Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Law
Doctoral School of Political Science

Annamária Sebestyén

YOUNG PEOPLE

IN POLITICAL PARTIES

The political socialisation background of party-politically active university and college students in Hungary

– Doctoral theses –

Supervisor:

Dr. Andrea Szabó

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CONTENTS

I. THE TOPIC AND PURPOSE OF THE DISSERTATION

The thesis analyses the political socialisation background of young people's party-political participation among a special youth population whose social, developmental and political behavioural characteristics are the most appropriate for a comprehensive study of the problem in the Hungarian context and at the same time for a comparison with the relevant results of the Western democracies' existing literature.

Studying this topic has a particular importance for several reasons. Over the last couple of decades, almost all European democracies have experienced a gradual decline in and aging of party membership (van Biezen [et al.], 2012; Kirbiš, 2013; van Biezen–Poguntke, 2014; Kovacic–Dolenec, 2018), however, while a relatively independent and dynamically developing research field has been built in Western Europe to understand these processes, only few analyses have examined the causes of these trends in the countries of the CEE region (e.g. van Biezen, 2003; Kirbiš, 2013; Smith, 2020; Čakar–Čular, 2023) and we know nothing about those young people who are breaking these trends. Due to their different party and social development, the post-socialist countries offer a particularly exciting field for studying these problems and in the case of Hungary, these questions are all the more interesting because the participation level of the society and young people here is not only low compared to Western standards, but also far below those of post-socialist countries (Horváth–Soós, 2015; Kovacic–Dolenec, 2018; Bíró-Nagy–Szabó, 2021).

Our existing knowledge also justifies our curiosity on the subject, as it suggests that the results of the Western European literature do not appear to be relevant in Hungary. On the one hand, the decline and ageing of party membership here has not been accompanied by the weakening role of parties in the political system, nor by the strengthening of other interest groups and organisations of the civil society. Indeed, despite the negative trends, political parties are still overwhelmingly important in the articulation and aggregation of interests, not to mention in governance (Cabada, 2013; Horváth–Soós, 2015). Thus, while in Western Europe the decline and ageing of party membership are signs of the parties' crisis and threaten their long-term survival (Dalton–Wattenberg, 2000; Cross–Young, 2008; Whiteley, 2011; Rainsford, 2014), in Hungary these threats are not imminent and therefore parties have little interest in counteracting these problems.

On the other hand, over the last ten to fifteen years, a number of new parties have entered the political landscape and attempted to break the trends and develop links with the civil society (Szabó–Kern, 2011; Róbert–Valuch, 2013). However, despite their anti-establishment character and generational messages, none of them has so far managed to reach a broad social embeddedness and maintain their youth base in the long term (Keil, 2014; Mikecz, 2019). Nevertheless, we know little about those young people who have remained in these political communities, nor about – and this is not a minor issue for the future of parties and representative democracy – the composition, quality and political socialisation background of the politicians' supply they provide for the parties. By problematising these questions, the thesis aims to take the first steps towards paying off the 'debt' of the Hungarian political socialisation research. And even if it cannot provide exhaustive answers, it hopes to generate interest in the topic and offer important pivots for future studies.

II. TARGET POPULATION, QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The doctoral thesis undertakes an exploratory empirical political socialisation research of young people's party-political participation in Hungary, but it does so in the context of an approach according to which *"every participation act is inherently the result of an interplay between the individual, who is participating, and the structure, which is mobilising"* (Hooghe–Stolle, 2005: 43), it is thus misleading to approach the problem from the perspective of the youth alone, since participation is both a matter of the individual and of the channels of mobilisation. With this in mind, the thesis attempts to look at the relationship between young people and parties from both perspectives.

Although we have some knowledge about the circumstances that hinder participation in party politics in Hungary, no empirical research has been conducted so far that has explicitly examined the issue among young people, i.e. that has asked specifically about the reasons for their lack of participation in party politics, so the dissertation is based on a double questioning approach: It aims not only to explore the specific constellations of political socialisation influences leading young people to participate in party politics, but also to investigate the political socialisation factors keeping them away from parties.

However, the thesis does not focus on the entire Hungarian youth, but on a special and politically very decisive group, the full-time college and university students. Being the intelligentsia and the social, political and economic elite of the future, students constitute a group that has a strong influence on the social and political thinking and behaviour of both older and younger generations (Bognár–Szabó, 2017), therefore, a deeper understanding of their political socialisation is of paramount importance in itself. Moreover, this is a youth group that draws its social, economic, political and cultural orientation patterns from Western European youth, while its socialisation is inevitably determined by domestic conditions and characteristics (Gábor, 1993). Thus, they offer a group that is the most comparable with the Western European youth, and on whom the prevalence and future prospects of the Western European developmental trends and processes can be accurately analysed.

It is well-known in the existing literature that the politically stimulating social environment of higher education is conducive to political engagement and activism (Muxel, 1999; Persson, 2014; Pickard, 2019), which is also confirmed by the Hungarian empirical studies. Students are more interested in politics than the average, show stronger party preferences and are more active in politics in all forms of involvement (Szabó-Oross, 2012; Oross-Szabó, 2017; Oross-Szabó, 2019b), consequently we are more likely to find young people who are active in parties among them. University and college students have been key actors in party formation since the regime change and have been a key target group of newly formed parties in recent years (Angyal [et al], 2017; Vermes, 2019).

