

Civil society in turbulent times/
A civil társadalom viharban



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(Fekete Éva)



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Fotó/István Péter Németh

Nem túlzás azt állítani, hogy a világ a feje tetejére állt. Évszázados normák kérdőjeleződnek meg, a második világháború után kialakult világtrend radikálisan megváltozik, a demokráciák recsegnek-ropognak, a szélsőséges gondolatok gyors ütemben terjednek. Ugyancsak kimondható, hogy véget ért a liberális konszenzus időszaka is, a liberális demokratikus keretrendszereket átszabó kormányok a szabadságjogokat fokozatosan erodálják, a jogállamiság is új jelentést kap, a közös értékrend, amely nyolcvan éve fenntartja a békét az európai közösségben, jelenleg egy léket kapott csónakra emlékeztet. Kérdés, hogy ebben a turbulens időszakban, amikor konfliktusok, háborúk, folyamatos válságok feszítik szét a nemzetközi közösséget és segítik hatalomra a populista politikai erőket, milyen szerep hárul a civil társadalomra? Képes-e a civil szektor továbbra is a társadalom immunrendszereként működni? A civil társadalom az önszerveződés terepe, az alulról építkező kezdeményezések színtere, és a centralizációs törekvések ellenére egyre nagyobb hangsúly helyeződik rá a közszolgáltatások biztosításában, a segítségnyújtásban, a kulturális innovációban és a közösségek támogatásában. Fontos kérdés azonban, hogy a változó, rendkívüli módon felgyorsult környezetben vajon mindez összekapcsolódik-e; az emberi és szabadságjogok tiszteletben tartásának és védelmének biztosítása, a demokrácia védelme és az állam felügyelete egyaránt a civilekhez köthető funkcióival és az állampolgári tudatosság erősítésével.

Egyre gyakoribb, hogy a populista és tekintélyelvű rendszerek különböző korlátozó intézkedésekkel lépnek fel ezen értékekkel és tevékenységekkel szemben. A kormányzatok számos országban törekednek arra, hogy erősítsék a kontrollt a civil társadalom szervezetei felett. Ez a növekvő felügyelet a sokszor „szűkülő térnek” nevezett jelenségcsoport erősödő jelenlétével jár együtt (Carothers 2016; Wolff–Poppe 2015). Szigorodnak a civil szektorra vonatkozó szabályok, a politika korlátozza, sőt, akár el is lehetetleníti a működésüket. Emellett egyre gyakoribbak a civilek ellen indított médiakampányok, a nemzetközi források megszerzésének korlátozása, a növekvő adminisztrációs terhek. A civil szférát ért támadások rontják a szervezetek hitelességét, továbbá alááshatják a civil szektor számára oly fontos közbizalmat és – azokban az országokban, ahol a civil szervezetek eleve alacsony társadalmi beágyazottsággal rendelkeznek – tovább csökkenthetik a civilek társadalmi bázisát és támogatottságát.

A civilek kontrollja másrészt a politika által kiválasztott szervezetek, szervezet-csoportok, alszektorok támogatásával jár – legyenek akár GONGO-k vagy álcivil szervezetek (Naim 2007). Ez a támogatás a kormányzattól történő, erősödő függést és így a kormányzati, közvetlen politikai céloknak való fokozott kitettséget jelent (Roggeband–Krizsán 2021).



Egyre többen hívják fel a figyelmet arra is, hogy az autokratizálódó államok nem megszabadulni szeretnének a civil társadalom szervezeteitől, hanem inkább elfoglalni akarják és a maguk legitimációs céljaira kívánják felhasználni azokat (Toepler et al. 2020). Ezen tendenciák különösen felerősödtek Közép-Kelet-Európában az elmúlt években, hiszen a civil szervezetek jelentős része függ az állami támogatástól mindez pedig a függetlenségük elvesztéséhez és a szektor teljes átalakulásához vezethet (ld. Bernhard 2020; Pietrzyk-Reeves 2022). Ugyanakkor a civil társadalom szerepe és annak változása nem csupán Közép- és Kelet-Európában probléma, hanem globális szinten felmerülő kérdés. A Civil Szemle 2025/2-es, tematikus száma ezen kihívásokat és anomáliákat járja körül, különböző politikai és társadalmi aspektusokból.

A tanulmányok első csoportja a civil társadalom különböző szerepeit vizsgálja egymástól markánsan eltérő regionális és országspecifikus kontextusban. Nagy Ádám, Béres-Áfra Zsuzsa és Szalóki Viktor tanulmánya azt járja körül, milyen eszközökkel próbálja a magyar állam elősegíteni a civil társadalom megszélidítését (házasítását), azaz egy erős kritikai és ellenőrző funkciókkal bíró civil társadalom helyett ez olyan szféra létrehozását jelentené, amely elsősorban az autokratizálódó hatalom legitimációját támogatja.

Kacziba Péter és Kákai László tanulmánya azt taglalja, milyen tényezők befolyásolják a magyar társadalom külpolitikával kapcsolatos attitűdjeit és preferenciáit. Külpolitikai téren a társadalom jelentős részének eltérő álláspontja sem volt képes a hatalmon lévő politikai párt által képviselt irányvonal megváltoztatására és a külpolitika Oroszországot támogató, illetve az Európai Unióval szemben szkeptikus irányának formálására.

Hamarsha Manal egy jelenleg rendkívül kurrens témát dolgozott fel tanulmányában, jelesül a gázai övezetben tevékenykedő segélyszervezetek munkáját és kihívásait elemzi különböző aspektusokból.

A lap negyedik tanulmánya az autoriter hatalommal szembeni ellenállás terepére kalauzol bennünket. Alam, Roy és Bíró írása azt mutatja be, milyen szerepet játszott Bangladesben a demokratikus értékeket támogató civil szervezetek hálózata a 2024-es júliusi forradalomban. A tanulmány kitér arra is, hogyan csatornázták be a civil szereplők kiszélesedő koalíciója az egyre növekvő társadalmi feszültséget.

Szegedi Péter tanulmánya egy speciális témát jár körül: a Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya-párt társadalmi aktivitásának egy szeletét. Az írás azt vizsgálja, hogy egy mozgalmi párt, amelynek aktivizmusa a kollektív cselekvésen és közösségépítésen alapul, hogyan képes együttműködni a civil társadalommal Budapest különböző kerületeiben.

A tanulmányok utolsó csoportja a helyi lokális szintre fókuszál:

Havasi Virág azt tárgyalja, hogyan sikerült egy önkormányzati ciklus alatt 2019 és 2024 között kiépíteni egy viszonylag jól működő részvételi modellt Miskolcon. Ennek során nem csak a részvételi modell elemeit ismerteti (mint a Részvételi Iroda létrehozása, állampolgári tanácsok vagy közösségi költségvetés szervezése), hanem azt is, hogy milyen eszközökkel vonták be az állampolgárokat a folyamatba, és milyen gyengeségei lehetnek a miskolci modellnek.

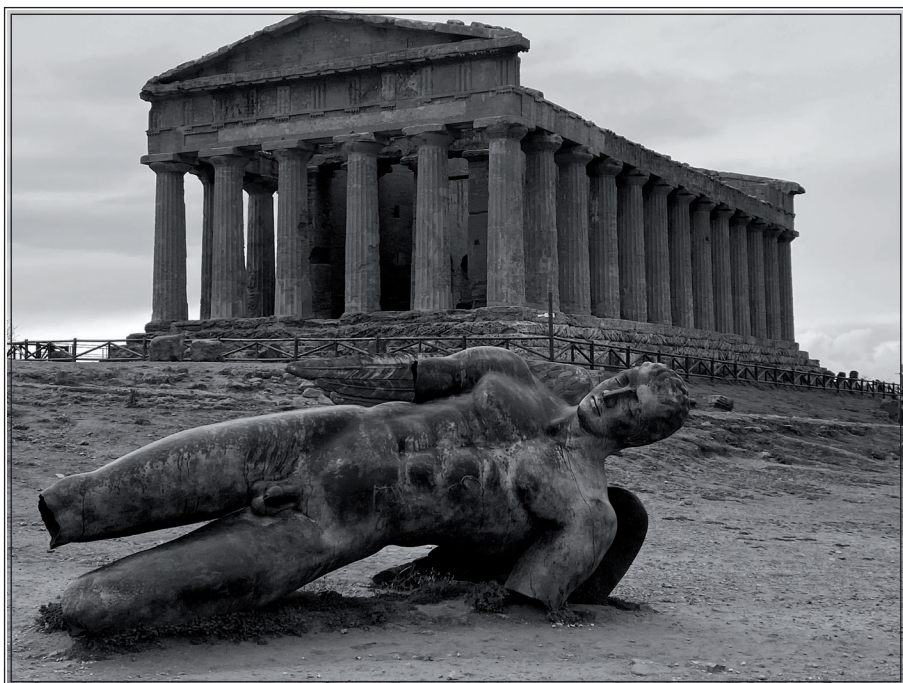


Fekete Éva tanulmánya egy kelet-magyarországi megyeszékhelyen alakult, kifejezetten zöld érdekvégyesítéssel és szemléletformálással foglalkozó informális csoportot mutat be, elsősorban azt vizsgálva, miként képes egy szervezet megtalálni a helyét a civilek között és hogyan képes kapcsolatot kialakítani a politikával.

A szám tanulmányai persze nem adhatnak teljes képet a civil társadalom és az állam, vagy politika viszonyáról, illetve a civil társadalom szerepváltozásairól. Arra azonban mindenképp felhívják a figyelmet, hogy a jelenlegihez hasonló időszakokban ez a szerepváltozás sokrétű és többféle irányú lehet: míg a magyar civil társadalom kritikai funkciói jelentősen gyengültek, másutt a civil társadalom képes volt jelentős szerepet vállalni a demokratizálási törekvésekben. Míg az országos szinten az autoriter vezetők ereje tűnik dominánsnak, addig a települési szint helyet adhat a részvétel revitalizálásának.

IRODALOM

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Fotó/István Péter Németh

THE DOMESTICATION OF THE CIVIL SPHERE — THE HUNGARIAN EXAMPLE*

Nagy Ádám–Béres–Áfra Zsuzsa–Szalóki Viktor

The Model of Civil Sector Domestication

■ During the period of Hungarian liberal democracy following the regime change (1990–2010), the government – albeit often professionally contradictory and inconsistent – generally approached civil society in a “laissez-faire” manner, expanding the possibilities for establishing organizations, attaining public benefit status, and diversifying funding sources. This setup undeniably faced specific growing pains: courts interpreted the conditions related to the registration of organizations quite arbitrarily (earlier research repeatedly documented contradictory rulings from the courts, etc.), financing was by no means impartial; however, this partiality remained at lower levels of professional-political decision-making and did not become a systemic mechanism (Bíró 2002).

In 2010, after eight years in opposition, the Fidesz party won a two-thirds majority in parliament. It announced the National System of Cooperation – NER (Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere), which brought significant changes in several areas, including the civil sector. In its political declaration on national cooperation, Parliament’s call and key phrase of this system are: “Let there be peace, freedom, and harmony.” Even this 2010 declaration employs the tools of militant rhetoric, using phrases such as “we have regained the right to self-determination” and “the Hungarian nation has successfully revolutionized.”



This new ‘social contract’ aims to make the country strong and prosperous by building its system around the following watchwords: work, home, family, health, and order¹.

Since 2010, the regime led by Fidesz, under the so-called “illiberalism” explicitly named since 2014, has created its narrative within the NER universe, demanding exclusivity, centralizing, and utilizing public resources for its ends (taxes, EU subsidies, and even citizen obligations), while suppressing alternative interpretations of reality. Over 15 years, the NER has dismantled the democratic institutional system that ensured mutual oversight (from the Constitutional Court, through the ombudsman's institutions, via the President's Office, down to the prosecutor's office, every public authority is practically arranged into a hierarchical – subordinate – structure), it has excluded and increasingly made the independent, critical press impossible, and not least has made the profit sector state-controlled, the property of its protégés (see Magyar 2013; Magyar–Vásárhelyi 2014; Filippov 2018). Particularly evident through the example of human rights organizations is the change in the relationship between the state and civil organizations since 2010 (Gerő et al. 2020).

The shift is characterized by four main areas: governmental and civil consultations have ceased, representational channels have narrowed, resources have been withdrawn from civil organizations, and, most notably, a governmental campaign has been launched against human rights-focused civil organizations. Deák (2024) describes the post-2010 government policy as a new type of authoritarian regime that “rejects democratic rules of the game, denies the legitimacy of political opponents, and is willing to restrict the freedom of its adversaries” (Deák 2024: 117). This political attitude has also affected the civil sector, which must either adapt to the new “rules of the game” or face co-option, marginalization, coercion, or replacement by government-created entities (Deák 2024).

The key term in the NER is dependence, while “autonomy” becomes its “pejorative term.” It is no wonder, then, that one of the most characteristic chapters of this structure is its treatment of civil society. Understandably so, as associations independent of power are alien to hierarchical social organization. From the media to culture and the profit sector, the system's primary goal is to establish dependence, thereby embedding a hierarchical order. Civil society, however, is everything that is not hierarchy and dependence: its lifeblood is autonomy, networks of co-operation, and self-governance. Its foundation is conduct characterized by limited and accountable public authority, taking on tasks not provided by the state or the private sector, and practicing participation, publicity, and freedom of expression. Civil society is essentially a form of political culture, a “civilized” public life

1 The Political statement of the Hungarian Parliament on the System of National cooperation https://2010-2015.miniszterelnok.hu/kozlemeny/az_orzagygyules_1_2010._vi._16._ogy_politikai_nyilatkozata_a_nemzeti_egyutt-mukodesrol

last accessed 18/03/2025



based on the rule of law, democracy, civic responsibility, and tolerance. This – not so latently – presupposes a commitment to specific values; that is, the cohesive force of this area is the manifestation of a citizen attitude, which often integrates into non-profit organizations but usually remains grounded in civic cooperation (Nagy–Nizák–Vercseg 2014).

Thus, according to the NER logic, the pressure to dismantle this autonomous world, regulate its members, restrict its scope, and render it impossible is inevitable since civility, the attitude of the citizen, would potentially create space for the free exchange of ideas. The system, therefore, poisons this civil world, both in its legal environment and by shaping public opinion, as well as distorting its financing. Since the rise to power of the Orbán government in 2010, apparent efforts have been observed to gain political control over the civil sector and to pursue a governmental practice that weakens civil society (Körösi 2015). This – and the phenomena discussed below – is what the literature calls ‘shrinking spaces,’ defined by a lack of opportunities. The danger of this process is that shrinking spaces can become closed and contested spaces (Wolf–Poppe 2015) in which the functioning of CSOs is severely limited and sometimes impossible. It is essential to see that the narrowing of opportunities is not unique to the NER; in Europe there is a growing tendency to limit CSOs, which, in Bolleyer’s (2021) view, is a consequence of the challenges of the so-called uncivil society (terrorism, crises, etc.) (Rumford 2001), while the impossibility of civil society is precisely the result of the intensification of uncivil processes (Bernhard 2020) with a lack of active actions and brakes. Yet, the domestication actions discussed in our study fall outside the term ‘uncivil society’ in that the threats claimed to be the cause of shrinking civil space are, in some cases, distorted or created and are specific in that while they constrain some organizations, they support others (Gerő 2020).

In our study, methodologically based on the pillars of desk research, supplemented in several cases with “worst practice” elements, we present how the interpretability of this model, since 2010, but mainly since 2014, has been structured and solidified within a process and framework for the domestication of civil organizations. We present the legal environment that has enabled the creation of the model, the financial background, and the media environment that supports the model’s validity and illustrate its operation with specific cases. In summary, we aim to argue that the NER system is not fundamentally based on the aforementioned “laissez-faire” approach but rather on a restrictive logic, precisely one that employs a threefold methodology: support-direction, domestication, and disqualification.

The first step is the promise of support: by centralizing and controlling funding, the government signals that civil support is contingent on aligning with the NER. This approach is successful with most organizations that prioritize mission-driven goals over a political stance. In its early stages, the model required only a non-contradictory attitude toward the system, but by the 2020s, it had shifted to include only organizations that actively reinforced the NER.



If financial coercion fails, the state employs media tools to apply pressure, especially targeting organizations aligned with independent or opposition causes. This step of domestication becomes apparent as communication efforts isolate organizations with traditional civil society goals, such as monitoring state power and influence.

And if even this fails, the state uses its public power tools to enforce government will: it turns off organizations deemed neither supportable nor domesticatable. While there were numerous examples of the use of the first tool, even in cases of imperfect implementation of the democratic model in Hungary, the use of the second tool has barely any precedent. The deployment of public power tools is characteristic of a non-democratic system.

Changes in the Legal Environment

According to Article VII of Hungary's Fundamental Law, everyone has the right to form and join organizations. This foundational principle, along with its freedom, was fundamentally restructured by Act CLXXV of 2011 – on the Freedom of Association, the Status of Public Benefit, and the Operation and Financing of Civil Organizations – which comprehensively regulates the functioning of nonprofit organizations². Under the legislation, civil organizations are required to submit annual reports, which inherently disclose the sources and amounts of funding they receive. Civil organizations must operate transparently – as is expected in other sectors – since they often carry out public duties, but transparency for civil organizations was assured even before this legal regulation. However, the law introduced only apparent public benefit regulations while abolishing the previous logical system that classified organizations based on whether they served themselves ("self-benefit"), served everyone (public benefit), or carried out state responsibilities (outstanding public benefit).

The situation changed radically in 2014 with the so-called "*Tusványos speech*" by the Prime Minister: "*When I look at Hungarian civil society, ... I see that we are dealing with paid political activists here. Moreover, these paid political activists are also activists who receive funding from foreign sources. They are activists funded by identifiable foreign interest groups, intending to influence Hungarian state life at any given moment and on any given issue. A committee has also been established in the Hungarian Parliament to continuously monitor, record, and publicize the*

² Among other things, it defines bankruptcy, liquidation, dissolution, and deletion procedures, legality oversight, the registry of civil organizations, their financial management, reporting obligations, bookkeeping, rules for public benefit status, provisions for civil information centers, regulations on state support for civil organizations, and the National Cooperation Fund. It also regulates the registration, operation, and dissolution of civil organizations. In parallel, Act CLXXXI of 2011, which governs the judicial registration of civil organizations and procedural rules, came into force. Additionally, a government decree from 2011 (350/2011) regulates the financial management, fundraising, and public benefit status of civil organizations.

acquisition of foreign influence.” (Orbán 2014) – thus clearly targeting civil organizations.

The opening act of this campaign was the so-called Norwegian case in 2014. In 2011, the Hungarian state signed a bilateral cooperation agreement with Norway regarding the Norway Civil Support Fund, which outlined the objectives, scale, and fields of development aid to be received by Hungary – covering a total of 12 fields/programs³. The Brussels-based Financial Mechanism Office administered the civil program, which selected the program’s Hungarian operator, the Ökotárs Foundation (Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation), through a two-round tender process (Autonómia n.d.). Eventually, this civil society organization came under scrutiny in 2014 as a “bad civil” organization with “influential” effects stemming from its redistribution of foreign funds (see later).

The next step – based on the Russian model⁴ – was Act LXXVI of 2017 on the Transparency of Organizations Supported from Abroad, which required organizations receiving over 7.2 million forints (approximately EUR 18,000) annually in foreign support to register as foreign-supported organizations. This legislation, commonly referred to as the “foreign agent law,” also mandated that these organizations disclose detailed information about all foreign supporters – whether through private donations or otherwise – and display the foreign-supported status on their websites and publications beyond the official registry.

A peculiar aspect was that the EU’s Erasmus+ program also fell under the law’s jurisdiction, requiring beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ program to register as foreign-supported organizations. The legislation was criticized by the European Court of Justice (NIOK 2021) and ultimately lost its effect in 2021⁵. The law’s significant negative impact was the stigmatization of civil organizations (TASZ 2017), which, although the legislation is no longer in effect, left lingering implications, as it suggested for years that civil organizations receiving foreign funding served foreign interests rather than or even against, community goals and Hungarian interests. Moreover, the legislation exempted sports and religious associations, political parties, trade unions, and public and political foundations from its scope, thus marking a distinction between “good” and “bad” civil organizations.

In 2018, Act CLXXV of 2011 was amended (Act XLVI of 2018) as part of the so-called “Stop Soros” legislative package, criminalizing assistance and support provided to refugees. Although the European Court of Justice also rejected this

³ Supporting and developing the civil sector was a priority for the donor (Autonómia n.d.).

⁴ Russia’s 2012 ‘foreign agent law’ imposed severe restrictions on NGOs receiving foreign funding, requiring mandatory registration, public labeling as ‘foreign agents’, extensive financial reporting, and frequent state audits. Organizations faced criminal penalties, fines, and disqualification from public work, while later amendments extended the law to independent journalists and media outlets. This model systematically dismantled civil society by stigmatizing and restricting foreign-funded organizations.

⁵ Judgment of 18 June 2020, Commission v Hungary (Transparency of associations) (C-78/18, EU:C:2020:476)



legislative package⁶, as it violated EU regulations – because it criminalized refugee aid and deemed asylum applications inadmissible (Arató 2021) – it remains in effect⁷. Another noteworthy detail is that the legislation was passed on June 20, which coincided with World Refugee Day. Although the Constitutional Court ruled that it was unlawful to threaten refugee-supporting civil organizations with imprisonment, the fact that assisting refugees remains considered illegal remains unchanged, thus intimidating all civil organizations that provide information and legal representation (Civilizáció 2023). Moreover, the legislative package targeted the Open Society Foundation, led by George Soros, which supported several Hungarian civil organizations, regardless of whether they were involved with refugees or not. Consequently, the media offensive accompanying the legislative changes labeled all such organizations as “Soros mercenaries”.

Act XLIX of 2021 further tightened regulations by targeting civil organizations engaged in activities that could influence public life. According to the law, organizations with an annual income exceeding 20 million forints (approximately EUR 50,000) are subject to special financial regulations, allowing the State Audit Office (ÁSZ) to inspect their internal documents. As a result, in 2022, ÁSZ launched investigations against several civil organizations, typically giving them an 8-day deadline to submit documents. This deadline, which was particularly burdensome for civil organizations operating with volunteers and no paid staff, clearly came at the expense of their operations.

Also, in 2021, the Child Protection Act (Act LXXIX of 2021) came into effect, conflating pedophilia and LGBTQ issues and aiming to make it impossible for organizations dealing with these topics to operate. The roughly 11-paragraph child protection section prohibits the depiction of sexual and gender minorities and the gratuitous portrayal of sexuality in schools, advertisements, various media platforms, and even bookstores⁸. Consequently, organizations addressing gender identity and equality were wholly excluded from schools. However, the legislation did not stop there: citing the law, the National Museum restricted minors under 18 from attending the 2023 World Press Photo exhibition in Helsinki.

In 2023, under the National Sovereignty Protection Act (Act LXXXVIII of 2023), the Sovereignty Protection Office was established, ostensibly to protect Hungary’s sovereignty by closely monitoring those receiving foreign funding. Still, in practice, it stigmatizes organizations involved in raising voter awareness of their rights – particularly when aided by foreign funding – thereby discouraging various civil activities. Soon after its establishment, the Office quickly began its work, investigating two organizations: Transparency International Hungary and Atlatszo.

6 Judgment of 16 November 2021, European Commission v Hungary (C-821/19, EU:C:2021:930)

7 <https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1800006.TV>

8 Hungary’s first Child Protection Act, Act XXXI of 1997, addresses child protection and guardianship administration across 190 sections.

Overall, civil society organizations, in addition to their daily activities, had to prepare for psychological warfare that could reach them at any time, either through media channels or even official procedures. This pressure disrupts operational structures and erodes the morale of staff working in high-pressure organizations. The continuous and increasingly stringent legislative pressure and the legal framework for restraining civil society organizations have not only created disillusionment and fear within the sector but have also made it clear that, regardless of whether precedent-setting proceedings are initiated, any organization (whether through a deliberate, ambiguous, or deliberately misinterpreted action) could at any moment find itself subject to targeted harassment based on the suffocating legal environment. Consequently, most organizations, having no interest in conflict, align their operations with the expectations of the NER.

Changes in the Funding Environment

As stated in the introduction, the first stage of domestication is the centralization of funding. Under the National Cooperation System (NER), the financial independence and autonomy of civil organizations have continually diminished, as evident in various measures, including the centralization of funding sources, political redistribution, and tightening of legal regulations. This process involved stigmatizing foreign-supported organizations, obscuring state support allocations, and providing preferential support to newly established government-affiliated civil organizations.

In 2011, the government abolished the National Civil Fund Program (NCA), which distributed approximately EUR 175 million (7 billion forints) annually among Hungarian civil organizations based on applications evaluated by decision-makers chosen mainly by the civil sector. In its place, the National Cooperation Fund (Nemzeti Együttműködési Alap, NEA) was established, with only one-third civil representation in decision-making, and placed under the direct control of the NER. In NEA's operations, civil organization support and influence on their political orientation became evident. In the very first call for applications in 2012, government-affiliated civil organizations received generous operational support from the budget (e.g., the Teleki László Foundation received 5 million forints (EUR 12,500), the Hungarian Melon Association 4.4 million forints (EUR 11,000), the Association of Hungarian Rural Residents 4 million forints (EUR 10,000), the Women for the Nation's Future Association 1.2 million forints (EUR 3000), and the Hungarian Women's Interests Association 3.3 million forints (EUR 8250) (Atlatszo, 2012)). The level of domestication is perfectly exemplified by a 2019 television interview with Vince Szalay-Bobrovniczky, Deputy Secretary of State for Civil and Social Relations at the Prime Minister's Office, who stated regarding NEA's resource distribution: "We strive to filter out any organization that we believe does not perform real work but primarily seeks to fulfill political goals with which we disagree." In 2020, the NEA distributed



more than 77 billion forints (19,25 million EUR), with a significant portion going to government-affiliated, mostly GONGO (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization) groups⁹. An example of these recipients is the Civil Cooperation Forum (Civil Összefogás Fórum, CÖF), which organizes pro-government rallies and NEA-sponsored marches and which received funding not only from NEA but also 508 million forints (EUR 1,270,000) from the state-owned Hungarian Power Companies in 2016, and 170 million forints (EUR 425,000) from a subsidiary of the state-owned Hungarian State Lottery Plc.; in 2021, they received an additional 25 million forints (EUR 62,500) from the Hungarian Development Bank, also state-owned, and another 40 million (EUR 100,000) from a subsidiary Hungarian State Lottery Plc. (Atlatszo 2022). These funds supported communication and campaign activities that reinforced the government's narrative and discredited or defamed the opposition, especially during elections. The intertwining of resource distribution and political domestication is further underscored by the appointment of László Csizmadia as the head of NEA upon its creation. Csizmadia, who also founded and serves as the spokesperson for CÖF, served as the president of the NEA council from 2012 to 2020.

In NEA, the decision-making positions reserved for civil representatives – a minority share of one-third – were often filled by government-affiliated applicants and their organizations, who then used NEA resources to finance their campaigns, thereby closing the circle.

Those above the 2017 “foreign agent law” marginalized many civil organizations that received foreign support. One example is the Foundation for Humanity, which works on human rights and had previously won multiple grants but was barred from accessing Erasmus+ funds due to its opposition to the legislation, making it impossible to continue some of its programs (Telex 2022).

The political distribution of state support has become decisive in the civil sector. In addition to NEA, the government established the Urban Civil Fund in 2019 to support local civil organizations. In 2021, the Urban Civil Fund distributed over 4 billion forints (approximately EUR 10,000,000), with a significant portion allocated to government-affiliated organizations. Approximately 60% of the funds were allocated to NEA-aligned organizations (Zubor 2022). Among the most prominent beneficiaries was the organization “Civilians in the Name of the Holy Crown,” which received 500 million forints (EUR 1,250,000). Other significant beneficiaries included the Carpathian Basin Youth Association (350 million forints, approximately EUR 875,000), the National Association of Hungarian Families (250 million forints, roughly EUR 625,000), and the Network for Families (200 million forints, approximately EUR 500,000). The Hungarian Christian Democratic Association, a politically affiliated organization, was also among the supported groups.

⁹ GONGOs (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations) are civil organizations created, operated, and funded by a given state's government to conduct political activities domestically or internationally that support that government's policies, or, in some cases, to secure foreign funding (Hasmath 2019).

The geographical distribution of grants is also telling, as in regions dominated by the Fidesz government, such as Northern Hungary and the Southern Great Plain, 70% and 65% of grants, respectively, went to NER-affiliated civil organizations. Generally, the fund's resources often went to local civil organizations that did not primarily focus on local community development, thereby reinforcing the government's political messages.

Meanwhile, organizations focused on gender equality, for example, are almost entirely excluded from state funding opportunities. Many marginalized organizations repeatedly applied for NEA grants but received no support, while others stopped applying as early as 2011 and never attempted it again (Szikra et al. 2020, p. 114).

The government is also not interested in strong, autonomous advocacy organizations, as genuine involvement of civil entities in the decision-making mechanism would contradict centralization efforts; however, these organizations may play specific limited legitimizing roles. An example is the umbrella organization created for youth advocacy, the National Youth Council, which began its operations in 2011, although it was officially registered only in 2015. After registration, a government takeover within the organization occurred in 2016, sidelining the truly professional civil members (Nagy–Szeifer 2016), and from then on, with increased financial resources, the organization only supported issues aligned with the government's ideology, remaining silent on topics like the "Stop Soros" legislative package or the stigmatization of students protesting for education (Oross–Nagy–Szalóki 2019). Similar governmental control can be observed in many advocacy organizations, which does not necessarily obstruct their work but does dictate their operational boundaries and scope of activities, limiting autonomy.

The examples reveal that the government is increasingly restricting the resources available to autonomous civil organizations while setting conditions undermining their independence and values. Thus, those unwilling to apply for domestic resources must turn to foreign funds. What is novel is not that the current government allocates resources to civil organizations close to it but that it reshapes the funding environment to compel civil sector actors to interpret themselves within a narrative aligned with government policy.

Media Environment, Governmental and Pro-Government Pressure

Beyond the laws, public statements and smear campaigns against civil organizations are regularly featured in state media (Ökotárs 2024). This propaganda constructs a narrative around civil society that emphasizes stigmatization, a sharp division between "good" and "bad" civil organizations, and fosters general hostility toward the concept of civil society.

Regarding civil organizations, the media amplifies the aim of undermining positive public opinion and reinforcing a stigmatization narrative (Móra et al. 2021).



In the summer of 2013, a list appeared in the weekly magazine *Heti Válasz* (Bódis 2013), naming 13 organizations identified as “Soros-supported” entities, which were funded by the Open Society Institute (OSI), the Center for American Progress, the Center for Reproductive Rights, and the Trust for Civil Society. The article suggested an international conspiracy theory, with George Soros as its primary driver, funding “bad” civil organizations in opposition to Hungarian interests from the United States. Later, in the media campaign connected to the so-called “Stop Soros” legislative package of 2018 (see later), organizations associated with OSI found themselves not only in the national but also in regional and local media’s cross-hairs, with social media platforms amplifying terms and stereotypes like “Soros office,” “Soros nest,” and “Soros soldier,” spreading and reinforcing these labels. These keywords sporadically appear across media channels, functioning as part of the NER media¹⁰.

A notable shift in media pressure against civil society emerged with the rise of Megafon, an organized effort to shape social media narratives. The network, claiming a “right-wing digital freedom fight,” argued that the right’s voice needed amplification to counterbalance the dominance of the “liberal mainstream” on the internet (Megafon n.d.). In addition to training, daily content production is among its tasks, and these reports target not only nationally significant organizations but also regionally focused civil groups¹¹. With a well-established structure, they bolster anti-civil rhetoric nationwide and devote significant attention locally to ensuring the constructed narrative remains persistent. Any organization can become a target, such as the Mikepéracs Mothers for the Environment Association, which advocates for transparency in local state investments in the eastern part of the country. In the propaganda’s interpretation, their work opposes significant investments, and thus, the Hungarian economy is allegedly influenced by foreign funding that affects national interests.

The government plays an especially active role in shaping the activities of legal and advocacy organizations, which, although operating independently of political parties, often find their activities interpreted within a similar sphere. During the so-called “Soros campaign,” which targeted civil organizations supported by the wealthy patron, many human rights civil organizations became targets of government attacks.

10 For example, concerning the U.S. Ambassador’s visit: “Pressman held a briefing at the Soros nest in Debrecen” (Magyar Nemzet 2024), and there are opinion pieces discussing “Soros mercenaries” (Magyar Nemzet 2024). Even in 2023, Orbán Balázs, the Prime Minister’s political director, used rhetoric characteristic of combat situations, referring to “Soros soldiers” on his public social media platform when the Open Society Foundation announced it would place greater emphasis on regions outside Europe (Orbán n.d.). On a local level, a specific Facebook page was created opposing the “Soros office” under the name We Don’t Want a Soros Office in Debrecen (We Don’t Want n.d.), and the local 1693.hu website also featured an introduction to the “Soros nest” in Debrecen (1693 n.d.).

11 In Pécs, a money bag was placed in front of a civil organization’s headquarters, while in Debrecen, “rolling dollars” were thrown into mailboxes following the U.S. Ambassador’s visit.

A telling example is the government's "National Consultation on the Soros Plan" (444 2017), where Amnesty International Hungary and the Helsinki Committee are explicitly listed as organizations that supposedly threaten national sovereignty¹² (Kákai 2020). Through smear campaigns, pro-government media outlets attempt to reshape public opinion by framing civil organizations as members of international networks intent on toppling the government.

Public Power Tools in Service of the NER

In terms of public power tools, government-led harassment and other repressive measures are particularly evident, and these actions often have lasting consequences, even if it later turns out that there was no violation of legal or ethical norms. By then, the damage has been done, leading to significant distortions in social structures.

The conflict surrounding the Norwegian Civil Support Fund (NCSF) began in 2014 when the Hungarian government attempted to gain influence over autonomous funding sources. The Norwegian government financed the program as compensation for access to the free market and supported organizations that focused on protecting democratic values (Kákai 2020). The distribution of the fund's resources was coordinated by the Ökotárs Foundation, which the government claimed was politically biased as it supported organizations that criticized the functioning of the state, such as Transparency International and K-Monitor. The Government Control Office conducted multiple raids on Ökotárs and other civil organizations, with some individuals even being taken away in handcuffs, though no irregularities were found (Glied–Kákai 2017; Bíró 2019). The support system was eventually shut down in 2021 after the Hungarian and Norwegian governments could not agree on the program's continuation.

The NER's domestication intentions took an extreme form concerning welfare civil society organizations. The tension between the Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship (MET) and the government was addressed in 2011 when the government revoked its church status. According to the related legislation, religious communities not explicitly named were required to reapply for official recognition; however, MET did not receive this official acknowledgment. As a result, the organization lost the rights and financial support previously necessary to maintain its institutions

12 In the national consultation launched in October 2017, the fifth statement read: "George Soros also wants migrants to receive lighter sentences for crimes they commit." The explanation mentions two organizations: "George Soros provides substantial funding to organizations that support immigration and defend migrants who commit illegal acts. One such organization is the Helsinki Committee, which argued regarding the illegal crossing of the border that applying severe legal consequences for unlawful entry is questionable. Another Soros organization, Amnesty International, repeatedly demanded the release of Ahmed H., who attacked Hungarian police officers defending the border with stones and was subsequently convicted. Amnesty would even seek compensation from the Hungarian state."



– including schools, social services, and homeless shelters. Due to the conflict, the functioning of MET's various social and charitable services was jeopardized. In 2024, the operating licenses for schools managed by MET were revoked just six days before the start of the school year (MET 2024). Although the European Court of Human Rights determined that the Hungarian government had violated MET's right to freedom of religion,¹³ the domestic legal and political situation remained unchanged, and the government has continued to sabotage the religious community's church status since 2011.

On January 1, 2024, the Sovereignty Protection Office (Szuverenitásvédelmi Hivatal, SZH) was established, with a statute claiming it was designed to respond to foreign interventions threatening national sovereignty. However, one of its first actions was to investigate the investigative news portal Atlatzso and Transparency International Hungary (Szabadeurópa 2024). Atlatzso has long been one of the most critical independent watchdogs in Hungarian public life, often exposing corruption cases, and it operates as an internationally recognized independent medium. However, the Office accused the organization of serving foreign interests. These investigations impose administrative burdens on Atlatzso and seek to damage its reputation, undermining the trust it has built with the public. Transparency International Hungary (TI) also became a target of the Office. The anti-corruption organization, committed to the rule of law and transparency, has disclosed numerous cases involving the government over the past years. In TI's case, the Office also cited foreign funding as grounds for investigation. According to the SZH's findings, "the organization operates as part of a more than thirty-year-old global lobbying network, conducting political pressure activities aligned with the interests of great powers behind this network" (SZH 2024), allegedly serving American interests. The Office further stated that TI "seeks to portray Hungary and its administrative bodies in a negative light. The organization inflicts genuine political, economic, and social harm in Hungary through its shadow reports, which contain disinformation submitted to the European Commission." This action closely mirrors the harassment of civil organizations in Russia during the 2010s. It is ironic, given that, before the NER era, today's leading figures within the NER frequently referenced TI reports. However, the SZH's domestication role is most evident in its investigation, under the guise of sovereignty protection, of the Göd Environmental and Urban Protection Association, primarily involved in uncovering legal violations related to the battery factory near the town of Göd (Gulyás 2024). The use of public agencies (such as tax authorities, offices, and investigative bodies) against civil organizations has, by 2024, shifted from sporadic, specific cases to a planned, systemic, and generalized practice.

¹³ Magyarország v. Evangéliumi Testvérközösség v. Hungary (Application no. 54977/12)



“It is Finished” – Conclusion

In our study, we aimed to demonstrate that the NER’s so-called “domestication” strategy regarding civil society and the measures employed to achieve it explicitly seek to weaken democratic institutions and structures and dismantle civil society’s independence. These independent institutions and organizations – many of which carry out state responsibilities – are often framed as enemies within government policy and rhetoric, rendering their autonomous and legitimate operations a perceived threat to the government that shapes this rhetoric. Since 2010, and especially since 2014, the state has established a system that addresses the lack of transparency among civil organizations, placing civil society under increasingly tight control. Through this pressure, it offers two choices: domesticate initially autonomous organizations or strive to render them ineffective. To this end, the government utilizes state resources or the promise thereof, its media dominance, and does not hesitate to employ its public powers – an approach foreign to democratic societal structures – to turn off autonomous civil organizations.

