

Narrative Stimulating Cubes

A Qualitative Method for Analyzing the Nature of Democratic Culture among Hungarian Students¹

Gyöngyvér Pataki

pataki.gyongyver@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Several recent studies on youth culture have demonstrated the low participation and political radicalization of young adults. In an attempt to understand whether apathy, love of comfort or inactivity lies behind the low participation of young adults, the Campus-life project (<http://campuslet.unideb.hu>) aimed to identify factors that structure and organize students' lives beyond the formal agents of civic socialization. Within this framework this paper seeks to reveal the relationship between public values and forms of collective action in two halls of residence at the University of Debrecen. In order to explore the forms of civic and political activities at the university a mixed method with the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. This paper, however, focuses its attention only on a specific projective technique used as a story trigger and presents an analysis of forty (4 semi-structured, 26 group and 10 narrative) interviews. The argument advanced in this paper is in accordance with Utasi's findings that pointed to a process of the individualization of private communities in parallel with growing institutional individualization. This process can be characterized by the fact that, under the circumstances of increasing institutional dependency and control, individuals paradoxically avoid integrating into macro groups and advocate for career opportunities. This new form of generational orientation leads to new forms of civic and political involvement.

KEYWORDS: participation, civic education, higher education, qualitative interview techniques

Introduction

Apart from active but small groups of radical actors,² Hungarian young adults (between the ages of 18-29) are lost between the plurality of social life-worlds and political subsystems, with one of the lowest participation rates in Europe. The European Social Surveys (2004, 2006, 2008) and Hungarian national youth surveys (Ifjúság 2000, 2004, 2008; Bauer–Szabó 2005, 2009, 2011; Laki–Szabó–Bauer 2001) revealed that the low level of political activity and affinity measured during the East European political transition in 1989 has further decreased among young Hungarian adults (Szabó–Keil 2011a; Szabó–Örkény 1998). It is known in the

1 Words of thanks and appreciation are owed to Prof. Ian Grosvenor, Prof. Ildikó Szabó and Dr. Béla Marián. Without their generous contribution this article would never have been completed.

2 Several recent studies about youth culture have demonstrated the political radicalization of young adults (Lánczi 2011; Bartlett–Birdwell–Krekó–Benfield–Györi 2012; Bustikova–Kitschelt 2009, 2011).

light of previous research (Utasi 2008; Szabó 2009) that young adults are neither motivated to identify themselves with formal communities nor readily participate in them. Apart from a small group of radical actors, young adults in Hungary have no voice and visibility in the political arena. They cannot be considered part of the political society. This process has led to the ongoing deficit in the legitimacy of the political system and to mistrust at an institutional and personal level. It partly points to the dysfunctional operation of political and civic socialization and also reflects the nature of the current democratic culture in which the public sphere is seen to be a remote, untouchable realm.

However, there is a slight and promising rise in some forms of political activity in a certain age group (20-29) (ESS 2010). Traditional forms of political activity are gradually becoming less acceptable, whereas case-driven civic activities are gaining more and more in popularity (Verba et al. 1995; Dalton 2008; Inglehart 1997; Norris 2002; Klingemann–Fuchs 1995; Pattie et al. 2004; Kriesi 2008; Jancsák 2009). These trends in patterns of activity can hardly be explained by political apathy or disappointment (Zukin–Keeter–Andolin–Jenkins 2006: 118-189; Szabó–Oross 2012: 66) any more. This interpretation appears to be unconvincingly simplistic.

There is a wide range of evidence that suggests that the public sphere – and the actions taking place within it – cannot be considered only as a scene of communication with definite aims and contents. The private and the public may no longer be conceived of as distinct and comprehensive frameworks of social practice. Habermas's classical concept of publicity (1962) was vociferously criticized from normative (Peters 2007; Fraser 1990) as well as from communicative aspects (Curran 2007; Heller–Rényi 2000). Sennett's illuminating work (1998) drew attention to the paradox of the public realm in late modernity. He argues that there are two contradictory processes underway. As the private man leaves the public arena, personality paradoxically gains more and more relevance in civic and political participation and the themes and legitimacy of the public sphere are primarily valued through the expectations of the private realm. The public is understood through the lens of the private. As a result, a private/public distinction gains an action theoretical, strategic relevance (Heller–Rényi 2000, Császár 2011). The public sphere is increasingly considered to be a continuously altering strategic space in which collective action is only understandable from multiple perspectives.

The dichotomy of the private and the public is one of the most fundamental and constitutive ordering principles in institutional order, as well as in the practice and experience of the spatial organization of modern social life. The alteration of the private and the public are intertwined, since one discursively constructs the other. The rise of privacy, with its rich information learning and technical capacity, has a definite educational relevance. Therefore, without careful consideration of the newly-prominent private realm and the relation of the private to the public, it is impossible to understand the shape and the formation of the public realm within

student communities. As a result, political and civic behaviour is considered in this paper to be action in this ever-changing strategic field which involves civic and political engagement, but also participation in communities.

After the political transition in a country with definite collectivist priorities there was an elementary need to redefine private and public boundaries and rebuild existing models of civic and political socialization. After the political transition a perceptible vacuum emerged as formal agents (schools, civil societies) played less and less role in civic and political socialization. The impact of informal agents in this vacuum (political actors, media, and peers) is of paramount importance and therefore the current model of political socialization is fragmented. Szabó (2010) reminds us that there exists no comprehensive youth policy which could create a consensus about civic identity and deliver unified patterns of social practices.

The very fact that from 2009-2013 there were five independent research projects which were devoted to the analysis of civic and political activities of Hungarian young adults shows the relevance of the problem. Studies significant to our concerns here can be divided into two strands of research. The first strand of research was only concerned with political behaviour, whereas the other strand employed a wider conceptual framework. Each of these research projects is now briefly summarized:

1. The *Active Young Adult* research project proposed to reveal the socio-economic background variables of active young adults,³ specifically of those who identify themselves with extreme right or left ideologies. The project maintained that some forms of activism – left radicalism (called ‘critical mass generation’), for instance, – are easily correlated with socio-economic background variables. Active neo-nationalists, however, cannot be described through pointing to the features of a specific social stratum (Róna-Sörös 2012). The popularity of these forms of activity is certainly growing beyond social classes. In light of the data, the involvement of Hungarian young adults also cannot be associated with objective or subjective deprivation (Rydgren 2007; Tóth-Grjaczár 2011). Szabó and Keil have even argued that the political transition has become endangered and stuck by the process of social integration. They emphasize that the indifference and passivity they identified was associated with cautious resistance rather than apathy. Analyzing democratic political participation opens up the question whether young adults are indeed indifferent or whether they are simply choosing new forms of engagement instead of the discredited classical forms of activities.
2. This is the starting point of the analysis of Feischmidt (2013) and her colleagues. Feischmidt has provided further evidence about the insufficiency of previous explanations concerning the activism of neo-nationalists. In the light of her findings, radical notions and forms of activity can be considered

3 <http://aktivfiatalok.hu/>

to be a kind of reaction to the material and cultural repression apparent in the neoliberal era (Holmes 2000; Kalb 2011; Minkenberg 2000). This approach relies on the consideration that new forms of exclusion caused by the structural deficits of new capitalism have appeared. Under the circumstances of collective frustration due to an unstable political and financial situation, the need for supremacy and personal and collective self-esteem is growing. As a consequence, – Fischmidt suggests – there has been a communitarian-traditional turn in the value systems of young adults. Rightwing, radical young adults refuse to participate in enjoyment-oriented and consumption-based free time activities. Active community involvement, commitment and intensive political affinity and activity seem to be perceived as a kind of revolt among them. The legitimacy of personal and collective supremacy is based on heroic and historical discourses in which identification of enemies and strangers plays a decisive role.