Western party and political sociology literature now has an extensive knowledge about the parties' attitude towards young people, the outsiders' perceptions of parties and the social background, political socialisation and motivations of party participants. However, research on all these topics has largely proceeded in parallel, and only a few studies were attempting to link and simultaneously investigate several problem areas (see e.g. Lamb, 2002; Cross-Young, 2008; Bruter-Harrison, 2009; Weber, 2017). The empirical research presented in this dissertation aims to join the latter and, in a complex and innovative approach, to examine the political socialisation aspects of party-political participation from multiple perspectives – political parties, outsiders and participants – simultaneously. Integrating the experiences of research from different perspectives, its main hypothesis is that party-political action is not only a function of the individual willingness to participate, but also of the accessibility and

mobilisation of political parties (H). The analysis of this problem is particularly relevant in Hungary, where parties cannot recruit in educational institutions and in many municipalities parties and especially their youth organisations do not have local organisations, which means that young people living there do not have the opportunity to meet these organisations, which may make it impossible for them to become potential participants (Oross-Szabó, 2019a: 35).

The hypothesis above necessarily entails the analysis of the relative importance of the two factors – political socialisation and party-political mobilisation – and deciding which of the two plays a greater role in the participation (P). In our view, party-political mobilisation is a key factor in overcoming the political socialisation barriers of participation in Hungary. We do not claim, that it can replace the predisposing political socialisation mechanisms, but the persuasive power of parties can correct the potential aversions taking place due to the deficiencies or countervailing effects of the political socialisation (AH1).

The thesis examines political socialisation as a process that starts in childhood but continues throughout life. This means that, although the focus is on students, the thesis does not consider their political socialisation to be complete, just as it does not consider their characteristics to be maintained in the future. Furthermore, the analysis is not limited to any definable period of life. The political socialisation contribution of all development stages is analysed, leaving it to empirical experience to determine which period or periods are the most significant in the evolution of the propensity to participate in party politics. Among the various socialisation mediators, the study places particular emphasis on family, peers, school, university and organisational environments, as well as political parties and events that directly or indirectly catalyse party-political action, whose effects are taken together and dynamically traced in order to identify the most important political socialisation factors, effects and combinations of effects predisposing party-political participation.

Hypotheses and problems addressed in the thesis

KEY HYPOTHESIS (H)		KEY PROBLEM (P)
H: Both predisposing political socialisation and party-political mobilisation play a role in joining party-political organisations.		P: The relative importance of political socialisation and party-political mobilisation in party-political participation.
DIMENSION		**HYPOTHESES(AH)** **PROBLEMS (P)**
party-political mobilisation		**AH1: The party-political mobilisation is a key factor in overcoming the political socialisation barriers of participation in Hungary. The persuasive power of political parties can correct the potential aversions taking place due to the deficiencies or countervailing effects of the political socialisation.**
		AH2: Party-political mobilisation does not follow a random pattern within the student society.
		P1: The places and procedures of party-political mobilisation and their role in joining and not joining organisations.
socialisation agents	**formal dimension**	**AH3: Students who are active in party politics come from a privileged group within the student society.**
		AH4: Gender socialisation plays a crucial role in the choice of party-political participation.

DIMENSION			HYPOTHESES(AH) PROBLEMS (P)
socialisation agents	content dimension	family	**AH5: Hereditary party membership is not the dominant route to party affiliation, the family does not influence through the pattern of action offered, but primarily through political communication and political values.** **AH6: The family has the effect not only of activating or neutralising party-political participation, but also of demobilising it, intentionally or unintentionally.** P2: The relationship of the family to young people's involvement in party politics.
		school	**AH7: Because of their privileged status, students who are active in party politics are more likely to come out of politicised educational institutions where they acquire much more of the impetus, knowledge and competence needed for political participation compared to their less fortunate peers.** **AH8: The neutral or countervailing effect of political socialisation in schools on participation should also be taken into account.** **AH9: A significant proportion of party participants start their public career in a student organisation that can be seen as a proto-political training ground.**
		peers	**AH10: Peer groups have a dynamic effect on party-political participation.** **AH11: Because of the distancing and aversion of the young generation towards political parties, peers also have a deterrent effect.** P3: The role of different (secondary, university, extracurricular) peer groups in promoting party-political participation and their importance in relation to other groups.
		relationship	**AH12: The socialisation agents and their mediations do not always coalesce into a consistent socialisation process similar to that in Western Europe, but contribute to the development of the party-political participation will in a way that is in conflict and sometimes in tension with each other.** P4: The interrelationship and consistency of mediations between different socialisation agents.
		catalysing moments	P5: The contribution of identifiable common and individual catalysing experiences and life events to party-political participation.
outputs	political attitudes		P6: To what extent do students who are active in political parties represent the student society in their political thinking (party choice, ideological orientations, political interests, political and social views, satisfaction with democracy).

