young offenders come.

There are no (institutional) channels of communication between this sector and the other two. Since the "bad situations" arise in this sector rather than anywhere else, most people in society do not have to take notice of them. We can, if we wish, imagine them and make them the subject of our academic inquiries. Even so, in my view, it is impossible for us to experience and truly comprehend such situations. We can "only" ever be visitors to that world.

SUMMARY

Of at least equal importance to changes in the law are the attitudes of people working in homes for young offenders. What do they think about their work? What are their motivation, commitment and professional standing? We need to ask such question because, even if a structure is operational, it will not be worth much without the right people and expertise. What follows demonstrates this in an emblematic manner: in the late 1980s, the director of the home for young offenders secured permission for the stamp, address and name of another external school to be placed on the school reports of young people incarcerated in the home. Obviously, this was a significant achievement because it substantially reduced the likelihood of future stigma.

At the outset of the political transition, the home underwent "democratisation" (barbed wire was removed from the walls of the building, the guard system was abolished, and the previously unwritten house rules were written down and published). Such changes reflected developments in society at large, but they did not radically alter the "atmosphere" in the home. Even before 1989/90 and in spite of the strict rules, the home had never really tried to enforce social norms. On the contrary, it had always represented a transition—a transition between the world of the poor and the rules, values and norms of society at large.

At a conference held some years later, referring to attitudes at the home in Rákospalota, a speaker noted that "an attempt was made to treat deviance by means of deviance". This did not mean that members of staff at the home belonged to the classical deviant groups (relating to alcohol, drugs, and sexuality) but that a majority of them were outside the mainstream of society. It was this feature that contributed to the development of the special "Rákospalota atmosphere"—one of the greatest assets of the home even today.

Why is it that among groups of similarly educated girls, some girls succeed while others fail?

I cannot give an exact answer to this question. As well as the chance factors mentioned above, other contributing factors must be common sense, emotional state, socialisation, as well as relations with family members and relatives (where such exist), the local economy, cultural traditions, and social tolerance. An additional influencing factor will be the effectiveness of justice and social policy institutions. Of course, the latter are often insufficient or entirely absent, but one never hears of a girl succeeding in the face of opposition from such institutions.

Still, what are the factors—the fortunate combination of circumstances—leading to positive developments? Above all, what role in this is played by homes for young offenders?

As we have noted, neither the social milieu nor social policy actions favour upward mobility. Thus, the function of girls' homes such as Rákospalota must be to provide girls with extra time to develop and to offer them emotional support.

By way of conclusion, a success story

Krisztina was a "love-child". This may sound rather good at first, but the word often signifies something rather different. In Krisztina's case, "love-child" meant that her parents were just casual partners. She did not even know them, as she was looked after as an infant by a grandparent. According to the child welfare agency, Krisztina did not receive proper care, so she was placed in state care. Krisztina ended up at Rákospalota—having committed burglary with some other kids in state care. She was relatively young—just fifteen years old—when she came to the home for young offenders. She turned out to be what the literature defines as a "flexible or mouldable child". Despite considerable social deprivation and poor socialisation, she seemed to have preserved her "innocence" and "joie de vivre". She soon acquired a leading position in the home's informal

hierarchy—but not by aggression nor by exploiting, in a negative sense, her intellectual advantage. Her position entailed privileges—such as the right to go wherever she wanted inside the home and to a nearby shop outside the home. Everyone, from the gatekeeper to the director, liked talking to Krisztina; in this sense she was a "favourite".

Since she travelled home more frequently than most of the girls, her peer relationships in her home village developed nicely. After her release, she soon got married. Her husband worked for a multinational company in a nearby town. For this reason and owing to her own efforts, she soon became an accepted member of the local community. This, in turn, enhanced her job prospects. Although she was just seventeen years old and had just seven grades of primary education, she was employed as a nurse in the village nursery.

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Interview with Melinda Horváth Váradi

The interviewee, Mrs. Melinda Váradi Horváth, moved into a girls' home in Rákospalota, Budapest, as a teenage mother. She now lives in a one-room flat and is expecting her seventh child. Like many other Roma, Melinda's husband became unemployed in the aftermath of the transition. He subsequently spent time in prison. Currently unemployed, he has recently trained as a carpenter. He would like to support his family by working as a carpenter. Both wife and husband were present during the interview and responded to the questions.

MELINDA: I was born in Sajószentpéter [a small industrial town in northeastern Hungary]. I will not say the year—or should I say it? I grew up as one of six children; it was very difficult. My mother brought us up alone. When I reached school age, I could not really attend school. My mother was working in three shifts, so as kids we were left to our own devices. I was the second-youngest child—the fifth child. My two elder sisters had already married, so I spent a lot of time looking after my little brother. Although I reached school age, I did not go to school very much. It was then that I was sent to a children's home in Miskolc. From Miskolc I came to Rákospalota. I spent... how many... five years there. I was 19 years old when I left the home and I was

14 when I entered... so, yes, five years. My eldest boy, Zsolt, was born there. Then I met my husband. I married him while I was in state care. It was 1994, I think. Yes, we got married in October 1994. My second child—Regina—was born there too, in Rákospalota. Staff at the home helped me a lot. They supported me in everything—Rákospalota became my first real home. I was taught how to wash clothes, how to cook and look after children, how to pick up a baby and change a nappy. You see, I was 15 years old when my son was born. And we made use of what I had learnt there when we moved to our own apartment. Then, sadly, my husband went to prison. After his release, my life began again. Things got better, because we were building our family together. Four more children were born; my husband and I have been together for fifteen years. Our eldest is 16 years old; he's in tenth grade. My younger daughter is in seventh grade, our middle son is in third grade, and the youngest son has just started in first grade. Another daughter attends kindergarten, and our youngest is still at home. Now I am expecting our seventh child. Yes, the baby is due on 17 December. Meanwhile my husband has learnt to drive and has qualified as a carpenter.

What more should I say? I was brought to the home in Rákospalota, because I was not attending school. The local authority arranged for this, because school was compulsory and I was not attending school. I was missing school a lot, so the local authority arranged for me to be taken into care. I was taken to the GYIVI[1] in Miskolc, but I kept running away. Then I received a conviction for hooliganism, so I was transferred to the home for girls in Rákospalota.

At first, Rákospalota was very bad for me. At the time I was still a minor, and I knew that you could not have a child if you were in care. I was afraid. For a long time I did not want to eat. I was alone in a special room for residents

[1] Child and Youth Protection Institute [Gyermek- és Ifjúságvédelmi Intézet] for children in state care.

who were unwell.[2] The director of the home—it was György F. at the time—was told about my condition by a woman manager called Ágota. Another member of staff, Mária B., told him how I was getting on as a pregnant girl. He called me to his office and told me that if I would eat normally, there would be no problems. They would not take my child away from me, as there was a new section for mothers where I could stay. In the end, I moved there when I was seven or eight months pregnant. They prepared clothes and a room for the child. They also prepared me for the birth, telling me what to expect and how it would be done. I then became acquainted with Erzsi E.; she became my carer, offering me advice during the pregnancy. We grew so close that I treated her like a mother. And I also had a very good relationship with András S. and with Jucus.[3] In fact, I was on good terms with almost all staff members at the home. I shouted back and argued with them, but in retrospect I value what they did for me and how they disciplined me. Because I can now pass on to my children the things I learnt there. I liked being in the home. As I was a minor, I knew how long I would stay there. I could not leave the home until I was 18 years old, because I was in state care and they were my legal guardians—and guardians of my baby. And when it was time to leave, I had no hope of finding an apartment, and my husband moved in too. When I turned 18 and I began receiving family allowance,[4] we went to live at my mother's place for a month. Actually, it was more than a month, it was three months. The idea was that we would start a new life with the two children. We very much loved each other, and we wanted to live together. We moved away from Budapest to my mother's place. But circumstances did not allow us to stay there. There were no job opportunities, and we could not get on with the other family members.

[2] A separate section within the girls home, where sick residents can be looked after. All (closed) institutions are required to have such a section.
[3] Staff members at the girls' home.
[4] Statutory state support paid for each child.

The local authority withdrew the childcare allowance that was due for each child. They also refused to pay me the special allowance.[5] In fact, they took away everything that I might have received for the children.[6]

My husband and I decided to move back to Budapest. We moved into a squat in the Ninth District, a council-owned flat in the building where my in-laws lived. This was not a good place either, because I was nine months pregnant with Regina, and my husband's mother did not want us living there. She was still looking for work at the time, and they had to support us, which she objected to. My husband and I agreed that I should move back into the state-run home for mothers—if they would take me. Fortunately, they allowed me to return.

I moved back into the home, and Regina was born there. Then they helped us to get a flat... This was not easy, and I was difficult to handle. I was still an adolescent, even though I had a child and was expecting the second one. I was still 17 or 18 years old. I did not really understand what was going on; they were preparing me for the outside life. I went to see the director—he was very ill by then—and I told him how the manager wanted me and the children to leave and how we didn't really have anywhere to go. And he reassured me that I should not be afraid; he would not let me go. And another manager was appointed, Mariann R., and she allowed me to move back into the mothers' section. At the time, a scheme was announced, a housing scheme for people in state care. The workers at the institute submitted an application on our behalf, and we were allocated a flat; we are still living in it today.

Staff from the children's home helped us to furnish the flat, which was empty. They made sure we had everything.

[5] Childcare Support: a form of assistance that can (!) be paid to deprived families.
[6] A typical "punitive" procedure used against clients that are disliked by those representing the authorities. This is an interview, and we cannot substantiate what the interviewee tells us; at any rate it is how she experienced the events.

For some time afterwards, they continued to visit us to see how we were getting on. Then, when my husband came home [from prison] and they saw he was with me, they let us go. Initially, I was on my own, and I had no idea how to ask for childcare support at the local council or enrol my son in kindergarten—or Regina at a nursery. Staff from the home were still visiting me, and they arranged for things and showed me what to do. Indeed, a social worker showed me everything; her name was Erzsi E. After I left the home, she came to visit me. We were on such good terms that she became my eldest son's godmother. We used to go down to the canteen and have lunch or breakfast there, or she would take me up to the kitchen in the mothers' section and we'd eat there. I found it difficult to cook at first, because I didn't even know how to cut up a chicken. We had a friendly neighbour, thank goodness, and we could ask her how to cut up a chicken. Her name was Mrs Puskás; I would knock on her door whenever I had a question. She loved to help—in everything—because she knew where I had come from and she could see the children had been brought up normally and that I was looking after them. She was always giving assistance or advice. And just opposite us, there is a little shop. And I was always running over to the assistant, Gabi, to ask her about this and that. And then my husband came out [of prison], and he would tell me how his mother did things...

And then some new people moved into the house, and we could feel how they thought of us first and foremost as Roma, even though we were leading normal lives. And it was enough for people to be prejudiced against you. For instance, for a period of three years, my husband was not even allowed to go down into the cellar—even though a section of the cellar belonged to our flat. They refused to let us go down there, since they were afraid of what we might do down there... Yet there was no reason for such fear.

I should point out that there is no problem with the Fourth District as far as family support is concerned,

because they give what is due. But we cannot go knocking on the door all the time... and when I fail to go to them, they come to me, because they have a department that deals with such things—they inquire why I failed to show up when I should have.

MELINDA'S HUSBAND: Yes, yes, they are very good to us, and it is so embarrassing; and this is what gives me the strength to go and do it [the carpentry course], and to be successful. I'd very much like to work in a workshop for five years or so, and then start my own business. I will be fourty-five years old by then, but I don't think it would be too late, for I will still have twenty years to work and do the jobs well. Yes, I now have an opportunity; I've been speaking to one of the carpenters, and he has said he will employ me from the first of the month. And I am very pleased about this, because the workshop is very close and... I can do what I like doing. You see, in the past I worked a lot on the streets as a road-sweeper. I never liked it, and I always had an inferiority complex, because I was working on the streets as a sweeper. People would look at me with penetrating glances. It was bad for the heart. I told myself I didn't want to feel like this. And this was what persuaded me, all that heavy iron, not to do it anymore, but to look for a normal occupation, something I like doing. I had inherited a trade from my father—basket-weaving. I know how to make garden furniture. And I would like to make garden furniture as a business—out of reed and wicker. When we were living in Sajószentpéter, I supported my family through basket-weaving. And on one occasion I heard that staff at the local council had fallen out about who should be the first to buy what I had made. And they were right to argue about it, because shortly afterwards we moved away from Sajószentpéter and I did no more basket-weaving. Yes, at the moment, I go into the city looking for iron, collecting metal objects—whatever I can find on building sites and in containers. The eldest, Zsolt, is attending police academy. And the situation there is that if parents do not request it, and there are not a sufficient number of

requests, then they do not provide lunch for the students. And this is very difficult, because we have to make lunch for the boy everyday—which is not cheap. His food alone costs us 30,000 forints. And then calculate what the other children cost—when families in Hungary are living on 80-100,000 forints a month.

MELINDA: And then there is Dávid, our middle son; he plays the violin, has singing lessons, fencing lessons, extra school lessons—all of which cost money. And now that our younger son has started school, he is also taking extra lessons, and I've arranged swimming lessons for him too. His posture's not good either, so he has been offered extra gymnastic lessons. And this costs a lot, and Regina is studying English. She is good at it; her results are excellent. Zsolt is studying two foreign languages, and we have to buy him protective clothing [for the fencing lessons], for they won't even let him take part without the equipment. The younger ones need special clothing for gym lessons too, as well as training shoes and indoor shoes. And they need more clothing when they go out to play; I cannot let them out in rags; they must dress normally.

The security I felt when I was at the home, all that was lost when I came out. I could not pay the gas bill, the electricity bill, and the fees for water and rubbish collection. I had two children, and Regina was just a toddler aged six-eight months. I could not go to work, and Zsolt was attending kindergarten. The three of us lived on 27,000 forints. I used to visit my husband in prison, but at the same time I had to provide for the children, and I could not pay the bills. When my husband was released, he began to pay off the bills, because they had taken away the electricity meter. It was very difficult, because when you are in care, everything is done for you. You don't have to worry, month after month, about paying off the electricity bill and the gas bill. Everything was done for me. We didn't have to worry about such things; we just had to feed and bathe the baby and then play with it. And it didn't matter if we spent every last penny

that we received for the children, because there would always be food the next day. I just had to go down into the kitchen and smile, and we were sure to get our meals. And we thought we had to pay a lot. And when we came out of care and were forced to face up to reality, then we scratched our heads, because we realised how it was not as we had imagined. When you're in care, you do not think twice about having a bath. Staff at the home did try to teach us about such things. One of the carers, Gabi M. was quite strict about teaching us how to use money and how to budget. Of course, she often told us how, in the outside world, we wouldn't be able to buy clothes for our children each week. We had to learn how to buy an item and look after it. Of course, we just laughed at her. For whenever my trousers got ripped, I just went to the storeroom and said I didn't have any trousers. Or if I had no pullover, they'd arrange for me to be given one. But when we came out of care, and we had to make ends meet, then Edit and I used to recall those times. We did not imagine it like this, and nobody had told us. In fact, they had told us, but we simply had not understood what they were talking about. When they started talking about such things, we would quickly move on. I became acquainted with my husband because his cousin, who was also in state care, was living in the mothers' section with her little girl. And he came to visit her. Then he started visiting me rather than her. One day, Erzsi E. told me I had a visitor—and I just laughed at her because I never had visitors. And she said, it is Zsolt Váradi. I said, Zsolt Váradi? Who is that? We'd not even been introduced. And then everything happened of its own accord.

MELINDA'S HUSBAND: European Union membership and the change of regime affected our lives too. Both had a great effect—the political changes too. After the changes of 1989/90, I worked as a telephone network mechanic. The postal company was taken over by the Austrians almost immediately. They quickly got rid of me, because I did not have the right qualifications. I found myself on the street.

I found some work, I worked at McDonald's in Régiposta Street, at Danone's milk factory, and at several other places. But I did not want to continue in that kind of environment. And I was just about to start a course, when the company was taken over and reorganised. I was unemployed for a year or so.

Concerning the past two years, I can only really tell you how I see things now. My feeling is that Hungary is still not mature enough for democracy. Perhaps 55 per cent is mature enough for democracy, but the rest do not want to accept democracy. The rest still want to cling to traditions. They say the old things, which in my view should be forgotten. People have to grow up, and then fit into the European Union. And the things we do have, I mean the Hungarian economy, should be kept in Hungarian hands. We should not be taking Hungarian products abroad and then bringing in foreign products—like, for instance, paprika from Italy and Spain. My impression is that Hungary is in decline. But at this point, I would have to start talking about politics.

MELINDA: I was still so young that I really did not appreciate the difference. I gave birth to Zsolt at the time of the changes—yes, in 1991. I was completely absorbed in having a child. The external world did not affect me. Even now I am not really aware of my rights. In order to get ahead in Hungary and in the whole of Europe, one has to know languages. And we must be aware of our rights, wherever we are living. I am not aware of them—I just know the inner moral standards. On the other hand, there were those minority groups, which said they were representing the Roma. I hold them in complete contempt—all of them. Because I feel I am a Hungarian citizen—although I am a Roma. And I really do not know the purpose of Roma representatives, for the Hungarians represent us in just the same manner—only now there will be many Roma getting rich on the backs of Roma and poor people.

MELINDA'S HUSBAND: And the circumstances of poor people and Roma people will not change; on the contrary. What

I hear people saying is that the local council and the government give a lot more assistance to Roma. And that is why people put their finger up at Roma. And this is not good for Roma; in fact, it is very bad. As a Roma, I find this difficult to accept. People say, of course, I'm bringing up six children and sending them all to school, because I get much more from the Hungarian state than they do as Hungarians. In fact, this is not the case. Today, in Hungary, both Roma and Hungarians are suffering in the same manner—those that are poor. I talk to a lot of pensioners, who complain about how low their pensions are. They cannot pay their bills etc, and they are afraid they will lose their flats. They have to pay up, and then they are left with very little money. What I see is that senior citizens are working in Hungary—those that can work are working. And the financial position of Hungary is getting worse rather than better. And what will the situation be like in ten years' time? Well, to be honest, I think it will be far worse than it is now. Because I will work as long as I can raise my two arms, but think of my six children, they are all getting older. And if I have to create the conditions for them to do something in life, then... Unfortunately, my child is 16 years old and he is already thinking how if he does a vocational exam and gets a high school diploma and a language qualification, then he will be able to succeed abroad. The children already know so much about how things work in Hungary that they are not even planning on doing something here. They will certainly need basics like a flat. Moreover, it is no longer the case in Hungary—as it was some years ago—that a family with five children is allocated a council flat with three rooms. I myself have six children, and we cannot even move from this one-roomed flat. And yet we have been to see the local council, and we have tried all avenues. Regina is now 13 years old, and Zsolt is 15, and it would be good for them to have separate rooms. But it is impossible, simply impossible. And I cannot say whether we will ever have a flat with an extra room. There is a housing construction allowance

scheme, but it is hard to make use of it, because you need your own capital. School began in September, and while the books are free, many other things are needed too. The price of four schoolbags was 20,000 forints, and then there are the penholders, the exercise books and everything else the school asks for. And it matters which pencils you buy, which clothes your children wear, which gym kit, English book, German book, dictionary, etc. And this costs an enormous amount of money in September. And then there is the money spent on keeping the fridge full. We cannot send the children to school if they are thirsty or hungry.

Opportunities at the Start of Life

László Németh

Three Children, Three Different Lives...

Through the lives of three young people in Hungary, I show how the opportunities of an upper-middle-class boy in Budapest, a lower-middle-class girl in a rural area, and a Roma boy in a rural area, have developed since the political changes of 1989/90. I examine the same phenomena, events, and relationships for each of the three children. My intention is to demonstrate the effects of social phenomena on the children's life chances and opportunities, as perceived by their own cultural circle and society around them.

As a social worker, I go to many places and meet many people. It was in the course of my work that I met the children described in this article—Kristóf, Erika and Józsi. I spent some time with each of them, and I saw how their lives developed both before and after the change of regime. I seek to show, by describing their lives, the factors influencing their opportunities and determining their place in society. In the last part of the article, I will explore how Hungary's membership of the European Union is influencing the three young people's lives.

I met the three young people for the first time when I was a community social worker, a youth worker. I met Kristóf when I was working as a development officer at an alternative school; he was a first grade pupil at the school. I got

to know Erika when I was working on a health development programme at a council-run school where she was a first grade pupil. I met Józsi when I was working as a camp organiser; he was one of the "disadvantaged" children at the camp. At the time, Hungary was in the midst of dramatic political and social transformation. The communist system of local councils was replaced—after the first democratic elections—by a system of local self-governments. After the political transition (1990), private schools began to appear alongside state schools. These new schools provided an alternative form of education for children whose parents could afford the school fees. The political changes led to a drastic restructuring of the labour market. Under the old communist system, able-bodied adults had been required to work; those who did not have registered employment faced criminal prosecution. As a result many jobs in industry served merely the political purpose of guaranteeing full employment. After the political changes, the old hidden unemployment—"unemployment inside the factory gates"—was replaced by overt unemployment, negatively impacting the lives of many hundreds of thousands of people. For structural reasons, therefore, the economic transition produced a poorly educated social group with unmarketable skills. Many people in this group have been unemployed ever since. Under communism, Roma too had been required to work. Indeed, they had developed a dualistic lifestyle: during the week, they worked at the large state-owned companies, while at weekends they lived a Roma lifestyle in accordance with their own identity. After the political transition, Roma were shut out of the labour market. They could not find paid employment, and modernisation reduced demand for their traditional services and trading activities. Consequently, Roma found themselves in a social vacuum.

The children were six years old when we met for the first time; they are now twenty-one years old.

THE INITIAL ENCOUNTER AND SOME BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE YOUNG PEOPLE

I met Kristóf when he was a first grade pupil at one of the first alternative (private) schools. As a social worker at the school, I was asked by Kristóf's parents to develop his creative skills, since he seemed to be particularly talented in the arts. From the age of four, Kristóf had attended a kindergarten in pleasant surroundings in Buda. In addition to normal kindergarten education, the children had also received instruction in crafts and environmental studies. Playful lessons in English had also been part of the kindergarten programme. When I met Kristóf, he was an open, friendly and balanced child. He obviously trusted me and his teachers, and he seemed excited by what was going on at school. He had learnt at kindergarten to treat adults as partners, which he now considered to be natural at school. He was allowed to make his own decisions and choices in certain fields, and he made use of this right. Indeed, he was rather choosy about what he ate and wore. Kristóf had his own room in a large four-room apartment in Buda (180 square metres); he could furnish his room as he wished. When we talked, he always asked when he did not understand something. Indeed, he tended to demand that I go on explaining something until he understood it. As an only child, he had his parents' undivided attention at home; they sought to answer his questions with patience, placing things in some kind of a context. The small size of his class (fifteen pupils) and the presence of two teachers meant that Kristóf received a similar level of attention at school. Before the political changes of 1989/90, Kristóf's father had worked as an engineer in a factory. When the factory was privatised, he bought a shareholding and then established his own company. Today the business, which has fifty employees, provides the family with a good income. Kristóf's mother was a teacher before 1989, but she then underwent retraining.

She is currently a human resources manager at a commercial undertaking.

I met Erika during a healthy lifestyle project in her village. Erika loved taking part in the various health development programmes; her mother helped in the background while her father, who was also present, tended to be more withdrawn. The tasks were organised so that families had to do them together. The idea was that the various exercises might become a part of their life in the future. Erika's mother was a friendly woman, so we quickly established a relationship. She told me that Erika had attended the local kindergarten from the age of four, and that she had just started at the local school. The village had an eight-grade primary school; Erika was in a class of thirty-two first grade pupils with one teacher. Her parents were impressed by the school. Erika's older brother also attended the school; he was in fourth grade at the time. The family lived in the village which had a population of 3000. Their centrally-heated home had been built recently; it had two rooms. Erika and her brother shared a room. When I met her, Erika was a friendly and well-balanced child. She seemed to trust me—she could see her mother trusted me. Although she was very excited about school, nevertheless she was anxious about whether or not she would be able to meet expectations. At kindergarten she had learnt to respect adults; she considered such respect to be natural at school. She had accepted that as a child she could not decide things for herself. She listened in interest whenever we talked, but she never initiated a conversation. At home, she was used to not having any say in adult matters. The adults around her tended to respond to her "childish" questions in a manner that they thought was appropriate for her age. When she raised questions about the outside world, she was told that it was none of her business or that she would find out as an adult. Gradually, Erika began to ignore the things going on around her. Until the political changes of 1989/90, Erika's father had worked as a skilled factory worker in a nearby

town. He had travelled there each morning in a minibus, returning in the afternoon. Today he still works at the factory, but there is no workers' minibus. Currently, he goes to work by local bus. He has to buy a ticket, but he is pleased to have a job. Erika's mother used to work for the local agricultural cooperative as a goose breeder. After the political changes and the closure of the cooperative, she began working for a private goose breeding company. She learnt how to use the new machinery when it was introduced. She is very pleased to be in work, because many local people have been made redundant as a result of the new technology.

I met Józsi through a local council. Under communism, local councils were rather odd bodies of local public administration. They exercised political control in all areas of life. I was organising camps for children and young people, and the local council asked me and some fellow organisers to run a free camp for local "disadvantaged" children. As far as the local council was concerned, "disadvantaged" children meant Roma children. The camp was attended by children of primary school age; all of them were Roma, because the council simply could not imagine a "mixed" camp. As we were preparing for the camp, I was told that Józsi, who had only started attending kindergarten at the age of five (when it became compulsory), had been placed in a remedial class for Roma children. This class had then become a separate first grade class at the local school. When we met for the first time, Józsi was a rather timid but friendly boy. He seemed to distrust me and other people around him; he feared being humiliated or threatened by non-Roma. He did not know the rules of non-Roma society. In his Vlach Roma community, he was treated by adults as an equal. It was only at kindergarten that he experienced for the first time that children are subject to different rules, and that while he was expected to show respect to adults, they might not show respect to him. Moreover, it was at kindergarten that he realised for the first time that adults might discriminate against him. In his own community, he could take part in

decision-making, expressing his own opinions—which the adults then took into account. It was natural for him to live in a busy community, where he did not have his own personal space at home. Roma accounted for 20 percent of the village's population of 4,000. Some streets in the village were inhabited exclusively by Roma, and Roma also lived elsewhere in the village. Józsi's family lived in a street inhabited exclusively by Roma. Their home had two rooms. The house was a so-called substandard dwelling. It was home to Józsi, his parents and his five siblings. Substandard dwellings had been built by the local council expressly for Roma—a kind of paternalistic form of segregation. The flat had no running water or indoor toilet. Conversations with Józsi resembled voyages of discovery. We had no knowledge of each other's world; there was much we could discover about another culture. Józsi had no knowledge of Hungarian fairy tales and legends; he listened with obvious pleasure when I read such stories. He found it odd, however, that I read the stories from a book. Indeed, he tended to ask me to tell stories without a book—just as his mother and grandmother were inclined to do. For Józsi, kindergarten had been school were obligatory experiences that operated according to strange rules. He did not really understand why he had to live at his home and go each day to a place that was alien to him and where he was likely to be treated with suspicion or to be humiliated. His father had completed eight grades of primary education, his mother six grades. They too were unable to help Józsi in this situation, because they only sent him to school because it was compulsory and because non-attendance could lead to sanctions. Until the political transition, Józsi's father was employed as an unskilled factory worker. He was a typical commuting worker—living at a workers' hostel in Budapest during the week and at home with his family at weekends. After 1989, his factory and the workers' hostel were closed. He has been unemployed ever since. He receives occasional work in the unofficial, grey economy; such work provides

a rather uncertain income. Occasionally, the local council requires him to take part in public works. Józsi's mother stopped attending school when she gave birth to her first child; she has been at home on child benefit ever since. (Maternity benefit is paid until a child is three years old; it substitutes in part for a working income.)

THE SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE PARENTAL VALUE SYSTEMS

Kristóf's parents were well-off relative to the rest of society. They supported liberal ideas, communicating the importance of tolerance and diversity to Kristóf. Through their behaviour, Kristóf learnt how to be aware of his own feelings and how to use such an awareness to empathise with others and to understand different ways of life and people with different values. His parents' relationship with each other provided a model of how wife and husband are equal partners in the family. At their places of work and in their social relationships, both parents favoured non-hierarchical relationships based on partnership. Kristóf learnt such models of communication in everyday life. After the political changes of 1989/90, his parents made use of the opportunities presented by a democratic constitutional state to shape their own lives and attitudes. They knew their rights, duties, and their own value preferences. They voted for liberal candidates at national elections and for the most trustworthy candidates (irrespective of party affiliation) at local elections.

In society's view, Erika's parents lived reasonably well—with occasional difficulties. Her parents supported conservative values and started going to church regularly after communism collapsed. They respected and yielded to authority. They considered their own value system to be the only basis for comparison. Thus, they regarded as deviant anything that differed from their own values; they rejected the value system of the minority. They communicated their views to

Erika. She was taught to consider condemnation and rejection of foreigners and people who are different than the norm. Indeed, she was to fear and hate Roma. Her parents' relationship with each other demonstrated how a husband was to make decisions in the family while his wife's place was in the kitchen. In their social relations, they supported unconditional respect for authority, demanding this also from their children. For Erika's parents, the political transition meant first and foremost economic changes. There was a change of ownership where they worked, and the working requirements changed. Even so, in society around them, the old leaders stayed in their economic and political positions. For them, the notion of a democratic constitutional state was an abstract one; it meant little to them. Local interests did not have to fear they would exercise their rights, because they knew they were powerless. They voted for conservatives at national and local elections.

Józsi's parents—in society's perception—were poor. Their values tended to be conservative, derived from a mixture of lack of self-worth stemming from their minority existence as Roma and the resultant emotional fractures. An important element in their value system was their Vlach Roma identity—which had three main elements: first, intra-community "sharing", "providing assistance", and the "real Roma life" (dress, cuisine, and hospitality); second, trade—the money earned by Roma at horse or vehicle markets provides a firm foundation for ritual communal events (eating, drinking or singing together). Such ritual communal events provide the third element of their identity: Roma fraternity and solidarity—the main cohesive force within the community. It is by making music together that Roma literally become "brothers in song". In today's Hungary, "Roma" are understood in opposition to [non-Roma] "peasants" (or gadzos), and this is true for Józsi's parents too. His parents' relationship with each other was determined by Roma customs; Roma purity rules explain in part the division of roles and work. The political transition initially inspired hope in

Józsi's parents, but this turned into disappointment. They hoped for a better future, a freer way of life, and a society in which they could preserve their identity. But then they experienced that as the requirements of the state disappeared, so too did its "care and provision". Their livelihoods became uncertain; they lost their jobs and the traditional forms of trade were obsolete. The introduction of a market economy actually increased their discrimination. Their social exclusion became a long-term phenomenon, and they were left to fend for themselves in the unofficial, grey economy. The Roma programmes of various governments had just a declaratory effect, while civil initiatives brought just temporary relief to only a few Roma. At first, they did not consider it important to vote at elections—it was not their business, they thought. Later on, without showing any real commitment, they tended to vote for whichever party promised more. At local elections they voted for one candidate after another, paying no attention to party allegiances.

PARENTAL WAY OF LIFE

Kristóf's parents established a way of life comprising a balance between work, leisure, physical exercise, recreation, and cultural programmes. From an early age, Kristóf was included in these programmes. His parents play tennis or swim on a weekly basis. Twice or three times monthly, they go to the theatre or to a concert, and they go to an exhibition monthly. They do sports according to season. They ski in the winter, row in the summer, and go horse-riding in the autumn and spring. They vacation abroad in the summer and winter. Four times a year, they go on wellness weekends at a spa.

Alongside their work, Erika's parents rarely have time for fun and entertainment. They watch television as a form of relaxation. After work, they tend to their vegetable garden which represents an important part of their livelihood and subsistence. They also have some land at the edge of the vil-

lage, where they grow various vegetables for commercial sale. Sport has no place in their lives. They go on a vacation every second or third year, usually to Lake Balaton. Otherwise, they only leave the village to visit relatives. The village does not have a theatre or cinema. Occasionally, a travelling circus comes to the village, offering a different form of entertainment.

For Józsi's parents, any communal event where they can sing and drink can be fun and entertaining. Such an event could be a name-day celebration or a party held before a friend or relative goes to prison or is released from prison—these tend to be the biggest events. But even a successful business deal may be celebrated by the community. Any member of the community can organise such celebrations, inviting the others. Men and women celebrate separately—eating, drinking, singing and conversing in two groups. Children usually join the women's group, but they also have free access to the men's group. Keeping fit through physical exercise (sport) is an alien concept to Józsi's parents. They travel for two possible reasons: to attend and/or do business at a market and to visit relatives. Even when Józsi's father was an urban "worker" during the week, he would still go to the market in accordance with the Roma tradition at weekends.

THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Kristóf loved going to school. Some days after school he had music lessons (including solfeggio), horse-riding lessons and fencing lessons. He went to the cinema (multiplex) once a week. Twice a month Kristóf attended children's concerts at the Music Academy. Every month he went to exhibitions with his parents; the family would then go to a café and talk about what they had seen. He regularly went to see productions at the children's theatre. Kristóf and his parents did sports according to season. They went skiing in the winter, rowing in the summer, and horse-riding in the autumn and spring. They travelled and vacationed abroad for shorter and longer periods in the winter and summer. Four times a year, they went on wellness weekends at a spa. Each summer, Kristóf spent a month abroad on an exchange programme, where he could practice his languages. Kristóf had many friends. Many of his friends came to his place to play with his expensive toys and try out his computer games. He was the first boy in his class to have a mobile telephone. Kristóf is well-informed about the issues affecting his own life, he has knowledge of and is involved in issues affecting the family. He keeps informed about what is going on in the world through the media.

Erika attended school conscientiously, but she did not really enjoy it. After school she did her homework, which her mother usually checked, helping her when there was something she did not understand. Erika had several girlfriends whose daily routine was similar. They tended to meet up for a few hours at weekends; they would sit on a bench in the churchyard, chatting and playing. Each summer, Erika and her friends attended a school camp in Balatonfenyves. Apart from gym lessons at school, there were no opportunities for sport in the village. Being out in the open air was their "sport"—according to season, they would go jogging or sleighing, swimming or ice-skating (at a nearby lake). Erika and her family always attended village festivals. She learnt how to mix in company and dance at the village's rather infrequent social events. She also enjoyed parties at school. Erika read a lot, borrowing books from the mobile library that came to the village each week.

Erika is informed about issues affecting her own life, but rather uninformed about issues affecting the family because her parents tend to treat her as a child. News reports in the media tend to disturb her because she cannot understand or interpret them, and there is no opportunity to talk about them with her parents.

Józsi found going to school every day very difficult. At school he encountered a system of rules and obligations

which was incomprehensible and—in his view—unnecessary. A positive feature of the school was that he was surrounded by other members of his own community, including his cousins. Another important consideration was that he received lunch at school. After lunch, Józsi went home and played with the other Roma children on the dykes. If the weather was bad, they went inside. Józsi did not study at home or do homework. The things regarded as important by "gadzos" were not important to Józsi. The customs and traditions of his own community formed his base of comparison.

Whenever possible, Józsi went with his father to the market, learning the tricks of the trade. He always accompanied his father, watching and learning about how the community resolved conflicts—whether this meant a *compromise agreement*, the *divano* ("out-of-court settlement"), or the community justice forum, the so-called *romani kris*—where his father also served as judge.[1]

At community events, Józsi almost always stayed close to his father, so that he might learn the greetings and ways of speaking that expressed community cohesion and respect. At celebrations and when providing hospitality, there were special rules relating to eating, drinking, and making toasts, as well as to the conduct of men and women.

Józsi naturally learnt about and joined in community sharing. Almost everything was shared within the community; a basic norm was that each member of the community helped the other. One could only reject such assistance if one knew that it would cause harm to the person providing assistance. If somebody in the community had more of something than did the others, he could be requested to hand over small amounts of it. Thus, for this and other reasons, there was no accumulation within the community. These were the circumstances Józsi was used

1 The described intra-community procedures are the standard rules applicable in settling disputes in Oláh [Romanian] Roma communities.

to. Therefore, in his case, the rules applying at school had no real validity.

Józsi is an informed young man; he has knowledge of and expresses interest in his own issues and the issues affecting his family. He has no knowledge of the news reported by the media.

STATE OF HEALTH

Kristóf is a very fit and sporty youngster. His parents are aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Since he was an infant, Kristóf has not received antibiotics. Instead, whenever he is sick, he is given homeopathic remedies. He goes to the doctor and to the dentist regularly. As far as nutrition is concerned, his parents try to ensure that he receives appropriate amounts of vegetables, fruit, vitamins and fish. At school, Kristóf can choose between three menus; he usually selects a vegetarian dish.

Kristóf's parents go for medical tests on a regular basis. If there is a problem with their health, they can make use of the services of a private medical specialist.

Erika is a rosy-cheeked girl who radiates health. She regularly undergoes medical checks at school; otherwise, she only goes to the doctor when she is ill. The doctor usually prescribes antibiotics. For special medical tests, Erika and her parents must travel to a nearby town. Thus they only do so when they are very ill; otherwise, they apply folk methods of healing. To see a dentist, they also have to go into town, so Erika's parents have rather bad teeth. As regards nutrition, Erika's family prefer traditional Hungarian dishes—which means that the whole family is rather overweight. Erika does not take meals at school, because she has lunch with her grandparents.

Józsi is a very thin child. He undergoes a regular medical check at school. If he or other family members are sick, they do not go to a doctor; instead, they heal themselves using traditional Roma natural healing methods. The family has

contact with a health officer, both because this is an obligation and because the development of the children is an important consideration in the family.

For special medical tests and for dental treatment, Józsi and his parents would have to travel into the nearby town. The parents are missing several teeth. As regards nutrition, whenever possible, Józsi's family prefer to eat Roma dishes—which tend to be full of calories. Often they have no choice about what they consume; at such times, they simply eat whatever they are given by their neighbours or whatever they find in the fields. Józsi has school meals because they are free for him and are always available. In the winter, Józsi often misses school, because he gets cold in his rather thin clothing.

TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTION, AND THE CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIP TO LEARNING

Kristóf is liked by the teachers at his school. He has a free and easy personality, knows how to apply the rules, and studies well. His whole lifestyle is one that teachers like. Kristóf's teachers can easily communicate with his parents, and they cooperate whenever a problem arises.

Kristóf's likes studying at school because it is a way of discovering the world. He is usually in a small cooperative group, where the focus is on experiencing things and where the needs of pupils can be addressed individually.

Erika is popular among teachers at school, because she is a quiet, obedient and respectful child. She is neither particularly talented nor a problematic pupil, and thus she tends to go unnoticed among the other children. In school matters, her teachers consult with her mother if necessary, but usually they only meet at the compulsory parents' evenings.

For Erika studying is an obligation; she is very aware that her future depends on her progress at school. She finds school lessons—where pupils sit facing the teacher—rather

boring, but she pays attention in a disciplined manner and does the necessary homework.

Józsi is not liked by teachers at school. There is a mutual dislike, and they do not understand one another. The teachers do not even try to comprehend Józsi and his world. Instead, based on their majority consciousness, they criticise Józsi constantly, impressing on him the need to change. Under such circumstances, Roma identity is interpreted on both sides as standing in opposition [to majority society]. At school, Józsi quickly learnt to meet the requirements in a minimal sense, that is, to behave outwardly as though he identified with the value system projected by the school. Józsi (and his family and friends) disapprove internally of gadzo value attitudes, maintaining an inner pride in such situations. For the smallest reason, he stays away from school, feeling good in his own community. For Józsi, the knowledge received at school is unnecessary, and it serves no purpose in his present life.

THE FUTURE

Kristóf's parents believe that Kristóf has received everything he needs to be a successful and satisfied adult. They believe he will be highly capable and will have a happy and balanced adult life.

Kristóf considers himself to be someone who will have the ability to create the lifestyle he is used to—in both financial and human terms.

Teachers at school regard Kristóf as a student who will go on to have an important social career—for which the school will have provided a high standard of knowledge and skills.

Erika's parents believe that Erika has been brought up well and is somebody who will prosper in life.

Erika considers herself to be somebody who will be capable of moving away from the village to an urban area, and to live somewhat better than her parents. A higher education

qualification would be a means for her to do so. She believes that she will be able to live a happy family life; she would like to have two children and live in a detached house.

Teachers at school regard Erika as somebody who will be a cog in the social machine. They are sure that she will become a useful member of society. They understand this to mean that she will live a middle-class life and will not cause problems for society.

Józsi's parents believe that Józsi has received a proper upbringing from the perspective of Vlach Roma identity. Roma have always had a hard life, and their lives will be difficult in the future too. If Józsi stays put in the community, he can live a happy life as a Roma; he will have everything he needs to do so.

Józsi considers himself to be a Vlach Roma child; he believes he will be a Vlach Roma in adulthood. For Józsi, the primary consideration is that he should be a member of his own Roma community; that he should be accepted and recognised as such. He is doing his utmost to become a recognised member of the community.

Teachers at school regard Józsi as a very deviant member of society. The school sees its role as being to correct Józsi's value attitudes: to "abolish" Józsi's Roma identity and to replace it with a "local peasant" value system. The school feels it has been authorised by society to change Józsi and to employ any means to do so. At a local level, this means that, in order to secure compliance with the unspoken set of values, the school may even temporarily suspend Józsi's civil rights.

Kristóf is the only one of the three children for whom Hungarian membership of the European Union is significant. As beneficiaries of the change of regime, he and his family acquired a social and economic status that allows them to make full use of the opportunities presented by the Single Market and the right to move freely and reside anywhere in the European Union. Thus, Kristóf will be able to continue his studies in another European country, while his

parents may perhaps move to the Mediterranean on retirement.

Meanwhile, Erika and Józsi—despite Hungary's formal membership of the EU—perceive almost no impact on their lives. At the time of the political transition, Erika's parents had the convertible knowledge that enabled them to cling on to their previous social status. Nevertheless, the changes going on around them were perceived more as a threat than as an opportunity. As a result, they withdrew into their own way of life and adopted a wait-and-see position. Even today, it does not even occur to them that they might shape their own life or that they might benefit from the opportunities presented by the European Union membership. They are disappointed with democracy because it has brought uncertainty to their lives. In their experience, elected officials and politicians do not represent them when making decisions; on the contrary, politicians seem to promote their own or party political interests. In light of her parents' attitudes, Erika also accepts the traditional passive and submissive female role.

Józsi's parents are among the losers of the political and economic changes in the 1990s. The loss of employment deprived the family of the social contacts that had provided a certain amount of social integration. Having been shut out of the labour market, Józsi's parents were confined to their village and to the streets inhabited by Roma. Although they have recovered their Roma identity, nevertheless long-term unemployment and a rather confined existence have effectively excluded them from society. Józsi and his family do not understand the changes going on around them; they have no connection points to gadzo society. The community has withdrawn into itself. The family keeps hold of Józsi by means of its Roma identity, thereby also preventing any other choice. Józsi will live according to the rules of the Roma community, irrespective of where he is in Europe.

European Union membership has added to the separation between the "winners" and "losers" in society. The bene-

ficiaries of Hungary's political transition now have access to EU funds. Targeted groups, such as Roma, will receive just a small fraction of the resources. The difference in living standards will grow. Equal opportunities would be realised if Erika and Józsi were not denied freedom of choice by a whole series of invisible rules—which effectively require them to adjust to prevailing middle-class values. Equal opportunities mean that the children should have the choice of preserving their own identities, integrating into their lives only those elements of middle-class life which they consider important. To establish equal opportunities, Hungary needs schools that provide an education like the one Kristóf has received—at some cost to his parents. We could speak of equal opportunities if—for Erika and Józsi too—school education meant small cooperative groups where the focus is on experiencing things and where the needs of pupils can be addressed individually and in accordance with their cultural mores. We cannot speak of equal opportunities as long as the paths of social realisation are defined by invisible rules. The European Union will satisfy the requirement of equal opportunities if it establishes the visibility of rules determining social paths, thus enabling people to choose their course in life and preserve their cultural identity. A further condition is that the EU operates a system of grants that is really accessible to the targeted groups.

As a social worker, I have sought to enable Kristóf, Erika and Józsi to meet with each other in different social situations—at kindergarten, at school, at places of entertainment, and in various cultural and leisure arenas. My aim was that they should learn about their different cultures and be able to relate to each other and each other's cultural mores in a spirit of tolerance and acceptance. I have attempted to instil in them multicultural value attitudes, offering them the possibility—as we work together—of developing a self-awareness that will enhance their empathy. I have sought to show all of them the possibility and

freedom of choice. In everything that I do and say, I try to show them that the world can be changed, that we are all important as individuals, and that we can live our daily lives in dignity—showing respect to others and demanding respect for ourselves. I also remind them that, on occasion, we must make use of the opportunities presented by law to establish or preserve our own dignity.

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Interview with András Parancs

The interviewee, András Parancs, is a young person similar to one of the children described in the study. He lives in a rural area, his parents are divorced, and he attends a vocational high school.

My name is András Parancs, and I live in Biatorbágy (twenty kilometres west of Budapest). I am an eleventh grade student, attending a vocational school for auto mechanics. I will take my vocational high school diploma next year; I have no long-term plans. I live with my mother, who is bringing me up on her own. I never see my father, and I have no brothers and sisters. My mother receives a disability pension, because of various illnesses. She completed eight grades of primary school and then attended secondary school for two years, but she left for some reason; I don't why. She used to work for KELTEX[1]—I think she worked on a circular knitting machine, but I'm not sure. Then she worked in a mill and at the post office, but I don't know what her job was or how long she worked there. She was never actually married to my father; as far as I know, it was an open relationship, and they had already broken up when I was conceived. My mother wanted me [to be born], my father did not. After I was born, there was a paternity case, lasting eight years. Every year, there were

[1] Keltex was a large state-owned textile factory.

three or four hearings, with a couple of blood tests as well. Maintenance payments were sorted out about a year ago, because he had been not paying. My mother did not want to go to court, but the local authority told her she would lose family supplement unless she took legal action against my father to make him pay. I've never really seen my father, maybe just for an hour. My mother and I live in an old cottage, with her elder sister. There are four rooms, apart from the storeroom, but—to save money—we only use two of them, a sort of kitchen and the main room where the three of us live.

On a typical day, I get up at about half past five. I travel by local bus to Budapest—the journey takes about a half an hour, so I arrive at school at about half past seven. School is usually over by about two o'clock. I head straight home, spending about an hour on homework. I sit down at the computer and play until eight or nine in the evening. Then I go to bed.

The weekly schedule is roughly that I attend school each day from Monday to Friday, not really going out much. I go out on Friday afternoons and Saturday evenings. Finally, Sunday is a family day, spent at home with the family. I don't really go to parties, mainly to concerts instead. I usually go in a group, rather than on my own.

We visit relatives about once a month—either our relatives in the country or various relatives and acquaintances in Budapest.

As far as holidays are concerned, the summer holiday is the only really important one, since it is longer than the others. I tend to do some kind of work in the summer, to earn a bit of money. We usually go on summer holiday for a week or two, mainly to the Balaton region, to the town of Velence. I've never been abroad. In the shorter school holidays, there may be a few day trips, walks in the forest, and suchlike.

Until sixth grade I went to a primary school in Biatorbágy. From sixth grade, I attended a grammar school in the eleventh district of Budapest, which had six junior grades

and six senior grades. I was at the school for three years until eighth grade. I had to repeat eighth grade. From there I transferred to a vocational high school, where I'm now studying for a qualification as an auto mechanic. [At the grammar school] I found French a bit odd, and then there were subjects like chemistry and mathematics. I failed in those subjects. I failed twice during the three years of French, just scraping through on the other occasion.

If I compare the three schools, then I think the main aim of teachers at primary school was not that pupils should make real progress, but that they should finish the school. In Biatorbágy I was an average to good student, but as soon as I started at the school in Budapest my marks got worse—not because I wasn't studying but because I didn't really know the basics. We did not receive at primary school what was required at a more demanding school. For instance, here in Biatorbágy, I was getting top marks in history in fifth and sixth grade, but at the grammar school I barely scraped through. I think there was definitely a difference. The school I now attend also has lower standards than the grammar school. To survive and go up into the next grade, it is enough just to attend classes. They don't really demand things or check whether you have done the assignments. If you note everything you hear in class, it will be more than enough to be able go up to the next grade.

Primary school was a pretty tough experience for me. I am fat, and people used to make fun of me. It was different at secondary school, because the teachers made sure we didn't hurt each other... And the students themselves were serious enough not to make jokes at each other's expense. At my present school, nobody's bothered about such things. There are just four girls out of eight hundred students. I am accepted here.

Does the school instil values in the students? I think I'd only say that about the grammar school, because I had a Hungarian teacher there who told us that we had to aim for a high school diploma, because primary education etc. was

not enough for anything. He tried to encourage us to want such things. And he also encouraged us students to make friendships. He told us that if we managed to get the high school diploma and then went on to study at college or university, there would not be much chance for making friendships or contact with others. Once you're there, you just have to study and study, he told us. At secondary school, a lot was based on human contact, on friendships and suchlike. Not just on exam results, but also on knowledge, and also sticking up for yourself.

Facilities were best at the grammar school; chemistry lessons were normal there. Teachers did not just talk about things or explain things... they could demonstrate things too. We even did experiments. At the primary school, there were no chemistry lessons. And at the vocational school we only had them for a year, and we just listened to the teachers and had to remember what they told us. There were no presentations, no experiments. Concerning what goes on in class—well, at the present school, when the teacher walks in, we all stand up and greet him. Then the teacher sits down and starts writing and explaining things on the board; nobody pays much attention, and just a couple of the students start writing. There's a discipline problem—at this school there is. There wasn't one—a discipline problem—at the grammar school. There, everybody just sat in silence, paying attention and writing. This is because 75 percent of our teachers are young; either they don't care about discipline or they simply don't know how to control us. They've just come out of university... the music teacher, for instance. In three years, we got through four music teachers. And each of them was a recent graduate. For instance, last year we had a music teacher, a graduate. He used to come into the classroom, he was a strange guy, wore round glasses, hey peace, man! He spoke very softly; some of us heard him, some of us didn't. Then later on, for a month or so, we had no music teacher at all—because he'd left the school. I don't think it was necessarily because of our class.

After that a woman teacher came, who was perhaps five years older than me, and then just three or four of us stayed in the classroom, the rest of the class went elsewhere. But the teacher didn't seem to mind; she didn't report it, and there were no consequences.

In Biatorbágy where I live, we have a rather reserved community—the young people anyway. At primary school, if you made friends with A or B, you couldn't then get close to C or D. They took it as a given that you weren't fond of them, and then it was not really possible to mix with them. What I'm saying is that if you're in a group, you can't really go over to the others and go somewhere with them. They don't tell you to get lost, but they do give you the cold shoulder. At school we have gangs of five to ten people, and we stick with them. You cannot simply go and talk to anybody; you need to know somebody who's on good terms with the person in order to go up and talk with him. In the current school, it's not just that they won't talk to you; they'll beat you, if they don't like you. It's an odd school. One of my friends calls it a "training ground for plebs and felons". The whole school is under camera surveillance; there's not a single corridor without a camera, and there are ten security guards running up and down. One kid was so badly beaten in the toilets that he had to be taken to hospital. And a kid in ninth grade was grabbed by some eleventh graders, taken to the bathroom, and forced to drink vodka—he had to be taken to detox. Yeah, there are some odd things going on in this school. Once they sprayed the bathroom with paint. I'm part of a small group—classmates and their friends. If we go out to enjoy ourselves, then we usually entertain ourselves. The other aspect of this is that where we go and play billiards, you really have to be a regular to know what's going on. Almost everybody knows everybody else, and everyone knows who you are. It's quite an open group, but it takes a while to be accepted.

Concerning the political changes in 1989/90, based on what I know of history and on my own thoughts and ideas,

I would say that neither system was much good; nor is the present one. Hungarian society was not really ready for the change of regime. There may have been a break with communism, but Hungarian society could not break away from socialism.

In my life, a change related to the European Union is that my present school received a billion forints from EU funds for improvements on the workshop. What we see out of this is a lot of beautiful machinery and everything, but we cannot use the machines because we might break them. The school received, or bought, the machines, and now the teachers have to go on training courses. Until they've done the training course, not even the teachers can use the machinery. They don't know how to operate it, because they have never seen anything like it. Most of the machinery is for cutting metals or for lathe work. We've received machinery for everything—for bodywork and for polishing. Cars in the olden days were simple; you could service and repair them at the side of the road. For the new Mercedes G series, you have to call a special repair car even if it's just a normal break-down. If you lift up the engine hood, what do you see—a plastic cover. And if you manage to remove that, then you still don't know where you are, because you need a computer to tell you. You can't just figure out what the problem might be. Nowadays what happens is that the man in uniform arrives, takes out his laptop, connects the cable, presses a few buttons, and then tells you what the problem is. You no longer have car mechanics in the traditional sense. The school received EU funds so that it could run modern courses. When I finish school, I shall go on to two years of work practice. I either stay at school, in which case a teacher will explain how to take apart an engine block or a gear box, or I go to a contracted workshop, such as a Renault workshop or a Mercedes workshop, or some other make of car. At such a workshop, I won't learn how a Renault engine block differs from a Mercedes block. But I will learn how to take apart a Renault engine. So if a Mercedes is put in front

of me, I still won't be able to touch it, because that's not what I will have learnt on work practice. If I do get to the stage of going on work practice, then I don't really want to go to a service centre, because you can't really learn about a particular model there. From what I've seen, the school may give you a broader view as well as experience in mounting and assembling in the literal sense.

The truth is my life's not really changed as a result of Hungary joining the European Union. Maybe if I manage to get the high school diploma and the vocational qualification, then with a language, it may be easier to get a job abroad—now that it isn't a closed country, a closed community, but a region that is economically joined together, even if the various countries are still separate. By the time I have my vocational qualification, perhaps [being in a region with] open borders will be better than if I were living in a separate country. Personally, I am not planning on leaving my dear little country, but it is still a possibility. There are better job opportunities elsewhere.

In ten years time, I imagine that if everything has gone well, I will have successfully taken my high school diploma, and I will have a vocational qualification too—which is good news. But to be in a position to answer this question, it is not enough for a person to have ideas. There are external factors, things that might happen to you—for instance, my mother might die, which would push my life in another direction. I don't really want to live in a big city; I don't know what other people think, but for me it would be difficult to leave the place where I have always lived. People say that Biatorbágy is out in the sticks, but I need the peace and quiet. I need to be close to the countryside. As regards work, it's quite difficult to imagine that you might work in your own trade. I don't see much chance of working as a car mechanic. True, they are not training too many skilled workers at present. There is a need for them. But it is still difficult to find a job in your own trade in the official economy, rather than in the black economy. In ten years time,

I would like to already have one child, but two will be the minimum. I would like a pleasant and quiet place of my own, an apartment with two rooms. A car—nowadays it's rather difficult to buy a car outright, because they are very expensive, and it is quite difficult to get the funds together and save up the money. Each month, the money goes not just on bills and the flat, but also on living—food, clothing etc. You have to save up, if you want to have a house and a good car.

If things continue in the same direction, then in ten years Biatorbágy and Budapest will have joined up; they will be linked by industrial zones. It doesn't appeal to me, but that's where we're heading. Looking at the current situation in Hungary, it seems like things are going from bad to worse. If this continues, there will never be an improvement. Hopefully we will still have a beautiful and peaceful countryside—for the trips that I love. As a young person, I feel good when I'm together with my friends. The present routine suits me—school during the day, and then relaxing or studying in the afternoon and evening. What I have suits me quite well—not my social situation but my youth.

Equality for Roma?

Gábor Daróczi

Roma Children in Hungarian Education

INTRODUCTION

The place where I was born lay six hundred metres from the Romanian border but decades from the "pulse" of the nation and far, far away from what we would now call an opportunity environment. It was a tiny village where the modern miracle of "piped hot water" was unknown in my childhood; where my father (and often my older siblings too) began the day by going out to cut wood, by taking out the ashes, and by heating water from a well for the youngest member of the family to bathe in; and where my parents did not know what they would give their five children to eat the next day. Under such circumstances, it seemed for a long time that our chances would be the same as those of our parents—who could not even finish primary school because their labour was required even as children.

Despite all this, my mother, applying all her innate feeling for education and sacrificing long hours for our benefit, made sure all her children acquired educational qualifications. Her toughest job was with me... In schools I attended, people thought of me as the "smart little guy who is just too lazy to study". And they were right. Even so, I was always lucky enough to have a class teacher or a subject teacher—and later on, a college or university teacher—who denied me the luxury of wasting my life away.

For many years I was convinced that I would never work in the field of "Roma issues". But then, in various jobs, I realised just how few people could really grasp what it means to live on the "gypsy row" or in ghetto-like circumstances, to have children there and send them to school there, to feel excluded and to suffer the condescension of others on a daily basis; and then to be shut out of the labour market, owing to disadvantages that stem from having attended schools run especially for us because of our innate "cultural otherness". Today even more Roma children are living in similar or worse conditions. In several jobs and as a participant in various programmes, I searched for a "solution"—a way of changing present circumstances. Instead of solutions, however, I encountered an increasing number of often interrelated problems. When in 2002 Bálint Magyar, the former minister of education, created the Office of the Ministerial Commissioner for the Integration of Disadvantaged and Roma Children and appointed Mrs. Viktória Bernáth Mohácsi as ministerial commissioner—who began the work with conviction and clarity—I immediately sensed that the post, while attracting controversy, would offer great opportunities. Before my predecessor was elected as a member of the European Parliament, we worked together on several different projects. It was therefore natural that I should apply for the post when it became vacant. Since then I have continued the work, shaping it in my own image.

The post of ministerial commissioner is a new one in Hungarian public administration. Until its foundation, there was no particular body in Hungary concerned with eradicating the educational exclusion of disadvantaged and Roma children. As a top official and ministerial advisor, my aim has always been to halt the process of segregation and ensure that disadvantaged children begin life with the same opportunities as other children. In my view, education offers Roma children the only opportunity to break out of the current situation; it is the only means of preventing the reproduction of deprivation within families and over several generations.

I felt pleased for several reasons when I received a request to write this paper. I welcomed the opportunity to describe my thoughts and experiences more freely than would normally be the case. I realised that my words would be read not just by activists in the field—who may be better informed than me in some areas—but also by European decision-makers with little knowledge of Hungary and Roma, whose lives have not taken them from a small village of a few hundred inhabitants to a government ministry. Since the limits of an article impose a framework on what I have to say—or more accurately on what I wish to tell—I shall at times digress from the memories, facts and statistical data. My purpose is that the article should be readable and easy to digest as well as factual and accurate. Hopefully, it will encourage everyone to raise questions and objections.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS IN EDUCATION

Some years ago, I held a class on minority awareness at a vocational secondary school. When I asked the students what they knew about Roma, a first-year student responded curtly: "Hitler didn't do a good job!"

At the time, under the auspices of various organisations, my colleagues and I held numerous classes on self-awareness and minority awareness for secondary school students, as well as sessions and courses on discrimination. In this way, we could form a reasonable impression of students' knowledge of and attitudes towards Roma. The above quotation was probably the most extreme example, but other similar comments were also made.

It became clear to me that the education system must have serious problems if students not only thought this way but also said such things to somebody like me, who was obviously affected by "the matter".

Subsequently, as ministerial commissioner, I experienced considerable opposition from educational bodies to our

measures against the segregation of Roma students within and between schools.

Even today, schools in Hungary are inclined to segregate disadvantaged Roma children from non-Roma children.

According to a representative survey of 573 schools conducted in the 2003/2004 school year,[1] one quarter of Roma primary school students are taught in classes where all other students are Roma. Moreover, at 178 primary schools and possibly more, the majority of students are Roma.

Generally speaking, such schools have the worst standards and the poorest staffing levels, facilities and equipment. The difference between Roma and non-Roma children thus grows continuously in the course of their education at school. After primary school, most disadvantaged children continue their education at vocational schools, which tend to offer training and skills in unmarketable areas. On leaving school, many such young people are unable to meet the requirements of the labour market and therefore join the lines of unemployed.

Segregation also means that the education system fails to allow children of different social backgrounds to get to know each other. As a result, it serves as a hotbed of prejudice, as the above example illustrates. In what follows, I examine the processes and events leading to the current situation.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Like many Central Europeans in the 30-35 age group, I have very tangible memories of the political transition. Many of my relatives lost their jobs and livelihoods from one day to the next. As a result of communism, many Roma were working in jobs that did not require educational qualifications, for instance as unskilled workers in the construction industry and in mining, heavy industry, and agriculture. Whereas, in 1971 85 percent of Roma of working age were in employment (compared with a rate of 87 percent among non-Roma), this ratio fell to 22 percent by late 1993 (compared with 64 percent among non-Roma). Evidently, one reason for the high employment rate in 1971[2] was that the jobless could be convicted for being "dangerous to the public because of idleness". Indeed, under communism all able-bodied adults were required to have a registered place of work. This meant there was substantial hidden unemployment—often referred to as "unemployment inside the factory gates" since many workers in the factories did not perform productive work. After the political changes of 1989/90, Roma workers were the first to lose their jobs, since privatised companies in the new market economy required skilled labour. This change not only jeopardised the livelihoods of families but also resulted in evictions and homelessness as families could not afford to pay their mortgages.

Similarly to Hungarian society as a whole, Roma communities became increasingly differentiated in the course of the political transition. However, whereas many non-Roma became middle-class, only a small percentage of Roma were able to react quickly and positively to the rapid economic and social changes: a few Roma became entrepreneurs—with varying degrees of success; others continued to work as unskilled workers as they had done in previous years; and a negligible number became university or college-educated professionals. Most Roma lost the rather haphazard benefits of communism: jobs with low but secure incomes; work opportunities with non-Roma; education for their children; and the prospect of a better future.

[1] Gábor Havas and Ilona Liskó, *Szegregáció a roma tanulók általános iskolai oktatásában* [The segregation of Roma pupils in primary education] (Budapest: Institute of Educational Research, 2004).

[2] István Kemény, Kálmán Rupp, Zsolt Csalog, and Gábor Havas, *Beszámoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetével foglalkozó, 1972-ben végzett kutatásról* [Research report on the situation of Roma in Hungary] (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1976).

Notwithstanding the difficulties, the transition period saw the foundation of the first Roma NGOs, political parties and initiatives, all of which aimed to secure for Roma—as full citizens—equal access to services and representation in proportion to their numbers. During these years, Hungary's minority self-government system was established—a unique achievement at international level. The new elected minority bodies were given the task, alongside local governments, of preserving and fostering minority culture and of representing the interests of the minority.

The minority self-governments function in the space between the government and the NGOs. In a formal sense they are state bodies, because their members are elected every four years in local government elections. In practice, however, they operate as civil bodies, because annual budgetary support (approximately 3000 euros per minority self-government in 2006) covers neither their own costs nor the cost of potential programmes. From the outset, therefore, the minority self-governments have realised innovative ideas by means of grants and project funding.

Until recently, the Soros Foundation was the only major supporter of Roma civil initiatives. Over the years, the Foundation has made an important contribution both in a financial sense and by showing consistent and courageous moral support for Roma and assisting them in organising themselves. In my view (and I may be completely wrong), it would be difficult to find a single Roma currently in a decision-making capacity or pursuing a political career, who was not involved in some way with the Soros Foundation.

As far as the representation of Roma in the Hungarian parliament is concerned, the first free elections in 1990 saw the election of three openly Roma as members of the national political parties. Since then, similar numbers of Roma have been present at the various levels of decision-making. Naturally, there have been differences in their ability to fight for Roma interests and their general political

role. Indicatively, however, Hungary was the first country in Europe to have Roma representatives in its national legislature.

The next milestone, as far as equal opportunities for Roma are concerned, was Hungary's accession to the European Union. Many of the European Union's demands and expectations with respect to Hungary related to the social integration of Roma. Since the mid-1990s, increasing amounts of domestic and EU funding have been spent on Roma issues, but such spending has failed to bring about real changes in the life of Roma—either directly or indirectly. As an implementer in the first stage of the National Development Plan and a designer in its second stage, I have received useful insights into the programmes. With a few refreshing exceptions, the social integration of Roma has not been a horizontal criterion when allocating funds. Thus, a municipality has been able to spend a large sum of money on the university library without also being forced to wind up a local school where Roma students are segregated.

At the same time, the European Union and its various bodies have played an important role in the development of Hungary's public policy relating to Roma. The need to comply with international standards means, or can mean, that more attention must be given to the social inclusion of Roma. This obligation does not cease even after a country joins the EU. Also worthy of note is that Hungary is the first and only country to have sent two Roma representatives to the European Parliament—both of whom are proud of their Roma identity and committed to their work. The programmes supported by them (of which two of the most important have been actions for the equality of Roma women and against segregation in schools) are the only events to have received an international response, thereby drawing the attention of decision-makers and the media to these areas.