3. The *My Place* research project is policy-based and being conducted in 14 European countries. The project is designed to uncover the nature of political and civic engagement in different European countries.⁴ This project stresses the significance of the culture of remembrance in civic and political involvement and attempts to understand new forms of participation, the democratic articulation of needs, xenophobia and radicalism.
4. The *Community Involvement as a Renewal of Democracy 2008-2012* research project led by Utasi (2011, 2013) has challenged previous concerns and shifted the emphasis within the concept of participation beyond political behaviour towards civic and community involvement.⁵ This entailed establishing a new perspective about the concept of participation. Private communities were analyzed as if they were a kind of societal ‘laboratory’ of democratic culture, the smallest units of democratic public life. Using quantitative data this research group uncovered the motivation, means, frequency and outcomes of activities which took place within interpretative private communities. Specific attention was given to the mechanisms by which social constructs and behavioral patterns are created in private communities. The project members also expressed some concerns about what roles the articulation of needs, democratic attitudes and communicative rationality play in private communities.

Analysis of the evolutionary units of democratic culture pointed to the fact that 22.5% of the entire population are not members of any private communities and a further 22.9% belong to only one such community. One

4 www.fp7-myplace.eu

5 <http://nyilvanos.otka-palyazat.hu/index.php?menuid=930&num=73034&lang=HU>. MTA Politikatudományi Intézet – Szegedi Tudományegyetem. N=1051.

third of the population live outside of a stable relationship, one fifth do not expect help from anybody and 3% do not share public opinions even among family members. Life in private communities, however, appeared to be notably more intensive. Members frequently share their time and ideas and the level of solidarity also proved to be high. Yet, most of the communities analyzed cannot be considered multicultural, multilocal or multicronal. In light of the data, Utasi declares that private communities function as status homogenous 'playgrounds'. They are informal, non-supervised spaces and their members ignore societal hierarchy in an attempt to create equal circumstances. They play as if they were all equal in rank. 75% of the respondents considered that their friends were of higher social status. 78% identified 'common views' to be the most relevant feature of their private communities. Access to these 'playgrounds', however, is characterized by a marked inequity.

After analyzing the role of communicative rationality in interpretative communities, Sik (2011) contends that communicative rationality (measured by altruism, tolerance and involvement in communication) has an intermittent impact on political and civic activities. It affects activity patterns through demographic and network parameters. Sik maintains that public engagement is more probable if educational achievements are high, income is average, age is not too advanced and if there are first-hand experiences with democracy. He also argues that civic and political participation fundamentally differ, since the political affinity and activity of people engaged with civic activities is notably low. Civic activity is primarily determined by the educational background, whereas political activity depends on gender and urban status. In conclusion, research findings concerning community involvement have demonstrated that private communities, with their intensive communication and homogenous nature – as a community of practice –, have a decisive effect on forms of civic and political activities.

4. While many rely on macro perspectives in their account of how institutions shape political behaviour and connectivity in a community, the micro level processes at work frequently receive insufficient attention in Eastern Europe. Social scientists have rarely looked at how the seemingly irrelevant micro processes of the evolution of democratic culture lead to significant outcomes among young adults in Hungary. The *Campus-life* research project was therefore launched to deepen the investigation into democratic processes in youth culture at the University of Debrecen.⁶ The project was designed to explain how the changing forms of connectivity and privacy contribute to civic education. Specifically, Campus-life research focused on the agents

6 Campus-lét http://campuslet.unideb.hu/OTKA_81858, Project leader: Prof. Dr. Szabó Ildikó, Department of Social Politics and Sociology, University of Debrecen

of informal socialization that structure and organize students' behaviour beyond their academic duties.⁷

Within the framework of the *Campus-life* project this analysis sought to uncover patterns of collective action in the student houses at the University of Debrecen. Consistent with the above-mentioned two strands of research, it aims to address the question whether *forms* of participation can be identified in relation to students' socio-economic status or whether participation is predominantly determined by patterns and meaning complexes as perceived in private communities. In advocating for a deeper understanding of the low political and civic participation among young adults, the paper offers insights into the complex relationship between students' perceptions of the public realm and the forms of activities which they consider engaging in. The process of the translation of public values into collective action is at the core of the analysis. The argument is organized around three interrelated questions: 1.) What characterizes students' political and civic involvement in student houses at the University of Debrecen; 2.) How is the private and public realm articulated and interrelated?; and, 3.) What does active involvement mean from the students' perspective?

Research Field

The determining role of the private (with its rich information and technical capacity in comparison to the public) affects the combination of cultural elements that can lead to the different forms of political and civic behaviour. Therefore the private rooms of student houses appeared to be an ideal place to ask about the students' private and public notions and activities.

Before the political transition, student houses attracted close attention as scenes of institutional control exercised over students' privacy. Several studies have highlighted the value preferences (Szentirmai 1972), the life styles (Diczházi 1987) and the time consumption habits (Falussy 1984; Falussy et al. 1991) of students living in student houses at that time. In the last two decades, however, under the circumstances of regular financial cutbacks, cultural and political self-governance within student houses has received less and less attention, financial support and publicity. While education has long been recognized as a function of student houses, the research focus in this field has shifted to the integration of educational expectations into an operation which also has definite business, service and management roles (Gábor 2006, Dénes 1995).

This paper neither seeks to contribute to the numerous institutional analyses carried out after the political transition, nor to offer insight into the integrative functions of student houses at the University of Debrecen. The primary contribution

⁷ Special attention has been paid to students in the field of political socialization since the political affinity and activity of young adults (with their higher educational achievements and predominantly urban backgrounds) has been proven to be higher. They are also the most affected by Western European trends.

of this study lies in the fact that it considers student houses as semi-private spaces where the private/public distinction is discernible. Private and public spaces in student houses – as states within a state – reflect students' attitudes towards institutional order and the public sphere. This research field offered researchers the opportunity to detect evolutionary processes of democratic culture in the micro spaces of students' institutional private lives. It also made it possible to uncover what implications the spatial and communicative signifying practices of the private/public distinction carry for civic and political behaviour.

At the University of Debrecen there are eighteen student houses with 4754 places for students. The dramatic change in the field of student housing can be illustrated by the fact that, out of 4754 places, 3128 were built or rebuilt in the last two decades by different private/public funding constructions. Some institutions are still owned and run by the university while others are run by private firms. As a consequence, there are contrasting managerial styles and objectives. Community initiatives and the preferred level of institutional control also differ. In an effort to reflect this institutional diversity the research for this paper was carried out in the private rooms of two student houses – the Campus Hotel⁸ and the Veress Péter Kollégium.⁹ These accommodation blocks are very similar in size but have contrasting managerial objectives and civic/political culture. After sufficient consideration the underlying assumptions which led to these institutions being chosen were the following: a) their community initiatives¹⁰; b) their intention to be a hotel or home (Douglas 1991); and, c) their notions about the satisfactory level of surveillance technology (McGrath 2004).