DIMENSION		HYPOTHESES(AH) PROBLEMS (P)
outputs	disincentives	**AH13: The alienating function of political parties is a major disincentive to party-political participation among students.** **AH14: Counter-incentives due to political apathy and age-specific characteristics of political development are less prevalent, while the anti-partisanship of NGOs and movements is a strong disincentive among students.** P7: Non-participants' opinions about parties, their fellow party members and their motivations, and the impact of these opinions on their attitudes towards party-political participation. P8: Party member students' attitudes towards the opinions of non-party members and their impact on their participation. P9: Identification of other political socialisation experiences that undermine the willingness to participate in party politics.
	motivations, role perceptions, future aspirations	**AH15: The political career patterns of ancestors are of less importance for the political career orientation of the students, which is more influenced by the incentives offered by political parties.** P10: What motivations, role perceptions and aspirations result from political socialisation processes, including predisposing mechanisms and socialisation within and outside the party? P11: What are the conditions under which students choose a political career as their life path and what are the motivations behind this choice? P12: The role of party types in shaping aspects of participation - motivations, role perceptions, future aspirations. P13: Examining the potential advantages and disadvantages of party membership, taking into account the influence of relationships within and outside the party in shaping motivations.

The existing literature suggests that in Western Europe privileged status and family political socialisation traditions are the most important preconditions of party-political participation. These are the factors that are able to counteract and overcome the obstacles that either society or political parties place in the way of participation in party-political organisations (Cross–Young, 2008; Bruter–Harrison, 2009; Rainsford, 2018; Breniaux, 2021). In addition, the literature also highlights strong social inequalities in mobilisation (e.g. Verba [et al.], 2018; Grabarek, 2011). Since this is also the general conclusion of the Hungarian empirical studies (Szabó-Kern, 2011: 71; Oross-Szabó, 2019a; Szabó-Oross, 2021; Marián, 2022), our research also expects significant inequalities in both party-political mobilisation and participation, and assumes that students both mobilised and participating in party-political organisations are a privileged stratum within the student society and are more likely to be from advantaged socio-cultural backgrounds and to be male. Furthermore, due to the concentration of the vast majority of the parties in the capital the thesis also assumes that both mobilised and participating students are more likely to be found among students living in the capital, studying at universities and colleges in Budapest and participating in courses that are in some way related to public life (AH2-AH4).

Contrary to the Western European literature, this thesis attributes an important but relative role to family political socialisation in the propensity to participate in party politics. For historical reasons, the strong presence of a multi-generational tradition of party membership is unlikely in Hungary, and the possibility of this scenario only arises in the case of members of the regime-changing parties. We hypothesise that hereditary party membership is not the dominant route towards party membership among Hungarian students, and that the family influences party-political participation primarily through political communication and value systems (AH5). At the same time, it is also assumed that due to the strong anti-party sentiments and negative, distancing and conflict-avoidant attitude towards politics among adult society (Horváth–Soós, 2015; Szabó, 2009; Szabó–Kern, 2011; Bognár, 2014; Oross–Szabó, 2019a), the family does not only have an activating or neutral influence, but also, intentionally or unintentionally, a demobilising effect on party-political participation (AH6).

Research conducted among Western young party activists suggests that, in addition to family (and complementing its influences), educational institutions, student organisations and peer groups are important channels to political parties, and that catalytic political events and personal experiences such as a parliamentary election, a political action or an encounter with a political figure can also play an important role in party-political participation (e.g. Cross–Young, 2008; Bruter–Harrison, 2009). In the Hungarian context, it is also inevitable to examine all these factors. These institutions and experiences can be important compensators for family political socialisation. It is assumed that, due to their privileged social position, party member students are more likely to come out of educational institutions and peer groups with a much higher impetus for political participation compared to their less fortunate peers. The thesis also presupposes that many of them start their political career in student communities, such as student councils and unions (AH7-AH11). We also pay a particular attention to identifying their collectively identifiable and unique experiences that catalyse party political participation (P5). At the same time, we expect that in our country, the individual fields of experience and their mediations do not always coalesce into a consistent socialisation process similar to that of Western Europe (Bognár-Szabó, 2017), but contribute to the development of the party-political will to act by confronting and sometimes straining each other (AH12). Therefore, in our study, we focus not only on mapping the effects of each experiential medium, but also on analysing their interrelationship and coherence (P4).

To a certain extent, all research on political socialisation has the task of accounting for the consequences of the mechanisms it identifies in political thinking and behaviour, and this dissertation is no exception. In this case, we extend our interest to specific outcomes of political socialisation, such as political attitudes and ideological orientations, disincentives and incentives for party-political participation, role perceptions and future aspirations related to party-political participation. With regard to the first dimension we seek to answer the question to what extent the political preferences of party member students reflect the political thinking of the student population, i.e., to what extent they are an adequate representation of their closest peers (P6), while with regard to the disincentives to party political participation, we examine what gaps students consider essential to fill in parties, either because they do not have something they should have or because what they do have is indispensable (P9). In the latter dimension, attention is paid to analysing the role of the arenas and procedures of party-political mobilisation (P1), as we hypothesise that not only the presence or absence of mobilisation may influence affiliation, but also where and how the party-political organisation invites the students to participate. On the other hand, we will examine students' attitudes towards party-political participation and party membership in order to explore the experiences and motivations that lead them not to engage in party-political activity and the political socialisation reasons underlying them (P7).