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Fotó/István Péter Németh

KÜLPOLITIKAI ATTITŰDÖK ÉS SZAKPOLITIKAI HATÁSUK: A REPREZENTÁCIÓ ÉS RÉSZVÉTEL LEHETŐSÉGEI A JELENKORI MAGYAR KÜLPOLITIKÁBAN*

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Bevezetés

A 2020-as évek elejére komplexebbé és instabilabbá váló nemzetközi környezetben a külpolitika vitális jelentőségű szakpolitikává vált. Szerepének felértékelődését a határokon átívelő politikai, biztonsági, gazdasági, egészségügyi és környezeti kihívások magyarázzák, amelyek megfelelő kezelése a kormányzati hatékonyság fajsúlyos fokmérője lett. Noha az Európai Unió (EU) tagállamai ezekre a kihívásokra eltérő módon reagáltak, jellemzően az euroatlanti partnerség megerősítésére törekedtek. Magyarország a 2010-es kormányváltás és különösen a 2011-ben meghirdetett keleti nyitás óta eltérő koncepciót képviselt. Az orientáció eredetileg az EU- és NATO-kötelezettségvállalások kiegészítését ígérte, azzal a céllal, hogy Magyarország hatékonyan tudjon reagálni a multipoláris átalakulással járó nemzetközi szerkezetváltásra, elsősorban, de nem kizárólagosan az Ázsiában zajló gazdasági növekedés vonatkozásában (Tarrósy–Vörös 2014). Noha a korszakban hasonló irányváltásokat más uniós tagállamokat is végrehajtottak, a multivektorális magyar orientáció utóbbiaktól eltérően a COVID–19 és a 2022-ben kezdődő orosz–ukrán háború után is megtartotta az euroatlanti partnerekkel szembeni kritikus hozzáállását. Az ellentmondásos irány a jogállamisági problémák mellett tovább mélyítette Magyarország és EU, valamint NATO partnerei közötti ellentéteket, és vitákat eredményezett a magyar külpolitika nyugati elköteleződését illetően (Atamanenko–Konopka 2022; Kazharski–Makarychev 2021; Kempe 2024).

Ezekben a vitákban euroatlanti szövetségeseink elsősorban a magyar kormány Oroszországgal és Kínával fenntartott szoros kapcsolatát sérelmezték.



Oroszország esetében a kritikai attitűd már a világvárvány előtt megjelent, azzal vádolva Magyarországot, hogy sorozatos vétőtevékenységével Moszkva stratégiai céljait segíti. Szintén elítélték az oroszoknak biztosított beruházási lehetőségeket, egyebek mellett a Paks 2 atomerőmű építési engedélyét és a Nemzetközi Beruházási Bank budapesti székhelyének létrehozását (Kalotay 2022; Waisová 2020). Ezek a kritikák 2022 után kiegészültek, például az orosz energiatülszórás fenntartására, Svédország NATO-csatlakozásának késleltetésére, a Kreml dezinformációinak terjesztésére, valamint az Ukrajnának szánt segélycsomagok vétőira vonatkozó vádakkal (Gizińska–Sadecki 2023). A Kínával kialakított szoros kapcsolatok szintén kritikát váltottak ki. Ezen a területen elsősorban az EU-s irányelvekkel szembeeső kínai beruházásokat ítélték el, például a Budapest–Belgrád vasútvonal építését, a Huawei 5G technológiájának kialakítását, valamint a budapesti Fudan Egyetem kampuszának terveit, amiket a kritikusok az euroatlanti blokk potenciális sebezhetőségeként értékelték (Venne 2022).

A magyar kormány ezekre a kritikákra nemzetközi és hazai kommunikációs kampányokkal reagált. Ezek egy része geopolitikai szükségszerűségből kívánta levezetni a külpolitikai egyensúlyozás okait, arra hivatkozva, hogy az ország elhelyezkedése és a környező hatalmi tömbök földrajzi közelsége pragmatikus orientációt követel meg (Orbán 2023). A kampány másik vetülete a kritikákat kívánta ellensúlyozni, előbb az EU-val, később a Biden-adminisztrációval kapcsolatban. A narratívában a kollektív nyugat, és különösen az Unió egy expanzionista hatalmi blokként jelent meg, amely a magyar szuverenitás és a hagyományos értékek felszámolására törekszik, a globalizmus terjesztésével kívánja kisajátítani gazdasági előnyeit és beavatkozik belügyeibe (Dudlák 2023; Schlipphak–Treib 2017, Szabó–Palócz 2021). Ezeket a véleményeket a magyar kormányzat hazai és nemzetközi környezetben egyaránt népszerűsítette, véleménycikkek, televíziós interjúk, online hirdetések, óriásplakát-kampányok, célzott politikai lobbitevékenységek és közösmédia-taktikák révén terjesztette.

Noha a jelenlegi magyar külpolitikai orientációnak és az ahhoz kapcsolódó vitának széles szakirodalma van (Bartha 2018; Kopper et al. 2023; Schmidt–Glied 2024; Varga–Buzogány 2021; Visnovitz–Jenne 2021), kevés szó esik arról, hogy a közvélemény a fenti vélemények közül melyik álláspontot támogatja, illetve mekkora mértékben. Másként megfogalmazva: a magyar külpolitika társadalmi megítéléséről kevés véleménykutatás áll rendelkezésre, annak ellenére, hogy a többségi attitűdök reprezentáltsága legitimálhatja a kormányzat orientációját, vagy épp ellenkezőleg, az azzal ellentétes kritikai véleményeket. Ebben a tekintetben a Fidesz ismételt választási sikerei bizonyos fokú támogatottságra utalnak, azt sugallva, hogy a magyarok többsége jóváhagyja a kormány külpolitikai orientációját. Ezeket a következtetéseket jelentősen árnyalják azok a politikatudományi eredmények, amelyek szerint a külpolitikai kérdések csak korlátozottan befolyásolják a választási preferenciákat, érdemi hatásuk a pártválasztásra elsősorban gazdaságilag fejlett országokban, illetve jelentős külső kihívásokkal küzdő államokban van (Jastramskis 2023; Oktay 2018).

Ezzel párhuzamosan éles vita zajlik a közéletben, amelyben nemcsak az ellenzék, korábbi külügyminiszterek és diplomaták, akademikusok és a civil társadalom képviselői, de közvetetten a kormánypárt magasrangú tisztségviselői is kifejezték nemtetszésüket, különösen az euroatlanti partnerekkel való kapcsolatok romlása kapcsán (Bartha 2018; Krekó 2015; Stumpf 2024; Vass 2023). A témával kapcsolatos kevés közvélemény-kutatás részben alátámasztja ezt az ellentmondásos tendenciát és a külpolitikai attitűdök rétegzettségére utal. Eredményeik egyfelől alátámasztják a többségi társadalom konzisztens nyugati irányultságát, másfelől jelzik Oroszország és Kína megítélésének fokozatos javulását, különösen a kormánypárti szavazók körében (Bíró-Nagy et al. 2023; Enyedi–Szabó 2022; Krekó 2018; Rényi 2022).

Tanulmányunk utóbbiakból kiindulva arra keresi a választ, hogy a magyar közvélemény külpolitikai percepciói mennyiben tükröződtek a kormány hivatalos irányvonalában, továbbá, hogy ezek az attitűdök a különböző érdekcsoportok reprezentációján és a nyilvánosság befolyásán keresztül milyen mértékben jelentek meg a szakpolitikai döntéshozatalban. E kérdésekhez szorosan kapcsolódik, hogy vajon az attitűdök formálásában, valamint a külpolitikai döntések alakításában milyen szerepet játszanak az érdekcsoportok vagy a civil szféra reprezentánsai. Egyáltalán mely szereplők és szervezetek képesek ma Magyarországon érdemi hatást gyakorolni a külpolitikai orientációra? Milyen összefüggés figyelhető meg ezen szereplők attitűdjei és a kormányzati álláspont támogatása vagy épp ellenzése között, illetve mindegyik milyen kormányzati reakciók láthatók (például GONGO-k szerepvállalása kapcsán)?

Ezen kérdések megválaszolása érdekében a tanulmány először bemutatja a közvélemény külpolitikára gyakorolt hatásának elméleti kereteit. Ezután összegzi a magyar külpolitika 2010 utáni főbb irányait és döntéshozatali struktúráit, majd ezeket összeveti a nyilvánosság külpolitikai percepcióival és a külügyi érdekcsoportok befolyásával. Az elemzés szekunder forrásokon és egy 2024. február 2. és 14. között végzett, 800 fős véleménykutatás eredményein alapul. A tanulmány az eredményeket a diszkusszió részben értelmezi, ahol felvázolja a magyar közvélemény külpolitikai attitűdjeinek jellemzőit és befolyási potenciálját, majd az esettanulmány eredményeinek összegzésével megválaszolja a kutatási kérdéseket.

Elméleti háttér: Attitűdök és reprezentáció a külpolitikában

Az elméleti rész a külpolitikai attitűdökkel kapcsolatos szakirodalmi eredményekre koncentrál, valamint felvázolja a társadalmi preferenciák külügyi reprezentációjának lehetséges modelljeit. Előbbivel kezdve megállapítható, hogy a klasszikus politikatudományi megközelítés a külpolitikai döntéshozás elemzésekor negligálta a nyilvánosság szerepvállalásának lehetőségét. A hidegháború elején kialakított Almond–Lippman-konszenzus szerint a közvélemény alapvetően a belpolitikai ügyekre koncentrál, a nemzetközi folyamatok korlátozottan érdeklik, azokkal kapcsolatban tájékozatlan, közömbös, véleménye szélsőségesen változékony (Almond 1956; Lippmann 1955).



A korszakra jellemző realista elméletek megerősítették ezt az álláspontot, hiszen az államot egységes szereplőként írták le, amelyben a külpolitika alakítója a nemzeti érdekeket prioritizáló és a közvéleményt negligáló politikai elit (Morgenthau 1948; Walt 1998). A klasszikus megközelítés tehát a nyilvánosságot a nemzetközi ügyek marginális, elszigetelt és uniformizált részének tekintette, amelynek érdemben nincs befolyása a külpolitikai döntésekre (Kertzer 2023).

Ez a hagyományos álláspont az 1960-as évek végén kezdett megkérdőjeleződni, amikor egyes társadalmi mozgalmak konkrét külpolitikai követeléseket is megfogalmaztak, például az Egyesült Államokban, Franciaországban vagy Csehszlovákiában. A realizmus versenytársaként megerősödő neoliberális elmélet adoptálta ezt a fejleményt, és amellett érvelt, hogy a globalizmus a nem-állami szereplők politikai térnyerését eredményezi. A külpolitika területén ez a kormányzatoktól független narratívák megjelenését okozza és hozzájárul ahhoz, hogy nem állami szereplők alternatív magyarázatokat juttassanak el a választókhoz, ebből következően – közvetve vagy közvetlenül – befolyásolják a külügyi döntéshozatalt (Rosenau 1980). Hasonló koncepciót alakított ki a konstruktivista elmélet. Az 1980-as években megjelenő irányzat ugyanakkor a nyilvánosság egészére koncentrált, azzal érvelve, hogy a nemzeti társadalmak saját, bár gyakran változó normákkal, identitásokkal és kultúrákkal rendelkeznek (Flockhart 2016). Ez a kognitív környezet a külpolitikai döntéshozatalban is tükröződik, hiszen a külpolitikai elit a belföldön beágyazott társadalmi normákat externalizálja (Adler 2008).

A korabeli elméletek mellett empirikus vizsgálatok is megkérdőjelezték az Almond–Lippman-konszenzust és arra a következtetésre jutottak, hogy a külpolitikával kapcsolatos társadalmi attitűdök relatíve stabilak és racionálisak (Holsti 1992; Page–Shapiro 1992). A külpolitikai attitűdök forrásáról ugyanakkor eltérő álláspontok alakultak ki. Az első érv közelebb állt a realista elmülethez, és egy felülről lefelé irányuló (top-down) modellt körvonalazott, amelyben a közvélemény külpolitikai attitűdjeit az elittől nyeri (Efimova–Strebkov 2020). Ebben az összefüggésben az elitek számos szereplőre utalhatnak, például a politikai, gazdasági, vallási és tudományos élet képviselőire, a sajtóra vagy külföldi hatalmakra (Eichenberg 2016). Ezek a szereplők képesek meghatározni a közbeszéd irányát, a külpolitika területén pedig külpolitikai narratívákat és értelmező magyarázatokat közvetítenek a nyilvánosság számára, amely hajlamos ezeket elfogadni, mivel nem rendelkezik mélyebb ismeretekkel a nemzetközi folyamatokról (Almond 1956; Lippmann 1955). Bár a felülről lefelé irányuló modell jelentős befolyást sugalmaz, az elitek hatása rendszertípusonként eltérő. Pluralista rendszerekben az egymással versengő elitek nézetei alakítják a közvélemény hozzáállását, ezáltal biztosítva alternatív magyarázatok együttélését. Ettől eltérően az autoriter rendszerekben a társadalmi megítélés alakításának képessége a politikai vezetés köré összpontosulhat, amely az attitűdformáló külpolitikai narratívák diverzitását korlátozza (Zimmerman 2002).

Míg a felülről lefelé irányuló modell a realista elmülethez igazodott, addig az alulról felfelé építkező (bottom-up) megközelítés a liberális és konstruktivista elméletekkel állt összhangban. A modell alapvetése, hogy az egyének az elit által

kialakított külpolitikai narratívákat személyes tapasztalatok, értékszemléletek, iskolázottság, ideológia vagy párthovatartozás alapján szelektálják (Zaller 1992). Kertzer (2023) a szelekciós folyamatban két fő irányt azonosított. A horizontális esetben az egyén külpolitikai attitűdjei a militáns és az együttműködő internacionalizmus között mozognak, ahol előbbi a biztonságot és az elrettentést, utóbbi pedig az együttműködést és a multilateralizmust részesíti előnyben (Holsti 1992). A vertikális esetben a konkrét külpolitikai kihívásokkal szembeni attitűdöket hierarchikusan strukturált értékek határozzák meg. Ezek közé tartoznak a személyes tapasztalatok, világnézetek, a politikai beállítottság, a párthovatartozás vagy a politikai döntéshozók kollektív megítélése. Ezek a tényezők együttesen irányítják az egyéneket a konkrét külpolitikai attitűdök kialakításában (Kertzer 2023).

Az attitűdökhöz hasonlóan a társadalmi mozgalmak és a közvélemény külpolitikai befolyásáról is eltérő vélemények alakultak ki. A nemzetközi viszonyok eleméletei ebben a kérdésben is megosztottak: a realisták megközelítésében a nyilvánosságnak korlátozott hatása van a külpolitikai döntéshozatalra, a liberálisok a külpolitikát pluralista produktumnak, míg a konstruktivisták a hazai normák externalizációjának tekintik (Walt 1998). A felülről lefelé és alulról felfelé építkező modellek szintén eltérő álláspontot képviselnek. Az előbbi szkeptikusabb a társadalmi befolyás lehetőségeivel kapcsolatban. Érvéle szerint a nyilvánosság preferenciáit végső soron a politikai döntéshozók és az elitek határozzák meg, ebből kifolyólag a társadalmi mozgalmak limitált befolyása is felülről vezényelt. Mindazonáltal ez a modell is elismeri, hogy a közvélemény nagyobb hatással van a külpolitikára, ha az elitek megosztottak és a választók támogatását keresik (Efimova–Strebov 2020). Ideális esetben ez nemcsak a népszerűbb külpolitikai koncepciók kiválasztását teszi lehetővé, hanem a népszerűtlenek korlátozását is (Baum–Potter 2015). Tulajdonképpen ez az érvelés határozza meg az alulról felfelé építkező modell véleményét is, amely azonban úgy véli, hogy a közvélemény döntéshozatalra gyakorolt hatása állandó, nemcsak alkalmoszerű. Ez az állandó befolyás az egyének relatíve stabil külpolitikai percepcióiból és a döntéshozatal nyilvános ellenőrzéséből fakad, amely a fékek és ellensúlyok, valamint a társadalmi mozgalmak érdeképviselete révén képes alakítani a külpolitikai eredményeket (Risse-Kappen 1991).

A különböző perspektívák áthidalására a szakirodalom egy kombinált elemzési modellt dolgozott ki. A modell a külpolitikára gyakorolt pluralista befolyás azonosításakor a politikai intézmények központosításának szintjét, a társadalmi széttagoltság viszonyait és a közpolitikai hálózatok (policy network) feletti ellenőrzés mértékét vizsgálja (Gourevitch 1986; Katzenstein 1985). Risse-Kappen (1991) véleménye szerint e három belföldi tényező viszonyrendszere és elrendeződése határozza meg az elitek azon képességét, hogy politikai akarataikat a nyilvánosságra kényszerítsék. Például a nagyfokú intézményi centralizációval rendelkező erős államokban a társadalom ellenőrzésére és a belföldi ellenállás leküzdésére rendszerszintű képességek állnak rendelkezésre. Ettől eltérően a gyenge, széttagolt intézményekkel rendelkező államok korlátozottan képesek a kormányzat politikai akaratát a nyilvánosságra kényszeríteni, mivel a decentralizált egységekben a nem



állami érdekek befolyásának lehetősége számottevőbb. Az intézmények mellett a társadalmi struktúra is nagyban befolyásolja az állam és a társadalom közötti viszonyt. Az előző logikát követve egy polarizált vagy széttöredezett társadalom korlátozott potenciállal rendelkezik a társadalmi szervezetek mozgósítására, míg egy kevésbé heterogén nyilvánosságnak nagyobb esélye van a kollektív nyomásgyakorlásra. Az előző kettő alapján a kombinált modell utolsó tényezője az a kérdés, hogy ki rendelkezik domináns kontrollal a közpolitikai hálózatok felett, azaz az állam, a társadalom vagy mindkettő hozzáfér-e a külpolitikai döntések alakításához. Az adott konfigurációtól függően (erős állam + polarizált társadalom; erős állam + homogén társadalom; gyenge állam + homogén társadalom; gyenge állam + polarizált társadalom) a külpolitikai döntéshozatal formáját végső soron vagy egy domináns tényező, vagy pedig a hasonlóan gyenge egységek közötti alkufolyamat determinálja (Uo.).

A kombinált modell érvényességét empirikus vizsgálatok bizonyítják. Ezek alapján a szakirodalom a külpolitika formálását ma már egy integrált jelenségnek tekint, amelyet alulról felfelé és felülről lefelé irányuló modellek egyaránt befolyásolnak (Eichenberg 2016; Kertzer 2023). Ebben a komplex képletben a kormányzatok akkor vannak a legkényelmesebb helyzetben, ha az elitek és a közvélemény konszenzusra jut. Ennél nagyobb kihívást jelent, ha a társadalmi többség aktívan szembenáll a kormányzati orientációval, aláásva ezzel a külpolitika egységét. Almond (1960) szerint ezek az ellentétes percepciók akkor váltanak ki társadalmi elégedetlenséget, amikor a társadalom részének vagy egészének a létét negatív folyamatok befolyásolják. Ez kiegészíthető Powlick és Katz (1992) véleményével, akik szerint kormányzati stratégiákkal szembeni társadalmi elégedetlenség akkor erősödhet fel, ha a versengő elitek alternatív politikai orientációikat hatékonyan népszerűsítik. Ez jobban megvalósítható a plurális kommunikációs környezettel rendelkező demokratikus országokban, és korlátozottan érvényesíthető az autokratikus rendszerekben, ahol a jellemző központosított ellenőrzés, a média monopolizálása és a nem kormányzó elitek kirekesztése korlátozza a közbeszédben jelenlévő külpolitikai orientációk pluralizmusát (Efimova–Strebkov 2020; Tang 2005).

A magyar kontextus: külpolitikai orientáció és szakpolitikai mechanizmusok

Noha a keleti nyitáshoz kapcsolódó külpolitikai irányváltás részletei széleskörben ismertek, a tanulmány kontextusának bemutatásához érdemes azokat röviden áttekinteni. Ebben a tekintetben a kiindulópont a 2010-es kormányváltás, amely után a magyar külpolitikában felerősödtek a multidimenzionális tendenciák. Elméleti szempontból az új külpolitikai felfogás leginkább a (defenzív) realizmussal talált közös nevezőt, ennek megfelelően a nemzetközi rendszert és az abban lezajló folyamatokat Magyarország biztonságát fenyegető környezetként azonosította. Az új geopolitikai megközelítésben központi szerepet játszott a globális tér átalakulásának valószínűsítése.

A 2011-ben meghirdetett keleti nyitás mögött álló egyik legfontosabb érv ennek megfelelően az ázsiai hatalmak politikai és gazdasági felemelkedésének és az euroatlantizmus hanyatlásának prognosztizálása volt, amelyet a kormányzat egyszerre látott fenyegetésnek és lehetőségnek (Matolcsy 2023). Előbbi olvasatban Magyarország földrajzi elhelyezkedése okán geopolitikai törésvonalak ütközőzónájában helyezkedik el, amely egy átalakuló és blokkosodó világrendben az eltérő nagyhatalmi érdekek okán destabilizálhatja az országot. A második eset ugyanezeket a jellemzőket előnyként azonosította, arra hivatkozva, hogy az ország rendszerszintű pozíciói közvetítő szerepet biztosíthatnak, és egy megfelelően artikulált külpolitika révén centrális pozíciókat alakíthatnak ki a kelet és nyugat közötti transzfer folyamatokban (Orbán 2023).

Ez a geopolitikai értelmezés egy ellentmondásos külpolitikai egyensúlyozást eredményezett, amelynek három fő célkitűzése volt:

- (1) A feltörekvő hatalmi központokkal történő kapcsolatépítés mellett fenntartani az ország nyugati beágyazottságát;
- (2) a lehető legsemmlegesebbnek maradni és közvetíteni az ellentétes geopolitikai érdekek között;
- (3) illetve támogatni a hasonló politikai irányultságú politikai pártokat és vezetőket, Magyarország nemzetközi pozícióinak megerősítése érdekében.

2010 óta ezek a prioritások számos külpolitikai lépésben megmutatkoztak. Az első prioritás a keleti nyitásban öltött testet, amely Magyarország egyensúlyozási koncepcióját a keleti és nyugati érdekek közötti navigáció szükségszerűségével igyekezett legitimálni (Pap–Kitanics 2014). A második elsősorban, de nem kizárólagosan az orosz–ukrán háborúban nyilvánult meg, amelyben a magyar kormány elismerte az agressziót, de semlegességre törekedett (Koenen 2023). A harmadik cél megvalósulása általában kiemelt jelentőségű külföldi választások előtt volt a legszembevetőbb, amikor a magyar kormány olyan szövetségeseket támogatott, mint Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Giorgia Meloni, Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders vagy Robert Fico (Higgins 2023).

A külpolitikai irányváltás szakirodalmi értékelése vegyes összképet mutat. Gazdasági szempontból az EU 2008-as pénzügyi válságból való lassú kilábalására adott pragmatikus válaszként értékeli, ugyanakkor rámutatnak a konkrét előnyök, a jövedelmezőség és a fenntarthatóság hiányára (Deregözü 2019; Farkas et al. 2016). Politikai szempontból az orientációt Magyarország összetett történelmi és kulturális hagyományainak ötvözeteként, a keleti partnerségek és a nyugati kötelezettségvállalások kiegyensúlyozásaként, illetve populista külpolitikaként jellemezték (Balogh 2022; Pap–Kitanics 2014; Varga–Buzogány 2021).

Bármelyik nézőpont is a helytálló, a külpolitikai irányváltás megértéséhez a szakpolitikai döntéshozatal vizsgálatára is szükség van. Ezen a területen a legfontosabb kiindulópont a Fidesz-kormányok elmozdulása a jó kormányzás elveitől a jó kormányzat modellje felé. Az új koncepció 2010 óta eltávolodott a korlátozott állami beavatkozás, a liberalizáció, a decentralizáció és a privatizáció neoliberális érveitől.



Ehelyett a jó kormányzat modellje vált alapvető mechanizmussá, amelyben az államot aktív, intelligens és erős entitásként definiálták, amely problémaalapú döntéshozatalt alkalmaz a többség érdekeinek hatékony képviselése érdekében (Stumpf 2009). A kialakított paternalista megközelítésben a kormány saját feladatának tekintette a stratégiai iránymutatások és az optimális választások meghatározását, azzal az elméleti célkitűzéssel, hogy a lehető legalacsonyabb költségen a lehető legjobb eredményeket biztosítsa (Gazdag 2018).

A jó kormányzat elvei mentén kialakuló centralizált rendszer egyebek mellett a külpolitika intézményi és döntéshozatali kereteit is meghatározta (Stumpf 2016; Visnovitz–Jenne 2021). Ezeket elsősorban a miniszterelnök munkaszervezeteiben és a külügyminisztériumban zajló intézményi reformok befolyásolták. A legmagasabb szinten a Miniszterelnökség 2010-es és a Miniszterelnöki Kabinetiroda 2015-ös létrehozása fontos fordulópont, hiszen a két minisztériumi szintű csúcsszerv kialakítása biztosította az egyéb kormányzati egységekkel kapcsolatos koordináció és kontroll lehetőségét (Müller–Gazsi 2023). Ez volt a helyzet a külügyek területén is, ahonnan kulcsfontosságú felelősségi körök kerültek a miniszterelnök csúcsszerveihez, egyebek mellett a nemzetközi stratégia kialakítása, az uniós ügyek, a nemzetközi fejlesztés, a nemzetközi kommunikáció vagy a külföldi hírszerzés. Noha e portfóliók némelyike időnként gazdát cserélt, a külpolitika kiemelt területeinek legfelül centralizált kontrollja a miniszterelnök központi szerepét jelzi a stratégiaalkotás, a döntéshozatal, és a külpolitikai retorika meghatározásában.

Ezeket a centralizációs tendenciákat felerősítették a külügyminisztériumban lezajlott változások. A minisztérium – a fentebb már jelzett irányok mentén – Szijjártó Péter 2014-es kinevezését követően a mérsékelt nyugati orientációról a politikai-gazdasági tényezők priorizálása felé mozdult el. Ezek a tényezők két jelentős átalakulást eredményeztek. Először is az euroatlanti irányzat visszaszorítását a külpolitikai diverzifikáció javára, ami a globális kelet és dél nagyobb entitásaira szakosodott helyettes államtitkárságok felállításával, valamint a tapasztalt diplomáciai személyzet lecserélésével valósult meg (Uo.). Másodszer, az átnevezett Külgazdasági és Külügyminisztériumon (KKM) belül az újonnan kinevezett diplomáciai testület elsődleges feladata az EU-n kívüli gazdasági kapcsolatok bővítése lett (Rényi 2015).

Fenti reformokat szigorú ellenőrzés és központosítás révén hajtották végre, ami nemcsak a külpolitika átpolitizáltságát fokozta, de a minisztériumok munkatársainak önálló kezdeményezési képességét is erodálta (Müller–Gazsi 2023). Az ebből következő többszintű centralizáció a döntéshozatalt a vezető kormánypárt és a miniszterelnök politikai érdekeihez kötötte (Hettyey 2022). Ennek eredményeként a külpolitikát egy felülről lefelé irányuló formula határozta meg, amelyben a legmagasabb szint monopolizálta a stratégiaalkotást, a döntéshozást, és a külpolitikai narratíva meghatározását, miközben az implementáció az erős kontroll alá kerülő alegységeknél maradt.

Külpolitikai attitűdök

A tanulmány ebben a részben szekunder források és saját adatgyűjtés segítségével körvonalazza a magyar társadalom külpolitikai attitűdjeit. A jelenkori viszonyok összegzése előtt érdemes rámutatni, hogy a történelmi Magyarországon a külpolitikai narratívák alakítását az elitek uralták (Pritz 2006). A domináns történeti diskurzusok a nyugati entitásokkal való integrációtól, a független magyar hatalmi központ létrehozásán keresztül, a keleti birodalmak térhódításának elfogadásáig vagy elutasításáig terjedtek (Jeszenszky 2002; Pritz 2006). Bár a közvélemény nagy része nem volt abban a helyzetben, hogy ezeket az egymással versengő orientációkat komplex módon értelmezni tudja, a történelmi magyar társadalmak különböző fokú külpolitikai tájékozottsággal és öntudattal mindenképpen rendelkeztek. A történelmi tapasztalatok, az elit megosztottsága, valamint a konszenzuskultúra hiánya miatt ezek az attitűdök ugyanakkor ritkán voltak egységesek, inkább a széttöredezettség vagy polarizáció jellemezte őket. Korszaktól függően a megosztottság epicentrumában a nacionalizmus és a nemzeti függetlenség támogatása, vagy az alárendelt státusz elfogadása, ezáltal a biztonság, stabilitás és a gazdasági haladás biztosítása állt (Bibó [1946] 2015).

A hidegháborút követően ezek az egymásnak ellentmondó álláspontok ismét felszínre kerültek. Míg a rendszerváltást követően az euroatlanti integráció vált a külpolitika központi elemévé, addig a 2010-es évek nemzetközi folyamatainak többpólusúvá válását a multidimenzionális orientáció térnyerése jellemezte (Schmidt–Glied 2024). Bár a szakirodalom széles körben elemezte az irányváltás gazdasági és politikai aspektusait (Balogh 2022; Pap–Kitanics 2014; Varga–Buzogány 2021), kevés elemzés született az új orientációval kapcsolatos társadalmi attitűdökről. A témában végzett néhány közvélemény-kutatás ugyanakkor értékes eredményeket szolgáltatott, elsősorban a külföldi hatalmakkal kapcsolatos percepciók és a történelmi polarizáció aktuális megnyilvánulásainak feltárásával (Bíró-Nagy et al. 2023; Krekó 2018).

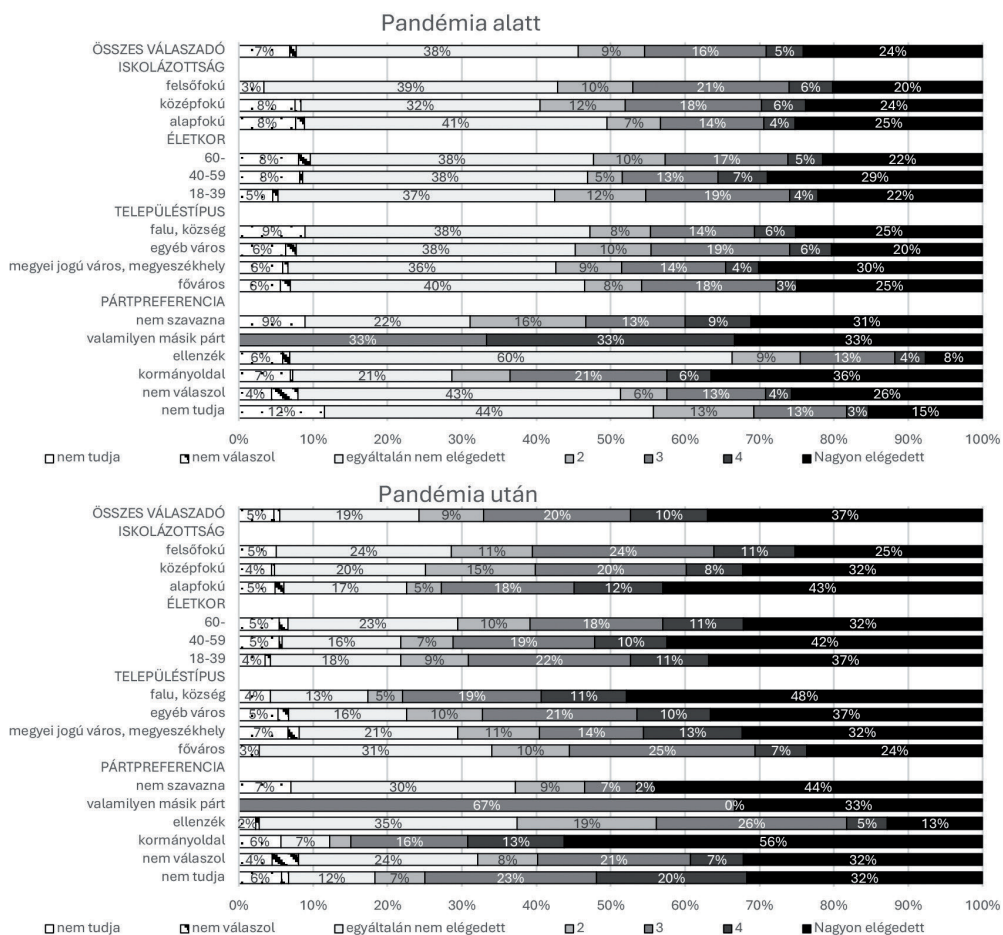
A közvélemény-kutatások eredményeinek egyik iránya a nyugati orientáció időállóságát jelzi. A TÁRKI 2000-ben végzett mérései szerint a korszakban a magyarok mintegy kétharmada támogatta az EU-hoz való csatlakozást, Magyarország NATO-tagságát pedig a válaszadók 64,8%-a pártolta (TÁRKI 2000). Körülbelül egy évtizeddel később, 2009-ben a megkérdezettek mintegy 57%-a vélekedett pozitívan a NATO-ról (Pew Research Center 2009), és 49%-uk bízott az EU-ban (Standard Eurobarometer 2009). A Globsec felmérései 2017-ben és 2024-ben is megerősítettek ezeket a pozitív attitűdöket. Felmérésük szerint 2017-ben a magyarok 61%-a tartotta előnyösnek az uniós tagságot, míg a NATO-tagságot 81%-uk vélte létfontosságúnak az ország biztonsága szempontjából. 2024-ben a válaszadók 86%-a kívánt az EU-ban maradni, 91%-uk pedig támogatta a NATO-tagság fenntartását (Hajdu et al. 2024; Milo et al. 2017). Bár az eredmények érzékeltetik a vélemények változásait, alapvetően az euroatlanti szövetségekbe és intézményekbe vetett közbizalom tartósságát jelzik (Krekó 2018).



A szekunder források által azonosított másik irány ezzel párhuzamosan a feltörekvő autoriter hatalmakkal szembeni attitűdök javulását jelzi. A Pew Research például az orosz befolyást negatívan értékelő percepciók csökkenését mérte, eredményeik alapján utóbbiak aránya a magyar válaszadók körében az 1991-es 56%-ról 2009-re 42%-ra csökkent (Pew Research Center 2009). Az elmozdulás az Oroszországgal kapcsolatos attitűdök növekvő polarizációjára is utal, amely a következő években is folytatódott. 2017-ben a magyar válaszadók 48%-a látta kedvezőtlenül Oroszországot, míg 39%-uk vélekedett pozitívan. 2023-ra ez a megosztottság tovább mélyült, 47% ellenezte a Moszkvával való szorosabb kapcsolatokat, 48% pedig támogatta azokat (Bíró-Nagy et al. 2023). Az elmúlt években hasonló módon javultak a Kínával kapcsolatos attitűdök. Krekó (2018) tanulmánya szerint a Kínával rokonszenvező attitűdök – egy 0-tól 100-ig terjedő skálán mérve – javuló tendenciát követtek, a 2007-ben mért 34-ről, 2014-re 46-ra, majd 2018-ban pedig 51%-ra növekedtek. A legfrissebb közvélemény-kutatások 2020-as évek elején is kimutatták ezt a tendenciát, sőt az USA és Kína megítélésének fokozatos kiegyenlítődését jelezték (Bíró-Nagy et al. 2023).

A fent idézett közvélemény-kutatások elsősorban intézmény- és országorientációs preferenciákat mértek, a magyar külpolitika társadalmi elfogadottságára csak közvetve utaltak. Jelen tanulmány emiatt saját adatfelmérést végzett, amelynek módszertana az aktuális szakirodalomra épült (Gaston–Aspinall 2021; Kleinberg 2022). Az N=800 fős mintán végzett adatfelvétel célja magyar válaszadók külpolitikai elégedettségének azonosítása volt a COVID–19 alatt és után. Az online önkitöltős kérdőív kitöltésére 2024. február 2. és 14. között került sor, így a világjárvány időszakával kapcsolatos attitűdöket retrospektív módszerrel mértük. A felmérés a 18 éves és idősebb válaszadókat célozta, a magyar lakosságra nézve reprezentatív volt nem, korcsoport, iskolai végzettség, és településtípus szempontjából. A válaszadók véletlenszerűen kerültek kiválasztásra, annak érdekében, hogy minden 18 év feletti magyar állampolgár egyenlő eséllyel tölthesse ki a felmérést. A feltett kérdések háromtól ötig terjedő skálán mérték a véleményeket.

1. ábra. Önnek mi a véleménye Magyarország külpolitikájáról?



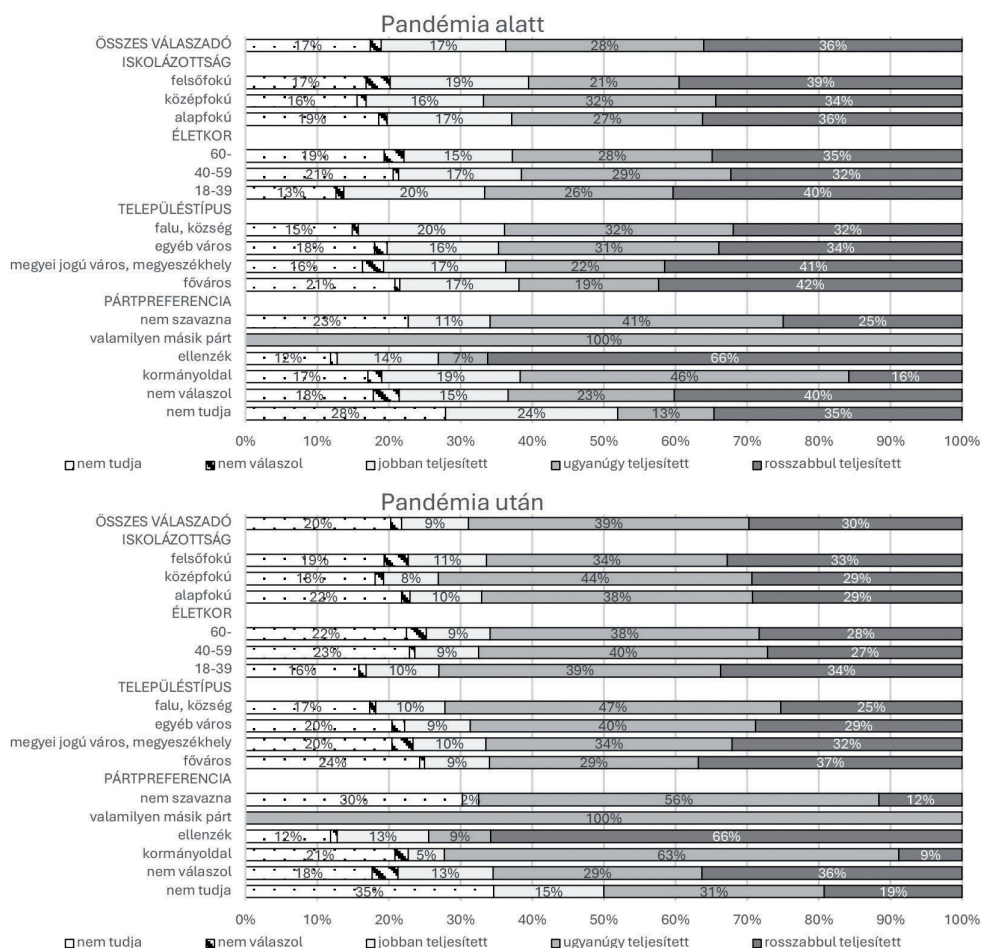
Forrás: Saját szerkesztés, adatfelvétel Fisherman's Online Kft.