The Campus Hotel, built in 2006 through a public-private funding construction, is owned by the University and run by Hunép Universal Zrt. The market-oriented operational body of Campus Hotel has contractually disclaimed any educational role. Students do not actively take part in the operations of the hotel and practically cannot shape their own living environments, especially not their own public spaces. The institution offers its services to 906 students (42 foreign students) from every kind of faculty. The Campus Hotel has 424 rooms in two buildings (A and B) on four floors. Visible public life mainly follows the smokers who occupy marginal spaces (balconies and entrances) in accordance with the changing regulations. Invisibly, however, public life takes place in B building's private kitchens.

In contrast, the Veress Péter dormitory and student hostel (built in 1964) enjoys relative independence in the structure of the university as an interfaculty unit. It is dedicated to the socialization and integration of students who are the first members of their families to attend university. The management of Veress Péter Kollégium has launched a great number of initiatives to enhance the sense of community, offering free

8 <http://www.campushotel.hu>

9 http://portal.agr.unideb.hu/kollegiumok/arany/koszonto/veres_peter_kollegium.html

10 This feature was chosen in accordance with the Connected Communities research project at the University of Birmingham: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/connecting-communities/index.aspx>

access to equipment (e.g. table tennis tables, bicycles) and to events (film clubs, mental hygiene seminars, etc.). A lower level of service is offered at lower price to 512 students (3 foreign students) of the faculty of agriculture. The university owns and runs this house and a democratically-elected student house committee helps with its operation. The Veress Péter Kollégium contains 126 four-bedrooms and eight two-bedrooms on six floors. The building has been under permanent reconstruction over the last six years. New rules and regulations follow the reconstructed areas. Although stricter rules have been established in the reconstructed parts, students tend to creatively reconstruct their environments, or occupy their own private spaces in the non-reconstructed area.

Finally, the two institutions have differing attitudes about the satisfactory level of personal security and social freedom. As a result, the proportion of both open and hidden mechanisms of control within the institutions is dissimilar and written formal regulations and their implementation in everyday practice contrast with each other. Although the list of regulations is long and detailed in each student house, students are forced to comply by the *faceless power of service* at the Campus Hotel and by *managerial maternal goodwill* at the Veress Péter Kollégium. In the Campus Hotel control is apparent on two different levels; the increasing proportion of spaces that are under surveillance and the actual presence of security guards. Surprisingly, even places with specific public functions (laundries, kitchens, studies) have become transitory, interstitial spaces because of the presence of surveillance.¹¹ At the Veress Péter Kollégium, however, institutional respect for privacy is evident. Bodyguards are only present at the electronic gate at the entrance to check students' identity and cameras are installed only on each corridor.

Methodology

In order to answer the question what implications socio-economic status, value profile or community commitments have for civic and political behaviour, mixed methods were used with a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. First, the Campus-life database¹² was analyzed in order to see whether forms of civic and political activities are associated with socio-economic background variables, activity structure or value profile. In the light of the quantitative data, as I have argued elsewhere, the explanatory power of socio-economic background variables, activity structure or value profile cannot sufficiently explain forms of civic or political activities involving right or left radicalism. (Pataki 2012).

The quantitative analysis of the students who lived in student houses, however, revealed a paradoxical phenomenon. Students can be characterized by their

11 In the Campus Hotel all corridors, entrances and public places (including the laundry and TV room) are controlled by video cameras. Security staff are always present in public spaces; even in kitchens or study areas.

12 Data for this study were taken from the 2010 Campus life database (www.campuslet.unideb.hu) which was designed to record the nature and the influence of group cultures on civic and professional socialization. It was an on-line survey connected to the administrative systems of universities. For the University of Debrecen the sample size was 4828. The samples in the survey were appropriately weighted in terms of faculties to correct for their disproportionate selection.

multilevel institutional dependency and at the same time by cultural independency and cautious self-management. Firstly, there is a strong familial dependency. Two thirds of students who live in student houses go home at least once a week to eat and have a rest, but they are less likely to nurture their close relations. Secondly, students in student houses are significantly more eager to meet the social, financial and academic expectations of the University of Debrecen than their peers. Even if they find these expectations stressful. Thirdly, their dependency on the entertainment industry is also evident. Unlike their peers, they more often go to parties and are less likely to spend their time in small places of entertainment such as cafes or restaurants. In contrast to their institutional dependency, students were very cautious about their cultural independency and self-management. Their cultural independency was reflected in their family-centered, profession and career-oriented value profile in which a constant reflection on self-biography was prevalent.

Previous understandings of patterns of activities which rested on explanations of socio-economic status or value profile seem to compete poorly with the power of community-related interpretations (Wenger 1998; Pusztai 2011). Analysis of activity patterns and world concepts that have evolved in private communities appears to be crucial to determining students' involvement in public matters.

This consideration led to the analysis of the role of interpretative private communities as communities of practice in civic and political involvement. The level of students' integration into formal and informal communities was uncovered by means of quantitative as well as qualitative approaches. This analysis of social integrity revealed that the students' low level of commitment towards formal or informal communities lies in their physical inactivity, their entertainment habits, the high frequency that they visit home and their strong desire to meet social, financial and academic expectations. After the analysis of students' integration into their social environment was complete, qualitative methods were used to highlight the way activity patterns were constructed in interpretative communities. Within this framework specific attention was paid to the complex relationship between students' perceptions of the public realm and the forms of actions thought reasonable in this public environment. Initially, a massive culture of silence prevailed regarding the utterance of public opinions; however, the use of 'triggers' (story cubes, mental-mapping, cards) in interviews helped to guide students to the verbal visual level where they could comfortably express their public notions.

This paper focuses on only one particular projective method, the use of story cubes, which appeared to be immensely productive when applied to recognizing hidden structures in activity patterns. The paper presents data gained using this technique in forty interviews (26 group interviews, 10 narrative interviews and 4 semi structured interviews) between January and June 2012.¹³

¹³ Interviews were audio-taped and securely stored in our project databank.

Methodological problems

It became clear at the beginning of the interview process that particular themes triggered specific strategies for hiding the real nature of existing ideas. The communicative professionalism my interviewees demonstrated was fascinating. By changing the private or public character of spaces, themes or situations, students were able to protect their opinions in an interview situation. They seemingly answered questions but at the same time did not impart information. In addition, students used mobile boundary setting practices to obscure boundaries and create cognitive and behavioral ambivalence about situations. They aimed to orient themselves about fluid, unfixed norms in this way. As a result, they could hide their identity using various forms of symbolic insignia. The dislocation of private/public boundaries proved to also be useful in setting the agenda and controlling the communicative action. As a consequence, they could stay in their private sphere, even in an interview situation, and did not have to face their civic responsibilities. These strategies helped them to mask their lack of knowledge and even their communicative incapability to rationally and not emotionally support their arguments.

To address these difficulties and overcome the boundaries of verbal communication the use of *narrative stimulating story cubes* was developed.¹⁴ By guiding the communication to a verbal-visual communicative level, students readily discussed their memories and find their comfortable place within a formal interview situation. It is worth noting here that there is no indication in the research literature that story cubes have thus far been deployed in social sciences.¹⁵ It proved to be a fruitful device for revealing hidden structures and patterns of action by triggering associations, projections and stories in formal interview situations.