In the last dimension, we look at how political socialisation processes predisposing party-political participation generate entry and participation motivations among students, and what role perceptions and future aspirations are associated with them (P10). On this basis, an attempt is made to map the types of participation. Our central question is that to what extent these types of participation have the potential for change, what their content is and to what extent they have the possibility of realising these goals in the future. This question is inescapable, because we find the political leaders of the future among these students.

III. METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

The hypothesis-driven, but also exploratory approach and the multiple perspective of the problem required the development of a research strategy that could both address the challenges of these conditions and link the different perspectives and their respective problem sets. Such a solution is offered by mixed methods approaches, whose most intrinsic feature lies in the simultaneous use and combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, and the integrated interpretation of results (Creswell, 2009). Among these, the research follows the preliminary quantitative version of the so-called explanatory sequential model (Cresswell-Plano Clark, 2018), in which quantitative investigation constitutes the first stage of the research, but it plays a minor and mainly preparatory role. Its results will guide the process of the qualitative studies that follow it and which will have a greater weight in the research.

The mixed-methods empirical research presented in this thesis consists of four research phases: a quantitative analysis, a focus group study, a qualitative interview study, and an integrated interpretation and evaluation of the results of the three sub-studies. The empirical basis of the quantitative phase is provided by the data of the fourth wave of the research series of the Active Youth in Hungary Research Group on the political orientations, socialisation and participation of full-time university and college students (Szabó, 2019). The significance of this survey is that it is the first large-scale youth survey in Hungary that, in addition to political socialisation, also addressed the issue of party-political mobilisation and participation, and emphasised the need to measure the group of students who are politically active in party politics. Consequently, its database is suitable for a simultaneous study of the role of mobilisation and political socialisation in party-political participation, but also for a multifaceted analysis.

Thanks to the wide range of variables, the quantitative part of the research will examine the willingness and effectiveness of mobilisation of the newly formed parties and those that have existed since the change of regime, as well as the role of mobilisation in the affiliation of students to the parties and the different parties. This not only provides an overall picture of the importance of party-political mobilisation in participation, but also gives some insight into the role of mobilisation in relation to individual parties. From the outsider's perspective, the analysis looks at the social preconditions for becoming mobilised, while from the participants' perspective, it also looks at the political socialisation mechanisms that influence party-political activity and the significance of their impact in relation to party-political mobilisation. It also comparatively examines the similarities and differences between the political thinking of students within and outside parties. The conclusions of this phase of research have served as a starting point for the development of qualitative interview research that will explore political socialisation in much more depth and comprehensively, and which will no longer treat the members of the investigated group as a homogeneous one.

Stages of the research

Stage	I. Quantitative analysis	II. Focus group study	III. Interview study	IV. A comprehensive interpretation of the results
Data	Active Youth in Hungary (2019; N=800)	Three focus groups among non-party member students (2020; N=23)	Forty interviews with student members of eight political parties (2021; N=40)	Combining the lessons learned from the three substudies and interpreting and evaluating them in the light of the questions and hypotheses raised in the dissertation
Problems	➢ Party-political mobilisation ➢ Factors for being targeted by party-political mobilisation ➢ The mobilisation potential of parties ➢ The mobilisation potential of each party ➢ The role of party-political mobilisation in participation ➢ The socialisation preconditions of party-political action ➢ Political views of party members	➢ Forms and arenas of party-political mobilisation and opinions on them ➢ Counter-incentives to party-political participation and their political socialisation aspects ➢ Attitudes towards party member peers ➢ The hypothetical motivations for party membership	➢ Political socialisation paths leading to parties ➢ The role of mobilisation in accession ➢ Motivations ➢ Role perceptions ➢ Future aspirations ➢ Attitudes towards the opinions of outsiders	

The second phase of the research is a focus group study, which, from the outsiders' perspective, provides insights into the reasons for disengagement from political parties and their political socialisation through an understanding of students' attitudes towards mobilisation, its arenas and forms, and their participation in party politics and party participants. This research phase forms a bridge between the first and third phases: it explores questions that were not addressed in the Active Youth research questionnaire, and its results are implicitly incorporated into the interviews, seeking answers to how party-affiliated students react to the perceptions of their outsider peers.

The third section is an interview study, which, through a comparative analysis of interviews with forty student members of nine political parties and their youth organisations, draws the typical political socialisation paths leading to political parties and the role and forms of party-political mobilisation in these paths in Hungary, shedding light on the factors, influences and combinations of factors predisposing participation. Also in this section, we analyse the types of participation of students in political parties according to the criteria set out in the previous chapter. The final section of the study will be the synthesis of the findings from the three sub-

studies and their combined evaluation and interpretation in the light of the questions and hypotheses raised in the thesis.

The thesis is not a theoretical one, but a work based on an empirical analysis of the problem. Nevertheless, it does not, of course, neglect a review of the literature and theoretical background of the topic. The primary aim of the literature sections of the dissertation is to review previous works and to thematise, organise and evaluate the issues raised by the literature in order to define and ground the dimensions, questions and hypotheses of the empirical research presented in the dissertation. This first part of the thesis starts with a discussion of Western European trends in party-political participation, and then outlines the domestic context of the problem through an analysis of their manifestations in Hungary *(International and Hungarian trends of party-political participation)*. It then moves on to the theoretical and conceptual foundations, as well as the dimensions, questions and hypotheses of the empirical political socialisation research on party-political participation *(Theoretical framework of the empirical political socialisation study of party-political participation)*. The theoretical section concludes with a methodological section, which describes in detail the methodological considerations of the research and the methods, sampling characteristics and procedures used in the three substudies *(The methodological framework of the empirical political socialisation study of party-political participation)*.

