

UNDERSTANDING HUNGARY: HOW TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

The purpose of the Roots and Wings Foundation is to initiate profound social change in Hungary through supporting bottom-up initiatives that increase individual initiative and responsibility, and strengthen trust and solidarity in society. Our programs embrace causes, groups, and civil society organisations (CSOs) that make their local environment and society more liveable, encouraging people to participate and act in a responsible way.

Building long-term trust between people, strengthening relationships and solidarity between different social groups, and setting

an example to encourage cooperation for common goals are all essential to the long-term development of local communities. The community foundation is an excellent and proven tool to achieve these goals - it is for this reason that the Community Foundation Support Programme supports existing community foundations and helps bring new ones to life.

The knowledge, experience and energy of individuals are multiplied when they act together; the same potential exists in community fundraising. In addition to donating money, the donor pays attention to and puts energy into important social causes and becomes part of them. The foundation's Live Crowdfunding Program builds a community of people who are keen to learn about different social issues and projects, and are motivated to make changes happen through their donations.

In rural Hungary, it is even more difficult to keep alive initiatives and attitudes that are democratic, economically prosperous

and fair, building on the work of active citizens. Therefore, the Roots and Wings Foundation's Small Town Program aims to strengthen the creative capacities of small town communities, and support their leaders to pay more attention to their future development.

Our success depends on our ability to understand, from several different perspectives, the decisive social processes now taking place in Hungary - even those that are not a focus of attention. This is the reason why we organised the **Understand Hungary** conference, where expert speakers gave insights into little discussed but critical trends in Hungarian society. They also presented examples of citizen initiatives which have the potential to change our culture for the better or are already succeeding in doing so.

The conference supporters are an extremely diverse community: the goal of ZEIT-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius

was to promote internationalism and novel learning methods; the Association for Community Relations have been supporting Romanian community foundations and were a partner in the organisation of the conference; Tamás Velki sees our work as a way to encourage bottom-up social initiatives; while through the Ferencváros Community Foundation's Swimathon project hundreds of private individuals have supported local heroes wishing to shape their communities with small donations.

We have made an impact, even beyond getting to know prevalent social trends: many people have come closer to the world of community initiatives, better understanding their potential for bringing initiative and solutions to their local communities. The youngest participant in the closing discussion said, "Now I can imagine my future in Hungary."

Below is a summary of the conference presentations. If you want to act, then you are one of us - contact us!

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The participants in our roundtable discussion were:

William Benkő, a US-based businessman, investor, coach, and former president of the American Chamber of Commerce.

Luz ‘Lucy’ Ilia Alvarez Martínez Szilágyi was born in Havana and is active in the fields of community development and adult education. She currently works as an assistant at a public procurement department.

Nick Thorpe, Central Europe correspondent for the BBC News, was born in England and has lived in Budapest for over 30 years with his Hungarian wife and five sons.


Cake-Baly Marcelo, who has become known as the main character of the film titled Citizen. He came to Hungary from Bissau-Guinea with a scholarship at the age of 18 in 1976. He graduated as an economist.

The discussion was moderated by Axel Halling, board member of the Roots and Wings Foundation, who lives in Berlin and works with community foundations at the German Federation of Foundations.

35 WE CAN REVERSE NEGATIVE TRENDS LOCALLY Through conversation, cooperation, sensitivity, smart action and even well-targeted businesses negative social trends can be reversed locally. Good examples were presented by Mária Szeder-Kummer from small villages in Zala County; Eszter Faragó-Kovách talked about social enterprises; Tracey Wheatley spoke about the Transforming Communities project and Mónika Bálint gave an overview of achievements of community organisers.

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A close-up portrait of György Csepeli, a man with glasses, looking slightly to the side. The image is partially obscured by text and has a red tint.

NEW 'CREDIT'

TO CURE THE HUNGARIAN PATIENT

A GENERAL SENSE

**OF BEING A SUBJECT, THE DENIAL
OF COMMUNITY, ANOMY,**

empty individualism and scapegoating are all among the reasons why we do not feel alright. Building a culture of trust can bring about change,” said György Csepeli at the **Understanding Hungary** conference organised by the Roots and Wings Foundation. In his lecture entitled **New Credit**, the social psychologist took stock - in the spirit of Széchenyi - of what the symptoms of the Hungarian patient are and what the remedy might be.

György Csepeli

Széchenyi's remarks and conclusions are still surprisingly relevant today.

In 1830, Széchenyi began an ambitious exploration; he wanted to understand Hungary. **Credit** is a book of social psychology, and the questions and answers he raised and found at the time resonate today. One chapter in the book is titled 'Why Hungarians are not as Well Off as their Circumstances Would Allow.' According to Széchenyi, it is due to the lack of credit. Credit here is a social psychological concept - it actually means trust. "The easing of the credit shortage is needed if we want to look forward to the future with confidence," said social psychologist György Csepeli, Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, at the beginning of his lecture.

The Hungarian Patient's Symptoms The tension between the present smallness and the **greatness of the past** is an important element in the group of symptoms, and it is characteristic of our whole region. Nobody loves to be small, and our region's nations are looking for greatness in their history, in retrospect, at each other's expense, but in fact none of them has ever been great - we have all lived under the rule of empires. Competition for the past is the result of a lack of sovereignty and belated national awakening.

"It is a basic experience of Hungarians, and it is not self-deception," Csepeli continued, "that we are alone: we live in a linguistic island, so we think differently from our environment, which is a competitive disadvantage. What is more, these walls are unbreakable."

“Our own physical bodies are problematic: although **suicide** statistics are improving, and today ‘only’ 19 suicides happen per 100,000 people (30-40 years ago the figure was 50), there is a type of gradual suicide which we are very good at. Alcoholism, drug use, eating habits... Because of these, we are leaders in Europe in the number of cancer deaths and cardiovascular diseases. Addictions are a compulsive compensation for the lack of confidence,” the speaker noted.

“Another important element of this set of syndromes is **denial** of the other: when we turn to the other, we have a kind of ‘ransom mentality’ - we are concerned that the other person wants to take something from us. We are suspicious of each other, and so we become trapped in situations where the other person’s suffering gives us joy. In such a setting, no constructive relationships can be formed. This is what results in a lack of community, empty individualism and an unparalleled complaint culture: we are not looking for a solution, but are dissecting the problem - not to get rid of it, but to take **perverse delight in the pain** while doing nothing to find a solution. By contrast, a credit mentality would mean turning to the other person with trust; we could approach each other with a positive image, which could as well be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

“A general characteristic of our region is having a sense of being a subject while lacking of civic awareness: we do not get agitated by state abuses, which is just unthinkable for a Western citizen who has grown up in democratic settings,” Csepeli pointed out.

“The next element of the set of symptoms - the denial of community - is something that counts as unique even in our region. In contrast to the glorious, powerful anthems of other peoples, our anthem is a self-defeating one, similar to our national calendar. We commemorate **historical tragedies** year after year, and most of our national heroes met with tragic ends. The acquired cultural patterns



live on from generation to generation, distancing us further and further from reality.

“Even though anomy is an important symptom of the ‘Hungarian patient’, looking for loopholes appears to be a useful survival tool: we do not care about the rules, but are trying to enforce our own will against them. This is what leads to a lack of solidarity, which means that social ties are weak. The power of society, however, comes from the strength of these ties, from the fact that even strangers trust each other. In our case, not even people who know each other trust each other,” Csepeli noted.

“Empty **individualism** can be seen as part of the symptoms. We only concentrate on ourselves, which ends us up in a social trap: everybody wants to succeed, but in the end, the community comes off badly. We live in a state of non-cooperation and non-competition in which brute force and fighting are all that matter.

“**Intolerance** is typical - if one’s life is vulnerable, it is the lack of accepting otherness that follows. We do particularly well in the field of hostility focusing on anthropological groups. We see an enemy in everyone, and then we are amazed that everybody sees an enemy in us: we are afraid of the Pirezians, an imaginary non-existent people. Since the change of regime, nationalism, anti-Semitism and anti-Roma sentiments have been on the increase. It is just typical that Hungary was not represented at the 100th anniversary celebrations of the end of World War I, even though all other warring parties - regardless of which side they fought on - were there. We do not seek to understand other narratives,” Csepeli concluded.