In addition to using story cubes, spatial and visual triggers were employed. Mental mapping, cards and story cubes were applied as project techniques in each group interview¹⁶ or after narrative interviews.¹⁷ Mental mapping¹⁸ helped to identify actual public spaces in student houses; cards¹⁹ which illustrated a list of social problems made it possible to solicit further

¹⁴ For the conceptualization and the development of the methodology I owe great thanks to Prof. Ildikó Szabó and Dr. Béla Marián.

¹⁵ Projective techniques in political socialization have rarely been applied in research in Hungary (Csepeli-Szabó 1984) Projective techniques in social sciences, however, are widely deployed (Vicsek 2006; Siklaki 2011).

¹⁶ Group interviews were conducted among roommates of the above-mentioned two student houses at the University of Debrecen. The main concern during the selection of my respondents was to highlight the role of interpretative communities in student participation. In a randomly-selected first room students were asked to identify peers with whom they shared their free time and private sphere and public notions. The next room was selected on the basis of these strongest ties. In this way I expected to determine private communities and friendships. One important consideration in the use of such a 'community based' study is that it supports the identification of those cultural practices (stories, identities, etc.) that fixate private communities and create the basis of collective actions. After gaining data concerning private communities I was interested in identifying students who lived in relative isolation. Key informers from the operational body helped me to find isolated students.

¹⁷ If someone was either too furtive or 'too informative' during group interviews the narrative interview appeared to be appropriate for obtaining reliable data. Through the analysis of biographies, students' own logical reasoning in terms of the private/public distinction became apparent.

¹⁸ In order to establish in detail the role of private/public boundary setting in space construction, students were asked to introduce, sketch and narrate places in the student house. The construction of meaning and symbols were recorded and coded. The order of the objects introduced by the interviewees and the drawing techniques were analysed.

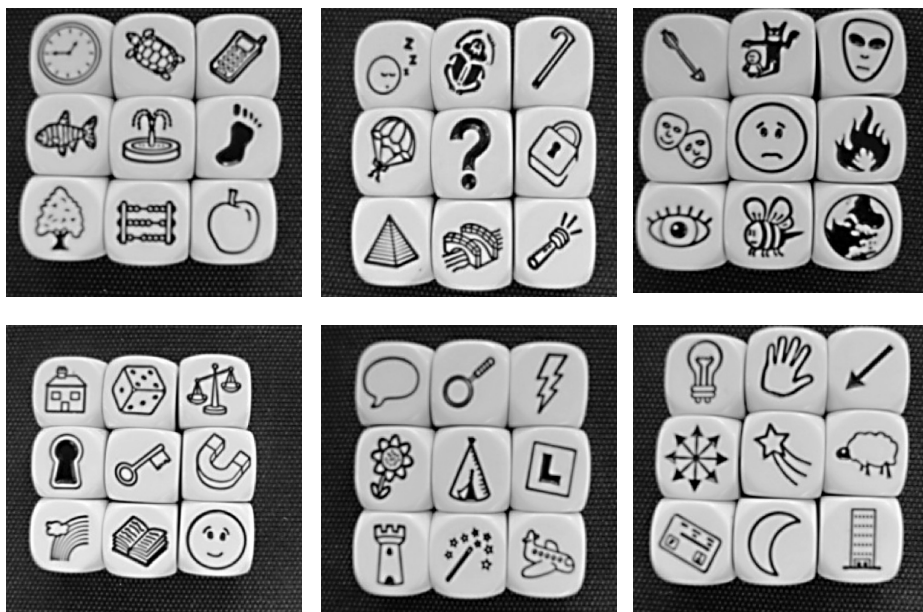
¹⁹ Respondents were presented with a list of social problems and were then asked to rate their severity using a scale. The soliciting question that was employed was: "If you were a prime minister, which would be the hottest problem to solve?"

activity patterns not triggered by the other two methods. Finally, story cubes allowed us to map primary and secondary meaning complexes associated with the public sphere.

Narrative-stimulating story cubes

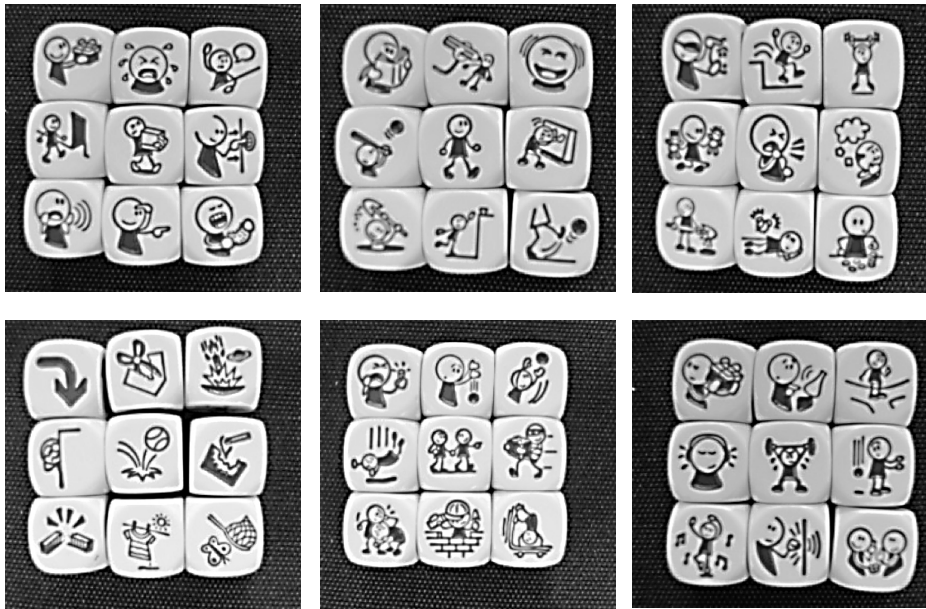
The story cube is a product of an Irish toy company²⁰ that was developed to foster the linguistic development of children. There are eighteen cubes. There are common symbols, signs and objects on nine cubes, and the other nine cubes depict human activities. All in all, respondents were presented with a combination of 108 pictograms ($2 \times 54 = 108$). The typology of the pictograms is illustrated in the photo illustrations 1 and 2.

Illustration 1.: Symbols, signs, objects



²⁰ Rory's story cubes. <http://www.storycubes.com>. 73 Rushfield Avenue, Belfast, BT7 3FQ, Northern Ireland,

Illustration 2.: Activities



In an effort to identify public topics that students were engaged with, respondents were asked to throw all the cubes. After looking at the pictograms visible on the top of each cube, respondents were asked to describe their view of Hungarian public life. If the focus changed, the soliciting question was re-presented: “What do you think of Hungarian public life?”²¹

Methodological advantages and disadvantages

One of the strongest arguments for applying this method is that it offers a comfortable interview situation in which thoughts can be encouraged and provoked without structured questions. It gives various opportunities to play with self-representation and to find a comfortable position in an interview situation. It guides students to the verbal-visual communicative level where they can comfortably express their public notions. It also gives the opportunity to present communicative professionalism, from double meanings to fictions. In addition to this, the logic of the game itself makes it more difficult to employ strategies to avoid communication. It is hard to recognize pictograms then delineate thoughts in associative sequences and control the situation. On the other hand, there were some disadvantages during the phase of data processing. Some strength of the method can also be considered weakness. The method is not appropriate for invoking intimate identification since it fosters expressing public notions without identification. The story cubes mostly triggered normative associations and stereotypes which were deepened when combined with other interview techniques. One other important

²¹ Consistent with previous research I cautiously avoided mentioning politics in the soliciting question since it gained definite pejorative associations after the political transition (Szabó-Örkény 1998; Szabó 2009; Laki-Szabó-Bauer 2001; Jancsák 2009).

consideration is that figural pictograms notably more frequently evoked associations than the pictograms with their abstract symbols. Therefore the method itself fosters narration rather than description. This consideration was taken into account during the analysis of conflicts.