The second part of the dissertation presents the research results. First, the results of the quantitative analysis are presented *(The preconditions of party-political mobilisation and party affiliation among young people in higher education - Results of the quantitative analysis)*, followed by the results of the qualitative research *(The political socialisation background of party-political participation of young people in higher education in the light of qualitative data)*. The dissertation first provides an insight into the most important conclusions of the focus group study *(Party-political mobilisation, participation and participants from the outsiders' perspective - Results of the focus group study)*, and then the last longer chapter presents the results of the interview research *(Political socialisation pathways to political parties and motivations for party political participation)*. The thesis concludes with an integration and overall assessment of the conclusions of the three substudies *(Conclusions and summary)*.

IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the doctoral dissertation suggest that despite their anti-establishment character, the new parties have done little to overcome the elitist nature and electoral mobilisation rather than recruitment strategy of their regime-changing counterparts. Indeed, our quantitative analysis has shown that both the parties that have existed since the regime change and the newly emerged ones have a weak mobilisation capacity. At the same time, however, the results also showed the parties' limited mobilisation potential, i.e. that their recruitment attempts are also insufficiently effective among students. The vast majority of young people reject the parties' approach.

Our focus group analysis revealed that the recruitment acts of political parties play a significant role in discouraging students from joining. Party-political organisations are addressing young people in inappropriate venues and forms, but contrary to our expectations, it is not so much these as the content of recruitment that is their biggest problem. The young people interviewed considered party mobilisation to be impersonal, superficial and commercial, not reflecting their interests and participation needs. Students have very different concepts of politics and political participation from those of political parties. They have little interest in the theoretical world of

politics about value debates, their perceptions are directed towards the practical side. Constructive action for the betterment of society is a particularly important aspect for them.

However, our findings suggest that the failure of party mobilisation is not only due to inadequate recruitment procedures, but also to additional political socialisation experiences that parties must also take into account if they are to implement a truly effective youth mobilisation strategy. One of the strongest disincentives to participation in party politics, according to the statements of the focus group participants, is the general social resentment towards parties and party members, fuelled by both the legacy of the historical past and the current party politics. A large proportion of young people would be reluctant to participate in political parties if only because of the potential disapproval of their environment, but negative social assumptions are also strongly present in their thinking and attitudes. In their eyes, being a member of a political party is a commitment with unforeseeable consequences. This attitude probably reflects a social strategy of political caution, inherited over generations, in anticipation of possible political changes. On the other hand, the past and the present determine both their perception of their contemporaries and their relationship with them. In terms of motivations, party members are mainly classified into two types. One is characterised by ideological closure, loss of autonomy, and in many cases fanaticism akin to radical religious conviction, while the other is characterised by material needs that override principles and human relationships. The majority of their fellow party members are perceived as belonging to the latter rationally pragmatic type, i.e. as people who are attracted to parties purely by material opportunities and relatively easy mobility.

And last but not least, among the political socialisation effects distancing people from political parties, there is another problem worth mentioning, which emerged in both the focus group and the interview study. This is the dilemma of permeability and interpenetrability between the civil sphere and the party-political space. Based on the international literature, this dilemma is resolved in a specific way by movement parties, the concept of which, based on empirical experience, is still unknown to Hungarian students (despite the fact that there have been and still are domestic variants of movement parties), but their stated needs and their ideas of the desired party form are closest to the functioning of a movement party. However, according to the focus group discussions and the statements of party members who have crossed over from the civil sphere into party politics, there is a much higher wall between the two spheres in our country, which makes it impossible, or at least very difficult, to move simultaneously in both spheres. On the one hand, although part of the opposition party political scene is open to the arrival of young civilians, their thinking, expectations and critical attitude towards the framework make them unpredictable and less integrable, and on the other hand, once they leave, the way back is largely closed, as the civil sphere punishes those who leave, becomes distrustful and closes its doors to them. As a result, these young people are likely to find themselves in a vacuum in the long term, from which they can find a way out if they find each other and develop and build themselves a viable long-term form of operation that can go beyond the current framework conditions.

With regard to the preconditions of party political participation, it can be said that most of the hypotheses of the thesis concerning social inequalities were not supported by the results of the quantitative analysis, and although the qualitative studies in many respects nuanced the conclusions of the quantitative research phase, overall it can be said that, based on our empirical experience, the dimensions determining political socialisation from this formal point of view are of minor importance in the mobilisation and participation of students in party politics in Hungary. However, there are several important factors behind this.

The data show that the student population is predominantly a privileged youth group, with a relative predominance of multi-generational intellectuals living in advantaged financial

circumstances and a minority of less fortunate young people. Thus, in terms of higher education, there is a very strong social selection in Hungary and the social composition of students is far from representative of the youth as a whole. It also follows that, as disadvantaged students are in a minority, they have a much lower chance of being included in the parties' mobilisation target group, and this low potential is further reduced by the fact that the parties themselves hardly mobilise students, so that the mobilised individuals are necessarily more likely to come from the wider group.