Who are the Roma? Who are we?

There are many terms and notions by which society at large attempts to define Roma, to define us. Generally speaking, such terms and notions are used in some manner in sociology. The following are the most common:

Self-identification: i.e. a person is Roma if he or she considers himself or herself to be Roma. The problem with this definition is that even today there exist historical memories that cause groups that have suffered repression in the past to be reluctant about expressing their identity. This explains why census data[3] show just 192,000 Roma living in Hungary, while according to researchers and Roma community leaders the real Roma population is at least three times higher. Identity based on self-identification has a further weakness. If, by professing to be Roma, a person can take advantage of positive action programmes (such as scholarships or other financial support), then the number of people "self-identifying" as Roma is likely to increase. This is particularly true in Hungary, where, under current data protection rules, such information cannot be passed on by the given institution (e.g. a university registry department). In the recent past, various institutions have reported rapid and unexplained increases in the number of students self-identifying as Roma. Sadly, it is very unlikely that such increases reflect a sudden improvement in the ability of Roma families to send their children onto expensive university courses.

Identified as Roma by the surrounding community: i.e. a person is Roma if other people (neighbour, nursery teacher, health visitor, doctor, policeman, etc.) consider him or her to be Roma. The opinions of majority society, however, are often based on unfounded stereotypes, on the so-called but never clearly defined "characteristics" of a Roma lifestyle (Roma never did and never will value education; Roma like to live from one day to the next; Roma girls have children when they are just twelve years old; Roma cannot plan for the future because there is no future tense in their language, etc.). Thus, Roma with higher educational qualifications and in socially acceptable jobs but nevertheless born in Roma settlements (most Roma professionals) are not considered to be Roma, whereas non-Roma people (ethnically speaking) living in deep poverty from the same Roma settlement are considered to be Roma.

[3] *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv* [Hungarian statistical yearbook] (Budapest: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2001).

The above demonstrates that it is practically impossible to determine the exact size of the Roma population. It is important to emphasise that 1993 was the last year (just four years after the transition) in which data about Roma children and their education could be lawfully collected. The recording of ethnic data was prohibited by the Minorities Act and the Data Protection Act, and since then we have had to rely on research data that do not affect personal rights. (Despite the legal changes, hardly a year goes by without one school or another being exposed for making a list of Roma students.)

The lack of statistical data by ethnicity poses a dilemma for education policies conceived in the spirit of equal opportunities and anti-discrimination, because one has to define the target group when drafting integration programmes aimed primarily at Roma children. Previous experience tells us that an ethnicity-based approach to deprivation is risky, since it implies the ethnicisation of a programme—which conflicts with the original aim of inclusion and integration. Moreover, sociological research has repeatedly shown the presence of disadvantaged groups irrespective of ethnic background.

This brief account shows the difficulties of defining who should be regarded as Roma and on what basis.

Defining the target group in the field of education

A manifest and multifaceted effect of social exclusion is being shut out of the labour market. When two old friends meet up, the first question—after the initial "how are you?"—usually concerns work. Our jobs determine our existence and our place in society, and they also form the foundation of our self-esteem.

A lack of the right educational qualifications and work experience is the main reason for the failure of people with multiple disadvantages to find jobs in Hungary. As the PISA research project has shown, the chance of acquiring the right educational qualifications is determined less by a student's individual abilities than by his or her parents' financial status—which, in turn, is determined by the position of the parents in the labour market, i.e. by their educational qualifications. This means that poverty and deprivation in Hungary are very likely to be passed on from one generation to the next.

The only way out of the situation is to use external support to break the cycle of deprivation. This requires an education system that can offer the right skills to multiply disadvantaged children and prepare them for lifelong learning.

If we accept that an ethnic approach may give rise to problems, then we must also ask ourselves how we can identify students in need of special attention. Is being born a Roma the root of the problem? The answer is obviously no, where a person will never suffer discrimination or where being a Roma is not accompanied by disadvantages (such as poverty, segregated housing, poor access to services, etc.) or where the person can freely exercise the rights associated with cultural otherness (such as the right to education in the mother tongue, the use and recognition of the mother tongue in the public sphere, etc.).

If we adhere to the position that the ethnic approach is wrong, then we have to find criteria that will help us to determine the target groups deserving special attention.

One easily definable criterion is long-term *poverty*. Children in poor families are far less likely to receive the equipment (from colour chalks to computers and educational games) which schools regard as self-evident (and may even demand) and which are indispensable to skill development at school.

A second criterion—perhaps the most important—is the potential for a *transfer of knowledge*. Does the family have cultural and social capital (knowledge, information, vocational skills, contacts, etc.) that can compensate for or mitigate the lack of financial capital? This also determines whether or not the family can assist children at home in overcoming initial learning difficulties at school.

Children without such resources begin their lives at a disadvantage. Owing to the selectivity of the Hungarian education system, they tend to have access to poor educational services. (Most schools make use of their "right to free choice of students" which—unlike the right of parents to free school choice—has never existed. Such schools are inclined to select children with the highest level of "pre-existing knowledge" who require less input.) Staffing, facilities and equipment in schools attended by such children will be worse than the national average and often fall short of standards in other schools in the same locality.

The third criterion is the lack of *mobility*. This concerns whether or not it is possible—in a literal sense—for a family to move to another locality in the hope of receiving better services (or where this is impossible, whether or not the child can go to another—better—school).

In addition to such indicators, another question concerns the time at which a child's disadvantaged status begins. Many people will answer that it begins when the child first leaves the family, when he or she first encounters competition and there is no familial support in the background—

which although it may not have prepared the child for all possible difficulties, nevertheless offered protection and acceptance. This suggests a time when the child is at nursery or kindergarten. Many others say, however, that the life chances of a child are determined at birth, because the presence of certain conditions and factors at home (healthy living conditions, nutrition, educational games, etc.) will greatly assist his or her subsequent situation.

Still others, including myself, argue that in modern life the competition begins while a child is still an embryo. Whether or not an expectant mother starts taking vitamins to protect her unborn baby can indicate a lot; and in some cases a family will spend nine months doing nothing but awaiting the new arrival.

Since its formation by the Ministry of Education in 2002, the ministerial commissioner's office has attempted to resolve the contradictions of the ethnic approach by targeting its programmes on disadvantaged sections of society. When defining the term "disadvantaged situation" Hungary's Education Act used criteria which ensured that a substantial part of the Roma minority would be covered. The cited research data prove that not all Roma are multiply disadvantaged, but a large share of the multiply disadvantaged are Roma (a significantly higher proportion than implied by their share of the total population).

The Education Act states that a family is *disadvantaged* if it receives regular payments or allowances in kind from the local government because of its financial situation. A family is *multiply disadvantaged* if, beside the above, a child struggles because his or her parents do not dispose of the knowledge that would assist learning at home.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN CREATING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

How is it possible, however, to break out of the trap whereby the financial situation and (lack of) educational qualifications of the parental generation is inherited by the next generation? Do schools at least give children a chance? Are they a means of breaking free from the vicious circle?

Until 2003, it was widely believed that that the educational reforms of recent years had benefited all children in Hungary. Such reforms began in 1985 and included the right to freely establish a school, the reintroduction of church schools, the introduction of foundation schools, and the replacement of central control with local control. In 2003, however, myths concerning the success of Hungarian education were dispelled with the first survey of the Programme for International School Assessment—PISA. This international survey compared student knowledge levels and the efficiency of education systems in 25 OECD countries. Concerning Hungary's education system, the survey concluded that, in addition to various knowledge shortfalls among students, a further weakness of the current system was that it actually reproduced social inequality; that is to say, the disadvantages of children on entry increased during their years at school. Thus, according to the survey, if we took two Hungarian children with the same abilities, knowledge and physical features (even the same skin colour!) but coming from families of differing financial status, and we examined them at the start of their school career and twelve years later upon leaving school, we would find that the social difference between the two children (their social differentiation) had grown substantially.

At the same time, it is also true that in Hungary the poor/non-poor group definition correlates far more closely with the Roma/non-Roma group definition than otherwise should be the case, based on the Rome share of the total population.

The main factors leading, directly or indirectly, to such an enormous increase in differences of opportunity are as follows.

Free school choice. This "achievement", which was introduced during the political transition and the reform of which has been a taboo until very recently, enabled all parents to choose the most appropriate school for their children—whether the school was run by a local government, a church or a foundation. Through their decisions, parents not only chose schools for their children; they also determined—in accordance with the logic of normative-based funding—which school maintainers should receive funding from the state.

Those parents who were able to exercise their right to free choice of school—because they had the appropriate contacts, information, and material goods—were naturally inclined to send their children to schools offering the best services.

As the children of better-off families moved to better schools, socially homogenous schools arose on both sides of the spectrum. Some schools thus had a large proportion of disadvantaged and Roma students, while other schools tended to have middle-class students. Children whose parents failed to exercise their right to free school choice, found themselves in even worse circumstances than before.

Working in tandem with parents, schools also became involved in the selection process, giving preference to middle-class children with "good potential" and prior knowledge.

After the introduction of free school choice, a further selection process between teachers and schools developed almost immediately. Most teachers believe that teaching disadvantaged Roma children is far more difficult and physically demanding than teaching students with a higher level of economic, cultural and social capital. For the same pay, everyone seeks the least burden. As a result, where they can, teachers try to teach in schools with very few Roma students.

Fortunately, there are exceptions to this rule. Nevertheless, the statistics substantiate this trend, showing that the proportion of lessons taught by non-specialised teachers is far higher in schools with mainly Roma students. (We should also note that an analysis of the division of resources for education at local level shows a relationship between capital investment and the relative "prestige" of schools.)

Based on the above, an argument against free school choice is that the practical realisation of the system is extremely cynical, since parents with a real choice of just *one* school (owing to a lack of financial means to transport their child to another school) can take little comfort in their theoretical ability to send their child elsewhere.

The absence of a system of teacher supervision. The former system, which had provided for the quality assessment of trainee teachers and the professional supervision of schools, was suddenly abolished in 1985. This entailed not only the disappearance of the "controllers" that had ensured compliance with communist party policy and sometimes destroyed the careers of individual teachers, but also the abandonment of the only system of professional quality assurance and the only direct channel of communication between the central control bodies and individual schools and teachers. The abolition of the old system was not accompanied by the introduction of a new and more effective external assessment system. Thus, since 1985 there has been no direct contact between teachers in the field and the central education authorities. In other words, teachers have received no guidance or assistance in their daily work for twenty years. If another teacher (e.g. the headteacher) can decide not to sit in on a few lessons of a new, recently qualified colleague (and there is no obligation for him or her do so), then there will never be the possibility of an external and unbiased review—which should form the basis of quality planning and assurance in every modern institution.

Specialised classes and schools, which were originally established to meet the needs of children talented in music, lan-

guages, mathematics or sport, have greatly contributed to the development of segregated classes and schools. Even today, the prevailing wisdom is that children have to be divided up as soon as possible in order to meet their special educational needs. Sadly, in practice, this has become a means of separating Roma children from non-Roma children and disadvantaged children from non-disadvantaged children.

What else can explain the fact that in a locality with a great number of rightly famous Roma musicians, not a single Roma child was given a place at a local school specialising in music? And why is it that bilingual Roma children, diagnosed with learning difficulties stemming from bilingualism, are never given places in specialised English or German classes? Concerning specialised schools, a fundamental and legitimate question is how one can to decide whether a five- or six-year-old child should receive a greater number of lessons in certain subjects and whether or not they will be talented in those subjects later on.

Deficiencies in the system of determining disability and, more generally, the problems associated with the category of Special Educational Need (SEN). SEN children are to be found in all countries, but their treatment by society and the education system varies from country to country. In many (mostly western) countries, SEN does not imply the stigmatisation of children; instead, it means first and foremost the provision of extra services (extra teaching, special experts). In Hungary, however, a rather odd situation has arisen.

One should note at the outset that the problem is not archetypically an issue of disadvantaged or Roma children, but the facts show that whereas just 2-3 percent of non-Roma children are classified as SEN children (the same percentage as the international average), the corresponding figure among Roma children is as high as 20 percent.

While the central budget provides twice the rate of normative funding for SEN children, in schools with special classes for SEN children, conditions for students are actually worse in such classes. Moreover, in almost one in three schools surveyed, the legal requirements for SEN classes were not fully adhered to—in areas such as the merging of grades, the proportion of lessons taught by specialised subject teachers, and the number of lessons taken by remedial teachers. As the survey showed, such failures are particularly common where children are in the greatest need and where educational services of a higher quality could help them to catch up with other children.

The classification of children as private students served originally to enable children with particular achievements in sport or culture, who were unable attend school on a daily basis because they were taking part in national or international sport competitions or international music, dance or singing events, to advance with their contemporaries by taking tests and examinations at regular intervals. Today, the classification of children as private students has become, implicitly or explicitly, a means of legally segregating "problematic children". Many children placed in this group have learning or behavioural problems. Thus their education requires (should require) relatively more time and energy.

Unfortunately, in today's Hungary, classification as a private student or a SEN student not only determines the school career of a child but also, in large measure, the child's opportunities as an adult in the labour market.

Such arbitrarily selected examples do not give an exact impression of the current situation of Hungarian education. Nevertheless, by exposing the most flagrant cases, they do show the main problem areas affecting all parts of the education sector.

As noted at the beginning of this section, segregation also means the failure of the educational system to create opportunities for children of various social groups to meet with each other and become acquainted with each other: it is thus a hotbed of prejudice. The question arises—and it is indicated in the title of this paper: What does the education system say about Roma? Regrettably, the picture is rather

depressing. The textbooks surveyed (reading practice, literature, history, social studies, etc.) sometimes simply do not refer to a shared past that goes back several hundred years or they contain baseless and inaccurate portrayals that tend to create rather than diminish stereotypes. In consequence of such weaknesses, several textbooks have had to be withdrawn in recent years.

Here too, some schools do carry on good practice. In such schools, it is quite natural, in music lessons for instance, that children will sing songs in Romani or Bayash, as well as in German, Greek or French. And in history lessons, not only is time spent on studying the history of Roma, but also contemporary history teaching material "automatically" includes information about important Roma events and individuals. For such courses and lessons, various institutions (private individuals, civil society organisations, government agencies and ministries) seek to provide the greatest amount of quality teaching material. Even so, much still needs to be done in this field, for it is important that all students study about their shared past, customs and mutually beneficial co-existence and that Roma children receive a strong positive self-image.

CASE STUDY

Recent measures taken by the Ministry of Education and other government bodies in Hungary—which are unique in Europe—indicate that the country is at the forefront of efforts to understand problems and combat segregation in schools. Nevertheless, as media reports have indicated, there are still cases of overt discrimination at local level. Perhaps the best example of educational discrimination is the case of Jászladány. Since the dispute goes back half a decade and has serious consequences both in education and in almost every other field (civil society initiatives, electoral law, etc.), we describe, in what follows, the most important events.

In 2000, the mayor of the municipality of Jászladány made a written proposal for the establishment of a foundation school, which he said was justified by tension between parents demanding higher standards and other parents who were less interested in education. The latter group he linked with poorer families and Roma, while the more demanding parents were mainly wealthier non-Roma who were able to contribute to the life of the local community. Two years later, the body of representatives of the local government decided to lease to the foundation school for a period of ten years a part of the publicly owned school building—which had recently been renovated using public funds. The local government also undertook to provide funding necessary for the operation of the foundation school. The actions of the local government thus resulted in an unlawful situation in which the exclusion of certain groups was given preference, to the detriment of accessible education for all.

As well as clashing with local community interest, the establishment of the foundation school in Jászladány breached numerous procedural legal rules of public administration. The local Roma minority self-government immediately reacted to the creation of an elite school, protesting in a letter against the policy of exclusion and subsequently holding a two-day hunger strike. At the outset, the parliamentary commissioner for the rights of national and ethnic minorities and the minister of education reminded the local government that it was bound by law to seek the consent and agreement of the local Roma minority self-government in all matters affecting the education of members of the minority. Since minority education took place at the school, the Roma minority self-government was indisputably affected. Despite this fact, the Roma minority self-government was never consulted. (Later on, the representative body of the local government—once again without the agreement of the Roma minority self-government—amended the school's charter, with the effect that, formally, minority education was not carried on at the school.)

Over time, various bodies (including the parliamentary commissioner for the rights of national and ethnic minorities, the County Office of Administration, the Supreme Court, and the Ministry of Education) confirmed that the actions of the local government with respect to the Roma minority self-government were discriminatory and in breach of the legal regulations relating to the foundation of schools. Indicative of the absurdity of the situation was that, in the local and minority elections of 2002, Jászladány voters re-elected the mayor and elected non-Roma—with the exception of just one representative—as representatives in the local Roma minority self-government. (At the time, non-members of a minority could take part in minority elections.) In this manner, the mayor's wife was elected to head the local Roma minority self-government, while other "representatives" in the minority self-government included the deputy chairman of the foundation school board, the local planning permission officer, and a local farmer.

In addition to the violations of procedural law, the Jászladány school scandal also represents a case of indirect segregation that could not be challenged under the laws in force. Under the Hungarian Constitution every citizen has a right to education and free access to compulsory primary education, and any form of discrimination in education is prohibited. Such legal guarantees, however, proved insufficient in the case of Jászladány. Based on these sections of the Constitution, the Education Act guarantees parents the right of free school choice and the right to establish schools. Subject to the necessary staffing, facilities and budgetary funding, a school may be established by any organisation entitled to do so.

The foundation school in Jászladány met these formal requirements, yet by establishing the elite school, the local government discriminated against those children whose parents could not afford to pay the school fees.

After registration at the beginning of the 2003/2004 school year, several Jászladány parents submitted official

complaints to the County Office of Administration concerning the foundation school's entrance procedure. In their petitions, the parents of Roma children complained that they had been prevented from filling out application forms for their children or had received no response to such applications and that their statements of intent submitted to the foundation school headteacher had been subsequently invalidated.

As relations soured, various parties sought a compromise solution. Within a period of weeks, an amount covering the school fees of Roma children had been collected.

Nevertheless, even today the situation remains unresolved. A lawsuit has been running for years, and there are obvious differences between the two schools. The student profile has met the expectations of those who established the foundation school. Thus, Roma children now account for more than 90 percent of students at the local government school (the percentage of disadvantaged children is even higher) and just 5-10 percent of students at the foundation school.

Despite a long list of failures, the Jászladány case has triggered some positive developments. One such development is the adoption of equal treatment legislation prohibiting both direct and indirect discrimination. Thus, in the future, measures that seemingly provide rights to everyone but which in practice discriminate against certain groups or individuals can be annulled by the courts.

The need for anti-discrimination legislation had been floating in the air for years or even decades. Cases such as Jászladány provided the necessary final push.

A further positive development is the amendment of the system of minority self-government elections. The "takeover" of the Roma minority self-government in Jászladány by elected non-Roma representatives laid bare the fundamental weakness of a system in which citizens of any ethnic background could vote in minority elections—and, indeed, be elected as the sole legal representatives of the minority.

In the 2006 elections, voting in minority elections—or offering oneself as a candidate—was subject to prior registration at the local government.

Perhaps the most important positive development arising out of the Jászladány scandal was the increased attention it gave to the issue of segregated schools—a major determinant of the situation of Roma. Despite all the problems and the ongoing lawsuit, it is my conviction that the Jászladány case will be resolved and that the change in attitudes initiated by the political elite will have an effect on Hungarian society as a whole. Perhaps even our generation will experience a time when all children, irrespective of their skin colour, will have equal chances in life.

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Interview with Károly Danyi

Jászladány, a village in central Hungary, has been in the news over the past seven years. In 2000, the media spotlight fell upon a private school in the village that had been established with the support of the local council. Ever since, the local Roma minority self-government and several NGOs have been protesting against the private school. They claim that the school's presence in the village has resulted in the wilful segregation of Roma students. Almost 90 percent of students at the village's council-run school are of Roma descent, but the Roma share of students at the new private school is negligible. The subject of the interview, who lives in Jászladány and is a Roma minority self-government representative, took part in the campaign against the establishment of the private school.

My name is Károly Danyi and I was born on 31 May 1950. I have six children and seven grandchildren. I started working at Construction Company No. 23 when I was fifteen years old. Then I went to work for the Horticultural Company. I did a course while I was working there, and began working as a supervisor in charge of sixty people. I worked for the Budapest Horticultural Company for sixteen years. I was paid 3000 forints per month, and I also worked part-time as a musician, even going to Germany.

We had a gypsy-music band called Monsoon. Our songs were about the suffering of Roma people. We sang Hungarian and Roma folksongs as well as whatever else people wanted to hear. Hungary came first out of thirty-six countries. I was the lead singer, and my style of music was awarded the best result in group B.

After I returned home, I spent four years at the Underground Construction Company. In total I worked for thirty-two years. I couldn't work any longer because of a horrible illness—lung cancer. I've been in hospital since May.

The important thing in my life is that I love my family and that I love all my friends; I'm happy to have got to know them. I like everyone. For me there's no such thing as a bad Roma or a bad Hungarian; both of them have to be liked. Anyway, it's impossible to choose which is good and which is bad. I like people who are kind. Even here in the hospital, they don't class me as a Roma; I have respect. I am obedient and I don't reject any of the treatments, because I want to live a little longer—since I know what it's like to grow up without a father.

My father left us when I was born. Until I was sixteen years old, I had no shoes; I went in my mother's scarf if I had to walk somewhere. It was very difficult to complete the little schooling that I have—eight grades [primary education]. In order to get more education, I went to work for a company. The people there grew to like me, and they helped me become a supervisor. I also registered as a tradesman, but I feared ending up at the police station or being taken off to prison, so I decided it was better to give back my [business] licence and try and live my life and bring up my children properly. Thank goodness, I sent them off to school. As soon as they'd completed the eighth grade, my children immediately found jobs at the Poultry Processing Plant. They couldn't stay on at school. This was because there were six of them at home, and I was the only one working; I couldn't earn enough to send them to college. At the time, there was no such thing as free textbooks or free school

meals. We received no financial assistance; there was no point in asking for it. I brought them up under very poor circumstances. There were—and still are—many families in Jászladány in the same situation.

I've not seen any big changes as a result of the EU membership. One of my daughters—she's thirty years old—is still living with us. Having left school, she got a job at the Metal Processing Plant, where she continues to work. She doesn't have any other schooling. Our situation has not changed as a result of the EU; it's neither improved nor got worse. We've not received the assistance that was needed. We've asked for free textbooks, and I even wrote to the Ministry of Interior, but they've not helped us either. Perhaps the only change is that because of racial discrimination, there are not many places offering jobs. Many things changed after the political changes of 1989/90—there were many new schools and parents could do as they pleased. Those who were able, took their children to [schools in] the nearest town. The Roma were the first to be dismissed from their jobs, and because of racial discrimination, it is difficult to find work. I attended the predecessor school of the present council-run school. It was built in 1948, but later on the mayor had it demolished. It was the only school in the village. We attended mixed classes; there was no discrimination between Roma and Hungarian pupils, and we grew up together. They couldn't discriminate against us, because there was just the one school.

Nor were the Roma children put in a separate class. Each of the classes had Roma children—about half Roma and half non-Roma. Of course, there were Hungarian children that had conflicts with the Roma children; there was always one or two of them, but we weren't bothered with them. There was one school, and we sat on the same bench—whether we wanted to or not. The situation is quite different today.

All my grandchildren attend the council-run school; none of them go to the private school because we can't afford it.

But if we could afford it, we wouldn't send them there, because we don't deny our own people, and I cannot deny, through my children, the people, Roma people, among whom I am bringing them up. But, in view of the things that are going on at the council-run school, perhaps they should have been sent to the private school, in order to have better chances. I don't think the council-run school offers a particularly good education.

Children attending the council-run school study far less than do those at the private school, and the teachers are less concerned about them. The language used by the teachers is worse. And they are more aggressive, which sets a bad example for the children. In addition, the chances of children at the school are far worse than those of students at the private school. I asked children in eighth grade questions designed for third grade students, and they were unable to answer them. So my question is: Why were they allowed to move up into the next class? How will these kids cope later on?

The founding of the private school led to changes in the council-run school. The computers were taken over to the private school; just one was left here, which is not much help to the kids. Children at the private school are taught computer studies, while our children wouldn't even have got close to a computer unless we'd established a special workshop[1] several years ago. The kids attend the workshop because there they can use a computer. In special afternoon sessions, they are taught things they don't learn at school. It's a big help to them, because we couldn't afford special coaching for them, as we're not in a position to pay. In the workshop, they receive assistance that helps them to study more easily, and their grades will be better. They are taught the normal subjects, but also how to study.

[1] Extra-curricular remedial classes for disadvantaged children, typically held in the afternoons and run by NGOs. They got money from the EU tender of the National Development Plan Human Resource Operative Programme in 2004–2006.

Those who attended last year are now continuing to study. The teachers here are fully equipped to teach the children. Some of the students saw a substantial improvement in their grades by the end of the year. The students improve more in just three hours at the workshop than they do all day at school. Nobody is concerned about them there.

The children like being in the workshop. When they come here in the afternoons, there's no trouble with them. Interestingly, they work hard and are clever, but they still don't perform well at school. The kids attending the workshop say hello to people on the street—even those who never did so before. They like their teachers more, and they understand the importance of studying. At the workshop they try to learn the things they've missed out on at school.

I was a member of the local council, and it was there that I heard that some people wanted to establish a private school. I immediately informed László Kállai, who was the chairman of the Roma minority self-government at the time. I was also a member of the minority self-government, and in 2001 I was its vice-chairman. I told László that there was a problem. A few of us sat down to discuss what we should do. We called together the Roma community in order to prevent it in some way. First, we submitted a petition to the mayor, in which we protested against the private school. We said that if a private school were to be established, this would lead to the segregation of Roma children—because this was the intention. More than half the students at the council-run school were Roma, and the idea was to remove non-Roma kids from the school. There would be fees at the private school—and Roma would not have the money to pay. The mayor did not accept the petition. He said that Roma children were not being segregated, but that a school was being established for better students, because they couldn't study in this way. Of course, this means the same thing. We then held a hunger strike for two days. The newspapers wrote a lot about us, but still nothing happened.

Later on, at a meeting of the local council, it was decided that the private school should receive part of the council-run school, including equipment. It was then that computers were taken over to the private school. The whole story began in 2000; it's been going on for six years now, and there's still no end to the court action. Many Roma parents tried to get their kids into the private school, but they weren't given places. And they still dare to say—even in court—that this is not segregation.

I couldn't stop this from happening, even though I was a member of the local council. I couldn't do anything because many people were against us. Council members were racists even twenty years ago. They don't like "blacks" [Roma], and this is still true even now. They weren't interested in the opinion of the Roma minority self-government; nobody wanted to know what we thought about the private school. But they should have asked for our opinion; this is what the laws state, because minority lessons were underway at the school and we were affected by such. Even so, they didn't contact us.

We were very disappointed when it turned out that the mayor's wife and one of the private school's people had been elected to the minority self-government, alongside just one Roma.[2] This could happen because anyone could vote for anyone; the fact that the mayor's wife wasn't a Roma didn't matter: she could still run for the post of chairman of the minority self-government. She was obviously not elected by Roma voters, but by her own supporters.

The minority elections of 2006 have just taken place. On this occasion, candidates and voters in the minority elections had to register as minority electors. Because only Roma voters were allowed to vote, there was a change in the composition of the minority body. Even so, some people said that non-Roma did vote in the election, while others said that they didn't vote. I don't know what the truth is.

[2] Non-Roma were elected to the Roma minority self-government in 2002.

Obviously, Roma are now represented in the body, but the opponents of the private school were not the ones to be elected.

I have grandchildren in eighth grade, seventh grade, and sixth grade, and one in second grade. My children will seek out their destiny with God's help. After eighth grade, most kids in Jászladány go on to commercial college. We want ours to go to grammar school or higher education, rather than commercial college. I should like them to go on to university and get a degree. I would be very proud of them.

Different Women

Andrea Pető

Esther and Her Bag

Between the collapse of "state-ist feminism" (1989) and Hungary's accession to the European Union (2004), several important works were published by both Hungarian and foreign authors on the reasons for the absence of a women's movement in Eastern Europe.[1]

After the political changes of 1989, a democratic expectation and a general hope was that the women's movement and the scholarly discourse would undergo dramatic changes, and that such changes would permit the importance and value of gender equality to become manifest in the public arena. As a participant in the academic feminist discourse, I too have encountered the various forms of institutional resistance to gender equality in society.[2] Various authors have indicated the factors that hinder—either through their absence or through their presence—the proper development of a women's movement.

[1] Andrea Pető, "Hungarian Women in Politics", in Joan Scott and others, eds., *Transitions, Environments, Translations: The Meanings of Feminism in Contemporary Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 153–161; Andrea Pető, "The History of the Women's Movement in Hungary", in Rosi Braidotti and Gabriele Griffin, eds., *Thinking Differently. A Reader in European Women's Studies* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 361–372.

[2] Ian Manners and Andrea Pető, The European Union and the Value of Gender Equality, in Ian Manners and Sonja Lucarelli, eds., *Values and Principles in European Union Foreign Policy* (London–New York: Routledge, 2006), 97–113.

In what follows, I describe and analyse the birth and activity of a special women's organisation, Esther's Bag—a Jewish feminist association. My aim is to show how it was that for some years this women's organisation edited and published the only feminist articles in a special section of the male-dominated, often ribald Hungarian press. At the same time, Esther's Bag also ran a feminist film club (at a time when many smaller cinemas had to close because they could not compete with the new multiplex cinemas showing the big Hollywood films) and it organised a reading series called "Untold Stories", which introduced works that stand in opposition to the Hungarian mainstream's perception of history and the Holocaust: in this way, we made space for constructions of gendered memory in society.

BACKGROUND

Within the space of a few months in 1944, Hungary—where the largest Jewish community in Eastern Europe now lives[3]—deported 500,000 of its citizens of Jewish descent to the concentrations camps.

Most of the assimilated and non-religious intellectual Jews live in Budapest. Under communism, the only possible life-strategy was to conceal one's Jewish identity. Thus, in private conversations between young people or adults, one question has often been raised: "How did you find out you are Jewish?" Indeed, many stories have been told about how and when people realised they were Jewish.[4]

Political scientists have characterised the post-1989 period as a time when the red carpet was pulled out from under society, revealing everything that had been swept under the carpet. The situation is not so simple, as far as women's politics is concerned. After 1945, not only was Hungarian society restructured, but also—thanks to full female employment and free abortion rights—the right of women to self-determination developed differently from how it did on the other side of the Iron Curtain. This is still true, even though—to the sorrow of many women—such self-determination never manifested itself in the public arena as "feminist consciousness". Following the collapse of "stateist feminism" and the conservative shift in women's policy after 1989, there was a drastic decrease in the number of employed women– a factor that had previously served to achieve "full" emancipation. The old patriarchal model of private life became the political norm in public life. The situation was made even more serious by the simultaneous collapse of social services and provisions for children (nurseries, kindergartens, and day-care centres), owing in large part to the triumph of neo-liberalism.

The historical churches—as victims of the communist regime—came out from under the red carpet as beneficiaries, but even today the churches are reluctant to face up to their collaboration with the communist apparatus and secret services or the spiritual consequences of such collaboration. Because they were victims, they seem to feel they are exempted from efforts being made in other parts of the world to redefine spirituality and reaffirm its social relevance for civilisation. On the contrary, ever since 1989, the churches have vociferously supported traditional female roles—motherhood as a norm, the biological difference of women, and they have related femininity to the concept of female dignity. In such matters, there is little difference between the Catholic and Protestant churches and the Jewish religious communities in Hungary. Older men remind younger women of their duties, forming a strong coalition against efforts to modernise—irrespective of whether such efforts are inspired by Catholic feminism, feminist Protestant theology or the female rabbi of a reform congregation.

[3] Zvi Gitelman, Barry Kosmin, and András Kovács, eds., *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2003).

[4] Ferenc Erős, András Kovács, and Katalin Lévai, "'How did I find out that I was a Jew?'", *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 17, no. 3 (1987): 55–66.

At the same time as in other countries where "state-ist feminism" had once prevailed, the 1990s in Hungary saw both a drastic reduction in female political representation and a failure on the part of the women's movement to make the anticipated impact. The various women's associations and NGOs, whose activity required great personal efforts, were unable to influence the mainstream or break out of a process that Sabine Lang has described as the "NGO-isation of feminism"—in which the NGOs representing "women's interests" operate with minimal prestige and budgetary resources in a system founded on individual self-sacrifice and self-exploitation.[5]

It was in this rather odd social space that the Esther's Bag Workshop [EszterTáska Műhely] was established as a foundation and an association of public utility.