“**Scapegoating** is another important symptom: we are reluctant to accept the consequences of failure. Failure is not followed by learning; instead we keep explaining it, looking for external factors,” Csepeli concluded his enumeration of the symptoms.

There Is a Way Out

“A smart man does not look behind his back so much as forward.” “A real, wise patriot is he who wishes what is possible and looks for mistakes in himself and not others.” “Even if nobody does their job, he does; like a real



hero, he stands on his own feet,” the speaker quoted from **Credit**, adding that the way out is still the same as Széchenyi indicated. According to Csepeli, the new credit (i.e. the rebuilding of trust) has several elements.

One of them is rationalism. This means a realistic assessment of the situation, the objectives, and the available tools, followed by action. Another one is positive thinking, which is self-fulfilling: it brings us and our environment out of a negative situation. This includes standing your ground, performance, and risk-taking, as well as serving the public good, which unites the country and the citizens - even if by ‘public’ we mean a smaller community.

Creating a culture of cooperation and trust is also indispensable: it is the main binder of society, and only trust and cooperation can lead to success. A culture of success is what eventually brings about true communities.

An important condition for change is self-confidence: the ultimate reason for the lack of cooperation is that we do not trust even ourselves.

More than that, we need empathy and tolerance: where we see that the other person is in trouble, our help should not be premised on what we get in return. It must be understood that helping as a selfless act is uplifting.

“The more people are free in a country, the stronger the country is, and the greater its chances of survival amid the fierce competition between countries and continents. Freedom and creation is what can help us,” concluded György Csepeli.



WOMEN ARE MORE INFLUENTIAL IN RWANDA

THAN THEY ARE IN HUNGARY

There are hardly any female decision-makers in today's Hungary, and this fundamentally determines the quality and level with which women's issues are brought to the agenda. Women are worn down in the double grip of the family (invisible work) and the work place. In addition, they are more prone to poverty. Creating communities and solidarity, and based on these, a strong representation of their own issues - this is what could lead to a solution, and not only for women," said writer, journalist and community builder Zsuzsa Rácz at the **Understanding Hungary** conference organised by the Roots and Wings Foundation.

Rácz Zsuzsa

“Following the success of **Stop Mom Theresa!**, thousands of women started to share their stories with me. They were all asking what they should be doing with their lives, even though I had written 300 pages about how I don’t know the answer. That said, I felt that I have to give them something, and that’s when I started the Mom Theresa Club. This ‘Mm Theresa’ thing is characteristic of me and of many woman: we want to save someone by any means,” Zsuzsa Rácz pointed out at the beginning of her lecture.

“I received plenty of letters which basically said that women always put other people’s interests ahead of their own, often not even noticing what they are doing. Ultimately, the stories were about how **woman become vulnerable**. I began to pay attention to identifying the common denominator in the book that was touching their hearts. I started to understand how we function socially because of our gender. The question arose: how can such a large group of people with such a social weight be in a minority position? Why cannot they **represent** their own interests well, when this results in systemic disadvantages in the most important areas of life, causing not only pain for themselves but also for their male counterparts?

Women’s representation at the highest levels of decision-making is extremely low: 10 per cent of Hungarian MPs are women - this ratio has remained broadly unchanged since the change of regime. This puts us in last place in Europe, with even Rwanda being ahead of us. There, a 50 per cent female quota has been



ends: they cannot get back into the labour market because there are no flexible jobs - only 5 per cent of jobs can be categorized as such. In addition to the lack of alternative forms of employment, the country loses a highly qualified social group.

When mothers do set foot in the labour market, it is then that they really have to look out for the systemic challenge of performing at work and at home at the same time. Invisible work, household chores and child-rearing - a crucial task that is traditionally carried out by women all over the world but is still not appreciated - is estimated to be worth some 25 per cent of GDP, or 33 per cent according to other estimates. Centuries-old patterns and gender roles determine who does what at home, and invisible work invariably goes to women - a consensus that is increasingly reinforced by the power rhetoric. There is hope,



nevertheless, as for new generations the mentality that a couple will share their chores is gaining ground.

The system of expectations of women - which they readily take on - is so contradictory that one third/one quarter of people in their 30s and 40s remain **childless**. According to sociology, this is because they have seen their mothers struggle with the combination of household and workplace chores.

In Hungary, every third child is hungry and cold - in those families, the woman is hungry and cold too. "Everywhere in the world, poverty has a woman's face - it is women who become vulnerable first, followed by children," Zsuzsa Rácz highlighted another sad aspect.

"One of the greatest obstacles to women getting on in life is that there is no exchange of information, no reliance on each other, **no solidarity**. To say something positive, the Mom Theresa Contest, which was in existence for eight years, has created a community that is still alive and is creating the same thing today. In today's Hungary it is a key issue whether a community - any kind of community - is able to function in the long run and in an autonomous way, being able to stand up for and represent itself. The Mom Theresa Contest has shown that this is all possible," Zsuzsa Rácz concluded.



A GOOD THING OR A DISASTER?

HUNGARY AND AUTOMATION

Up to two million jobs may be lost in Hungary in the next ten years. Production without human labour does not necessarily bring prosperity: in the past 40 years, labourers' bargaining power against capital has deteriorated. The government's re-industrialization and education policies are believed to be mistakes: neither of them facilitate preparation for a major technological change." Journalist Miklós Kis spoke about the fourth industrial revolution and its consequences at the **Understanding Hungary** conference organised by the Roots and Wings Foundation.

Miklós Kis

“At the heart of the fourth industrial revolution is artificial intelligence, which allows automation that will have an incredible impact on the labour market and society as a whole. Many jobs will be discontinued in the world and in Hungary - the big question is how many exactly and at what pace,” pointed out journalist and analyst Miklós Kis at the beginning of his lecture, **The Fourth Industrial Revolution and Us. Hungary’s Potential Futures.**

There are many different answers. Let us start with the Minister of Finance: Mihály Varga said that 350-400 thousand jobs would be discontinued due to digitalisation. Even though the finance minister in office is considered to be an optimistic person, this initially seems to be a large number. However, based on existing analysis, it is actually one of the smallest. According to a study by the Institute for Economic and Enterprise Research at the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 513,433 jobs could be automated if the 2016 level of technical development is taken as a basis. That was the year the study was conducted, and it is important to note that the researchers did not take new technological advances into account. According to a recent McKinsey report published in May 2018, 49 per cent of working hours could be **automated** at the current technological level. Of course, it would not necessarily be worthwhile for company owners to suddenly make this move, especially bearing in mind the relatively low levels of Hungarian wages, but the ratio would mean that 2.2 million jobs would be lost. Company analysts outlined scenarios up to 2030: according to one scenario assuming a

fast uptake of technology, all jobs that can be discontinued will be eliminated by new technological opportunities by 2030; the slow scenario gives a loss of just 44,000 jobs in the same period, with jobs being retained primarily because of low wages; while according to the average scenario, 1 million people will lose their jobs.

Other research estimates that 2.4 million people will lose their jobs - this is a calculation by the Bruegel Research Institute, which forecasts the disappearance of 55.34 per cent of jobs in Hungary. A significant difference between the calculations of McKinsey and Bruegel is that, while researchers at the latter institute expect the complete disappearance of entire professions, McKinsey judges that very few occupations can be fully automated, and that it is basically working hours that can be automated.

“One thing is certain: many jobs will disappear. The big question is whether new jobs will be created in their place. Many people wave it off by saying we have already experienced some major explosive technological advancements, for example 20 years ago we did not have search engine optimization professionals. However, the World Economic Forum (WEF) predicts that many fewer jobs will be created than will be lost to technology. The McKinsey report, on the other hand, is very optimistic: they say that in Hungary, only up to 3 per cent of professions can be fully automated, so in fact we are saving on working hours, and the new jobs created will bring higher added value, coupled with higher wages. In turn, higher wages will generate higher

consumption, demand and new jobs. For this reason, they recommend that automation be as fast as possible.”