Students, with these social qualities and their participation in higher education, already fulfil some of the common prerequisites for mobilisation, and if they are met, party mobilisation seems to be mostly random in our country. The gender of the student does not matter, nor does where he or she lives or where and at what level he or she studies, and, with the exception of participation in social science courses, the field of study has no significant influence on whether or not he or she becomes a mobiliser. Nor does participation in student organisations have any bearing on this. At the same time, we should not overlook the weak mobilisation tendencies of political parties, i.e. it is conceivable that if political parties mobilise more intensively, the equality of opportunity in terms of mobilisation in the above dimensions will also disappear.

Some of the above statements also apply to students involved in political parties. In the light of the quantitative data and the data from the interview survey, it can be said that, as expected, students who are party members represent a group with a rather homogeneous social composition. It is a stratum of young intellectuals, most of whom, although not concentrated in the capital, are basically an urban upper stratum. Those living in the municipalities are a minority, and the experience of the interviews suggests that these young people tend to be active in party politics in the nearest big city rather than locally. However, it is not these characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of the student population, but primarily their degree of mobilisation and their political socialisation.

The findings of the quantitative analysis suggest that mobilisation plays a key role in the political participation of the Hungarian students. Those who are asked to participate by party organizations are over six times more likely to be party activists than those who have been omitted from this process. However, our results suggest that mobilisation per se is not enough to motivate young people to participate: politically stimulating family and friends and events that shape political views and learning in relevant fields of education are also needed to set the stage for involvement.

These findings were significantly nuanced by the interviews with young party members, whose comparative analysis identified six typical political socialisation paths leading to parties. In the light of their implications, these political socialisation trajectories can be said to have both confirmed the expectations of the thesis for each socialisation arena, but also to have highlighted different eventualities and the potential conflict potentials of the political socialisation leading to parties. To summarise these results, contrary to the conclusions of the quantitative analysis, the existence of an active political family is not necessarily a precondition of the party-political participation intention in Hungary.

In most cases, family political socialisation plays a purely indirect role, and, as we point out in our analysis, the starting point of the *peer-driven* and *high school socialisation-motivated* joining scenario, which covers almost half of the students interviewed, is an apolitical family environment. In the first case, family upbringing is neutral or unintentionally demobilising: parents do not show commitment to a party, value system or political course of action. However, there is no reason why their children should not change this attitude, and in the long run, the young person's commitment also influences parents' party choice and political participation,

showing that political socialisation is a back-and-forth process in which not only the socialising environment but also the socialised individual influences (Szabó, 2009).

In the second case, the parents' abstention from politics is a conscious attitude resulting from specific political socialisation experiences, which they try to develop in their children, and breaking this tradition inevitably causes conflict with the parents. Those brought up in these families usually join their party when it no longer requires parental consent or when they can more permanently escape the family's direct control. In this sense, they can be defined as a type of rebel against the family, and it is not uncommon to find young people who find a 'second' or 'substitute family' in their party. But a similar type of rebel is represented by those who join under the influence of party-political mobilisation, who are brought up in the crossfire of two conflicting family political traditions, the choice between which is also a choice between opposing camps of family members. This inevitably gives rise to the need for these young people to transcend the conflict between these extremes. However, as they are less fortunate than their peers motivated by their socialisation in secondary school, deprived as they are of a school environment and peers who are partners in rebellion, they will only find an alternative in the parties that mobilise them and reflect their emotions and thoughts.

To a certain extent, the *peer-driven* and *NGO-to-party membership* scenarios are type that defy expectations. The former pointed to the possibility of getting into parties without a politically stimulating family, peer and school environment. A single partner predisposed to party-political action is a sufficient criterion. This partner, however, is a special person who, for some specific reason, has a strong influence on the participant of this scenario and plays a major role in his or her political socialisation, and in a sense begins to take on the responsibilities that are normally the responsibility of other socialisation agents.

In this scenario, we found that participants are relatively "clean slates" in party-political organisations. In essence, their political knowledge, beliefs and opinions are shaped and formed in a particular direction by the peer who brings them in and within the framework of the organisation. This also means that all these aspects are not necessarily prerequisites for party membership in Hungary. The latter scenario is special because, although it involves the interdependent and coordinated transfer of political values by socialisation mediators, it does not encourage the development of party-political participation but of a civic identity and inclination to act, and at the same time a critical attitude towards party politics. In this political socialisation scenario, the intention to act in party politics is not formed as a result of the influence of socialisation mediators but as a result of a political environment that makes it impossible for civic action to be effective. However, this is a 'forced choice', and the conflictuality of this scenario lies precisely in the fact that it involves a confrontation with one's own principles and those of others who share them.