ESTHER AND HER BAG

In 1999, Katalin Pécsi—who was at the time a teacher of Hungarian literature at the Táncsics Grammar School in Buda and who had already successfully put together a Jewish literary anthology available in a limited number of copies at select bookshops—edited a special edition of *Szombat* [Saturday]. The magazine, which was read mainly by a new generation of Jewish male intellectuals in Budapest and was extremely critical of various aspects of the Jewish religious community, was published monthly and contained articles of medium length. The three male editors were of all of the same generation, while the editorial board members were all older men.

In Hungary, from the mid-1990s onwards, almost all magazines and periodicals of note produced special "women's" issues, thereby addressing, in their view, the need to cover the "issue of the day". What happened at

[5] Sabine Lang, "The NGOization of Feminism", in C. Kaplan, S. Keates, and J. S. Wallach, *Transitions, Environments, Translations. Feminisms in International Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 101–120.

Szombat was different, however. Owing in large part to the enthusiastic efforts of the editor Katalin Pécsi, the special issue led to further conversations "with women". The conversations were continued over cups of coffee at the Café Central—reflecting the café traditions of previous generations of feminists. It was there that the Esther's Bag Workshop was formed. The founding members were: Mónika Sándor (psychologist), whom I had met at the women's club run by Chabad Lubavitch, the Hasidic Orthodox community; Borbála Juhász (historian), who had been a student of mine at the Central European University; Judit Wirth, who had wide-ranging experience and was the president of NaNe, an organisation combating violence against women; Zsuzsa Toronyi, who was a museologist and archivist at the Jewish Museum; Andrea Kuti, who was training to be a rabbi; and myself, a teacher and researcher of social/gender history at the Central European University (from 1991).

Esther's Bag functioned because its founding members were at a special point in their lives. We all felt relatively free but also rather dissatisfied with our previous work. Whether we were between jobs, recovering froma divorce, in the midst of a romance, or about to give birth—all of us suddenly wanted to do work that inspired us. It was an exceptional moment. We already had professional experience; we knew what we did not want to do and also what we were really interested in. Each of us brought with her a network of contacts at Hungarian and international NGOs. We could also mobilise contacts in our respective professional fields. Internationally, it was at the Bet Debora conferences in Berlin that we found the milieu that reflected our intellectual and spiritual yearning. The Esther's Bag Workshop organised events that we thought would contribute to a reinterpretation of Jewish tradition from a woman's perspective.

ACTIVITIES

Our existing contacts were crucial to the success of our activities. At the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, Zsuzsa Toronyi was curator of a long-planned exhibition about Jewish women. *Untold Stories* exploded onto the public scene with the first evening held at the Jewish Museum. An exhibition catalogue was produced and edited by Zsuzsa Toronyi.[6] The papers were translated into English and made available on CD. The first evening was followed by seven further events, at which women of various ages read out their stories.

The *Untold Stories* were written for this occasion. Many women were accompanied by their families who, sitting in the front row and struggling to hold back their tears, looked on as the women read out, for the first time publicly, their experiences of persecution and their stories of discrimination. When one of the women took from her bag the dress which, in the winter of 1944, the other girls in the labour camp had secretly made for her to wear on her eighteenth birthday, we felt that our efforts had not been in vain. Our audience was always mixed, and that was the attraction of the evenings. Older and younger women and men, mothers with their daughters and sons, Jews and non-Jews—perhaps sixty or so, sometimes a hundred of us. One of our friends had a bakery; she brought savoury scones, which we ate with wine, as we talked about our shared past. The evenings provided the missing link in the chain for the Hungarian women's movement; their effect was the same as when the awareness-raising groups in North America faced up to slavery. The groups there rejected discrimination from a Protestant theological standpoint. Here, our hope for reinterpreting progressive politics by forming groups and raising consciousness was based on *tikkun*

[6] Zsuzsa Toronyi, ed., *A zsidó nő* [The Jewish woman] (Budapest: Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, 2002).

olam, the command to repair the world. All of this took place among a generation whose members should have experienced the 1968 movement but did not do so because of the repressive effects of "state-ist feminism". Of course, as Emma Goldman so rightly pointed out, women do not like to take part in a revolution if they cannot dance. So we too spent much time together in a relaxed atmosphere. Papers, plans, edited stories, and internet articles were conceived while we nibbled at biscuits. We shared our sorrows and our joys. Sometimes the meetings were connected with festivals—above all with *Rosh Chodesh*, the first day of every month in the Hebrew calendar, marked by the appearance of the new moon and considered to be a "women's holiday". Although none of us had kept the holidays previously, it was an interesting experiment with a tradition that was unknown to us. Esther's Bag was a learning process for us all, in the course of which we tried to determine the meaning of tradition for ourselves. We also held two Hanukkah parties, celebrating the Festival of Re-dedication by lighting candles—one in a café, and one in the apartment of Lujzi Vasvári, organiser of the Pest–New York Salon and an honorary member of Esther's Bag. The grandmothers' generation knew the songs; we listened to them and were delighted to see how relaxed they looked as they sang.[7]

Thanks to her good relationship with the management of the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, Zsuzsa Toronyi arranged for us to hold at the museum the first evening of *Untold Stories*, a conference on Jewish women's literature, and a presentation of a magazine published by a historical research institute of Jews in Austria. We did not have to pay rent for the venue, and this was also true of the feminist film club. Vera Surányi, who worked for the Hungarian Film Institute, later joined us in our work. Her feminist film club showed films on Sunday afternoons at an

[7] Andrea Pető, "Women in the Hungarian Jewish Communities: Tradition(s)?", in *Jewish Central Europe. Past and Present* (2003), 36–46.

alternative cinema called Cirkogejzír. To cover costs, we sold tickets for 500 forints. This way, we were able to see many special films that we otherwise would not have seen. Each film was followed by a debate. At the time this was the only feminist film club in Hungary.

As soon as the feminist pages began to appear in the magazine *Szombat*, there was a dramatic increase in the number of copies sold. Esther's Bag's co-operation with *Szombat* produced the only feminist press product in Hungary. Indeed, many readers of the magazine were "only" interested in feminism.

The articles we published in *Szombat* concerned festivals and newly published books. Since most of us had a humanities background, we wrote reviews of books by female authors and reports on women's topics. Several articles were written when Elfriede Jelinek received the Nobel prize; we also held a conference on that occasion. Since I often travelled to places such as Mexico, Moldova and Armenia, I wrote reports for the supplement on the lives of Jewish women and their memories of the Holocaust. We also interviewed Kinga Fabó, a person who will be the subject of doctoral theses in years to come (unlike the female star-poets currently favoured by men working in the media, most of whom will pass into obscurity). We chose, as the subjects of our interviews, women who fight against social forgetting. We were their "sisters in arms", and for a time we felt at home at *Szombat*. (The founders of Esther's Bag and three of the editors of *Szombat* had a shared past: in the 1980s, all of us had attended the so-called Flying University, and on Fridays we had met up—along with other young Jewish intellectuals—at the Rabbi School in the Eighth District; at the time we had suspected, and now we know, that we were under the surveillance of the secret police.)

DIFFICULTIES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

The threads of friendship between us and the "honorary Esthers" became stronger. A support network developed; as it became more institutionalised, there were inevitable changes leading to a crisis of identity.

In 2002, we changed the legal status of the workshop to a more official form; it became a foundation. There were administrative consequences of this change: we had to collect a statement from each member—all of which had to be dated within a period of one month—accepting my invitation as founder to join the foundation. It quickly became apparent that although all of us wanted to do things, the administration involved was very off-putting—even though we attempted to keep it to a minimum.

Even so, after a while we began to apply for grants. The practical side of filling out application forms was never a problem—we always knew what we wanted to do—but state funding procedures dampened our spirits. Much time was lost in obtaining obscure documents and certificates (e.g. a certificate verifying that we had no customs debt). It seems never to have occurred to lawmakers that they might make special rules for small (cultural) foundations, which would diminish their administrative burdens.

Such administration was very time-consuming and a constant source of tension. We used it to model typical marital conflicts, such as who should be responsible for paying bills, who should take out the garbage, who should cook tonight, etc. But such things are just superficial aspects of equality and co-operation; emancipation should not stop there. The other memory against which we all had to fight was our shared nightmare of the communist pioneer movement. We laughed and chatted a lot about what one should or should not do at a pioneer group meeting. But this shows what the literature on social movements also underlines, namely that mobilising experience is crucial in the civil society sector.

We detested the formalism of the pioneer movement. We were full of the idealism of 1989 and our childhood experiences of "the group at any cost" led us to experiment with alternative groupings—which inevitably entailed conflict.

A successful grant application did not mean immediate income but merely a pledge that if the association or foundation held an event (which it funded itself), it could then submit an invoice to the funding body by a certain deadline. The funding body then spent an inordinate amount of time verifying the invoice. After a long wait (six months if we were lucky), the money was transferred. Although the amounts were small in the wider picture, nevertheless they represented substantial sums—if we had to advance them from our own pocket for an indefinite period of time.

A characteristic feature of the new social movements in western countries is that they train the experts who are then recruited by government bodies. This is how the state apparatus acquires its base of experts and the political parties their professional grounding. In Hungary, however, this rarely happens. Those who start working in the non-government sector are hardly ever offered government posts later on. In consequence, many activists working for NGOs train for long years only to see their initiatives thwarted by the state apparatus. Esther's Bag is an exception to this rule, for it has served as a training ground for Borbála Juhász, who went on to be a head of department of equality of men and women at Hungary's first, newly formed Ministry for Equal Opportunities, and Katalin Pécsi, who became the educational manager at the newly established Holocaust Documentation Centre. But as these women moved into the mainstream, the rest of us were left wondering how much they would be able to preserve of the spirit of Esther's Bag (sadly, as it turned out, next to nothing) and whether new recruits could be found for our training ground.[8]

[8] Andrea Pető, ed., *Női esélyegyenlőség Európában. Nőtudományi tanulmányok és a munkaerőpiac kapcsolata Magyarországon* [Equal opportunities for women in Europe. The relationship between women's studies papers and the labour market in Hungary] (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2003).

Our lives and routines changed: Borbála Juhász and Katalin Pécsi became important civil servants; Andrea Kuti married and moved abroad; Zsuzsa Toronyi had a child; Mónika Sándor began her PhD and started a new job, which, with two children, proved too great a burden; Judit Wirth decided to invest her energies in NaNe. But in their place came Judit Gazsi and Vera Surányi. Under the new circumstances, personal contacts brought in new members. The work of Esther's Bag changed as the new members introduced their own fields of interest.

It turned out that Esther's Bag was indeed the product of a fortunate moment in history. Since Hungary's accession to the European Union, equal opportunities experts have simply been appointed, rather than selected from among the trained experts. Indeed, the most important criterion seems to have been membership of an inner circle of decision makers—rather than long-term experience in the NGO sector or a master's degree in gender studies from a foreign university. Indeed, since gender studies are unknown in Hungary, the level of professionalism is very low.[9]

An additional factor is that all social movements are utopian: they seek a more beautiful, humane and just world. And if this is not translated into tiny successes and small victories in everyday life, then one's personality quickly becomes distorted. Esther's Bag is an attempt to translate ideas into action. Every event we hold is a miracle—amid rather poor conditions. But those of us who attended the film clubs, the conferences, and the evenings of "untold stories" went home feeling that we had done something to stick together the pieces of our broken world.

We had no great illusions concerning the support we were likely to receive from other institutions: from the outset, we only planned events that we could finance ourselves. We

[9] Ibid.

saw how the civil society sector usually means self-exploitation and the use of one's own resources.

In Eastern Europe, 1968 never meant the street demonstrations of Paris, the new sensibility, environmental issues, or the peace and women's rights movements. Instead it meant the crushing of the Prague Spring—with Hungarian tanks among others. Consequently, recognition of women's rights as human rights is a slow and hesitant process. In order to make headway, civil society organisations often have no choice but to employ the old methods of the era of "state-ist feminism" (personal lobbying of government decision-makers, seeking alliances with political parties, obtaining key positions in umbrella organisations). Few civil society organisations will express satisfaction with a government in power until they have received the funding they desire. In consequence, the aim of any government is to reduce the potential for criticism from such organisations by means of the redistribution of funding. For our part, however, we wanted to increase our freedom potential through a critical and wry approach. This meant, however, that we could not count on support from any level of government or the Jewish nomenclature.

Between 2002 and 2005, we regularly published articles in *Szombat*. This gave structure to our activities—we had to take note of new books and submit material on time. It also set the limits on our work.

In the end, we proved too radical for *Szombat*; we wrote too few articles on Orthodoxy and Israel and too many on gender-based discrimination. There were limits to the tolerance of the male editors. Indeed, topics such as female rabbis and the crisis of Jewish masculinities made them hit the roof. The members of Esther's Bag sought to expound the different gendered experiences, while *Szombat*'s editors were interested in "Jewry" in the singular sense. We opted for pluralism, and invested great energies in making our case. The editors began to employ methods that we knew only too well from communism; they censured the material

we submitted. At first, they attempted to divide our group. Then, with the name Esther's Bag still at the top of the page, they asked young, inexperienced and easily manipulated women to write articles instead of us—and without informing us. Fortunately, this technique did not work because we drew together. Later on, we decided to publish electronically. Not all of us were interested in writing. When relations with *Szombat* deteriorated beyond repair, none of us was particularly bothered that we no longer had to write. This also meant, however, no more deadlines. Without discipline we too eased up.

From the outset, our objective was that Esther's Bag should be a place where people come together: people of different interests and with different amounts of time at their disposal. As time passed, however, we realised that, in line with the neo-conservative shift, Jewish women of the younger generation were more attracted to the various religious movements such as the Pesti Shul, a modern Orthodox community established in 2001, and the Chabad. In the Reform community, the division into two parts of Sim Shalom, headed by the only female rabbi, Katalin Kelemen, was also a result of the general polarisation.

The members of Esther's Bag became events organisers: we arranged book series, held photo exhibitions, published books (including *The Diary of Éva Weinman*), and organised conferences on Jewish women's literatures or Jewish women's films. There are, of course, state-funded institutions specialising in such fields, but they do not share our special spiritual inspiration, which seeks to reinterpret Jewish tradition from a woman's perspective. Because of the neo-conservative trend, they cannot satisfy this need. On the other hand, our "uniqueness" isolated us and prevented us from mobilising a coalition.

For other women's organisations, Esther's Bag was "too Jewish"; for Jewish organisations, it was "too feminist". Hidden anti-semitism could be felt when we heard among women activists criticising the left-wing government some-

one say: "Well, if Esther's Bag [i.e. the Jews] hasn't [haven't] received any money, then what hope do we have?" We joined a nascent umbrella organisation called For Women's Interest (Női Érdek). An enduring hope was that we might have our own office, a place where we could meet with readers, talk and drink tea. The editorial office of *Szombat*, which consisted of two small rooms, was never suitable for this purpose. Thus, when it seemed that the Women's Centre [Nőház], which had been planned since the 1990s, would finally be established, we happily became involved. At the beginning, we thought it would be an inclusive and democratic organisation. But unrealistically high rent fees (accepted at the very outset) and the anti-democratic conduct of the management persuaded us—with nine other founder women's organisations—to dissolve the Women's Centre.

The women's policy issues spotlighted as a result of the EU membership, such as women's employment and sexual harassment in the workplace ("women's" issues as a result of anti-discrimination legislation) were of no great interest to us.[10] In line with European trends, the Hungarian women's movement is becoming more technocratic as it seeks to accommodate the language and practice of neo-liberalism. The budgetary system and the new system of EU funding are strengthening this trend. Under such circumstances, an NGO made up of volunteer activists with a critical view of Jewish traditions has very little room for manoeuvre. In years to come, our organisation will probably have to professionalise its work or accept that it cannot meet the requirements of the grants procedures. The system has been devised with the intention of norm transfer and unifying the European civil society movement. This is how a united "Europe" is to be born. The trouble is many of us do not fit in.

[10] Andrea Pető, ed., *A társadalmi nemek oktatása Magyarországon* [Gender Studies in Hungary] (Budapest: Ministry of Youth, Family and Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2006).

Moreover, in the European Union, it is only in Hungary that equal opportunities means also "women, Roma and people with disabilities". We do not find such an approach to equal opportunities anywhere else in Europe. There are three basic reasons for this link. The first is that this is a politically correct way of formulating the employment problems faced by Roma in such a way that they are required to look for the factors causing their inequalities of opportunity among themselves rather than in majority society or the institutional systems. Second, women politicians fighting for "women's rights" can neutralise to some degree efforts to push them aside if they take a joint stand with Roma, who have a stronger position in domestic political life, and with people with disabilities. The third reason is that if we speak of "women, Roma and people with disabilities" together, we inevitably switch to an alibi rhetoric, that is we do not say anything that would require us to take concrete action, because these groups cannot be united using the rhetoric of political mobilisation.

European Union membership has made the increasing professionalism of women's civil society groups inevitable. In the process, small organisations based on individual goals and individual input will gradually disappear. What will remain are the "official" women's groups with their professional forms of administration and management—which are actually modelled on the decision-making and executive structures of the state institutions. In the future, we shall have to decide whether or not we want to run such an organisation.

SUMMARY

After a long grants application procedure, we held the fourth Bet Debora conference in Budapest from August 24–27, 2006. The conference began amid hectic circumstances. It was at this time that the Hungarian media reported how the previous Hungarian member of the UN

CEDAW committee had written a letter to the heads of all the New York missions to the UN stating that it would be unfortunate if I received a political post in the organisation because I was "a Zionist activist, founding member and head of an influential Hungarian Jewish women's organisation (Esther's Bag)". The conference was the summation of all our previous activities. Not only did we serve as hosts to almost 50 Jewish activists, scholars and female rabbis from 15 countries, but we also could thematise the topics ourselves, attempting to provide a theme to the European discourse. To mark the occasion, we organised an exhibition entitled *Jewish Women*, which presented women's life stories and photos taken at the previous Bet Debora conferences in Berlin. We published postcards and a book about *bat mitzvah*, a ceremony for girls celebrating their acceptance into the Jewish community. And, most importantly, every participant received the information material for the conference in a linen bag—Esther's bag—produced especially for the conference.

WHY DID WE CALL OURSELVES ESTHER'S BAG?

Esther is a key personality and heroine of Purim, a joyous Jewish holiday that commemorates the deliverance of the Persian Jews from evil Haman's plot to exterminate them. Esther's story can be read in the *Book of Esther*. The sweet triangular pastries served at Purim are called Haman's bags, named after a man. Thus, we lose the opportunity—although Esther was the heroine and by celebrating her we raise her from forgetting—to make her a "real" or "living" tradition. To do justice to all the "Esthers" who have ever lived, we named our organisation "Esther's Bag". Naming also means having power over it. We too would like to believe that we have such power from ourselves, for ourselves—and even though we find ourselves in a strange period of transitions and these opportunities are here only temporarily.

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Interview with Magda Kun

The interviewee, Magda Kun, is an active participant in programmes organised by the Jewish women's group Esther's Bag [EszterTáska]. By telling her untold story, she has become part of the discourse, stimulating other women to relate their untold stories as well.

My name is Magda Kun and I am a journalist. I have always been interested in children's and young people's literature. I am a qualified primary school teacher, librarian and journalist. My last place of work was the Youth Magazine Publication Company [Ifjúsági Lapkiadó Vállalat], where I contributed to a magazine for the very youngest of children. Other members of staff and I used to ironically call the magazine the "absolute mini-magazine" since our readers could not even read. The children were usually given the magazine *(Dörmögő Dömötör)*[1] by their parents or grandparents. I worked there as an editor and I also wrote several columns. I read the manuscripts and edited the supplements, games and quizzes as well as an article for parents. I prepared the texts for printing. I adored the work. I left the company on retirement. Previously I had worked

[1] A very popular children's magazine.

at the National Educational Library, where I was responsible for international lending. I was asked to work there after having spent more than a decade working in the library of the Teaching Training Institute. On my arrival there, I found a large disorganised mound of books. On my departure, I left a well-organised library of 25,000 volumes. Since then, the library has outgrown this framework. It has been computerised and has moved to larger premises—it is a pleasure to see how much it has developed. I also worked for several years in the Art Department of the Adult Education Institute and at the State Book Distribution Company. This was where I began my working career, in what is now the Writers' Bookshop [Írók Könyvesboltja]—which at the time was managed by a brilliant book retailer, Lajos Szenes.[2] He was the grand old lord of the book trade—a cultivated, broad-minded and wise man, who was known and loved by all. He put me in charge of youth books, and it was then that I fell in love with this type of literature.

I came into contact with the group Esther's Bag after I read in a magazine that the group was looking for "women's untold stories". By chance I happened to receive at the time an autobiographical text by a childhood friend; she had written it at the request of her family. The woman had had an extremely interesting life. She had lived in several different countries and various types of society. She had a large family and was an intelligent person who had seen a lot. I thought the text could be of interest to Esther's Bag. With the author's permission, I sent it off to Katalin Pécsi, a leading member of Esther's Bag. It seems the text and the very short accompanying letter caught Pécsi's attention. We met up, and she asked me to write down my experiences during the war. She inquired whether I knew anybody else in the same age group that could also provide a text. At about this time, I attended a reunion of my old classmates,

[2] Head of the Writers' Bookshop.

and I asked some of them to write about the part of their life they considered to be the most important. This was how I came into contact with Esther's Bag, and I began receiving invitations to various events organised by the group. I was interested in the lives of women, for I had worked with women all my life. It was this that drew my attention to the existence of a woman's way of seeing things. Until then I had never really considered whether we women tell our stories in a different manner from men. I realised that we do indeed approach most things differently. Our criteria are different, and we emphasise different things. This may be of value to society. I do not know; future generations will decide. Without a doubt, my husband and I—we have been living together for fifty-six years—have many shared experiences, going right back to childhood. I often smile when I think of how differently we can perceive the same event, and in my view there is something typical about how we consistently and repeatedly employ different approaches.

I think the difference is gender-based. In many respects, I would connect it to gender. Like most men, my husband has a technical mind; he always wants to know how something works, how it was made, what technology was involved, etc. For my part, I am more interested in human relations, in how something developed, who was originally interested in it, what was the motivation behind it, what were the human factors leading to the current state of affairs.

To cite another example from our life: our daughter attended an academy in Poland; she is now a sculptor artist. During the study breaks, she always flew home, and so we often went to the airport. At the time, you could watch the planes from a terrace on the first floor of the airport building. On one occasion, a large group of nursery school children came out on to the terrace with their teacher. The idea was that the children should experience the transport system. I immediately saw an opportunity as the editor of the magazine *Dörmögő Dömötör;* I was curious to find out what the children found interesting. I spoke to the nursery school

teacher and asked her to invite me to the subsequent class discussion of the airport visit.

I greatly enjoyed it. The children had to draw pictures: the small boys drew wonderful aeroplanes. Their pictures were so true-to-life that you could almost hear the roar of the engines. The pictures expressed power, motion, determination and speed—but people were completely absent. The little girls were less skilled at drawing pictures of the planes, but they always depicted people in their pictures—in the actual plane if nowhere else. None of the pictures drawn by the girls was completely without people. Nobody influenced the children; they could freely choose the topic of their drawings. This illustrates the typical difference of approach.

From time to time I have attended events organised by Esther's Bag. My main interest was the literary evenings. Katalin Pécsi teaches literature and English, and she has often invited female poets—very good ones, such as Ágnes Gergely, Zsuzsa Beney, Magda Székely as well as others. She arranged and held successful poetry evenings, with musical accompaniment. I loved to listen to the poetry and music, and my husband always came along too. Katalin Pécsi asked us—as survivors of the camps—to read out our accounts, in order to add credibility to our words. This is what the meetings were like.

This made me think about topics that I had previously ignored—such as differences in perceptions of men and women. As I observed the people around me, I became convinced of the existence of such differences. Of course, I've never carried out an academic survey on the matter, and I don't know the extent to which generalisations can be true. But if we look at Hungarian history or world history, it is quite evidently the history of men rather than of women. I could probably count on just one hand the women mentioned in a school history textbook.

Similarly, most social structures and countless other phenomena in this world have been created by men. I have read, for instance, that men's spatial orientation is better.

Observations within my own family have tended to verify this. My husband can find his way in foreign cities as though he were a bird. He just has to look at the map of the town or city—which also offers a bird's eye view. Having done this, he can then drive with confidence. Under the same circumstances, I am completely lost. If necessary, I can always find a solution to the problem, but it takes me longer and it is more tiring for me. I do not do it as instinctively as he does.

We women have other skills—neither greater nor lesser in number or value. Our skills are of a different type. We are probably more experienced in the practical aspects of everyday life. We are more flexible, ingenious and adaptive when it comes to resolving tensions and coping with human relations. Perhaps we have a tiny bit more patience, understanding, and empathy. Scientists say that while men are better at spatial orientation, women have superior linguistic abilities. The two halves of a woman's brain communicate more quickly and more flexibly, while their "chattering" has a smoothing effect on the people around them. I think the scientists are right.

The women's untold stories that I have told and that we have told are already past events. They will not have a great influence on the future. At most, they will be an established part of the family history that I plan to write.

I am still in contact with Esther's Bag. I know nothing about how the group started. When the group came into my life, it was like out of the head of Zeus. I know nothing about how it was run previously. But I have been thinking about what the future might hold for the group. For example, I recently attended a conference held at the Central European University, having been invited by Andrea Pető.[3] At the conference I saw a publication summarising the measures taken by recent Hungarian governments as well as civil society organisations to promote the equality of marginalised social groups, including measures taken to protect women.

[3] Bet Debora Conference, August 23–27, 2006.

These significant and long-term measures were developed by Katalin Lévai,[4] Kinga Göncz[5] and their staff. In my view, Esther's Bag could have a large role to play in ensuring that the effects of such measures and the underlying ideas penetrate people's minds; that they are internalised—to use psychological terminology.

What I find good about the set-up of the group is its activity in the public realm. For instance, Katalin Pécsi has told me about an excellent lecture series on the Holocaust, held at the documentation centre in Páva Street, where many teachers and education specialists receive accurate historical information.[6] The need for such events is great, because nowadays there is a great deal of falsification of history.

Both students and teachers are in need of the authentic data and information available there. In addition, the group also organises various programmes in co-operation with the Central European University[7] and the Bálint Jewish Community Centre.[8] I approve of such programmes, and sometimes I attend them. I think the work of Esther's Bag in the public realm is extremely useful; I try to contribute when I can.

Esther's Bag needs to reach out to even more people and establish contact with them. They are doing so already—very effectively. They may be able to add new forms of activity. At the moment, I am not sure how this could be done, but there must be opportunities if the group can join forces with other groups. As far as I know they have already established contact with student exchange groups, which is to be welcomed. By means of such groups, inter-cultural rela-

[4] Head of the Government Office for Equal Opportunities.
[5] Kinga Göncz replaced Katalin Lévai as minister of youth, family, social affairs and equal opportunities. In 2006, she became Hungary's foreign minister.
[6] Holocaust Memorial Center (1094 Budapest, 39 Páva Street), www.hdke.hu.
[7] Central European University, www.ceu.hu.
[8] Bálint Jewish Community Centre, Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association.

tions could be developed—for which there is a great need. A valuable approach would be to involve students with dual identity—who could then serve as a bridge between the various cultures.

In my view, the people working for Esther's Bag are highly flexible, open-minded and willing to try new ideas. They are obviously trying to broaden the current range of activities.

Living a Full Life, But Differently

György Könczei

The Struggle for the Rights of People with Disabilities

From the ghetto of invisibility to a slow and gradual acceptance

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, people with disabilities have experienced an improvement in their situation, although change has been painfully slow in many areas. A decade and a half ago, acceptance levels in Hungarian society—as elsewhere in the world—were perceptibly lower than they are today. At the time, people with disabilities still tended to be referred to as *fogyatékosok*—the equivalent of the English term "disabled" or "handicapped". Today, the usual Hungarian expression is *fogyatékossággal élő ember*—the equivalent of the English expression "person/people with disabilities".[1] The lives of people with disabilities—those with physical, hearing, mental, visual or psycho-social disabilities as well as autism—are now perhaps somewhat easier than they were fifteen years ago. Nevertheless, if you have a disability or other health impairment, you still face many of the same basic problems.

For instance, if you have Down's syndrome or are a person with autism, you still cannot be sure of appropriate healthcare provision. Your doctor may be ignorant of your

[1] In Hungarian, the word *person* ['ember'] cannot come first as it does in the English expression *person with disabilities*, but the current expression [fogyatékossággal élő ember] is obviously better than the old one which defined the person merely as disabled [fogyatékos].

needs or even afraid of you, or s/he may simply send you away. You will only find a job if you live in one of the very few areas in Hungary covered by the supported employment scheme, which is only gradually developing into a national system. If you are a person with autism, you will be subject to constant discrimination and rejection. At least now you do not have to fear being turned away or refused service at a bar or restaurant, for the principle of equal treatment was introduced into Hungary's legal system in 1998.

If you have physical disabilities and you are a wheelchair user, you can now travel on certain trams and buses. And certain pavements now have ramps. On the other hand, with the exception of a few stations, you still cannot use the underground (subway) system in Budapest. The smaller and more rural the settlement in which you live, the less likely you are able to access the offices of your local authority or council. If you have a hearing disability or are deaf, you may possibly find an induction loop at the theatre, and you also have access to the national sign language system, but this service may not be available when you need it most. If you are an expert working with people with disabilities and you apply for government funds in order to realise a specific project or make a proposal concerning an improvement to legislation, the most probable response will be: "Resources are limited, and we have far more important things to deal with."

A significant change in Hungary is the legal ban on discrimination based on disability. Another positive development is that people with disabilities have come out of the ghetto of invisibility and discrimination. Today, you are more likely than before to find a young person with Down's syndrome sitting next to you on the underground (subway), to see two people communicating in sign language on the street corner, or to be passed by someone in a wheelchair at an art gallery.

The process of ensuring that people with disabilities have physical access is slow but continuous. Nevertheless, in the

broader sense, change has been minimal when it comes to eliminating people's mindblocks. Indeed, the attitudes of ordinary people still tend to reflect underlying prejudice and stigma. In terms of allocating resources and setting priorities, attention to people with disabilities is once again in decline. In the absence of empirical studies, it is impossible to say whether solidarity has increased or declined over the past fifteen years. Everyday experience in Hungarian society indicates stagnation or possibly decline.

1997: THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE FROM CARRYING OUT DISCRIMINATION TO BANNING DISCRIMINATION

In 1997, the Council of Europe decided to examine whether there was a need for anti-discrimination legislation in its member states. For this purpose a working group was set up with a mandate lasting from the spring of 1997 until the spring of 1999. I now believe that the establishment of the working group was rather unfortunate, but this was not apparent to me at the time.

Many years earlier, Gerben DeJong amd Mike Olivier had laid the conceptual foundations of the *social model of disability*[2]—which they referred to differently at the time. In the mid-1990s, experts in disability studies formed a new paradigm based on this earlier model, which they referred to as the *medical model of disability*.[3] In line with the traditions of the Council of Europe, a body known for its generally progressive stance, the new model raised *important* and *topical* issues. But it seems to have done so in the wrong area, since

[2] www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies

[3] Simply put, the medical model treats disability as *a problem of the individual* that has been caused by trauma or chronic disease and that can be healed through rehabilitation provided by experts. By its very nature, the medical model often labels and stigmatises people, because a condition first has to be identified if the person "is to be healed". In the social model, disability arises as a result of the social structure, superstitions, and a lack of access to the physical and intellectual infrastructure.

the working group in question was established under "*the partial agreement on social and public health* (sic!)".[4] This gave free scope to government officials with attitudes reflecting the medical model to respond to an issue that was primarily social and legal in nature. Thus, in addition to the fact that the government officials representing the European countries in the working group were diametrically opposed to a positive response to the issue (for such a response would have required additional effort and resources), as documented below they themselves discriminated against people with disabilities.