A közvetlen elégedettségi mutatókat az 1. ábra szemlélteti. Az ábra legfontosabb tanulsága az elemzési időszakok közötti elégedettség javulása: a pandémiát követő időszakra a legnegatívabb válaszok aránya csökkent. Noha a javuló tendencia minden klaszterre jellemző, az egyes csoportokon belüli eltérések számottevők. Az iskolai végzettség tekintetében a világjárvány alatti túlnyomórészt negatív és jobbra kiegyenlített megítélés az azt követő időszakra átalakult, a javuló elégedettségi mutatók az alapfokú végzettségűeknél ugrásszerűen nőttek, míg a felsőfokú végzettségűek esetében mérsékelten. Az életkor esetében a változás kiegyenlítettebb volt, ellentétben a lakóhelytípusokkal, ahol a fővárosi válaszadók percepciói a világjárvány után is nagyrészt negatívak maradtak, a falvak viszont ugrásszerű javulást mutattak.



Míg ezek az arányok inkább fragmentációra utalnak, addig a pártpreferenciák esetében polarizáció azonosítható. A kormánypárti szavazók túlnyomórészt kedvezően, míg az ellenzéki szavazók többségében kedvezőtlenül nyilatkoztak; az arányokban történt változások ellenére ezek a többségi attitűdök a két periódus alatt változatlanok maradtak. Megjegyzendő, hogy a világjárvány idején a kormánypárti szavazók mutattak nagyobb mértékű deviációt, míg a világjárvány után ez inkább az ellenzéki szavazókra volt jellemző.

2. ábra. A magyar külpolitika jobban vagy rosszabbul teljesített az uniós átlagnál a világjárvány alatt és után?



Forrás: Saját szerkesztés, adatfelvétel Fisherman's Online Kft.

A közvetlen elégedettségi mutatók a percepciók általános javulását jelezték, bár jelentős csoporton belüli eltérések azonosíthatók.

A részletesebb kép kialakítása érdekében az adatfelvétel többváltozós módszertannal dolgozott, a közvetlen mellett a relatív attitűdöket is vizsgálta. Az így kapott eredményeket a 2. ábra ismerteti, ahol a válaszadók magyar külpolitikára vonatkozó közvetett értékelései az általuk megállapított uniós átlaghoz képest kerültek összegyűjtésre. Az eredmények alapján ismét általános trend az első és második periódus közötti percepciók javulása, a pozitív irányú változást azonban többségében a háromfokozatú skála középértékét jelző „ugyanúgy teljesített” opció jelezte.

A világválság idején a legkedvezőtlenebb vélemények a felsőfokú végzettségű válaszadók, a 18–39 évesek, a fővárosi lakosok és az ellenzéki szavazók körében összpontosultak. Bár a pandémia után a vélemények általánosságban javultak, ezekben a csoportokban a negatív attitűdök kiemelkedők, az ellenzéki csoportnál pedig változatlanok maradtak. A két periódus között számottevő pozitív változás a középfokú végzettségűek, a 40–59 évesek, a falvak és kormánypárti szavazók esetében volt azonosítható. Érdemes ismét rámutatni arra, hogy a javulás a skála középértékét képviselő relativizáló válaszhoz kötődik, még a kormánypárti szavazók körében is. Ez a jelzésértékű eredmény jól reflektál a kormányzat által gyakorta hangoztatott külpolitikai excepcionalizmus társadalmi megítélésére (Hettyey 2024).

Összességében a primer és szekunder eredmények egy összetett képet körvonalaztak, a külpolitikai attitűdök pedig egyszerre mutattak stabilitást és volatilitást. A regionális preferenciák tekintetében az euroatlanti orientáció az 1990-es évek óta stabil maradt, míg a feltörekvő hatalmakkal szemben egyre nagyobb polarizáció figyelhető meg. Az elégedettségi arányok kevésbé tűnnek stabilnak és eltéréseket mutatnak a vizsgált periódusok és a szociodemográfiai skálák között. A politikai preferenciák tűnnek az attitűdök legfontosabb meghatározó tényezőjének, ami jelzi a közvélemény tartós megosztottságát. Ebben a polarizációban a kisebbségi vélemények koherensebbek, hiszen inkább elutasítják a Fidesz külpolitikáját és a nyitottságot a feltörekvő hatalmak irányába, míg a többségi vélemények ellentmondásosak, hiszen egyszerre helyeslik a kormányzati külpolitikát és a kritizált euroatlanti orientációt.

A reprezentáció és részvétel lehetőségei

Az attitűdök áttekintését követően a tanulmány a külpolitikai érdekcsoportok és a nyilvánosság egészének külpolitikára gyakorolt befolyását vizsgálja. Amint az korábban bemutatottuk, a magyar külpolitikát egy felülről lefelé irányuló, centralizált és átpolitizált formula definiálja. Bár ezek a mintázatok nem szokatlanok, az intézményi fékek és ellensúlyok ideális esetben fenntartják a külpolitika megfogalmazásának relatív pluralizmusát (Gazdag 2018).

A vizsgált periódusban a magyar eset eltért ezektől az ideális példáktól, hiszen a legfelsőbb szint alatti aktorok csak korlátozottan tudták befolyásolni a külpolitikai irányokat. Ez vonatkozott mind az ellenzéki pártokra, mind pedig a parlamenti bizottságokra, amelyek egyike sem bírt olyan politikai és törvényhozási többséggel,



amelyek nyomást gyakorolhattak volna a kormánypártra. Ugyanez igaz a Fidesz-en belüli néhány kritikus véleményre. Ezek a bírálatok főként az euroatlantizmussal összefüggésben merültek fel, a kormánypárton belül ugyanis a feltörekvő autokratikus hatalmakkal való kapcsolatok javulása és ezzel párhuzamosan a nyugati szövetségekkel kialakított partnerségek romlása 2014 óta feszültségforrás volt (Stumpf 2024).

A formális politika képviselőin túlmenően elviekben a külpolitikai érdekcsoportok is befolyásolhatták a külügyi döntéshozást. Skonieczny (2017) ezek közé az érdekcsoportok közé a diaszpóra-szervezeteket, külföldi kormányzati lobbikat, a vállalási szervezeteket, a civil szervezeteket (*Non-Governmental Organization*, NGO) és vállalatokat sorolja. Elsőként a hazai szintre összpontosítva megállapítható, hogy a magyar érdekcsoportok külpolitikai befolyása meglehetősen korlátozott volt. A felsoroltak közül egyes privilegizált üzleti körök tekinthetők a legbefolyásosabbnak, mivel alkalomszerűen befolyásolni tudták a döntéshozást (Boda, 2020). Mindazonáltal lobbiképességük nem volt független a kormánytól és nagymértékben klientista favorizálástól függött (Panyi, 2020). Hasonló, de kevésbé befolyásos szimbiózis jellemezte a diaszpóra és a kormány közötti kapcsolatot. Ebben a partnerségben továbbra is a kormány bizonyult a fajsúlyosabb félnek, hiszen állampolgárságot, szavazati jogot, állami támogatásokat és segélyeket biztosított a diaszpórának (Herner-Kovács, 2014). Viszonzásképpen a diaszpóra aktív szerepet játszott Magyarország puha erejének növelésében, ez a szerep azonban nem járt együtt a külpolitikai orientáció módosításának lehetőségével. A diaszpórához hasonlóan a vállalási szervezetek, az akadémiai közösség és a szakmai egyesületek is korlátozottan tudták befolyásolni a külpolitikai döntéseket. Jellemző szerepük egyes konkrét diplomáciai folyamatok támogatása volt, elsősorban bilaterális viszonylatban.

Az érdekcsoportok közül az NGO-k különösen hátrányos helyzetben voltak. Nyugat-európai összehasonlításban a politikailag aktív NGO-k száma Magyarországon alacsony, 2010 óta csökkenő tendenciát mutat. A csökkenést több tényező okozta. Ezek közé tartozik a Nemzeti Együttműködési Alap 2011-es létrehozása, amely központosította az állami finanszírozást és az elosztási rendszert (Kákai 2013). A pénzügyi nehézségeket 2017-ben tovább nehezítette, hogy a kormány szigorú szabályokat vezetett be a külföldi finanszírozás visszaszorítására. Ezek a döntések csökkentették a politikailag aktív, de független szervezetek számát, így a megmaradt néhány szervezet külpolitikai szerepvállalása a minimálisra csökkent (Kákai–Glied 2017). Ezzel egyidejűleg a politikai érdekérvényesítés egyre inkább pártkötődésűvé vált. A kormánypárti oldalon ez az aktivizmus a kormánypárt által szervezett és támogatott GONGO-k (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization) részéről inkább a hivatalos irányvonal proponálását jelentette, a külügyek lényegi befolyásolásának lehetősége nélkül (Deák 2022). Noha az ellenzéki vagy független oldalon tapasztalható aktivizmus lehetővé tette egyes alternatív külpolitikai magyarázatok helyi és nemzeti szintű népszerűsítését, ugyanakkor a politikai döntéshozatalt nem tudta befolyásolni. Ha ez alapján vizsgáljuk a hazai szervezeteket, akkor a GONGO definíciónak Kapitány (2019) számításai szerint 54 civil szervezetből 13 felelt meg.

Ha ennek a vizsgálatba vont szervezeti körnek az adatait vizsgáljuk jól látható az arányeltolódás a GONGO-k irányába. Míg ez a 13 szervezet 2011-ben 61 millió forintból gazdálkodott, addig 2018-ban már 754 millió forintból, azaz bevételeik több mint tizenkétszeresére nőttek. A szerző szerint az arányeltolódás a kormányzat által ad hoc döntések révén megszerzett támogatásoknak köszönhető (2011-ben az ad hoc döntéseken alapuló támogatások 40 százaléka, 2018-ban már 70 százaléka került ezen szervezetekhez) (Kapitány 2019: 71). Ugyanakkor fontos kiemelni, hogy egy GONGO esetében nehéz elkülöníteni a szervezet értékeit és meggyőződését annak a kormánynak a politikájától, amely a GONGO-t létrehozta és/vagy finanszírozza annak érdekében, hogy felhasználja a politikai rendszer és a kormányzópárt hatalmának megerősítésére. Mindennek következtében minél nagyobb teret nyernek a GONGO-k, annál inkább megváltozik a független civil társadalom szerkezete, befolyásának mértéke, és csökken a közpolitikai – ezáltal a külpolitikai – érdekérvényesítő képessége (Deák 2022).

Bár Skonieczny (2017) érdekcsoportokat felsoroló listáján nem szerepel, a hazai médiakörnyezetet is célszerű megvizsgálni. Az ágazatban 2010 óta folyamatosak a centralizációs tendenciák, melyek a közszolgálati és kormánypárti műsorszolgáltatók lojalizálásától kezdve, az ellenzéki vagy független sajtó többségi részesezésének megszerzésén át, a helyi médiumok felvásárlásáig terjedtek (Adamczyk 2023). A folyamat eredményeként a médiakonglomerátum irányítására létrehozott KESMA ellenőrzése alá 2018-ra 476 különböző médium került (TASZ 2024). Bár ez számottevő hazai befolyást biztosított, az alapítvány gyakorlati mozgásteret a külpolitikai retorika területén a központilag kialakított direktívák közvetítésére korlátozódott. Hasonlóan korlátozott helyzetben találta magát a megmaradt ellenzéki vagy független sajtó. Esetükben kiemelendő, hogy egyes feltörekvő digitális médiaplatformok (pl. *Partizán*, *Telex*) az online téren keresztül a kormánytól mentes külpolitikai diskurzus alakításának fontos szereplőivé váltak, és tulajdonképpen de facto közszolgálati műsorszolgáltatóként működtek. Ennek a szerepkörnek a kialakulását elsősorban a Youtube és a hírmegosztásra alkalmas közösségi médiák (Facebook, Twitter) hazai elterjedése tette lehetővé, részben ellensúlyozva az online kormányzati kommunikáció előző években tapasztalható felerősödését (Merkovity, 2016; Kacziba, 2023).

Míg a Fidesz dominanciája nagymértékben korlátozta a hazai érdekcsoportok befolyását, addig az ország strukturális gyengeségei miatt bizonyos külföldi érdekekhez igazodnia kellett. A jelenleg nyilvánosan elérhető információk alapján e befolyás mértékéről kevés tudható. Egyes országok ugyanakkor sikerrel lobbizhattak a kormánynál. Ezek közé tartozik Kína, Oroszország, Törökország és Izrael, amelyek érdekei a szakirodalom véleménye szerint gyakorta estek egybe Magyarország EU-ban vagy NATO-ban képviselt álláspontjával (Gizińska–Uznańska 2024; Orenstein–Kelemen 2017). Eltérő célokkal, de az USA és az EU is sikeresen gyakorolt nyomást Magyarországra, például az Ukrajnának szánt segélycsomagokkal vagy Svédország NATO-tagságával kapcsolatos vétók feloldása kapcsán (Higgins 2024).



A külföldi kormányzatok a nagyvállalataik lobbitevékenységét is segítették. Ilyen eredményekre példa a Roszatom Paks 2-re vonatkozó építési engedélye, vagy a BYD és a CATL debreceni és szegedi gyárainak létrehozása. Ezek a beruházások ugyanakkor eltörpülnek a német autógyárak befolyásához képest, amelyek a 2010-es évek közepén a magyar GDP mintegy 4–5%-át termelték (Bán 2014). Ezek a vállalatok nemcsak adókedvezményekben és állami támogatásokban részesültek, de Magyarország támogatását élvezték az uniós jogalkotásban is (Panyi 2020).

A külpolitikára gyakorolt társadalmi hatások elemzésekor érdemes megvizsgálni a szélesebb nyilvánosság hatását is. E tekintetben a közvélemény befolyása lehet közvetlen vagy közvetett, előbbi esetben tömegmozgalmak gyakorolnak direkt nyomást a kormányra, utóbbiban a választói magatartás indirekt módon befolyásolja a döntéshozást (Forgas–Williams 2016). A közvetlen esettel kezdve megállapítható, hogy Magyarországon az elmúlt két évtizedben külpolitikai kérdésekben nem alakult ki önálló tömegmozgalom. A tisztán külpolitikai jellegű megmozdulások ritkák maradtak, és általában néhány budapesti külképviselet előtt tartott rövid demonstrációk formájában öltöttek testet. Megjegyzendő ugyanakkor, hogy a belpolitikai kérdésekben szervezett tömegdemonstrációknak visszatérő elemei voltak a külpolitikai irányvonalat kritizáló jelszavak és molinók is. Ezek közvetlen hatást ugyan nem gyakoroltak a külpolitikai orientációra, mégis jelezték, hogy a külügyi kérdések áttételesen jelen vannak a szélesebb társadalmi vitákban, és képesek a kormányzati döntésekkel szembeni mobilizáció részévé válni.

A közvetlen nyomásgyakorlással ellentétben a közvetett befolyás némiképpen kimutatható a magyar külpolitikában. Hatása megfigyelhető, ha közvélemény percpcióit és a választási eredményeket összevetjük a külpolitikai prioritásokkal, döntéshozatali gyakorlatokkal és szakpolitikai irányokkal. Ebben a tekintetben a prioritásokat a keleti nyitás testesítette meg, a döntéshozatali gyakorlatokat a felülről lefelé irányuló modell determinálta, míg a szakpolitikai irányokat a multidimenzionális balanszírozás jelezte. Egy komplex kép rajzolódik ki, ha ezeket összevetjük a közvélemény preferenciáival. Egyrészt a külpolitika voltaképpen tükrözte a többségi preferenciák alapjait azáltal, hogy fenntartotta az euroatlanti szervezetekben betöltött magyar szerepvállalást. Másrészt ezekhez kritikusan viszonyult és pragmatikus kapcsolatokat alakított ki ezen szervezetek legfőbb nemzetközi versenytársaival. Az ebből következő szakpolitikai produktum egy olyan külpolitikai koncepciót definiált, amelyben a többségi preferenciák reprezentációjának látszata megmaradt, ugyanakkor a kisebbségi attitűdök aránytalanul nagy képviseletet kaptak, különösen azok, amelyek egybevágtak a kormányzat saját érdekeivel.

Noha a modellben korlátozottan érvényesültek a többség preferenciái, ez nem tükröződött a választások során, sőt, a Fidesz négyet is kétharmados többséggel nyert meg. Ez arra utal, hogy a külpolitika marginális szerepet játszott a választások befolyásolásában: bár a szavazók jelentős hányadának külpolitikai preferenciái nem tükröződtek a szakpolitikai végeredményen, többségük láthatóan figyelmen kívül hagyta reprezentációjának hiányát. Ennek következtében a kormány hatékonyan korlátozta a közvetett társadalmi befolyás lehetőségeit: alkalmazkodott a stabil

többségi preferenciákhoz, ugyanakkor a döntéshozatali folyamat során egyes kisebbségi preferenciák képviselését részesítette előnyben.

Diskusszió

Az eredmények értelmezése a továbbiakban a magyar közvélemény külpolitikai attitűdprofiljának és befolyásolási potenciáljának elemzésével folytatódik. Az első célkitűzéssel kezdve megállapítható, hogy az eredmények összetett attitűdprofil körvonalaznak. Alapvető mintázatként a szekunder források stabil többségi euroatlanti irányultságot mértek, még a nyugati szervezeteket aktívan kritizáló kormánypárt szavazói körében is. Ez az ellentmondás a Fidesz néppárti jellegét és sokszínű szavazói bázisát tükrözi. A sokféleség magyarázza azt is, hogy a kormánypárti szavazók az euroatlanti orientáció mellett hajlamosak a feltörekvő autoriter hatalmakkal szemben is kedvezőbb véleményt formálni, ami preferenciáik dualitását jelzi. Ezzel szemben az ellenzéki szavazók következetesen elleneztek a kormány külpolitikai irányvonalát és negatív véleményt formáltak az euroatlanti versenytársokról.

A vélemények töredezettsége különösen a pandémia idején volt szembetűnő, amikor még a Fidesz-szavazók körében is alacsonyabb volt a külpolitika támogatottsága. Ez arra utal, hogy a pandémia során hozott külpolitikai döntések, például a vakcinák gyors beszerzése, közvetlenül érintették az állampolgárokat és kritikusabb reakciókat váltottak ki. Ez rávilágít a belpolitikai ügyek kulcsszerepére a külpolitikával kapcsolatos közvélemény formálásában: a választók érzékenyebben és kritikusabban reagáltak, amikor a fenyegetések közvetlenül érintették őket.

A pandémia utáni időszak ugyancsak jelezte a bel- és külpolitikai percepciók közötti szoros kapcsolatot, hiszen ez a mintavételi periódus egy másik jelentős fenyegetéssel, az orosz–ukrán háborúval esett egybe. A pandémiához hasonlóan a háború is jelentős biztonsági fenyegetést jelentett, azonban csak közvetve és korlátozottan érintette a válaszadók mindennapi életét. Ez a viszonylagos távolság, párosulva a kormány retorikájával – amely összhangban a közvélemény preferenciáival elhatárolódott a konfliktustól –, a külpolitika megítélésének javulásához vezetett. Az időszak eredményei fontos szociodemográfiai trendeket is feltártak: pozitívabb elégedettségi szintek voltak megfigyelhetők az alapfokú végzettségűek, a falusi lakosság és az idősebb generációk körében, sőt a direkt percepciókat mérő kérdések esetében az ellenzéki szavazók is javítottak véleményükön.

Ezek az eredmények lehetővé teszik a magyar közvélemény mintavételi időszakban jellemző külpolitikai attitűdprofiljának körvonalazását. A vizsgálat alapját a tanulmány elején felvázolt elméleti vélemények képezik, amelyek szerint a felülről lefelé irányuló modellben a közvélemény külpolitikai attitűdjeit az elitek, míg az alulról felfelé építkező formulában az egyéni vélemények és személyes preferenciák formálják (Kertzer 2023; Zaller 1992). Ezekkel az elvekkel összehasonlítva a magyar eset egy többrétegű mechanizmust tükröz, ahol a külpolitikai percepciókat

három egymással összefüggő szint: az elit narratívái, a társadalmi prioritások és az egyéni percepciók alakítják. Az elit szintjén a külpolitikai attitűdöket olyan történelmi diskurzusokban gyökerező, egymással versengő narratívák keretezték, mint a nyugati orientáció, a nemzeti függetlenségre való törekvés vagy a keleti tradíciók hangsúlyozása.

Ezek a narratívák viszonylag stabilak maradtak, és a nemzetközi folyamatok értelmezésének domináns keretrendszerét képezték. Az elit ezeket a diskurzusokat a külpolitikai intézkedések legitimálására és a közvélemény formálására használta, ugyanakkor a választók véleményének befolyásolását társadalmi és egyéni szűrők korlátozták. A társadalmi szinten a külpolitika másodlagos jelentőségű volt a belpolitikai kérdésekhez képest, ezen a szinten a közbeszédet a belső prioritások uralták. Az ebből fakadó relatív külügyi közömbösség fragmentált és ingadozóbb véleményekhez vezetett, mivel a belpolitikai fókusz csökkentette a külpolitikai attitűdök koherenssége tételének fontosságát. Az egyén szintjén számos személyes preferencia befolyásolta az elit által meghatározott külpolitikai diskurzusok szűrését. A külpolitikának tulajdonított prioritás a személyes érintettség szintjétől függően változott: nőtt, amikor az egyének úgy érezték, hogy a nemzetközi ügyek közvetlenül érintik őket és csökkent, amikor ez az érintettség hiányzott. Ez a változó nagyban befolyásolta a preferenciákat: közvetlen érintettség esetén a biztonság, stabilitás és jólét szempontjai kerültek előtérbe, közvetett érintettség esetén absztrakt attitűdök, mint az általános világnézet, ideológia vagy politikai hovatartozás is domináns szerephez juthattak. Ezek a nemzetközi események hatására „mozgó” tényezők hozzájárultak a percepciók volatilitásához, egyúttal magyarázzák a külpolitikával kapcsolatos attitűdök változékonyságát.

A különbségek ellenére ezek a szintek együttesen határozták meg a külpolitikai percepciókat, ami integrált attitűdformálásra utal (Eichenberg 2016). A felülről lefelé irányuló modell döntő szerepet játszott a külpolitikai narratívák stabilitásának biztosításában, ezáltal a társadalmi és egyéni percepciók formálásában. Az alulról felfelé építkező formula befolyásolta a külpolitika jelentőségével kapcsolatos társadalmi és egyéni véleményeket, és ezáltal meghatározta a rendelkezésre álló külpolitikai narratívák szelekciójának formáit (Kertzer 2023). Az így kialakult attitűdprofil tehát a legfontosabb alapelvek esetében stabil preferenciák, a kevésbé központi kérdések esetében azonban változékonyság alakította.

Az attitűdök értelmezése után a diszkusszió, a nyilvánosság döntéshozatalára gyakorolt potenciális befolyását értékeli. Ebben az elméleti részben ismertetett kombinált modellt hasznosítjuk, amely a külpolitikára gyakorolt befolyás azonosításakor a politikai intézmények központosításának szintjét, a társadalmi széttagoltság viszonyait és a közpolitikai hálózatok feletti ellenőrzés mértékét vizsgálta (Gourevitch 1986; Katzenstein 1985).

A politikai intézmények helyzetét tekintve az eredmények egy erősen centralizált rendszert azonosítottak. A külügyi rendszert 2010 óta a felülről lefelé irányuló döntéshozatal jellemezte, a kulcsfontosságú tervezési és döntéshozatali hatáskörök a miniszterelnök köré szervezett hivatalokban összpontosultak (Müller–Gazsi 2023).

A nagyfokú centralizáció mellett a decentralizált vagy alacsonyabb szintű kormányzati egységek befolyása csak korlátozottan tudott érvényesülni, a KKM szerepe is inkább az implementáció felé tolódott el. A társadalmi homogenitás hiánya, amely a kombinált elemzési modell második faktora, felerősítette a centralizációs tendenciákat, hiszen korlátozta a nyilvánosság kollektív befolyásolási képességét.

Ebben a tekintetben az előző fejezet különbséget tett a közvetlen és a közvetett befolyás között. A közvetlen befolyásolás, mint például a tömegdemonstrációkon keresztül történő nyomásgyakorlás, Magyarországon külpolitikai kérdésekben ritka maradt. Ez részben a külpolitika másodlagos szerepével magyarázható, másrészt azzal, hogy a kormányzat nem kérdőjelezte meg az ország euroatlanti tagságait, ezzel fenntartva a többség és a vezető politikai elit közötti konszenzust (Dreher 2023). Ráadásul az EU- és NATO-tagság támogatásától eltekintve a magyar közvélemény nem alakított ki pártpreferenciákon átívelő konszenzust a külpolitika egyéb kérdéseiben, ami többek között a pártpolitikai megosztottságra, a konszenzuskultúra hiányára, valamint a külpolitika másodlagos jellegére vezethető vissza. Ez a fragmentáció csökkentette a külpolitikára gyakorolt közvetett befolyást és biztosította a kormány számára a külpolitikai preferenciák szelektív képviselésének lehetőségét. Ennek eredményeként a Fidesz igazodott az euroatlanti integráció többségi preferenciájához, de az érdekeinek megfelelő kisebbségi álláspontokat képviselte.

Az erős állam és a széttagolt társadalom kombinációja lehetővé tette közpolitikai hálózatok feletti ellenőrzést is. Az eredmények a pluralista részvétel egyetlen valódi bizonyítékát a gazdasági szereplők és a külső lobbicsoportok körében mutatták ki, amelyeknek alkalmanként sikerült befolyásolniuk a döntéshozatalt (Boda 2020). Mindazonáltal ezeket a behatásokat általában gazdasági vagy nemzetközi érdekek vagy a kettő együtt vezérelte, ezáltal a felülről lefelé irányuló döntéshozatali kereteket alapvetően nem befolyásolták. A központosított rendszer ugyanakkor nem akadályozta az érdekcsoportok alternatív külpolitikai magyarázatainak disszeminációját. Ezek az alternatív narratívák a közbeszéd és a külügyi diskurzus részévé váltak, a választói preferenciákban megjelentek; azonban a döntéshozást csak korlátozottan tudták befolyásolni. Ebből következően a külpolitika közpolitikai hálózatait a tervezéstől a döntéshozatalon át a végrehajtásig túlnyomórészt a kormányzat irányította, korlátozott lehetőséget hagyva a nem állami szereplők részvételére.

A tanulmány eredményei ezen a ponton lehetővé teszik a kutatási kérdés vizsgálatát. A bevezetőben megfogalmazott kérdés arra kereste a választ, hogy a magyar közvélemény külpolitikai percepciói mennyiben tükröződtek a kormány hivatalos irányvonalában, valamint, hogy az attitűdök a különböző érdekcsoportok reprezentációján és a nyilvánosság befolyásán keresztül milyen mértékben jelentek meg a szakpolitikai döntéshozatalban. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a magyar közvélemény külügyi percepciói csak korlátozott mértékben tükröződtek a hivatalos külpolitikai irányvonalban. Bár a kormányzat igazodott az euroatlanti tagságok fenntartásának többségi preferenciájához, azonban nagy mozgástérrel



rendelkezett a társadalmi attitűdök szelektív képviselésében. Ebből következően a külpolitikai orientáció inkább azokat kisebbségi attitűdöket reprezentálta, amelyek egybecsengtek a Fidesz érdekeivel. Ez a széles mozgástér elsősorban a közvetlen és közvetett részvétel ellehetetlenítéséből, valamint a döntéshozatali folyamat monopolizálásából következett.

Az erre vonatkozó eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a nyilvánosság különböző szintjeinek és szereplőinek korlátozott lehetőségei a politikai intézmények és közpolitikai hálózatok feletti kormányzati kontrollból következtek, amely kiegészült a történelmileg széttagolt és jelenleg polarizált társadalmi attitűdök szelektív képviselésének lehetőségével. Ennek eredményeként egy ellentmondásos külpolitikai orientáció alakult ki, amely az euroatlanti tagságok fundamentumának tiszteletben tartásán túl csak alkalmanként felelt meg nyugati szövetségseink érdekeinek és – ami még fontosabb – a magyar közvélemény többsége preferenciáinak.

Konklúzió

A tanulmány a magyar közvélemény külpolitikával kapcsolatos attitűdjeit és azok szakpolitikára gyakorolt hatását vizsgálta a pandémia alatti és utáni időszakra fókuszálva. Az eredmények megerősítik az integrált külpolitika-formálásra vonatkozó elméleti érveket. Míg az attitűdök kialakulásában vertikális és horizontális megközelítések egyaránt szerepet játszottak, addig a szakpolitika kialakításában a felülről lefelé irányuló mechanizmusok domináltak. Ez az aszimmetria rendszerspecifikus jelleget tükröz: a Fidesz által létrehozott illiberális rendszer ugyan kisajátította a politikai döntéshozatalt és nagymértékben befolyásolta a percepciókat, de teret hagyott az egyéni választásoknak.

Ezen keretek között az intézményi centralizáció hatékony megvalósítása, a nem kormányzó elitcsoportok meggyengítése, a politikai kommunikáció dominanciája, és a társadalmi széttagoltság kihasználása lehetővé tette a kormány számára a külpolitika monopolizálását. Ugyanakkor ezek a tendenciák olyan alapelvek képviselésével párosultak, mint az euroatlanti tagságok fenntartása, a külpolitikai narratívák pluralizmusa, valamint a szűkülő, de még létező médiaalternatívák jelenléte. Ez a dichotómia, kombinálva a külpolitikával szembeni általános közömbösséggel, egy többszintű berendezkedéshez vezetett, amelyben a magyar kormány eddig tiszteletben tartotta a közvélemény konszenzusának alapjait, de szelektíven értelmezte annak irányait és saját érdekeivel összhangban alakította a szakpolitikai döntéseket.

Támogatói információk

A tanulmány „A közösségi média meghódítása? Magyarország és Görögország digitális nyilvános diplomáciája a COVID–19 pandémia időszakában” című PD138100. sz. OTKA kutatás keretében készült.



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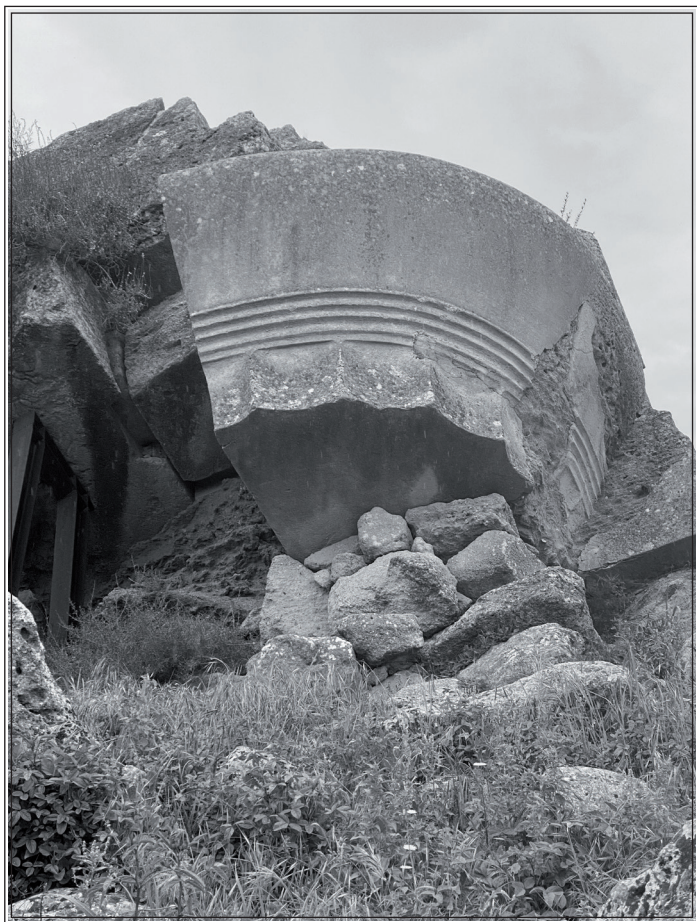
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Fotó/István Péter Németh

ACTIVITY OF CHARITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN GAZA*

Manal Hamarsha

Introduction

■ The ongoing crisis in Gaza has evolved into one of the most protracted and severe humanitarian emergencies of the 21st century, exacerbated by political instability, blockades, and recurring conflicts (Diab et al. 2018). Gaza is still dealing with several issues as of 2024, such as extreme poverty, restricted access to essential services, and the devastation of vital infrastructure. Due to the region's precarious socioeconomic structure, the local government is unable to meet substantial humanitarian needs alone (Buheji–Hasan 2024). Charitable and civil society groups have emerged as a crucial core, offering short-term aid and long-term rehabilitation support. Nevertheless, there are persistent concerns regarding the effectiveness and durability of their initiatives because their work is carried out in a constrictive setting that prevents the full achievement of humanitarian objectives (Roy 1996).

Charities and civil society organizations (CSOs) work to fill gaps left by government institutions in areas affected by protracted crises. The work of these non-profit organizations is crucial in addressing the urgent humanitarian needs in Gaza, which include medical aid, food supplies, psychological support, and educational materials (Schultz 2021). However, the challenging environment in Gaza, characterized by military restrictions and limited access to external resources, hinders the work of these organizations in meeting the basic needs of the local population, as a result of their work being severely restricted and their vital contributions being obscured (Muslih 1993).



The main driving force behind this study is to examine the diverse functions and analyze the documentation of activities and contributions of seven major active nonprofit organizations in Gaza, identify their contributions to the local environment, and shed light on how these organizations operate within Gaza, the challenges they face, and their effectiveness in difficult circumstances. Given the numerous factors that influence these efforts in Gaza, it is essential to examine the strategies employed by these organizations and assess their capacity to adapt to ongoing and evolving challenges. This evaluation will enable a more comprehensive understanding of their broader and longer-term impact, as well as inform the delivery of strengthening their management strategies in times of crisis (Mali 2024). These organizations are working to coordinate efforts to alleviate the crisis, but their initiatives still do not fully address the full range of humanitarian needs. This examination will not only shed light on their immediate responses to critical needs. However, it will also emphasize the importance of long-term recovery initiatives to enhance resilience and sustainability in the face of ongoing hardship.

By emphasizing the contributions of organizations such as USAID, OCHA, and the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, this study contributes to the body of literature by thoroughly examining both group and individual initiatives in the humanitarian sector. A thorough examination of the patterns, difficulties, and achievements in the area's humanitarian response is made possible by the study's temporal breadth, which spans ten years of activity. Additionally, the geographic focus on Gaza underscores the localized nature of the crisis and the specific contextual challenges that impact humanitarian operations (Sanderson 2017).

To summarize, this study significantly contributes to our understanding of the role of nonprofits and civil society groups in times of crisis, particularly in areas like Gaza that are affected by violence. It evaluates the effectiveness of these initiatives, provides insightful analysis of the tactics used to address humanitarian requirements, and offers valuable suggestions for improving future responses in similar crises. By examining the activities of these groups, this study aims to contribute to scholarly discussions and inform real-world crisis management techniques by highlighting the necessity of coordinated, flexible, and sustained humanitarian measures in protracted wars.

Overview of Previous Studies

The intersection of humanitarian response, civil society organizations, and charitable efforts, particularly in conflict zones, has garnered significant public and scholarly attention. Most of these organizations operate in severely affected areas such as Gaza, and their role is particularly prominent in times of crisis, political instability, military occupation, and economic blockade. The literature on organizations that support and assist human suffering has increased, and efforts have been made to fill research gaps on this topic to enhance resilience in highly restrictive environments.



Alkahlout (2020) examines the role of Qatari humanitarian aid in supporting CSOs in the Gaza Strip since the 2007 siege. He explores the challenges CSOs face, including the Israeli blockade, political divisions, and restrictions on democratic processes. Through a combination of literature review and field research, including interviews with CSO staff, Gazan residents, and Qatari charity representatives, the study assesses the impact of Qatari aid on political, economic, and social developments in Gaza. The findings indicate that while Qatari aid has provided crucial support to CSOs, it has also led to unintended negative consequences that affect the operational dynamics of these organizations.

The study of Saad et al. (2022) examined the interconnectedness of social safety nets and cash assistance and voucher programs in Gaza. This study presents effective cash assistance programs to raise the minimum poverty line and build resilience in the face of economic volatility. It also examines how programs can help disadvantaged groups amid ongoing economic challenges, the fragmentation of restrictions on financial flows, and a lack of coordination with social protection and humanitarian relief systems. This study emphasized the need to integrate immediate assistance with ongoing social support.

In Gaza, a territory plagued by continuing crises and damaged infrastructure, Chilvers et al. (2017) investigate emergency preparedness initiatives for women with disabilities led by civil society. The study of the Within and Without the State program underscores how marginalized groups—especially women with disabilities—are often excluded during emergencies. These women collaborated with community researchers to develop crisis-response plans that prioritized long-term advocacy, effective emergency planning, improved support coordination, and accessible shelters for individuals with disabilities. The results underscore the importance of inclusive humanitarian interventions in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations during periods of instability and violence.

One of the topics consistent with the literature is the pivotal role civil society organizations play in providing essential services without direct state intervention. UNRWA's work by Akram et al. (2010) is often referred to in reconciling the services provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), including emergency services such as health care and education, the dual pressures it faces, meeting the population's basic needs, and providing detailed accounts of operational frameworks and providing assistance under siege and limited international support El-Mougher (2022). The study highlights the importance of coordination between international and civil society organizations to enhance the effectiveness of assistance efforts in conflict areas.

Siman (2021) and Rabbani (1994) provided strong evidence from several studies on the unique challenges faced by civil society organizations in reaching disadvantaged groups. Their final findings showed operational constraints resulting from movement and security concerns. Several reports have documented that international civil society organizations have continually adapted to the use of continuous confinement methods, with many organizations employing local workers who can



navigate checkpoints or developing methods to deliver aid in the event of physical obstacles.

Karlstedt et al. (2015) confirmed that civil society organizations in the occupied Palestinian territories are unbalanced in their tasks. This study's results emphasize the need to alleviate the pressure resulting from the political scene and enable humanitarian organizations to operate in conflict areas on a complete and equal basis with other areas.

A crucial theoretical contribution to this area of research comes from Paffenholz (2015), who introduced the concept of "civic space" to explain how CSOs operate within constrained environments, especially in conflict zones. The case of Gaza (Aall-Helsing, 2021) expands on this concept, describing the extreme limitations imposed by ongoing military operations and the near-constant threat of violence. These limitations, combined with political restrictions, have severely curtailed the ability of CSOs to function effectively. Asi and Williams (2018) further explore these dynamics by documenting the consequences of restricted humanitarian access on the population's overall well-being, emphasizing the need for international advocacy to address these barriers.