“The weak point of the argument is that expecting higher wages from jobs generating higher added value contradicts recent historical experience. Since the 1970s, this simply has not been the case, and while the average productivity of workers has been increasing, this is not reflected in their real wages. Another point in the McKinsey report which can be debated is that only a very small proportion of occupations can be automated: at the current technological level, it cannot be said that all taxi drivers and carriers will lose their jobs, but in 5-10 years this could become reality.” The analyst concluded his take on alternative scenarios by noting that “we have to expect entire forms of human activities to be substituted, and not only manual labour. For example, in the healthcare sector, a doctor can be much more easily replaced than a nurse, because the physician robot brought into the system knows much more than a human can know.”

An important point for Hungary is that as a result of automation labour costs will have less impact on where the working capital goes and where a company will open its new factory. Strange things are happening that have never happened before: Adidas has relocated one of its factories to Germany, and Foxconn has built one in the United States. The examples show that very highly automated factories can be built, and if labour costs are no longer so important, factories are built close to the market outlets.

Or there may be other factors that influence decisions, such as the tax or customs system of the destination country. Hungary is heavily affected by the process: we keep trying hard to attract working capital, but this model can spring a leak if labour costs become less and less relevant to decisions affecting the flow of working capital. We should have this on mind when thinking about Hungary's future.

“Will the fact that machines can produce an incredible amount of goods bring us an age of prosperity?” the lecturer raised a key question. “It is definitely worth talking about the fact that workers, who perform more and more efficiently, are getting lower and lower real wages. It can be debated whether globalization and the outsourcing of production are behind the phenomenon, or the **automation** that has already begun. It is certain that the bargaining power of labourers against capital is shrinking, and low salaries mean low demand.”

“Automation is much like global warming: changes are coming that can be foreseen and can radically transform society - but it is less clear what form this transformation will take and how society can best



respond. We have to face this and find out what Hungary's opportunities are in the process."

'How is Hungary preparing for change?' Miklós Kis answered his question as follows: "My personal opinion is that the industrial era continues in accordance with the government's vision. At the same time, we know that this is not entirely true: we are investing more and more resources to somehow maintain and increase industrial production. According to the latest news, for example, we are giving BMW HUF 135 billion in exchange for a thousand jobs. We are spending 20 per cent of this year's budget on Hungary's economic functions, which equals approximately HUF 4000 billion. From a good part of this money, we try to lure manufacturing companies into coming here, whereas the role of industry in employment keeps decreasing. So the government keeps pressing the pedal, but we are not moving forward."

"In the area of education, **the cabinet acts in the spirit of the '50s**. We expect everyone to have the profession they learnt at school and to cultivate it throughout their lives. In fact, a realistic approach would be to prepare for the key sectors that are emerging and have a well-trained workforce to match them. On the other hand, we have to be prepared for the post-work world because it will inevitably occur."

"According to an EU survey, Hungary is among the countries where people are most afraid of artificial intelligence and robots. I see the wisdom of the Hungarian people there,' Miklós Kis concluded.

Basic Income & Autonomy

Several interesting comments followed Miklós Kis's presentation. One of our guests talked about providing people with a basic income to help people find their way in the transforming world. He noted that attempts to test the effects of the basic income were often stopped because revealing the good results is against the interests of many.

The same person said that automation is by no means a technological issue; the real dilemma is how we use technology - like how the fourth industrial revolution relates to global warming and sustainable development, for example - and that is a very political issue.

Another commenter noted that **artificial and human intelligence are usually compared in four dimensions**. Regarding the scope of information (i.e. the amount of information processed) and the speed of data management, machines are winning, but for the time being they are still far behind in the areas of autonomy and comprehensiveness. By 'autonomy' we mean that machines only do what we command them to do, and by 'comprehensiveness' the fact that robots cannot handle relevant information outside their area of operation. This is where the significance of humans can be grasped: humans can make general abstractions and our minds are not focused on just one thing. We can make decisions and act upon them. Many people believe that the differences between machines and people in these areas are soon to disappear.

HUNGARIANS

PASS ON PESSIMISM

WHY DO WE PASS on to our children that Hungarians are negative in their attitudes? Why don't we pass on that Hungarians are positive in their attitudes?' 'Nowadays - even if a lot of positive things are happening in the country - the air is getting thinner.' 'I've never met a Hungarian who would be genuinely happy living abroad.' 'It all starts with not being afraid.' 'Everybody can do a lot in their lives, the situation is never hopeless - we have to go on as if we were **living** in a cheerful era.' Foreigners who have come to live in Hungary talked about Hungarians and their experiences at the **Understanding Hungary** conference organised by the Roots and Wings Foundation.



A.H.: Lucy, when did you first meet Hungarian pessimism?

L: When I arrived in '83, the first or second sentence I heard was that Hungarians were pessimistic. I did not really experience it at the time because we were young and your youth is generally cheerful. As time went by, I realized that this was a fact, but I always say: why do we continue this story? Why do we pass on to our children that Hungarians are negative in their attitudes? Why don't we pass on that Hungarians are positive in their attitudes? If we were passing on a different



Cake-Baly Marcelo, Axel Halling, Nick Thorpe,
William Benkő, Szilágyiné Alvarez Martínez Luz Ilia

message from generation to generation, **pessimism would disappear**. That's it.

A.H.: Marcelo, how did you end up in Hungary?

M: When I was young, there was a war of independence going on in my country, Guinea-Bissau - I grew up in this war. Then I volunteered to become a **soldier**, and later received a scholarship, was demobilised and came here to **study**.

A.H.: As far as I know, you work as an actor and a tram driver. An interesting combination.

M.: Yes, that's life. You have to survive.

I couldn't find a job in my profession, I met a lot of **discrimination** in the labour market. I had to make a living somehow. People say that working is not a shame, so I became a tram driver. The acting thing started out by chance: a director came up to me on the street and offered a leading role, which I accepted. In fact, I enacted myself: the protagonist faced the same problems as I have experienced.

N.T.: I came to Hungary because I wanted to go east from England and somehow I came here. I'm always scared when people talk about Central Europe. I want to cry out in protest, saying I don't want to be in the centre - I want to live on the **periphery**. And it's happening, too. As a journalist, I came to Hungary because in '86 I was expecting something to happen here. Since then I have gained a lot of experience, because something is always happening. That's why I have stayed.

W.B: 28 years ago I came because the wall started to shake and crumble, and

I assumed there would be business opportunities here. And there have been great opportunities in this country ever since: you have the right knowledge and attitude - here you can create.

A.H: What has changed the most in Hungary since the change of regime?

W.B .: In '90 you had far fewer choices in every aspect of life. Today, there is such an excess of choices that life has become much more complicated. We need to grow up to combining our opportunities well, and I'm not convinced that we have fully learnt this. That said, let me say something in the country's defence: I am not convinced that other countries have learnt to manage those opportunities either.

A.H .: As a businessman, what do you miss in Hungary?

W.B: It's not fair to **divide the country into two**, but I will. One half of it is helpful and will welcome you and do anything for you. The other half will start by pointing out what can't be done and why - in other words, they don't look for opportunities to help or cooperate with others.

A.H.: Which experience is more common? I find that, compared to Germans, Hungarians have some kind of improvisational skills. Have you had this experience too?

W.B: I prefer to be in touch with people who are looking for problems and solutions, and do not spend their time interfering with other people's lives. There are many people in this country who want to live in an honest way and work in an

honest way - I try to surround myself with such people.

A.H: Do you feel like an American Hungarian? Do you have to face any disadvantages because of this?

W.B: I usually say that the hardware is Hungarian and the software is American. I get into conflict with some people because they know I was born and raised



abroad, so they assume I don't know the ropes. If I meet someone like that, I step aside, because I don't want to convince those people. There are many people who have a different approach - with them, you can create together.

A.H.: Nick, what has changed the most in the past 30 years - outside the political system?

N.T.: I wouldn't want to return to the pessimism issue, but I feel that **the end of the '80s, beginning of the '90s, was a much more hopeful era**. Then the state was becoming smaller, and people were not afraid of anything. They felt that they had an increasing number of opportunities. Nowadays - even if a lot of positive things are happening in the country - the air is getting thinner. There are those who respond to this by working better and harder, as dictated by the current conditions, so that we get some air and there be communities and honesty, and a future for Hungary. And of course there are those - and you cannot blame them - who leave the country.

A.H.: How many of them do you think will come back, bringing their experiences with them?