At the outset, the working group had two consultants: a German professor and me. My fellow consultant saw which way the wind was blowing. He *did not answer* the question; indeed, just two pages of his paper (published in 2000) addressed the issue. He acted "wisely", since this is exactly what the working group wanted: to gloss over the issue and make it seem that not only was anti-discrimination legislation unnecessary but that the issue was not really an issue at all. (My role in this process was to be a "try-your-strength machine". The working group seemed to automatically dismiss whatever I wrote. It did not even accept my paper,[5] which was finally published on a website edited by Adolf Ratzka www.independentliving.org.) A colleague who was present at all the meetings and who clearly saw what was happening, said the following: "They don't like you here. And they won't like you until you start saying what they want to hear." For me personally, the two-year period of working for the group was one of unprecedented humiliation. The motto with which I began my paper—a quote from Colin McKay saying "Anyone who has not been subjected to discrimination does not really know what it feels like"—was originally intended to demonstrate the situation of people with disabilities, but it also applied to me. It cer-

[4] For the results, see www.coe.int.
[5] www.independentliving.org

tainly hurt, but I did not regret the experience. I tried to come to terms with it by acknowledging that it was better to be ignored and to suffer discrimination for the sake of my long-term goal than to back off by agreeing to lie, even if this would have brought me greater recognition ("The person who withholds information is an accessory to the crime"). But I was not the only one to feel discriminated against by the working group. An even greater problem was that the other people involved did so too.

A surprising story...[6]

On completion of the working group's initial phase, NGOs were called to Bonn to give their opinions and to be consulted *(NGO hearing)*. Having listened to the representatives of eight organisations of people with disabilities outline their view on achievements since at the previous NGO hearing, the chairman of the working group proceeded to criticise and correct their appraisals. This caught the attention of the representative of Disabled People's International, an intelligent and astute British gentleman in a wheelchair. He waited until the afternoon session, before tackling the issue:

"Mr Chairman, please tell us why you always try to correct us each time we speak?"

"You misunderstand me, Sir. It's not like that at all. I merely interpret what you have said."

"Well, it seems to me this committee had had an opinion on everything even before you invited us to come here."

"It's not like that at all. If this had been the case, we wouldn't even have invited you here."

Blood rushed to the face of the NGO representative. He closed his memo pad and, without saying a word, rolled out of the chamber in protest. The representatives of the various

[6] I cite this case, although there were several similar instances. According to one contributor to the working group, unemployment is significantly higher than average among people with disabilities because *they do not like working.*

disability organisations were not only treated like scenery, they were also humiliated. They were told, like children, where they were going "wrong". In reality, however, they are the principal experts on the issues they face.

The analysis, which served as a background study, was rehashed by the Council of Europe without any major amendments in 2003.[7] The focus of the new publication was once again constitutional law, which is completely irrelevant to the original issue. Nevertheless, the editors of the publication had no choice but to mention the European Union's adoption in the meantime of a secondary legal document binding on its member states. The document in question was a *directive* (see below) banning the discrimination of people with disabilities. (As a side-point, my text is treated in Austria as one of a collection of texts on anti-discrimination relating to people with disabilities,[8] although this pales in comparison to what then followed.)

Positive developments

In the winter of 2003, I took part in the European Social Charter Government Committee meeting at the Council of Europe's human rights offices. I met the same colleague who had told me some years before why the working group would not accept me. I was pleased to relate to him my experiences on that particular day: The European Committee on Social Rights, which undertakes the legal monitoring of the Council of Europe's international agreement, the European Social Charter, *only considers* a member state to be in compliance with Article 15 of the Charter if it formulates the rights of people with disabilities, that is to say, *if the member state has its own anti-discrimination legislation protecting the rights of people with disabilities*. This had been the aim of our efforts in the working group several years before. And this is what the highly esteemed judicial body had adopted as its own idea, subsequently demanding compliance from member states.

[7] http://www.coe.int
[8] http://bidok.uibk.ac.at

1998: ACCESSIBILITY, OR THE PARTIAL SUCCESS OF HUNGARY'S EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES LEGISLATION for people with disabilities[9]

During the drafting of legislation, all those involved (people with disabilities, government officials, representatives of the NGOs, and other experts) understood quite well that the provisions on accessibility—see *Closing provisions*, Section 29(6): "Accessibility to buildings existing at the time of proclamation of the Act shall be effected gradually but no later than January 1, 2005"—were likely to become the Achilles heel of the Act. Not surprisingly there was little success in backing the legislation up with significant funds. When the so-called regulatory concept—a document indicating the probable content of any subsequent Act—was drafted, the Ministry of Welfare and the government spectacularly withdrew. In each committee they voted against the bill introduced to Parliament by Gabriella Béky and György Szigeti. (It was then that the government and the system of public administration understood the enormous cost of providing accessibility, an area that had been neglected for decades.)

The government failed to support the legislative bill during the parliamentary debate. This led the National Federation of Associations of People with Physical Disabilities to begin a campaign of collecting signatures in favour of the bill. The 130,000 signatures collected exerted a positive effect on legislation.[10] This step marked the coming of age of the disability movement, despite the fact that it

[9] www.foka.hu/alapitvany
[10] It is no accident that the *Disability Studies Handbook* contains *just one* reference to Hungary (Albrecht, Seelman, and Bury 2001, 552)—to the collecting of these signatures.

was motivated by political factors rather than the will of the movement itself. For the first time, people with disabilities and their organisations felt strong enough to step out from behind their shields, which had been protecting them for decades, and to turn against the government in power for the sake of their common interests.

Nevertheless, their firing power was quickly exhausted and the movement gradually abandoned the struggle. The next government was thus able to disband the team of two that had prepared the legislation (Mihály Kogon and myself) and to remove the issue from the agenda. And yet there would have been much to do, since a key aspect of the legislation was the formulation of a ban on discrimination against people with disabilities and the introduction of sanctions relating to this ban. This was finally codified in Section 27 of Chapter VIII of the Act—*Protection of the rights due to the disabled persons and the body responsible for the tasks arising out of this legislation*. The text of Section 27 reads as follows: "If someone is discriminated against because of his/her disability, he or she shall be due all the rights that are directive in the case of a violation of rights of the person." This is a reference to Sections 76 and 84 of the Hungarian Civil Code. Until the adoption of Section 27, disabilities had not been covered. The provision means that if accessibility to a public building is not provided for in accordance with the law and a person with a disability cannot, as a result, enter the building, then this would be considered illegal discrimination of a person with a disability. Thus the provisions of the Act can be used against a body that fails to comply with the law. When the bill was being drawn up, we hoped it would ensure the automatic monitoring of its own provisions. But this did not happen: just two civil actions were launched in the course of subsequent years.

The fact that the movement gave up the fight (which is further evidence of its relative immaturity, since the signature campaign had been strongly motivated by politics—a fundamental mistake) meant that nobody was left in the

ring. Meanwhile, the highly respected ombudsman Katalin Gönczöl established in a report that if the process of providing accessibility were to continue at the same rate, it would not be accomplished by the deadline of January 2005 and might possibly take as long as *150 years*. Her report failed to spur the Government into action. Thus, in late 2004, the Council of Disabled People's Organisations and Dr. Lajos Hegedűs, chairman of the National Federation of Associations of People with Physical Disabilities began "tough negotiations" with the Government concerning the deadlines as well as new legislation on their amendment. Such efforts were commendable, but rather late in coming. The amendment was drafted and subsequently adopted. In the meantime, the Equal Treatment Authority published a progressive legal interpretation in May 2006,[11] while requesting the opinions of voluntary organisations and experts. The President of the Republic expressed disagreement with certain aspects of the legislation. At the time of writing, we are awaiting the final appraisal.

To summarise:

- NGOs have been involved throughout in the drafting of legislation;
- when the struggle began, the movement was fully involved and took a stand: it collected signatures;
- when the struggle needed to be continued between 1998 and 2004, the movement was largely absent and consented to non-action in the field of accessibility.

Our achievements in connection with the act and accessibility in general were made possible by the disability movement. At the same time, our shortcomings were also the movement's shortcomings.

[11] www.egyenlobanasmod.hu

2000: THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE PROVISION OF ACCESS TO EVERYDAY CULTURE

The European Union as a motor for change

The persistence of discrimination underlines the importance of the social and legal protection mechanism. This is because, ever since the Treaty of Rome, Europe—the whole of the European Union—has been founded on a problematic political philosophy. The hidden prerequisite is that pluralist liberal democracy should provide everyone with the opportunity to take part in politics, but that it is up to the individual to decide whether or not to make use of this opportunity. This seems to suggest—albeit in a far broader context—that we should support the medical model cited above. And yet this is a basic error. Those who are marginalised and ostracised or who lack the resources needed for survival (including people with disabilities, other discriminated persons, and members of ethnic minorities, etc.) number in the millions, and they are restricted in their social rights even today. Western and Eastern Europe differ in terms of the extent of this problem. Even so, it would be a mistake to say that such problems are the consequences of "people's own decisions" or the result of circumstances of their own making. On the contrary, people with disabilities are substantially limited in terms of educational, cultural and career opportunities. Poverty and a lack of education are passed on from one generation to the next. The channels of self-advancement open to other people remain closed to them.

Such discrimination is obviously not simply the result of discriminatory action on the part of the government but the consequence of society's self-reproductive mechanisms. The crisis in Europe's social fabric raises the question more compellingly than ever before of how to create a real political community. The European Union has been forced to

confront these issues. This is mainly because people with disabilities are a major pressure group within the European Union. The issue is of increasing importance despite the fact that poor funding has made the implementation of their rights more difficult to achieve. This is true despite the fact that the text of the original Treaty of Rome fails even to mention people with disabilities. Disability started to become a major political issue in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Characteristically, even as late as the 1940s, Beveridge was still arguing about whether or not people with disabilities could/should be employed. The original English term *"dis-abled"* means unable to work or sustain a family, etc.

In Europe, the 1970s saw the international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) of people with disabilities begin to place pressure on the "social policy" of the broader community. Possibly the most important of the various organisations representing people with disabilities is the European Disability Forum, an umbrella organisation. Changes in values, attitudes and notions concerning people with disabilities are largely due to the Forum's efforts in the field of human rights. Thus, from the mid-1970s onwards, the struggle against social inequality as well as efforts to promote the social and economic integration of people with disabilities gradually became Community political objectives.

Further positive developments at European Union level

The issue was not just one of social justice but also one of economics, since purchasing power and the labour force were/are important resources in terms of Community economic development. European Union law also had to reflect the changes in attitudes. The breakthrough in European law came in 1997. The most important element of the new Treaty of Amsterdam was unconditional support for human rights. Indeed, the principle is repeated several times in the

text of the Treaty of Amsterdam. The struggle against all forms of discrimination and for the full equality of people with disabilities led to the insertion of the following broad interpretation into the Treaty of Rome as Article 6a:

"Without prejudice to the other provisions of this Treaty and within the limits of the powers conferred by it upon the Community, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation."

Throughout Europe, people with disabilities and their organisations welcomed these developments. They believed they would no longer be "invisible citizens" since the cited provision had extended the ban on discrimination to incorporate discrimination based on disability. Several member states had already given a broader interpretation in their domestic law to the ban on discrimination based on gender. The movement of people with disabilities was equally enthusiastic about the adoption of Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000, which established a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.[12] The new directive reflected the change in the provisions of the Treaty of Amsterdam, establishing a general framework for equal treatment and banning discrimination based on disability at the workplace and in employment.

"Thus, within the Community, discrimination based on religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation must be banned in the areas covered by the directive ... With regard to disabled persons, the principle of equal treatment shall be without prejudice to the right of Member States to maintain or adopt provisions on the protection of health and safety at work or to measures aimed at creating or

[12] Council Directive 2000/78/EC of November 27, 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

maintaining provisions or facilities for safeguarding or promoting their integration into the working environment."

AUGUST 2006: THE UNITED NATIONS

Preliminary summary of about four years of work

There are few more important achievements in disability affairs than our achievements of late August 2006. After considerable preparation, the world's first universal international draft agreement on "the rights of people with disabilities" (hereinafter the Draft) was elaborated under the auspices of a UN ad hoc committee designed for this purpose.[13] It will soon replace the General Assembly's decade-old "Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities," a document that was not binding on states.

Initiated by Mexico five years ago, preparations for the draft have been characterised by intensive lobbying on the part of member states, groups of countries, and international NGOs, including the International Disability Caucus, IDC. The process culminated in the two-week session held in August. Despite criticism and reservations, the international disabilitycommunity naturally considers the draft to be a great achievement.

Preliminary developments within the United Nations

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed on 10 December 1948. Wide in its scope, the declaration did not specifically refer to disabilities.

During the first post-war decade, the UN Secretariat and the Economic and Social Council urged the provision of

[13] For the text adopted by the UN General Assembly, see the UN website: http://www.un.org.

programmes for people with physical disabilities as well as for blind and deaf people. In 1950, for instance, the Social Council debated two reports on the rehabilitation of the *handicapped* and the *blind*.

After several conferences on the matter, in the 1960s the UN began to monitor rehabilitation systems, programmes and organisations in member states. In 1969, the General Assembly proclaimed a declaration on Social Progress and Development, Article 19 of which mentions health, social security and social welfare services, as well as "appropriate measures for the rehabilitation of mentally or physically disabled persons."

On 20 December 1971, the General Assembly issued the non-binding Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons. This was followed, on 9 December 1975, by a declaration on the rights of people with disabilities.

The year 1981 was declared the "International Year of Disabled Persons" (in Hungary it was referred to as the "year of the disabled"). This was followed by the Decade of People with Disabilities (1983-1992).

In 1982, the General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons.

In the course of 1992–1993, an ad hoc working group based at the United Nations Office at Vienna produced, in the course of three sessions, an international document entitled "Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities" (United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/96, December 20, 1993).[14] Hereinafter the document will be referred to as the Rules.

[14] http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/dpi1647e.htm

The process of drafting the document

The need for such a document was first expressed in the declaration of the UN Conference on Racism and Xenophobia, which was held in South Africa in 2001. Support was greatest among the developing countries. The developed countries anxiously noted that the provisions would overlap with the terms of existing human rights treaties. These two separate positions were present throughout. In terms of disability affairs, the developing countries were more progressive than the developed countries, the latter employing rather bureaucratic arguments and strategies.

The Comprehensive and Integral International Convention to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities—United Nations Resolution 56/168, adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2001—established an ad hoc committee. The committee's first session was held in New York between July 29 and August 9, 2002. At the first meeting of the committee, in which all UN member states participated, in order to clarify what steps had already been taken in the field, the General Assembly examined all documents concerning the rights of people with disabilities and issued by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the Commission on Social Development (CSocD). It is worth noting that Mexico arrived with a concrete draft text, which was not supported, however, by most developed countries.

At the outset and subsequently, the European Union presented a very generalised and weak position.[15] The proposals were of a lower standard than the existing system and application of law in the member states. The document bore witness to a failure to clarify the issues. Among other things, it emphasised that the new international convention "should not prevent" the further development of the Rules... It took some time before the Europe Union clarified its posi-

[15] Elements for an International Convention: A/AC.265/2003/CRP.13/Add.2.

tion. Some delegates—probably expressing their own opinions rather than the official view of their governments—questioned the necessity of the Convention. Their fear was that representatives with disabilities would become so numerous that there would be insufficient space in the chamber. Another fear expressed at the official level was the following: "The United Nations human rights provisions are sufficient. Even the treaty on women's rights was unnecessary. The present treaty is even more unnecessary than that one was, and if we continue along this road then we shall soon be sitting here devising an agreement on the rights of gay people!"

From the outset, the international NGOs were also involved in the work of the ad hoc committee. The world has changed dramatically over the past fifteen years. When, during a four-year period beginning in 1991, a committee of which I was a member drafted the amended European Social Charter under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the only people permitted into the chamber apart from the delegates of governments were the representatives of European workers and European employers. In 1999, on publication of the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights, representatives of NGOs were far more numerous than representatives of governments. Taking into account the original position of governments, the draft would have been far less effective than the final version forwarded to the General Assembly. The physical presence of several hundred people representing civil society—many of whom with serious disabilities—changed the rules of the games. Such campaigners made it clear that the upcoming convention was about them and addressed to them. By constantly citing the principle "Nothing about us without us!" and by sticking to their guns, the representatives of the NGOs ensured that the vast majority of the positive and progressive elements were included in the draft. A good example of such civil courage is an event that initially caused great surprise, then uproarious laughter, and finally a loud

handclap. In 2004, the third year of the drafting work, the leading official of the World Blind Union, Kicki Nordström handed out to delegates a one-page document written in Braille during a brief afternoon break in proceedings. The sheet of paper was there on every table, together with two other proposals not written in Braille. The moderator of the session, a New Zealander, indicated in the debating chamber that while he could read the two typewritten proposals, the one in Braille was incomprehensible to him. He then asked the representative of the World Blind Union to make known the content of the Braille text. The representative of the World Blind Union, having grown tired of receiving so many texts that he and other blind people could not read because they were not available in Braille, said merely the following: "We have made our proposal public; we now welcome your comments."

Historic results

The work ended with two achievements of historic significance. The first achievement was that the ad hoc committee forwarded the draft—the most debated of all time—to the UN General Assembly. The second was the establishment of the International Disability Caucus, IDC, as a body that will lobby at the highest levels in support of people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION: THE PAINFUL LACK OF AN ELITE

Disability means limited capabilities and functions; it does not hold out the prospect of an easy life. The quality of life can be made worse by the absence of proper access in the physical and intellectual environment—which often leads to such related factors as unemployment, poverty, discrimination, prejudice and pity. It is the community that can do the most to solve such problems. Meanwhile the

effects of such problems can be limited or prevented by targeted and well-structured government measures and programmes. However, community solidarity and government action do not come free. Events in Hungary over the past decade and a half have shown that there is no such thing as a "disabled-friendly government". Governments come and go. They have various divergent goals and promote ideas that are sometimes good and sometimes bad, reflecting a higher or lower degree of solidarity. In the meantime, the limited resources are divided up among rival groups and sectors. Those areas with strong lobbying power or better contacts come out on top.

In Hungary, the most important lesson of the past fifteen years in the field of disability is that progress—even the smallest achievement—*has to be forced out of the government and other authorities. The political community will not come into being by itself.* People must fight for resources and for solidarity. Potential partners in this struggle, with their experience and knowledge, are experts working in the field, volunteers and the NGOs. Ultimately, however, success will not depend on them. They are not capable of showing sufficient strength towards society and the government, and they do not have enough credibility. Success will be achieved not by them, but in an odd way by people with disabilities—those having the greatest difficulty in realising their interests. It is only by sticking together and by taking a common stand that people with disabilities will achieve significant results. (A possible strategy is to send ahead one or two partisans who may win a battle—as in the case of the adoption of the Act. But the task we face is not to win a battle but to be victorious in war. And at the moment—think about the case of access—the war is being lost.) Consequently, the key to success in the future is the *movement*. But it cannot—and does not—work without its own elite. And this elite needs to be university-educated, multilingual, skilled and representative of many different groups of people with disabilities—the whole community of people

with disabilities. It should be capable of taking a united stand, of acting strategically, and of co-operating as a virtual community. The most important task facing Hungary in the coming decade is to establish an elite capable of leading the movement. If possible, this should be done in cooperation with the major organisations, other volunteers, the National Council on Disability, and government bodies.

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Interview with Zsuzsa Csató

The interviewee, Zsuzsa Csató, is an affected parent; her daughter, Borcsi, was born with Down's syndrome. The birth of her child and the lack of provision for people with disabilities completely changed her life. As an affected parent, she became a supporter of voluntary initiatives—which are so important for disabled people—and an innovative expert on establishing new services.

Nobody with a life as long as mine will have a short biography. This is a basic fact. Until Borcsi was born, I was a biochemist and I loved it. Messing around with test tubes, I had nothing to worry about. There *was* something to worry about, but, looking back, it seems pretty ridiculous; the most that could happen was that a test tube got broken or a chemical substance was lost, or that something didn't work out. When Borcsi was born, I thought I'd be going back to work after six months. Within a very short time—actually, in the very first week, since the nursery told me immediately—it became clear that I couldn't seriously think that I would. The diagnosis was made; I won't tell that story—anyway, it is the same for all parents. Everyone has feelings of no longer being able to cope, of life being unfair. And then everyone starts doing the same things, at least most people do, trying everything. That's really what happened to me as

well, so that when Borcsi was a month old, I went to the first such parents' meeting—when everybody around me had collected together material about what Down's syndrome meant. Then, when she was one to three years old, we tried to do everything possible for her in Hungary and abroad. Basically, we tried to do anything that would not cause harm. This lasted for quite a long time, and even now I think that if a person finds her or himself in the same boat, or gets bogged down in the same way or in a similar manner, then the most important thing she or he can do is to try everything rather than sit doing nothing—if this is in the person's nature and the opportunity is there. Then, when she [Borcsi] was three or four, she went to kindergarten. Crazy as I am, I thought the kindergarten would take over the task of bringing her up. Three years later, she knew a lot less than at the kindergarten, which was a special education kindergarten with an entrance exam. We'd already tried more than 30 kindergartens, where we'd been told that the reason they couldn't accept a child with Down's syndrome was not because the child required additional attention but because other parents would remove their children. I think even today this is what private kindergartens fear, although they won't admit to it. The situation has improved a lot in the meantime because now children with Down's syndrome are the favourites among people with disabilities, because they have a good disposition—this is the real reason. The situation has improved, but there's still some way to go.

This is how I got into the movement. I tried to go back to work, but it was very hard, physically hard. If you're taking her to physical therapy and development classes, and you live far away, then it's quite difficult to organise it all. When Borcsi started going to kindergarten, I went back to work, still as a biochemist. And roughly one and a half or two years later, I suddenly realised it wouldn't work. I had a constant temperature and was feverish; my body simply couldn't take it. By that stage, I had divorced, having been left

with the two children. And I had no car. Actually, I then started to move in two directions, because, firstly, I couldn't keep still and, secondly, I really wanted to give both my daughters everything. This was one side of it: how to give Borcsi more. At the kindergarten, several other parents and I started organising swimming sessions.

I cannot and never could just sit around. It's impossible in Hungary to organise a group of parents by saying "come on, I'm going to organise you." We were talking at the side of the pool, and one of us would go off shopping, while the other looked after her or his kid. It was spontaneous. We're brought up to think that an individual cannot take time to look after her or himself. Unless you offer something—at least formally—that helps the child, then the parent will feel guilty. To get a group of parents together, you need a reason, a pretext. To admit that it's good for you, rather than good for your child, is something shameful even today. So this was one of the directions. After three of four years (in about 1986), this developed into the Hungarian Down Foundation, which I headed for five years; it wasn't as famous or as large as it is now. No, it was really tiny then. It comprised a parents' group, a swimming session, and a couple of other activities. In 1990, I went to study in the Netherlands for a year, and when I came back the person who had led in the meantime said that she liked doing it. We tried to do it together, but it didn't work. Our aims were the same, but the means were quite different, so we went our separate ways.

The training course: for most people, it was a departing gift from the outgoing regime. Basically, a load of people were sent abroad to learn English. I could take Borcsi with me; it never even occurred to me to leave her here. I simply wouldn't have gone. It was the fourth study grant I'd won; the three preceding study grants had been withdrawn when they found out I had a child with Down's syndrome. The French and Canadian scholarships had been withdrawn. I couldn't go, they said, with a child with Down's

syndrome, because the state wouldn't agree to it. This had been their reaction. The French one was a study grant for a biochemist. I realised that what made them so afraid was that many people try to have heart surgery done abroad. Even the Dutch made me sign a paper that I would bring her [Borcsi] back to Hungary if she needed any Down-related healthcare. Not if she got pneumonia, but for everything else. There is some justice in it; it's an honest deal, because it really is expensive. But Borcsi's already had heart surgery; she has a small hole on her heart, which we have looked at every year. The other front, which arose out of this situation, was that I had to give up the biochemistry game. Work in the laboratory was all about experimenting, and this takes a lot of time, and I always had to get up and leave—when I had to go and get my child. So I could only take on work, like, for instance, pharmacy control, with fixed hours of work. You check how much iron or something the substance contains... it's very dull. Then I organised a conference, translating and editing a conference brochure. Subsequently, I went to work for [the magazine] *Élet és Tudomány*, as a journalist. Then I worked for Andrew Czeizel,[1] who took me on because I spoke three languages and I could help him translate and read about genetic diseases and other disorders. Someone was needed to type up the data forms, and to get parents—those coming to him [Czeizel] for genetic advice—into filling out the data forms. I learnt what one could possibly expect from such a system. And where I was working, one could see psychiatrists, neurologists, other doctors and specialists. I saw what they could deduce from books and what they had no clue about. Their views varied. I met one of my best friends there, a rather short woman; together we founded the Society of Short People. Then the Hungarian Down Foundation was formed there, and thereafter I came to work for the

[1] A well-known Hungarian professor of genetics.

National Health Protection Institute[2] [NEVI], where I stayed for 13 or 14 years. While working for NEVI, I established the Information Centre for Self-Help Groups. At the time, I didn't understand why self-help groups in Hungary always develop into NGOs. Now I do understand. There's so much to do in this area that if someone is active enough to join a group, then she or he is bound to want to change the world. All the groups changed into NGOs.

As soon as this became my thing at the NEVI too, and I had a life which involved providing services for the mentally retarded, and to parents, children and experts in this field, rather than being concerned specifically with Down's syndrome, I could no longer separate my working life from the people that I met outside of work. Because these groups also met up outside work; indeed, for the others, this was not their main job. The greatest difference from today's situation was the great longing for some kind of community, for being able to sit down from time to time with similar people. Most of them could not talk about their problem. They didn't like to talk. But the feeling of being in a place where the stigma was gone for a few hours, because the stigma did disappear—this was a very good feeling. It's not really comparable with what I saw later at Alcoholics Anonymous, because ceremony was given such a big role there, while it was almost absent in our groups.

What tended to happen was that someone came to me saying that she or he was looking for such and such a group, and it turned out there was no such group, and if the person had the strength of will to go through months of looking for other people—which never just happened on its own, then the groups were formed. I could assist them in the sense that we could provide space and advertise the group, and that the NEVI was a health-related institution. If it was chronic illness and disability, then we had the contacts and knew how to find these partners. But I wasn't involved in

[2] NEVI (National Health Protection Institute), a government funded body.

the organising part of it, in deciding the nature of a particular group, or who should join it or who they should want. I had no wish to be involved in that.

The important thing was to have an NGO that was no longer just an association of people but an organisation providing services. In fact, two things were important: the first was that there should be some kind of kindergarten, or some kind of service, one day or half a day per week; and that transport would be organised. A kindergarten had to be formed, because this is what families needed. Moreover, the political system now made this possible. On the other hand, there was the protection of interests. And the protection of interests gradually changed into demanding the price reduction of a single medicine, a miracle medicine, so that it would be accessible. It was 30,000 forints, and the aim was a price of 10,000 forints, and they managed to achieve this. And on the day they achieved this, the chairman of the NGO stated that the medicine is very expensive. And then I felt I didn't want to be a part of this, because nothing would ever be good. The OEP[3] (National Health Insurance Fund) was quite right to do what it did at the time in ensuring that there was hard evidence that a medicine worked before hundreds of millions [forints] were spent on it.

In my view, a community arises when an organisation or a conscious group of people, sharing the same fate, search for each other. And this is what happened with other illnesses—the chronically ill, adults sought each other out—but not in the case of the mentally handicapped. In theory, this could be the case with the parents too—10-15 years later I saw that there were groups of parents that I could describe using this word. Because I had a look at how this happens in other countries; and everywhere they used "techniques". I can't call them anything else: for instance, a lecture series or some other pretext for the group to

[3] OEP (National Health Insurance Fund), a body that pays for healthcare for insured persons

meet. Otherwise it didn't work. For instance, for asthma sufferers, there was an exercise lesson. These things are crucial in keeping the group alive by means of various things that are important to the people in the group. And my point is that I probably used this word because it was not conscious. It hurt me greatly to realise that I was getting out of there, or that I believe it is important that there should be a community of fellow sufferers, and they just spit on it. For them it was much more important to talk about their illness or about their husbands, and it was important for them to be together here. But two things were much more important, one of them was that 100 times as many people could have come than did come, who had a need for awareness. People really do find it difficult to open up. This was one of the things that happened. The other thing was that there is a very strong tendency in Hungary to turn into a service provider. I think this is because large NGOs were established in foreign countries and they became bureaucratic. And people realised that personal relations were being lost, and how good it would be to have small groups. And in Hungary there were no large associations or large organisations. There was the Trade Union, but I wouldn't call it an organisation in this sense. And when these small groups had been formed, the need arose for services that only large organisations can provide. For example, putting together books, forwarding information, or nowadays making a website... but at the time this was unheard of. There were newspapers. Many of them had newspapers. There were almost always lectures at the regular meetings; the best example is the Diabetics Club. NGOs were formed. There were at least 20-30 or perhaps even 70 NGOs that were national and which incorporated the chronically sick or people with disabilities—organisations of varying significance and strength. But just 20-30 of these were started at the NEVI, or were given space there. And there really was a need for an institution offering assistance in this field.

The effect of Hungary's political changes (in 1989/90) was that before I went to the Netherlands, there had only been the Down Foundation, and there was nothing else in my life. I didn't even know of other organisations. When I was abroad, I had a look at everything. In the Netherlands, we went every weekend or every second weekend to look at institutions or organisations. It was on this subject that I wrote my thesis: *Parent groups in special schools*. It was a conscious effort, and when I came home and was already working at the NEVI, the political changes had already taken place. Another important thing I've not yet mentioned is that in an odd way the history of these NGOs was linked with democracy. But not in the manner it is described in the great [historical] works, that is to say, that the law on associations was adopted, and then people were free to form such NGOs. Of course this did play a part—but I didn't see it like this. The way I saw it was that people started to be more active and speak more freely. At a certain point in time, it just started to open up—this is not a good word for it either, that their mouths or their gums opened up, but some kind of opening did begin. I think it happened first at church—at various sites—I perceived it in the churches. In about 1985–1986, I went to the church on Gábor Szarvas Square, to Father Kozma—even though I'm a Jew. But I was looking for community, and there was no community, and we went there; every two weeks the parents of mentally retarded children, the kids themselves, and the assistants met up there. And I really liked it at the beginning—for about two or three years. We celebrated birthdays, we went on outings or we chatted. By the time I left three years later, there was a Bible study each second week and a mass the next. So it wasn't right for me; they took Borcsi along, I was grateful, because she needed community. There was no other community. There really wasn't. After my divorce, I had two choices: I could either stay at home—like most people do in this situation (they take the child [to kindergarten], bring her home, go to work and

that's it); or I could try to get out as much as possible. I really believe we were right not to stay at home. First, in a community... I also thought—like everyone else did—that everything would change overnight, and wow, how good it was going to be. First, I got to know a great many people, which was a joy for me, and heard of their goals. I wouldn't separate the movement for NGOs and the development of communities of people facing the same problems from the establishment of democracy and the political parties. For, to my surprise, I found that when the parties were formed the people who were full of wanting to do something, including some who wanted to make a career, appeared in the political parties. I really think this is now history, but it was very interesting to watch. As they withdrew after the initial enthusiasm and gave up believing they would find the purpose of life and their own self-realisation in a political party, a second group appeared in the NGOs. In the leadership of the NGOs, you could almost see a second party establishment system just several years, two or three years, after the formation of the political parties. The people who had been active there [in the parties], now became active here [in the NGOs]. The positive side of this was that they wanted to do some good, but felt they couldn't do it there, whereas they felt they could do something more worthwhile here. What was less positive was the appearance of the hacks. 'I just want to be boss, it doesn't matter where.' Rather unsettling phenomena surfaced in the movement. While there were some committed people who were willing to make sacrifices, this is all you can say about how democracy works here in this country. In my view, the whole generation tends to lack the art of co-operating in thought and deed. So what almost always happens is that there is a person who tells people what they want, and, in my view, that's not what they were thinking of. Think of how many one-man NGOs there are. There is no action, no service provision, no interest protection, nothing. At the same time, I admit it's just as well there are some NGOs.