Moreover, the academic discourse has shifted towards examining the long-term impact of CSOs beyond immediate relief. Studies, such as those by Natil (2021), suggest that CSOs in Gaza play a dual role: they address short-term emergency needs while working toward sustainable development and resilience-building. These organizations promote education, foster economic opportunities, and support community cohesion, all of which are critical for the long-term recovery and resilience of the population. This dual role is increasingly being recognized as vital in conflict-affected regions, where cycles of violence and instability often render traditional development models ineffective.

The literature also addresses the financial and operational sustainability of CSOs. In conflict zones like Gaza, where state institutions are weak or absent, civil society organizations (CSOs) often rely on international funding, which can be volatile due to shifting geopolitical priorities. Vaughan and Hillier (2019) examine how fluctuations in donor funding impact the capacity of CSOs to plan and execute long-term projects. This is particularly relevant in the Gaza context, where international sanctions and restrictions on the movement of goods have severely limited the resources available to local organizations. The dependency on external funding also raises questions about the autonomy of CSOs and their ability to respond to local needs, as the priorities of their international donors may limit their flexibility.

The interaction between civil society organizations, governmental entities, and international organizations is an indispensable necessity for confronting the multidimensional challenges facing residents of conflict areas, such as Gaza, especially in long-term crises. Dynamic, political, social, and economic efforts must be integrated to respond harmoniously, and each of these parties must present its effective strengths. Recovery is a comprehensive, ongoing, and long-term process. Organizations must bridge these gaps and provide humanitarian relief with gov-



ernmental and international support while enhancing flexibility and sustainable development, limiting restrictions imposed on access, material instability, and significant political pressures, and continuing research on how to support the efforts of these institutions in areas affected by the conflict; this is what Lewis, Kanji, and Themudo (2020) emphasized in their article.

The theoretical foundation for analyzing the activities of charity and civil society organizations in Gaza heavily relies on theories of humanitarian aid, crisis management, and the operations of non-profit organizations. Barnett (2018) provides a comprehensive overview of humanitarianism as both a political and moral endeavor, framing aid work as a necessity and a form of international intervention. This aligns with Fassin's (2011) concept of "humanitarian reason," which describes the ethical imperatives driving humanitarian action, particularly in conflict-ridden areas such as Gaza.

Kaldor's (2016) "New Wars" theory also informs the operational dynamics of non-profit organizations in crisis zones. This theory posits that contemporary conflicts, such as those in Gaza, are characterized by the breakdown of traditional state structures and increasing reliance on non-governmental entities to provide essential services. Kaldor's theory helps explain the expanded role of CSOs in Gaza, where state capacity is severely limited.

As Coombs (2007) outlined, crisis management theory offers another valuable lens for understanding how organizations operate during emergencies. This framework assesses the effectiveness of CSOs in Gaza, examining how these organizations prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises. Adaptive management is particularly relevant, as it describes organizations' need to remain flexible in rapidly changing circumstances—a frequent occurrence in Gaza's volatile environment.

The role of civil society in conflict zones further underscores the importance of local actors in providing humanitarian aid. Edwards argues that civil society acts as a bridge between state structures and the local population. This function is especially critical in contexts such as Gaza, where governmental institutions are either absent or severely incapacitated. This theory is supported by Melese et al. (2024), who explore how CSOs in Gaza have adapted to the constraints of their operating environment by focusing on community engagement and localized solutions.

While studies by Farhat et al. (2023) and Butt and Butt (2016) have discussed the operational challenges faced by CSOs in Gaza, there has been limited exploration of how these organizations collaborate with international bodies. This is particularly important given the constrained environment in which they operate. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the collaborative strategies employed by CSOs and international organizations, providing insights into the effectiveness of coordinated efforts.

Another gap is the limited focus on gender-specific interventions, despite organizations like the Women's Programs Center in Rafah being at the forefront of providing services to women and children. Studies by Bouri (2024) and ActionAid briefly address the importance of gender-sensitive humanitarian strategies, but



few have provided an in-depth analysis of these initiatives. This research will focus on gendered approaches to humanitarian aid, highlighting the efforts of women-led organizations in mitigating the crisis.

In summary, this literature review highlights the considerable work done by scholars and organizations in documenting the activities of charity and civil society organizations in crisis zones and identifies several gaps in current research. This study aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of the activities of CSOs in Gaza, with a primary focus on long-term recovery efforts, collaboration strategies, and gender-sensitive interventions.

Methodology

The primary method employed in this research is a qualitative approach involving data collection through remote interviews and field observations. This method was chosen for its effectiveness in exploring complex human behaviors, organizational strategies, and collaborative efforts within the humanitarian field (Silverman 2021). Given the sensitive nature of the conflict in Gaza, qualitative methods allow for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders without placing participants at additional risk.

Online interviews were conducted with five staff members from seven key organizations: Rebuilding Alliance, the World Food Program, Women's Programs Center in Rafah, ActionAid, USAID, Islamic Relief, UNRWA, and OCHA. These organizations were chosen for their significant involvement in humanitarian operations within Gaza, providing a comprehensive perspective on the roles of international and local actors in crisis relief efforts. The interviews aimed to gather detailed insights into organizational activities from 2014 to 2024, including strategies for managing the ongoing crisis and specific challenges, particularly those related to the operational restrictions imposed by the conflict environment.

The seven organizations were selected based on their long-standing involvement in Gaza's humanitarian landscape and the diversity of their interventions. Each organization represents a distinct facet of the broader humanitarian effort, encompassing emergency food aid, healthcare, gender-sensitive programming, and infrastructure rehabilitation. This deliberate sampling approach ensures that the study captures the full scope of organizational responses to the ongoing crisis (Patton 2002).

The interview questions focused on organizational activities, crisis management strategies, and the challenges of operating under restrictive conditions. Field observations, drawing on reports from international organizations and local sources, were also incorporated into the study. This component facilitated a grounded understanding of the local context, capturing the tangible impact of organizational activities on the ground (Marshall–Rossman 2014).



The interview comprises seven questions that address key aspects of their humanitarian efforts, the challenges they face, and strategies for overcoming resource constraints. The responses were originally in Arabic and have been translated into English. Key topics include infrastructure development, collaboration with other actors, and adaptive strategies to maintain operations amid significant restrictions.

The online interview questions were designed to address several key areas, including:

1. The nature and scope of activities during the crisis.
2. Strategies developed for immediate relief and long-term recovery efforts.
3. How collaboration occurs between international and local organizations.
4. Challenges and limitations include access to affected populations, resource constraints, and security risks.
5. Adaptive measures are being taken to continue operations amidst severe restrictions and escalating conflict.

The Questions of the Study

1. What key activities has your organization implemented in Gaza during the crisis?
2. How does your organization balance short-term relief efforts with long-term recovery planning?
3. What collaborative strategies does your organization employ with other humanitarian actors in Gaza?
4. What challenges does your organization face in delivering humanitarian assistance in Gaza?
5. How does your organization overcome resource constraints by continuing to deliver aid?
6. What specific security risks does your organization encounter in Gaza, and how do you mitigate these risks?
7. What adaptive strategies have you implemented to sustain operations despite the severe restrictions imposed on you?

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, effectively identifying patterns and themes across large datasets (Braun–Clarke 2019). The data analysis process followed several steps, beginning with the transcription of interviews and field notes, followed by iterative coding to identify recurring themes related to organizational strategies, challenges, and impact. The thematic analysis focused on key areas of interest, such as:

Analyzing how organizations adapted their operations in response to the evolving crisis and the restrictive environment in Gaza.



Identifying synergies between international and local organizations and their collective efforts to provide humanitarian relief and exploring the primary obstacles organizations encounter, including restrictions on movement, resource limitations, and security concerns. The analysis process was facilitated by qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 12), which aided in the organization and retrieval of coded data (Jackson–Bazeley 2019). The themes of the humanitarian aid and crisis management theoretical framework were reviewed, allowing for a grounded analysis of the data within the broader context of non-profit work in conflict zones.

Given the sensitive nature of the research context, strict ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the study. Ethical considerations are paramount when conducting research in conflict zones, where participants may be exposed to risks such as political persecution, security threats, or social stigmatization. Therefore, the confidentiality of participants was strictly maintained.

This means all participants were fully informed about the nature of the study, its objectives, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Moreover, confirmation was obtained from all interviewees, ensuring their participation was voluntary and confidential. Interview transcripts and field notes were anonymized to protect the identities of participants and organizations, particularly in cases where critical information could endanger the security of staff members (Mack 2005), and to minimize risks to participants, interviews were conducted remotely via secure video conferencing platforms, further reducing exposure to potential physical threats or political repercussions.

Findings and Analysis

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has elicited a multifaceted response from various charity and civil society organizations, each playing a crucial role in addressing immediate relief needs and long-term recovery. The collective efforts of organizations such as Rebuilding Alliance, the World Food Program (WFP), the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, ActionAid, USAID, Islamic Relief, UNRWA, and OCHA have significantly impacted the Gaza population.

Organizations have provided critical aid, including food, medical supplies, and emergency shelter. The WFP's food distribution programs have been pivotal in alleviating hunger among Gaza's most vulnerable populations. Their efforts have ensured the provision of essential food items to thousands of families, helping to mitigate the severe food insecurity exacerbated by the ongoing conflict (Hassoun et al. 2024). The Women's Programs Center in Rafah has focused on addressing gender-based violence and providing psychological support to survivors. Their initiatives have offered immediate assistance and counseling, addressing the acute needs of women and girls affected by the conflict (Tol et al. 2013).

Beyond immediate relief, organizations have also concentrated on long-term recovery and rebuilding. Rebuilding Alliance's efforts to reconstruct homes and



schools have contributed to the stabilization of affected communities. Their work in rebuilding infrastructure has provided essential services and fostered a sense of normalcy and hope among displaced families (Harrow–Sola 2022). UNRWA’s educational programs have been crucial in ensuring that children continue their education despite the conflict. Their focus on educational continuity helps build resilience among the younger generation, which is essential for the long-term recovery of Gaza’s socio-economic fabric (Parker 2020).

Rebuilding Alliance

The Rebuilding Alliance focused on infrastructure development, particularly on rebuilding homes and community centers that were destroyed in the conflict. They also provided legal assistance to displaced families and implemented solar energy projects to ensure reliable power in communities suffering from chronic electricity shortages. Moreover, they balanced immediate infrastructure rebuilding with long-term projects, such as developing sustainable power solutions and establishing legal frameworks to help families retain their properties. Their goal was to build resilient communities through long-term recovery strategies that address both physical and legal needs.

The Rebuilding Alliance worked with local contractors, engineers, and international organizations to allocate resources effectively. Collaborations included exchanging best practices in sustainable building techniques and combining efforts for legal advocacy to protect housing and land rights in Gaza. The blockade and security concerns significantly delayed their projects. Another challenge was the lack of materials, as restrictions made it difficult to import essential building supplies. Frequent airstrikes also endangered staff and ongoing construction projects, further impeding progress. They overcame resource constraints through donor engagement and by using locally available materials whenever possible. They also relied on community involvement, where residents assisted with rebuilding efforts, reducing reliance on external resources and building local capacity for future reconstruction work.

Security risks were ever-present, particularly during active conflict. They communicated closely with local authorities and community leaders to mitigate these risks and ensure their teams operated in safer areas. They also developed contingency evacuation plans and regularly trained their staff on security protocols. Their adaptive strategies included focusing on sustainable, low-resource rebuilding methods, such as solar energy and sourcing materials locally. They also engaged in remote project management, ensuring that rebuilding continued despite the restricted movement of international staff and supplies.



World Food Program (WFP)

WFP provided food vouchers and direct food aid to vulnerable populations. They also focused on nutrition programs for children and pregnant women. During the crisis, they ensured food security through local agricultural partnerships and supported livelihood programs to promote long-term sustainability. In the short term, they provided immediate food aid to those in need, while their long-term strategy involved building resilient food systems by supporting local farmers and offering training on climate-resilient farming. This approach ensured that local agriculture could withstand future crises, reducing reliance on external food aid.

The WFP collaborated with local NGOs and international organizations to coordinate food distribution and prevent duplication of efforts. Collaboration also extended to logistical partnerships, where they shared resources and infrastructure to streamline aid delivery, particularly during periods of heightened conflict and restricted access. Restricted access to certain areas and border delays were significant challenges, limiting the timely delivery of food. The destruction of infrastructure, such as roads and food storage facilities, further complicated their efforts. The volatile security situation also made it difficult to reach some of the most affected populations.

WFP overcame resource constraints by partnering with local suppliers to procure food and resources locally, reducing dependency on external imports. Additionally, they leveraged innovative technology, such as digital cash transfers, which enabled more efficient aid distribution and minimized logistical costs in times of crisis. Security risks were pervasive, including airstrikes and military operations that hindered their operations. To mitigate these risks, they implemented real-time security monitoring and collaborated with local partners who possess a deeper understanding of the security landscape. They also trained their staff on emergency evacuation protocols.

Women's Programs Center

WPC was an organization that provided educational programs, psychosocial support, and vocational training for women. It also offered trauma recovery services and mental health programs for women and children affected by the ongoing conflict. The organization aimed to empower women by providing them with the necessary tools to rebuild their lives. In the short term, they provided mental health counseling and emergency vocational support, helping women regain economic independence. Long-term recovery efforts included capacity-building programs that equipped women with the skills necessary for future employment, ensuring they could contribute to rebuilding their community after the conflict. They partnered with international NGOs, such as UNRWA and ActionAid, to offer integrated services for women and children. Collaboration included sharing trauma



recovery programs, jointly developing vocational training initiatives, and advocating for women's rights within the broader humanitarian response in Gaza.

The main challenges included limited access to healthcare for women, cultural barriers that prevented some women from accessing services, and security risks that affected both staff and the women they served. Additionally, funding constraints made it difficult to sustain long-term educational and vocational programs.

WPC addressed resource constraints by partnering with local organizations that helped them stretch their funding and resources. They also focused on community-driven solutions, such as involving local women in program design and implementation, which reduced costs and ensured that the programs were tailored to the community's needs. The ongoing conflict and airstrikes posed significant security risks. To mitigate these risks, they collaborated closely with local leaders and communities to ensure the safety of their programs. They implemented psychosocial support for their staff to help them cope with the stress of working in a conflict zone.

They implemented remote counseling and online vocational training for women, ensuring their services continued even during heightened conflict. They also relied on local trainers and staff, who continued to deliver services when international staff were unavailable.

ActionAid

ActionAid actively distributed emergency food supplies, provided essential hygiene kits, and offered mental health support services. It also focused on establishing temporary shelters and educational support for children affected by the crisis. ActionAid provided short-term relief through rapid response teams that addressed immediate needs, including food and medical supplies. For long-term recovery, they implemented community-based programs to rebuild infrastructure and support local livelihoods. This dual approach ensured a balanced response.

ActionAid employed collaborative strategies by participating in humanitarian coordination clusters and conducting joint assessment missions with other organizations. They shared resources, information, and logistical support to ensure an integrated response and avoid duplication of efforts.

Key challenges included severe restrictions on movement and access, intermittent funding shortages, and the volatile security situation. These factors complicated logistics and hindered the organization's ability to consistently reach and support affected communities. To overcome resource constraints, ActionAid prioritized partnerships with local organizations for resource sharing and operational support. They also sought flexible funding arrangements and implemented cost-effective strategies to maximize the impact of available resources.

Security risks included targeted attacks on aid convoys, threats to staff safety, and general instability. ActionAid mitigated these risks by implementing security



protocols, coordinating with local security forces, and adjusting operational plans to ensure the safety of staff and assets. ActionAid adopted adaptive strategies to maintain operational continuity, including leveraging local partnerships for operational flexibility, utilizing innovative technologies for remote monitoring, and adjusting program activities based on real-time situational assessments.

USAID

USAID implemented infrastructure repair projects, focusing on water and sanitation systems, as well as healthcare facility support. It provided emergency medical supplies and helped strengthen local healthcare networks. Additionally, it offered educational support for children by rebuilding schools and supporting remote learning initiatives. In the short term, USAID delivered emergency medical and water supplies. In the long term, it focused on rebuilding critical infrastructure, such as water treatment plants and schools. These efforts ensured that communities recovered and became better equipped for future crises through the development of sustainable infrastructure.

USAID partnered with local governments, UN agencies, and international NGOs to ensure its efforts were aligned and complementary. Since its work primarily focused on rebuilding public infrastructure, it coordinated with other organizations to prevent duplication of efforts and integrated its projects into broader community recovery plans. The key challenges included access restrictions, particularly in areas heavily affected by the conflict. USAID also faced bureaucratic delays in obtaining permits to work in specific regions and logistical challenges related to moving supplies through blockaded areas. Security risks further limit its ability to deploy staff efficiently.

To overcome resource constraints, USAID leveraged its extensive network of local contractors and partners, which allowed it to source materials and services locally. It also relied on public-private partnerships to maximize funding efficiency and shared resources with other NGOs and governmental bodies, enabling it to operate effectively despite restrictions.

Security risks, including airstrikes and general conflict-related violence, necessitated proactive measures to mitigate risk. USAID ensured its staff received regular security training and used satellite monitoring to track the evolving security situation. Additionally, it coordinated closely with local leaders to identify the safest areas for project implementation.

USAID adapted by implementing remote management strategies for infrastructure projects, allowing local contractors to continue operations even when international staff were unable to enter Gaza. It also invested in mobile water purification systems and temporary healthcare units to provide immediate relief in areas where permanent facilities had been destroyed or severely damaged.



Islamic Relief

Islamic Relief focused on providing emergency food aid, shelter, and healthcare services. It also ran orphaned sponsorship programs and provided cash assistance to highly needy families. Additionally, it established medical camps in response to healthcare shortages, offering free medical care to thousands of residents.

In the short term, Islamic Relief focused on delivering immediate food, shelter, and medical assistance to vulnerable populations. For long-term recovery, it rehabilitated healthcare facilities and supported economic development programs, including providing micro-loans to small businesses and offering vocational training programs. It collaborated with local charities and international organizations, such as UNRWA and OCHA. It coordinated with other humanitarian actors to ensure complementary services were provided, such as integrating its food aid programs with healthcare services offered by other organizations, which minimized service gaps and maximized resource use.

The main challenges included funding shortages and access restrictions. Additionally, supply chain disruptions due to the blockade made it difficult to bring essential supplies, such as medicine and food, into the region. The organization also faced staff safety risks, especially during active conflict, which limited its ability to deliver aid effectively. Moreover, the key security risks included airstrikes, military incursions, and restricted movement due to curfews. Islamic Relief implemented real-time security monitoring to mitigate these risks and provided staff training on handling crises. It also established safe zones in collaboration with local authorities to protect staff and beneficiaries. The organization developed mobile health clinics and temporary shelters that could be set up quickly in areas affected by the conflict. Additionally, it used remote distribution systems for food and cash assistance, leveraging local volunteers to reach areas where staff could not safely operate, ensuring aid reached those in need even during extreme restrictions.

UNRWA

UNRWA continued to provide education, healthcare, and emergency relief services for Palestinian refugees in Gaza. During the current crisis, the organization focused on emergency shelter, food distribution, and medical aid through its extensive network, which had been converted into temporary shelters for displaced families.

In the short term, UNRWA provided emergency food and shelter to displaced populations. Long-term recovery efforts included rebuilding educational infrastructure, focusing on teacher training, and providing vocational programs for young people to ensure they had the skills necessary to rebuild Gaza's economy. UNRWA collaborated closely with other UN agencies, including OCHA and WFP, as well as local NGOs, to coordinate relief and recovery efforts. Its collaborative strategies



included joint planning on food distribution, healthcare provision, and education services, ensuring that the population's diverse needs were met comprehensively.

The main challenges UNRWA faced were access restrictions, particularly for humanitarian staff, and ongoing security concerns. The damage to infrastructure, including schools and healthcare facilities, also hindered its ability to deliver aid effectively. Additionally, funding shortfalls continued to be a significant barrier to scaling up operations.

UNRWA overcame resource constraints by leveraging its extensive network of local staff who lived and worked in the refugee camps. This enabled the continuation of operations even when international staff were restricted from travel. The agency also relied on multi-donor funding mechanisms, which allowed it to pool resources and share operational costs with other humanitarian actors. Security risks included the bombing of facilities, such as schools and clinics, where displaced people sought shelter. To mitigate these risks, UNRWA worked closely with local communities to establish safe zones and continually updated its evacuation plans. It also collaborated with local authorities to ensure safe passage for staff and aid convoys.

UNRWA implemented remote learning programs for students unable to attend school due to the conflict. Additionally, it utilized mobile medical units to deliver healthcare in areas inaccessible to regular clinics. Focusing on community-based operations continued services, even under the most challenging circumstances.

Collaborative vs. Individual Efforts

The coordination among international and local organizations has been a defining feature of the humanitarian response in Gaza. Collaborative efforts, particularly those facilitated by OCHA, have aimed to streamline aid distribution and avoid duplication of services. OCHA's role in coordinating relief activities has enhanced aid effectiveness by ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and that service gaps are addressed (Groten 2021).

For instance, joint initiatives between UN agencies and local NGOs have provided more comprehensive responses to health and education needs. For example, the collaboration between Islamic Relief and ActionAid has leveraged their combined strengths in providing medical care and educational support, resulting in a more holistic approach to crisis management (Zaqout et al. 2024). While collaborative efforts have been beneficial, individual organizational activities have also made significant contributions. Organizations such as USAID and the WFP have implemented specific programs tailored to their respective areas of expertise. USAID's infrastructure projects and the WFP's targeted food assistance have effectively addressed particular needs, highlighting the strengths of specialized approaches (Gross–Feldman 2015). However, individual efforts have sometimes faced challenges related to coordination and integration with broader relief efforts. Differences in organizational priorities and operational methods have occasionally led to inefficiencies and gaps in service delivery.

Key Themes

One recurring theme is the challenge of coordination among multiple actors. Despite OCHA's efforts to facilitate collaboration, organizations often encounter difficulties synchronizing their activities. This can result in overlaps in some areas while leaving others underserved. The complexity of the operational environment in Gaza, characterized by frequent political and logistical obstacles, exacerbates these challenges (Qarmout–Bland 2012).

Another significant theme is the interplay between international and local organizations. International organizations, such as UNRWA and the WFP, bring substantial resources and global expertise but may face limitations in local knowledge and community engagement. In contrast, local organizations, such as the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, possess valuable insights into community needs and cultural contexts but may struggle with limited resources and capacity (Suraningsih et al. 2024). The sustainability of relief efforts is a crucial theme, as evidenced by the data. While immediate aid is essential, there is a continuing need to focus on long-term recovery and building resilience. Sustainable programs that address both the immediate needs and the underlying issues contributing to the crisis are vital for ensuring a lasting impact. Initiatives that integrate community participation and local capacity-building tend to have more enduring benefits (Buxton 2008).

Discussion

The humanitarian response in Gaza, as implemented by organizations such as the Rebuilding Alliance, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, ActionAid, USAID, Islamic Relief, UNRWA, and OCHA, has had a significant impact on alleviating the acute needs of the population. This evaluation assesses the short-term relief efforts and the long-term development strategies employed by these organizations.

Organizations have demonstrated significant success in addressing immediate needs. The WFP's food distribution programs have effectively mitigated hunger among Gaza's vulnerable populations, with reports indicating a reduction in food insecurity among recipients (Zaqout et al. 2024). Similarly, the Women's Programs Center in Rafah has provided essential support for survivors of gender-based violence, offering psychological and emergency assistance that has been crucial for immediate recovery (Tol et al. 2013).

In the longer term, organizations such as Rebuilding Alliance and UNRWA have made significant strides in reconstruction and education. Rebuilding Alliance's efforts to restore homes and schools has been pivotal in rebuilding Gaza's infrastructure, contributing to community stabilization (Harrow–Sola 2022). UNRWA's educational programs have ensured continuity in education, fostering resilience among children and providing a foundation for future socio-economic recovery (Parker 2020).



Despite these successes, ongoing challenges persist, particularly regarding sustainability and the scale of recovery, as well as the scope of the need.

Unlike many other crisis settings, Gaza's ongoing conflict, coupled with stringent restrictions on movement and resources, creates a highly complex environment for humanitarian efforts. The persistent blockade and frequent hostilities exacerbate the challenges faced by aid organizations, limiting their operational capacities and impacting the effectiveness of their interventions (Groten 2021). This situation contrasts with other crises, such as those in Haiti or Syria, where challenges also exist, and the nature of the conflict or geographical constraints differ.

The operational environment in Gaza, characterized by political and logistical challenges, presents unique difficulties compared to other regions. For instance, in post-earthquake Haiti, while logistical challenges were significant, the lack of conflict allowed for relatively more straightforward access to affected areas (Chen et al. 2013). In Gaza, the dual challenge of conflict and blockade necessitates a more nuanced approach, striking a balance between immediate aid and sustained engagement in a volatile environment (Cordery et al. 2023).

The role of local organizations in Gaza, such as the Women's Programs Center in Rafah, highlights the critical importance of local knowledge and engagement in humanitarian responses. Local organizations often have a deeper understanding of the community's needs and cultural context, which can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of interventions. This scenario differs from situations where international organizations may dominate the response due to their scale and resources, as observed in the aftermath of natural disasters such as the 2011 Japan earthquake (Nassar et al. 2025).

Recommendations for Improvement

Based on the findings from the analysis of the activities of charity and civil society organizations in Gaza, several recommendations can be made to improve humanitarian strategies and policies for future crises. Improved coordination among international and local organizations is essential. At the same time, collaborative efforts have been beneficial; enhancing mechanisms for real-time information sharing and joint planning can address gaps and reduce duplication. As exemplified by OCHA's role, establishing more robust frameworks for inter-agency collaboration should be prioritized to streamline operations and enhance the overall effectiveness of aid (Qarmout-B-land 2012).

Also, it is crucial to invest in the capacity building of local organizations. Local NGOs and community-based organizations often have unique insights into the needs and dynamics of affected populations. Providing training and resources to these organizations can amplify their impact and ensure that interventions are better tailored to local contexts (Suraningsih et al. 2024). This approach should be complemented by ensuring that international organizations support rather than



supplant local efforts. On the other hand, Humanitarian strategies should be adaptable to the political and logistical constraints inherent in conflict zones. Developing flexible operational models that can swiftly adjust to changing conditions and incorporating mechanisms for conflict-sensitive programming is necessary. Strategies should also include advocacy for greater humanitarian access and efforts to negotiate temporary relief corridors to reach the most affected areas (Buxton 2008).

Integrating long-term recovery and development goals into immediate relief efforts should be a priority. Ensuring that relief activities are part of a broader strategy for sustainable development can enhance the long-term impact of humanitarian interventions. Programming that fosters resilience and promotes economic recovery, such as vocational training and small-scale economic initiatives, should be integrated into the response efforts (Kaidarova–Korganbekova 2024).

Conclusion

This research reveals several critical insights. The comprehensive analysis reveals that, while these organizations have made notable contributions to both immediate relief and long-term recovery, the scale of the crisis continues to pose significant challenges.

The organizations studied—Rebuilding Alliance, the World Food Program (WFP), the Women’s Programs Center in Rafah, ActionAid, USAID, Islamic Relief, UNRWA, and OCHA—have collectively played a crucial role in alleviating immediate suffering and facilitating recovery efforts. Their activities have addressed essential needs such as food security, healthcare, and education, contributing to some stabilization of the region (Zaqout et al. 2024). However, despite these efforts, the ongoing conflict and blockade severely constrain the extent and effectiveness of their interventions, underscoring the persistent challenges in achieving comprehensive relief and development (Cordery et al. 2023).

The analysis highlights the effectiveness of collaborative efforts among organizations compared to individual activities. Collaborative initiatives have demonstrated higher efficiency and impact by pooling resources and expertise. For example, joint programs involving multiple organizations have addressed complex needs more effectively than isolated efforts (Qarmout–B-land 2012). Conversely, organizations operating independently often face limitations due to logistical constraints and lack of coordination (Suraningsih et al. 2024).

Several recurring themes emerge from the data, including the challenges of operating under restrictive conditions, the crucial role of local versus international organizations, and the need for sustainable relief efforts. Coordination difficulties and political barriers impede effective humanitarian response (Nassar et al. 2025). The study also emphasizes the importance of local organizations, which possess unique insights into the needs of the affected population and contribute significantly to the overall effectiveness of the response (Harrow–Sola 2022).

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BREAKING THE CHAINS OF FEAR: CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE IN DEFYING AUTOCRACY AND SHAPING BANGLADESH'S 2024 JULY REVOLUTION*

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Introduction

Civil society has long been a driving force behind political transitions, often critical in resisting autocratic regimes and advocating for democratic reform (Diamond 1994). The 2024 July Revolution in Bangladesh epitomizes this dynamic, showcasing how CSOs can mobilize grassroots movements and civil resistance to challenge oppressive rule. This revolution, fuelled by widespread activism, marked a pivotal moment in Bangladesh's struggle against autocracy, demonstrating the power of collective action even under severe repression. Similar autocratization trends have been observed globally, from Bolivia to Turkey, where ruling parties consolidate power by undermining democratic institutions and silencing dissent (Riaz 2023).

The political landscape in Bangladesh before the revolution was dominated by an entrenched ruling party that suppressed opposition, curtailed freedoms, and imposed widespread censorship. The political environment is highly manipulated by the hostility between secularism and religious influence, which notably affects CSOs' operations in Bangladesh. The ethnic composition of the population, with its diverse communities, also plays a vital role in forming civil society's involvement, often muddling enlistment across different social groups. Additionally, religious and ethnic identities have sometimes been co-opted by political parties to acquire influence over CSOs, further confusing their efforts. This governance created growing social and economic inequalities, heightening public discontent. The often-contentious liaison between political parties and CSOs, where CSOs are repeatedly seen as intimidation to the regime's legitimacy, worsens this environment, complicating their work even further.



Civil society, with its history of championing democratic values, emerged as a central actor in opposing this authoritarian regime, culminating in the July Revolution—a movement defined by grassroots activism and solidarity across diverse social groups. Globally, civil society is recognized as a cornerstone of democratic movements, often operating independently of the state to influence policy and advocate for social justice (Edwards 2014). Autocracy, in contrast, concentrates power in the hands of a few, suppressing political freedoms and dismantling democratic institutions (Linz 2000; Svobik 2012). Political revolutions, such as the July Revolution, occur when popular movements seek to dismantle oppressive regimes, often triggered by government repression, restricted media freedoms, and rising inequality (Skocpol 1979; Abbink–Pezzini 2005).

Leading up to 2024, Bangladesh endured prolonged authoritarian rule marked by censorship, suppression of dissent, and systemic inequality. The transformation gained motion through the 'anti-discrimination student movement' against the government job quota system, also known as the 'Quota Reform Movement,' which vibrated across various sectors of society. The government's crackdowns on the current student movement and labor organizations exemplified its authoritarian nature, fuelling widespread dissatisfaction (Riaz 2016). Against this backdrop, civil society became a unifying force, galvanizing resistance through strategic mobilization and grassroots activism (Lewis 2011). The revolution gained momentum through student-led anti-discrimination protests, resonating across various societal sectors. These protests became the nucleus of a broader democracy movement, rallying civil society organizations to challenge the government's authoritarian policies. Unlike previous uprisings, the July Revolution was notable for its strategic organization, inclusive coalitions, and innovative use of digital platforms. Civil society leveraged these tools to bypass censorship, amplify its message, and connect diverse social groups in a unified front against oppression.

The strategic approach of CSOs during the revolution underscores their pivotal role in fostering solidarity and resistance. Building networks that coupled disparate social groups created an organized movement capable of challenging state power. Digital platforms played a transformative role, allowing activists to organize and communicate despite state efforts to silence dissent. CSOs leveraged digital activism, transparency initiatives, and grassroots organizing to sustain the movement (Sakib 2020; Schnell 2023). These efforts made the July Revolution a landmark event in Bangladesh's political history and an important case study for understanding civil society's potential to drive democratic transitions under repressive regimes (Howard 2010).

This current study utilizes a qualitative approach combining focus group discussion, expert interviews, and secondary data analysis to explore and document the historical significance of civil society's role in the July Revolution and its contributions to broader discussions on democratic transitions. The findings highlight how grassroots movements supported by CSOs can act as catalysts for political change, even in repressive contexts (Keane 2020). The revolution illustrates the resilience



of civil society, which, despite facing severe repression, succeeded in undermining the moral authority of an autocratic regime. By analyzing the successes and challenges these organizations face, this study underscores the need for continued support for civil society in repressive environments. It advocates for creating inclusive platforms where civil society, political parties, and governmental institutions can collaborate to prevent authoritarian backsliding and foster sustained democratic progress (Huntington 1991).

This study explores two key questions: How did civil society influence the July Revolution? and what role did civil society play in resisting autocratic rule in Bangladesh through digital platforms? These questions form the backbone of the study, guiding the investigation into how CSOs navigated fear, repression, and censorship to mobilize resistance and advance democratic change. The study's primary objective was to assess CSOs' contributions to the anti-discrimination student protests that united diverse groups, transcended party affiliations, and ultimately challenged an authoritarian regime. While this approach has been the focus of much worldwide civil society discourse, the challenges CSOs face in Bangladesh—such as political overthrow, ethnic and religious tensions, and limited access to resources—are crucial to understanding the dynamics of the July Revolution. These protests became a focal point of public discontent and a direct challenge to autocratic legitimacy. To achieve this, the research pursues three specific aims given below.

- 1) Analyse how CSOs mobilized public support and spearheaded resistance against autocratic rule.
- 2) Examine CSOs' strategies to counter fear, repression, and censorship.
- 3) Evaluate the broader impact of civil society on political transitions, democratic movements, and public empowerment during the revolution.

The study seeks to illuminate how CSOs facilitated political change in a repressive environment by addressing these objectives.

Literature Review

Civil society organizations (CSOs) role in political transitions has been widely debated, particularly in autocratic or semi-autocratic contexts. As intermediaries between the state and the public, CSOs are often portrayed as catalysts for socio-political transformation. This review explores key civil society theories, examines global case studies, and identifies gaps addressed in this study, focusing on Bangladesh's 2024 July Revolution.

Civil society's impact on democracy has long been studied. Tocqueville highlights how civic associations foster social cohesion and enable collective action, strengthening democratic values (Tocqueville 2002). Similarly, Putnam's (1993) social capital theory emphasizes civic networks' role in promoting trust, cooperation, and good governance. His analysis of Italy demonstrated that regions with robust civil networks had better governance outcomes.



In *Bowling Alone* Putnam (2000) linked declining civic engagement to weakened social cohesion and diminished collective action. The concept of 'political opportunity structures,' developed initially by Eisinger (1973) and later expanded by McAdam (1999) and Tarrow (2011), highlights how CSOs use political openings to organize and challenge authoritarianism, while Tilly (2004) underscores their role in collective action. Bermeo (1997) argues that CSOs erode authoritarian rule through sustained activism and protests, mediating between the state and the public. These frameworks are critical to understanding CSOs' role in promoting democratic transitions.

CSOs have played decisive roles in global political transitions, which Huntington explained in his article on Democracy's Third Wave started in the late twentieth century (Huntington 1991). During the third wave of democracy, the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, youth groups and digital activists coordinated protests against Hosni Mubarak's oppressive regime, leveraging social media to amplify dissent (Tufekci 2017). Though Egypt's democratic transition faltered, the movement showcased CSOs' ability to challenge authoritarian structures. Other examples include Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan Revolution in 2014 (Diuk 2014). Youths-led CSOs, including students, NGOs, and opposition parties, planned mass protests against electoral fraud, advocating for fair elections and reforms (Wilson 2005; Kuzio 2006). Coalition-building and non-violent resistance were key to their success. In addition, the second wave of democratic transitions in Central and Eastern Europe, known as color revolutions, has notably contributed to the collapse of the post-communist authoritarian regimes in the face of opposition CSO mobilization (Way 2008). Similarly, in Hungary, internal dynamics made by CSOs fuelled the series of Round Table Talks, and debates between outgoing and incoming political elites, and external support materialized the peaceful and non-violent transition to democracy from authoritarian soviet influence in 1990, which enabled Hungary to form an independent democratic third republic (Dayioğlu 2024). However, this process initially started through the profound Hungarian Revolution in 1956, which was the first successful step in the democratic transition (Furlow et al. 1996; Matthews 2007).

In Latin America, CSOs helped dismantle dictatorships in Chile and Argentina during the late 20th century. Grassroots movements in Chile, particularly the student protests of 2006 and 2011, demanded educational reforms and political accountability, pressuring governments toward democracy (Donoso 2016). Argentina's mass mobilizations similarly propelled the country from authoritarianism to democratic governance (Oxhorn 1994). However, not all CSO actions foster democracy. Some inadvertently strengthen authoritarian regimes through inaction or factionalism (Hellmeier–Bernhard 2023). In Bangladesh, CSOs have sometimes aligned with political factions, undermining their independence (Tasnim 2017). Repression forced many activists into exile, paralyzing domestic civil society and limiting its effectiveness, though the movements for democracy had not ended.



In the recent era, digital platforms have transformed civic engagement, particularly for exiled Bangladeshi dissidents. Social media enables activists to maintain connections with their homeland, amplify voices internationally, and mobilize against authoritarianism (Kabir 2021; Torres–Beltran 2023). Exiled activists advocate for foreign intervention, reflecting their shifting networks and international engagements (Esberg–Siedhoff 2022). These platforms helped to disseminate personal and practical narratives and foster civic participation by capturing a broader audience (Murru 2017), gaining external support, and fostering internal dynamics to uphold the spirit of revolution.

The July 2024 up-ringing initially called an ‘anti-discrimination student movement’ sometimes it was called the ‘Quota Reform Movement,’ initiated by students, marked a turning point in Bangladesh’s political landscape—these protests targeted reforming government job quotas. However, the government’s attitude, rhetoric, and excessive force on the protesters ignited the united diverse social groups and galvanized public support to turn the movement into a revolution. People from all social classes, political parties, groups, CSOs and their all-out initiatives, digital activists, and grassroots organizations become actively engaged to sustain the revolution with a one-point demand to oust the autocrat Prime Minister (Schnell 2023; Sakib 2020). The efforts from all sides including CSOs highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability in mobilizing anti-corruption campaigns against the autocratic government (Landell–Mills 1999). In this case, social media has become a powerful tool, enabling CSOs to bypass state censorship and reach broader audiences (Roy 2019). However, challenges like clientelism and repression complicated these efforts, requiring nuanced strategies for effective mobilization.