N.T.: I'm a great proponent of migration. This morning there was a show on BBC in which a Somali woman said that if you can migrate, it means you can go home too. I've never met a Hungarian in London or elsewhere who would be really happy abroad. Hungarian patriotism is that strong - much stronger than ours, English

people, who emigrate and forget that we have a country somewhere. As I see it, the patriotism of Hungarians is completely independent of their political views. People, by the way, almost always want to go home at some point - except for me.

A.H.: Marcelo, I read in an interview that your patriotism is rather strong as well. You also say that you are Hungarian. How did that come about?

M: I spent my youth having to fear when a bomb would fall on my head. Then I came here - everything I have, the meaning of my whole life is here. I went to school here, I have been working here for 34 years, my family is here, just like my children who have grown up here and served in the Hungarian Army. My whole family, my whole life is Hungarian. I have done as much for the nation as any Hungarian citizen.

A.H: Was getting the citizenship difficult for you too?

M: I'd lived here for a long time and had a family when I applied for a citizenship - I had to wait four years to get it. I've experienced all that you can see in the movie. They never said anything to me directly, but when I went and asked them why my case was taking so long, I never got a specific answer. I waited patiently.

A.H .: Lucy, there's a big difference between Cuba and Hungary in terms of atmosphere. What have you experienced from this?

L: In Cuba, people are more cheerful: when there's a tornado, they do not escape into a hole but go out and swim - so they are not afraid. Everything begins with **not being afraid**. People are generally cheerful also because when they have problems

- and there are plenty of problems in Cuba because the economic situation is very difficult - they do not lose hope. In Hungary, there is this saying that 'Hope dies last.' Well, people in my country hope to find what they don't have if they look for it. It might be that they find it in unexpected places, but sometime, somehow, they can achieve what they want. Because they have hope, they are happy.

A.H.: How could the co-existence of foreigners and Hungarians be improved?

L: I have a lot of experience with this thing - especially recently - that trying to get close to a person is futile if they start by telling you that you don't speak Hungarian well. I tell them, don't I? Then how come you understand what I'm saying? Many people are also irritated by my being cheerful. I don't know how to change these things. I think this is not about the innate qualities of humans, these things have been picked up by them on the way. You have a lot of angry, malicious, stressed people.

N.T.: I see kindness manifesting between strangers every day - on the tram, on the street, in the store. The many homeless people who are now displaced to the suburbs have survived because they have their own social net - people who give them something every day: money or food or blankets. The nice side of the story is that here it can be shown how Christian a Christian country is. When we had the refugee crisis in 2015, I saw a tractor driver in Ásotthalom, a village famous for its anti-migrant sentiment, who slowed down - albeit did not stop - and gave an apple

to everybody on the edge of the road. How can this be strengthened? Everyone can do a lot in their own lives, the situation is never hopeless - we have to go on as if we lived in a cheerful era.

L: Since we have the migrant issue, I do my best to have people get to know me as much as possible. I try to approach people everywhere, patiently and smiling - and this confuses people who verbally abuse migrants.

A.H.: Marcelo, what experiences have you gained since the outbreak of the refugee crisis?

M: The migrant issue has become a question of hatred. When the movie came out, I was invited to many countries, and wherever I went I saw that the citizens of the state are truly equal, and the migrant issue is not a political issue and no political ambitions are linked to it. Here in Hungary, it is a political issue unfortunately. I've been working in my job for 20 years, and no day passes without somebody asking me where I come from. I have been asked whether migrants really rape girls and take people's jobs. They ask those questions very seriously. All of this has become so accepted in Hungarian society that I don't know where we will end up in the short term.

When I was a student, I made friends with a lot of Hungarian students. They took me to visit their families, I was there during the weekends, I was welcome. The change of regime did not bring much good for foreigners.

Many Hungarian scientists have emigrated, who then assisted the development of the host country; can't we have migrants like that in Hungary as well? You just have to trust the person, give them opportunities and they can be like anybody else. But if politics benefits from it and the whole society goes crazy, then I don't know...

A.H.: Although in Germany you hear a lot of negative opinions about Hungary, many tourists come here. What could be a good ad slogan about Hungary this year?

L: CAF broadcasting country. Competition. Anger. Fear.

N.T.: You know the British have a sense of humour and there is a lot of debate about migration there as well. If I had to advertise Hungary in Britain, I would take advantage of this and write in English: 'Come to us, before we come to you.'

1

WE CAN

REVERSE

NEGATIVE TRENDS LOCALLY

THROUGH CONVERSATION,
COOPERATION, SENSITIVITY,

smart action and even well-targeted businesses negative social trends can be reversed locally. Good examples were presented by Mária Szeder-Kummer from small villages in Zala County; Eszter Faragó-Kovách talked about social enterprises; Tracey Wheatley spoke about the Transforming Communities project and Mónika Bálint gave an overview of achievements of community organisers.

The first speaker on the Active Communities panel was Mária Szeder-Kummer, Head of the Association for the Villages of Zala. She presented three examples of how life in Zala can be changed through cooperation and dialogue.

“In the past period, we conducted community surveys in three villages. Most recently, a mayor contacted us saying that people are not interested in anything, they cannot be involved in any process, there are no common issues, or if there are, they lead to conflicts,” community development professional Mária Szeder-Kummer noted.

“In light of this situation, we prepared basic interviews for the community development process. The last question of the interviewee was, ‘What would you change locally and how could you personally contribute to such changes?’ We interviewed about 30-40 families in each local community. The personal conversations were followed by a community gathering where we jotted down the experiences we had gathered on a wall and drew up the village’s problem map, starting to discuss issues. The conversations were closed by highlighting the issues that the communities can resolve,” said the lecturer, outlining the association’s working method.

Mária Szeder-Kummer concluded her lecture by presenting some good examples of cooperation from the County of Zala:

“In the village of Zalabér - a village of 800 people situated a few kilometres from the town of Zalaszentgrót - we found that the independent mayor could not

rise to serious political challenges, so the village was not accessing many sources of funding. At the same time, there were **12 formal and informal communities** that were active in the village, including a parents' board, a neighbourhood watch service, as well as many other local associations. So there was some kind of community life, even though water was running down the inner walls of the library. The biggest lesson learned from the community survey was that everyone was very active, but the communities could not cooperate with each other. So our task was to convene the communities and have them introduce themselves - yes, you have to do that even in a village of 800 people - and draw up some common rules that they have been trying to follow for almost a year now: they **listen to each other**, they go to each other's events, and coordinate their programs, because they have the same sort of opportunities in terms of reaching people.

“In Becs völgye a conflict situation had occurred because the village was strongly divided between the former mayor and the current one: the two camps simply do not talk to each other, there is anger, there is conflict, there are lawsuits. The previous mayor created communities and took up issues, while the current one is young, dynamic, and prioritises high profile results. Here, people were very open to being interviewed, they were even expecting us, waiting for us; but they did not come to the community discussion. The village is still so much divided by the conflict situation that people dare not voice their opinion in public. Here we

are working together to try to help resolve the conflicts: the former mayor now organises co-operation schemes across the entire Gőcsej region because he has realized that if he addresses the other villages in the region as a private individual, people are more open to cooperate.

“Teskánd is the third local community where we currently work. It is a village near the town of Zalaegerszeg with a population of 800 people. Half of the inhabitants have moved there from the town - they are the ‘blow-ins’ - and you have the locals, of course. Typically, the blow-ins attended the community discussions - they are the ones who want change, and we are now working on the issues they are ready to take up. We’re talking about two relatively simple things: the first one is that in the spring and autumn garden cleaning periods, smoke descends on the village. The other one is that the blow-ins would readily buy local products through an online network created by them. Well, they had to realize there, at the community discussion, that this was not going to work out: regardless of the fact that there is a good IT professional among them, producers were not willing to appear on the online space. They were **told by the locals** that they should go to events, and talk to each other at the bus stop or in the doctor’s office - then they would then have the necessary connections to buy local products. The majority of the blow-ins were surprised by this and thought they would never talk to people and ask for goods, but then they realized there was no other option.

The Active Communities panel continued with a presentation by Eszter Faragó-Kovách, expert in the social enterprise SIMPACT. She talked about the weight, role, opportunities and pitfalls of social enterprises.