Finally, there are two relatively conflict-free political socialisation paths. One is through a university degree related to politics, while the other leads to political parties through the family. For both, however, it can be said that they start from a family with politically homogeneous values, where values are transmitted through conscious and guided upbringing. Moreover, both are characterised by the consistency of political socialisation outside the family and the quality of the family's values reinforcement. In the *university-inspired accession* scenario, the family's political socialisation traditions are partly continued and partly changed over the life course. Young people in this scenario carry on their family's political values but transcend family traditions in terms of political action. However, it is the process of political education in the family that lays the foundations and prepares them for this tendency. Indeed, in this scenario, participation in party politics would hardly be possible without the transfer of values from parents, without encouraging their children to take an interest in politics and to act, and without supporting their choice of career.

The other, *family-motivated party-political entry* scenario, offers a relatively straight but closed path to the parties. Participants in this scenario are part of the party practically from childhood, and the party is as much an evidential socialisation agent in their lives as the family or nursery and school. Consequently, they see joining the party as a natural and self-evident step, the fulfilment of their socialisation from childhood. At the same time, their parents ensure that socialisation outside the family and the party is kept under control. They allow their children only into peer communities, camps and educational institutions that confirm the correctness of the values of the family and the party. This kind of closed political socialisation process is conducive to the consolidation and uninhibited embrace of political identity, but, as we have noted, it also inevitably leads to isolation from dissident communities, even to a weak perception of the opinions that emerge within them.

In conclusion, the socialisation agents considered important appear in very different roles – neutral, directly or indirectly supporting and counteracting –, reinforcing or weakening each other's effects, in harmony or in conflict with each other and with the individual in the political socialisation of party members, confirming our hypothesis. In contrast to the Western European experience, the political socialisation process leading to political parties in Hungary is in many cases quite conflictual. In light of our results, the most important direct precondition for party-political participation among the Hungarian college and university students is the act of party-political mobilisation. This can occur both through party member ancestors, peers predisposed to party-political action, and strangers. The personal persuasive power of the party community can have a very powerful effect. In scenarios motivated by secondary school socialisation and party-political mobilisation, as well as in the case of joining inspired by university studies, it provides the impulse that reinforces the will to participate and triggers joining, while in the case of the scenario leading from NGOs to parties, it dissolves the aversion to party-political participation stemming from prior socialisation. Overall, therefore, and in support of our hypothesis, party-political mobilisation in our country is a key factor that can overcome the perceived political socialisation barriers to party political-participation and dispel the reservations arising from the deficiencies or countervailing mechanisms of political socialisation.

And last but not least, the dissertation also examined two outcome dimensions of political socialisation relevant to party-political participation – the political thinking of party members and the motivational background of their party-political participation – with the intention to explore what kind of motivational participants Hungarian political socialisation processes produce, and to learn what kind of politicians and political field Hungary is likely to have in the coming decades. For this reason, we have also sought to some extent to answer the question of the extent to which party members hold the potential for change, what this potential entails and to what extent they have the potential to realise these goals in the future.

For these questions, our quantitative analysis showed that party and non-party students are quite similar in their political preferences. Although the former have a demonstrably higher level of political interest compared to their non-party counterparts, their ideological orientations and satisfaction with democracy and the existing order clearly reflect the political thinking of the student population. They also share a similar political image: for them, politics is not a respectful and attractive activity but rather a corrupt, or at least a doubtful one.

On this basis, we conclude our analysis with the assumption that it is conceivable that young people who are career-oriented and who seem to accept the status quo, are interested in adapting to it and maintaining it, are attracted to politics in our country, and that, on the contrary, they are driven to party politics by desperation and the will to change. We have also suggested that, given their incumbent position, members of the governing party are likely to be the former, while members of opposition parties, and especially the two new parties with a movement

character that are popular with young people, are more likely to be the latter. The results of the interviews do not indicate such a sharp difference in motivations between students from the governing and opposition parties, but it should also be noted that the research gave equal opportunities to all the parties surveyed, i.e. only five members of the governing party were interviewed, while thirty-five young people from the seven opposition parties were asked, so that the opposition parties were necessarily over-represented. For this reason, we cannot exclude the possibility that if more students from the governing party are included, our analysis will also lead to different conclusions.

In the analysis, we distinguished between five types of participation of party member students. Contrary to our expectations, most of them turned out to be 'general' types, independent of political party, i.e. young people falling into these categories were found in all the parties studied. In terms of the ideal-typical political socialisation scenarios leading to parties, the participation types were found to be mixed without exception. This means that the motivations established by political socialisation leading to parties do not necessarily determine subsequent motivations.

In terms of the system maintainer versus system changer mentality, our types of participation reveal more complex relationships than simply attributing the former to career builders and the latter to all other participatory groups, and also show the particular pitfalls of the reformer perspective. In this dimension, the involvement of the *supporters* is essentially negligible, since they are already one foot out of the party and building their careers outside it. They participate in the work of the party on an ad hoc basis and even then, mainly along selective incentives such as learning and networking or cultivating existing relationships. Their declarations indicate that they will become passive party members in the future or will not retain their membership.

In contrast to the *supporters*, the *community people* and the *actors* are already organically integrated into their party and are likely to remain so in the long term. Both groups of participants, however, represent an executive type subordinate to party goals. Young people in these groups are not really involved in shaping the functioning and policies of the party. They are marginalised in the process of programme formulation and value debates and participate as outside observers rather than active shapers. They respect and accept the hierarchy within the party and have no particular problem fitting into it. They strive to find their place in the party according to their own needs and abilities. Community members are primarily concerned with the emotional rather than the political cohesion of the community, and actors are primarily concerned with tasks in which they feel productive and socially useful.