Despite extensive CSOs’ roles in political changes, literature and research on Bangladesh’s civil society is limited. The literature highlights the crucial role of CSOs in assembling civic resistance yet also warns of co-optation risks and varying degrees of success in achieving lasting democratic transitions (Bermeo 1997; Tufekci 2017). While past movements like the 1990 pro-democracy protests have been studied (Uddin 2006; Katsiaficas 2011), there is little analysis of how modern CSOs confront autocratic governance. This gap is evident in the context of digital activism, youth-led movements, and student protests, all central to the 2024 July Revolution. Unlike earlier movements, the Revolution showcased a high level of coordination among diverse actors and strategic digital platform use.

While existing literature has focused on the international role of CSOs in challenging autocratic regimes, it is equally central to examine the local socio-political context within which these organizations function. Bangladesh’s political dynamics, characterized by a fusion of religious, ethnic, and political complexities, influence how CSOs can operate, mobilize, and advocate for change. The internal political conflicts, particularly between secular and religious factions, often complicate the ability of CSOs to present a unified front against authoritarian rule.

This research examines how CSOs supported the July Revolution and navigated repression, contributing to understanding political change in South Asia.



Building on frameworks from Tocqueville, Putnam, Tarrow, and others, it situates the Revolution within global civil society dynamics. The study underscores CSOs' transformative potential in repressive regimes, offering lessons for democratic transitions worldwide. Addressing gaps in existing literature highlights how modern CSOs can adapt to evolving political landscapes and act as catalysts for democratic transition and ousted autocrats.

Comparative Perspectives

The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bangladesh's July 2024 Revolution mirrors similar movements in other countries, offering compelling comparative insights. This study adopts a comparative lens, examining how CSO-led mobilizations in Ukraine, Myanmar, and Hong Kong share similarities with Bangladesh's revolution, particularly in digital activism and coalition-building. After years of stagnation under Hasina's autocratic regime, Bangladeshi CSOs were revitalized by the digital mobilization of diverse societal groups. This shift, catalyzed by anti-discrimination protests and the job quota reform movement, underscores how digital platforms can reignite civic action in repressive contexts.

Bangladesh's movement has striking parallels with Myanmar's anti-coup protests of 2021. During Myanmar's Burmese Spring Revolution, CSOs resisted military rule and organized nationwide demonstrations characterized by marches, chants, and potent symbolism (Thorner 2024). However, repression took a heavy toll, with leaders arrested, exiled, or driven underground. Like Bangladesh, Myanmar's protests were marked by mass arrests, internet shutdowns, and violent crackdowns, yet the involvement of students, youth, and professionals provided critical momentum for nonviolent resistance (Kyaw 2024).

Similarly, the July 2024 Revolution in Bangladesh shares key characteristics with Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests of 2019–2020. Hong Kong's CSOs were pivotal in mobilizing mass demonstrations, exemplified by the anti-extradition protests led by the Civil Human Rights Front. Various professional groups, including medical staff, lawyers, and airline workers, independently organized rallies to amplify their demands (CEC China 2022). As in Bangladesh, social media became an essential tool for organizing protests and engaging international allies, demonstrating the power of digital connectivity in modern movements.

Sudan's civil uprising of 2018–2019 offers another pertinent comparison. The movement that ousted Omar al-Bashir saw grassroots organizations and professional associations, particularly those led by doctors and lawyers, play a transformative role. Decades of military rule had weakened Sudanese CSOs, but their resurgence during the protests proved pivotal. The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) coordinated national efforts, while local resistance committees ensured widespread participation. These grassroots strategies fostered resilience and a shared sense of purpose among protesters, mirroring the decentralized but cohesive nature of Bangladesh's 2024 uprising (Zunes 2021).



The Arab Spring of 2011 also serves as a historical touchstone. For example, civil society groups in Egypt leveraged social media to bypass state-controlled media and coordinate massive protests against Hosni Mubarak’s regime (Tufekci 2017). This blueprint of digital mobilization informed CSOs worldwide, including those in Bangladesh, as they utilized similar strategies to galvanize public action and circumvent government repression.

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004–2005) further highlights the strategic role of civil society in challenging authoritarianism. Ukrainian CSOs were central to organizing protests against electoral fraud, effectively combining grassroots mobilization with international lobbying to sustain their efforts (Kuzio 2006). They also fostered a collective identity among diverse groups, a dynamic echoed in Bangladesh, where CSOs challenged the legitimacy of the 12th National Election on January 7, 2024. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) reported widespread electoral violations, including excessive campaign expenditures averaging Tk 1.5 crore per candidate (TBS 2024). This prompted prominent CSOs to spearhead protests demanding fair elections, underscoring the parallels between the two movements.

These comparative perspectives reveal a recurring theme: CSOs, even under repressive regimes, can galvanize public dissent through innovative strategies, grassroots organization, and digital mobilization. Whether in Myanmar, Hong Kong, Sudan, Egypt, or Ukraine, civil society has consistently been a cornerstone of resistance, and Bangladesh’s July 2024 Revolution exemplifies this enduring legacy.

The following table presents the comparative outlines of different revolutions throughout the world:

Protest/ Revolution	Country	Opposing or Ousting Ruler	Key Issues	Role of CSOs
Myanmar Spring Revolution	Myanmar	Myanmar Army	Long-standing military rule, ethnic conflicts, economic inequality, lack of political freedom, and human rights abuses.	Coordinated nationwide protests, launched a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) involving civil servants and healthcare workers, supported armed resistance by ethnic groups, and aided the formation of People’s Defence Forces (PDFs).
Hong Kong’s Pro-Democracy Protests	Hong Kong	Hong Kong Government (under Chinese influence)	Erosion of autonomy, lack of democratic reforms, controversial extradition bill, police brutality, and concerns over Chinese influence.	Organized mass protests, led civil disobedience campaigns, occupied public spaces, initiated general strikes, and conducted international advocacy efforts.



Protest/ Revolution	Country	Opposing or Ousting Ruler	Key Issues	Role of CSOs
Sudan's Civil Uprising	Sudan	Omar al-Bashir's regime, later the Transitional Military Council (TMC)	Authoritarianism, economic hardship, corruption, ethnic tensions, and human rights abuses.	Facilitated mass protests, spearheaded civil disobedience and general strikes, formed resistance committees, and leveraged international advocacy.
Arab Spring (Anti-government Protests and uprising)	Multiple Countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen)	Authoritarian regimes	Authoritarianism, economic hardship, corruption, lack of political freedom, human rights abuses, and social inequality.	Mobilized mass protests, utilized social media for coordination, led uprisings, and engaged in varying levels of CSO and political movement involvement.
Egypt's 2011 Revolution	Egypt	Hosni Mubarak's regime	Authoritarianism, economic hardship, corruption, lack of political freedom, and police brutality.	Organized mass protests (e.g., Tahrir Square), leveraged social media for mobilization, conducted general strikes and engaged in widespread civil disobedience.
Ukraine's Orange Revolution	Ukraine	Viktor Yanukovich's regime (alleged electoral fraud)	Electoral fraud, Russian influence, political corruption, and lack of democratic reforms.	Orchestrated mass protests, promoted civil disobedience, boycotted elections, and garnered international pressure and observation.

This above comparison underscores how CSOs in various autocratic settings—such as Myanmar, Sudan, and Egypt—employ similar tactics but face different contextual challenges. In Bangladesh, the intersection of secularism and religious identity introduces a unique complexity, as political and religious factions are often intertwined with CSOs’ work. The religious-secular divide, specifically, has shaped the contours of civil society activism, sometimes acting as a barrier for CSOs that are perceived to challenge the religious norms prevalent in society.

The 2024 July Revolution offers a powerful example of how civil society can erode authoritarian rule through collective action, strategic mobilization, and innovative use of technology and social media. Its lessons extend beyond Bangladesh, offering a framework for understanding how civil society can foster democratic transitions in repressive contexts worldwide. By building solidarity networks, challenging oppressive power structures, and advocating for inclusive governance, civil society remains an essential force in the global fight for democracy and human rights.



Methods

This research explores how CSOs assisted the July Revolution and routed suppression, influencing the understanding of political change in South Asia. The study employs a qualitative mixed-method approach, integrating focus group discussions (FGDs), expert interviews (EIs), and secondary data analysis to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which civil society contributed to political change.

Study Design

The study utilizes three core qualitative methods, such as *Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)*, where FGDs provide a platform to collect diverse perspectives from CSO leaders, grassroots activists, and individuals directly involved in the 2024 July Revolution. These discussions highlighted their experiences, strategies, and challenges in resisting autocratic repression. *Expert Interviews (EIs)*, which enable Semi-structured interviews with key figures from CSOs, protest leaders, political analysts, and journalists, were conducted to gain in-depth insights into strategic decision-making, the use of digital platforms, and the navigation of state censorship and repression. *Secondary Data Analysis*, where a systematic analysis of documents, media reports, and publications from CSOs was undertaken to construct a detailed timeline of events and assess civil society's influence on the political transition. This included analyzing press releases, protest flyers, social media content, and academic literature. Each method complemented the others, enabling triangulation and cross-validation of data to ensure reliability and depth (Patton 2002; Yin 2017).

Sampling and Data Collection

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Three FGDs were conducted, each comprising 12 directly engaged participants in the July Revolution. Participants included individuals arrested, injured, or oppressed during the movement. These FGDs provided a collective narrative of civil society's grassroots efforts, highlighting the personal risks and challenges faced during the protests.

Expert Interviews (EIs): Purposive sampling was employed to select five experts, including leaders of prominent CSOs, protest organizers, and seasoned political analysts. This non-probabilistic sampling method ensured that participants had firsthand knowledge and expertise about the revolution. Semi-structured interviews allowed for exploring their strategies, motivations, and experiences, offering detailed insights into civil society's leadership and adaptive strategies under a repressive regime (Patton 2002).



Secondary Data Analysis: A systematic approach was applied to collect and analyze secondary data from 2013 to 2024, incorporating diverse sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of Bangladesh's political landscape. The data sources included media reports from domestic and international news outlets, documenting key events, public reactions, and government responses. Civil society publications such as press releases, policy briefs, and protest materials were examined to capture advocacy efforts and narratives. Social media content, particularly posts from activists and civil society organizations (CSOs), was analyzed to understand digital mobilization strategies. Additionally, academic studies and government documents provided scholarly insights and official perspectives on political developments (Corti et al. 2019).

The study specifically considered journal articles, crime reports, human rights reports, electronic and print media reports, and police statistics that detailed various aspects of political affairs, conflicts, student movements, state oppression, and human rights violations. Particular attention was given to reports on state-sponsored crimes, attacks on journalists, Islamic scholars, minority communities, CSO members, teachers, human rights activists, NGO workers, social media influencers, and political dissidents. The 2013–2024 period was chosen as it represents Bangladesh's full transition into an authoritarian regime, although signs of this shift have been evident since 2009.

Analytical Framework

The study employed content and thematic analysis to systematically interpret data from secondary sources, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Expert Interviews (EIs). Content analysis was used to categorize and interpret data, identifying recurring themes and patterns to uncover underlying meanings. This approach ensured a structured examination of media reports, policy documents, social media content, and government publications.

Thematic analysis was applied to explore qualitative insights from FGDs and EIs, focusing on key themes such as strategies for mobilization and public engagement, resistance to repression and censorship, digital activism, and the broader influence of civil society on political transitions. The study provided a nuanced understanding of political resistance and advocacy efforts by examining how activists and organizations navigated challenges.

The analysis followed an iterative process, where insights from one method refined and complemented the interpretation of others. Integrating multiple data sources ensured a comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the evolving political landscape (Braun–Clarke 2006).



Results

This study reveals the critical role civil society organizations (CSOs) played in the 2024 July Revolution in Bangladesh. Based on FGDs, expert interviews (EIs), and analyses of secondary sources, the study identifies how CSOs' strategies, challenges, and achievements in catalyzing and sustaining the revolution, which led to significant political change, are discussed below.

Rising Tensions and Development of the Movement

1. Initiation of the Movement (January–June 2024)

Political instability has plagued Bangladesh since colonial rule (1757–1947) and the Pakistan era (1947–1971), deeply affecting society. Economic crises, poverty, unemployment, and corruption fuel ongoing unrest (Peiris 1998). Conflicts stem from ideological clashes, weak institutions, power struggles, labor disputes, and corruption, which criminalize politics and obstruct good governance (Ahmed 2004; Bateson 2012; Daly 2002; Priyangika 2000; Wight 1978).

Under British rule, Bengalis in East Bengal faced discrimination as a "non-martial" race, while Pakistan's oligarchic state denied them fundamental rights (Choudhury 1972). The struggle for equality led to the 1971 Liberation War, but these ideals remain unfulfilled (CPD 2011; Khan 2014; Turk 2023). However, the country was on the democratic track until 2006, starting from 1991, and then it became vulnerable again. From 2007–2008, Bangladesh was ruled by a military-backed caretaker government and entered a non-democratic process. This caretaker government arranged a national election at the end of 2008 and handed over the power to the newly elected government in 2009. But, unfortunately, since 2009, Bangladesh has faced increasing autocracy, with non-participatory elections (2014, 2018, 2024) undermining public trust (Paris 2022). Political violence peaked in 2013, causing 750 deaths and 30,000 injuries in 3,800 incidents (Suykens–Islam 2015). The 2018 election saw killings, disappearances, and mass arrests, worsening human rights abuses (Aljazeera 2018; Safi et al. 2018; Schlein 2019; Vaughn 2020).

Over 13 years, 2,644 people died from state-sponsored abuses, and millions faced false charges (Human Rights Watch 2023a; Odhikar 2022a, 2022b, 2023; Rahman 2023; The Daily Star 2023). Rising tensions before the 2024 election (ACLED 2023) have fuelled political intolerance, urban unrest, corruption, favoritism, restricted freedoms, and abuse of power (Human Rights Watch 2023a, 2023b). A significant number of human rights activists, religious leaders, minority people, journalists, political leaders, teachers, students, and members of CSOs were thrown in prison for expressing their thoughts, that against government oppression. Most importantly, in the last 15 years, people of Bangladesh from all classes and professions, including all media and journalists, lost their freedom; the country was just seized by a few people under the authoritarian rule of the Prime Minister.



Therefore, CSOs and all other stakeholders waited for a common event or platform to revolt and restore the democracy and freedom of the country (*EIs*). Finally, the abuse of the government job quota system severely affected meritorious job seekers, and fuelled student agitation and a movement for quota reform. Students from all levels, public and private universities, and schools and colleges, became actively involved with this movement. CSOs, including other social groups and political parties, utilized the opportunity and became instrumental in supporting and accelerating the movement, shaping key moments, and responding to events in different phases (*EIs*). In early 2024, CSOs like Odhikar and Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) warned of eroding civil liberties, including threats to press freedom and judicial independence (FGD-2). Advocacy intensified in March, targeting international stakeholders. Human Rights Watch amplified CSOs' concerns, calling for scrutiny of Bangladesh's democratic practices. Grassroots efforts began to grow. Small-scale protests against political corruption, discrimination, and speech restrictions laid the groundwork for more significant movements. Advocacy campaigns and CSO-backed student groups slowly raised public awareness (FGD-3). However, the government did not consider student demand and movement as a serious issue because they learned that they could manage everything by using excessive force, threats, filing false cases, and mass arrests when necessary.

Consequently, by May, public engagement surged as CSOs broadened their coalition to include labor unions and university students. Mass protests became common, fuelled by digital mobilization through online platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, which bypassed state-controlled media. This surge was driven by expanding state repression, particularly the restoration of a debated job quota for freedom fighters' descendants, political rhetoric, and attacks on students in different places, which sparked national outrage (The Hindu Bureau 2024).

2. Heightened Repression and Counter-Strategies (July 1–25 2024)

In early July, student-led blockades disrupted transportation networks. On July 15, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sparked outrage by likening protesters to 1971 war collaborators, escalating tensions. Violent clashes followed, with six deaths on July 16 and over 300 injuries across campuses. Amid heightened repression, the government shut down schools, universities, and internet access while imposing censorship. Students organized a nationwide "shutdown," and CSOs shifted to encrypted communication tools like Signal and VPNs to evade surveillance. International attention grew as organizations like Amnesty International and the United Nations condemned state violence. From July 1 to July 25, over 2,000 protesters were arrested, and police brutality intensified, with dozens killed in clashes (FGD-2). Despite repression, CSOs maintained their efforts. Decentralized coordination allowed them to sustain momentum, documenting abuses and rallying international support. On July 21, the Supreme Court ruled against the quota reinstatement, but the decision failed to appease protesters, who rejected the new government circular (The Hindu Bureau 2024).

3. *Pinnacle of the Revolution (July 26–August 5, 2024)*

The movement peaked in late July, with widespread protests despite nationwide curfews and internet shutdowns. Diplomats from 14 Western countries condemned the excessive use of force. The government restored limited internet access but banned social media on July 28 (The Daily Star 2024b). On August 1, the government banned *Jamaat-e-Islami* (political party) and its *student wing*, accusing them of links to terrorism. Meanwhile, six arrested protest top leaders were released. Students issued a one-point demand on August 3, calling for Hasina's resignation and the formation of a "national government." Violence surged on August 4, with deadly clashes in Dhaka and 21 other districts, resulting in over 93 deaths. In Sirajganj, a mob killed 13 police officers, sparking further chaos. The government imposed an indefinite curfew, but protesters called for a final march to Dhaka (Star Digital Report 2024). On August 5, more than tens of thousands defied the curfew and gathered near the Prime Minister's residence. Overwhelmed by the scale of dissent, the army allowed protesters to advance. Later that day, Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India. The army chief announced the formation of an interim government, marking the revolution's conclusion (Adler 2024; Reuters 2024).

Strategic Role of Civil Society in Bangladesh's July 2024 Revolution

Mobilizing Public Protests and Demonstrations: Civil society organizations (CSOs) such as Odhikar, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), and Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) played a critical role in mobilizing public protests. These organizations formed a coalition that united student groups, labor unions, and women's movements to challenge the government's legitimacy. A "ripple effect" strategy was employed to coordinate protests across various demographic and professional groups, as explained by a CSO leader (Els-1). While mobilization endeavors were indeed facilitated by the collective action of different societal sectors, the political, religious, and ethnic tensions that have long existed in Bangladesh were constantly at play. For instance, religious groups often found themselves in direct opposition to CSOs advocating for secular democratic principles, further complicating the efforts of CSOs to unite various groups. By ensuring peaceful yet impactful demonstrations, the coalition garnered widespread support. The involvement of student unions, labor groups, and intellectuals further broadened the movement's base and sustained its momentum (FGD-2).

Lobbying for International Support: CSOs also engaged in advocacy to internationalize their cause, highlighting the government's repressive actions. They effectively contacted global human rights organizations, diplomatic missions, and international media. This approach attracted international attention and heightened pressure on the government to address demands, demonstrating the effectiveness of coordinated global lobbying efforts (Els-2).



Media and Digital Strategy: Social media and independent journalism were indispensable to the CSOs' strategy. Following the unlawful arrest of student leaders, CSOs launched widespread media campaigns, which sparked public outrage. Both traditional outlets, such as newspapers and television, and digital platforms, including WhatsApp and Facebook, were used to disseminate information, counter state narratives, and sustain the movement's momentum. Social media, in particular, proved vital in mobilizing the youth, enabling real-time updates, and organizing flash protests (Tufekci 2017).

Legal Assistance and Human Rights Monitoring: To counteract government crackdowns, CSOs set up legal aid networks for detained activists and systematically documented incidents of state violence. This documentation informed international human rights bodies about the government's abuses, ensuring the regime's actions were scrutinized globally.

Resistance to Autocracy

Civil society organizations (CSOs) displayed remarkable resilience in countering the government's repressive tactics during the revolution. Despite facing censorship, arrests, intimidation, and violence, they adopted strategic measures to sustain the movement and expose the regime's autocratic practices. Overcoming government censorship proved to be a significant challenge. Authorities restricted access to media and digital platforms, attempting to suppress the dissemination of information. However, CSOs effectively circumvented these restrictions by employing encrypted messaging apps, virtual private networks (VPNs), and decentralized communication systems. These strategies allowed activists to coordinate protests and maintain the flow of information, ensuring the movement's continuity even in the face of severe blackouts (Diamond 2019).

The regime's use of arrests and intimidation against protest leaders was another major obstacle. In response, CSOs established robust legal support systems, such as a pro bono network organized by human rights lawyer Sara Hossain, to defend detained activists (Els-4). Rapid response teams were also formed to monitor police actions and provide necessary assistance, ensuring that protest leaders could continue their work despite threats. These efforts played a crucial role in maintaining the morale and cohesion of demonstrators (Lewis 2011). The physical attacks on activists and leaders, particularly in June and July, posed yet another challenge. CSOs created emergency hotlines and evacuation protocols to address this, enabling threatened members to relocate to safe locations. Such measures minimized disruptions and reinforced solidarity within the movement.

Prominent voices in Bangladeshi society have long criticized the Awami League government's authoritarian practices. Dr. Kamal Hossain, an eminent jurist, condemned the government's corruption and called for its removal, emphasizing the suffering caused by its autocratic misrule (Prothom Alo 2021). Human rights activist



Sultana Kamal highlighted the need for a society rooted in justice and dignity, envisioning a future where human rights prevail over violent power struggles (Prothom Alo, 2024). Similarly, Mahfuz Anam, editor of *The Daily Star*, lamented the party's detachment from the people, observing that the Awami League has strayed far from its revolutionary roots (Anam 2024).

Economists and intellectuals have also criticized the government's policies. Dr. Anu Muhammad highlighted the regime's preference for elite interests over public welfare, describing its development agenda as unsustainable and unjust (*The Daily Star* 2024d). He further condemned the unprecedented bloodshed during the movement, noting the government's failure to suppress the protests, which drew spontaneous support from across society (*The Daily Star* 2024a). Academic and artist Naeem Mohaiemen emphasized the regime's consolidation of power through media suppression and boycotted elections, underscoring the autocratic nature of governance since 2014 (Mohaiemen 2024). Journalist Shariar Ibrahim detailed systematic repression tactics, such as extrajudicial killings and judicial manipulation, which dismantled political opposition while fueling public support for non-political protests (Ibrahim 2024).

The legitimacy of the Awami League's rule came under intense scrutiny during the protests. July's demonstrations highlighted mass killings, detentions, and disappearances, raising grave questions about the regime's political mandate. Filmmaker Mostofa Sarwar Farooki likened the government to a Nazi-like force, warning of its potential for destruction if left unchecked (*The Daily Star* 2024c). Prominent economists and organizations have further criticized the regime's autocratic tendencies. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman of Transparency International Bangladesh described the parliament as a "puppet show stage" due to its lack of active opposition (Islam 2016). Renowned economist Rehman Sobhan criticized the country's elite-dominated and deeply unjust society (Dhaka Tribune 2017). Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar of Shujan highlighted the absence of political accountability, noting how restrictive laws undermined freedoms and violated people's rights (Islam 2016).

International organizations such as Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) have documented Bangladesh's democratic decline. Since 2014, the country has been labeled a "flawed democracy", with observers frequently describing the regime as highly autocratic (Ibrahim 2024). This resistance to autocracy in Bangladesh illustrates the resilience and creativity of civil society in challenging authoritarianism. Through innovative strategies, legal advocacy, and unwavering determination, CSOs have resisted repression and laid the groundwork for future democratic reforms.

Public Engagement

Engaging Urban Youth and Students: Recognizing the disillusionment of urban youth and students with the lack of democratic freedoms and uncertainty



of getting a job due to the quota system, CSOs designed targeted social media campaigns to mobilize this demographic. The campaigns resonated with young audiences, fostering solidarity and participation (FGD-2).

Digital Mobilization: Social media emerged as a powerful tool for CSOs to expand their reach to everyone to join the movement. Activists employed hashtags, viral videos, and live streams to engage with a broader audience, especially young people disconnected from traditional forms of activism. These digital initiatives created a sense of community and maintained the movement's momentum, even when physical gatherings were disrupted due to government crackdowns (Els-3; Tufekci 2017). CSOs devised pointed social media campaigns to mobilize bred millions of online engagements, with hashtags like #QuotaReform and #Bangladesh-Protests trending nationwide, drawing significant participation from students and professionals alike (Sakib 2020).

Mobilizing Intellectuals and Academics: CSOs actively engaged influential academics, artists, and intellectuals, emphasizing the necessity of collective resistance. Public figures endorsed the movement, participated in rallies, and used their platforms to critique the regime, enhancing the protests' legitimacy and broadening their appeal (FGD-3).

Discussion

The study summarizes in this discussion how CSOs in Bangladesh undermined autocratic power, empowered citizens, overcame challenges, and contributed to a global dialogue on democratic struggles.

By orchestrating protests, leveraging media, and building cross-societal coalitions, civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bangladesh galvanized widespread support, leading to the regime's eventual collapse.

Impact on Autocracy

The mobilization of civil society was central to weakening Bangladesh's autocratic regime. Through coordinated protests, international lobbying, and digital campaigns, CSOs played a crucial role in challenging the government and pushing for tangible changes in governance. Large-scale demonstrations, particularly those led by students and youth organizations, disrupted the government's narrative and exposed the fragility of autocratic control when confronted with unified public resistance (FGD-3). The research underscores the importance of civil society in maintaining accountability and facilitating democratic transitions (Carothers 1999; Diamond 2008). CSOs in Bangladesh framed the discourse around democracy, human rights, and anti-discrimination, which drew international attention and amplified pressure on the government.



This pressure resulted in significant government concessions, such as the call for early elections, as reported by a CSO leader (Els-5). These outcomes highlight how organized civil society can destabilize autocratic regimes and create fractures in their power. Participants in the focus group discussions noted that these concessions included reducing censorship and lifting restrictions on assembly, signaling shifts toward democratic practices.

The July Revolution also demonstrated civil society's ability to influence governance, setting precedents for civic activism that would have long-term effects. A key achievement was the resignation of prominent government officials, signaling the collapse of the autocratic structure. Scholars like Schock (2005) contend that nonviolent resistance can have lasting effects on political systems, creating conditions for the re-emergence of democratic values.

The aftermath of the revolution, marked by increased political engagement and international support for democratic reforms, underscores civil society's role in challenging autocracy and reshaping political dynamics. However, the revolution created only a temporary democratic opening. The future of Bangladesh's political landscape depends on whether civil society can sustain its momentum and continue holding the government accountable (FGD-2). This mirrors patterns seen in other countries, such as Egypt and Ukraine, where civil society's influence in post-revolution governance has been more limited (Tufekci 2017; Kuzio 2006).

Role of Fear and Empowerment

One of the most significant impacts of Bangladesh's civil society was its ability to dismantle the culture of fear imposed by the autocratic government. Authoritarian regimes often rely on fear to suppress dissent, using threats of violence, imprisonment, and censorship to create a sense of powerlessness among citizens. However, as Scott (1990) suggests, fear-based governance is regularly challenged by collective civic action. In Bangladesh, CSOs were crucial in empowering citizens, offering platforms for individuals to voice grievances and collaborate despite the looming threat of repression.

Through strategic communication, CSOs highlighted stories of courage and resilience, effectively reducing the perceived risks of participation. They built solidarity networks and encouraged broader participation in the movement (Carothers–Breckenmacher 2014). Empowerment, in this context, was both symbolic and practical. Focus group participants reported that seeing community leaders, students, and intellectuals publicly speak out against the regime diminished the widespread fear of retaliation. Visible acts of defiance and public solidarity eroded the government's psychological control over the population, shifting the power dynamics.

Through education and solidarity, empowerment fostered an environment where citizens felt encouraged to act, as Scott (1990) describes, in the face of power, thereby establishing a culture of resistance.



Digital platforms and social media played a vital role, allowing CSOs to circumvent traditional censorship and reach a broad audience. By amplifying the protesters' stories and emphasizing the struggle's collective nature, CSOs turned fear into solidarity, making it easier for citizens to resist without feeling isolated (Tufekci 2017).

This empowerment was particularly evident among urban youth and students, who played a central role in the revolution. The ability of civil society to mobilize these groups was crucial in overcoming government oppression. Their participation fuelled a new generation of activists who were less intimidated by the regime's threats, thus sustaining the momentum of the revolution despite government crackdowns.

Limitations and Challenges

While the revolution highlighted the strengths of Bangladesh's civil society, it also exposed several limitations and challenges. These included internal divisions, financial constraints, and harsh government repression. Focus group participants noted that CSOs often faced resource shortages, exacerbated by government crackdowns that restricted funding access and led to the frequent arrest of leaders.

Internal divisions also posed challenges. While many groups were united in their opposition to the autocratic regime, they differed in strategies, goals, and methods of resistance. Some organizations favored nonviolent protest, while others advocated more confrontational tactics, leading to internal conflicts that sometimes hindered the movement's cohesion.

Externally, the regime's repression was a significant obstacle. Violent crackdowns, mass arrests, internet blackouts, and media restrictions severely limited the CSOs' ability to organize and mobilize effectively. However, civil society's adaptability allowed it to continue its efforts, using underground networks and encrypted communication to circumvent these restrictions (Lewis 2011).

The immediate goal of ousting the autocratic government was achieved, but the findings suggest that CSOs lacked a coherent strategy for post-revolution governance. This uncertainty following political victory is not unique to Bangladesh. However, it mirrors other revolutionary movements' challenges, where the revolution's triumph often leads to confusion about the future direction (Kuzio 2006).

Broader Implications

The July Revolution in Bangladesh has had far-reaching implications for understanding the role of civil society in challenging autocratic regimes, both locally and globally. It demonstrates that even in intense repression, CSOs were crucial in facilitating political transitions. Through effective organization, grassroots mobilization, and framing the narrative of resistance, CSOs rallied support against the autocratic regime.



This experience aligns with global movements such as the 2011 Arab Spring and Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, where civil society was central in organizing mass protests and advocating for democratic reforms (Kuzio 2006; Tufekci 2017).

Bangladesh's revolution also underscores the transformative power of digital tools in modern civic resistance. CSOs leveraged digital platforms to communicate with local and international audiences, ensuring transparency and amplifying their impact. This mirrors the findings by Shirky (2011) and Tufekci (2017), who argue that digital communication empowers civil society by offering alternative platforms for organizing and spreading information, even under conditions of censorship.

On a global scale, this case highlights the growing importance of CSOs in resisting autocracy and advancing human rights from Sudan to Hong Kong (Howard–Hussain 2011). Despite facing severe repression and resource limitations, Bangladesh's civil society showed how collective action could weaken authoritarian regimes, offering broader lessons for democratic movements worldwide. It suggests that when supported by digital platforms, civil society can be a potent force for political transformation.

While the July Revolution sparked immediate political change, it also raised questions about the long-term sustainability of civil society's impact. The revolution's success highlights the need for civil society movements to balance short-term mobilization with long-term institutional reform to ensure lasting democratic change. The challenge is ensuring these changes lead to a stable and enduring democratic system. This lesson is vital for other regions where democratic freedoms are threatened (Bermeo 1997). The Bangladesh revolution illustrates that civil society can drive significant political change despite severe government repression, emphasizing its continued role as a key force for democracy and human rights.

Conclusion

This study has found that CSOs played a pivotal role in overthrowing Bangladesh's autocratic regime during the 2024 July Revolution, culminating in the departure of long-standing leader Sheikh Hasina. The findings exhibit that CSOs were focal on mobilizing public dissent, challenging state repression, and shaping the revolution's trajectory. By leveraging grassroots protests, digital tools, and international advocacy, they successfully challenged autocratic rule and played a central role in one of Bangladesh's most significant political transitions. They created space for collective action, empowered citizens, and fostered a culture of resistance, even amid harsh repression. The revolution's success also highlights the importance of creating inclusive platforms for dialogue between civil society, political parties, and governmental institutions. This factor is particularly crucial in Bangladesh, where ethnic, religious, and political fault lines often hinder collaborative efforts.



The central argument of this paper is that CSOs' ability to unite diverse social groups, build solidarity networks, and use digital platforms to amplify resistance was essential in eroding the government's authority. Strategic mobilization allowed civil society to challenge existing power structures and empower youth and students, whose participation was critical in sustaining the revolution.

This study contributes to the broader narrative on civil society and political transitions, focusing on Bangladesh's unique context. While much of the existing research on civil society and democratic transitions has concentrated on regions like the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Latin America (Tufekci 2017; Kuzio 2006; Carothers–Breckenmacher 2014), this work fills a crucial gap by examining civil society's role in South Asia.

The findings align with established theories on civil society's role in challenging autocracy (Bermeo 1997; Tufekci 2017) but also offer new insights into how digital tools can be used to overcome repression in contemporary movements. Additionally, this research highlights how civil society's adaptive strategies—such as encrypted communication, decentralized protests, and online campaigns—allow resistance to continue even when traditional forms of protest are blocked.

Future research could further explore the role of CSOs during the July Revolution, especially regarding their long-term impact on Bangladesh's political landscape. Although the revolution led to significant political change, the future remains uncertain. Research could investigate how civil society continues to shape the political process and protect against authoritarian backsliding (Carothers–Breckenmacher 2014). Comparative civil society studies in post-autocracy countries like Tunisia, Ukraine, or Venezuela could offer valuable insights into the factors influencing long-term political stability (Kuzio 2006; Tufekci 2017). Additionally, examining the internal dynamics of CSOs, including leadership conflicts, resource limitations, and strategic disagreements, would provide a more nuanced understanding of civil society's challenges in driving political change (Lewis 2011).

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that civil society was essential in challenging autocracy and shaping Bangladesh's political landscape during the July Revolution. CSOs used innovative strategies, overcame significant repression, and mobilized broad public support. The findings expand research on civil society and democratic transitions, offering crucial insights for understanding future democratic resistance in repressive environments. As civil society continues to confront autocratic regimes worldwide, the lessons from Bangladesh's revolution remain invaluable for future political movements.

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MOVEMENT PARTIES AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY

LOCAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS AS SOCIAL INTERMEDIARIES IN THE CASE OF THE HUNGARIAN TWO-TAILED DOG PARTY*

Szegedi Péter

Introduction

The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) is considered a distinctive hybrid political organization within the Hungarian political system. Over the past decade¹, it has been established as a stable element within the Hungarian political framework. Originating as a small-scale street art initiative, it has evolved into a fully fledged political organization. Although the party has secured no National Assembly or European Parliament mandates, the 2024 municipal elections are recognized as its most successful electoral performance². In this election, 51 mandates were obtained, primarily in major cities and several smaller municipalities with populations under 10,000. Additionally, Gergely Kovács was elected as mayor of Budapest's 12th district, while the party also achieved a majority in the local assembly.

This organizational development has been underpinned by significant structural efforts through which a nationwide network has been established. This network operates in almost all significant municipalities and extends its presence to smaller settlements as well. The MKKP has employed community organizing methods to establish these local units, allowing them to operate independently of direct party leadership intervention (Szegedi 2022).

¹ 2014 is recognized as the year when the MKKP officially became a political party.

² Although the local elections held concurrently with the European Parliament elections brought some successes, such as the acquisition of mandates in several major cities, they were perceived as a disappointment by certain party members. The party failed to surpass the 5% threshold required for representation in the European Parliament, despite polling at 11% among decided voters in March, according to Medián (partpreferencia.hu). However, the sweeping changes initiated by Péter Magyar ultimately reduced the MKKP's support below the 5% threshold.



These units are sustained by strong internal cohesion, ensuring their functionality even in the absence of election-related stimuli. Unlike other opposition parties, the MKKP's local organizations are not contingent upon electoral success but rely on community engagement to maintain their continuity. Consequently, the party has expanded its voter base and support even following elections deemed unsuccessful (2018, 2019, 2022).

The MKKP, as an anti-political and centrist anti-establishment formation (Glied–Szegedi 2024), defines itself in opposition to mainstream politics and employs novel methods rather than conventional political tactics and tools. Consequently, the party is predominantly composed of non-professional politicians. This grassroots organizational structure and unconventional “amateur” political approach have been the MKKP's greatest strengths but also its most significant challenges. Integration into politics for the MKKP has necessitated a process of professionalization, which has generated numerous internal conflicts within the party. Such internal tensions have led, for instance, to the departure of Zsolt Victora in 2022, as well as the party's most significant internal conflict: the March 2024 re-vote on the primary membership decision and Gergely Kovács' resignation ultimatum. The latter event resulted in the departure of Tamás Gráf, the national network developer, and Tarcsay, a local organizer, from the party.

This study seeks to explore the relationship between the MKKP and civil society. The central thesis posits that the organizational model employed by the MKKP facilitates engagement with the non-institutionalized segments of civil society. It is argued that the party exhibits a high potential for involving local communities at the grassroots level. Two theoretical frameworks have been employed to examine this phenomenon: the theory of movement parties and Peter Mair and Richard Katz's three faces model. The former provides insights into the looser, movement-like characteristics of party organizations, while the latter aids in understanding the autonomy of local units from the central party structure, including the scope and actors involved in local decision-making. A more detailed presentation of the two theories is necessary for this study, as joke parties in general, and specifically, the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), can be categorized as movement parties (Glied–Szegedi 2024). In the case of movement parties, it has been observed that the autonomy of local organizations is strengthened, meaning that the *party on the ground* becomes more prominent. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the theory regarding the differentiation of party organizational components is essential.

To investigate these dynamics, semi-structured interviews (*Appendix A*) were conducted with activists, members, leadership figures, and representatives of the MKKP (*Appendix B*). Nevertheless, various sections are found to provide valuable insights for the present analysis. Additionally, the analysis examines the MKKP's municipal activities from 2019 to 2024 from the perspective of civil society. Specifically, the relationship between MKKP representatives and civil society is assessed through the municipal decisions initiated or influenced by the party's representatives.

This study has been included in the thematic issue of *Civil Szemle* because the MKKP, as a unique political organization within the Hungarian party system, consciously strives to organize and strengthen local communities through its organizational structure. In doing so, it represents a distinctive form of interaction between Hungarian politics and civil society, fundamentally diverging from Hungarian political traditions.

Theory of the Three Faces

In their foundational study on political party organization, Peter Mair and Richard Katz (1993; 2002) proposed a conceptual model that delineates party structures into three primary “faces” or organizational components: the party in the central office, the party in public offices, and the party on the ground; offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the internal dynamics of political parties.

The first of these components is the party leadership, represented by the central office, whose principal role is to oversee the party's overall functioning. This includes managing electoral campaigns, coordinating the activities of party activists, and ensuring the smooth operation of the party apparatus at various levels. The central office serves as the hub from which strategy and coordination flow, providing a unifying direction for the party's efforts.

The second component, composed of party members who hold public office, includes representatives in national parliaments, governments, and local authorities. These individuals often gain significant influence within the party, primarily through their electoral success and public popularity, which can be influenced by external factors such as media visibility and public opinion. In many contemporary democracies, public funding for parties is often tied to electoral results, meaning that successful politicians not only enhance their standing but also contribute directly to the party's financial stability. This financial support further solidifies their influence within the party's internal hierarchy.

