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Paradox of assimilation among indigenous higher education students in four central European countries

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ABSTRACT

There are about 3 million Hungarians living as minority abroad in seven countries of Central Europe. Our research covered higher education with Hungarian medium of instruction in four countries where Hungarians still live in homogeneous blocks. The main points of our analysis were how the progressive assimilation effects on their perception of their life prospects, since we suspected that the controversial relationship between national identity and citizenship still has its negative effects on subjective factors of their life. For our investigation, we compared the families' social status, the students' academic careers, and their future career plans, their views on the meaning of their lives and on generalized trust as well as their religiosity. A subsample of students from Hungary was also involved in the comparison. We analyzed data on 1739 students. We concluded that progressive assimilation did not coincide with positive prospects.

Introduction

The new borders in Central Europe set by the post-World War I peace treaties left large Hungarian communities under the control of countries to which they had no connection in terms of linguistic, cultural, or national identity. The cultural environments in their new countries (today's Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia) were entirely different from one another. In some of those countries, they still live in a nearly homogeneous bloc, while in others they live in diaspora (not completely assimilated but in an advanced state of language loss). Their access to education in their mother tongue also differs. These minority communities are considered “residual communities” because their numbers are continually decreasing (Szarka, 1999). Calculation of assimilation based on census and population movement statistics showed that assimilation among Hungarians living in Slovakia and Serbia is high, while in Romania and Ukraine it is extremely low (Hablicsek, Tóth, & Veres, 2004).

The controversial relationship between national identity and citizenship still has negative effects. Communist ideology proclaimed the eventual disappearance of nations. The mismanagement of the ethnic diversity by the suppression of education in their mother tongue led to the increased social inequalities. Cordell, Agarín, and Osipov (2013), p. 236, Lambrev, 2016).

During the communist era, there were political obstacles to mother-tongue education. Therefore, it became one of the central political issues addressed by the representatives of Hungarian minority groups after the democratic transformation. On the one hand, minority schools are a means of protecting a minority and maintaining their identity; on the other hand, access to mother tongue education is crucial to a successful school career. The integration of minorities can be achieved by their educational career and social mobility. Indigenous groups can face discrimination in education when the language used in the classroom is not their language. To avoid “ethnophagy” (the absorption of minority peoples by the majority), it is essential that instruction is provided in a language they are familiar with (Despagne,

2013). Despite European integration, there is a “de facto inequality between individual members of the society belonging to communities different from the majority population” (Cordell et al., 2013, p. 237). The examined minority has education with instruction in Hungarian; however, their minority status affects their perception of life prospects. In our research, we learned about the social composition, position, and perceptions of minority students in the four different countries with the largest Hungarian communities. This paper offers the first comparison of students from these communities. Our study consists of using previous research statistical data to learn *how the social status of minority students affects their perception of their life prospects*. More specifically, the paper addresses three research questions: What is the social background of students in minority Hungarian higher education institutions? What factors influence their higher education choices as well as their visions of their future work? Finally, what factors influence their life plans? In other words, we mapped their religiosity and their views on the meaning of life and on generalized trust.

Ethnic Hungarian students

Ethnic Hungarian communities in different countries show different features in terms of their proportion in the population, social status, geographical distribution, settlement structure, and language use. From the perspective of education politics, the countries with ethnic Hungarian communities can be classified into two groups. One of the main differences accounting for the other variances is that most ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia live in areas where Hungarians are in the majority, while most Hungarian communities in Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia do not (Csete, Papp, & Setényi, 2010). Our study focuses on four relatively large ethnic Hungarian groups. Our data are from the regions populated by Hungarians: Transylvania in Romania, the **Highland** in Slovakia, Subcarpathia in Ukraine, and Vojvodina in Serbia (Table 1).

Indigenous Hungarians – it is necessary to distinguish them from diaspora Hungarians who emigrated – lag behind the ethnic majority in all regions in terms of participation in, and level of, education. The disadvantage tends to increase as higher education is approached (Keller, 2004; Molnár & Molnár, 2005; Veres, 2013). These results are appalling, considering that before 1920, Hungarians’ literacy rates in Austria–Hungary were much higher than those of Slovaks, Romanians, Ukrainians, and Serbs.¹ After that, the mother tongue education of minority Hungarians continuously declined because of the nation states’ educational policies, which failed to support minorities’ equal opportunities and instead sought to fully assimilate ethnic communities (Csata, 2004; Molnár & Molnár, 2005). In the last 25 years, there has

Table 1. Population of the countries and regions surveyed (persons).