How to Start a Social Enterprise Effectively Having followed the work of many non-profit organisations, I noticed that many of them do not adjust their work to what they want to do, but to their financial sources, that is, they tailor the coat to the button. I didn't like that and started considering alternative ways. Another decisive experience of mine was when I visited a café where people with a reduced capacity to work are employed. I thought it was a more effective way of social integration than distributing flyers on Blaha Lujza Square. I really liked that social goals were paired up with income, allowing non-profits to reach the goals they consider important, and not the goals their donors consider important," said Eszter Faragó-Kovách, describing her personal motivation.

"We need to define what the concept of social enterprise means: on a theoretical level, we can say that the social goal is at the forefront, but the pursuit of economic sustainability also appears. This means that a social enterprise works for profit, it has a business income, but it seeks financial sustainability instead of working for gain. The ownership structure of social enterprises is also fundamentally different

from that of companies in the private sector: the share and responsibility of members is more equally distributed,” the speaker described the essence of social enterprise.

“In the area of social enterprises, there is a very important difference between our region and Western Europe, namely that here organisations are less ready to take economic risks, which is partly due to their approach but also the lack of resources. Another important difference is that democratic functioning is much less typical in our region, and the high level of autonomy that is characteristic of Western Europe is missing; here, social enterprises are heavily dependent on the state.

“According to a broader definition by the European Commission, in 2015 there were 3360 social enterprises in Hungary; according to another, more limiting definition, there are currently 400. If we take the number of organisations registered in state programs, then the number is 1000 - although only 212 of them have been found to be genuine social enterprises. So, the number of social enterprises depends heavily on the definition, but their significance is given. Also, it is a very young sector, with only 20 years of history. According to a research study conducted by the University of Miskolc in 2017, most social enterprises operate in the regions of Central Hungary and Northern Hungary. On the national level, more than half of the sector is made up of small organisations with 1-10 employees. The scope of activities performed by social enterprises is very varied: you cannot say they only sell products or services,” said **Eszter Faragó-Kovách**, describing the Hungarian scene. She listed

the following positive examples: Coffee Shop 'I Won't Give Up', Pipacs Bakery Social Cooperative, HelloMum Community Café, and 'Thousand Year Old Chestnut Grove' Social Cooperative.

As an expert, the speaker then posed the crucial question: 'What are the biggest pitfalls and success factors for social enterprises?' She immediately answered this with: "The first thing is that the founders do not put enough **energy into planning**. The second one is that the team needed for the implementation is missing. Many people think you only need a good idea, and no expertise. On the contrary, you have to make an effort to ensure that the social entrepreneur learns what the product and service is all about. Many non-profit organisations do not really strive for revenue, insist on their usual way of operating, and have a great deal



Eszter Faragó-Kovách

of difficulty understanding the market for their product. Often, priorities are missing: short-term goals come to the fore. In many cases, social enterprises do not cooperate with each other, and their products are often not marketable. Typically, they do not look for good practices or examples from abroad, even though many successful social businesses copy a foreign model. They do not deal with their internal conflicts - many social enterprises go bankrupt because they fail to pay attention to the conflicts between employees and management. A key person drops out - we often find that social enterprises are very leader-focused, and if the leader, the driving force behind the community drops out, the initiative dies. It is very typical of social enterprises to piggyback public and other fundraising sources without preparing adequately for the greatest risks,” the expert outlined some typical mistakes.

Eszter Faragó-Kovách concluded her speech by giving some advice:

“If somebody wanted to start a social enterprise now, I would suggest them to first sit down and think about what they exactly want to do and how they can make money. I would tell them to carefully select the target group they want to focus on. Another important thing is to have a target group and business idea that are compatible with each other. It is worth checking out what other social businesses are out there and how they work. Finally, it is important to reflect on what they are already good at.”

WE CAN

REVERSE

NEGATIVE TRENDS

IN THIS SECOND PART **LOCALLY**
OF THE ACTIVE COMMUNITIES PANEL

of our conference, community activist Tracey Wheatley spoke - in light of her experiences from the Transforming Communities program - about local community responses to global challenges. What could be the source of happiness? We found that it was people's relationships with each other. People are the most important local resource, and we must build on this. Everyone has to find within themselves how they want to connect with others. For example, we seem to be working in a community garden; but we are actually improving the quality of human relationships.

2.

Tracey Wheatley outlined the starting point of their social experiment as follows:

“I invite you to a bit of time travel: when the economy collapsed about 10 years ago, we saw that more and more people were raising the question of how to find answers to global challenges at the local level. We looked at what other countries were experimenting with: we got to know the **Transition Network initiative**, which promised to be very exciting. The movement was initiated by psychologists who were curious about what methodologies people use to unite in smaller communities, to find local answers to complex global issues such as global warming and the economic crisis. Their goal was to give people an experience of what is coming, as a new reality, because we all have a role to play in connection with these global issues. That said, the basic assumption of the psychologists was that when we approach people with complex and distressing problems, they would tend to turn away and retreat into their own everyday worries.

For this reason, we turned it around and asked: what if global crises are signs of the need for change? After all, the current social system does not bring so much happiness. What if our communities were looking for ways to become happier? And

When we returned from abroad, we decided to start working in this spirit at the Wekerle Estate in Budapest. With support from Protect the Future, Transforming Wekerle Estate was established. For 10 years we initiated continuous and rich

cultural interventions in the life of the community. The resulting community was about helping each other. Taking up the most interesting and attractive common ideas we tried to provide people with a variety of ways to get involved and to become a democratic community. The Wekerle Estate is not an average place. It began 120 years ago, when, following international examples, people created this one square kilometre area after asking the question: 'What will be the future of our cities?' Cities were not liveable even back then, mainly because of the impact of expanding industry. Ongoing global and local impacts mean that cities will not be liveable in the future either, so we are continuing to take on a story that is very important for us. The democratic community formed has achieved some significant successes. For example, when the state wanted to build a four-lane road through the forest situated next to the Wekerle Estate, we had a strong base for protesting, and we exerted pressure on decision-makers effectively.

There is a lot you can do alone, in a single community, but there was a very nice moment in our life when we won a grant from the **Norwegian Civil Fund** (NCF) and had the opportunity to initiate open dialogue with other communities, sharing our experiences with each other. We offered three years of cooperation and experience exchange to 20 communities in Nagyszékely, Pécs and Soroksár, which are each very different. Together with them we have achieved some very good results: everyone has been confirmed in their belief that they are doing a good thing, we



have learnt from each other, and we have strengthened positive trends. We mostly focused on improving the quality of communities. Reducing energy use was an important aspect for us: we provided a lot of insulation programs, helping 150 families on the Wekerle Estate to insulate their windows. We have also found that food is really a gateway to communities: many people are ready to deal with it, it talks to a lot of people, and they have an open attitude to it.”

“Although There was no continuation of the NCF grant, these communities are still in touch today, but now in an informal way, and unfortunately with less practical work. Nevertheless, we have screened the French film titled **Tomorrow** in over 50 communities. It presents well-functioning and positive examples, according to our experience, it gives people new ideas and inspires them to do this kind of system building,” said Tracey Wheatley about what has followed a very dynamic 10 years.

“We are moving towards a step change on the Wekerle Estate: we have many joint projects with the municipality, one of us is an elected member, many of us participate in the work of the committees, and we assist the development of local government concepts with the involvement of local society. In addition, we have become a good example of the Transition Network, and together with our six foreign partners, we are looking at how local communities can work with their local government,” the speaker outlined a promising perspective.

“At the same time, I feel a lot of tension, as this kind of community work is direly needed in Hungary, and these cooperation schemes are very vulnerable. According to the United Nations Environment Report, we have 12 years to get ourselves together: unless CO2 emissions are reduced drastically, we will be in serious trouble, and warming will become irreversible. One possible way is to develop better systems of solutions and cooperation at the local level. We are in a deadlock: we see how much this work is needed, but we are still unable to carry on with it in a genuinely profound way,” Tracey Wheatley concluded her lecture.

Mónika Bálint, Coordinator of the National Community Organising Program of the Civil College Foundation, also spoke on the **Active Communities** panel, giving a comprehensive overview of the issues tackled by community organisers through local advocacy processes, and the key factors for success.

