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Book of Thesis

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THE ACTIVE HUNGARIAN YOUTH IN TRANSYLVANIA

The institutionalization of Hungarian youth organisations in Transylvania from the point of view of minority nation building

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1. Antecedents of the research and main questions

The aim of my dissertation is to examine the institutionalization of Hungarian youth organization in Transylvania. The most crucial political changes in the history of the Hungarian minority of Romania happened during the 1918 regime change. The following two regime changes in 1944 and 1989 did not impose a paradigm change either, but at the same time they significantly affected the frameworks and opportunities for self-organisation and self-expression. The regime change created a wholly new situation. Thus, the events of 1989 serve as a natural starting point for the reinvigoration of the Hungarian public life in Transylvania. After the disintegration of the bipolar world order, the new political and legal environment favoured the self-organisation of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. As a result of this, new organisations started springing up, and old organisations were re-established. During the reinvigoration of civil society following the fall of the Ceauşescu-regime, the youth were the most dynamic factor in the democratisation process. In the year 1989, in the context of the post-revolutionary atmosphere, local RMDSZ bodies and youth organisations were founded in Transylvanian settlements simultaneously and in parallel. The latter mostly bore the name MADISZ (Hungarian Democratic Youth Union). Despite this, examining Hungarian youth organisations is not one of the most popular topics when it comes to studies on the Hungarian society in Transylvania.

The Hungarian youth in Transylvania has got specific characteristics in more than one respect. During its examinations, at least two dimensions have to be taken into account, as in addition to the youth aspect, the national aspect is also of key importance. During the research, the first and maybe the most significant question was this: from the point of view of which discipline should the topic be analysed? Is there a theoretical framework that allows the two aspects to be examined weighted equally, or should one aspect be chosen as the basis of the key aspects during the research? Determining the unit of analysis was also an important decision; should the Hungarian youth organisations or their institutionalization be the main focus? When focusing on the youth organisations, all three aspects of the analytical unit can be underlined. Should one concentrate on the youth aspect, a youth sociology approach can be adopted. If the Hungarian aspect is emphasised, a nationalism theory approach seems relevant. If the organisational aspect is the main aspect, organisational sociology theories can be applied. When focusing on the institutionalization process, the history of the Hungarians in Transylvania cannot be overlooked. In this case, an important aspect has to be taken into account from a socio-historical point of view: at the most important historical turning points (regime changes of 1918, 1944 and 1989), the Hungarian society in Transylvania organised itself on a national principle. Thus, the attempts of the Hungarian society in Transylvania to organise itself can be regarded as an institutionalization process based on a national principle. This process can be examined through theories on nationalism.

2. Methodology

In the first part of the dissertation, the key aspects and theoretical approaches of three disciplines (youth sociology, nationalism theory, and organisational sociology) are analysed in order to define which discipline and which theories can provide an adequate theoretical framework for the analysis of the institutionalization of Hungarian youth organisations in Transylvania.

During the literature review, no integrative theoretical approaches were found that would analyse with an equal weight the youth and national aspects. A decision was then made to focus on the institutionalization process in my dissertation. Thus, the methodological starting point of the dissertation which defines the analysis procedure was decided to be minority nation building process, from the field of study of nationalism. This certainly does not mean that the youth and organisational aspects will not appear during the analysis, but the research questions do not refer to these aspects.

In the second part of the dissertation, the institutionalization of the Hungarian youth organisations in Transylvania are analysed. The most important historical turning points of the Hungarians in Transylvania are first reviewed from a historical point of view. I focus on the youth aspect of these turning points, in particular on presenting two intellectual groups, Transylvanian Youth (Erdélyi Fiatalok) and Trust (Hitel), which were the dominant youth intellectual groups from the point of view of inner publicity during the interwar period. When

presenting the periods in question, mostly secondary sources were used. Contemporary press materials were used when available. Thereafter, the changes in national politicy after 1989 were described. This was followed by an attempt to divide into periods the institutionalization process of the Hungarian youth organisations in Transylvania after the Romanian revolution in 1989.

It was attempted to present the positions that were taken in the most important issues and the positions and strategies that appeared alongside the potential fault lines within the political and youth elite. While examining these fault lines it is crucial to note that political differences of opinion within Hungarian youth organizations reflect divisions within not the entire Hungarian youth community, but the conflicts primarily concern the inner circles of youth elites. The periodisation of the Hungarian youth organisations' institutionalization process also includes the major changes that were the starting point of the new periods. The aim was not to provide a simple chronological order of the events, but also to interpret the background processes of these events. The turning points are also often related to a conflict. In this chapter, it was attempted to present the different viewpoints, positions and strategies in these conflicts.

The third and final chapter describes my experience on the study trip to Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca). The new, unconventional forms of civil initiatives that were met during the study trip are also presented.

3.   Conclusions and results

In the theoretical chapter, I present the theoretical and conceptual approaches of the national minority youth. In the chapter that contains the periodisation of the Hungarian youth organisations' institutionalization, two more phenomena are described. On one hand, the potential fault lines within the political and youth elite; and on the other hand, the disputed issues that arose in the community life of the Hungarian youth in Transylvania.