	Romania (persons) (2011)*	Slovakia (persons) (2016)*	Ukraine (persons) (2014)*	Serbia (persons) (2016)*
Total population	20 121 641	5 426 252	45 245 894	7 076 372
Region populated by Hungarians (administrative unit)	Transylvania (2011) ²	Southern Slovakia (2011) ³	Subcarpathia (2003) ⁴	Vojvodina (2002) ⁵
Total population of the region	6 789 250	1 499 971	1 254 614	2 031 992
Ethnic Hungarian population	1 216 666	432 534	151 516	290 207

Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office⁶

¹Illiteracy rates in 1913: Hungarians 20.7%, Slovaks in Hungary 30.3%, Serbs 40.2%, Romanians 66.9%, Ukrainians in Subcarpathia 72.2% (Hanák, 1983).

²Veres (2013).

³<http://delszlovakia.sk/2014/09/25/a-lakossag-nemzetisegi-osszetetele/>.

⁴Molnár-Molnár D. 2005.

⁵<http://www.prominoritate.hu/folyoiratok/2012/ProMino12-3-03-Badis.pdf>.

⁶https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/eurostat_tablak/tabl/tps00001.html.

been a slight expansion in the structure and capacity of education.⁷ Despite this short revival, minorities' level of education is still behind that of the majority, and there has been a statistically significant fall in the Hungarian population. Social mobility in the majority population's statistics are much better in this respect as well (Papp, 2012a). Recent data show that in each country, the proportion of ethnic Hungarians with higher education degrees is less than that of the majority population (Ferenc, 2012). Hungarian communities, who have been living as a minority for a century, have access to only a very limited range of public and higher education opportunities in their mother tongue. The system of vocational training has not yet been developed; there is no medical and legal training in higher education, and only sporadic technical and economic training. Owing to the lack of variety in Hungarian degree programs, some Hungarian-speaking families opt for state language education from the beginning in the hope of better career prospects. Their other option is emigration, which then deprives the Hungarian minority of its highly qualified members (Keller, 2004; Papp, 2012b).

We can track ethnic Hungarian students' mother tongue education on the basis of national statistics and conservative estimates. In general, owing to the expansion of minority education after the end of communism, a significant proportion of ethnic Hungarian children started their education in a Hungarian-speaking primary school in the 2010s. This was the case with 80% of Hungarian children in Romania, Ukraine, and Serbia and 75% in Slovakia. As a result of the expansion, the number of Hungarian students in higher education is increasing, but the variety of degree programs in Hungarian does not meet the demand (Papp, 2012a, 2012b). Generally, the higher the level of education, the lower the proportion of Hungarians taking part, so they are likely to attain a lower level of education. In Romania, which has the largest Hungarian minority, the 2011 census found that 14.8% of Romanians and only 10.3% of Hungarians have higher education degrees (Veres, 2013).

The statistics show a worse situation in Slovakia. Whereas 10.4% of the entire population have higher education degrees, only 5.3% of Hungarians do so. Even in the decade 2001–2010, there were 1,000 settlements with a Hungarian majority, yet Hungarian primary education was unavailable to them (Törzsök, 2008).

Since Ukraine gained independence, the number of Hungarian education institutions have been on the increase, and so has been the number of Hungarian classes at each level of education. In the Hungarian region of the country, 10.4% of the age group attended Hungarian primary schools in 2001, but only 4% of university and college students studied at Hungarian institutions (Molnár & Molnár, 2005). Statistics on education in the Hungarian region of Serbia show that the number of Hungarians in higher education is increasing. In 2004 the proportion of Hungarian college students (in short-cycle undergraduate training) was 11.25%; that of Hungarian university students was only 6% (Szügyi, 2012).

The performance of education institutions and their students can be compared on the basis of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results. Data from 2003, 2006, and 2009 clearly show that minority students' performance was below that of the majority of students. However, in Serbia and Romania, Hungarian students who were educated in their mother tongue performed better than those who were educated in the language of the majority. By contrast, in Slovakia, students' performance in mother tongue education is declining year by year (Papp, 2013). To make matters more complicated, minority students who take part in majority education usually perform worse at school and come from a more disadvantaged background. Papp calls the phenomenon the "assimilation spiral." Deprived of the chance to be educated in their mother tongue, minority students will perform poorly in ever-increasing numbers, which will prevent their social status from improving and will even add to their social disadvantage. The process is self-perpetuating, as low-status minority parents do not tend to make informed choices about their children's schooling. Earlier research findings have drawn attention to the paradoxes of school career in the first generation, followed by the paradoxes of assimilation in the second and third generations of voluntary minorities (Rumbaut 1997).

⁷Thanks to the expansion of education after the democratic transformation, mother tongue education is available today in each community from the lowest to the highest level. Thus, an increasing number of young Hungarians are entering higher education in their native regions.