The reformer mentality is most widely found among ideologists who seek to radically transform both society and politics, but also their party. However, they are hampered in their efforts to achieve these goals by a number of circumstances. Some of these are of a personal nature, supporting the insight of political socialisation studies that political behaviour is influenced by innate dispositions and constitutional characteristics (Muxel, 2022; Renström-Bäck, 2022). Ideologues are young people with a particular theoretical orientation. They are people of thought, not of action. They are concerned with the feasibility of their ideas, but implementation, practical action, is no longer their forte. On the other hand, these young people have a high degree of autonomy, are relatively independent of community recognition and judgement, are highly critical and do not shy away from conflict. They find it difficult to tolerate hierarchies and are not really able or willing to fit into them. They see subordination and competition for position as meaningless and even counterproductive in terms of goals, change and cooperation. They are, however, rather inflexible when it comes to principles, and cannot tolerate their party not representing them credibly, changing its objectives or lowering them. All of these are reasons for them to leave, and no amount of work or career progress that they

have invested will be a disincentive to do so. This mentality, as reflected in the statements of the students, is difficult to fit even into the operating logic of left-wing parties that aspire to some degree of grassroots democracy. The party community has little to do with these young people. It often misinterprets them and regards their behaviour as unpredictable, and is therefore not interested in supporting their political advancement. On the other hand, young ideologues themselves are often reluctant to enter the hierarchy and to endure the formal constraints of their positions. As a result, there is little chance of advancing their goals, at least through the party.

Finally, while the intention to change is also present among a significant proportion of career builder students, they pursue a much more cautious and effective strategy for political advancement than their ideologist counterparts. As such, they are much more likely to be the future's politicians than the ideologists. These students are not concerned with changing parties and the framework they offer, accept hierarchy and take on the challenges necessary for promotion. They do, of course, occasionally intervene in the shaping of their destiny within the party, but only within the limits of the room for manoeuvre provided by the party framework, never crossing its boundaries. In this sense, at first sight they do indeed appear to be "system maintainer", but this strategy is mostly pursued in the spirit of the realist idea that it is necessary to first play by the rules to get to the top and gain power, and then to make real changes. However, as these students are less principled than ideologists and the road upwards is both rather long and requires a strong ability to adapt to changing conditions, it is questionable how much these initial intentions of political engagement will be worn out or preserved by the time young people reach the top. Of course, we cannot tell today, and further follow-up of these students will only lead us to the answer.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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VI. ACADEMIC ACTIVITY

Publications

Sebestyén Annamária (2022): A hatalom és az ifjúság a '60-as évek Magyarországán. [Power and Youth during the '60s in Hungary] In. Antal Attila – Mándi Tibor – Paczolay Péter (szerk.): *Társadalmi mozgalmak, civil társadalom, emberi jogok. Ünnepi kötet Szabó Máté 65. születésnapjára.* Budapest, ELTE Eötvös Kiadó. 247–267.

Szabó Andrea – Oross Dániel – Papházi Viktor – Pokornyi Zsanett – Sebestyén Annamária (2021): *A magyar társadalom politikai értékei, identitásmintázatai, 2020.* [The Political Values, Identity Patterns of Hungarian Society, 2020] Budapest, TK PTI. ISBN 978-963-418-043-2

Sebestyén Annamária (2021): A pártokba vezető politikai szocializációs szcenáriók a magyar hallgatók körében. [Pathways into Political Party Membership among Hungarian Students] *THEMIS,* 103–129.

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Csákó Mihály – Sebestyén Annamária (2017): Csákó Mihály – Sebestyén Annamária (2017): Egy autentikus diákmozgalom. [An Authentic Student Movement] *Educatio*, 26 (2): 26–37. https://doi.org/10.1556/2063.26.2017.1.3

Conference lectures

New National Excellence Programme 2022/22 Conference, ELTE Faculty of Law, Budapest, Hungary, August 31 – I held a poster presentation *(Hungarians' Preferred Government 30 Years after Democratic Transition).*

Interdisciplinary Doctoral Conference 2021, University of Pécs, Pécs, Hungary, November 12 – I held a poster presentation *(Hungarians' Preferred Government 30 Years after Democratic Transition).*

New National Excellence Programme 2019/20 Conference, ELTE Faculty of Law, Budapest, Hungary, December 14 – I held a presentation *(Recruitment, recruiters and Recruits among Hungarian University Students).*

Conference on "The political realm from social science perspectives" (2019), Corvinus University of Budapest, Faculty of Social Sciences and International Relations, Institute for Political Science, Budapest, Hungary, December 5 – I held a presentation *(The Preconditions of Party-political Activism among Hungarian University Students).*

Book launch – "Are they different or the same? Students' political activity and political orientation in Hungary, 2019", ELKH Centre for Social Sciences Institute for Political Science, Budapest, Hungary, November 14 – I held a presentation *(Socialisation Pathways among Politically Active Students).*

Conference on "Youth movements in Hungary" organized by the Hungarian Sociological Association (2017), WJLK, Budapest, January 27 – I held a presentation *(Youth movements in Hungary).*