Membership of the European Union and EU funds raise the possibility of an improvement in the situation. I certainly am happy to hear—and so are others—that now hundreds of millions of forints can be obtained rather than just five million forints. But in reality, I don't see it. I read in the newspapers that a home has been set up or that the Care Foundation [Gondviselés Foundation] has just won 100 million or, I think, 88 million, whatever, that a new kindergarten is going to be started. But I also know that the kindergarten already existed—it was at another site and was not owned by them. And this means a lot to the foundation. And that until now there were 150 square metres, whereas now there will be 200 square meters, and ten more children will be accepted. But you surely don't think that this is a real difference in quality. I don't think it is. And this was the best grant scheme there was. That is to say, of all the grants on offer for day care provision, this was the best in terms of quality. Not the scheme itself, but the project as such. And concerning the other schemes too, I feel that two things are clashing: one of them is that funds have to be obtained from the EU. Of course, I say this too, but the skill of obtaining money and the skill of improving the quality of life of people with disabilities are two different skills. And it's not good if it's in the same organisation and in the same hand. And so we operate separately. There will be people who get the EU funds and who use them for whatever purpose. Of course, they will build, but one cannot be certain they will do so in a way that is best for us. Yet we only have one life. That is to say, things will certainly be better in 20 years time, but I'm rather unimpressed by that. And on the other side, there are experts who know what they would like to do, but such people don't know how to apply for funds; they're neither managers nor leaders. They know what makes people feel better in this world and what can help them to become mobile on their own. This is a very important skill, and it would be better perhaps if we would finally acknowledge the necessity of both types of knowledge, and that both

are needed in order for us to move forward together, and that the system does not allow these to work together. The funds that would assist in this area are not available. Theoretically speaking, the EU's project preparation facility, or PPF[4] helped, but even during the preparation stage, those who were unable to write applications were pushed out. There was another PPF scheme, but it was hardly noticeable. In addition, there are two other factors that make it very difficult to predict how much the funds will help. There will definitely be benefits, because any financial input tends to benefit a system. But there are two very critical aspects. The first is that these are always just projects; they always start something, and it's impossible to see how you will sustain them. And this can be perilous. The grant applications always require that a project be sustainable, but if there are no public funds or anything else behind it... and there are none... then we can only do it by cheating... They simply don't allow you to move forward on the basis of the real state of affairs. This is one factor, making it very difficult to sustain anything. The other factor is that our priorities do not reflect our needs, but whatever the priority is according to the EU. And this is not the same thing. I accept that jobs are very important in the EU, and I also accept that jobs are very important in Hungary too. But they had the infrastructure before they started, whereas we don't have it. And this is a very big difference. I'm not saying that employment can't be used to solve many things, but that we are having to build according to a reverse logic. We're not building in line with short-term and long-term needs. Instead, the main priority is to meet the EU's expectations concerning jobs, and whatever you can squeeze into that. And this is not a good way of thinking, it's not the most efficient way. Of course, it is [a good way] as far as obtaining money is concerned. Even so, I say that if a hundred times the money

[4] A facility that assisted organisations in obtaining European Union funds. Consultants provided support to NGOs and local governments as they applied for grants.

comes in, then, sure, let's go and get it. Sure, the money is needed. The other factor that makes it very difficult to make good use of EU funds is our institutional system, of which we should be ashamed. The institutional system for disabled people still comprises the enormous institutional homes. Despite the fact that since 1990—for 20 years—we've been talking about normalisation and integration, none of these institutional homes has been closed down, not a single one. We've built I don't know how many [institutional] homes for 200 people, and they're beautiful, quite beautiful. I know that in such small villages or towns, there is community and there is life. That is to say, the quality of life won't necessarily be better just because something is family-sized. It will be another kind of quality of life, but not necessarily a good one. Even so, it seems such large institutions are the ones capable of applying for funds at the moment. And it's clear, quite clear that these large institutional grants are strengthening the large institutions, rather than breaking them up—that almost never happens. I'm exaggerating a little, because occasionally they do buy a house [a residential home] outside. But I don't think there are more than 10 such houses in Hungary.

In the field of childcare, Hungary's political changes took effect with the passing of childcare legislation. But this has not happened in the field of care for the disabled. We do have a disability law—or rather an equal opportunities law, which lays down the need for integration and normalisation. But this has not been accompanied by money, a saddle-horse and a gun. We've merely laid down the principles, but the grant schemes are not devised in accordance with the principles, and their evaluation is certainly not done in accordance with them. And there is nothing that might help to change the system. The following is a case in point, which would never occur to you unless you had faced it in despair. Officially there are about two thousand people living in residential homes in Hungary. There are 15,000 people with disabilities living in institutional homes. 14,800.

And at least half of these two thousand people are in residential homes on the sites of institutional homes. In my view, such homes are not residential homes, rather they are merely a better form of institutional provision. I think the system is a self-preserving one. And it will remain so, until we can change things in a real way. Another example: legislation prescribes (this includes the law on equal opportunities and the one on equal treatment, both of them) that the country's institutions should be accessible to disabled people, physically and in terms of communication, having special regard for the social sector. But the social sector includes the institutional homes, and making them accessible will cost billions of forints. This is money down the drain, because, using the same funds, we could easily build new, smaller buildings, or buy dwellings in villages. And then in place of the billions, we'd have small accessible houses, and the cost of making them accessible would be so much less. Instead, we're literally pouring in the money. We are meeting the requirements of a piece of legislation—I believe, truly believe, in access for the disabled, but the price of meeting the requirements is that we are stabilising the system, because we have poured additional billions into it. And the upcoming development plan states the same thing yet again, namely access for the disabled to social services.

Almost Beyond the Pale

Ágnes Herpai Márkus

Living in the ZalA Region

Falling behind and keeping up during one and a half decades of transition

Today it is almost a cliché to say that Hungary is dividing into two parts. Regional and social disadvantages are self-reinforcing, and they bring despair to whole regions and broad sections of the population. The downward spiral is accelerated by multiple forces, but there are counter-currents that divert and hinder their influence. I was able to experience, with a group of truly committed and engaged people, how a small region in Zala County (in southwestern Hungary, close to the border) looked for solutions, while displaying a healthy balance of independence and co-operation, a desire for advancement and the necessary degree of solidarity. In what follows, I summarise the experiences of the transition period. My account is necessarily a subjective one, but it will hopefully provide beneficial insights.

Although I was born in Budapest, I worked for almost ten years in small villages in Zala County. During this period, I made some disturbing discoveries as well as exciting findings. I experienced first-hand the process of division and falling behind. Based on my experiences working for the ZalA-KAR Regional Association, I offer a subjective account of Hungary's successes and failures in the field of social and regional inequalities over the past decade.

SOCIAL AND REGIONAL MARGINALISATION

Regional differences are inevitable. Owing to differences of terrain and climate, villages and towns acquire different functions and develop at different rates. In Hungary, a combination of geographical features and historical events shaped these processes in an interesting manner.[1] Hungary was once the granary of the Habsburg Empire. Its role within the empire strengthened the agrarian character of the country and forestalled urbanisation and industrialisation. The rapid changes of the twentieth century and the loss of a significant number of regional urban centres as the result of border revision (Treaty of Trianon) disturbed the traditional urban-rural relationship in the country. There was a rapid and perceptible process of differentiation between eastern and western Hungary and between Budapest and the regions. The collapse of the country's mining and industrial regions also resulted in social and regional imbalances. Wealth and dependence rates differed between areas cultivated by peasant farmers and regions subject to industrialisation and the growth of the middle class. Such differences continued to prevail even after World War II, despite political attempts to establish equality. Indeed, some regions—such as rural agricultural areas close to the country's borders that were intentionally isolated—became even more marginalised.

Hungary's regional development plan of 1971, prepared and approved under the framework of central planning, identified the types of settlements that were to be developed, supported and neglected—by employing means typical of the era. Absurdly, the model—which was forced upon society—was considered progressive at the time in Europe, as it embodied the possibility of some kind of local self-determination. Taking into account the basic rationale of spatial processes, it was a logical system of settlements and public services and a model of their rational operation. Similar plans were formulated in other parts of Europe. In Hungary, however, forced "co-operation" between settlements, a system of joint councils, the dominance of larger settlements (considered to be of higher status), and development strategies that disadvantaged smaller settlements, were understandably resisted by rural society. These processes, in combination with the earlier collectivisation of agriculture, resulted in the depopulation of smaller villages, as the more educated and skilled inhabitants migrated to the regional centres. Faced with diminishing opportunities to influence their own destiny, small villages found themselves unable to take the required action.[2] By the late 1980s, rapid depopulation could be observed in several regions of Hungary (northeast, east, south and south-west) and on the isolated farmsteads of the Great Plain.

[1] Pál Beluszky, "Kompország városai (Történeti régiók és városok)" [The towns of the ferry country (Historical regions and towns)], *Tér és Társadalom*, no. 1 (1996): 23–41; György Enyedi, *Társadalmi-területi egyenlőtlenségek Magyarországon* [Social and regional inequalities in Hungary] (Budapest: KJK, 1993).

TÜRJE

Türje is a scenic village in Zala County that has been inhabited for several hundred years. In the past, an abbey—which still stands—played an important role in the life of the village. But in the recent past, Türje has closely resembled other villages. Indeed, in the 1970s, life in the village was almost identical to that in other settlements of similar size elsewhere in the region and the country. Thanks to full employment, adult family members had secure and foreseeable incomes. It became increasingly common for different generations to live in separate dwellings and for young people to move to the "pleasant and large" towns. Few young people wished to preserve the rural lifestyle of

[2] Beluszky, "Kompország"; Enyedi, *Társadalmi-területi egyenlőtlenségek;* Teréz Kovács, *Vidékfejlesztési politika* [Regional development policy] (Budapest–Pécs: Dialóg Campus, 2003).

physical labour on a daily basis. They were more attracted to jobs in urban areas—in the industrial or service sectors.

Türje's kindergarten, school and day-centre for old people "provided" for the needs of villagers. Traditional skills that had been necessary for the subsistence of large families—such as the cultivation of smaller and larger plots, animal husbandry, and handicrafts—became superfluous for the majority of villagers. The process was accelerated by the school: instead of working together on the land, children worked on dismantling small motors. Such technical knowledge could be used in the industrial subsidiaries located in the village and in the workshops of the co-operatives. At the edge of the village, behind the cemetery, new houses were built for Roma—and almost all of them found work.

In the meantime, much was forgotten... Relationships were transformed and the new lifestyle brought an end to the communal forms of work. Although the impression in urban areas was of the power of the "village community", young people in the villages tended to perceive the limits of such a community: the village was less tolerant of new customs and behaviour that diverged from the norm, and it no longer offered sufficient support.

All of this was hardly a recognisable problem: people thought that they were living (could live) well. However, attitudes began to change in the mid-1980s. Increasingly, people began asking: what will happen here? Unusual and incomprehensible things started happening: some people lost their jobs, and they remained jobless, despite knocking on doors elsewhere. In 1988–1989, the co-operatives began to find it difficult to sell their produce, and the co-operatives' workers immediately felt the result: the usual annual wage increase of 1-2 percent was abolished. More and more people began reclaiming land from the co-operatives, which had been established as part of the Soviet-type ideological initiatives of the 1950s, and cultivating it themselves. But the old knowledge and co-operative work methods no

longer existed, and new tools were in short supply. Workshops serving the needs of the co-operatives were dying out. By the turn of the 1980s/90s, even graduates were working at the local construction carrier company, in the knitwear factory at Mihályfa, and in the clothing factory at Zalaszentgrót. People at the end of their tether felt shame. They were kept by the village. Those who became jobless withdrew into their own homes or into themselves.

The political changes of 1989/90 brought changes to the opportunities of different regions in the countries of Eastern Europe—either reversing possibilities and limitations or strengthening existing processes. Marginalised agricultural areas were considered to be disadvantaged—"regions of negative continuity"—both during the period of central planning and under the new regime.[3] In the enthusiasm following the collapse of communism, many people expressed confidence in the possibilities offered by small businesses. Those who registered themselves as entrepreneurs in 1990 imagined a future of increasing profits and economic development. Gradually, their expectations diminished. Within one or two years, many of them sought merely to sustain themselves and their families. Unemployment was greatly stigmatised. More and more families were being affected by this "embarrassment". Those affected did not want to ask for help. Instead, they avoided contact with others and tried to solve their problems themselves. Unemployment in the region soared in 1991: liquidation proceedings were initiated against the co-operatives, and local industrial plants were closed or privatised. The jobless concentrated on satisfying the basic needs of their families; more and more of them were turning to agriculture—without the necessary qualifications, experience, knowledge or skills. Various family members could take part in the work. But fewer and fewer families were suc-

[3] Gyula Horváth, "Európai integráció, keleti bővítés és magyar regionális politika" [European integration, eastern enlargement and Hungarian regional policy], *Tér és Társadalom*, no. 3 (1997): 17–56.

cessful. But they did not request or receive outside help. There were no institutions or organisations capable of offering assistance. And yet, by that time, a freely elected local government was in charge of the village.

In the first free elections of 1990, many villagers failed to take part in voting for their member of parliament and their village leaders. It was not compulsory to vote—this was different from the local council "elections" held under communism. Some of them thought they could express an opinion by not voting. As in other villages, so in Türje, the previous council chairman became the mayor. Up until this point, the story I have told mirrors what was happening in many other villages around the country. But from the early 1990s onwards, there were some unusual developments in Türje. It was at this time that I arrived in Türje and got caught up in the lively spirit and enthusiasm of local people.[4]

ZalA-KAR

In 1991, the mayors of the Zalaszentgrót region consulted with each other, having recognised that they faced many similar problems. They had diverse experiences and backgrounds: one mayor had been a worker, while another had been a doctor, and another the chairman of the council. The mayors realised that they needed each other's help. Since she had the most experience and was a natural leader, the mayor of Türje—Erzsébet Guitprecht Molnár—became the motor of the initiative. Having become tired of repeating the same information and suggestions to her colleagues who were novices in local government, Mrs. Guitprecht began organising joint meetings. Such discussions resolved the resistance to her and other former council chairmen, because they were all in the same boat: the absence of a telephone network and sewage system was a problem everywhere, and all of them had to cope with the tasks stemming from the new political system.

[4] Erzsébet Guitprecht Molnár, and Ágnes Herpai Márkus, "Térségfejlesztés—a családokkal, a családokért" [Regional Development—with Families and for Families], *Falu. A vidékfejlesztők és környezetgazdák folyóirata* (Autumn 1994): 71–76.

Subsequently, the meetings received a new framework. In 1992, with the assistance of Dr. Pál Bánlaky, a member of staff at the Ministry of Welfare, and Béla Jagasics of Zalaegerszeg, a meeting was held between several mayors in the region. The aim of the meeting was to discuss and search for opportunities for concerted action. It was then that Dr. László Benedek offered his assistance to the region, and I offered, as a mature student, to join him as a voluntary assistant. This led to the establishment of the ZalA-KAR Regional Innovation Association. As I am writing this piece in 2006, it all seems to have been so simple—but it didn't seem to be so at the time. Several lawyers were consulted about the most appropriate legal form. Should the new legal structure be a foundation, a free association (as proposed—but not regulated—by local government legislation), or an association?

It was only four years later, in 1996, that regional development legislation finally regulated the possible forms of association between local self-governments, providing a standard framework for co-operation between and among urban and rural regions. The smaller the settlement and the more disadvantaged the region, the quicker the initial exuberance of possessing a freely elected local government was replaced by despair. Lacking the necessary expertise and institutional back-up, local people felt rather helpless when confronted with the rigors of the market economy. In many villages, local administration was performed by just one or two persons. Those affected by such problems found it difficult to see how progress could be made.

In the region of ZalA-KAR, closed schools and outward youth migration were coupled with increasing unemployment, neglected children, impoverished families, abandoned houses and agricultural plots. Each mayor had to keep reminding himself or herself as well as the local body

of representatives that co-operation was now voluntary and that each settlement (whether large or small) had the same rights. Nothing was compulsory—each village could co-operate when, where and how it saw fit. (Formerly, the villages—with the exception of Türje—had been forced to co-operate under a "joint council", which had caused some bad feeling.) The fact that an agreement was signed establishing the association and that, in addition to the development of infrastructure, the issue of the region's marginalisation and impoverishment became an accepted priority, was the result of a lucky coincidence of many different factors.

One of the principal factors was the introduction of a regular institutional framework for the informal exchange of information. The mayor of Türje, a woman of unusual wisdom and leadership skills, was instrumental in persuading the various mayors of different backgrounds (hardly any of them were university-educated) and with different work experience (some were former council chairmen, others had no experience of local administration) to take concerted action. Various people in local civil society became actively involved and there was a steady supply of committed external advisors, experts and developers. A very important factor was the initial financial support received from the Soros Foundation and the Ministry of Welfare—which was like honey on a spoon to those who were otherwise less confident in the success of the project.

In the end, the association was joined by local villages, but not by the local town, whose leadership rejected any form of co-operation. (With more than ten thousand inhabitants, they had fewer problems they could not resolve themselves.) Even the villages had many disputes with each other. For instance, it was several years before the villages of Batyk and Zalabér settled their debts in connection with a school in joint use and before the leaders of the villages could sit down and discuss new institutions without reopening old wounds. The successes we achieved helped to smooth this process.

The founders of ZalA-KAR, which had been established by fourteen local governments, felt the power of the community spirit. Concerted action brought quick results in fields such as the laying of telephone lines—without which the region would have been doomed to further stagnation. The charter of foundation had only just been signed and stamped when a grant from the Ministry of Welfare was received, and ZalA-KAR had the pleasant task of determining how the money should be spent. Support from the Soros Foundation helped to establish the framework for joint action. Events at the time proved decisive to the subsequent development of the region.

In 1993, local mayors and other people in important functions came together to elaborate—with the assistance of László Benedek—the criteria for supporting small-scale family-run businesses and farms and how the support should be divided between current and potential farmers. The aim of *support for family-run farms* was to strengthen traditional, family-run and primarily agricultural businesses. The presence of a business licence was not the most important aspect. Instead, what mattered was whether or not the activity in question would secure a family's livelihood in the long term, thus providing an opportunity for the family to look after itself and to utilise the resources of families threatened by unemployment during this difficult period. The assistance was neither purely a business grant nor purely social support. It was somewhere in between, most closely resembling the social land programme—a support system introduced at about the same time and enabling socially disadvantaged families to become small agricultural producers or animal breeders.[5]

As a social policy specialist and a community and social worker, the focus of my work is and has been the fight

[5] József Serafin, "Szociális földprogram mint produktív szociálpolitikai eszköz" [The Social Land Programme as a Productive Social Policy Instrument], *Falu. A vidékfejlesztők és környezetgazdák folyóirata* 10, no. 2 (1995): 63–68.

against inequalities. The situation was very interesting: at the time, I was a third-year university student, attending Hungary's first university course in social policy. We heard a lot about the new social institutions, where many of the students were working. The new social legislation was barely a year old, and there was a strong belief in the necessity of new services. But the co-operation established among the remote villages of southwestern Hungary was of a quite different nature. In a village where almost everyone would have been unemployed if the local business had closed down, and where just one or two people (sometimes not even the mayor himself) received wages from "the mayor's office", other issues arose. Local people were adamant that families, and the village itself, should be self-supporting, as far as this was possible. They wanted everyone to work for a living. Even now such attitudes are hard for someone versed in social policy to accept, since not everyone is capable of looking after him/herself. What should be done with such people? In such regions, however, one can understand why the leaders of small villages think in such terms. They too face these difficulties—but without the resources to resolve them. It was in this area that I clearly felt the presence of a challenge.

It was crystal clear to me that important things could happen in this area. Marginalisation was faced by both ordinary people and the decision-makers. There was significant interest in business, family production units, and agriculture. The villages faced mass unemployment. Although investors sometimes came, nevertheless many moved on after only a few months. Many people were thrown out of work after just a few weeks—and they didn't even receive their wages. Under such circumstances, awarding family economic support seemed to be a sensible and necessary measure, despite the fact that many business start-ups ended in failure or stagnated. Indeed, in some cases, they would fold up as soon as the initial phase was over. Nobody felt really secure. During this period, it was very important

that the leaders of the villages had the means to take limited one-off measures, in connection with which they had to consider what their task should be, who should be informed of the possibility, who should be given monetary funds, and who needed constant but more practical assistance. I cannot say that this was always clear to everyone, but in my view it was fundamentally important that we did not just offer the infrastructure and economic development programmes available elsewhere, but also human development programmes that aimed to provide opportunities and make up for real deficiencies.

The momentum of the first three to four years brought, as a "bonus" of the family economic support, the agricultural expert consulting mechanism, field trips, presentations, meetings and training sessions for farmers and entrepreneurs, as well as—thanks to co-operation with the Business Development Foundation—micro-loans and other similar credit constructions. After the installation of the telephone lines, which was the first joint success, the region began installing a proper sewage system—which had been deficient. Later on, there were more and more attempts to implement sustainable development projects, including the use of recycled energy—which was also an important and valuable direction for the region to take. But in the initial period, the priority was to exploit the possibilities, and efforts were aimed at creating value—which is quite understandable in a region that struggles to keep up. Before long, ZalA-KAR published a tourist map in co-operation with the Hungarian Nature Protection Association. Such matters were more about the economy and the development of infrastructure in the villages—tourism becoming a priority as a local source of economic development. Later on, there were developments and training sessions contributing to an increase in the tourist capacity and leading to the establishment of the Association of Hosts.

In addition to such measures, there were also human development programmes based on real equal opportu-

nities. Family economic support was as much a local economic development possibility as a form of social assistance. If not those at the very bottom, others who seemed to be hardly any better off did at least see an opportunity for keeping up and even for being able to establish job opportunities for others. Once such economic support had been received, it became clear that there was a need to turn to marginalised people in villages lacking institutions and experts.

During the following decade, ZalA-KAR initiated programmes, supporting people without long-term and legal employment, so that they could take part in training courses and consultations and find jobs. At the very outset, it became clear that being jobless does not mean not having anything to do. Many were forced into illegal work as day workers at the local refrigeration plant, producing delicacies such as snails for consumption in France. More and more decision-makers in the region concluded that employment was one of the most important, albeit not the only means of integrating the population and giving them the feeling of cohesion and survival. It is not in itself enough, because some people need more than just a job. But it is important—just like any other activity that sustains and provides a livelihood for local society.

Automatically and immediately, the affairs of old people and children arose. The first successful grant applications made under the PHARE programme addressed the need to offer assistance to elderly people, attempting to re-introduce personal social services by employing experts trained by local villages working in co-operation and organising volunteers. The Red Cross was already present in the region—co-operative efforts began with them. In the early 1990s, the grants provided allowed significant room for manoeuvre: competition for funds was less intense since the number of properly prepared organisations was small. We therefore had ambitious plans and ideas. Colleagues, friends and I dreamed up new programmes and services that would be

available in several villages, trying our utmost to reach really needy people in the smallest of villages. We then made application after application—frequently winning grants. Social services were funded for some years using pre-accession funds and ministry grants. We did not succeed in obtaining normative support, which would have made it easier to develop ongoing initiatives. The system of normative funding discriminated against small villages, and it did not favour regional co-operation schemes even where such were rational in terms of funding and expertise. One of the absurdities of the ZalA-KAR story is that by the time domestic funding and legislative regulation "reached" the regional level, almost all the solutions proposed by domestic legislators had already been tried and failed. Despite this fact, people living and working in the region did experience the temporary functionality of the jointly elaborated models.

Even before the legal rules and financial normatives applying to regional co-operation were "produced", a regional system of provision for elderly people had been tested. It became clear that the urban model would not work. The work was fascinating. With the participation of enthusiastic local figures and committed teachers, we reconsidered the possible means of dividing up the various educational tasks—this work was supported by the Education Modernisation Foundation (KOMA). Most of the proposals could be realised ten years later with the implementation of the educational tasks of multi-purpose associations—which are almost compulsory in nature. Another achievement was the establishment of a social institution providing real personal assistance and advice, using PHARE grants: it embodied the first regional child welfare service.[6] This institution was more community-based than previous ones had been.

[6] Ágnes Herpai Márkus: Tégy, ha tudsz, társulásban [Do it if you can as an association], *Család, Gyermek, Ifjúság* VII, no. 3 (1999).

In the case of children, the situation differed significantly from the other regional economic, employment, infrastructure and service-development programmes. We started working with children using volunteers selected from among our friends or fellow students. Enthusiastic local people also expressed a desire to be involved, including young academics and professionals, political and church leaders as well as parents and teachers—all adults with a responsibility for children. For some years, we organised hiking camps and advisory sessions for children. We were surprised by the opportunities in what seemed to be destitute villages.

As university students from Hungary's capital city, we greatly enjoyed discovering the beautiful region around Türje. We had some wonderful experiences. Our caving friends were happy to guide us along the rock passage at Nagygörbő. And to our surprise it turned out that children from the village of Görbő were the only ones with knowledge of the basalt path. Children from other villages knew nothing of the treasures of the region. They did not visit the other villages and were taught little about the local region at school. But the hiking camps gave them strength and new insights into their region. The first events held in the summer demonstrated to the children that things did not have to be as boring as they may have thought, and that they were capable of organising their own programmes. Adults also became involved in the programmes: in the third summer we sat down with them and drew pictures to show to the local mayors and tourism experts about how the local young people wished to see themselves and the region. Some of them even wished to become volunteers assisting in the provision of services to elderly people. Clearing snow in the winter was, for them, a pleasant opportunity to meet up with friends—notwithstanding the value of their work and the attention paid to the environment.

All of this was incredibly exciting and the efforts "paid off". Many of the participants in the children's programme continued their studies and prospered elsewhere in the country and the world. But others stayed at home: today they assist others in making grant applications—as many of them wrote applications before their parents or older colleagues. They already have experience in how to change their lives and they are more courageous and ambitious as a result. With local teachers, we made an attempt in 1995 to coordinate the development of small schools at regional level (KOMA). The children's camps, children's advisory sessions and the adults that assisted were used to develop the child welfare and child assistance services in the region. This is one of the most important achievements, and a rare instance of optimism in the marginalised regions. Real community experiences and initiatives do eventually form and expand. The child welfare and assistance services formed from the children's camps and programmes are good illustrations of this. For a period of several years, this power could be radiated by the institution. It was in 2001 that I managed to let go, and although there have been some changes in image and staff composition, it is still working even today.

There is another important element, without which ZalA-KAR would not have been able to overcome the many difficulties it faced, namely consistent management—which is necessary to ensure regional co-operation, to realise the selected programmes and to generate new ones. A combination of local workers and supportive decision-makers as well as assistance from external experts enabled the realisation of the innovative trials. The combination of internal and external resources is the factor that is able to stop and even reverse the rapid downward spiral of marginalised regions. A large part in this was played by the local management. The office began operations in 1993 in a small service apartment in Türje, with just two "real" workers and a volunteer—me. Fortunately, I was not the only volunteer, for sometimes local young people and interested students would come and volunteer too. Later on, we used conscientious objectors on community service. Sometimes we could

pay experts using funds from various grants, including István Martincsevics, who served as secretary for a decade, and the first agrarian expert Ferenc Nagy, as well as Dezső Kovács, village tourism expert, and Mrs. Andrea Szőke Hajduk, who became a tourism development officer after resigning as deputy head teacher. Almost uniquely in the early 1990s, I was employed as a social policy expert by the regional association. Ours was almost the only regional association at the time to operate a co-operation office. Even today it is rare for a regional office to employ a social policy expert. Given the extent of social and regional inequality and the increasing marginalisation of certain regions, the absence of social policy experts in the regional associations does not bode well for regional policy and the social development of rural areas. I shall return to this topic when discussing the current situation.

ZalA-KAR is a unique case, but there could have been—and have been—similar attempts elsewhere. But the really exciting and valuable aspect of the ZalA-KAR programmes was/is their complexity. A peculiar aspect was that for a period of ten years the developments took place against the background of the development of the local town—which was rather unfortunate. Despite this parallel development, we did manage to realise important improvements, employment programmes and innovations in public services, which could then be linked up with those in the local town. As far as equal opportunities and social cohesion are concerned, an interesting fact is that many projects were too "social" to be classified as traditional regional development but too "regional" to be classified as social policy. Indeed the region was too rural for social projects, since ZalA-KAR was not eligible for social policy funding despite the need for social projects. Even today, central government decision-makers still consider villages as weak entities with uncertain futures. Despite the declared aims of helping settlements to catch up and establishing equal opportunities, the current regulatory and funding environment tends to conserve the disadvantages. Unfortunately, such varied and vivacious initiatives as ZalA-KAR are still not sufficiently common in rural Hungary.

On the contrary, many marginalised areas are now extremely weak. Only investment in public services, infrastructure, or some other form of economic intervention could bring results. But such factors could not provide the commitment that developed in the region. And although in many senses the initial enthusiasm is now gone, the region has learnt a lot, and this will have a lasting effect. We recognised that—a region cannot be reborn by means of construction projects and private investment alone; nothing happens by itself, so local people must make an effort, and while external financial and professional assistance is necessary, it is not sufficient; long term progress requires co-operation based on equality—with assistance for weaker groups such as children, Roma, and the elderly, who then "re-pay" the community/region by giving it strength, fortitude and vivacity and who are therefore not to be regarded as burdens but as resources. Finally, we found that equality between the various settlements (villages and towns) is also important: larger settlements should not be allowed to dictate to smaller settlements; instead, there needs to be a proper division of tasks and functions.

Our experiences and conclusions assisted the region in finding its place both within the new framework established by the regional development legislation of 1996 and at the time of the formation of the multi-purpose small regional associations at the beginning of the current decade.

OFFICIAL MEASURES STIFLE ZalA-KAR

The 1990s saw real co-operation between villages of equal status and improvements affecting local society and public services. And then legal regulations began to catch up with the situation on the ground. In most areas of the country, various legal forms of regional co-operation were in

place[7] when the Hungarian parliament adopted the Act on Regional Development. Although the new legislation determined the nature of small regions and the levels of regional planning and funding, nevertheless it failed to designate legal rights and competences at the level of the regions. Progressive aspects of the new legislation were that it recognised regional diversity, accepted that regional interests should be reflected in the division of funds, and clarified the framework for regional co-operation.

All of this had little effect on ZalA-KAR. What was important, however, was that communication and conciliation could begin with the local town and several small adjoining villages—which had previously been reluctant to co-operate. This was vital, since it enabled representation as a statistical small region in the county forums of regional development. Looking back, it is clear that the town and the surrounding area were compelled to acknowledge each other, in preparation for more intensive co-operation later on. And the question which is still so crucial in many regions—namely whether the local town is fully involved, merely co-operates, or obstructs—was less threatening in light of the strong regional partnership that had already been developed.

After the first wave of grants and ensuing developments—creating the conditions for village tourism, training sessions, voluntary work, more dynamism in caring for the elderly, enhancing and reforming educational and social services, the introduction of employment, training and social land programmes, the establishing of regional child welfare and family advisory services—new opportunities arose at the turn of the millennium, including the regional social development (catch-up) programme. Such initiatives provided further opportunities for local villages to develop

[7] Éva Gadóczi Fekete, and Éva Bodolai, *"Együtt!—De hogyan?" Kistérségi szerveződések megjelenése a területfejlesztésben* ["Together—but how?" The role of regional organisations in regional development], Miskolc: Regional Research Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1995.

their social services, based on existing experience and in a manner that ensured that the services would be provided in the villages themselves and would not merely strengthen the urban infrastructure—which has happened under other catch-up programmes in similar regions. The villages had to come together to re-consider their options when the operation of public services and the funding weakened. Willingness to compromise was the result. Once again, the opportunity came at the right time: the innovations were "worn out". While the institutional framework was capable of maintaining results, the whole process had become frozen. Co-operation at the regional level was no longer a novelty but rather an expectation. Marginalised regions did not receive external assistance despite theoretical promises and upcoming European Union membership. The resources that had initially set ZalA-KAR in motion could only be nurtured locally, and so they began to weaken. This period demonstrated that in order to make a region more dynamic, there is a need for a combination of internal and external resources, and that a long process is required before such a region is capable of standing on its own two feet and no longer requires external help. Funding by itself does not represent a sufficient amount of external assistance.

Even so, there were during this period several initiatives, of which the Homecoming Programme should be mentioned. In order to meet the new expectations, ZalA-KAR established the multi-purpose regional association and integrated the funds of the town and the surrounding area in the social, educational and regional development fields. Nevertheless, this was evidently not enough. Co-operation among multi-purpose associations was forced upon regions by the funding requirements. Rarely was it based on such an organic process as the one in our region. And even in our region we could not always persuade the leaders of the villages to co-operate in an effective manner and on a daily basis with experts from other services. Without such co-operation, there can be no real integration. The Home-

coming Programme for university graduates is a beautiful example of co-operation, staff renewal, and creating opportunities. The programmes in the region became training courses and practice workshops instructing young unemployed graduates of the region and giving them useful skills—in fields such as project management, funding, and regional development. The knowledge of the young people trained in this way could be used by the region's institutions and organisations in a programme for supporting employment. New resources thus became available and the young people found work—an important consideration. The programme is a real advance and promotes the sensible use of opportunities.