“For a long time, we thought it was enough to showcase social problems in public spaces, at exhibitions, during organised actions, and society would wake up and change - we were not right. That is when many of us realized that we need to start much stronger self-organising processes, and we need to think in a much more structured way about how social change can be achieved,” began Mónika Bálint, presenting her personal motivations.

One of the main elements of community organising is trying to think in the long term, creating organisations that build themselves up in a systematic way, strength-

ening their base in order for them to have real links to society while recognizing the capacities inherent in their base. We help them recognize that the fact that the state and communities are becoming distanced from each other is only partly due to the state distancing its citizens from itself; on the other side, citizens fail to make decision-makers accountable for how they could be involved in running society. We want to see change whereby an increasing number of communities hold decision-makers accountable for what they spend taxpayers' money on, how they run institutions, and whether that meets the expectations of local citizens.

For this reason, power is a central concept in community organising methodology. As a first step, we try to think differently about the concept of power: according to this methodology, power is the ability to change. Everyone has to have power in order to change, and the com-



munity has much more potential because one source of power is the public, or organised society. Another important element of community organising is having personal relationships: our communities are built on personal relationships. Community organising itself starts with personal conversations, followed by community discussions and then, community action. The basis for joint action is the common interest found in individual interests. In other words, communities find the issues and goals they want to act on together,” said the speaker about the objectives and methodology of community organising.

The process of community organising begins with an interview-marathon: we try to reach as many people as possible, assess their problems, then build a strategy and create interventions - so we plan actions. Action can mean almost any kind of activity: it could be a negotiation with the head of a local institution, or it could be collecting thousands of signatures, depending on the local context and on how we can achieve our goals. Then, the processes are evaluated: if we have managed to achieve our goals, we celebrate and try to move on to the next problem.

Let me give you some examples. One of the best known success stories is the work done by the ‘**Let’s Move So They Can Make a Move**’ Association. They achieved one of their greatest successes in connection with the home nursing benefit. As a community of parents, they started working on improving the situation of their sick children five years ago. One of the priorities was the issue of home care, because in most such cases, one of the parents has to stay at home, looking after the sick child.

During a five-year process involving many steps, a lot of demonstrations, negotiations, petitions and networking, they have achieved their most important goal: the amount of the home nursing benefit was raised to a uniform 100,000 HUF per month for all parents looking after a sick child at home.

The other group is from Mátészalka: they started as a trade union, and then they became active not only in the workplace, but also in connection with public issues. In a year they conducted over **300 interviews**, and most of the issues raised were related to local public transport. This is the area where they went on to achieve their greatest successes. They managed to establish a relationship with the local public transport organisation bureau, and, after some intense work, some of the services were reorganised. The first big success was the introduction of a Saturday bus service between Nyíregyháza and Mátészalka. Previously, train services between the two cities were very scarce, similar to bus services, and in the evenings there was no public transport whatsoever between them. In a period of six months they managed to achieve the introduction of Saturday night services. What is more, eight new bus services have been launched between Nyíregyháza and Mátészalka. In order to achieve this goal, a wide variety of tools were deployed: a blog with many successful memes, a letter-writing campaign involving thousands of people writing to the mayor and the heads of the local transport company. They also attended public hearings, and contacted a state secretary from the region - the new services were introduced as a result of addressing him publicly.

I would also like to talk about Mátraverebély, where a very small community of

mostly Roma women have been working to achieve changes in the village. Their biggest issues were most apparent before last year's parliamentary election. There is an old building of the Ant Cooperative situated in the segregated part of the village, which is very polluted, and where drug use is unfortunately very prevalent. Parents are worried about their children going there or to the surrounding area. The activists wrote a letter to the mayor and the National Public Health and Medical Officer Service, and after several months of negotiation and correspondence the latter obliged the owner to clean up the building, which it did not do. At last, a local candidate MP achieved an agreement whereby the local community received HUF 90 million for clearing away the building and converting the surrounding area into a park, with the owner selling the building to the local council for one forint. The building is going to be pulled down in the spring. Our community organiser there had been trying to build contact with locals for two years. By now, they have become a coherent team as a result of their joint action on this issue. Perhaps their representative will now run for the local council elections.

“In these cases, affected and active people have overcome their own limits and fears, and succeeded in winning on the issues they represented”, concluded Mónika Bálint.

COMMUNITY

FOUNDATIONS TO TURN AROUND NEGATIVE SOCIAL TRENDS

DOMESTIC COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

have invigorated the life of their city or district. These local-focused, value-driven and independent organisations have become multi-faceted supporters of local people, groups and CSOs working for change. In 2017, they spent a total of 19 million forints - most of it raised by themselves - to support 31 local causes. Tamás Scsaurszki, Chairman of the Roots and Wings Foundation's Board reported on the four-year results of the organisation's Community Foundation Support Programme at the **Understanding Hungary** conference organised by the foundation.

The account also included some self-reflection and criticism. In 2014, five of us launched the Community Foundation Support Programme to provide professional and financial support to courageous people and groups who want to establish community foundations in Hungary. We had been through a long planning process - we even planned how we would be planning. We really tried to understand the country and the world we live in, where we wanted to achieve change. It was very important for us to set goals that were realistic, but also advance the country, the community. This is how we arrived at community foundations and decided to focus on them. This was because we saw the different ways in which community foundations can have potential. First, they can give people the confidence to build democratic, transparent and credibly functioning local institutions run by themselves, with the entire community benefiting from them. Second, we thought that community foundations could give everyone the opportunity to do something for the community with which they have the strongest ties. Third, we believed that community foundations could prove in practice that very different people can work together for a common goal.

We also had a couple of assumptions. For example, that there are exciting initiatives in every community as well as people and groups who want change. And most of these people need some kind of support. A community foundation that defines itself as a support organisation can be useful in this setting. Being a support

organisation means that it does not implement its own programs, but promotes the ideas and causes of others financially and professionally. We also thought that by combining this internationally successful concept with local specialties and local people's creativity, we could create a very long-lasting institution that will continue to benefit the community for generations. We hoped that by combining the uniqueness inherent in every community with the trio of fundraising, grant-giving and community-building that characterizes the work of community foundations, we would be helping to create institutions that have a genuine local identity. We also hoped that with time the impact of the activities performed by community foundations would become visible on the national level as well," said Tamás Scsaurszki about the starting up and objectives of the programme.

Four years have passed, and the time has come to report on what and how much community foundations have given their communities, and where the Community Foundation Support Programme is at now. First of all, I would like to talk about the uniqueness that is characteristic of every community foundation; this is so partly because each community is different, and partly because each group that launches a community foundation is different. Let me start from the East. Miskolc is a city with a heavy industrial past, widespread social problems, and a dwindling population - no one would say it is an ideal terrain for a community foundation. Fortunately, many people in the city - especially those who started the

local community foundation - did not know this. Among them was a mediator, a teacher, a local entrepreneur, a businesswoman who organises business breakfasts, a Calvinist pastor - and the list continues. They decided to provide a positive field of force for Miskolc people who wanted change. It was with this considerable optimism that in 2016 they founded their organisation, called the Térerő Community Foundation for Our City. It was clear that they started with great momentum, because only one year later, in, 2017, they were awarded the 'Most Promising Community Initiative' by the Volunteer Center Foundation.

If we head west from **Miskolc**, we will quickly reach Budapest and its 9th district, Ferencváros. In 2010 three people asked themselves whether it would be possible to create a community foundation in Hungary - here and now, to be specific. The question was a hot one because at that time many people in professional NGO circles thought that the community foundation was a very useful model, but the concept was not feasible in Hungary. The three of them conducted dozens of interviews with people who had ties in the district. As a result, a group of 12-14 people formed around them, who liked each other and decided to work together. When the three initiators said they wanted to create a community foundation, the majority approved, saying this could be something to benefit the district. This is how the Ferencváros Community Foundation was founded in 2011. In the past seven years, it has become one of the largest civil society organisations in the district, and it is also well-known nationally.