During the foundation period (1989–1990), a number of mass movements formed. This initial momentum led to the establishment of many organisations with thousands of members, in addition mass events were organised. The youth organisation network was comprised of grassroots organisations that started springing up simultaneously with the older generations' organisations. Within a relatively short period of time, youth organisations started interacting with each other and, after a number of national-level meetings, established their first umbrella organisations. They cooperated closely with the older generations, but at the same time they preserved their independence. The youth organised itself on a national principle and addressed not only generational issues, but were actively involved from the very beginning in solving issues which concern the whole Hungarian community in Transylvania, for example the fight for ethnic rights.

The pioneering period (1990–1995) could be best described with a general perception of "everything is possible". The decisive moment of this period was the integration of MISZSZ into the RMDSZ structure, which was practically the integration of the Hungarian youth elite into the political life of the community. The main fault line appeared between two youth elite groups: those who engaged in politics and those who engaged in civil activities and distanced themselves from politics.

During the period of pact-based politics (1995–2001), the organisation network was based on agreements between the pillars that represented youth organisations (organisations representing university students, high school students, religious youth etc.). The most important aspect of these agreements was to establish common representation. Another important agreement in this period was the cooperation of RMDSZ and MIT, the youth umbrella organisation that strived to represent the whole Hungarian youth in Romania. The most important conflicts of this period are also tied to RMDSZ.

The main conflict that defined the fragmentation period of the Hungarian youth organisations in Transylvania (after 2001) was their attitude towards RMDSZ. The Hungarian subculture in Romania formed along an ethnic fault line. However, another fault line emerged in the subculture as well, and it institutionalised by the end of the 2000's. It was created by the conflict between central RMDSZ leadership and its internal opposition. The regional opposition between Catholics and Protestants was much less significant. Conflicts generated by the generation gap had also weakened. The

"radical-moderate" conflict, however, had a strong structuring force. On one hand, central RMDSZ leadership ("the moderates") focused mainly on the integration of the Hungarians living in Transylvania into Romanian society. On the other hand, RMDSZ opposition ("the radicals") called for the integration of the Hungarians living in Transylvania as an autonomous society. This opposition was reproduced in the Hungarian youth organisation network of Romania, creating a political culture of fragmentation, characterised by conflicts, and goals that are often mutually exclusive. The internal opposition and the MIT member organisations, that took the "radical" side distanced themselves from RMDSZ leadership. This conflict led to MIT voluntarily leaving the RMDSZ Council of Representatives (SZKT). They thought that leaving the Council will weaken RMDSZ legitimacy, as without the youth, RMDSZ will no longer represent the whole Hungarian community in Transylvania.

RMDSZ initially handed over youth policy competences to the self-organising youth. Their key youth partners were first MISZSZ and OMDSZ, then MIT. The most important RMDSZ decision regarding youth policies was to institutionalize their relationship with youth umbrella organisations that incorporated quasi-independently organised and functioning youth organisations. By this, youth organisations became involved in the decision-making structure of RMDSZ. By the 2000's, tensions were rising between MIT and RMDSZ. The situation had become untenable not only for the youth, but also for RMDSZ. This is when RMDSZ started to address youth policy issues. The first and most important step was to support the

establishment of a youth umbrella organisation (MIÉRT) that incorporates the youth organisations that are willing to cooperate with RMDSZ. Thus, MIÉRT filled up the vacuum in RMDSZ legitimacy that arose after MIT left.

After the pioneering era, the Hungarian youth organisation network pluralised. In parallel with RMDSZ becoming a political party, the attitude towards RMDSZ became the main fault line between youth organisations. This became a structural factor that led to a political and, later, organisational fragmentation. In parallel with the escalation of the conflict between MIT and RMDSZ, a new youth structure arose. This ended a period of institutionalization in the youth organisation network. The period between 1995 and 2001 was defined by a push for a common representation. After the fragmentation of the youth organisation network, however, the youth organisations that shared ideologies and cooperated with RMDSZ separated from those who distanced themselves from RMDSZ and played the role of the opposition.

4. Publications related to this topic

Kiss-Kozma Georgina: Színes kisebbség, mozgalmas ifjúság: (Papp. Z. Attila (szerk.): Változó kisebbség. Kárpát-medencei magyar fiatalok – A GeneZYs 2015 kutatás eredményei.) *Kisebbségi Szemle*, 2018. 3 (1). 67 – 81.

Kiss-Kozma Georgina: Ifjúsági Évkönyv – Erdélyi fiatalokról: (Bodó Barna (szerk.) Erdélyi Magyar Civil Évkönyv 2016-2017 – A Mi fiataljaink.) *Kisebbségi Szemle*, 2018. 3 (3). 119 – 127.

Kiss-Kozma Georgina: Pillanatkép a magyar ifjúságról: (Az ifjúság kutatássorozat legfrissebb hulláma – Székely Levente (szerk.): Magyar fiatalok a Kárpát-medencében – Magyar Ifjúság Kutatás 2016.) *Kisebbségi Szemle*, 2019. 4 (1). 93 – 105.

Kiss-Kozma Georgina (2019): A romániai magyar ifjúsági szervezetek intézményesülése a rendszerváltást követően – Politológus doktoranduszok V. konferenciája – BCE Politikatudományi Doktori Iskola, Budapest, konferenciaelőadás.

Kiss-Kozma Georgina: Egy új perspektíva a romániai magyar ifjúsági szervezetek intézményesülésének vizsgálatához. *Pro Minoritate,* 2021, tavasz. 77 – 104.

Kiss-Kozma Georgina: Kísérlet a romániai magyar ifjúsági szervezetek intézményesülésének periodizációjára. *Kisebbségi Szemle*, 2021. 6 (1). 27 – 48.