Another reason why this measure is important is that, because central funding was being used as a carrot to enforce regional co-operation, local grass-root forms of co-operation began to diminish. The balance of power that had been slowly established on the ground began to collapse, and the towns were able to enforce their will. Joint and coordinated development and amicable co-operation became almost impossible under these circumstances. At the same time, social policy, including public services, had generally been ignored as a possible field of action for regional associations—which have concentrated over the past 10 years on activities directed at infrastructure and economic forms of regional development. This means that the associations do not have the experts, experience or local resources to reach marginalised areas and populations and to administer programmes relating to such. In addition, the associations—which are considered to be important and sustainable actors in the struggle against marginalisation—are lacking one crucial element: the funding of both co-operation and the services that are to be jointly provided does not reflect the significant differences between regions or the existence of different types of regions. As a result, not only do the leaders of villages regard these processes and supports as unfair, but also the changes do not affect the people who are

dependent upon such assistance and support and upon possibilities created and offered by others. ZalA-KAR feels itself to be stuck in this trap and is looking for a way to break free from a renewed wave of social marginalisation and regional deprivation.

SOCIAL AND REGIONAL INEQUALITIES—HOW THEY HAVE WORSENED DURING THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS

Hungary's marginalised regions—de-industrialised areas, frontier regions, and poorer agricultural areas—hoped to leave behind them their inherited disadvantages. This was only really achieved by the dynamic major urbanised regions. The increased role of local government was not enough in light of the absence of innovative and experienced local experts, of functioning and properly funded public services, and of a successful development policy and regional policy. Although in many places village schools have reopened, they are unable to keep up with the challenges of a rapidly changing world. In many places, such as Pakod with 1000 inhabitants, where one of the biggest developments of the 1990s was the construction of an enormous gym, they are unable to make use of the developments. In Pakod's case, there is no money to ensure that children can use the gym with proper adult super-vision, and its maintenance raises the already enormous costs faced by the local school. Such examples are symbolic: we can re-build and maintain the buildings and roads in our region, but if we have no ideas about how to use them and there is no outside help, then there is no hope of change. This is in fact a distortion of the autonomy of local communities—there are no resources in the villages and no balancing mechanisms. The efforts I have outlined are sufficient to prevent a region from becoming marginalised, but this is only true in a few rare cases and cannot reverse a national trend.

ZalA-KAR has a special history, but it is not unique. In marginalised regions where there is no choice but co-operation, there have been several superhuman attempts, rarely successful, over the past decade and a half. The hope of European Union membership encouraged many in the early 1990s, and served as a reference point in terms of access to the developments, giving legitimacy and support to similar attempts. But EU membership has not resulted in any real changes. The regulatory and domestic funding of institutions has tended to strengthen the anomalies, and the assistance received between 2004 and 2006 has not reduced—based on experience to date—the further marginalisation of disadvantaged regions. On the contrary, regions in a better position have been able to acquire additional funds by utilising their existing resources, and thus differences have become even more acute.

And the country really has been divided into two. The dividing line—and perceptions of the dividing line—has (have) not always been the same throughout the past decade and a half. For many years—and to some extent even today—the public's impression was that the River Danube marks the dividing line between dynamic regions (in the west) and more backward regions (in the east). This is an over-simplification. The real dividing line is a north-west–south-east axis, with the really problematic areas lying "under" and "over" this axis. The worst regions are the frontier zones by the Ukrainian, Romanian, Slovakian and Croatian borders. If one visits these regions—which are beautiful and contain many natural treasures—one quickly perceives the poverty and marginalisation of the local population.

In recent years, it has become rather fashionable to speak of regionalisation and the importance of managing social services and public administration regionally. The issue has become a favourite topic in both the professional discourse and the ordinary media. With similar intensity and regularity, the availability and sustainability of services is mentioned in relation to the fragmentation of Hungary's local

government system and as a possible field of intervention with respect to social marginalisation. The link between social and regional justice is becoming better known and increasingly obvious to all. We now treat the regional roles, functions and forms of co-operation as self-evident. In my view, this is an important achievement of the past decade and a half. In the early 1990s, the domestic political elite was fired with enthusiasm for local autonomy and government. At the time, co-operation between settlements, the problems of marginalised regions (above all marginalised social groups in such regions) were still not the focus of attention. Today, this issue cannot be avoided. One measure to promote equal opportunities in Hungary must be a reduction in regional differences—which can be achieved only by means of considered and coordinated intervention. By concurrently applying social-policy and regional-development approaches, we can deal effectively with regional and social disadvantages.

As a result of all this, a special role will be played by *the maintenance and expansion of innovation in the social sphere, proactive social policy approaches and measures, and creative social policy ideas that attract new resources*. This latter requirement implies both exploiting and promoting existing income-producing capacity (self-supporting, self-sustaining, in the social economy) as well as any methods and innovative measures which produce resources in the above sense or which increase, by rationally and economically utilising the available financial, economic, infrastructure and human resources, the effectiveness and functionality of social services, *thereby multiplying the value of the resources used*. For the sake of all this, the functions of social policy at local level need to be re-interpreted and a regional approach introduced—one that would integrate regional justice into social justice. The history of ZalA-KAR serves both as an example and as evidence. Hungary's EU membership has resulted in little progress in this area, but the future offers hope.

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Interview with Károly Hársfalvi

The interviewee is mayor of Óhid, a deprived rural community in Zala County, and chairman of the ZalA-KAR Regional Association.

My name is Károly Hársfalvi and I am fifty-two years old. I was not born in Óhid, I moved there in 1979. My birthplace is Alsópáhok, between Hévíz and Keszthely. I grew up there, attending primary and secondary schools in Keszthely. I then did a university degree. After graduation, I began working at a co-operative in 1979. I received several promotions between 1984 and 1987, when I left my profession. I switched to the processing industry, working as director of a fertilizer plant in Zalaszentgrót. From 1991 until 1998, I served as managing director of two commercial companies. From 1998 until 2002, I was sales manager for a company in Győr. I also served as an unpaid mayor from 1995 until 2002. I have two children. My daughter is a twenty-five year-old IT specialist. We built a detached house in Óhíd in 1985 and the family has been living in the village ever since. I like living here. We have been here for a long time now—even though some members of the family would like to leave. In fact, my son has already moved to Zalaegerszeg, but I am going to stay here. I grew

up in a busy community by Lake Balaton. I do not miss hustle and bustle. And if I want, I can get in the car and can be in a busy town within ten minutes.

I would have liked my life to be affected by Hungary's joining the EU. If anybody was a supporter of Hungary's accession, it must have been me. I really was in favour of it in almost every respect. I was confident that we would see the benefits of EU membership in Hungary—if not immediately, then at least after a few years. It has been an enormous disappointment for me, I must say. In my view, rather than having a positive effect, it seems to be affecting us detrimentally, especially in rural Hungary. I do not know whether the major urban centres are better off or not. But I really did think—and am still waiting for it to happen—that my village would get some of the EU funds, even in the initial period. But this has not happened. To apply for a grant, you have to show that you have your own funds... More than once we have realised, during these first two years, that the grant schemes are not designed for villages. Whether we are talking about the cohesion funds or the structural funds, smaller settlements only get a kick at the ball if they form an association. And this does not mean a couple of villages coming together. To have a chance, they have to form a small regional association. In the first round, we did not have a real chance. Even so, I am confident that, under the next National Development Plan, we will have a chance—but I emphasise, this will only happen if we join forces. If you go it alone, you won't even get a kick at the ball.

There are grants from the government ministries, grants for improvements in local health services, and they are functioning, but what can we do? Local authorities are using the county regional development funds as grant opportunities. To a lesser extent, there are the regional grants, not the grants for the human sphere but the development grants—where applications evidently have to be submitted to the development councils. Here, however, labour force and county regional development, as well as the counties,

are to disappear—which is outrageous in my view. I am a member of the county regional development council, and I can state that the abolition of the counties is an attack against smaller settlements. They are turning off the tap that enabled such settlements to realise small investments costing 1 or 2 million forints, such as minor road projects, pavements, etc. The Regional Development Programme is to stay in some form, but here in the western part of Hungary, in Transdanubia, funding possibilities are very limited, because they say we are rich. In fact, we are not rich at all.

It is very important that the village is to have three parks and playgrounds. We need infrastructure, and I mean both physical and human infrastructure. The village has everything that one would expect to find in a settlement of three thousand inhabitants. And yet we number just 650. We have a dentist service and a pharmacy, a school and a kindergarten, social services, a home-help service, a village warden—everything. This is an enormous burden. But we have to run these services, and we do run them. But to develop them would mean renovating the kindergarten, renovating the school...

In this sense, the European Union is a disappointment for me. Indeed, it has been a disappointment for the whole country, because we were counting on a larger sum of money. Of course, a lot of political noise is being made about the date for the introduction of the euro... This is important to some people, but for most people it will become important only when it is about to be introduced. But I just said this in passing. This is what I think about the EU.

What is it like to live in a village? That is a more difficult question than the previous one. What is good about it and what is bad? A positive thing is that we all know each other. I am not saying we are all friends, but there are no strangers here. It is a community of families. This has both advantages and disadvantages. If such a rural community functions well, then an excellent community spirit can be creat-

ed—whether from the grassroots or from above. Our village does have a good community spirit, and I put this down to the work of the NGOs over the past eight years. I say eight years, because I have been mayor for eight years. And that is when the NGOs were established. Communities of friends formed at minor events... We do have programmes. I think this works elsewhere. The funds flow in. So these NGOs are definitely part of the community scene. Settlements like ours are clearly being distinguished from towns of 10-20,000 inhabitants and treated in a different way. It is far more difficult there. But here it works very well.

The community has to be mobilised. That is to say, we have an annual routine of events and dates, repeated each year. There is a demand for it. I am in charge of it—and I say this without feeling self-important. It covers everyone from senior citizens to the younger ones. People have demanded more, but we have told them to organise events themselves. Thus, there are no problems from this perspective. One has to ensure in a village like this that there is always some money for development projects as well as for the ordinary day-to-day services. Interestingly, people are sometimes less appreciative of developments costing several tens of millions of forints than they are of a project costing just one or two million forints—which they may find more attractive. What I am saying is that things function a little differently in a village, as compared with a town—where megalomania defines everything. This is not the case here, where people want ordinary practical things, tangible improvements that are not particularly large but are beneficial. This is a factor to consider. To be honest, I did not realise this until quite recently. In fact it only occurred to me about a year ago. It is madness to take on loans here, simply to get one thing or another—the largest possible investments, but for more cash. And it is a lot more.

And what is the downside? Well, although many things can be found in a village of this type, there are many things

that are not available. For instance, if I want to go shopping, I have to get in the car and drive to the shops. I am not saying this is a bad thing, because going shopping can be a pleasant outing. The point is, services are not always available here.

Here in our village, you can get on the Budapest coach in the morning and return in the evening. We are fortunate in that the village is served by the Veszprém County Coach Service as well as the Zala County Coach Service. We are also on a Vas County Coach Service route. So there is a coach service to Veszprém, Szombathely, and Budapest. In total, twenty-eight routes pass through or terminate in the village. This is very good. As I say, Óhíd has everything that you would normally expect to find in a larger settlement. It is no small task to operate all these services. Four villages belong to the district.

The school is also run by a regional association, comprising Óhid as well as Kisgörbő and Nagygörbő. The association extends over six settlements. Even though the two other settlements are part of the association, some of the children from those villages do not attend the school. That is to say, they are spread around. I have great respect for the social services that have been established in recent years. What we do not have is a club for senior citizens. We used grants from the Small Regional Fund to completely renovate the school, and we also appointed a social worker and a village warden (who was given a vehicle). A home-help service with meals was set up.

Meals are taken in the village warden's car to villagers requiring them. This functions at the small regional level, and from January 2008, a home-help service must be provided by law. We wanted to achieve this by January 2007, but technical problems arose in two settlements, so our plans could not be realised. But the system will certainly be in place by 2008. We have arranged for qualified district nurses to perform this work. The Red Cross and the Kolping Association will also be involved. At the beginning

of the year, we invited the Red Cross and the Kolping Association to make bids for the provision of support services and community services. A contract was signed with the Kolping Association. When the regional council made its decision, there was just one offer—from the Red Cross—and it was in line with the cost projection. Then, several weeks later, the Kolping Association made an offer. It would have been better if there had been two offers when the decision was made, but such is life.

Our village is a deprived rural community. The financial deficit is quite clearly an operational deficit. This year we were not classified as having a deficit—even though in reality we did have one. And the situation will be the same next year too. This simply means that our revenues are greater than our expenses—which is because the central budget supplements the few forints that make up the difference between revenues and expenses. The use of these funds is subject to a very strict grant system. So this is why I say the village cannot observe it. The village is aware of it only in the sense that there is no money for development projects. So settlements with deficits have no chance of development. This is the truth. Of course a village can still have a peck here and a peck there; it will still develop in some areas, and there is credit and such like... But the truth is that a settlement that has a deficit will not develop. But if we think about it, 80 percent of settlements in Zala County are deprived settlements through no fault of their own.

The situation in our village is very fortunate. There are jobs here. The only jobless people are those who do not want to work. The Zala Furniture Company is developing from year to year. With almost 80 workers, it is the biggest local employer. There is another employer too, the local government: just last week we opened a new residential street. We had guests from the County Assembly, and they could not believe that the village has 150 jobs. This is the future of the village. But this also means that we have less housing than in earlier years.

People are moving into the village, and this is why we had to invest in a new residential street, because the local authority had run out of residential plots. And there are people interested.

The ZalA-KAR Association was formed in 1993, initially establishing a presence in the villages by means of various grant programmes, mostly in the regional development, social and cultural fields. The years 1996, 1997, 1998 were very good. And then, for a period of three to four years after 1998, such associations were in decline throughout the country. In Zala County, many of the associations did not function. Fortunately, ZalA-KAR continued to operate: it always managed to apply for and win enough grants to cover the costs of one or two people. And the small regional associations have become really important since 2004, when the government decided to establish more associations, and the situation became more earnest. Now there is the provision of statutory tasks as well as regional development—and one package comes after the other: primary education, social and health services, internal audit, social child welfare.

Now we have a situation where, in my view, the mayor deals with the association in an appropriately earnest manner. The working structure of the small regional association has been established and it has moved to Zalaszentgrót, the centre of the small region. We would like to see a local applicant [for the position of director]. But it is not so simple to find someone who knows the small region and has contacts both upwards and downwards—a manager type with the right expertise in the educational, social and healthcare fields. At any rate, we have advertised the post. Frankly speaking, we have still to be contacted by someone who could do the job. There does not appear to be anyone in the region who would be a suitable managing director. So I do not know what the solution will be. Some people have expressed an interest—but they live a hundred kilometres away. And just think of the time it would take for someone

to get to know the 24 settlements and form relationships with the people. What we really need is someone who lives locally and has all these qualities.

The ZalA-KAR Association has been an enormous challenge in my life. This was particularly true in 2004–2005, when the multi-purpose associations were on the agenda. For me, the great challenge was that everyone at the government level—starting with the Ministry of Interior—was urging the formation of multi-purpose associations, but nobody could say in concrete terms what they really wanted. In 2005, I went about three times to various conferences and consultations on this topic, held at the Ministry of Interior. But each time I felt that we knew quite a bit more than the people at government level. We have read and researched a lot, and we have experienced things at first hand. And I have offended a great number of people here in Zalaegerszeg, because I speak my mind and I have been to see everyone. I went to the head of department at the Ministry of Education, and to other places. And I offended that man when I asked him what kind of primary education he wanted, and he told me that the children should get on the bus at six in the morning. And the teacher would go on the bus too, and they would sing on the school bus, or something like that... But where will a child sing at six in the morning? What rubbish! Fortunately, matters became somewhat clearer during 2005. But there is still a lot of disruption, and a lot of blank areas. But we are still doing some rummaging, because the workers here are living in uncertainty, based on the Labour Code.

Not everybody has heard of ZalA-KAR because not all people read the newspapers, but people who are interested will have heard of it. The name ZalA-KAR is a trademark here in Zala County, and throughout the country I think. It was one of the first associations, and it has always managed to survive. I am not saying this is because Laci Benedek[1] is the

[1] Director of a consulting firm specialising in rural development.

founder of ZalA-KAR, but he is the founder. He is quite informed about local politics as well as at the national level. If someone does not want to know more about ZalA-KAR, then he or she will choose ignorance even if I deliver a newspaper twenty times in one day. We did have our own newspaper—*Zalakar Hírmondó* [Zalakar Herald].

In 2006, there is a series of credits, a credit programme worth a hundred million forints. The applications have been arriving recently; now the correction process is underway. The pro-forma evaluations have begun. This is a very important decision for the notary to make. It seems that the applications will cover the 100 million forints available, and the applications that have been received are of high quality. We are the only association in Zala County to cover the sum available. As far as the future is concerned, a very important factor is that next time 400 million forints will be available. And if we look at the whole process, we had a trial period in 2002, with roughly 20 million forints—which we also had to win. If we get into the three-five hundred million league, then this will be a great challenge. It will create funds for development and generate further sums too, so one could say that we can do this acting together. This is one factor. Rural development is part of regional development. The other factor—and in my view this should be the priority—is the provision of statutory functions, which will be a basic task of the multi-purpose associations in the coming years. Nobody knows what the government will add to the current tasks in education, social services and health—but we will know soon. So this is the other half of the matter, and the more important of the two. Employment is right at the centre, as this is a grave problem in the region. We were the first in the country to establish an employment pact. In this regard, we won a grant under the Human Resources Development Operative Programme[2] in 2004. As far as I remember, it was worth 26 million forints. Under the pro-

[2] A means of using the EU funds that became available in 2004.

gramme, by surveying the labour market in the small region, many different factors were elaborated, which will assist in creating jobs later on. But I have always said that jobs will not be created by pen-pushers. We need to create business conditions that are attractive to capital, because if capital feels comfortable, then there will be jobs. If we can attract companies to the small region that are satisfied with the local workforce and infrastructure, then we will get more jobs. It is an automatic process that creates jobs. We are trying to train people, making decisions from above. We debate whether people need skills in this area or in that area, but we do not really know what kind of training people should receive. The reason we are training them is because the Human Resources Development Operative Programme provides funds for this purpose. If businesses feel comfortable here, they will come.

I see resources for the small region's future in three areas—which is in part the continued development of a process. I am confident there will be results.

At Home in a Foreign Land

Endre Sik

Innocence Lost—Hungarian Refugee Policy between 1988 and 2004

The story tells of an unusual situation—the birth of an institutional framework. I consider such a situation to be unusual, because ordinary people experience the existence of institutions as "given", "eternal", "unchanging" and "finished"—even if they do sometimes change. Situations where something is created from nothing are rare, and yet my generation witnessed the creation of the Hungarian refugee policy from nothing. The basis of my testimony is, firstly, that I was able to conduct research on "refugee policy" in 1988–1989, i.e. while it was in its embryonic stage; this was the result of a lucky combination of circumstances—being in the right place at the right time and knowing the main actors in refugee policy. Secondly, in 1995, I became the founder president of the Hungarian Association for Migrants [Menedék[1] Egyesület], a position I held until 2005.

I shall relate the story twice. First, I present the institutional origins: why was Hungarian refugee policy born in innocence (the social situation signified by this term will be addressed in depth later on)? How did it lose its innocence? Where is it now, in its maturity? I then present the same

[1] In Hungarian 'refuge'.

period by means of the history of the Hungarian Association for Migrants—Menedék (www.menedek.hu). I demonstrate how this NGO grew from nothing and how, after its childhood innocence, it inevitably suffered the growing pains of adolescence, the awkwardness caused by disproportionately long limbs arising from rapid growth, and the combination of immense self-confidence and frequent doubts. Today the Hungarian Association for Migrants is a mature organisation. It has become a professional and weighty actor in its own field.

HISTORICAL ROOTS

To understand the origins of Hungarian refugee policy, one needs to become acquainted with two prior processes—the first stretching back to World War I and the second embracing the communist period.[2] The long-term effects of events in the first half of the 20th century—the two world wars and the ensuing frontier revision as well as the destabilising ethnic, religious and political conflicts that plagued the region throughout the period—influenced the development of Hungarian refugee policy at the time of the political changes of 1989–1990. Defeat in World War I and the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire intensified class divisions and antisemitic tendencies. Moreover, frontier revision transformed the old multinational Kingdom of Hungary into the homogenous Hungarian nation-state. World War II placed further burdens on Hungarian culture, which had already become rather xenophobic. Hungary bore the human, intellectual and financial burdens of a second military defeat. The Holocaust and the post-war resettlement programmes (the expulsion of ethnic Germans and

[2] Endre Sik, and Judit Tóth, "Loss of Innocence—The sociohistorical aspects of the Hungarian refugee policy." *Migration,* nos. 11–12 (1991): 119–132. Endre Sik, and Judit Tóth, "Governmental and Non Governmental Refugee Policy in Hungary", in H. Adelman, E. Sik, and G. Tessenyi, eds., *The Genesis of a Domestic Regime: The Case of Hungary* (Toronto: York Lane Press, 1994): 65–72.

the inward migration of Hungarians from neighbouring countries) further homogenised the Hungarian population.

Communism ensued. The regime made a partial taboo of certain issues (Jewish identity and the existence of Hungarian communities outside the country), thereby preventing their proper discussion. Meanwhile, the borders were closed in both directions. There was no way into the country. With just two exceptions (small groups of political refugees from Greece in the late 1940s and Chile in the early 1970s), migrants needed much patience and many permits in order to settle in Hungary. And it was just as difficult to emigrate from the country. It is no accident that in the aftermath of the 1956 revolution, in addition to a small group of political refugees, many young Hungarians (approximately 200,000) made use of the temporary opening of the border to leave the country. Throughout the communist period, it was not easy to travel abroad for several reasons such as the difficulty of obtaining a passport, a visa and, not least, foreign currency. Moreover, two types of passport were required—one for travel to the West, and one for travel to the East: the former was not to be kept at home and the latter was not valid everywhere (making it actually more difficult to travel to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia than to the West). Even though things became somewhat more relaxed in the early 1980s (for instance, passports were easier to acquire and a little amount of hard currency could be kept at home), nevertheless emigration was still classified as a crime—and immigration was not simple either. The Hungarian government's decision in 1989 to allow East German visitors to pass through the border to Austria—their first chance of free emigration—was an initial step towards the subsequent democratic changes in Hungary and East Germany and an act that has since acquired symbolic value.

(INNOCENCE...)

It was into this introverted and homogenous world that, in 1988, several hundred "refugees" came—unexpectedly and in a concealed manner. The use of inverted commas is part of the essence of the story for two reasons. First, neither politicians nor academics and journalists—nor even the individuals themselves—knew how to describe their exact legal and political status. Second, for better or worse, within a period of weeks, this had become the generally accepted term used to describe them.

Where did they come from and why did "refugees" appear in Hungary at this point in time? It was a chance combination of circumstances in which the forces compelling people to flee, the receptive milieu, and the policies of the destination countries provided, for a very short time, the suitable conditions for "migration".

In communist Romania, Ceausescu—the omnipotent ruler of both party and state—wished to demolish villages and resettle the inhabitants in other parts of the country where they could contribute more effectively to the "construction of socialism". The Hungarian population in Transylvania did not welcome such "special attention". At the time, the first Formula One competition was held in Hungary. Many young ethnic Hungarians in Romania requested and received tourist passports for the occasion. They came with their friends to Hungary by car. After the race, instead of returning to Romania, they set out for Sweden or for Austria, where—for a period of weeks—they immediately received refugee status (without inverted commas).

Those who were slower or less fortunate, as well as those who were more patriotic or who had relatives here in Hungary and who found work and accommodation, stayed in Hungary and became "refugees".

The continued presence of the "refugees" in Hungary was possible because it fitted in very well with the changes that were already underway as a forerunner of the political transition. For example, the first non-government rallies in Hungary were held to protest the destruction of villages in Romania—and to speak of Hungarians from outside Hungary "as refugees" was to break with the previous taboo. Showing solidarity with Hungarian minorities abroad and caring for those ethnic Hungarians who had fled to Hungary were activities that could bring quick popularity to nascent political groupings that lacked political experience and infrastructure.

In this context, the inverted commas express a situation that was merely tolerated in a political sense but which was nevertheless highly popular. But this is not the only explanation for the inverted commas. At the time, there was no better way of expressing the arrival in the country of ethnic Hungarians from the neighbouring countries.[3] Even more importantly, there was no legal restriction on the use of the term, as Hungary had still to ratify the Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees, and thus the term was "free" to use.

Refugees had not arrived en masse in Hungary since the autumn of 1939—when Polish soldiers fleeing the German advance arrived in Hungary to a warm and well-organised reception. Thus, there was no legal framework, organisation or expertise that might have offered support to the Hungarian authorities in the face of the "refugees.[4]

Political enthusiasm, the search for identity, and the lack of a bureaucratic system combined to produce favourable

[3] The other possible terms ("tourists", "long-term foreign visitors to Hungary", "unlawful residents in Hungary", "foreign citizens of Hungarian ethnicity residing in Hungary", "settlers from Transylvania") were awkward and inaccurate. After a radio interview given by the secretary of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the HSWP on January 25, 1988, the official media also began referring to the "situation of the refugees from Romania" Gyula Francia, *A Menedék—Migránsokat Segítő Egyesület és a magyarországi menekültügy bizonytalanságai* [The Hungarian Association for Migrants—Menedék, and the uncertainties of the Hungarian asylum system], PhD thesis, ELTE PPK, 2004.

[4] The arrival of the Greeks and Chileans—their "taking refuge" in Hungary—was classified as a party matter. Thus, their "treatment" was also a special party responsibility rather than an official task of the state.

circumstances in which ordinary citizens, the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, the churches, liberal NGOs, the border guard, and the Hungarian Diaspora attempted to work together for the sake of the common good, leaving aside their own ideological and logistical limitations, fears and suspicions.

This was the "era of innocence" when Hungarians could hardly have been xenophobic and when many of them offered assistance to the "refugees" because they felt sorry for them and/or were inspired by patriotic feelings or the desire to do something against communism. Public officials showed a human face, the border guards (when they were not busy deporting people) acted as social workers, the Hungarian parliament voted for a special fund to assist the migrants, the party headquarters (when not directing the secret police) tried to channel these "popular initiatives" towards new forms of ruling. The churches undertook organisational work and assistance spanning the borders; the county governments joined forces with local branches of the Red Cross to direct charity and voluntary work and to divide up central government funds; newly-formed and more established "alternative" organisations distributed gift parcels, administered official affairs, lobbied, and used their personal contacts to offer support.

(...LOST)

All of this did not even last a year. Innocence was lost and a "period of bleakness" ensued. Public enthusiasm subsided; it was soon replaced by welfare chauvinism—the EU-conform brand of xenophobia. A bureaucratic system was introduced to the public sector: a legal framework for the refugee issue was harmonised with the international treaties and conventions. Efficient local cooperative bodies were replaced by a mishmash of professional bodies with thousands of other responsibilities. Hungary's political parties, its parliament and its politicians were preoccupied with

each other and with the major issues of the country's political and economic transition. The issue of the Hungarian minorities across the border was no longer a crucial element of public discourse.

Even so, two pieces of evidence indicated that the "era of innocence" had not disappeared without trace. First, as an American lawyer—an expert on international refugee law—pointed out, Hungary's regulations on refugee status were in fact "Hungarian refugee" regulations, whose function was to regulate the migration of ethnic Hungarian "refugees" from the neighbouring countries rather than to facilitate Hungary's reception of refugees from anywhere in the world.[5] Second, when the Hungarian state adopted the Geneva Convention in the autumn of 1989, it did so with a geographical proviso that ruled out asylum procedures for refugees from outside of Europe. Thus, the "innocence" resulted in ethnicity-based positive and negative discrimination.

Refugee policy became both a national policy issue and a security policy issue. This was implicitly acknowledged when refugee policy became the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior.[6] And it became even more manifest when in 1991, owing to the Yugoslav wars, the refugee policy system was overhauled in light of the appearance of migrants en masse—though most of them did not want to stay in the country. The purpose of the reforms was to filter out spies and HIV sufferers, to seal off the refugee camps, and to encourage refugees to move on as quickly as possible. Government policy in this area was bound to succeed,

[5] Maryellen Fullerton, "Hungary, Refugees, and the Law of Return", in Endre Sik, and Judit Tóth, eds., *From Improvisation toward Awareness? Contemporary Migration Politics in Hungary* (Budapest: MTA PTI, 1997), 131–147.

[6] The body responsible for the affairs of foreigners in Hungary (under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior) was the Office for Refugee Affairs [Menekültügyi Hivatal] between 1989 and 1993, the Office for Refugee Affairs and Migration [Menekültügyi és Migrációs Hivatal] between 1993 and 2000, and the Office of Immigration and Nationality [Bevándorlási és Állampolgársági Hivatal] after 2000.

since its aim was identical to that of both the human smugglers and the refugees.

Under these circumstances, there was a heightened role for the local representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The tasks were to ensure the conformity of the domestic legal framework with international norms, to monitor the provision of state tasks, and to reduce the imbalance in the relationship between civil society and the state.

THE LIFELINE OF A REFUGEE NGO

It is correct to begin to tell the story of the Hungarian Association for Migrants here, since it was the UNHCR that served as the midwife at the birth of Menedék. At a dinner party, Philippe Labreveux—then Hungary representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees—suggested the formation of an umbrella organisation that would bring together all the smaller organisations involved in the refugee issue in Hungary. Those attending the dinner party included politicians, representatives of multinational firms, refugee policy experts, lawyers and human rights activists. The profile of the new body was established around the dining table. Since it lacked an office, Menedék's seat was officially designated as the Budapest office of the UNHCR. Thus, in January 1995, the Hungarian Association for Migrants—Menedék was born. The founding members set out the following aims:

- To represent international migrants, in particular asylum-seekers, refugees, persons under temporary protection, resident aliens, foreign workers and immigrants.
- To assist the legal, social and cultural integration of migrants and refugees wishing to stay in Hungary.
- To represent the interests and rights of migrants with respect to political, administrative, and governmental bodies and in the media.

- To conduct research on migration.
- To inform the media primarily by means of the monthly newsletter *Oltalomkeresők* [Shelter Seekers].
- To develop and sustain co-operation with human rights and other civil society organisations with similar aims as well as with international organisations.

For some time after its establishment, the Association as well as two or three other NGOs (the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, the Cordelia Foundation, and the Red Cross) formed the organisational framework for the local activities of the UNHCR. Together they participated in the lobbying aimed at securing a legal framework in conformity with EU rules. By organising and coordinating programmes for the social integration of refugees, they also demonstrated that refugees could be treated in a manner that was different from the security-oriented approach of the government. During the initial period, in addition to the lobbying activity, most of the work comprised the compilation and circulation of information brochures about the rights of migrants. Later on, the Association undertook the organisation and operation of a national network of lawyers offering free legal advice to migrants.

At the time, all activities of the Association were based on a research group functioning under the auspices of the Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Within this framework, various research projects on migration were undertaken. The results of such research were debated in the course of round-table discussions or published in separate volumes.

Since at the time there were very few similar organisations in the region, the Association's work in the international field blossomed—due once again to support from the UNHCR. The Association compiled the ECRE Country Reports. In 1996, a group of experts visited the eastern Slavonian region to obtain information about the political, demographic and military situation there.

The Association's success led inevitably to its growth and professionalisation—a process that automatically gave rise to conflict. The Hungarian Association for Migrants experienced all the various conflicts that inevitably arise in the work of a successful NGO.

"Peaceful co-existence" with the authorities meant, simultaneously, both a requirement to co-operate as well as a constant struggle stemming from the different values and organisational structure of the Association. At the same time, since normative government funding was the only way to avoid the uncertainties of project-based funding, the Association also needed to resolve the quandary of how to lobby against the government while offering advisory services on its behalf.

Despite constant and rapid growth,[7] project-based funding caused ongoing financial uncertainty. This meant that successful projects could only be staffed with people who were not in employment, because it was impossible to guarantee their future. Moreover, owing to the differing criteria of the elected management committee and the executive management, conflicts arose in the field of funding and setting priorities. As a result, the general assembly today is merely an obstacle to the work of the Association's staff. The repeated restructuring of the Association has led to the complete replacement of the original staff. Almost everyone that began working at the Association before the arrival of the current director has been dismissed. In the end the director even replaced the recalcitrant president of the Association. Other NGOs were both rivals on the international stage as well domestic partners in cooperation against the state.

All these almost inevitable conflicts have not influenced the professionalism of the Association's work. Today the

[7] In 1993, the annual revenue of the Hungarian Association for Migrants was about HUF 5 million. By 2003, its annual revenue had risen to more than HUF 100 million (Francia, *A Menedék*).