“If we head southwest from **Ferencváros**, 200 kilometres away, we reach **Pécs**, a city that has been struggling with serious problems over the last 20 years - in fact many people say it has reached a hopeless nadir. Here, the organisation of the community foundation started in 2015-16, with a diverse group of people. This included civil society activists, entrepreneurs running restaurants and cafés, a university professor, a sociologist researcher, a community development professional, and a successful local businessman. Their common denominator was they were all well-known and respected in the city of Pécs, because they had all made a mark in their own fields. We are talking about experienced people who have been through failures in their work for the community, so they moved forward slowly and cautiously. But they do move forward because they love their city and see the community foundation as an opportunity to do something for it together,” **Tamás Scsaurszki** reported on the beginnings of community foundations.

“At this point, the question arises: what are the common features that



connect the three foundations? The organisations and the Community Foundation Support Programme could point to many things: I will now highlight four of them, backed up by numbers, because we have just done some research to assess the impact of community foundations. My first statement is that each of the three community foundations is a local-focused, value-driven and independent community organisation. This is due to the fact that 75 per cent of their income comes from local sources: a total of 2,800 individuals and 55 local businesses and institutions supported the foundations in 2017. In addition to financial support, dozens of companies have provided pro bono support, and a total of **103 people** work in the foundations on a voluntary basis. One of the strengths of community foundations is that they can collaborate with very different supporters, as some people donate HUF 1 million per year, while others give HUF 2000. The same is true for pro bono supporters: someone has provided one of the foundations with an office, while others funded the printing of a flyer.”

“Community foundations have become multi-faceted supporters of local people, local groups, and CSOs. In addition to financial support, they also provide very important professional (non-financial support), encourage people to act, draw attention to common issues, and link needs with local resources - they simply give publicity and credibility to those people and causes that advance the local community. In 2017, they spent more than half of their income (HUF 19 million)

supporting 31 local causes. The palette was very diverse: they mostly supported community development, cultural and educational programmes, and also some environmental, health and legal defence activities.

The third thing we have found in common is that community foundations strengthen relationships among people, build trust, and bring together professional partners, authenticating efforts to make the community a better place to live and work, and making joint action enjoyable.

The fourth thing I would like to say is that community foundations reach many people in many ways and have quickly become **active members** of local community life, as real team players. In the programmes they supported, 100 professionals and organisers participated in 2017, 649 people volunteered, and 154 local institutions, CSOs, municipalities and 36 paid service providers were mobilized to achieve common goals. This means that in the past period community foundations have become very active members of a major system,” said the Chair of the Roots and Wings Foundation’s Board of Trustees, outlining the ‘big picture’.

Another task for the Community Foundation Support Programme is to launch the organisation of new community foundations. As you can see on the map, there is still plenty of room for community foundations in Hungary; we saw this in the spring of 2018, so we announced a call for proposals by groups who want to create a community foundation. We received 4 applications by the deadline of September 30.

We thoroughly evaluated them and selected the one with the highest professional standard, where the members showed the greatest commitment to their community - this was the organising group that formed at Rákosmente.

However, I must admit that I found the low number of applications to be shocking and sad - those who saw me in those days know that I was deeply depressed. In the autumn months we tried to understand what it was all about. Was it that the social environment has become so unfriendly and hostile that people do not want or dare to create CSOs? Or is the community foundation not timely as an organisational concept? Maybe our program is not good? We talked to a lot of people: people who were interested but did not apply in the end; we asked for the opinion of the existing community foundations; we consulted with professionals and volunteers on what could have happened.

From the conversations we concluded that people see a potential in community foundations, and would be ready to organise, but our program **was not flexible enough**. We realised we have to change our way of working, and then they would be happy to work with us and establish community foundations. We will do what is required of us, and in the meantime we will continue working with the five groups we know. And to the many other groups who have shown interest, or who are yet to become inspired by community foundations, we will return in March when we will announce a new call for proposals. So please look out for us - we are open and keen to work with more individuals who want to establish a community foundation.



THE PYRAMID of RURAL SOCIETY MIGHT BE SHAKEN

**THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL
ENVIRONMENT**

MAINTAINED BY POWER, 'DEPEASANTATION',

land concentration and individualization have created a very stable looking social structure in the Hungarian countryside. We talked about the characteristics of rural Hungary's pyramid-like social structure with sociologist Imre Kovách, scientific advisor for the Institute of Sociology at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The expert argued that the poorest one and a half million Hungarians living in the countryside have not submitted to their fate, and civil society initiatives could play a key role in communicating the values needed for change.

‘Mobility and Immobility in the Hungarian Countryside’ was the title of the lecture you gave at the Understand Hungary conference. Earlier you wrote that the intensive phase of post-change of regime mobility processes in Hungary is over. Is there still mobility in the countryside?

Mobility never ends, there are always new developments. My statement about rural Hungary is that there is a relatively stable social structure there. Moreover, the state’s policy is specifically to maintain this stability, which is in the interest of some very important rural actors. At the same time, mobility has a migration component: people go away, for example because they do not like the rigid hierarchy of local society in which they do not have much chance to rise, so they either move to other local communities in Hungary or go abroad. Following large and medium-sized cities, this latter kind of mobility is increasingly reaching smaller communities as well.

What characterizes the stable structure of rural society?

Clarifying the concept of the countryside is not easy, but be sure it includes farms, villages and smaller towns. Local society can be imagined as a pyramid-like structure. There is a big group of people at the bottom, we can call them

poor; this social group comprises hundreds of thousands, over a million, people who are so necessitous that we definitely cannot talk about recent improvements to their status. That said, the consumption of even the social groups categorized here - with the exception of the hundreds of thousands of people at the bottom who live in abject poverty - has somewhat increased amidst the economic prosperity of recent years.

How many people are we talking about exactly?

I would point to percentages: the village population constitutes 30-32 per cent of Hungarian society, but obviously not only they belong to the countryside. I usually say that half of the Hungarian population can be characterized by a very strong rural character. A quarter or third of those people can be classified into this social group.

The lower base of society has another major group; for the sake of clarity, we call them lower middle class. Here, at least one person in the family has a job, and they are a little better off than the poorest part of society, but there is always the danger of falling down: they do not have any reserves, there is unemployment, and in case of illness they can easily sink into the big, massive lower group. This will have significance when explaining rural society's need for political stability.

There is a group in the countryside that can be regarded as **middle-class**, the top one-third perhaps, in which social capital and material capital are combined. They integrate rural society and have a great influence on the relations within it - of course,

together with those at the top of the pyramid. The top of the upper third of rural society is where economic and political power is concentrated, very often in the form of an oligarchy - the expression here simply means that political and economic capital merge - for example, an entrepreneur becomes a mayor, or vice versa.

There are many people who do not belong to the rural top elite, still they have a sort of capital that is very important for the cohesion of the local society - namely, cultural capital. Rural societies - with the exception of the most deprived villages - have a strong cultural life. It is a bustling world in which a new identity is created and traditions are found - and obviously it can be maintained by a local upper middle class possessing cultural capital.

Earlier you also wrote that society is becoming more and more individualized. Isn't there a contradiction there?

It is without doubt that individualization reached Hungary after the change of regime. On the one hand, this gave people some freedom because they could get rid of the social habits they didn't like. On the other hand, in truly individualized societies around the world - including the Hungarian countryside - people have a strong desire to belong to a community. This desire for identity may manifest in the way they want - at least in the cultural sphere - to make the history of their family or the place where they live a continuous one. In many places, they try to regain this individual and community

history in a symbolic way as well. All cultural actions play a great role in the creation of this new identity, from sausage festivals to inviting celebrities that have ties in the local community to come back there. All of this serves the stability integrated and maintained by politics, and also demanded by people for many different reasons - so the will of politicians and that of rural society met at the elections.

What are the interests along which a stable rural political structure

forms? It is often emphasized that we are talking about a mass of subordinate people - yes, that's true. Someone on workfare can vote as they want in the voting booth, but they know they get their money from this system, and they get more than they would if they were unemployed. A lower middle class person knows exactly that if the lower third of society is dissatisfied and endangers social stability, then they must be **pacified**, which is only possible through the public resources channelled to him/her. For this reason, you have a peculiar situation in which political stability is in the interest of two social classes with conflicting interests, that is, those at the bottom and the lower middle-class. In addition, their situation has improved slightly in recent years, and they have been through periods when they did not have even such scarce resources. Consequently, they voted for those who can secure this stability.