Table 1.: *Advantages and disadvantages*

Advantages	Disadvantages
Comfortable interview situation without structured questions	Inappropriate for uncovering intimate identification
Verbal visual level of communication	Normative stereotypes
Opportunities to perform communicative professionalism (jokes, fiction)	The proportion of stories triggered by the symbols and the figural elements were dissimilar
Flexible opportunities for self-representation	Evocation of enthralling, dramatic events (narration rather than description)

Results

Content analysis

Narrative stimulating story cubes triggered stereotypes embedded in stories. Content analysis was concerned with the public visions that were triggered and the context these stories were embedded in. The real value of these stories lies in their nature, the frequency of their appearance and the context they were embedded in. Analysis of the cubes helped to identify the broad associative field; the way the cubes were set out on the table (visual constructs) informed me about the categories these associations were organized and, finally, the stories (narrative constructs) highlighted the context these associations and categories were embedded in. Data collected, therefore, have been categorized into two separate dimensions: 1.) primary meaning complexes; and, 2.) secondary meaning complexes (visual and narrative constructs).

The first level of interpretation was at the level of pictograms. I assumed that the pictograms first chosen were either the strongest triggers or the symbols that had the most obvious public associations. The frequency of the choosing of each pictogram and the pictograms first chosen in each case were recorded. The second level of interpretation was the level of stories. Secondary meaning complexes – visual and narrative constructs – helped me to specify the categories in which associations were organized and the context these categories were embedded in. Although respondents were asked to express their opinions about Hungarian public life, the data received were either public or private in character. As for secondary meaning complexes, it was possible to discern three distinct levels of public/private spheres: the classical political sphere, the social sphere and social lifeworlds. Social lifeworlds have been considered to be a broadly minded private sphere which includes everyday









social interactions. This twofold private/public character of social lifeworlds made it possible to gain insight into the nature and strategies of private/public distinctions.

To conclude, the content analysis relied on the identification of primary and secondary meaning complexes. Most importantly, the research addressed two questions: 1.) What kind of public associations were triggered; and, 2.) what kind of stories were they embedded in?

Primary meaning complexes

The underlying methodological assumptions behind the analysis of primary meaning complexes are as follows: if a certain pictogram was associated with the same meaning in at least seven independent cases it was not considered to be a coincidence. With seven independent selections a relationship was assumed between the pictogram, its associations and the stories. Out of 108 pictograms only 32 appeared independently in seven stories. The most frequently-chosen pictograms were selected and among them the strongest triggers were identified. Results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2.: *Primary associations*

Cubes	Pictograms	Primary meaning complexes	First choice	Frequency
Reading figure		<i>plagiarism of the president, rules, learning, entertainment, youth, literature</i>	3x	17
Weight-lifting figure		<i>fitness, energy, struggle, persistence, weight-lifting, sports</i>		15
Digging figure		<i>he digs himself into the problem, he is obsessed with his work, he buries the country, he digs himself out of trouble</i>		12
Eating figure		<i>healthy food, greed, addiction, worries</i>		12
Hobgoblin		<i>robber, wolf, pessimism, devil, fears, shadows</i>		12
Smiley		<i>relaxation, communities, laugh, madness, election, security, sense of humor</i>		11
Robber		<i>bankrobber, crime</i>	3x	10
Man with headset		<i>ignorance, headset, happiness</i>	2x	7

A quick overview of the first half of the table makes it possible to sense the negative universe that is evident at the level of primary associations. Although significantly more cubes align with positive meaning (17) than with negative (12), respondents connected even undoubtedly positive signs (smiley, presents) with negative meanings. This phenomenon is best illustrated with the *smiley* pictogram, which was not only associated with relaxation and communities but also pretence and madness.

If we look more closely at the first associations with the pictograms we can see that, apart from the typical activity patterns of students' life cycles, a personal existential struggle is recognizable. Notably, in this existential struggle students do not expect external support. Out of 32 pictograms five can be connected to the exploitation of career opportunities (ball, weight-lifting figure, digging figure, alarming clock, sleeping figure). After the reading figure the second and the third most often chosen pictograms were the weight-lifting figure and the digging figure. The professional world is vividly evoked in most interviews. Worryingly though, none of the comments related to challenges or creativity; most of them referred to the humiliation and boredom suffered by employees. As a result, frustration and fears of unpredictable tragedies were quite often mentioned. Five pictograms triggered such associations (lightening, star, landing, robber and hobgoblin). Out of 32 pictograms the *robber* and *man with a headset* proved to be the strongest triggers, which indicates students' resistance towards their unstable surroundings.

Analysis of the primary meaning complexes depicts a distant public sphere which is closely connected with crime, corruption, deception or robbery. In this predominantly bipolar world the concepts of success and failure are primarily determined by personal skills and capabilities. A fear of unpredictable incidents is prevalent.

Secondary meaning complexes

In the previous section I argued that there is a specific associative field that reflects students' notions of the public realm. I have also tried to depict some of the common features of this public vision. In this section I move on to the stories these associations were embedded within. Some forms of participation are also evident in these stories.

The content analysis of stories offered deeper insight (than the simple frequency of associations) into the context and the meaning of utterances. In an effort to answer the question what kind of associations appear, how often and in what context, I noted down every meaningful utterance and ignored the meaningless text between the argumentation. In doing so, 758 meaningful utterances were identified from 40 interviews. Utterances were coded into categories which were further structured into more general meaning complexes. Students' own categories – visual forms of cube constructions – were taken into consideration during the process of categorization. Secondary meaning complexes are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.: Secondary meaning complexes

Public and private secondary meaning complexes	Utterances
Social sphere	287
Political sphere	82
Social lifeworlds	345
Self-representation	12
Communication	32
<i>Total</i>	<i>758</i>

Although respondents were asked to share their public opinions, the number of private (345) and public comments (369) was not fundamentally different. This fact and the remarkably small amount of self-representation within public stories show students' resistance to expressing political identification. In the generation examined, discussion about political matters is considered to be intimate or even taboo. Self-representation and privacy plays a decisive role in expressing political and public attitudes.

Politics

There was apparent resistance to sharing political opinions throughout the interviews. When speaking of either 'particular' or 'general' events students did not conceive of an intermittent public space they could fully participate in. They did not consider themselves to be part of political society. Data provided a vision of a general political atmosphere in which some patterns of active participation were also recognizable.

Out of 758 remarks only 82 contained political meaning: 52 comments were concerned with political actors and 30 with political incapability or financial/legal instability. The 52 utterances were divided among 27 political actors which points to the fact that only very few actors received marked attention. Among them we can find contradictory figures in Hungarian public life (Gyurcsány, Matolcsy) or the main characters from open scandals ('The Whisky Drinking Robber', 'Stolbuci').