Association manages projects for the Interdisciplinary Centre for Comparative Research in the Social Sciences (www.iccr.co.at). It represents Hungary in the most influential European lobby organisations, including the Migration Policy Group (www.migpolgroup.com), the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (www.picum.org), and the European Council of Refugees and Exiles www.ecre.org), and it also manages several refugee integration projects under the auspices of the Human Resource Development Operative Programme (www.hefop.hu) and the European Refugee Fund (www.http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/refugee/funding_refugee_en.htm). In 2006, after among others several local governments, the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Civil Rights, schools and NGOs, the Association for Hungarian Migrants became a recipient of the UN Refugee Award.

THE FUTURE

The era of innocence has irrevocably ended. But this does not mean inevitable future decline. We are unlikely to experience the best of all worlds, but it is still worth trying to preserve something of the innocence, while replacing whatever has been lost with expertise, tolerance, good judgement and self-limitation.

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Interview with Attila Mészáros

The interviewee was himself a migrant. Later on, he worked for the Hungarian Association for Migrants [Menedék Egyesület], which is mentioned in this paper. In the interview, he offers insights—from two perspectives—into the situation of migrants in Hungary.

I was born on May 5, 1972 in a village called Baj_a [Hungarian: Bajsa] in the Ba_ka region of Vojvodina, in the former Yugoslavia. It was a multicultural village of about 2600 inhabitants. Slovaks, Hungarians and Serbs lived together as a cohesive community—their ancestors had come as settlers in the 18th century. Thus, Baj_a was not a recently settled village, and we were not really affected by the post-1945 wave of settlement that affected other parts of Vojvodina. My mother and father, who had degrees in geography/history, were teachers at the local school, which I also attended. I went on to high school in Ba_ka Topola [Hungarian: Topolya], a neighbouring town. I subsequently enrolled at the Teacher Training College in Subotica [Hungarian: Szabadka], where I attended courses without completing a degree. After Teaching Training College, I came to Hungary where I became a student—and subsequently a lecturer—at the Németh László People's

Academy[1] in Sopron. This was the first time I left Yugoslavia for a longer period. At about this time—1991–1992—the Yugoslav crisis was just beginning. Initially, I came for one or two weekends as a student. The Academy offered courses in three areas of study: folk culture, music literature and religious studies; renewable energy; and social policy. Lectures were available in these subjects, and students came from Hungary and from the neighbouring countries. Coming from an "exotic" war-torn region, I was asked to lecture on the current state of affairs whenever students came from abroad—from other colleges in Northern Europe. This was how I first came to Hungary. I then completed a course at the John Wesley College in Budapest, thereafter doing all sorts of work in Yugoslavia for a year or so. Subsequently, an opportunity arose to spend six semesters as a full-time student in Sopron. So I came to Hungary to study.

The Sopron college was just being established, but it soon closed down—that is to say, courses of this type were discontinued. Some other students and I went to Denmark for a month to visit adult education centres there. In light of the situation in Yugoslavia, I decided to continue studying in Hungary. The adult education centre in Sopron had introduced me to social work, and so I thought about enrolling in a college offering courses in social work. I had no long-term plans, and I was not thinking of working in social work in Hungary. I simply wanted to get a place at a college where such subjects were being taught. In a brochure, I read about the John Wesley College, which was unknown to me at the time. By the end of the first year, I realised that the college was based on a group of intellectuals that had been active in the old *Beszélő* [Speaker] circle[2]. The college was run by Gábor Iványi, and the teaching staff included Gábor Havas, Miklós Szabó and Ottilia Solt—all of whom

[1] An adult education centre, similar to a *community college* in the US.
[2] The samizdat journal of the democratic opposition during the Kadar regime.

had been involved in the Hungarian Foundation for Supporting the Poor [SZETA] and were founding members of the Alliance of Free Democrats[3] [SZDSZ]. In other words, after the populist college in Sopron, I found myself in a very different world. The college offered me a place, and I studied there for some years. This was about 1994–1995. Earlier on, in 1991, actually in 1989–1990, I had been called up for military service in Yugoslavia. I could not imagine myself as a soldier, still less taking part in a war. And I really felt that the whole thing had nothing to do with me. And so I began to play a game with the Yugoslav military, trying to convince them that I was not fit for service as a soldier. It was not easy to convince them of this during the war years. The game lasted from 1990 until 1997. Each year, I had to go for medical tests and prove that I was unfit for service. Finally, in 1997, I succeeded.

During this time, I was mainly living here in Hungary. I may have the year wrong, but I think it was about 1996 when my passport was withdrawn—I had become such a problem figure in Yugoslavia. At that point, I could have chosen refugee status. That is to say, I could have decided to stay here, knowing that I would not be allowed to go home for as long as the military conflict lasted. In fact, I made a different choice: I decided to go home. I accepted that I would not have a passport for six months, and that I would have to stay there—with the risk of being summoned for military service. This was my choice—which also meant suspending my studies at college. I had no passport for six months, so I did all sorts of different things at home, as well as proving once again that I was still unfit for military service. Then I got a new passport and returned to Hungary. So the years between 1990 and 1997 became a great game—it was not a particularly entertaining one, but it ended in success, so it was worthwhile. But each year, I lost a month or

[3] Alliance of Free Democrats—a liberal party in Hungary, it formed part of the pre-1989 democratic opposition.

so, owing to the medical exam or having to go to a specialist or to the military hospital. At such times, I would "display" various psychological symptoms. Finally, in 1997, I managed to get myself demobilised. Well, that's my story about the military. I then went back to college, attending courses in education and in social work. Initially, I found life in Budapest rather difficult: I lived in a dormitory in the Eighth District of Budapest during the week, but I went home to Vojvodina at the weekends. I was not particularly happy, but various things kept me here in Budapest. Gradually, the situation changed, and I began to spend more and more time in Hungary. But I was still a tourist or very much a student, and I did not feel part of the local community. But then I spent a year at home, and finally there were all sorts of problems at the college—which were even reported on in the press. Iványi, who was the head of the Oltalom Charity Association [Oltalom Karitatív Egyesület] and the maintainer of the college, fell out with the teachers at the college, who then resigned en masse. The college director, Gábor Havas, as well as other teachers, followed suit—and so did we. We were very close to our teachers and to what we were learning. And so we transferred to the University of Pécs; this is important because, in the end, I was taught by my old teachers while in Pécs, and my degree was issued by the University of Pécs. Thus, I earned a degree in Social Work in 2000. In the meantime, I was working. I did night duty at a hostel for homeless people, funded by the Oltalom Charity Association. The hostel was located next to our college and dormitory. I then became a social worker for the Shelter Foundation [Menhely Alapítvány], working for several years at a hostel for the homeless. After a while, I became tired of working with homeless people; I realised it was not for me. While I was still attending the college, I became involved, as an interpreter, in the work of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee,[4]

[4] Human rights organisation.

which introduced me to the refugee field of work. I worked as a researcher in the refugee camps and as an interpreter, since I spoke Serbian and most of the refugees had come from Serbia. I could use my knowledge and could thus work with them directly. This lasted from 1995 until 1999 and 2000. In 2000, I began working for the Hungarian Association for Migrants [Menedék Egyesület]. There was a programme which aimed to assist Vojvodina Hungarians—those who had been in the refugee camps for some time—in integrating into society. The programme only lasted several months; I think it was funded by the Dutch embassy. I was contacted by an acquaintance who worked for the Hungarian Association for Migrants. We ran the programme together for three months. Then the term was extended for a few months, with the same funding. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the main supporter of the Hungarian Association for Migrants, favoured this kind of auxiliary field work. I visited the refugee camps and tried to offer support to the people living there. In this way, I was appointed by the Association as a member of staff focusing on refugees from Yugoslavia. My tasks have changed over the years, since I worked initially as a social worker. In recent years, I have worked as a programme supervisor, responsible for coordinating social services, obtaining funding and administering day-to-day tasks. The kind of service that I began—being present in the camps—has now become a continuous service. Indeed, we now have a smaller or larger presence in all three refugee camps.

Looking back, I am reminded of the multicultural milieu of my childhood. It was quite natural for me to have Serbian friends. They spoke to us in Hungarian, because there were more of us. Of course, we also spoke Serbian... In a way, my current work is a little bit similar. The mentality and attitudes that I found here were rather strange to me. I found it difficult to understand how people could think of discriminating against somebody simply because of their background. But we never allowed that to happen.

For us it was quite natural to be living alongside Slovaks and Serbs.

On the other hand, such experiences have clearly influenced what I am doing now, and the fact that I do not perceive it as a deliberate choice that I am working in this area, or that I drifted into the work rather than it being a long-term plan. But I do see two things. One of them is that what comes naturally to me—and is the focus of my social work—is not the desire to help (although this is one aspect) but the many abuses of power I have experienced in my own life at the hands of the authorities. I think this is what drives me to help other individuals and groups in desperate circumstances. And my present contribution is at the programme level rather than at the individual level.

War and the abuse of power have instilled in me a commitment to those who are at the mercy of others. On the one hand, one obviously needs to be willing to help others. One aspect of social work and of offering support—in fact its main rival in some instances—is that it should not become a willingness to help at any price—which would be a kind of manic syndrome. This is actually the greatest danger in professional social work. If you want to help refugees, the homeless or anyone else, you must be professional when offering support. You must learn the basic professional rules—which are taught at college. You must know how to avoid getting drawn in or burnt out, how to define boundaries that help you to adhere to the professional rules, how to cultivate sufficient empathy, how to offer support without losing your own identity and personality, and how to avoid becoming enveloped in the problems of others. I'm not very good at it, and I do not do it anymore. A person can do it effectively for some years, but after a while he or she will burn out. So it is good to do something else in the meantime; I no longer do this kind of assistance at the individual level.

Some of the refugees have been deprived of their rights—they have limited rights. This is unfortunate both for the

refugees and, in some instances, for the Hungarian state. To cite a specific example: some refugees have temporary status, which means they need a special permit to work and are subject to special rules. This is not good for them; they are pushed out of the Hungarian labour market—which involves a whole series of additional disadvantages. Nor is it good for society at large or for the Hungarian state, because these people have to be looked after. In some cases, they have to be fed and housed for years—which has a whole series of negative effects for the individual and is very costly to the state. One could actually calculate the cost of keeping somebody in a refugee camp. It would surely be much cheaper to look at the interests of the state and economic utility—to allow people to integrate, or even to support such integration. At least, we would not be limiting their rights. The state is half of the problem, and the other type of power—and perhaps my wording is a little imprecise—is wielded by majority Hungarian society. Here I see many different areas where we need to do something for the sake of refugees, because Hungarian society tends to reject them—as do other societies in Central and Eastern Europe. I find it difficult to confront such discrimination, but I feel I have to do something against it. It is difficult to watch what is happening...

We have programmes, which reflect the resources at our disposal. I would distinguish two significant elements in our support work. The first of these manifests itself at the level of the individual. We have ten or so social workers trying to teach the refugees and other clients—people of differing status—to manage their affairs themselves. This is the level of the individual. If required, I could discuss in further detail how this works or does not work. This is the level of the individual, and the social workers are responsible in this area. But in order to successfully integrate the refugees, society needs to accept them. That is to say, integration functions well when it is a two-way process; there has to be a willingness to receive and accept the refugees. In this context, financial aims could certainly be listed, in addition to humanitarian aims. The secondary level is communication with society. Although we do not have the means to organise ground-breaking campaigns, we are nevertheless trying to address this issue. For instance, last Friday we held a community event in Békéscsaba, which aimed to bring the refugees and people from other cultures a little closer. In this instance, we brought the refugees closer to mainstream Hungarian society. We have organised a series of programmes in Békéscsaba, a town in southeastern Hungary: an afternoon that begins with a football match between the refugees and the local theatre group; a film about refugee affairs, in fact about integration, about the life of a second-generation peasant-girl in Britain; and a theatre performance, a work by a Dutch dramatist about a young Bosnian refugee. There will be a chamber performance, quizzes, craft sessions. The aim is to find as many points of contact as possible. There will be concerts where refugees and migrants play their instruments, or concerts of exotic music or world music. We are trying to create all of this at the personal level, so that, by means of knowledge, people become more accepting of others. But there's nothing extraordinary about this; the people are here among us, and we are using their culture. Think of world music or of everyday things like Chinese food, gyros, or suchlike. The man standing behind the gyros grill is no different from you and me. On International Refugee Day, we held a similar event in Ráday Street, Budapest. Another initiative was a social advertising campaign. Creative material was published in the free journal *Pesti Est* [Budapest Night] and on postcards that were distributed free of charge. These are the two levels of action and setting things in motion. The individual support level is easier to measure: two hundred people visit us each year, and we can evaluate our success by looking at areas such as jobs, housing, education, health, etc. At the other level, we distribute 40,000 free postcards. Obviously, it is difficult to appraise the success of such a campaign. Compared with

the mainstream position, it is more difficult to change deeply held attitudes by such means.

My teachers and their SZETA[5] traditions share the worldview of my upbringing. I found many similarities here, particularly with regard to the acceptance of others—which was quite natural to me. I don't know how important the college was, but the fact that I am here now doing what I do—I've thought about this quite a lot—does not seem to be the result of a conscious decision. The determining factors have been my language knowledge, my past in the Helsinki committee, and Ferenc Kőszeg[6]—minor factors in separation but having a cumulative effect. And also by the fact that I had to leave my native land—which was actually my decision, albeit I had little real choice. And by the fact that if the war had ended, I would not even have thought of coming here. And by the fact that I did not become a soldier, refusing to submit to the authorities in Serbia. And, finally, by the fact that I grew up in such a mixed a community. All these factors, working in combination, have brought me to where I am now. And I suspect that if I had continued working as a social worker in the field, I might well have left by now. I could work with the homeless for a few years, but then I changed course and I am now doing something a bit different—even though I am still working to make support at the personal level more effective. And what I do now is not direct support. I do not do my daily work now, thinking about how I am trying to manage support tasks and what a good feeling that is. And how this might somehow make me feel better. It never worked before; I never felt particularly good just because we were helping people. In other words, I don't think that level did very much for me. And it shows the basis on which I value this work that I once had a task—and this is what I remember about my time as a

[5] Hungarian Foundation for Supporting the Poor, semi-legal support organisation under communism.

[6] President of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee and member of the Alliance of Free Democrats.

social worker—where I helped many people, or I helped them to achieve something, when I was working with individuals. And, obviously, the reactions were good—when things came together and a person was able to achieve something by means of my support. But what I really remember is the time when a group managed to apply and promote the community interest. And here again, the motivating factor was not the people who were directly benefiting from this. What spurred me on was being able to stand up to the government and promote the interests of a marginal group. Here again, I was confronting the government and representing the interests of a group. The specific issue, to be clear, was that one hundred-sixty Vojvoidna Hungarians had lived here in Hungary for a period of ten years, and their status still had to be settled. Their rights were limited; they were socially deprived; and an indelible mark had been left on their lives by ten years of living in a refugee camp. And there were some people who wished to deny them this protection and send them home. Meanwhile children had been born in the camps. In my view the behaviour of the government and the refugee management body was unethical. Something had to be done against them. It was then that Ferenc Kőszeg (head of the Helsinki Committee) and I decided to join forces and take action at the community level rather than at the individual level. And we managed to get the attention of the media—especially because many of the refugees were ethnic Hungarians. We asked the minister of interior to use her discretionary powers and offer these people long-term residence permits. We were initially unsuccessful, but following pressure from the media, we finally achieved our aim. In this way, one hundred-sixty people were allowed to stay in Hungary.

For me Hungary's accession to the European Union amounted to exclusion from the European project since I held a Yugoslav passport. Until the late 1980s, you could travel anywhere in the world with a Yugoslav passport, and there was money too. By the time I could have taken advan-

tage of this, the country's economy was in disarray and the isolation of Yugoslavia and its citizens had begun. Then came the economic embargo and the ensuing poverty. I had no opportunity to travel. My first so-called EU experience came in 1994 when I went to Denmark for a month with my college. But for me, accession to the European Union, to the European cultural milieu—to the many cultures of Europe, to European liberty, to free movement—took place when I obtained my Hungarian passport. It was not when Hungary became, from one day to the next, a member of the European Union. Of course, I was pleased, because exclusion would have been a bad thing, but I did not feel particularly exuberant. In contrast, I felt very good when I got my Hungarian passport. Indeed, the very next day I got in the car and drove to Slovakia—the nearest foreign country. It was a peculiar feeling, because I had some bad memories. For instance, on one occasion, the Czechs had put me off the train because my visa had expired. And whenever I travelled by coach with a Yugoslav passport, I was treated like someone with the plague. The new passport was my entrance ticket to the European Union. As far as the Hungarian Association for Migrants is concerned, we can now offer various programmes for refugees. This is what it is about mainly, because there are new sources of funds. One source is the European Social Fund, which we use to run three large projects. Previously, there were the PHARE programmes, which prepared the country for membership. But this is a great step forward. We are involved in various projects and partnerships, which strengthen membership. If I could speak good English, it would strengthen my involvement too. Indeed, I would become actively involved in the tasks. But this is not the case, and so I have not become involved in the task of making contacts. So this is what has changed, I think. As far as the refugees are concerned, the change is that Hungary has not become more attractive. Incomes have not increased, and integration has not become easier. There has been no change in terms of

granting residence to refugees in Europe or Hungary. They continue to go where they can earn the most, where they speak the local language, and where there are existing communities ready to support them—there has been no change here. A problem for migrants right now is the new Dublin Agreement, which requires that fingerprints be taken from all migrants on entry to the European Union—in the country of entry. This means that the migrants are immediately registered by the authorities, and could be given refugee status. But most of the applicants do not come to Hungary to become refugees here. They simply end up here, having been left here by human smugglers or having run out of money. The smugglers tell them they have reached the agreed destination. There are a thousand ways that refugees end up here. And most of them move on while the claim for refugee status is being appraised. That is to say, the refugee status procedure begins here in Hungary, but the migrants travel on to other parts of Europe. And the new rules—Dublin II—attempt to prevent this from happening. Under the rules, migrants can be returned to the country where the refugee status procedure began. This is one of the changes resulting from EU membership—alongside the many new programmes.

Contributors

Gábor Daróczi (1974) was born in Berettyóújfalu, near the Romanian border. He attended local primary schools. In 1985 he moved to a school in Budapest, where he received his high school diploma. He earned a degree in cultural management at the University of Pécs. He worked in the Education Department of the Soros Foundation and then for the National Health Development Research Institute on a national representative survey of Roma health. He is currently working for the PHARE Office of the Prime Minister's Office where he co-ordinates a national media campaign on Roma education and Roma identity. In late 2004, he became ministerial commissioner for the integration of disadvantaged and Roma children at the Ministry of Education. Since mid-2006, he has been performing the same task as a political consultant to the Ministry of Education.

Ágnes Herpai Márkus (1967) is a social worker, social policy analyst and community development expert. She graduated as a teacher of mathematics and chemistry. In 1988, she began working at a children's home and then joined the staff of the Family Support Service in Kőbánya, Budapest. Between 1993 and 2001, she initiated social services in the

civil society and regional development organisations of villages in Zala County. Since 1999, she has been a freelance consultant specialising in regional strategic planning and a researcher of multiple social disadvantages. This latter topic is the theme of her PhD thesis. Since 2003, she has been working for the National Institute for Family and Social Policy, where she is responsible for the co-ordination of regional and sectoral planning relating to EU funds. She is an external lecturer at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

Dávid Kardos (1978) graduated from the Faculty of Law and Political Science, Eötvös Loránd University. From 2002 until 2005, he was an adviser to the National Radio and Television Commission. Since 2005, he has been working at the European Parliament for Mrs. Magda Kósa Kovács MEP.

Eszter Kósa (1972), PhD, is a social worker and social policy analyst. Since 1997 she has been working on projects in the social field funded by the European Union, initially in the business sector and more recently in public administration. Since 2005, she has been a freelance consultant and expert advisor. Her fields of interest are social policy, social inclusion, training, planning, and EU support policy.

Dr. Magda Kósa Kovács (1940) earned a degree in French and Hungarian from the Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University. From 1964 until 1972, she was a teacher at Leövey Klára Grammar School, Budapest. She also became a research fellow at the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. From 1977, she worked for the Teachers' Union, serving as its general secretary from 1980. From 1985 until 1990, she was general secretary of the National Trade Union Council. In 1990, she became a member of the Hungarian Parliament, serving, from July 15, 1994, as minister of employment in the government of Gyula Horn. In October 1995, she resigned from the post and was relieved of her ministerial duties on

December 1. Between 1995 and 1998, with brief intervals, she was a member of the Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional and Judicial Affairs. From 1998 until 2002, she chaired the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights, Minorities and Religious Affairs. She is currently a member of the European Parliament, vice-chairwoman of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, and substitute member of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.

Dr. György Könczei (1958), PhD, is an economist and sociologist. He is a professor at the Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Education, Eötvös Loránd University. In the course of his career, he has worked as a researcher at the Cooperative Research Institute, as programme director at the Soros Foundation, and as ministerial adviser for the Ministry of Welfare responsible for drafting a Bill on the Rights and Equal Opportunities of People with Disabilities. In 1999, he became counsellor for the Republic of Hungary in matters relating to the European Social Charter. He has been a researcher and writer in the field of disabilities for twenty years. He is a founding member of the Disabilities and Employment Policy Adult Education Centre (est. 2006) and the founding editor of www.disabilityknowledge.org (est. 2005).

Péter Mózer (1965) is a social policy analyst and assistant lecturer at the Department of Social Work and Social Policy, Faculty of Social Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University. He is also a social policy adviser to the government's Committee on Fiscal Reform. His fields of research are the social and economic policy issues of welfare programmes; opportunities for linking taxation with social policy; monetary provisions and welfare services; as well as poverty and measures to combat poverty. He has contributed to many research projects in these fields and has published widely.

László Németh (1958) is a social worker and social policy analyst. He is a practising art therapist and a university instructor of social workers. He supervises and offers support to social workers, art therapists and team leaders. As a social policy adviser, he elaborates expert strategies for decision-makers as well as monitoring and evaluation systems for funding organisations. He also designs model programmes, taking part in such programmes as a consultant. He is a university instructor in European Union assistance programmes and sources of funding. He also assists organisations applying for such funds as a consultant and supervisor.

Dr. Andrea Pető (1964), PhD, habil., is a historian and sociologist. She is an associate professor at the Department of Gender Studies at the Central European University, Budapest, and an associate professor at the University of Miskolc, where she directs the Equal Opportunities and Gender Studies Centre. She has published four monographs and edited eighteen volumes (six in Hungarian, two in Russian, and ten in English) on gender and women in politics. She is also the author of numerous articles in English, Russian, German, Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Hungarian, Italian and French.

Dr. Endre Sik (1948), PhD, Sc, is a professor at the Department of Minority Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, a senior researcher at TARKI, and director of the National Focal Point of the European Union Centre for Monitoring Race and Xenophobia. He heads the PhD programme at the University of Pécs. For ten years he was chairman of Menedék—the Hungarian Association for Migrants. He has also served as president of the Hungarian Sociological Association.

Résumé en langue française

Cet ouvrage n'est pas destiné en priorité qu'aux experts du sujet mais aussi à ceux qui participent à la prise de décision au niveau européen et également aux citoyens simplement curieux. Conformément au but des rédacteurs, il présente d'une manière claire et agréable à lire le développement des quinze dernières années dans les régions hongroises ou l'égalité des chances fut un enjeu particulièrement important. L'idée de base du livre est de traiter d'une approche personnelle l'expérience vécue de ces développements au sein de certains groupes sociaux. L'ouvrage initie son lecteur d'une façon unique à la période depuis la chute du socialisme d'État jusqu'à l'adhésion à l'Union européenne de la Hongrie, en la présentant du point de vue des activistes et des experts travaillant dans les différents domaines de la promotion de l'égalité des chances. Les chapitres du livre sont suivis par des témoignages des membres des groupes cibles.

L'introduction de **Madame Magda Kósa Kovács, député européenne**, initiatrice du projet et co-rédactrice de l'ouvrage, présente l'importance de l'année 2007, „*l'Année Européenne de l'égalité des chances pour tous*" et sa signification pour la Hongrie.

Sept chapitres traitent d'une façon non scientifique le sujet des groupes cibles désavantagés, se basant toujours sur des expériences personnelles vécues. Cette partie est précédée par un article-

résumé, écrit par David Kardos, sur l'égalité du traitement et l'égalité des chances dans les droits européen et hongrois.

Le dernier chapitre est un résumé du texte ou Eszter Kósa publie des faits et des données sur les sept groupes sociaux désavantagés qui sont traités dans le livre. La conclusion donne des informations sur l'emploi au sein de ces groupes, sur leurs ressources financières, leurs conditions de vie depuis le changement de régime jusqu' à nos jours, en les mettant dans un contexte européen.

La bibliographie en langue anglaise et hongroise facilite les recherches ultérieures sur le sujet.

LES CHAPITRES DE L'OUVRAGE:

LES FEMMES

Le Sac d'Esther
par Andrea Pető

L'auteur, qui est également co-rédactrice de l'ouvrage, écrit des publications sur des associations civils et des mouvements civils depuis presque dix ans. Elle s'occupe, depuis au moins aussi longtemps, de la problématique de l'égalité des chances des femmes et de l'enseignement de la science des sexes sociaux. S'associant à ses amies, elle a initié un cercle de réflexion dans le Café « Central » de Budapest, l'appelant *le Sac d'Esther*. Ce cercle a regroupé des femmes juives souhaitant échanger leurs pensées, s'autoanalyser, analyser les problèmes de la société. Il a fonctionné dans un premier temps en tant que rubrique de discussion mensuelle du magazine « Szombat » (*Samedi*), magazine de la culture juive. L'article démontre comment le *Sac d'Esther* est devenu inassumable pour le magazine « Szombat » fidèle aux principes traditionnels. Le texte décrit également les débuts du répertoriage des *histoires orales,* nommées « Histoires inracontées » et explique aussi ce que représente aujourd'hui l'activisme des femmes et l'identité plurielle en Hongrie.

Dans l'interview qui suit l'article, Magda Kun, conteuse d'histoires, membre actif du *Sac d'Esther*, raconte ses propres expériences.

Vivre avec une déficience

Les droits combattus des personnes handicapées
par György Könczei

L'auteur résume, en tant qu'expert du sujet, ses observations sur la transformation des directives et des règles de droit concernant les personnes handicapées au niveau onusien, européen et hongrois, depuis la fin des années 90. L'article suit de près le changement et le développement continus de la perception des personnes handicapées. En lisant le texte, le lecteur se rend compte du fait que les principes, les interdictions et les obligations répétés à l'écrit et à l'oral ne signifient pas une égalité réelle des chances pour les personnes handicapées. Pour atteindre ce but, il reste une multitude de choses a changer dans les quotidiens – les associations des personnes vivant avec une déficience travaillent activement pour y arriver.

L'interview qui suit l'article présente Zsuzsa Csató qui, tout en éduquant son propre enfant trisomique, a crée et fait toujours fonctionner une association civile très active offrant un soutien pour les personnes qui se trouvent dans la même situation de vie.

LES ROMS

Les enfants roms dans le système scolaire hongrois
par Gábor Daróczi

Il y a quelques années, une école d'une petite ville de province, Jászladány, a fait couler beaucoup d'encre en Hongrie. En effet,

les enfants roms ont suivi leurs études séparés des autres au sein de l'école. Le Ministère de l'Enseignement Publique a pris des mesures catégoriques contre cette ségrégation.

Par ailleurs, notons que cette affaire n'est pas un cas unique. Dans son article, Gábor Daróczi énumère plusieurs exemples différents de l'isolation des enfants roms dans les écoles. Entre autres, il parle de la classification fréquente des enfants roms comme handicapés ou de leur placement dans des établissements spécialisés. L'auteur nous explique le sens de ce que la classification comme handicapé signifie, la difficulté du passage entre différents types d'école, et par conséquence, la signification de l'(in)égalité des chances pour l'avenir des enfants roms.

L'interview qui suit l'article est le témoignage de Károly Danyi, rom de Jászladány, père de 6 enfants qui fait part de ses propres expériences sur l'enseignement en Hongrie.

Vivre dans la pauvreté

Vers un autre monde...
par Péter Mózer

L'article traite d'un groupe spécial de personnes souffrant de l'exclusion sociale: la situation des jeunes femmes adultes. Le sujet est un établissement de redressement hongrois pour filles, ses possibilités, son rőle au sein du système judiciaire et de la politique sociale. L'auteur démontre la transformation de l'établissement depuis les années 80 jusqu'à nos jours: le changement des liens entre organisation sociale et établissement de redressement ou correctionnel, celui de la fonction même de cet établissement, ainsi que le développement à l'égard des techniques, des possibilités et des solutions de la réinsertion sociale. La transformation radicale de la fonction de cette institution est due au changement important de l'environnement social (appauvrissement, chőmage, phénomène des sans-abri, des filles-mères, etc.) et à la reconsidération de certains délits (par ex. : désoeuvrement dangereux, racolage).

L'interview qui suit l'article présente Melinda Váradiné Horváth qui a vécu dans l'établissement mentionné en tant que fille-mère mineure et qui attend aujourd'hui son septième enfant ayant une situation régulière confortable.

Enfants vivant dans la pauvreté

Le destin de trois enfants: quelles chances pour l'avenir?
par László Németh

L'auteur de l'article présente la vie de trois enfants hongrois, « typiques » du point de vue de l'égalité des chances. Traiter du même point de vue les destins différents de ces enfants lui permet de les rendre concevables et de les comparer. Les trois « types d'enfants » de l'article sont les suivants: fils des parents blancs de la classe moyenne, vivant dans une grande ville; fille dont les parents ont un bagage scolaire de niveau moyen et des revenus moyens, vivant en province; garçon issu d'une famille rom, parents au chőmage, vivant en province. Leur présentation prend en compte leurs relations au sein de leurs familles, leurs résultats scolaires, leurs loisirs, leurs circonstances de logement, leur état de santé, leurs projets et possibilités pour l'avenir, en recouvrant 15 années de leur vie. L'auteur a commencé à suivre leur vie de près en travaillant dans les services sociaux.

Suite à l'article, András Parancs, jeune adolescent est interviewé. Il correspond à une des catégories décrites dans l'article.

LES RÉFUGIÉS

La naissance et le développement des affaires des réfugiés en Hongrie – la perte de l'innocence par Endre Sik

L'auteur présente le parcours d'une association civile qui s'occupe des réfugiés en Hongrie depuis le changement de régime. Le lecteur suit les différentes étapes du développement de l'associa-

tion nommé „Menedék" (*Refuge*): le rőle de „sage-femme" que le HCNUR (Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les Réfugiés) a joué pendant les débuts; ensuite, la période de la „coexistence pacifique" avec les autorités, conséquence d'une coopération contraignante malgré les intérêts opposés; les joies et les peines de l'institutionnalisation et de l'agrandissement de l'organisation, les difficultés du financement des projets, la lutte pour la dotation de l'Etat, la compétition inévitable avec les autres associations civiles.

Dans l'interview qui suit l'article, Attila Mészáros parle de la situation des réfugiés. Depuis son arrivée en Hongrie en tant que réfugié, il a obtenu la nationalité hongroise et travaille aujourd'hui pour l'association „Menedék" ou il aide les autres immigrés.

Vivre dans une commune désavantagée

Retard et rattrapage dans le développement
au cours des quinze dernières années
par Ágnes Herpainé Márkus

L'auteur, encore étudiant, est arrivé dans le *kistérség* de Zalaszentgrót, à l'Ouest de la Hongrie, en 1993. Le terme „*kistérség*" (établissement public de coopération intercommunale, l'équivalent hongrois approximatif du terme de la communauté de communes) était à l'époque un phénomène nouveau et unique concernant sa forme juridique et son cadre d'organisation. L'association de quelques maires locaux avait pour but de mettre en place des projets afin de développer l'emploi et l'économie locaux. L'auteur de l'article a également participé à ce travail: il était bénévol pendant 18 mois, chargé de l'organisation de camps d'été pour enfants et de fournir de l'aide aux enfants pour créer leurs propres collectivités locales. Ensuite, ils ont initié des programmes de services sociaux, créé une association d'intérêt commun, mis en place des projets visant le développement touristique, économique, de l'emploi et de la formation continue. Ils ont créé le modèle local du système de sécurité sociale qui était capable de réaliser des projets correspondant aux besoins locaux, en tenant compte des possibilités découlant des changements des règles de droit et en profitant mieux des ressources européennes. Le cas décrit dans l'article est un exemple réel du développement territorial.

Suite à l'article, l'interview fait intervenir Károly Hársfalvi, maire de Óhíd, petite commune désavantagée du *kistérség* de Zalaszentgrót traité dans le texte.