The third and final component in Mair and Katz's model is the membership base, commonly referred to as the *party on the ground*. This group comprises grassroots activists, loyal supporters, and reliable voters who participate in party activities, particularly during election campaigns, often serving as unpaid volunteers. Their primary function is to act as a conduit for local knowledge, feeding information up to higher levels of the party while also serving as the operational backbone during critical campaign periods. These activists provide crucial labour and energy that help drive the party's outreach and voter mobilization efforts, making them an indispensable part of the party structure. Furthermore, local organizations play a crucial role in the selection of candidates, policy issues, and even electoral defeats, which have been found to correlate with the weakening of the party's autonomy on the ground (Cross 2016). With the development of online spaces and communities, grassroots organizations within local party structures have been strengthened.



At the same time, well-known politicians attempt to exert greater dominance over the party as a whole through new digital media (Hanel–Marschall 2013). Moreover, in the case of new parties, the party on the ground is more dominant than other organizational units (Poertner 2023).

Since then, it has been regarded as the most significant theory in the non-hierarchical organizational approach to parties, serving as a general framework for research in which the relative weight of different organizational units within parties has been examined (e.g. Moens 2023) or the independent functions of specific components have been analysed (e.g., Hansen et al. 2024). Studies have been conducted on various cases, including the Five Star Movement (Crulli 2022; Oross–Mikecz 2018), the political groups of the European Parliament and European supranational parties (Calossi–Cicchi 2019), the National League for Democracy in Myanmar (Roewer, 2019), the Indonesian National Democratic Party (Trinanda–Astanujat 2023), center-right parties in Central and Eastern Europe (Enyedi–Linek 2008), and the new digital functions of parties as organizational units (Peña–Gold 2022).

One of the significant strengths of Mair and Katz’s theoretical framework is its adaptability, allowing for a nuanced comparative analysis of different party organizations across various political eras and party families. In modern political systems, particularly within cartel parties (Katz–Mair 1995; 1996) or business-oriented parties (Hopkin–Paolucci 1999), there has been a noticeable increase in the influence of party members holding public office. This shift can be attributed to several factors, including the growing personalization of politics, where individual politicians, rather than party platforms, become the focal point of public attention, which is amplified by media exposure. This mediatization of politics has elevated the visibility of successful politicians, who often wield considerable influence within their parties, at times challenging the traditional party leadership. Furthermore, the financial dependence on electoral success has made these officeholders key players, as their victories directly translate into funding for the party, reinforcing their importance. As a result, a significant portion of political parties has hollowed out one of their oldest and most essential functions: facilitating connections between civil society and the state, or “*high politics*” (Mair 2013; Panebianco 1988). Furthermore, the bureaucratization and professionalization of civil society have led to a decline in volunteerism, thereby constricting the social spaces that previously fostered connections between parties and civil society (Martin et al. 2022). It is asserted that a similar shift can be observed in the case of movement parties, specifically toward the party on the ground. Essentially, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a backlash against the utilization of parties dominated by elected representatives. Therefore, the study hypothesizes that these parties maintain closer ties with both formal and informal organizations of civil society, as they primarily define themselves in opposition to elites and elitism.



Movement Parties

Movement parties are generally considered modern, contemporary formations that became widespread from the 1980s onward (Gunther–Diamond 2003)³. Empirical research (Almeida 2015) has indicated that their emergence is closely linked to neoliberal economic policies and the waves of discontent they triggered, as certain opposition parties developed strategies centered on street-level activism, collective action, and closer collaboration with civil society. This emphasis on grassroots engagement and direct action has distinguished movement parties from more traditional political actors that rely on formal institutional structures. Fundamentally, movement parties are defined as those that adopt the strategies of social movements—such as loose organizational structures, street activism, grassroots democracy, and direct democracy—while also acting as challengers to political parties (Kitschelt 2006). Their primary tactics are, therefore, rooted in non-conventional political participation, with voter mobilization being primarily conducted through activism (Peña 2020), often complemented by populist and anti-elite messaging (Mercea–Mosca 2021).

Additionally, movement parties have been observed to demonstrate particular strength in the online sphere (Deseriis 2020), mainly to compensate for organizational shortcomings. Their online communities constitute a crucial element of their mobilization potential. Empirical evidence has been provided to support the correlation between non-conventional political participation, the use of the Internet as a primary source of news, and voting for movement parties (Mosca–Quaranta 2017).

The rise of movement parties has been found to exert a profound impact on the organization and functioning of political parties, particularly in addressing socio-economic challenges. In two-party systems, where new political actors face significant barriers to entry, social movements have frequently sought to influence established parties from within. Examples of this phenomenon include the influence of the Tea Party on the Republican Party in the United States, as well as the rise of figures such as Jeremy Corbyn, Donald Trump, and Bernie Sanders, who have sought to shift the ideological direction of their respective parties. In contrast, in multi-party systems, where the political environment provides greater flexibility, social movements have been more likely to institutionalize themselves as new political parties. Notable examples of such cases include Podemos in Spain, SYRIZA in Greece, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), and the Five Star Movement in Italy. These parties have been observed to have emerged from grassroots movements, challenging the established political order by addressing socio-political grievances that had often been neglected by traditional parties (Hutter et al. 2019).

3 Although Donatella della Porta and her colleagues (2017) have argued that movement parties emerged simultaneously with the appearance of political parties, and Marina Prentoulis–Lasse Thomassen (2019) have classified 19th-century labour movements as movement parties, these claims have been subject to further academic debate.



The organizational structures of political parties, particularly those of movement parties, have been found to reflect broader shifts in political participation and the evolving dynamics of engagement within the contemporary political landscape. Research conducted by Ingrid van Biezen and her colleagues (2012) has demonstrated that parties maintaining stronger ties with civil society largely owe this to their organizational structures. Specifically, it has been observed that parties that have preserved their organizational autonomy from their representative groups have remained significantly more connected to the civil sphere, particularly at the local level, highlighting the critical role played by local organizations in sustaining these connections.

Joke Parties and the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party

The theoretical foundation for categorizing joke parties as a distinct party family within political science remains underdeveloped, primarily due to their marginalization and exclusion from the classifications established by Beyme (1985). Joke parties exhibit significant diversity, reflecting the societal and political phenomena they satirize (Paár 2016). Nevertheless, they may be regarded as a party family, as their defining characteristic—humor—provides a basis for identifying shared attributes (Oross et al. 2018). Furthermore, notable similarities can be observed in their content and communication strategies, as most joke parties demonstrate anti-elitism (Szegedi 2021; Farkas 2018). This tendency can be attributed to the dynamics of political humor, which often ridicules more vigorous opponents, as weaker adversaries tend to evoke greater sympathy. Consequently, joke parties predominantly critique members of the political-economic elite or societal phenomena shaped by governmental influence.

The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) initially expressed its street activism primarily through various forms of street art, including posters, graffiti, pictograms, and stickers, displayed in public spaces (Bucs 2011). Beginning in the mid-2010s, the MKKP increased the frequency of these street art activities and embarked on more ambitious projects, such as building or renovating bus stops and voluntarily repairing roads.

A notable shift occurred during the 2018 parliamentary elections, when the MKKP ran a national list and garnered 1.75% of the vote (NVI 2018), making the party eligible for state funding. Although the MKKP's street actions are designed to involve civilians in playful and participatory projects, they often deliberately provoke conflicts with local or state authorities. Initiatives such as constructing bus stops, repairing roads, or painting sidewalks in bright colors draw attention to neglected urban areas and implicitly critique the inadequacies of local governments, all while maintaining a humorous and irreverent tone (Oross et al. 2018).

In parallel, the party experienced significant growth in both its voter base and organizational infrastructure. In the 2019 local elections, the MKKP secured two municipal

council seats and a deputy mayor position (NVI 2019). By the 2022 elections, it had increased its share of the vote to 3.27% (NVI 2022). Following 2019, the MKKP underwent a significant transformation, becoming more professionalized by hiring paid staff, and evolving into a nationwide organization with local branches in most major cities outside Budapest (Szegedi 2022). These local branches placed a strong emphasis on community building, a key priority actively supported by the party.

Political Community

We can consider any organization in which a network of relationships, a sense of belonging, and a communication network have developed among its members based on specific values or similarities as a community (Szegedi 2022). Classical interpretations distinguish between traditional and mechanical organizations (cf. Tönnies, 2001). The former is based on traditional relationships, such as kinship and neighborhood. At the same time, the latter is organized around personal interests and has some form of legal codification, for example, commercial contracts. Furthermore, within a community—depending on its level of development—various functions may emerge, ranging hierarchically from the redistribution of the community’s products and services to full solidarity (Warren 1964).

When discussing political communities, the major classical theorists primarily refer to it as an identity created from the relationship between sovereignty, the state, people, and territories (Baker–Bartelson 2009), which essentially meant the nation (cf. Durkheim 1964; Elias 1991; Anderson 1983) and continues to be understood this way even today (cf. Mölder et al. 2023). However, this paper interprets political communities as local communities intentionally formed for a political purpose (cf. community organizing [Stall–Stoecker 2016; Alinsky 1973; Bobo et al. 2001]). This research refers to the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party, a political organization that engages in community organizing through the establishment of local branches (Szegedi 2022). This is not entirely foreign to the behavior of political parties in Hungary, or in any other country. In Hungary, Fidesz has been particularly effective in establishing strong online and offline networks among the party, its supporters and sympathizers, and the broader society (Metz–Várnagy 2021)⁴.

If a political party engages in community organizing, and we accept that the primary function of parties is to exercise public power (cf. Sartori 1976), we can conclude that they do this with political goals in mind, to strengthen their agenda. However, the organization of a political community by parties is more likely to be successful if it is centered around specific issues rather than general values or ideologies (Debié 2012). Additionally, it enhances the community’s resilience against economic and political pressure (Maeda et al. 2016).

4 However, other parties have also made attempts at this, such as the Momentum Movement, where elements of community organizing are clearly present in its youth organization, *TizenX* (Fényes 2023).



By creating online communities, the number of loyal voters can also increase (Koc-Michalska–Lilleker 2019). The formation of community identity reduces the chances of political disengagement (Shaw 2007). Furthermore, renewal and innovative ideas are often the results of community work, allowing community members to become active shapers of politics (Bainter–Lhevine 1998). Additionally, the knowledge and experience of political communities can play a significant role in expanding the knowledge base of civil society (Miller 2008), by building connections with the broader civil society, which is crucial for the social embeddedness of political parties.

Local Governments, Politics, and Civil Society in Hungary

Hungarian civil society faced significant structural deficits following the regime change. Although it emerged from the underground culture of the socialist era during the 1990s and 2000s, gaining general acceptance, this acceptance primarily pertained to protest culture. Even in the 2000s, researchers identified substantial limitations, such as a marginal presence or being perceived as “*exoticisms of intellectual subculture*” that were incapable of mobilizing broader societal engagement (Szabó 2004: 166). Consequently, non-institutionalized civil society participation did not become widespread within Hungarian society, serving instead as an advocacy tool primarily for a narrow intellectual elite. Institutionalized civil society, such as NGOs, was similarly underdeveloped. Experts in the field struggled to find practical solutions to enhance the civil sector or encourage broader societal participation (Szabó 2009; Tóké 2009; Kákai 2010; Domaniczky 2010). Therefore, the role of government and local governments in engaging civil society and fostering public involvement in political issues became especially significant. A practical method for this involvement is through local government engagement in local decision-making processes. This can occur in two main ways: civil organizations can participate in elections, enabling their members to serve as representatives, or they can be integrated into decision-making processes, utilizing their local knowledge to engage citizens on issues directly affecting them (Csegény–Kákai 2001).

Between 1990 and 2010, however, the civil sector encountered numerous financial challenges. Its funding is derived mainly from normative subsidies, with this proportion gradually increasing over the two decades. Additionally, there was a stark contrast between state and local government support, with the latter falling significantly short, rendering the civil sector increasingly dependent on the state. Furthermore, non-normative support was a key characteristic of the period, allowing for discretionary allocations, as funds were not automatically tied to specific functions (Bocz 2009). Despite underfunding and preferential treatment given to organizations aligned with political interests, there was generally no overarching political distrust toward civil society as a whole. A broad political consensus existed regarding the necessity and support for civil society, except for far-right parties (Zsolt 2020).

However, the position of civil society shifted radically after 2010, as a newly emerging political framework sought to redefine the relationship between the state and civil society (Brachinger 2022). Of the three main functions of civil organizations—advocacy, community organization, and provision of public services—the government aimed to involve the civil sector in decision-making solely in terms of service provision (Sebestyén, 2016). Thus, the government effectively rejected the self-organizing, community-building, and monitoring roles of civil society. Ádám Nagy (2016: 147) categorized seven obstacles imposed by the Hungarian state on civil society, obstacles that, though present before 2010, were significantly strengthened and broadened in scope after this period. These obstacles included: *“1. regulations irrelevant to the sector; 2. dismantling of civil autonomy; 3. degradation of civil financing; 4. inextricable entanglements; 5. distortion of civil ethos; 6. increased bureaucracy; 7. scapegoating.”* In addition, the populist government revived the state-socialist “good vs. bad” narrative against civil society, based on a populist dichotomy (Rixer, 2020). Essentially, the populist “us vs. them” contrast was extended to civil society, with “us” symbolizing the “good” and “them” the “bad”.

Attila Ágh (2016) attributed the fundamental weakness of civil society and its susceptibility to political co-option to “democracy without participation,” characterized by a lack of social solidarity and a prevailing inaction in participation. Similar trends are evident in empirical research by Andrea Szabó and Márton Gerő (2019), which shows a gradual decline in political association in Hungarian society outside of electoral contexts. However, their research also indicates higher levels of participation in local issues, suggesting that local civil society may be more readily engaged in local government decision-making processes. In this regard, local government representatives and local branches of political parties could play a significant role. Consequently, after 2010, Hungary’s active social segments increasingly turned to non-institutionalized forms of civil advocacy. Social movements and waves of protest, cyclically reemerging in the socio-political space, represented relatively novel phenomena in Hungarian civil and political advocacy. These movements were fuelled both by the discrediting of opposition parties and the systematic obstruction of civil organizations (Kákai–Glied 2024).

Local Party Organisations and the Civil Society

The local organizations of the MKKP function with a remarkable degree of autonomy, as the national leadership largely refrains from intervening in their activities. These local branches are free to act within the broader framework of the party’s image, provided their actions remain consistent with its guiding principles and values. This decentralized structure not only fosters innovation but also empowers grassroots participants to take the initiative, enabling the party to maintain a dynamic and adaptable presence at the local level.



One party member emphasized the significance of local activism: “What is realized at the local level depends on the local activists.” *So, if someone says they want to build a bus stop here and finds helpers who say, ‘We will help build it,’ then that bus stop is likely to be built.*” (Party member 2., online interview, 20. 12. 2023.). Or as one other said: *Since this is a bottom-up organization if someone has a good idea and we can realize it, then we do it*” (MKKP party member 2., personal interview, 11. 12. 2023). Another activist elaborated on the autonomy granted to local branches: “In theory, local organizations can make independent decisions.” *Only if it does not fit into the direction, they might say okay, do it, but we will not associate our name with it. So, you do what you want*” (MKKP party activist 1, online interview, 31. 01. 2023). These statements illustrate how MKKP’s organizational framework is intentionally designed to grant local branches the freedom to shape their priorities, develop projects, and address community-specific needs with minimal interference from higher leadership.

Local organizations bear a significant portion of the responsibility for the party’s active work, particularly in areas that do not involve national media or high-profile political issues. Instead, these efforts are often rooted in creative and community-oriented initiatives, such as street art and urban beautification projects. For example, activists often take on tasks such as restoring neglected public furniture, repainting benches, or revitalizing community spaces. These activities not only draw attention to the party’s presence but also create tangible benefits for residents, blending political activism with civic improvement. The Dog Party fundamentally relies on the independent initiatives of its activists. *Every local group and every activist observe their surroundings with a keen eye, and if they identify something they can change or carry out an attention-grabbing action for, they can request [...] any support from the party headquarters [...] to help them realize their ideas.*” (Party activist 2, online interview, 20. 12. 2023.)

Decision-making processes within these local branches are typically collective, ensuring that a wide range of voices and ideas are heard. This grassroots democratic approach reinforces the sense of community and collaboration that defines the party’s operations. *“In more significant matters, such as deciding who will be a candidate [...], it is the membership that makes the decision. However, if we see that the local community [...] does not favor someone who wants to be a candidate in their area, then that person [...] is filtered out.”* (Party coordinator, online interview, 30. 01. 2024)

Additionally, MKKP places a strong emphasis on its ties to civil society. Many of its activists are simultaneously involved in other civic organizations or the social welfare sector, allowing them to integrate their party roles with broader social commitments. For example, one of the activists said in an interview: *“I have been an active participant in public life for at least 30 years, involved in the work and founding of numerous civil organizations, from establishing the Rotary Club [...] to countless other initiatives. There are a few things I have been part of, ranging from the disabled sports federation to many other activities. [...] What I am most known for here is that I run a business club.”* (Former party activist, personal interview, 08. 06. 2021.)



This dual engagement strengthens the party's connection to the communities it serves and expands its influence beyond traditional political boundaries. The participatory and accessible nature of MKKP's organizational model lowers barriers to entry, making it easy for individuals to join and contribute. Unlike traditional political parties that often require formalized membership and adherence to rigid structures, MKKP encourages involvement through collaborative and creative actions, such as community art projects and urban renewal efforts. This inclusive approach allows anyone, regardless of prior political experience, to take an active role in the party's work. As Gráf Tamás (online interview 2023. 12. 8.), former network developer of the MKKP, described: *"We operate completely differently from other parties; our membership is small [...]. In our party, someone can become a member only if they have actively organized or participated in some activity for the Dog Party for at least a year and if the membership approves their inclusion."* By prioritizing hands-on and impactful actions, the party creates an environment where grassroots participants feel directly connected to the outcomes of their efforts.

This deliberate organizational structure ensures that local branches operate as independent units, distinct not only from the higher levels of the party but also from other branches within the same tier. Such autonomy allows each branch to address the unique needs and challenges of its specific community while staying aligned with the party's overarching mission. For MKKP, the primary goal of this decentralized model is to balance resources effectively and establish strong, self-sustaining local communities. These communities are designed to remain active during election cycles and throughout the year, driven by internal motivation and shared goals rather than external pressures (Szegedi 2022). Ultimately, MKKP's model reflects a broader civic empowerment and engagement philosophy. By emphasizing local autonomy, grassroots democracy, and strong ties to civil society, the party creates a framework that is both flexible and resilient. This community-focused activism enables MKKP to operate as a dynamic force for social and political change, grounded in its members' collective energy and creativity.

Involving Civil Organisations

In the case of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) during the period between 2019 and 2024, municipal engagement was observable in three⁵. Districts of Budapest. Among these, Gergely Kovács (District XII) and Veronika Juhász (District II) participated in municipal activities solely as representatives; thus, their influence on actual municipal decisions was marginal. Nevertheless, their methods of engaging civil society in local politics, despite not holding decision-making positions, remain relevant.

5 Not accounting for Zsolt Vitorá, who entered the municipal assembly of Zugló as an MKKP candidate but left the party in 2022 to continue his municipal work as an independent representative.



In contrast, Zsuzsanna Döme, as Deputy Mayor of District IX, had a direct impact on municipal decisions, making it an important area of analysis to understand how the MKKP interacts with civil society when in a decision-making role. Dávid Nagy, the party director of MKKP, had the following to say about cooperation with civil organizations in municipalities: *“There are several places where [cooperation with local civil organizations] is being discussed because, in municipal elections, there are far more civil organizations involved—not just pseudo-civil organizations but genuine ones. We are receiving inquiries, and we will decide on these on a case-by-case basis”* (online interview, 03. 02. 2023).

Gergely Kovács characterized his term from 2019 to 2024 with the following statement: *“With the power of publicity and action, we managed to achieve quite a lot in District XII over the past four and a half years”* (MKKP party 2024a). In District XII, the MKKP often fulfilled functions typically associated with civil organizations. For instance, during the COVID–19 pandemic, the party’s activists (termed passivists) assisted the elderly—who were advised to stay at home—by shopping and performing other essential tasks for them, as well as providing hot meals for those in need. Additionally, they succeeded in having local council meetings broadcast on the local TV channel, as the MKKP had previously streamed these sessions themselves in the absence of official broadcasting. They also publicized a municipal grant intended for civil organizations, which had previously been accessible only to organizations affiliated with the Fidesz and KDNP parties. Furthermore, the MKKP’s primary activity in District XII involved anti-corruption efforts, with the party assuming the watchdog⁶. The role is typically associated with civil society organizations (MKKP party 2024a). As Zoltán Bürger explained: *“They [municipal representatives] are the ones who most often find themselves in a position to carry out a type of political work that is of the watchdog nature—being close to the action, they gain access to information that not everyone has”* (online interview, 02. 03. 2023).

Similarly, in District II, the MKKP focused on assuming civil organizational functions and facilitating the socialization of political issues. Examples include firewood donations to those in need, carried out with the involvement of the party’s passivists (MKKP party 2023a), as well as collecting books for the Budai Children’s Hospital (MKKP party 2023b). Additionally, social engagement, solidarity, and community organizing played a prominent role in the MKKP’s political agenda. Initiatives included the *“Star in a Strike”* program, which provided childcare support for striking teachers (MKKP party 2022a), and, upon Veronika Juhász’s suggestion, the district launched a new grant program allowing individuals to apply for funding for community-building projects (MKKP party 2022b).

In District IX, similar activities were observed. Although Zsuzsanna Döme initiated numerous proposals, the municipal council did not support many of them. However, during the COVID–19 pandemic, the district implemented a community assistance system that involved 600 volunteers.

⁶ This was also the title of the MKKP’s investigative/anti-corruption YouTube series.



Moreover, at the Deputy Mayor's suggestion, the district launched a participatory budgeting program, reformed the grant application process for civil organizations, and made vacant municipal properties available for cultural or social use through a competitive application process. Public outdoor neighborhood meetings were also introduced to incorporate residents' input into municipal decisions. In 2024, the MKKP proposed extending the community activity grant to address micro-local issues (MKKP party, 2024b).

Perhaps the most distinctive initiative reflecting the MKKP's approach to engaging civil society and strengthening local communities was the "*Rózsa Sándor Public Money Squandering Fund*" (RÓSÁNEKATÉKA). Through this program, the party allocated a significant portion of its state funding via grants to support local activities aimed at fostering community organizations (e.g., community gardens, bus stops, dog parks) or civil organizations (e.g. Angyali-szigeti Civilek Egyesülete, Tabu-lapláza Alapítvány, Kéz A Mancsért Civil Állatvédő Egyesület) (MKKP party 2022c).

Conclusion

In summary, it can be stated that the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) adopts a unique approach to engaging with civil society. On the one hand, significant emphasis has been placed on building local political communities within its organizational structure, which are easily accessible and open to participation by virtually anyone in local activities. This approach enables the joining of local units of the party to transcend mere formal relationships, fostering informal networks characterized by distinct internal cohesion and operational dynamics, thereby cultivating a unique set of relationships among group members. Consequently, the party's local organizational units function autonomously at the local level.

On the other hand, the practice of community organizing continues to be utilized by MKKP representatives, even when they hold political power. In many cases, local communities and activists are incorporated into municipal activities. Furthermore, municipal operations frequently encompass functions traditionally associated with civil organizations, such as anti-corruption initiatives and social services.

The organizational efforts of the MKKP can be considered relatively successful, as the party has continued to operate despite several unsuccessful elections. Additionally, its voter base has steadily expanded from one election to the next. Although the party did not achieve the 5% threshold in the 2024 European Parliament elections, its performance, when compared to the 2022 elections, showed an improvement in relative terms under conditions of lower voter turnout (NVI 2024; 2022). This indicates that voter participation among MKKP supporters is more potent than that of other parties, a factor attributed primarily to the strength and activity of its local communities. Furthermore, the party has become a genuine alternative at the local level in the eyes of voters⁷.

⁷ It is impossible to know what results would have been achieved if the Tisza Party had also participated.



A key aspect of this success lies in nominating candidates for municipal elections who are prominent and actively engaged organizers within their respective local political communities. The municipal elections can be unequivocally regarded as a success for the party. The central question remains whether the MKKP can effectively leverage its mandate until 2029 to continue its growth or whether it will consistently remain below the 5% threshold.

The principal objective of the MKKP – to establish strong, independently functioning local political communities within the increasingly constrained political and societal space occupied by the state (Ágh 2022) – has demonstrated the capacity to offer a genuine alternative to mainstream parties (i.e., cartel parties) and can be deemed successful.

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Appendix A

List of interviewees

Position	Date of interview	Mode of interview
Regional Coordinator	2021. 05. 07.	Personal
Former Party Member	2021. 05. 15.	Personal
Candidate for Representative, Party Member	2021. 05. 20.	Personal
Former Activist	2021. 06. 02.	Personal
Independent Local Organizer, Activist, Municipal Representative (2019–2024)	2021. 06. 08.	Personal
Co-Chair	2021. 09. 06.	Online
Former Board Member	2021. 09. 07.	Online
Co-Chair	2021. 09. 17.	Online
Candidate for Representative, Activist	2023. 02. 01.	Online
Operational Director	2023. 02. 03.	Online
Board Member	2023. 02. 03.	Online
Former National Network Developer	2023. 12. 05.	Online
Candidate for Representative, Municipal Representative since October 2024	2023. 12. 11.	Online
Regional Coordinator	2023. 12. 18.	Online
Candidate for Representative, Activist	2023. 12. 20.	Online
Regional Coordinator	2024. 01. 13.	Online
Regional Coordinator	2024. 01. 30.	Online

Appendix B

Questionnaire

How can someone be an activist of the party?
Does the activist have an impact on the decision-making?
How many members does the party have?
How can someone become a member of the party?
How many local party organizations does the party have?
How are the local organizations' relations with the party elite?
How centralized is the party organization?
How big is the role of the party leader in the party?
How are the representatives' (local council, European Parliament, etc.) relations with the party elite?
How big is the overlap between the representative and the party elite?
Who has the bigger influence on the decision-making?



Fotó/István Péter Németh

AN ATTEMPT TO ENCOURAGE AND INSTITUTIONALIZE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN MISKOLC BETWEEN 2019–2024*

Havasi Virág

Introduction

In Miskolc, during the 2019–2024 municipal election term, the winning coalition sought to enhance public participation. To this end, an 'Office of Participation' (Részvételi iroda) was established, led by the officer of citizen participation (állampolgári részvételi referens) of the municipality, and the 'Citizen participation principles' (Állampolgári részvételi koncepció) of Miskolc was elaborated with the involvement of civil society organizations active in the city, which was unanimously adopted by the general assembly.

Over the past five years, various participatory and deliberative techniques have been tested, and specific departments and actors within the local government have begun to learn about citizen participation, its advantages, and challenges. The purpose of this study is to introduce and analyze this period, aiming to answer the question of how and with what results the participation directives of Miskolc were implemented.

The sources of this study include semi-structured interviews with the officer in charge of citizen participation, the chief architect, and the current and former presidents of the Dialog Association, as well as my own experience as a participant observer. I moderated discussions in the case of the 'Review of the Sustainable Urban Development Strategy,' the 'More Than Green Conference' and the series of 'Urban evenings'; I was a member of the jury at the first social hackathon and a member of one of the teams at the second; I participated in the planning and preparation of the 'Urban evenings,' I compiled and evaluated questionnaires



in consultation with the local government, and conducted interviews with experts on the topics related to the Urban evenings¹.

In the introductory part of the study, I clarify the concepts of public participation, representative, participatory, and deliberative democracy, as well as their relationships to each other and the types of democratic innovations. After that, I will summarize the legislative background and domestic situation of citizen participation in Hungary; then, I will describe the structure for public participation in Miskolc, its Citizen participation principles, the applied methods of involvement, and the results of their application; as well as the first steps taken in order to incorporate principles of citizen participation into the operation of the municipality.

Democratic innovations and public participation

Prosperity, educational revolution, and improved access to political information collectively contributed to increased political awareness among citizens, more vigorous mobilization, and a higher degree of public participation. Some citizens in Western societies have become increasingly skeptical of democracy, have distanced themselves from political parties, and have less trust in political leaders, the government, and parliament (Newton 2012). A significant problem is the phenomenon of the democratic deficit, characterized by a substantial proportion of passive citizens whose political activity is limited to casting their votes or not participating at all.

Dissatisfaction with the functioning of democratic systems led to the development of new solutions (Newton 2012). Since the 1960s, unconventional forms of protest have emerged, including the occupation of public spaces, performances, social forums, and flash mobs (Tarrow 2011), alongside the spread of democratic innovations. In the simplest terms, democratic innovation refers to the process of enhancing the quality of democratic governance. This is a simplification and a common element of the definitions created by Newton (2012) and Elstub–Escobar (2019), but it expresses the essence of the concept.

Depending on the source of the shortcomings in democratic systems, there may be different ways to remedy them. Some of the problems stem from the fact that citizens are often uninformed, apathetic, and susceptible to being misled. In these cases, educating, informing, and encouraging citizens to take a more active role is the solution with bottom-up innovations, which Newton (2012) classifies as follows:

1 The interviews were: a local patriotic entrepreneur, a landscape architect, the head of the Miskolc baths, the chief engineer of Miskolc Tourism Ltd., an engineer dealing with bath development and bath investment, the manager of Miskolc Tourism Marketing Nonprofit Public Benefit Ltd., the director of the city transport company (MVK Zrt), the director of the city's museum, the president of the Association for Miskolc with Bicycle, the director of the Miskolc Cultural Center.

1. Reforms of elections and voting procedures: reducing the voting age, universal citizenship, race-conscious re-districting, making voting registration easier, early, electronic and postal voting, compulsory voting, etc. (Newton 2012).
2. Informing citizens, consultation, deliberation: deliberative forums, consensus conferences, planning cells, scenario workshops, study circles, electronic notice boards, democratic kiosks, civics, and citizenship courses, citizenship mentors, citizens panels, juries, panel and focus groups, deliberative polling, etc. (Newton 2012) In Miskolc, the series of „Urban evenings“ and the related preparatory work can be put into this type.
3. Co-governance, i.e., the involvement of citizens in decision-making and implementation: participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies, neighborhood development, village and community councils, community policing experiments, health, education, and planning boards (Newton 2012). Among the tools applied in Miskolc, community planning was a method of co-governance.
4. Utilizing the tools of direct democracy, including referendums, initiatives, recalls, town meetings, and forms of co-governance that grant citizens real decision-making powers (Newton 2012). In Miskolc, the participatory budget and citizens' assembly were implemented for this form.
5. E-democracy: online versions of traditional forms, including e-elections, e-petitions, online polls, and electronic means of finding others with similar political agendas, contacting others, and promoting everyday actions (Newton 2012). In Miskolc, online public opinion polls were used as part of each process, and an interactive website supported the participation program. In this latter, there was a possibility for comments, submitting ideas for the participatory budget, and voting online.

When problems arise with politicians, political procedures, and institutions, increasing transparency and accountability can lead to more effective outcomes. These goals are served by top-down, constitutional, governmental innovations, which either refine the operations of classical institutions with increasing vertical accountability or increase horizontal accountability by strengthening the operation of checks and balances (Newton 2012).

Some refer to participatory democracy as a deliberative, direct, or strong democracy (e.g., Pataki 2007), suggesting that there is some confusion in the use of these terms. Regarding the types of democracy and their relationship to each other, I consider the grouping and definitions of Oross (2020) to be suitable, according to which indirect/representative democracy means that public policy decisions are made by representatives elected by citizens and the institutions of direct/participatory and deliberative democracy aim to remedy the weaknesses of representative democracy. Direct/participatory democracy means the direct participation of citizens in the operation of social institutions, including workplaces, media, and public administration. In deliberative democracy, public discussions play a crucial role in the decision-making process, as they are connected to those who are directly affected by the decisions.



The actual decision-making power of citizens does not necessarily characterize deliberative methods, and discussions do not always accompany the institutions of direct democracy (Oross 2020).

Public participation, in its narrower sense, refers to the involvement of individuals in the institutions that operate democracies, including voting, contacting a political representative, participating in protest campaigns, lobbying, and attending consultations². In a broader sense, public participation involves citizens and their communities assuming responsibility for the processes that occur in their immediate and broader environment and being involved in shaping various social and economic matters (a slight modification of Nárai–Reisinger's 2016 definition). The adjective 'citizen' was chosen instead of 'public' as the name of the participation program in Miskolc, as it adopted a broader sense of 'public' in terms of content and approach, aiming to encourage and support it.

Democracy, democratic innovations, and social participation in Hungary

A low level of political interest characterizes Hungarian society as a whole, with fluctuating political participation and low trust in political institutions. All of these (and not independently of them) are accompanied by a highly materialistic value system, low levels of general trust, solidarity, and tolerance, as well as a low tendency to take risks. (Havasi 2022a) Csizmadia (2014) refers to the Hungarian society as one that lacks foundation, as a result of which democracy grinds to a halt, stiffens, and loses its ability to renew itself. The cohesion of citizens and a well-functioning system of citizenship education should serve as a foundation.

Hungary's political system is based on the primacy of representative democracy; the role of direct and participatory democratic institutions is supplementary to this. Legislation enacted since the change of regime has created the basic legal framework for public participation (Jávor–Beke 2012). The Hungarian constitution (later the Basic Law) contains several human rights that are necessary for the foundation of public participation (freedom of information, the right to access data of public interest, the right to advocacy, the freedom of expression and thought, freedom of assembly and association), and also contains institutions of direct democracy: the local and national referendum, the detailed rules of which are laid out in pivotal laws. In our legal system, social consultation is a requirement during legislative processes for laws, government decrees, and ministerial decrees, as well as in regional and settlement development³, and it is also an element of numerous tender invitations. In the case of local governments, the relevant law⁴.

2 <https://countytoolkit.devolution.go.ke/public-participation>

3 Government Decree 314/2021(XI.8.) on Urban Development Concept, Integrated Urban Development Strategy and Urban Planning Tools, as well as Certain Legal Institutions for Urban Planning

4 Act CLXXXIX of 2011 on Local Governments of Hungary



Their task is to support self-organizing communities, cooperate with these communities, and ensure broad citizen participation in local public affairs.

In Hungary, the introduction of top-down democratic innovations at the governmental and constitutional levels is not typical; in fact, we have observed the emergence of anti-democratic innovations in recent years, which has increased the rule of law deficit.

The existing tools of direct democracy in the country are primarily used by the elite, who often exploit them (Herman 2015). An increasing number of bottom-up democratic innovation experiments are taking place at the local level, and parties and social movements are also attempting to introduce innovations. Case studies can be found in Oross (2020), Gosztonyi (2022), Kuna-Simon (2012), and Szántó (2012), which discuss participatory budgeting, citizens' assemblies, and traditional involvement tools, respectively. Füzér (2017) analyzes the process that took place in Pécs after the turn of the century, during which a transition occurred from a community initiative model to a beneficiary model. In the meantime, the interpersonal social capital of active citizens and their trust in the participation process eroded. Kocsis and his colleagues examined the practice of population involvement in Hungarian municipalities as part of the large-scale ÖFFK II research project (see: Kocsis–Csanádi 2018; Kocsis 2019; Illésy et al. 2019). They found that the majority of local government leaders were reluctant to involve the public to a greater extent, primarily due to their perception of local governments as their right to control. (Kocsis 2019). The results of their large-scale local government questionnaire indicate that in Hungarian local governments, public opinion is primarily channeled through public hearings and forums. Besides these, other relatively frequently used means are tours of the municipality and mayoral visits to homes; these are followed in frequency by informal customer service hours, public meetings attended by specialists, street forums, idea boxes, the inclusion of selected public stakeholders, even less often local referendums, hours of the municipality, online customer service points, regular visits to local businesses, neighborhood trust system, specialized advisory panel, focus groups, participatory budgeting. The size of the settlement is a significant factor in determining which devices can work effectively.

The citizens themselves prefer different tools depending on the size of their settlement; according to the findings of Jávör–Beke's (2012) survey targeting the population, "in smaller settlements people tend to use more direct, personal relationship-based, and constructive solutions (such as public forums, public hearings, participation in community work), while in larger settlements, especially in big cities, they prefer more institutionalized, impersonal forms that focus on disputes and protests (such as civil protests, local referendums, etc.) (Jávör–Beke 2012: 81).

Boda–Jávör (2012) employed an interview-based methodology to investigate the attitudes of institutional actors and civil organizations toward social participation. They found that "employees of state institutions generally consider participation to be important and potentially useful in normative terms, but in their work, they tend to perceive it more as an additional task." (Boda–Jávör 2012: 62).



The underdeveloped democratic culture, characterized by a low level of awareness and intention, as well as incomplete knowledge among citizens, was considered a factor hindering social participation. The actors of civil society did not dispute that “greater awareness and activity from society would be necessary.” However, they pointed out that “existing intentions often fail due to the resistance of public administration and local government actors. This, in turn, dampens even the remaining enthusiasm and further undermines the already low level of community activity” (Boda–Jávör 2012: 62). Overall, it can be said that the Hungarian situation is characterized by a desire for cooperation with society, which drives neither national nor local governance. However, local communities also have limited demands in terms of involvement in decision-making.

The participation programme in Miskolc between 2019–2024

Hungary has been governed by Fidesz with a two-thirds majority since 2010. During the same period, most local governments have also come under Fidesz's control, including large cities such as the traditionally socialist Miskolc. Under Fidesz's leadership, the country has become an illiberal democracy, characterized by a rule-of-law deficit and weakening of civil society, as well as a decline in civic activism (see in more detail: Havasi 2023), which is reflected in the European rule of law enforcement process against the country. In this political environment was the winner of the 2019 local government elections in Miskolc, the coalition of opposition parties and civil society organizations (Függetlenek A Szinva Városáért Egyesület–MSZP–Momentum–Párbeszéd–Jobbik–LMP–DK–MMM–Velünk a Város Lokálpatrióta Egyesület), whose intention -among other things- was to strengthen citizen participation. To this end, the position of *Citizen Participation Officer* was created, which was filled by an experienced sociologist and civil activist. The Office of Participation, situated in the city center, served as an open space accessible to both citizens and informal and formal communities. The office staff, which would eventually consist of three people by the end of the term, visited public events in the city to make contact with the population and promote the participation program. In the first year, the principles of citizen participation were developed through the participation of politicians, local government officials, including lawyers, representatives of professional civil society organizations, and active community members.

The Municipal Citizen Participation Principles of Miskolc MÁRK) names four participation levels and various participation methods within them. During the process, several methods are combined at different levels of participation. The initiator of the given process must define the methods and framework and inform the invited actors about these factors in order to prevent unrealistic expectations, dissatisfaction, and disappointment.