Democratic culture. Students generally avoided expressing public opinions throughout the interviews. When they were 'forced' to do so they did not pronounce reflective political notions based on rational argumentation or detailed information. Only two democratically elected parties were mentioned: the governing party (FIDESZ) and the extreme right party (JOBBIK). The frequent appearance of political messages from the media and the reiteration of parents' views signals that the effect of the media and parental background cannot be ignored. In accordance with the official communication of the current government, thermal waters, Hungarian athletes, Hungarian science and national sovereignty quite often emerged during the interviews. Students argued that a *lack of professionalism* (5 utterances) and insufficient articulation of interest (5 utterances) had led to the current state of public affairs. My respondents identified *mass communication* as being a governmental means of misleading citizens.

*“Big magic. The government’s performance is big magic. It bewitches people.”*²²

“Politicians suck out money and mood while they simply ignore us.”

“Europe is laughing at us.”

Nevertheless, active participation as a civic responsibility in a democratic culture and the function of the media as a public service were not thematized. Respondents shied away from politics; they are evidently not even looking for solutions to current public affairs. They definitely do not intend to be involved in political society. Politics and political involvement are connected to the failures of their parents’ generation.

“It is the world of losers.”

Table 4.: *Politics as a public sphere*²³

	Politics as a public sphere	Utterances
Political actors (Subtotal: 52)	State	3
	Government	8
	Europe	9
	Parliament	4
	The Whisky Drinking Robber	3
	Globalization	2
	Malév airline	2
	Gyurcsány (former prime minister)	2
	Opposition	1
	Mafia	1
	Schmitt Pál (former president)	1
	Matolcsy György (former minister of economics)	1
	Stolbuci (Stohl András media star)	1
	Jobbik (extreme rightwing party)	1
	Fidesz (governing party)	1
	IMF	1
	Political elites	1
	Student Council	1
	Student House Committee	1
	Agricultural policy	1
	Dirty politicians	1
	Policies	1
	Dictator	1
Reform	1	
Presidential speech in Ószöd	1	
Olympics	1	
European Championships	1	
Governmental Failures (Subtotal: 16)	Political professionalism	5
	Past orientation	6
	Lack of articulation of interest	5
Finances		14
Total		82

22 Interviews are translated which entails that the sentences presented here do not always convey the sentiments or directly match the words used at the time.

23 The table contains five persons out of whom three are politicians. Those who are not politicians include Antal Attila (‘The Whisky Drinking Robber’) who committed robberies on thirty occasions and graduated in prison. Stohl András (stolbuci) a famous actor and reporter from RTL Club TV channell was also sentenced to ten months imprisonment.

Society

While students refused to talk about their political involvement, they were willing to have a conversation about societal matters. Out of 758 meaning complexes, 297 referred to ‘people’ or to the ‘Hungarian people’ in general. These utterances mostly revealed structural features of Hungarian society, including its options and limitations.

Crime. The most prevalent societal phenomenon mentioned throughout the interviews was crime. Crime was mentioned in different forms and contexts on 64 occasions. Corruption (4), tax-evasion (10) and robbery (15) are at the top of the list but deception (11) and exploitation (9) were also among the most frequently-mentioned public features.

Hierarchy. It is illuminating to consider that, apart from crime (64 utterances) and pessimism (59 utterances), the third most commonly-mentioned public feature was social control in terms of exploitation or being exploited. The frequent appearance of hierarchy in stories, constructions and abstractions is thought-provoking. Students discussed hierarchy or leadership on 14 occasions and 20 other remarks referred to the controlled mass or misled, ‘sheep-like’ Hungarians.

“We do not have to go far away. The structure of the university is hierarchical indeed. Teachers and students are organized hierarchically and the Student Council or the Student House Committee is also hierarchical. Within the society of these student house there are leaders, followers and workers.”

The *sheep* and *bee* pictograms triggered associations with badly-informed, defenseless workers who are exposed to their working environment. Students reluctantly identified themselves with the mass. They either placed themselves on top of the hierarchy or at a meta level in order to indicate that they are not going to be involved in any way in this hierarchical societal structure.

“Everybody is sleeping or staring at his TV in block of flats. Life is gambling. There are so many empty men and this is me and I am just laughing.”

These findings were further substantiated by analysis of the visual constructs. The way students placed the cubes on the table in one third of the cases formed a hierarchical shape. The form of the construction in nine interviews out of forty was markedly hierarchical. Most often, private life, success or some kind of meta power (god, awareness, sense of humor) occupied the highest position. Students tended to reduce the complexity of public life into bipolar dimensions of good/bad, significant/insignificant, private/public.

Chart 3.: Visual constructs (hierarchies)



Pessimism. Under conditions of multiple hierarchies personal success is hardly imaginable. Students mainly foresee discouraging future perspectives:

“You are a loser but that is life. The whole country is a loser.”

“The central element is pessimism. Hungarian pessimism.”

Students argued that the low level of reliable information and the inability to orient oneself among rules and regulations exaggerate social instability. This leads to a sense of distorted perspective.

“We are trying to move in darkness.”

“Everybody is trying to be aware of vital things but it is almost impossible.”

Social order. In stories there emerged a strong desire for stability and predictability (18 utterances). Students contemplated public security (29) and the necessity of regulations at length (5+5). Views about the Hungarian state and legal system were contradictory. Several utterances were concerned with overregulation, law-evasion, and a lack of equitable legal services. Worryingly, some of the respondents (9) supported radical forms of strict and oppressive law enforcement.

Transcendence. Students seemed to be prepared to face personal tragedies in their lives and they strongly believed in the ability of external forces to change their surroundings.

“We are waiting for a miracle. Is it positive or negative?”

“Put it here, under the question mark.”

Table 5.: *Society as a public sphere*

Society as a public sphere		Utterances
Crime (Subtotal: 64)	Murder	2
	Robbery	15
	Tax evasion	10
	Corruption	4
	Mafia	1
	Deception	11
	Exploitation	9
Pessimism (Subtotal: 59)	Pretence	12
	Awareness	9
	Instability	29
Finances (Subtotal: 43)	Pessimism	21
	Hierarchy	10
	Leadership	9
	Lack of overview	4
	Lack of identity	2
Transcence (Subtotal: 42)	Obedience	18
	Miracles	15
	Accidents	11
	Incidences	10
Order (Subtotal: 18)	Apocalypses	6
	Law (positive)	4
	Law (negative)	5
	Law enforcement	9
Sports		14
Reluctance to act		13
Stereotypes		16
Environment		20
Free time activities		8
Total		297

This section concludes with the consideration that students behave extremely cautiously concerning environmental matters and career development. They cannot form encouraging future perspectives in a social context where inconsequential decisions guide unstable public order. Respondents were not willing to become ‘responsible citizens’ but preferred to be clever strategists. They do not intend to actively form or be informed by this social context. They rather wish to take advantage of it and cunningly move between institutional levels. Most importantly, they aim to become ‘leaders’ or ‘followers’ but definitely to avoid the life of the exploited ‘worker’.

Life-world

After identifying strictly political meaning, complexes and remarks about society general utterances were coded into the *life word* category if they referred to the everyday interactions of students. Descriptions of everyday events and phenomena offered a different perspective with which to analyze students’ visions of Hungarian public life: the perspective of privacy. Not surprisingly, private experiences reflected

the consequences of scandalous events in political life and hierarchical structures even in the students' private sphere.

Aggression. Verbal (12 mentions) and non verbal aggression (25 mentions) was prevalent in students' everyday stories. There are institutional (4), existential (10) and even physical threats (5) in my respondents' lives. They clearly perceive social and political divisions and conflicts in their surroundings. Whereas anger is growing in the students' public environment the typical activity pattern on the level of everyday interactions does not concern attempts to solve problems but rather to avoid conflicts, or even discussions.