As for the upper-middle class, it is clear that they are the main beneficiaries of the system, so stability is also in their interest. Moreover, the stability of property dictates the same: if the social balance in the countryside was disrupted, the acquired wealth and capital could be redistributed. And one more thought: the need for stability is accompanied by something that the media and intellectuals do not really want to understand even though it is an extremely important factor: the power of searching for and wanting an **identity**. For some reason, those in the current opposition camp have totally neglected to recognise and serve this demand.

Does this mean that the lower third of rural society have given up on enforcing their own interests? Giving up is not a good expression - if I give up on something, it means I once had it. This social group only suffered losses as a result of the regime change, because you had many people at the bottom of the social hierarchy before as well, but in relative safety compared to now. After 1990, this collapsed. This group is not prepared to enforce their interests, as they could only do so while being atomized politically, and there is no political force that would organise, enlighten and mobilize them.

In addition, in our research we measured whether individualization has reached this social group as well. We also asked whether, following from this individualization they have lost most of the skills, such as cooperation and solidarity, that social



groups in a similar position in earlier ages needed to handle their social situation. This is perhaps one of the most serious developments of the past 20-30 years.

Poverty had its own culture in the **Kádár** era and before '45 as well. By this I mean the forms of cooperation that helped them to diminish their disadvantage. For example, the poor were not seen as redundant ne'er-do-wells, but as part of society:

the notion of decent poverty could be traced in teachers' admonitions from 50 and 90 years ago: 'My child, it is alright if your clothes are ragged, but they should always be clean.' This served to maintain and recognize the condition that the poor are part of society and do their utmost to improve their situation. This also meant some kind of cooperation, which was severely weakened during individualization.

Does the concept of 'depeasantation', which has been introduced by you, have anything to do with this? Yes, it does. Defining the concept of the peasant is not an easy task either, but I'm sure that a significant number of analysts recognise the ability to reflect on the changing economic and social conditions as part of the concept of the peasant. They can be innovative in farming and develop effective strategies to compensate for their losses. A classic example: traditional small or medium size peasant farms typically did not shift to producing one single product. Regarding the production structure, diversification was a well-practiced and viable peasant strategy. This social group was able to react to changes: for example, when the crop was bad, the army seized goods, or the state or the landlord collected too much tax.

They were also able to cooperate. Exactly. This reflective ability and the ability to cooperate is what has melted out, or leached out, of this third of rural society. Since it is not there anymore, we can rightly say that there has been a process of negative individualization going on. This points to a condition that is even more severe than social differences, their magnitude, or objectively measured lifestyle circumstances. On the other hand, it explains why there is social and, consequently, political stability in the countryside, despite the fact that large numbers of people are having problems sustaining themselves and live in disadvantage, in a deprived or near-deprived state.

In a well-functioning society, should these skills be restored by the education system? While many things can be taught about the practice of poverty-mitigating cooperation, many things cannot. In a non-conserved society, a well-functioning education system has a function to reduce social differences. It obviously cannot help people living on the outskirts of a village to get into a big city, into an upper-middle class position, but it could give them opportunities for a job and mobility. For example, it could bring someone living on the edge of a village to strike as a skilled worker for wage increases at Audi. By now it is becoming a commonplace that the Hungarian school system increases social differences instead of reducing them. That is exactly why it can be held responsible for the above-mentioned phenomena.

You also wrote that land concentration is now higher than in 1935, during the Horthy era. How does this relate to the social structure described? The theorem holds in the way that the top landowners of the time had more land than the ones today, but now the structure is much more concentrated than it was then. It is among the most concentrated in Europe. This is not just about land property, but land use, as large producers manage a significant proportion of leased land.

In the countryside, the primary and most important capital they could use is land. If land is used in such a concentrated way as in Hungary - with 15-16 thousand farms over 50 hectares using 80 per cent of the land - it means that most of the masses living - stuck - in the countryside do not have access to land.

Large farms are mechanized, employing few people with a different sort of expertise. I did not use the term 'stuck in the village' by chance, as in Hungary the proportion of the rural population is twice the EU average. From this point of view we could say - using a strange expression - that the countryside is **overpopulated**: the rural economy cannot support the rural population. And from the countryside there is nowhere to go - not even when there is such a shortage of workforce as now - because the difference between rural and urban housing prices is not compensated by the wages.

The erroneous agricultural policy started at the time of the regime change deprived many people of the opportunity to work in agriculture, even part-time. I think that even now many more people could live off agriculture, but they don't have land. For many people, it could mean an extra income, and extra social net, if they were to have a piece of land. Data shows that **more than one million people have dropped out** from some form of agricultural production since the mid-1990s - this is a large number, in practice it means one million families. Land is the most important rural capital, and concentration means that land is not available as a source of power and income for significant and growing masses of people.



How much is this social structure a cultural pattern that has been there for 200 years, and how much can it be attributed to the agility of the present government? Széchenyi wrote about a lack of trust in Credit, while in *People of the Puszta* Illyés wrote about servants unable to defend their interests and trembling to maintain their own terrible poverty. *People of the Puszta* is not about peasants, but about servants, and those are two distinct worlds. There are analogues, but we shouldn't compare the past with the current situation so unequivocally.

I only raised that from the aspect of mentality, 'If it doesn't get worse, we will submit. Just let us have the little we already have...' I think differently about this than many other people. They may be analogues, but to consider the rural society today or its decisive part to have a serf mentality... I refuse that, figuratively speaking. It is a foolish approach that has no evidence.

Most of this society still retains much of its reflectivity and social energies, and this cannot be regarded as submitting to its fate. I have also tried to illustrate what rational considerations lie behind their electoral behaviour: these people follow their interests and are not stupid. They cannot see an alternative; they do not believe in

confusing political ideas born far away from them. They believe in what they can make a living from, so their political opinion is what it is. It does not mean that they like their autonomy being restricted. Nor does it mean that they don't want to go up in society, but their sense of reality dictates that they have to function somehow within this system. Blaming them from an external point of view for not overturning the system makes no sense - radical changes are never initiated by the masses. That would be the responsibility of intellectuals and an upper middle-class involved in politics. When intellectuals and the media blame the common people for the prevailing social relations, they only try to run away from their own responsibility and inertia.

Is this social group waiting to be addressed? Are they open to it?

Nobody tries to do it really. If this conversation is about how this social system could be changed - this is what I see behind the questions - then I can say that the key to it is in the hands of those who have influence on this society. So the upper one-third of the rural population can change things. At present, their interests blend in with the political system, since they are its beneficiaries. However, this unity of interest will not necessarily last until the end of time, because if there are problems with financing, it can be shattered. If the current stable political environment - in which the power can maintain itself with the use of clever techniques, without violence and directly experienced restrictions - wavers, and those in power have to

reach for other means, it might not be tolerated by this social group. If somebody thought that addressing a large part of the countryside was their vocation, they would have to start by addressing the top one-third.

What scope do you see for CSOs and civil society efforts in the Hungarian countryside? It is no coincidence that the political power, which is trying to limit autonomy efforts, turned against civil society early on. Civil society would have a tremendous role in conditioning, in teaching people to enforce the values needed for change, such as autonomy, reflection, self-expression, self-organising, and manifesting interests. This is an arduous job: you cannot foresee when it will yield results; it might not yield any spectacular results at all, but it is inevitable.

Otherwise, there is a great cultural change going on: we measure from time to time that the cultural consumption of the upper middle class in the countryside does not differ significantly from that of the upper third in metropolitan areas. At the same time, this social group is culturally open. For now, this openness and bustling atmosphere is a good fit for the system: it builds a **local identity** with a strong conservative tint, but it may not stay like that forever.

If new civil society initiatives are not aimed directly against stability, but for instance at resolving local issues, they can be viable. From this point of view, any

local topic can be very important, from gardening to bird watching. The slow organisation of the world built this way is a tissue that can set the ground - by copying the mechanisms of fungus propagation - for important things to come.

I see some very faint tendencies of embourgeoisement in the upper third of rural society. And the demand for autonomy in an embourgeoised world will grow after a while - as has always been the case. This is where the cooperation between the System of National Cooperation and this social group can break down - and civil society has a tremendous role in handling this.