At the level of *information*, the goal is to provide information about the participation processes, which are facilitated through the city's website, Facebook page, the 'Minap' newspaper, its online version, and the [tervezzukmiskolcot. hu](http://tervezzukmiskolcot.hu) website. The Department of Communication and Media of the mayor's office performed information-related tasks in connection with the participation processes. Given that everything had to go through the responsible persons in the office, publishing information and news was a slow and complicated process. This particularly disturbed the activists of the CSOs, as it was very different from their flexible, quick-reaction approach to working. Although communication was recognized as important, it was the most criticized element in the participation processes according to all actors. *It would have been nice if there had been someone in the office who had focused solely on this task... The communication interfaces must be constantly provided with content. The employee responsible for communication should be able to devise and execute campaigns, working closely with us, of course. (excerpt from interview - participation officer)*

According to the MÁRK, the *consultation* is a two-way, asymmetrical process during which the municipality provides information and asks for opinions. Its tools include an online participation website, an online questionnaire, field trips (kitelepülés), a community survey, and an idea box. The MÁRK did not name it, but the "Urban Evenings" series also served this purpose, about which I will talk in more detail later.

The *dialogue* is a regular, public communication about a specific issue, utilizing various means, including community planning, community assemblies, public forums, community discussions, customer service hours, public hearings, and sectoral civic workshops (MÁRK).

In the case of a *partnership*, the municipality undertakes to make the decision that developed in the dialogue. In addition to the municipality, the actors and tools of the partnership mentioned in the MÁRK are the Civil Partnership Council, civil workshops and councils, participatory budgeting, local referendums, community assemblies, and community initiatives (MÁRK).

The creation of a *civil partnership system* was one of the objectives of the MÁRK. In Miskolc, the cooperation between the municipality and civil society organizations has a long history which has had its ups and downs. The MÁRK targeted the establishment and operation of civil workshops, as well as the creation of a Civil Partnership Council. The *professional workshops* should be organized among CSOs active in the city and interested in participating in the process, tailored to their respective scopes of activity. These workshops can delegate representatives who may participate in professionally relevant meetings of the local government committees with the right to consult. The members of the Civil Partnership Council would be invited by the current vice-mayor responsible for civil partnerships, who would be selected from among organizations that contribute to the performance of local government tasks or participate in the reconciliation of interests at the sectoral or local level. (An alternative to this solution could be for the civic workshops to delegate members to the partnership council.)



The Civil Partnership Council has the right to comment on the budget chapters that affect CSOs and the principles of municipal subsidies for CSOs. The professional workshops were not established, partly because the potential key actors of the workshops—the most significant green organization and the most innovative organization operating in the social sphere—became disappointed with the participation process.

In the field of social services in Miskolc, the role of civil organizations is significant. The city has signed service agreements with 15 organizations, and the Miskolc Disability Professional Workshop (Miskolci Fogytékösügyi Szakmai Műhely) has been operating for two decades, bringing together around thirty professional interdisciplinary partners. (Havasi 2022b) All of this could have provided a solid foundation for the outlined structure to function effectively. However, one of the most substantial and innovative organizations in the social sector became disillusioned with the participatory process, as its proposal was eliminated during the pre-screening phase of the participatory budget due to its cost implications. The submitting organization disputed the necessity of the amount estimated by the municipality for implementation, as their calculations included the involvement of volunteer work. The municipality, on the other hand, was obliged to proceed through public procurement processes.

At the beginning of the term, representatives of the green movement reached out to the citizen participation officer, proposing the development of a civic strategy for the city, the establishment of a civic roundtable, and the inclusion of civic representatives in municipal committees. The initiators were involved in the civil partnership task force, but they felt that the emerging MÁRK lacked guarantees. Consequently, they withdrew from the process. They also expressed dissatisfaction that a separate civil strategy was not developed, but the participation officer insisted that the participation of citizens and civil society organizations could not be separated. Consistently adhering to this position, the officer invited CSOs from Miskolc to all events and gatherings throughout the term. While some organizations ensured their representation on every occasion, others protested by refusing to participate.

The Civil Partnership Council was not established either, despite its significant potential contribution to the city. The current support and grant system of the civil sphere is fragmented. Establishing a comprehensive and transparent civil support system in collaboration with stakeholders would be highly beneficial.

After the adoption of MÁRK, the primary goal of the civil participation officer was to incorporate participatory principles *into the operational framework of the municipal office and local government*. She aimed to develop procedures and ensure that the involvement of citizens and civil organizations became an integral part of everyday administrative processes. A significant achievement was made during the review of the Sustainable Urban Development Strategy. An event was organized, during which a large number of the city's civil organizations were represented. Various topics were discussed at the roundtable sessions, and one key proposal that emerged was to ensure that future municipal grant applications are

developed in collaboration with representatives from civil organizations relevant to the topic and location. The resigning mayor approved of the idea, and in consultation with the grant department, plans were made to establish five task forces for the TOP+ projects. They also approved the list of 30–40 organizations to be invited to participate in these groups. The question remains whether the new city leadership will uphold this decision.

Another goal would be to ensure that the organizations involved in the planning process can join as a consortium partner role in the city's grant applications. This would override the recent practice where MESZEGYI (Miskolc Unified Social, Health, and Child Welfare Institution) and the Maltese Charity Service have been the city's constant partners in tenders. The question once again arises: if the organizations do not receive guarantees for consortium partnership, will they be willing to contribute their ideas and energy to the applications?

According to the MÁRK, participatory points (részvételi pont) are multifunctional, integrated civil community spaces where involved organizations carry out voluntary participatory tasks in addition to their core activities. These tasks help facilitate multidirectional communication between the city district and the municipality while also supporting local community initiatives and empowering citizens. The cooperation agreements with the civil organizations selected in each city district were not established, as the municipality was unable to provide compensation. Despite this, the involved organizations still joined for individual actions in connection with the city's participation processes. The civil participation officer considers it essential that the participatory points will continue to function in the future. However, for the process to be controllable and for the operating organizations to dedicate sufficient time and energy to this activity, compensation is necessary.

Participatory Techniques Used in Miskolc

From among the *traditional participatory tools*, Miskolc has held *public hearings* and *community forums*. The latter were most often initiated by community groups who opposed a planned investment. The forums typically saw a large turnout, with the Citizenship Participation Officer moderating the discussions. A negative aspect of the events was that the municipality was reluctant to openly communicate or admit that the controversial investment would proceed, with only the specifics of how it would be carried out in question. As a result, the residents' disappointment was almost predictable. A positive aspect of the process was that taking into account the doubts raised during the forums, changes were made to the plans. For example, by rotating the new building, fewer trees need to be cut down. The construction of the new road will also include traffic-easing solutions.

Among the democratic innovations, a community assembly was held, participatory budgeting was introduced, and a series of city evenings were organized.



The citizens' assembly (közösségi gyűlés) and citizens' jury (állampolgári tanács) are deliberative methods in which participants make proposals to decision-makers on a predefined issue. These processes facilitate in-depth discussions, allowing citizens to reflect on and deliberate specific topics before offering their recommendations. The assembly or council is composed of a representative group of members from the given community, who are randomly selected through a lottery method by the organizers. During the 2–7-day event, participants listen to experts, and then, in a debate led by an independent moderator, they develop a consensus-based opinion on the issue at hand. The two formats differ in the number of participants: the assembly typically includes a larger group, ranging from 50 to 150 people, while the jury consists of 12 to 24 participants⁵. The municipality of Miskolc chose climate protection and the related issue of air quality as the topic of the community assembly. The 46 participants elaborated on seven proposals in detail (Bördös 2021), which the municipality began implementing, at least by looking for funds.

Participatory budgeting (részvételi költségvetés) is a democratic innovation in which citizens directly participate in the decision-making process regarding the allocation of a portion of the state or municipal budget. Many versions of participatory budgeting have developed, differing in terms of the powers granted to citizens (such as choosing between specific investments, determining development priorities, or submitting their ideas), the methods used to involve them (directly and/or indirectly, through elected representatives or civil organizations), and the activities in which citizens participate (forums, discussions, casting votes). For more details, see Syntomer et al. (2008). Merényi identifies the common characteristics of participatory budgeting as follows: “The process should be tied to specific budgetary and financial decisions, involving either the affected groups or the entire local population; the process should be repeated over several years; active citizen participation should be a part of the involvement; and the results should be transparent and accountable” (Merényi 2020: 11).

In the version applied in Miskolc, citizens can formulate proposals on three topics: making the city more nature-friendly, reducing social inequalities, and creating missing services, public spaces, and facilities. During the pre-screening of proposals, the municipality's experts examine their feasibility and cost requirements. From the proposals that pass this filter, a citizens' council selects 15 proposals to be put to a vote. Volunteers are invited to join this council, and their selection is based on ensuring that the council represents the city's population as well as possible. After registration, citizens can vote on the proposals through the participatory website. In the first year, 170 ideas were submitted; in 2023, 150; and in 2024, 91. Meanwhile, the total amount increased threefold, rising from 15 million forints to 40 million forints. The situation worsens when considering the number of voters: in 2022,

⁵ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/citizens-assemblies>, <https://involve.org.uk/resource/citizens-jury>

134 people voted, while in 2023, only 100 people participated in the election. The implementation of the ideas has started, but it is happening very slowly. Many of the ideas from 2022 were still in the procurement or detailed planning stages in 2024. The decrease in the number of submitted ideas may be attributed to the fact that those whose ideas were rejected in the first round did not become active later on, as well as the slow pace of implementing the ideas.

The series of *"Urban Evenings"* (városi esték) aimed to facilitate discussions among Miskolc citizens, municipal representatives, and experts on three specific topics in a café-style setting to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Before each event, the goal was to gather and share information related to the evening's topics, as well as to gauge public sentiment through an online questionnaire. The reopening of the former Diósgyőr swimming pool and the issue of urban transportation sparked great interest, as evidenced by the number of completed questionnaires (1,400 and 714 respondents, respectively) and the attendance at the events. The situation of the city's largest park, Népkert, attracted less interest, with only 294 people completing the questionnaire and 25 attending the event. The attendees were mainly relevant professionals, residents of Népkert, and leaders of local businesses and institutions.

At the "Urban Evening on Transportation," pro-car residents were underrepresented, resulting in their perspectives being somewhat overlooked, and communication with this group was lacking. Although expert interviews were prepared before the events, almost none of them were published. The primary reason for this was the absence of a person responsible for coordinating communication who could also manage matters within the municipality. At the events, discussions were held in roundtables, divided by subtopics. At the first event, people did not move from their initially chosen tables. However, at the following two events, the organizers switched to the "World Café" method, meaning they rotated the participants among tables. All three events were exciting, held in a good atmosphere, and the questions were explored from many different angles. A key aspect of the method is that it prioritizes enhancing citizens' access to information over community organizations. Nevertheless, in the case of Népkert, the relevant local government professionals received inspiration, and further discussions took place between the so-called "Népkert round table" and the chief architect's cabinet regarding the direction of future planning. The unanimous conclusion from the event evaluation surveys was that participants were satisfied with the organization and execution, and they would be happy to attend similar events in the future. A critical comment addressed the "insularity" of the Népkert event and the absence of local MPs. The explanation for this absence was that party representatives were intentionally kept away to prevent the events from being hijacked for political purposes. Unfortunately, the political climate is such that civil initiatives must distance themselves from political parties, even though they should be seen as potential resources and allies.



The citizen participatory principles of Miskolc embraced a broad approach to participation, incorporating the use of tools focused on *community development*.

During the examined period, the Participation Office supported *grassroots initiatives*. The most successful of these was the "Adopt a Public Space!" program, in which a local community takes responsibility for the care and maintenance of plants and public objects in a specific public area. By 2024, 36 active communities were operating. In addition, two community gardens were established, and a community in a segregated area was strengthened, taking on the responsibility of managing their community center during the examined period.

The inspiration for *social hackathons* (szociális ötletmaraton) comes from hackathons—typically prize-based competitions where diverse teams work intensively over two to three days to solve a challenge, usually involving the development of software. Social hackathons differ primarily in the challenges they present. However, their execution is similar: idea pitching, team-building to match ideas with participants, idea development, presentation of project plans, and final decision-making. The first social hackathon in Miskolc, held in spring 2022, had a broadly defined challenge: to improve the quality of life for the city's residents. A total of 37 ideas were submitted, and with the help of mentors, 50 participants developed six project plans. Out of the developed ideas, two were implemented, even though all the ideas received either cash prizes awarded by the jury or special prizes based on contributions from attendees aimed at supporting their realization. The second social hackathon, which focused on climate neutrality, presented a challenge in terms of attracting fewer ideas and participants. Ultimately, 25 people developed four projects. While implementation has started, progress has been slow and more challenging than anticipated. According to participants' feedback, the social hackathons were considered highly successful, with most highlighting the value of the human connections formed and the joy of experiencing creativity and enthusiasm sparked. However, the organizers were dissatisfied with the number of participants, the quality of ideas, and the composition of the participants. This latter group proved to be relatively homogeneous, consisting mainly of professionals in humanities. Organizers believe this is due to these initiatives being newly launched in a society that has become passive, and they will need time to gain momentum. The idea of shortening the event was considered. However, it was concluded that if someone is unwilling to dedicate one or two days to developing an idea, they are unlikely to invest more energy in its implementation. This is evidenced by the fact that only a tiny portion of the winning ideas were eventually realized despite the available resources.

Among other postmodern tools of participation, community planning stands out in Miskolc, emerging as the most prominent element of the participatory program. During these events, local stakeholders and communities collaborate to create a shared vision, community plan, and/or strategy. Typically, few participants attended the community planning events, but those who did came up with great, inspiring ideas. However, the results should be approached with caution precisely

due to the low participation numbers and the lack of representativeness of the method. Community planning took place about the "Szinva Green Corridor" (Szinva Zöld Folyosó) plan, which aims to bring the stream that runs through Miskolc closer to the people and foster a more vibrant relationship between humans and their environment. As part of this process, community planning sessions were held at six locations that are suitable for community gatherings and meetings. Additionally, there was a "Szinva tour" by bike, featuring the city's chief architect and interested citizens. A total of fifty people engaged in these activities, and a few comments and suggestions were also made on the website. Additionally, community planning was conducted regarding the future of the Görömböly wine cellar row, as well as several surrounding squares.

The principles of participation, their place within the organizational structure of the municipality, the Chief Architect's Cabinet, and the Climate Protection Group

According to the MÁRK, the goals of the participatory process in Miskolc are to establish an organized form of cooperation with civil organizations and active communities, to develop a systematic practice of involving stakeholders, and to ensure that investments align more precisely with actual needs. Additionally, the goals are to strengthen Miskolc's identity and establish social responsibility. (MÁRK) The very phrasing ("establish," "develop") indicates that everything that has happened in Miskolc over the past five years is merely the beginning of a journey. The Miskolc program will demonstrate long-term results through continuous learning of consultative methods (MÁRK).

The personal goal of the participation officer and the vice-mayor responsible for civil participation was to integrate the concept and practice of participation into the office's daily operations, making it a part of the office's functioning. A related result is that a local government decree was passed on the socialization (társadalmazás) procedure, according to which, if any office unit wants to socialize an issue, the civil participation officer prepares a plan with its financial implications and submits it to the mayor. If the mayor approves, the process will start.

In the examined period, the chief architect's cabinet was the most active, either as an initiator or as an invited actor in the participation processes in Miskolc. This is partly natural because *"they are the investors; everything comes from there."* On the other hand, the principles of local governance and participation espoused by the chief architect and their team also steered the processes in this direction: *"The municipality is the government of the city's residents; it is even in the name." It is one thing for people to hold positions there, but positions are based on the mandate of the city's residents. Therefore, decision-makers should not make decisions solely at the municipal level while city residents suffer the consequences; instead, decisions should be made through collaboration. ...It is clear that every municipality represents the community's interests, which may sometimes clash with individual*



interests, but not because the official prefers it; rather, it represents the community's interests. (Interview excerpt – Chief Architect)

The Urban Maintenance Group (városüzemeltetési csoport) primarily sought the Participation Office's assistance for public forums. Cooperation with the Miskolc Cultural Centre has also begun, but it can still be considered to be in its infancy. The collaboration mainly involves providing space for civil groups at city events, such as a street section, square, or terrace. This offers a good opportunity for them to introduce themselves and also gather some resources. Therefore, there is much-untapped potential in the cultural field.

A challenge for the city's Climate Protection Group was to finalize a climate agreement, as Miskolc, along with two other Hungarian cities, was included in the European Union's 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission. This commitment involves developing comprehensive plans for a climate-neutral city and establishing the necessary partnerships to implement them. The task force, in collaboration with the Participation Office, organized a series of workshops in different city districts on related topics. Except for the water protection workshop, the participation willingness was very low. The question remains whether the topic did not interest people enough or if there were issues with communication, the invited group, and the method of reaching them. I assume that the water protection workshop was more successful because an active community from North Kilián hosted the event. A more successful socialization attempt was the "More Than Green" conference, which featured roundtable discussions. During these discussions, the attending CSO representatives and citizens not only discussed the given topic but also made commitments on how they could contribute to the goal of a climate-neutral city. They were also able to present their suggestions, not only then but later online. In preparation for the climate agreement, the organizing partners decided that the theme of the second social hackathon in Miskolc would be climate neutrality. Even before the 100 Climate-Neutral Cities project, the topic had appeared in participatory processes, as the community assembly focused on air quality, and the "Szinva Green Corridor" also touches on the stream's ecosystem. The process was successful in the sense that a climate contract was established; however, upon examining the number of signatories, it becomes clear that widespread involvement was not achieved.

Unlike the participatory office in Józsefváros, where it was part of the mayor's internal cabinet during the previous term, in Miskolc, it was under the responsibility of the vice-mayor and the head of the office made efforts to keep the processes distanced from party politics. *"Of course, everything is politics, but I said (...), I am not willing to select initiatives or civil organizations based on politics (...)."* (Interview excerpt – Participation Officer) Over five years, dilemmas arose in this regard, such as whether the participation office should assume the role of moderator in a public forum initiated by a local Member of Parliament.

In general, the organizers of the participatory programs attempted to keep local MPs at a distance so that party politicians could not utilize them for political

marketing. This is a contradictory situation, as it would be a healthier solution if the MPs were present at consultations affecting their areas, engaging in dialogues and initiatives. The situation, however, is that there is indeed a risk that political parties might attempt to appropriate the results. A regrettable consequence of this phenomenon is that, in the current political climate, a movement can be harmed if it aligns with any party, as opponents can immediately raise concerns about political agendas.

The MÁRK's principles of participation include that participation must be accurate and meaningful and cannot be used to pretend to support a predetermined political or professional position. Proposals and opinions received through the participatory system must be taken seriously, and stakeholders must be informed of the outcomes. In this regard, the Miskolc processes can be considered particularly successful, even when considering the aforementioned challenges.

Summary

The methods that enable and encourage public participation (in Miskolc, referred to as citizenship) incorporate elements from both the direct/participatory and deliberative democracy toolkits. Among democratic innovations, bottom-up type innovations serve to achieve these goals. Several democratic innovations were tested in Miskolc, which, based on Newton's typology, were the following: „Urban evenings“ and interactive website (which served to inform, consult, and deliberate citizens), community planning (as a means of co-governance), participatory budget and citizens' assembly (tools of direct democracy), online public opinion polls, interactive website (e-democracy). The study aimed to investigate how and with what results the citizen participation program in Miskolc developed, as well as how citizens' activity and capabilities were enhanced. Several notable achievements were made, including the implementation of various methods, the establishment of infrastructure for citizen participation, and its integration into the municipality's daily operations. However, the weaker aspect of performance is the number of citizens reached and activated. One possible reason for this is that more time is needed to scale up participatory processes and for citizens to learn democratic modes of operation.

Another weak point of the processes and a partial cause of the low participation rate was communication, which will need to be improved in the future if the ongoing work is to continue.

An innovative procedure, institution, or tool does not necessarily lead to the expected results, and even if it does, it may come with high costs, requiring significant time and energy investment. In this regard, good decisions were made in Miskolc, as the chosen methods effectively served the actual purposes at a cost-effective rate.



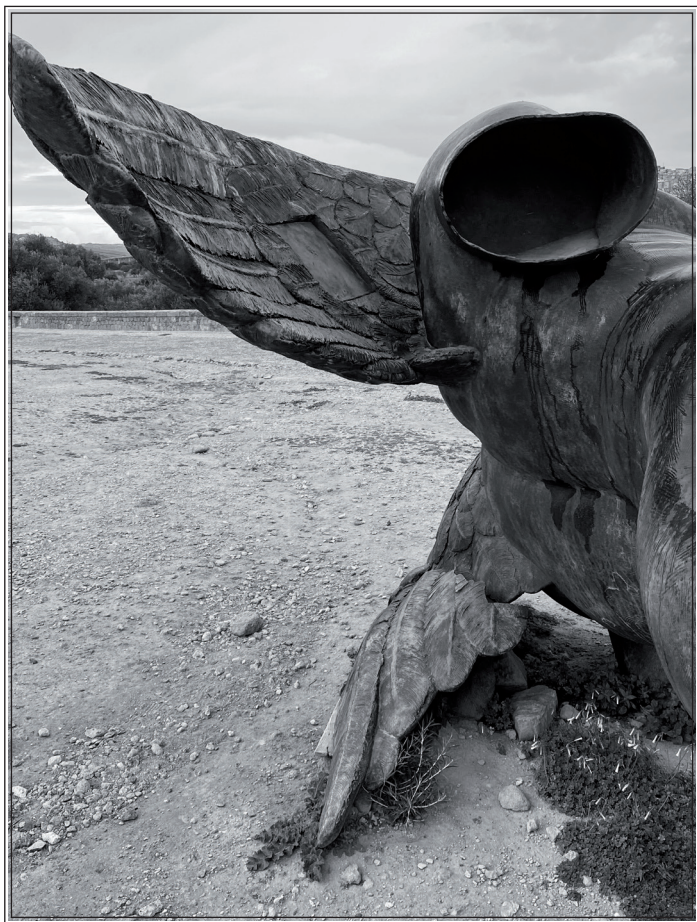
It is impossible to avoid conflicts altogether; democracy involves debates, which in turn leads to conflicts. Certain critics of the participatory process in Miskolc, especially those from the civil sphere, would expect more and more substantial decision-making rights. However, it is also true that our legal system is fundamentally based on representative democracy. Thus, participatory democracy and its institutions can help us operate this democracy in a more meaningful and high-quality manner.

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Fotó/István Péter Németh

DILEMMÁK ÉS ALKUK — ESETTANULMÁNY*

Fekete Éva

„Miután a kiindulópontunkat tisztáztuk, kezdjük meg utazásunkat a Föld egy másik sarkára, amely megtagadja, hogy a tőke kedvéért globalizálódjon, és a technológia kedvéért informacionalizálódjon. Azon a földön, amit a múlt álmai és a jövő rémálmai, szenvedély, nagylelkűség, előítéletek, félelem, fantázia, erőszak, elhibázott stratégiák és szerencsés leletek népesítik be. Egyszóval: emberek.” (Castells 2003)

Bevezetés

A 2019-es évben útjára indult Fridays For Future (FFF) mozgalom a mozgalmárok egy új nemzedékét szólította meg globálisan, a jövőjükért aggódó húsz év alattiakat a világ minden pontján. A legjobb szándékú, a bolygó és a rajta élő fajok védelmében felszólaló hangokkal telt meg a nagyobb városok főtere péntekenként, és az újszerű gondolatokkal felfegyverzett fiatal aktivisták keltette hullám még abban az évben megérkezett Magyarországra is. A magyarországi kezdeményezés honlapjára kattintva, a hírek menüpont alatt az utolsó bejegyzés hároméves.

A „civil társadalom” kifejezés esztétörténeti fejlődése szorosan összefügg a nemzetállam fogalmának alakulásával, összefüggéseiben kapcsolódik az államhatalom, az állampolgárság, a piacgazdaságok kialakulásához. A civil társadalom az általánosan uralkodó nézet szerint valahol az állam és a piac között húzódó, úgynevezett összetett szektor, mely egyének, szervezetek, mozgalmak, áramlatok bonyolult elegye. A „civil társadalom” közvetlen megfelelője a latinban a *societas civilis*, az ógörögben a *politike koinona*, mely mindkét nyelvben olyan aktív állampolgári közösséget jelent, ami maga alakítja a politikát és az intézmények rendszerét, vagyis mindkettő egyfajta politikai társadalmat takar (Arisztotelész 1996; Cohen–Arato 1994). A civil társadalom fogalmi és tartalmi értelmezése, politológiai, szociológiai értelmezési keretrendszerének változása végighúzódik a történelmen, s a jelen kor globális civil társadalmának értelmezési keretéig mutat.



Arisztotelész, Hobbes, Locke, Hegel, Marx, Tocqueville, Castells, Habermas művein keresztül végighaladva a fogalom történeti idővonalán azt láthatjuk közös pontként, hogy minden korban szoros összefüggésben áll az egyéni jogok, a szabadság, a polgári erény és a demokratikus értékek ideáljával.

Az 1990-es években és a kétezres évek legelején zajlott tudományos diskurzusban is azt találjuk, hogy a lokalitás kérdéséről erősen megoszlanak a vélemények a civil társadalommal kapcsolatban. Míg Putnam a klasszikus civil társadalom felbomlásáról beszél (Putnam 1995), addig Etzioni a közösségek helyi bázisra épülő újjászületését látja (Etzioni 1993). Manuel Castells a kisközösségekkel foglalkozva arról ír, hogy az egyének valahová tartozás iránti igénye erős, ellenáll az individualizálódás és atomizálódás társadalmi tendenciájának és a közösség egyfajta kulturális identitás (Castells 2003).

A globalizáció és az internetes hálózatok létrejöttével, a társadalmi mobilizálódás, vele együtt pedig a mozgalmak működése alakult át. Hálózatok jöttek létre, melyek globálisan lépnek fel az új globális rend ellen, mindezekkel együtt pedig a szolidaritás kifejezésének módja is megváltozott. A szolidaritás kifejezése a tényleges erőfeszítéssel járó cselekedet mellett/helyett lehet egy „a közösségi médiában gombnyomással kifejezett gesztus” (Takács 2018: 11). Az online térben buzgón érvelők, petíciókat aláírók, egyes ügyek mellett kiálló tömegek nehezen jelennek meg a valós térben is a zászlókkal vonulók mellett, mögött. A legtöbben „leadják voksukat, ami nem kerül semmibe” és „bátorító szavakat motyognak”¹ azoknak, akik kiállnak az igazság mellett. Azok pedig egyre kevesebben vannak: „Egy erényes emberre az erény kilencszázkilencvenkilenc támogatója esik...” (Thoreau 1993: 14).

A szolidaritás-deficit miatt szemünk előtt bukkannak fel az online térben felerősödő, milliók által támogatott globális mozgalmak, melyek a valós térben feloldódnak, majd sok esetben eltűnnek, ahogyan a hazai FFF-mozgalom.

A széles körű társadalmi szolidaritás hiányának egyik oka lehet a civil szektor folyamatos átpolitizálódása. A nem kormányzati, nonprofit szervezetek, ellenőrző és korrektív funkciójukon keresztül a demokrácia zálogának is tekinthetők. Függetlenségük megőrzése és a befolyásolhatóságuk elkerülése érdekében külföldi forrásokat vonhatnak be tevékenységükbe, mellyel hatást gyakorolnak a közpolitikákra és védelmezik a jogok érvényesülését. A demokratikus országok kormányzatai e szervezetek ellenőrző tevékenységét saját transzparenciájuknak erősítésére használják fel, míg az autoriter hatalmak, ezen számukra előnytelen fellépést minden eszközzel ellenőrizni és korlátozni igyekeznek (Deák 2021). A Magyarországon is tapasztalható átpolitizáltság nem előzmények nélküli és nem egyedi Közép- és Kelet-Európa országaiban. A kommunista rendszerek összeomlása után több mint három évtizeddel elmondható, hogy azokban az országokban, melyekben negyven év államszocialista időszak után indult újra fejlődésnek a civil társadalom, a szektor fejlődését befolyásoló közös történeti és társadalmi előzmények miatt hasonló trendek

1 Az idézett részek Henry David Thoreau, *A polgári engedetlenség iránti kötelesség* című írásából származnak.



várhatók annak jövőjét illetően is (Meyer et al. 2017). Az autokratikus, civileket ellehetetlenítő törekvések a régió más országai mellett Magyarországon is megjelentek a politikailag kényelmetlen, nem kormányzati szervezetek visszaszorítására.

A korábbi szabályozás teljes átszabása, a támogatási rendszerek centralizálása, a 2011-es civil törvény együttese elvette a hatalmat az ellenzékbe szorult civilektől (Sebestény 2017) és az egyre kifinomultabb médiagépezet „az újonnan felbukkanó civil szereplők, a társadalmi mozgalmak aktivistái esetében a rendszeres karaktergyilkosságtól sem riad vissza” (Ágh 2016: 36), ami csak keveseket nem rettent el a kiállástól a jogok érvényesítéséért.

E kevesekből a valós térben létrejött csoportok, közösségek együttes cselekvésének képessége, folyamatos bomlásának és épülésének dinamikája számos dolog függvénye (Utasi 2012). Az egyéni életutak és a társadalomban végbement változások egyaránt hozzájárulhatnak ahhoz, hogy a csoportok megerősödnek, felbomlanak, majd újjászerveződnek, a siker vagy kudarc pedig múlhat az erőforrások mozgósításának sikerességén is. Támogató tömegbázis nélkül az erős belső szervezettséggel, országos hálózatokkal nem rendelkező civil szervezetek hamar eljelentéktelenednek (Oberschall 1993). Az olyan bizonytalansággal, bizalmatlansággal átszótt, kevésbé szolidáris társadalmakban amilyen a hazai, ennek kockázata még nagyobb. A 2019 utáni évek társadalmi kihívásaira adott hazai megoldások és válaszok azt bizonyítják, hogy Magyarországon nem beszélhetünk országos hálózatokkal átszótt, belső szervezettségű civil társadalomról. Az egyes globálisan felmerülő, helyben megoldandó problémákban lecsapódó kihívásokra, de a helyi ügyekre sincsenek egységes civil társadalomként adott válaszok, csupán helyi, kis szolidáris közösségek laza és organikusán szerveződő csoportjainak spontán válaszai vannak jelen a reflexív szolidaritás megnyilvánulásaiént (Takács 2018). Ennek felismerése után pedig nem tekinthetünk a hazai mozgalmakra, mint egy jól szervezett szektor erős szervezetire, inkább úgy kell tekintenünk rájuk, mint hús-vér aktív állampolgárok közösségére.

A 2019-es év után számos extrém kihívással kellett megküzdeniük a hazai civil szervezeteknek és informális közösségeknek. Járvány, háború, energiaválság, és belpolitikai fordulatok fokozták a már fragmentált közösségek izolálódását, az egyének és csoportok közélettől elfordulását és regresszióját. Az esettanulmány arra kíván rámutatni, hogy amennyiben létezik is globális civil társadalom és vannak globális civil mozgalmak, azok végső soron az egyénektől erednek, sikerük az egyéni élethelyzetek és attitűdök függvénye. A tanulmány célja, hogy egy hazai, klasszikus grassroots szerveződés első öt évének áttekintésével, a csoport történeti változásai mellett ismertesse annak teleológiai, morfológiai és strukturális aspektusait. A tanulmány nem titkolt célja, hogy az alulról szerveződő, globális célokért lokálisan fellépő zöld szervezetet Manuel Castells szavaival élve „emberi vállalkozásként” (Castells 2003: 213) mutassa be.



Módszerek

Az egyes, közös érdek, érték és cél mentén létrejött kis csoportok fejlődésének öt szakaszát Bruce Tuckman (1977) a megalakulás, a viharzás, a szabályozás, a teljesítés és felbomlás szakaszaiban határozta meg (forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning). Az esettanulmány egy ilyen kis csoport fejlődési szakaszait ismerteti. A vizsgált csoporthoz megalakulásakor, mint civil szervezetek működése, működtetése és zöld aktivizmus terén tapasztalattal rendelkező szakember csatlakoztam. Az 1990-es évektől önkéntesként számos zöld civil szervezet életszakaszait volt alkalmam megfigyelni, ám egy szervezetet sem figyelhettem meg megalakulásának első perceitől. A résztvevőként megélt korábbi tapasztalataim azt mutatták, hogy erős viharzás után az egyes szervezeteknél bizonyos életszakaszban, bizonyos körülmények hatására egyfajta vákuum keletkezik, mely a szervezet belső dinamikáját befolyásolva hullámmozgást okoz annak működésében.

A vizsgált szervezetnél e korábban tapasztalt jelenségeket próbáltam rendszerezve megfigyelni. A csoporton belül, tapasztalataimon alapuló, a más tagok által kezdeményezettéket támogató feladatokat láttam el, melyek során megelésem szubjektívek voltak ugyan, de kutatóként folyamatosan objektivitásra törekedtem. A tanulmány alapjául szolgáló megfigyelésben betöltött „egészen résztvevő” szerepköröm vethet fel etikai kérdéseket, ugyanakkor úgy érzem, a pozícióm a validitást erősíti.

A tanulmány a vidéki grassroots-szerveződés bemutatásával szemlélteti azokat az alkalmazkodási és megküzdési stratégiákat, melyeket egy informális csoport egy kelet-magyarországi megyeszékhelyen önkéntesen végzett érdekérvényesítő munkája során alkalmazni kényszerül a környezetvédelem területén. A tanulmány résztvevő megfigyelésen alapuló esettanulmány, mely az önszerveződő csoport öt évét „valódi résztvevőként” (Marshall–Rossman 1995: 60) vizsgálja, mutatja be, felhasználva a csoport beszámolóit, internetes bejegyzéseit a kronologikus közlés érdekében.

Az esettanulmány a kifejezetten zöld érdekérvényesítéssel és szemléletformálással foglalkozó informális csoportot, valamint annak tevékenységét és működését abból az aspektusból vizsgálja, hogyan befolyásolta és formálta belső folyamataikat, kommunikációjukat és döntéseiket a munkájuk nyomán kialakult feszült viszony a helyi politikával. Kitér a csoport bázisépítő munkájára, a helyi közösségbe való beágyazottságára, az önkormányzati választások előtti és utáni aktivitására és működésében végbement változásokra, követve Manuel Castells, a környezeti mozgalmak sajátos jegyeit bemutató logikáját. A tanulmány először bemutatja a vizsgált csoport megalakulásának körülményeit, eszközeit és módszereit, amelyekkel hatni kíván a helyi a társadalomra, majd megvizsgálja intézményesülésüket és a települési önkormányzathoz fűződő kapcsolataikat.

Eredmények

„A jobb feltételek el fognak jönni, mert hozzákezdünk... Elmondhatjuk tehát, hogy a zöld politika elsőrendű célja egy belső forradalom: 'az Én kizöldülése'.” (Alley 1995)

Identitás – A csoport tagjai, a megalakulás

A csoport létrejött a Fridays For Future, a megyeszékhelyen megszervezett egyetlen eseményéhez köthető. A későbbi tagok, a helyi középiskolások által szervezett demonstráció hivatalos programja után a helyszínen maradvá beszélgetésbe elegyedtek. Az egymást korábbról nem, vagy csak felületesen ismerő négy nő azonnal a településen tapasztalható környezeti, köztisztasági problémákról egyeztettek véleményüket, beszélgetni kezdtek városuk zöldítésének lehetőségeiről, a klímaváltozás elleni küzdelem fontosságáról és lehetséges helyi eszközeiről. A négy alaptag egyike a helyi és országos zöld mozgalomba beágyazott aktivista, aki az első találkozás után a kapcsolattartást szorgalmazta, az új ismeretségek által inspirálva mások bevonását kezdeményezte.

Az FFF rendezvényén résztvevők, első találkozásjukra olyan helyi, aktív személyeket is meghívtak, akik lehetőségeikhez mérten, saját csatornáikon már aktívan tettek valamit azért, hogy városuk tisztább, élhetőbb hely legyen. Így kapott meghívást egy nagy múltú helyi zöld szervezet elnöke, valamint egy nagy létszámú, a hulladék égetése és a levegő szennyezése ellen fellépő, offline is aktív online csoport adminisztrátora. Az első találkozón megfogalmazták célkitűzésként a fák, városi zöldfelületek védelme érdekében végzett együttműködést és a közös fellépést, a lakosság tájékoztatását, valamint szakemberek és a város vezetőinek bevonását egy hosszú távú, konstruktív tervező munkába.

A csoport, megalakuláskor 2 férfiból és 5 nőből állt (30–50 év közöttiek), akik érettségivel, középfokú szakképzésben végzettséggel (2 fő) és felsőfokú végzettséggel (5 fő) rendelkeztek. A csoport alapító tagjai között pedagógus (3 fő), doktori fokozatú ökológus végzettségű (1 fő), egészségügyi (1) és gazdasági végzettségű személy (2) is volt. Nonprofit szervezeti tapasztalattal az alakuló csoportból két fő rendelkezett. Önkéntesként, adományozóként az alapítók minden tagja részt vett valamilyen szervezet munkájában a megalakulást megelőző időszakban. A tagok ebben az informális közösségben is önkéntesként vállaltak részvételt.

A csoporthoz a második évében aktív feladatokat ellátó személyekként csatlakozott további két tag azoknak csoportjából, akik az FFF rendezvényén is jelen voltak. A két egyetemi hallgató környezetvédelemmel kapcsolatos szakirányú képzésben vett részt az említett időszakban. A csoport a harmadik évben két újabb taggal bővült, akik egyes témák mentén szakértőként, és/vagy aktivistaként segítették a szervezet céljainak elérését.



Az első találkozó után a résztvevők informális csoporttá alakultak, az új szerveződés magát elnevezte és megkezdte a kommunikációs csatornák kiépítését a lakosság és a helyi önkormányzat felé. A tagok közös megegyezéssel kinyilvánították szándékukat, hogy szerveződésük informális maradjon. Céljuk ezzel az volt, hogy ne szervezetként, hanem a lakosság egy folyton változó, nyitott, egyénenként nem beazonosítható tagsággal rendelkező csoportjaként léphessen fel a közösséget érintő ügyekben. Magukat a helyi lakosság egyfajta szimbolikus szócsöveként határozták meg a hatalom irányába. Megalakulásukkor hangot adtak annak is, hogy az aktivista kifejezést annak „radikális színezete” miatt mellőzik, magukat önkéntesként, csapattagként és alapító tagként aposztrofálják a nyilvánosság előtt.

Működésük organikusan szerveződött, a csoport az egyes tagok érdeklődése mentén informális szekciókká alakult, melyek minden tag számára átjárhatóak, és minden városlakó előtt nyitottak voltak. Ezek alapján a csoport a castellsi típusok közül a „helyi közösség” csoportjába tartozó környezeti mozgalom, mely a közösséget saját lakóhelye védelme érdekében mozgósítja. A tekintetben is a fenti kategóriába tartozik a csoport, hogy helyi jellegű, de nem csak helyi érdekű, hiszen „a lakosok életminőségi jogainak megerősítése érdekében gyakran fellép az üzleti vagy bürokratikus érdekekkel szemben” (Castells 2003: 218).