"As for self-protection, problems somehow must be solved. The best solution is to bury them inside myself. This assures the avoidance of life-imprisonment."

Worryingly, students quite often mentioned deviant behaviour (21 utterances) as a response to the social injustices experienced. They mentioned drug addiction, alcoholism, gambling, smoking and addictions to technology.

"When we are pessimistic we do not know what to do. We are eating, getting fat. Not knowing which direction we should move, we drink and use drugs. There is a way here but it does not lead to anywhere where finally, there is light at the end of the tunnel."

Personal struggle. Consistent with the findings uncovered at the level of primary meaning complexes, respondents did not expect external help in their everyday stories. 43 utterances were associated with the difficulty of career development, out of which external help was only mentioned on three occasions. Success or failure almost fully depended on personal capabilities and less attention was given to social factors or getting the support needed to achieve goals.

Institutions. The context in which institutions appeared allowed me to draw some preliminary conclusion about the role these institutions play in students' civic socialization. Students relatively often referred to the university (22), and especially to its faculties. Student houses, however, were mentioned only on two occasions out of 758 utterances. This points to the fact that, regardless of institutional initiatives, student houses are not considered to be scenes of successful political or civic education. Student houses cannot be regarded as determining spaces of public life at the University of Debrecen.

Table 6.: *Social lifeworlds*

Social lifeworlds		Utterances
Relations (Subtotal: 70)	Interest	8
	Friendship, love	18
	Kids	13
	Family	14
	Party	17
Life standard (Subtotal: 58)	Money	22
	Relaxation	6
	Food	9
	Living conditions	9
	Mental hygiene	12
Personal struggle (Subtotal: 43)	Support	3
	Career development	13
	Externally imposed	7
	Personal failure	8
	Decision	12
Job (Subtotal: 38)	Work alcoholism	32
	Unemployment	6
Aggression (Subtotal: 37)	Fighting	13
	Murder	1
	Suicide	1
	Bad-will	5
	Anger	5
	Quarrel	12
Threats (Subtotal: 28)	Institutional	4
	Physical	5
	Existential	10
	Unknown	9
Deviant behavior (Subtotal: 21)	Drug addiction	3
	Food addiction	4
	Alcoholism	7
	Gambling	4
	Smoking, addiction to technology	3
University		22
Sports		14
Activity pattern (Subtotal: 12)	Shifting responsibility	2
	Ignorance	6
	Career building	4
Students houses		2
Total		343

Private stories from students' life words are a particular display of personal struggles in an unwelcoming social environment. Students who live in student houses at the University of Debrecen are not willing to form the social mechanisms of their surroundings. They perceive a discouraging negative universe which promises quite little to their age group.

Forms of Active Participation

As was pointed out earlier, students' visions of the public realm can be characterized by multiple hierarchical structures and a lack of perspective. The question that needs to be answered here is how active participation can be characterized under these circumstances.

Keeping in mind students' public visions, what kind of political or civic involvement seems reasonable for them? In the above-depicted hierarchical society students are cautiously looking for their place in order to avoid integrating into the faceless mass. Within this framework, having flexible variations of self-biographies and easily moving among hierarchical structures seem to be rational choices. Young adults quite often emphasized the importance of pretence (12 mentions), reserve (13) and awareness. Their orientation among lifestyles, social layers and institutional levels appears to be of paramount importance. On the basis of the interviews, three separate forms of activities were identifiable: 1.) development of communicative status; 2.) orientation, a constant reflection on the institutional mechanism and on the process of institutionalization itself; and, 3.) duplication of real spaces and creation of alternative realities.

There has long been a tradition of duplicating public spaces in Hungary. Parallel economical or public spheres have existed in several historical periods. Due to the historical continuity of parallel worlds, there have existed ready-made activity patterns that young adults only need to follow after consideration of the opportunities that these alternative realities offer to them. Alternative realities are understood in this paper to mean public scenes with three distinct characteristics: 1.) they are regulated playgrounds with predictable consequences; 2.) within them, perception and construction of space and time is extraordinary; 3.) social meaning is not given but rather formed within them. As a result, alternative realities offer a scene for active involvement or post-conventional forms of activity.

At the level of everyday interactions it is also possible to identify alternative realities, strictly regulated. These are places that could offer opportunities for active participation. Sport clubs and communities with a specific focus on tradition can be identified as alternative realities. The Facebook page of the student houses, for instance, is a nice illustration of a secondary economy which provides students with regulated freedom of consumption. Not to mention private communities – in accordance with Utasi's findings (2013) – that can also be considered alternative realities in democratic public life, where the techniques of communication and orientation can be acquired in protected milieus.

According to our data the form that activities in students' everyday interactions take is not the classical form of democratic involvement, but rather professional communication and orientation. These professional skills are being formed in the alternative reality of parallel public spaces. They offer opportunities for active involvement in parallel to the discouraging reality. These parallel realities are status homogenous insofar as the status of members is not questionable.

Conclusion

This analysis for this paper in the framework of the *campus-life* project sought to reveal patterns of civic and political participation in an attempt to contribute directly to

the discussion about the low affinity and activity of young adults. It aimed to address the question whether forms of participation can be associated with students' socio-economic status, or if they are predominantly determined by patterns and meaning complexes perceived in private communities.

First, quantitative analysis was carried out to answer the question what implications socio-economic background, value profile or activity structure have for civic and political involvement. In the light of the quantitative data, the explanatory power of socio-economic background variables, activity structure or value profile proved to be insufficient to explain students' participation. The low impact of socio-economic status variables was further substantiated by my qualitative data. Although qualitative interviews were carried out in two student hostels where students' socio-economic backgrounds sharply contrasted, the perception of public matters and forms of participation or resistance did not show significant differences. The argument advanced in my quantitative study accords with previous findings of Utasi (2013) and Gábor (2012) who declared that the peculiar evolutionary development of youth culture in Hungary has led to a paradoxical situation in which institutional dependency and cultural independency coexist.

This consideration led to study of the role of interpretive communities. Analysis of the activity patterns and world concepts that have evolved in private communities appeared to be fundamental to determining students' involvement in public matters. In an effort to reveal the role of interpretative private communities in civic and political participation, the level of students' integration into formal and informal communities was firstly uncovered, and then by means of qualitative methods the construction of activity patterns was analyzed.

The quantitative study of social integration revealed that the low level of social integration of students in student houses is due to students' entertainment habits, the frequency they go home and their overly strong desire to meet social, financial and academic expectations.

Within this framework, this paper focuses on the construction of activity patterns within interpretative communities, on the complex relationship between students' perception of the public realm and forms of action thought reasonable in this public environment. The new projective technique developed in the research for this reason reflects an invitation and a plea for the conceptual framework of '*political participation*' to be widened and for the possibilities of post conventional activities beyond the classical notion of political apathy to be considered.

To my knowledge, *narrative stimulating story cubes* have not been used in social sciences before. Although photographs and objects are often used as projective techniques, their interpretation is complex and manifold. The simplicity of pictograms and the respondents' own narratives facilitate interpretation. Since this method generates lots of information in a relatively short period of time, it could be a suitable 'supplement' for different types of interviews in many research fields.

The primary contribution of this method, however, is that it provides a comfortable interview situation without structured questions. The power dynamic between researcher and respondent in terms of age or gender can be nicely formed during the interviews. The method creates a playful, protected milieu in which representations of the surrounding public environment are detectable.

This projective technique was applied in 40 qualitative interviews (26 group interviews, 4 semi-structured interviews, 10 narrative interviews) in two student houses at the University of Debrecen. Respondents were asked to *throw narrative stimulating cubes* (18), and, by using the pictograms on the top of each cube, put together their understanding of Hungarian Public life. The content analysis of this method relied on the characteristics of the stereotypes triggered, the frequency of their appearance and the stories these associations were embedded in. Visual constructs – the way the cubes were set out on a table – were considered to be a kind of mental map. They reflected students' own perspectives about social structures and their place within them. There were two interrelated dimensions of content analysis: the level of 1.) primary meaning complexes; and, 2.) secondary meaning complexes (visual and narrative constructs). Primary meaning complexes offered the opportunity to specify the associative field, the way cubes were set out on a table helped to locate categories in which these associations were organized and, finally, narrative constructs were used to draw attention to students' public notions and forms of involvement.

Story cubes as a narrative stimulating projective surface also appeared to be suitable devices for uncovering social structures and their representations. They were proven immensely fruitful at revealing hidden structures and strategies of self-representation. Some concerns, however, must also be taken into account when using narrative stimulating story cubes. They evoke quick stereotypes and are inappropriate for revealing intimacy. It is therefore suggested that they be used in combination with different interview techniques in order to deepen the meaning of the associations triggered. The method itself fosters narratives rather than descriptions. It encourages respondents to tell amusing or enthralling stories and pinpoint conflicts and events.

Narrative stimulating story cubes proved to be appropriate for acquiring data about students' public notions and political activity. Qualitative analysis led to the following outcomes, which allow me to draw some tentative conclusions in terms of public notions and the construction of forms of activities:

(1) Public notions. Although the question students were asked referred to Hungarian public life, students avoided speaking about public life in the traditional sense. They tended to speak about Hungarian people in general or about events which had taken place in their close vicinity. The notion of modern societies seems to be missing from the students' civic culture, which further indicates their low motivation to be active

citizens. The fact that only a few of the statements collected can be associated with political attitudes or self-representation indicates that the majority of students shy away from expressing public opinions.

Public stories were interpreted on three different levels – on the level of social life-worlds, society and politics.

Social life-worlds. In the description of students' everyday interactions and future ambitions, personal existential struggles seem to be of paramount importance. According to students' perceptions, success and failure in their careers exclusively depend on personal abilities in a non-supportive institutional context. The lonely existential struggle apparent throughout the everyday stories which were presented was accompanied by continuous existential, institutional and even physical threats. Not surprisingly, deviant behaviour such as verbal and non-verbal aggression and, in extreme cases, food, drug and alcohol addiction were also quite often mentioned or referred to.

Society. Apart from mentioning fascinating and scandalous everyday stories, respondents confined their comments to broad generalities. Between the 'particular' and the 'general' students do not seem to perceive an intermittent public space they can identify themselves with or be involved in. When describing Hungarian public life, students emphasized the presence of crime, hopelessness and multiple hierarchies. Intense desires for security and a strong belief in transcendent solutions show that young adults in Hungary are not convinced about the outcome of reform initiatives. Findings suggest that consequential policies targeted at youth might help mitigate students' personal frustrations and existential instability.

Politics. Taking into consideration the political comments during the interviews, it became clear that expressing opinions is widely considered to be taboo. Opinions, however, if they emerged, were definite and remarkable, a fact which opens the space for further questioning around the concept of political apathy. In the light of the data it can be stated that engagement in political debates is not conceived to be part of the 'academic ethos'. The number of political comments was considerably less than the number of remarks about society in general or on social-life worlds in particular. Leaders, political actors and well-known celebrities were hardly ever mentioned. If they were mentioned, their close connection to crime was pointed out. My respondents intend to stay away from or even ignore public matters because of the lack of professionalism of political actors and the lack of democratic articulation of interests.

(2) Translation of public values into activities. On the basis of my data I would argue against Szalai (2011) who found that young adults in Hungary cannot be considered to be a political generation and do not have the necessary power to form existing political systems. The argument that this generation suffers from political apathy also appears to be a deceptive simplification. My data indicate

firm resistance against the public sphere. However, we should take into account two factors before we surrender all claims that students have the capacity to form political systems. On the one hand, young adults are not part of political society in Hungary. Therefore they are neither committed to nor constrained by any political culture. Unlike intellectuals, they are not forced to react to or follow certain rules expressed by the existing political culture. Ignorance can be bliss. In a way, young adults in Hungary can stay away from social and political institutions and even stay away from processes of institutionalization (Rosen 2001). On the other hand, they disdain pointless, everyday existential struggling and do not share the logic of older generations. These two factors, albeit from outside the political system, may enjoy enough power to form political actors.

This argument is further underpinned by the fact that there is an essential frustration and disappointment with elites and forms of democratic culture as a corollary of the structural deficits of new capitalism. As a consequence, young adults, in this atmosphere of general mistrust, are forced to cautiously plan their futures and tend to perfect the skills that are needed to occupy higher positions. These include high level reflection, communication and orientation, as well as the reconceptualization of reality; the creation of alternative realities. All of these forms of post conventional actions erode political systems and question its legitimacy from an external perspective.

(3) Institutional impact. Although I analyzed two institutions with contrasting operational objectives and managerial styles, neither of them provide an example of successful political socialization. While faculty played an important role in political socialization, student houses (even with their specific community initiatives) did not provide an environment where students actively determine their living conditions. From an institutional point of view, my data show that formal institutions (universities, student houses and even families) have a limited effect on the students' patterns of activity. Informal institutions, however, such as 'institutionalized' space construction or communication have a significant influence on students' political behaviour. The reason for the low institutional influence on political socialization seems to lie in the fact that students do not tend to identify themselves with institutions and they avoid classical forms of activities. Rather, they wish to take advantage of the discrepancies in the different levels of the system.

(4) Private communities. Finally, my data reflects the alteration of classical communities characterized by norms, boundaries and collective identities. My findings provide further evidence of the rearrangement of values and commitments (Bauer-Szabó 2005, 2009, 2011). In the emerging new communities, communication and orientation gain prevalence (Delanty 2003). Parallel to the alteration of communities, the patterns of the translation of public values into collective action also changes. In

the light of our quantitative and qualitative data, young adults in Hungary display particularly well the concept of a 'fluid society' in an East-European context (Bauman 2000). They dwell in disorder, tolerate fragmentation and flourish on dislocation in the midst of the identity game as communities disappear (Wouters 2007).

The argument advanced in this paper is in accordance with Utasi's findings that point to the process of the individualization of private communities in parallel to growing institutional individualization. This process may be characterized by the fact that, under the circumstances of increasing institutional dependency and control, individuals paradoxically avoid integrating into macro groups and advocate for career opportunities. The public sphere and spaces are understood through the lens of the private. The private/public distinction gains a specific action theoretical perspective (Mannheim 1969). This new form of generational orientation leads to new forms of civic and political involvement. How can we expect political participation in a situation where the people concerned are not aware of institutional forms of articulating needs or eliminating conflicts? What is more, they are not going to be involved in the sustenance or alteration of these institutional forms since they do not believe in them.

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