Bázisépítés, beágyazottság és kommunikáció

A csoport megalakulása után azonnal komoly erőfeszítéseket tett arra, hogy belső szervezettségét és láthatóságát erősítse és megkezdje a minél szélesebb körű mobilizációt, támogatókat, adományozókat, az ügyek iránt lojális és elkötelezett csapattagokat érjen el. Arculatának kialakítása után a szerveződés saját e-mail címet regisztrált és a tagok online közösségi platformokon, a legnépszerűbb videómegosztón és saját blog-felületen is kommunikálni kezdtek a helyieket érintő, környezettel kapcsolatos ügyekről. Ez az időszak egybeesett a COVID-19-járvány miatti lezárások legszigorúbb szabályozásával, így ezek a csatornák jelentették a leginkább aktív kapcsolatot a csoporton belül és kívül egyaránt. Ennek kiépítése és folyamatos, aktív használata prioritást jelentett a tagoknak és egyúttal komoly kihívást is. A saját weboldal kialakítását annak költséges volta és a domain bejegyzés adatszolgáltatási kötelezettsége miatt a csoport elvetette.

A nyilvánosság, alkalmazott eszközök

A csoport láthatóságát és bázisépítését egyaránt növelő első komolyabb, a lakosság bevonását célzó akciója 2020 augusztusában indult a település egyik közkedvelt, turisztikai célpontként is népszerű részére tervezett beruházással kapcsolatban. A beruházás keretében egy kisebb ligeterdő helyén több ezer négyzetméteren térköves díszteret és zenélő szökőkutat terveztek, ami a város lakóinak körében komoly visszhangot keltett.

A csoport kihasználva a fejlesztésre irányuló figyelmet, utcai akciókkal, demonstrációval, az érintett területen élők tájékoztatását célzó szóróanyagokkal, táblákkal, plakátokkal igyekezett felhangosítani a közvélemény nemtetszését a projekttel kapcsolatban.

A helyi lakosságot érintő ügyek nyilvánosság elé tárása és a közösség véleményének becsatornázása a város vezetése felé, hosszú idő után egy új hangot jelentett a település közéletében, s ez az újszerűség a lakosság és város vezetőinek reakciójából is érzékelhető volt. Szeptemberben a város vezetése a városfejlesztési és városüzemeltetési osztály illetékeseinek bevonásával a főkertész, a kabinetvezető és a nagy visszhangot keltő projekt által érintett területért felelős köztisztviselő részvételével egyeztetést kezdeményezett az alig fél éve alakult informális lakossági csoporttal. Az egyeztetésről megjelent beszámolók arról tanúskodnak, hogy a kabinetvezető hangsúlyozta, hogy informális, politikamentes, lakossági csoportként a tárgyalásra, a csoporttól érkezett ötletekre nyitott az önkormányzat, a város egészségesebbé tétele számukra is cél.

Az elkövetkező időszakban az önkormányzat polgármesteri fásítási programot indított a közterületi zöld felületek növeléséért, az alpolgármester kezdeményezte egy zöld kerekasztal létrehozását a csoport bevonásával, mindezek mellett pedig a kabinet felajánlott a helyi újságban egy fél oldalnyi felületet a csoport szemléletformáló cikkei számára. Az önkormányzat élénk együttműködést mutatott a csoporttal. Cikkekben, rádiós és televíziós anyagokban hivatkozott a fejlesztések, projektek kapcsán a csoporttal folytatott sikeres egyeztetésekre. A tagok e beszámolókból szembesültek azzal, hogy az önkormányzat narratívájában a csoporttal folytatott egyeztetések minden esetben véleményegyezőssel zárultak, az egyes projektek kapcsán felmerülő zöld témákban a csoportot mint partnert tüntették fel. Meglátásuk szerint az önkormányzat projektjeinek zöldre festésére használta az egyeztetéseket, a lakosság részéről így a csoport tagjai felől is igényként felmerülő környezeti felelősséget a város „marketingeszközzé konvertálta” (Glied 2016: 10), így a csoport saját csatornáin egyre gyakrabban kényszerült helyesbítések, pontosítások, nyílt válaszok közlésére a megjelent sajtóanyagokkal kapcsolatban.

Az augusztusi, első önkormányzati egyeztetés után a csoport tovább folytatta kampányát a nagy intenzitású, zöld felületek elvonásával járó projekt ellen. A beruházás káros hatásait taglaló információkat és egy online kitölthető kérdőívet osztottak meg közösségi felületeiken, a lakosság véleményét várva a tervekről. A frissen alakult csoport által megosztott kérdőívre 12 nap alatt ezer ember válaszolt a 120 ezer fős megyeszékhelyen élők közül, amit a csoport sikerként élt meg.

A projekt következő év őszére az előzetes terveknek megfelelően megvalósult, a helyi hírekbe egy a projektnek ítélt, zöld fejlesztéseket elismerő díj hírével együtt került be. A város narratíváját erősítő, a valóságot csak kis részben fedő hír helyesbítését hiába kérte a csoport és a címet odaítélő grémium is.

A csoport első három évét összefoglaló beszámolóból kirajzolódik, hogy a csoport ez idő alatt kilenc nagy tématerületen összesen 181 programot, egyeztetést, találkozót bonyolított le, ezernél több fát és cserjét ültetett, 6 nagy országos mozgalom



aktív hálózati tagja lett, 29 cikket jelentetett meg a helyi lapban, közösségi finanszírozásból fakataszter-applikációt programoztatott, iskolákkal, óvodákkal, cégekkel kötött partnerséget, 1500 tagú online csoporttal kommunikált és közel 600 ezer forintot gyűjtött lakossági és vállalkozói adományozóktól informális csoportként.

Az ellenfél-célok, alkuk és stratégiák

A helyi közösségi csoport tagjai akcióikkal, posztjaikkal a felelősségteljes város-tervezésért és a városi-ipari fejlesztés terheinek tisztességes megosztásáért, a magánberuházások és létesítmények nemkívánatos hatásainak elkerüléséért szállnak síkra. Ezzel egyidejűleg pedig, ugyan nem tudatosan, de az átláthatóság és település zöld felületeinek felhasználásával kapcsolatos döntésekből való kirekesztés miatt szót emelve, állampolgárokként álltak ki a kiterjedtebb helyi demokráciáért a hatalommal szemben. A csoport első, tartalmas három évét nem hagyta szó nélkül a város vezetése. Egy közmeghallgatáson, a csapat képviselőjében felszólaló önkéntesnek, a város első embere válaszában kifejtette, a csoport nem kérheti számon a zöld kérdéseket a városon, mert annak nem felügyeleti szerve, nem áll jogában kritikákat megfogalmazni annak, aki maga nem tesz semmit.

Az egyre fokozódó feszültséggel teli közegben a szerveződés tagjai számos konfliktusos helyzetben kerültek szembe egymással és önmagukkal. Az egyik ilyen konfliktusos helyzetet a helyi politikával, az egyes körzetek képviselőivel való viszony kérdése szülte a csoporton belül. A semlegesség kényszere, mely feltételként és elvárásként támasztva egyaránt jelen volt a csoport mindennapjaiban és implicit módon a helyi képviselők munkaköri leírásában is, ellehetetlenítette azokat az előremutató együttműködéseket, melyekből a teljes lakosság profitálhatott volna.

A csoport, öt éve során számos helyi kormánypárti és ellenzéki politikussal került kapcsolatba és ezzel egyidejűleg komoly dilemmával szembe. Felvállalható-e az együttműködés, a közgyűlésben ellenzéki politikusként helyet foglaló szimpatizáns képviselővel, ha az a város vezetésének „összenő, ami összetartozik” narratíváját erősíti? Mondhatja-e egy informális csoport egy állampolgárnak, aki történetesen ellenzéki képviselő, hogy egy demonstráción ne vegyen részt? Elfogadja-e a csoport egy kormánypárti képviselő titokban nyújtott szakmai segítségét? Vegyen-e részt a csoport a céljai szempontjából fontos akcióban a város vezetőivel, ha tudja, a lakosság szemében ez az „összenő, ami összetartozik” narratívát erősíti? A csoporton belül erről több esetben nem született egységes döntés, ám ebben az önkormányzati választások változást hoztak.

Az újabb öt évre megválasztott városvezetés, míg a kampányidőszakban óvatosan kezelte a zöldek akcióit, a választások után már nyíltan ellenségesen kommunikált csatornáin és ellehetetlenítette a csoport tevékenységét. A számos ponton groteszk helyzeteket okozó fellépés a szerveződés és a csapattagok egyéni megküzdési stratégiáit is próbára tette és kreatív megoldásokra kényszerítette.

A közintézményekből, óvodákból, iskolákból kitiltották a faültetések szervező önkéntesek, így azok új helyeket kerestek az adományba kapott facsemetéknek.

A cigarettacsikk eldobásának veszélyeire, szennyező hatására figyelmeztető plakátokat, melyeket az önkéntesek buszmegállóban helyeztek ki, a közterület-felügyelet leszedette, és bírság kiszabását helyezte kilátásba, így a csoport plakátok helyett köztéri kiállítást készített. A járó motorral várakozás veszélyeiről a csoport által szervezett gyerekrajz pályázatra érkezett rajzokból a csoport információs táblákat készíttetett és helyezett ki óvodákra és iskolákra. A főépítész a városkép szempontjából problémásnak ítélte a táblákat és azok kihelyezésének módját, a program folytatását pedig engedélyhez kötötte. Utasította a csoportot arra is, hogy a táblákat terveztessék át, saját költségen készíttessenek engedélyes tervet az azt tartó állványzatnak. Céljaik elérése érdekében, az újabb és újabb akadályok ellenére újabb és újabb ötletekkel juttatták el az üzenetet célcsoportjukhoz, de ezt a sarokba szorított, legkevesbé sem proaktív állapotot a csapat tagjai közül többen meghasonulásnak élték meg és kiváltak.

Az intézményesülés dilemmája

Első átütő kampánya és számos sikeres programja után a helyi nyilvánosság, mint a leginkább aktív és leggyorsabban reagáló, környezet- és természetvédelemmel foglalkozó „szervezetet” tartotta számon a csoportot. A városvezetéssel zátonyra futott együttműködés után, céljaik megvalósításához a lakosság segítő kezeit és forrásait vették igénybe. Az adományok fogadásának technikai megoldására, az átláthatóság és elszámoltathatóság érdekében az alapítókban felvetődött az intézményesülés lehetősége. A szervezetté válás gondolata számos olyan dilemmát hozott felszínre, melyek látens módon a kezdetektől jelen voltak a csoportban.

A felelősség kérdése, a szervezetben betöltött pozícióval járó bürokratikus terhek és a szerep felvállalása a nyilvánosság előtt, mind olyan kihívást jelentettek a csoport tagjait alkotó egyéneknek, melyekkel nem tudtak, vagy nem akartak megküzdeni. Az egyes tagok más és más indokkal, de a csoport bejegyzése ellen érveltek. Míg egyesek a több évtizedes szervezeti létből származó rossz tapasztalataik miatt gondolták problémásnak, addig mások az intenzív önkéntes szerepvállalásuk miatt családjukban már meghúzódó konfliktusok miatt szavaztak ellene. Akadtak a csoportban olyanok is, akik aktív pedagógusként a munkahelyükkel való összeférhetetlenség, vagy elkerülendő konfrontációk miatt szavaztak arra, hogy a csoport ne alakuljon bejegyzett szervezetté. A grassroots forma adta szabadság és rugalmasság megőrzése érdekében a csoport gesztorszervezet bevonása mellett döntött annak érdekében, hogy a támogató közösség pénzádományait transzparensen tudja kezelni. Bár az eredeti forma mellett maradvá függetlenségük megmaradt, a gesztorszervezetre tekintettel kommunikációjukban a korábbiakhoz képes visszafogottan és megfontoltan fogalmaztak egyes közéleti témákban az esetleges, a gesztort érhető retorziótól tartva.



Az idővel egyre összetettebbé váló feladatok és az azokhoz jól illeszkedő pályázati források lehívása, valamint az esetleges vállalati adományok fogadása miatt többször felmerült az intézményesülés lehetősége a csoporton belül, de az ellene szóló érvek mindig túlsúlyban voltak.

Külső nyomás, belső törés

A szerveződés tagjai többszörös teher alatt végezték önként vállalt feladataikat. Egyfelől nyomás érte őket csoportként. Rájuk nehezedett a támogatók elvárása, akik adományaikért cserébe eredményeket, sikereket vártak. Az elvárás, hogy segíteniük kell, ha valaki hozzájuk fordul, hiszen ezért vannak. Nem mondhattak nemet például egy óvodavezetőnek, akit az óvodaépület felújítása után az önkormányzat az udvar rendezésével, zöldítésével már magára hagyott. Rájuk nehezedett a nyomás az elvárással, hogy bizonyos helyi ügyekben ők képviseljék a teljes lakosságot. Beadványokat írtak, jogszabályokat böngésztek, sokszor versenyt futva a véleményezésre hagyott rövid határidőkkel, melyeket az illetékesek vagy válaszra sem méltattak, vagy elutasítottak. Eközben nyilvánosan felvállalt tagságuk és véleményük miatt az online térben sértő, személyeskedő kommenteket kaptak, a városháza kommunikációjában „álzöld propagandistaként” hivatkoztak rájuk, arra utalva, hogy tevékenységük ellenzéki pártpolitikai érdekeket szolgál a zöld ügyek mögé rejtve. A kifejezetten semleges, zöld szemléletet formáló és építő programjaik mögött is politikai összefüggéseket és ellenzéki összefonódásokat véltek felfedezni a városházán és a kommentszekciókban is, így jó szándékuk ellenére gyakran védekezni kényszerültek.

Ezzel együtt az egyes tagok magánszférájára is nyomás nehezedett. Egyiküknek a munkahelyén kellett magyarázkodnia a csoport véleménye miatt, míg másikuknak családi vállalkozásáért kellett aggódnia a hirtelen megsokasodott ilyen-olyan ellenőrzések okán. Mind konfliktusba kerültek családjukkal a „semmiért” felvállalt „felesleges stresszforrásért” és „stigmáért”, ami miatt „elhanyagolták a családot”. A kívülről érkező és a családjaikból eredő nyomásnál is nagyobb terhet jelentett azonban a tagok számára, hogy a fent leírt konfliktusok elkerülésére, saját belső készítésük ellenére ne tegyenek semmit, vagy szavaikat és tetteiket gondosan megválogatva lépjenek fel az igazságtalanságok ellen, személyes dühüket elfojtva.

Elmondásuk szerint a legnagyobb frusztrációt okozó kihívás önkéntes tevékenységük során a semleges és indulatok nélküli véleménynyilvánítás kényszere, valamint a professzionalizmus, mint informális csoportként feléjük támasztott indokolatlanul magas elvárás. A tevékenységüket a sorozatos kudarcok és a bénító közöny ellenére, saját belső békéjük miatti előremenekülésként jellemezték.

A feszültség, melyet az okozott, hogy tekintettel kellett lenni az egyes csapat-tagok helyzetére, egyre megfontoltabban, diplomatikusabban kellett fogalmazni, óvatosabbnak kellett lenni bizonyos helyzetekben, miközben egyre több és több

feladat, probléma és kihívás megoldását várta el tőlük a helyi lakosság, fokozatosan okozta a csoport belső törését, kényszerű leállását, majd fokozatos átszerveződését.

A csoport tagjai közül ketten végleg kiléptek az önkormányzati választások után, ketten egy konfliktusos helyzet után részben háttérbe vonultak. Jelenleg az aktív tagok iskolai szemléletformáló programokat szerveznek és a településre tervezett akkumulátor gyárakkal kapcsolatos információgyűjtést végzik. A csoport közösségi felületén az utolsó bejegyzés féléves².

Összegzés

„Nem annyira az a fontos, hogy sokan legyenek jók, mint inkább az, hogy legyen valahol tökéletes jószág, mert az majd az egésznek a kovásza lesz” (Thoreau 1993: 13).

A globális civil társadalom létrejöttével, számos nagy múltra visszatekintő, tradicionális nem-kormányzati szervezet pusztta méretéből adódóan veszítette el gyökereit a civil társadalomban és vált egyszerűen túl „nagygyá ahhoz, hogy kicsi legyen” (Mitchell–Schmitz–Van Vijfeijken 2020: 2). Ezzel a hatékonyságát növelő, globálisan is széles képviseletet biztosítani képes struktúrával a szektor egyre inkább hasonlatossá vált az általa korábban megvetett multinacionális nagyvállalatokhoz és fokozatosan veszítette el azt a grassroots mozgalmi jelleget, mely kezdeti sikereiket eredményezte. Globálisan tapasztalható az a trend, mely a demokratikus fellépés tereit zsugorítja, fokozatosan leépíti a demokrácia, a civil társadalom és az emberi jogok érvényesülésére irányuló támogatások körét és kereteit (Mitchell–Schmitz–Van Vijfeijken 2020). Bármikor megtörténhet, hogy a civil szervezeteket különböző módokon, például külföldről finanszírozott szervezetként megbélyegzi a kormányzat. Erre erősítenek rá a civil társadalom egészének legitimitását megkérdőjelező kommentelők és álprofilok az online térben, melyek a közösségeik jogaiért kiálló csoportokat összemossák politikai szereplőkkel, a helyi közösségek érdekeivel szemben mások érdekeit képviselő ügynökökként tüntetik fel azokat. Annak reálisan fennálló lehetősége pedig, hogy egy megbélyegzett közegben aktívan szerepet vállaló személy maga is stigmatizálódik, személyes karrierjében és magánszférájában hátrányt szenved, nem teszi a szektort népszerűvé az utánpótlást biztosító munkavállaló szakemberek, és aktívan kiálló állampolgárok számára sem.

A globális civil mozgalmak között Manuel Castells a zöld mozgalmakat tekinti a proaktív mozgalmak prototípusának. A társadalmi mozgalmak között, mint mondja, a zöld mozgalmak különleges helyet foglalnak el, mivel egyszerre reagálnak globális problémákra – mint a klímaváltozás vagy a biodiverzitás csökkenése –, miközben hangsúlyozzák a lokális közösségek szerepét a változások előmozdításában, hidat képezve a globális kihívások és a helyi cselekvések között (Castells 2003).

2 A csoport közösségi felületein a mintavételkor (2024) nem volt látható aktivitás, ugyanakkor a tanulmány írásakor (2025) a csoport újra aktívan kommunikál tevékenységéről, mely a fentebb leírt hullámzó tendenciát támasztja alá.



Fontos szerepe van a valóban a helyi közösség érdekeit képviselő érintetteknek a helyi kihívásokkal szembeni fellépésben, de az egész mozgalom globális céljainak elérésében is. Ezért nem elhanyagolható felismerni és nagyobb odafigyeléssel értelmezni a grassroots-szervezetekben aktívan tevékenykedő és a nyilvánosságban szerepet vállalók magánszférájában megvalósuló egyéni megküzdéseket és életstratégiákat.

Az esettanulmányban bemutatott, saját életterét az egészséges életminőségét veszélyeztetőktől védő helyi csoport a tuckmani életfázisok mindegyikét megélte öt éve alatt. Az egymást nem ismerő lakosokból együttműködő csoport jött létre (forming), kialakultak a szerepek (storming), megalkották saját együttműködési és működési szabályait (norming), intenzíven teljesítették céljaikért a kitűzött feladataikat (performing), majd a nyomás alatt megtörve felbomlottak, átszerveződtek (adjourning). Jól érzékelhető, hogy az egyre professzionalizálódó, egyre szervezettebb fellépés egyre nagyobb láthatóságot és ezzel egyidejűleg egyre nagyobb nyomást jelentett a csoport tagjainak. Az intézményesülés lehetőségét szinte ösztönösen kerülő csoport tagjai lemondásokkal, konfliktusokkal teli mindennapjaikban, a munka, a család, a megélhetés és sokszor karrierjük terhére, mindezeket kockáztatva végeznek komoly érdekérvényesítő munkát a közösség javára.

A civil szektort gyakran szervezett hálózatnak tekintik, de a hazai tapasztalat erre rácsfol. A nagyon is reális, életminőségünket komolyan veszélyeztető akkumulátorgyarak, erőművek, lerakók és egyéb fejlesztések elleni fellépés háziasszonyok, apukák, diákok elkeseredett harca mindannyiunkért. Ebből pedig az következik, hogy cselekvéseikre nem tekinthetünk, mint a nyilvánosság felől érkezőre, hanem figyelembe kell vennünk a cselekvő egyének magánszférájában jelentkező kihívásokat, megküzdési és életstratégiákat, dilemmákat is. A szolidaritás mikroszintű megközelítésének középpontjában tehát az egyének állnak, az ő motivációik megértése nélkül nem érthetjük meg a hazai mozgalmak működését, vagy működés-képtelenségét sem.

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Ádám Nagy Zsuzsa—Béres—Áfra—Viktor Szalóki

The Domestication of the Civil Sphere – The Hungarian Example

In our study, using examples, we examine the Hungarian model of domesticating the civil sector, according to which (Nagy, 2014) the „National Cooperation System” (Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere, NER) – the name and frame of the Hungarian governmental model with a two-thirds majority since 2010 – employs a multi-step domestication methodology.

The first step involves centralizing funding and exercising control over power. This method proves effective for most civil organizations, as their primary interest is not in political statements but in achieving organizational goals. Consequently, they do not oppose this operational mechanism based on “power” – understood here as funding or its promise.

If financial pressure is unsuccessful, the state employs its ever-expanding media arsenal as a pressure tool. At this stage, only those organizations that aim to fulfill the ethos of monitoring state power, alongside traditional civil society roles of participation, service, and oversight, continue to resist.

If even this approach fails, the state utilizes its public power tools to enforce the government's will – primarily seeking to turn off those organizations labeled as hostile.

In our study, which methodologically relies on desk research supplemented in several cases with “worst practice” elements, we demonstrate how the interpretability of this model has evolved and solidified into a threefold approach: disqualification, domestication, and direction. The unique office established under the guise of sovereignty protection aligns with this model, which, in our view, supports the execution of this final step. Consequently, our study period spans 2010-2024, with a narrower focus on events between 2014 (following Prime Minister Orbán's 2014 Tűszvényos speech) and 2024.

Of course, we do not wish to simplify reality into an evil state/NER versus a sound civil society contrast. Still, it is a fact that the Hungarian state has gradually dismantled the democratic institutional system over the past decade, including by narrowing the opportunities for civil society. Overall, we believe that while there are numerous examples of the first tool, even within the imperfect implementation of the democratic model in Hungary, there is hardly any precedent for using the second tool. The deployment of public power tools is characteristic of a non-democratic system.

Keywords: Domestication of civil society, disqualification, domestication, direction, legal environment, funding environment, media environment, public power.

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Kacziba Péter–Kákai László

Külpolitikai attitűdök és szakpolitikai hatásuk – a reprezentáció és részvétel lehetőségei a jelenkori magyar külpolitikában

A tanulmány a magyar közvélemény külpolitikával kapcsolatos attitűdjeit és a politikai döntéshozatalra gyakorolt hatásait vizsgálja, a COVID–19 pandémia alatti és utáni időszakra fókuszálva. Kutatási kérdése, hogy a magyar közvélemény mennyiben egyezett a kormányzat hivatalos külpolitikai orientációjával, illetve milyen szakpolitikai hatást tudott arra gyakorolni. A tanulmány utóbbiak alapján bemutatja a külpolitikai stratégia 2010 utáni főbb irányait, feltárja a döntéshozatal centralizációját, illetve primer kutatási eredményekre és szekunder mérésekre hagyatkozva ezeket összeveti a magyar nyilvánosság külpolitikai preferenciáival és döntéshozatali hatásaival. Az eredmények rávilágítanak, hogy a magyar kormányzat az euroatlanti irányzat kritikájával egyértelműen marginális és kisebbségi preferenciákat képviselt, amelyet a hatalomkoncentráció miatt sem a szélesebb nyilvánosság, sem a külpolitikai érdekcsoportok nem tudtak érdemben befolyásolni.



Kulcsszavak: Magyar külpolitika, reprezentáció, közvélemény, érdekcsoportok, centralizáció.

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Péter Kacziba—László Kákai

Foreign policy attitudes and their impact – The possibilities of representation and participation in contemporary Hungarian foreign policy

The study examines the attitudes of the Hungarian public towards foreign policy and its impact on policy-making, focusing on the period during and after the Covid–19 pandemic. Its research question is to what extent Hungarian public opinion was in line with the official foreign policy orientation of the government and what policy impact it could have on it. Based on the latter, the paper presents the main orientations of the foreign policy strategy after 2010, explores the centralisation of decision-making, and compares these with the foreign policy preferences and decision-making effects of the Hungarian public, based on primary research findings and secondary measures. The results reveal that the Hungarian government, in criticising the Euro-Atlantic orientation, clearly represented marginal and minority preferences, which, due to the concentration of power, neither the wider public nor foreign policy interest groups were able to influence in any meaningful way.

Keywords: Hungarian foreign policy, representation, public opinion, interest groups, centralisation.



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Manal Hamarsha

Activity Of Charity and Civil Society Organizations in Gaza

Many charitable and civil society organizations have made tremendous and extensive efforts during the crisis in Gaza, playing a crucial role in addressing the urgent and critical needs in the region. Despite their inability to meet all humanitarian needs and requirements due to the restrictions imposed on them under current circumstances and war conditions, they have played a significant role and initiated numerous activities in a substantial manner. Non-profit organizations must highlight this role. This article provides a comprehensive theoretical description of the activities of various organizations, including the Reconstruction Alliance, the World Food Programme, the Women's Program Center in Rafah, ActionAid, USAID, Islamic Relief, and UNRWA. Through this study, we will highlight the efforts of these multifaceted institutions to mitigate and alleviate the crisis, supporting the people of Gaza and emphasizing the importance of both immediate relief and long-term recovery initiatives. This research paper will provide qualitative evidence. Interviews were conducted with staff members of these seven organizations to provide a comprehensive picture. The scale of these organizations' activities and initiatives during the crisis provides a clear understanding of the collaborative and individual efforts between them.



In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial role of diverse organizational efforts in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The specific focus of each organization, along with coordinated efforts, played a vital role in addressing the complex needs of the affected population. The findings provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of these responses and offer recommendations for strengthening future humanitarian strategies in similar crises.

Keywords: Humanitarian Response, Crisis Management, non-Profit Organizations, Gaza Relief Efforts.

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Mohammad Ashraful Alam—Prakash Chandra Roy—Bíró Judit

Breaking the Chains of Fear: Civil Society's Role in Defying Autocracy and Shaping Bangladesh's 2024 July Revolution

This paper explores the critical role of civil society in political change in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on the 2024 July Revolution. The study investigates how civil society organisations (CSOs), grassroots movements, and advocacy groups effectively mobilised opposition against the country's autocratic regime and fronted democratic change. The research aims to weigh the contributions of these organisations, particularly their role in organising the anti-discrimination student protests, which were pivotal to the revolution's success. Using a mixed-method qualitative approach, the study draws on interviews with civil society leaders, focus group discussions with activists and protest participants, and an analysis of relevant documents, media reports, and public statements. Key findings expose that CSOs were essential in coordinating the protests, fostering coalitions between various social groups, and utilising digital platforms to swell their advocacy efforts. These engagements contributed to broader civic engagement, weakening the regime's authoritarian grip. Despite facing awful state suppression, civil society's nonstop efforts battered the moral authority of the dictatorship, allowing the eventual overthrow of the government. However, the study also admits CSOs' challenges, including state co-optation and control attempts, which limited their effectiveness at specific points. The paper stresses the need for continual support of civil society in authoritarian regimes. It highlights the importance of creating inclusive platforms for dialogue between



civil society, political parties, and governmental institutions to prevent authoritarian backsliding. The insights from Bangladesh's experience provide a framework for understanding civil society's role in democratic transitions worldwide. **Keywords:** Civil Society, Democratic Transition, July Revolution, Chains of Fear, and Autocracy.

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Szegedi Péter

Mozgalmi pártok és a civil társadalom – Helyi pártszervezetek mint társadalmi közvetítők a Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt esetében

Az elmúlt években a Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt (MKKP) a magyar pártrendszer szerves részévé vált. A 2024-es önkormányzati választások óta az MKKP növelte képviselőtét a helyi önkormányzatokban, és még Budapest 12. kerületének polgármesteri posztját is megszerezte. Ezek ellenére a helyi szintű sikerek mellett a párt országos támogatottsága továbbra is a parlamenti küszöb alatt marad. Ennek következtében az MKKP-nak továbbra is a helyi politikára kell összpontosítania, ahol politikájuk szorosan kapcsolódik a helyi civil társadalomhoz. Jelen kutatás Peter Mair és Richard Katz „három arc” elméletének segítségével kívánja elemezni az MKKP szervezeti struktúráját. Az elmélet szerint a politikai pártoknak három megkülönböztethető összetevője, „arca” van: a party on the ground, amely aktivistákból és helyi szervezetekből áll; a party in central office, amely a közfeladatokat ellátó párttagokat foglalja magában; és a party in the central office amely a pártvezetést jelenti. Mivel az MKKP-t mozgalmi pártnak tekinthetjük, kapcsolatuk a civil társadalommal jelentősen erősebb, mint a hagyományos pártoké. Emellett a párt szervezeti fejlődése a kollektív cselekvésen és közösségépítésen alapul, amely erős aktivista bázist hoz létre, ami kevésbé hajlamos a politikai apátiára.



Ezáltal az MKKP kiemelkedik, mint olyan politikai szervezet, amely képes mozgósítani a választókat, miközben hatékonyan képviseli a civil társadalom érdekeit. Továbbá a tanulmány megvizsgálja, hogy az MKKP képviselői hogyan működnek együtt a civil társadalommal Budapest különböző kerületeiben.

Kulcsszavak: Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt, helyi közösségek, mozgalmi pártok, civil társadalom.

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Péter Szegedi

Movement Parties and the Civil Society – Local Party Organizations as Social Intermediaries in the Case of The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party

The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) has become a significant player in Hungary's party system in recent years. Since the 2024 local elections, the MKKP has increased its representation in local councils and even secured the mayoral position in Budapest's 12th district. Despite these successes at the local level, the party's national support remains below the parliamentary threshold. As a result, the MKKP must continue to concentrate on local politics, where their policies are closely tied to local civil society.

This research aims to analyze the organizational structure of the MKKP using Peter Mair's and Richard Katz's "three faces" theory. According to this theory, political parties have three distinct components or "faces": the party on the ground, comprising activists and local organizations; the party in public office, which consists of party members holding public positions; and the party in the central office, referring to the party leadership. Given that the MKKP is considered a movement party, its connection with civil society is notably more substantial than that of traditional parties. Furthermore, the party's organizational development is rooted in collective action and community building, fostering a robust activist base that is less susceptible to political apathy.

Thus, the MKKP stands out as a political organization capable of mobilizing voters while effectively representing the interests of civil society. Additionally, this study will examine how MKKP representatives engage with civil society within various districts of Budapest.

Keywords: Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party, local communities, movement parties, civil society.



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Havasi Virág

An attempt to encourage and institutionalize citizen participation in Miskolc between 2019–2024

The study presents the process that took place in Miskolc between 2019 and 2024, during which the municipality aimed to establish and deepen the culture of social participation in the city. To this end, the Office of Social Participation was created under the leadership of the referee responsible for civil participation. The concept of citizens' participation was developed in consultation with members of civil society, which the General Assembly unanimously endorsed. Subsequently, several participation methods were tested. Some of these latter innovations were integral to democratic processes, including citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting, and city hall meetings. In contrast, other traditional means of participation included citizens' forums and public hearings. However, some methods focused on community development, including community initiatives, community discussions, community surveys, and social hackathons. Other postmodern means of social participation were also applied. Social participation had begun to be integrated into the municipality's operations, primarily thanks to the openness of the chief architect's cabinet, which willingly involved itself in many processes. Cooperation with the Department of City Maintenance and the institution providing cultural services has also started. A local government decree was established regarding the socialization procedure, and a proposal was accepted, according to which the city's tenders should be prepared in the future to involve representatives of civil society organizations concerned by topic and/or location in the planning. Although the creation of a system of civil cooperation was included as a goal in the concept of citizens' participation, it was not possible to initiate its operation. Another weak point of the processes was that very few people were involved in the programs, more than the already active citizens of the city, and even some of the latter deliberately withdrew from the participation process in Miskolc due to conflicts and dissatisfaction. This low participation rate was not unexpected; the experts involved in the process had expected significant effects only in the longer term. However, weak performance regarding communication activities also had a role in this low participation.

Keywords: Social participation, democratic innovations, local self-government.



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Fekete Éva

Dilemmák és alkuk – esettanulmány

A 2019 utáni években számos extrém kihívással kellett megküzdeniük a hazai civil szervezeteknek és informális közösségeknek. Járvány, háború, energia-válság, és belpolitikai fordulatok fokozták a már eleve fragmentált közösségek izolálódását, az egyének és csoportok közélettől elfordulását és regresszióját. Az esettanulmány egy vidéki grassroots-szerveződés első öt évének bemutatásával kívánja szemléltetni azokat az alkalmazkodási és megküzdési stratégiákat, melyeket egy informális csoport egy kelet-magyarországi megyeszékhelyen önkéntesen végzett érdekérvényesítő munkája során alkalmazni kényszerült a környezetvédelem területén.

Az esettanulmányban egy kelet-magyarországi megyeszékhelyen alakult, kifejezetten zöld érdekérvényesítéssel és szemléletformálással foglalkozó informális csoportot szeretnék bemutatni. A csoport tevékenységét és működését abból az aspektusból vizsgálom, hogyan befolyásolta és formálta belső folyamataikat, kommunikációjukat és döntéseiket a munkájuk nyomán kialakult feszült viszony a helyi politikával. Kitérek a csoport bázisépítő munkájára, a helyi közösségbe való beágyazottságára, az önkormányzati választások előtti és utáni aktivitására és működésében végbement változásokra.

A csoport munkáját a kezdetektől figyelem, érdeklődésem az keltette fel, hogy a helyi önkormányzat és a szervezet között kialakult dinamikában jól kivehetőek a hatalom és a civil közösségek közötti erőviszonyok. A vizsgálataim során megfigyelhettem a csoport tagjainak egyéni dilemmáit, a kapcsolatrendszeik mentén történő információáramlás módját, a választások előtti és utáni működésük eltéréseit, mely úgy érzem, érdekes lenyomata a hazai társadalmi folyamatoknak. A tanulmány résztvevő megfigyelésen alapuló esettanulmány.

Kulcsszavak: Közélet, közösség, lokalitás, részvétel, szolidaritás, civil mozgalom.

Fekete Éva 1999-ben szerzett Nyíregyházán tanár diplomát, majd 2018-ban mesterdiplomát a Debreceni Egyetem szociális munka- szociális gazdaság (SOWOSEC) nemzetközi képzésén. 2020 óta az ELTE interdiszciplináris társadalomkutatás doktori programjának doktorandusza, kutatási területe a közösségi terek lokális közösségre és a társadalmi tőkére gyakorolt hatása.



Ötletgazdaként 2014 óta a Labor Café Adománykávézó, Nyitott Közösségi Tér szakmai koordinátora, amely 9 éve működik Nyíregyházán kizárólag adományokból, önkéntesek bevonásával a helyi közösség aktív közreműködése mellett.
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Éva Fekete

Dilemmas and bargains – A Case Study

In the years after 2019, civil organizations and informal communities in Hungary have faced numerous extreme challenges. The pandemic, war, energy crisis, and domestic political shifts have intensified the isolation of already fragmented communities, contributing to the disengagement and regression of individuals and groups from public life. This case study illustrates the adaptation and coping strategies employed by an informal group engaged in environmental advocacy in a county seat in Eastern Hungary during its first five years of voluntary grassroots activities.

The case study focuses on an informal group formed in an Eastern Hungarian County seat dedicated to green advocacy and raising environmental awareness. It examines the group's activities and operations through how tensions with local politics shaped their internal processes, communication, and decision-making. The analysis highlights their grassroots organizing efforts, integration into the local community, activities before and after municipal elections, and organizational changes over time.

I have observed the group's work since its inception. The power dynamics evident in the relationship between the local government and the organization piqued my interest. My research allowed me to explore the individual dilemmas of group members, the flow of information along their relational networks, and the differences in their operations before and after elections. I believe these observations provide a compelling snapshot of current Hungarian social processes. This study is a participatory observation-based case study.

Keywords: Public life, community, locality, participation, solidarity, civil movement.

Éva Fekete earned her teaching degree in Nyíregyháza in 1999, followed by a Master's degree in 2018 from the University of Debrecen in the international Social Work and Social Economy (SOWOSEC) program. Since 2020, she has been a doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary Social Research Doctoral Program at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE). Her research focuses on the impact of community spaces on local communities and social capital. As the initiator and professional coordinator, she has led the Labor Café Donation Café and Open Community Space in Nyíregyháza since 2014. This initiative has successfully operated for nine years, funded entirely by donations, supported by volunteers, and actively involving the local community.

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■ The examples reveal that the government is increasingly restricting the resources available to autonomous civil organizations while setting conditions undermining their independence and values. Thus, those unwilling to apply for domestic resources must turn to foreign funds. What is novel is not that the current government allocates resources to civil organizations close to it but that it reshapes the funding environment to compel civil sector actors to interpret themselves within a narrative aligned with government policy.

(Nagy Ádám–Béres-Áfra Zsuzsa–Szalóki Viktor).

■ ... a magyar közvélemény külpolitikai percepciói mennyiben tükröződtek a kormány hivatalos irányvonalában, továbbá, hogy ezek az attitűdök a különböző érdekcsoportok reprezentációján és a nyilvánosság befolyásán keresztül milyen mértékben jelentek meg a szakpolitikai döntéshozatalban. E kérdésekhez szorosan kapcsolódik, hogy vajon az attitűdök formálásában, valamint a külpolitikai döntések alakításában milyen szerepet játszanak az érdekcsoportok vagy a civil szféra reprezentánsai. Egyáltalán mely szereplők és szervezetek képesek ma Magyarországon érdemi hatást gyakorolni a külpolitikai orientációra? Milyen összefüggés figyelhető meg ezen szereplők attitűdjei és a kormányzati álláspont támogatása vagy épp ellenzése között, illetve mindegyik milyen kormányzati reakciók láthatók (például GONGO-k szerepvállalása kapcsán)?

(Kacziba Péter–Kákai László)

■ By leveraging grassroots protests, digital tools, and international advocacy, they successfully challenged autocratic rule and played a central role in one of Bangladesh's most significant political transitions. They created space for collective action, empowered citizens, and fostered a culture of resistance, even amid harsh repression. The revolution's success also highlights the importance of creating inclusive platforms for dialogue between civil society, political parties, and governmental institutions.

(Mohammad Ashraful Alam–Prakash Chandra Roy–Biro Judit)

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