Data and variables

For our analysis, we used an international student database called Institutional Effects on Student Achievement (IESA), which was created in the winter of 2014–2015 (Pusztai, Bocsi, & Ceglédi, 2016). We analyzed data on 1,739 Hungarian students from 13 institutions of higher education in five different countries of Central Europe, focusing on one region in each country. We compared data on students from Hungarian institutions or faculties of higher education⁸ in Romania, Ukraine, Serbia, and Slovakia to corresponding data from universities⁹ in Eastern Hungary, as the latter were the most similar to the minority institutions in terms of the social composition of the student population. The database represented full-time students, including state-funded and tuition-paying students alike. The sampling frame was established on the basis of the data provided by the institutions. We contacted the student groups when they were taking part in their university/college courses. The randomness of the sample was achieved by the random selection of these groups. The survey was gathered by interviewers, the ethical approval was obtained, the participation of respondents was anonymous and voluntary in the survey.

During our analysis, we tried to learn about the social status of students in minority Hungarian higher education institutions. In addition, we examined the goals influencing their higher education choices, as well as their visions of their future work. Apart from types of cultural and social capital that can be described with hard indicators, we also collected information on subjective factors influencing their life plans. In other words, we mapped their religiosity and their views on the meaning of life and on generalized trust. We compared the minority groups with different degrees of assimilation to one another, as well as to majority Hungarians living in Eastern Hungary.

We formulated our hypotheses on the basis of the statistical features of the communities and the findings of our own research, which goes back over a decade (Pusztai, 2007, 2015). We expected that the proportion of students whose parents had a low level of education would be higher in minority institutions than majority Hungarians in higher education in Hungary because of the expansion of minority education and the academic and residential mobility of the high-status population. We hypothesized that in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more, parents of students were of higher status.

We hypothesized that, owing to the disadvantages of minority existence that manifested themselves in mother tongue education, office procedures, and employment, ethnic Hungarian students would express a more negative attitude toward the meaning of life and generalized trust than their majority peers in Hungary. We hypothesized that in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more, they had a more positive attitude toward the meaning of life and generalized trust.

We hypothesized that the minority communities would share a strong religious identity and that their religious practice would be more intense, since religiosity may support national identity in a multicultural and multiethnic environment (Doktor, 2007; Pusztai & Fényes, 2012). Therefore, we expected indicator values to be high in the different dimensions of religiosity, in accordance with Gereben and Tomka's findings (2000). We hypothesized that in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more and discarded their ancestral cultures, their religious practice was less intense.

Students' social status

One of the essential research conclusions of the sociology of education is that there is a close correlation between students' academic achievement and careers and the social status of their families (Pusztai, 2015). According to this approach, students' academic success results from their

⁸Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences; Off-site Faculty of Babeş-Bolyai University in Satu Mare; Off-site Faculty of Babeş-Bolyai University in Odorheiu Secuies; Partium Christian University; University of Oradea and Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania from Romania; Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute and the Uzhhorod National University from Ukraine; Teachers' Training Faculty in Subotica of the University of Novi Sad from Serbia; J. Selye University and Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Central European Studies from Slovakia.

⁹University of Debrecen; Debrecen Reformed Theological University; University of Nyíregyháza.

families' investment into cultural capital. That is to say, children from higher status families have a greater chance of entering higher education and of having a successful academic career. This, in turn, reproduces the disadvantage of the not-so-well-schooled Hungarian minority.

Our empirical findings showed that in the case of minority families, both the fathers' and mothers' level of education were lower than in the case of majority Hungarian families from Hungary, and the proportion of parents with higher education degrees was relatively low (around 20%) in each region. From this, it follows that over three-quarters of the students of minority higher education institutions will be first-generation intellectuals after graduation. This leads to the conclusion that minority institutions are socially open and support low-status students' careers (Table 2).

Of the regions of the survey, Hungarian students from Ukraine were in the best position, with the highest proportion of parents with university degrees and the lowest proportion of parents with only primary education. The proportion of parents with only primary education was the highest among Hungarian students in Romania, and they were followed by their peers from Slovakia and Serbia. It is worth noting that official statistics on the level of education of the entire Hungarian minority population are different: Hungarians in Romania have the highest level of education, followed by those in Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. However, one has to consider that in Ukraine, the parents' age group has a structural advantage. In the Ukrainian system, some secondary and "half-tertiary" qualifications that are not classified as higher education anywhere else on the basis of their curricula and the duration of the training count as higher education qualifications. The still-lower total education levels of Romanian and Slovak parents may suggest that mother tongue higher education is socially even more open there, but they may also imply that high-status minority people send their children to majority higher education institutions in their country or to Hungary.

The minority groups of the survey also differed in terms of parents' position in the labor market. The most secure position among the minority populations – second only to majority Hungarians – was held by parents from Slovakia, with over 80% having a legal income. They were followed by those in Romania, Ukraine, and Serbia. The labor market position depends on the countries' economic performance. What the regions have in common is that mothers' employment figures are below those of fathers, although their education level is higher. The widest gap is in the data from Serbia (Table 3).

Table 2. Parents' level of education.

	<i>Eastern Hungary</i> (<i>N</i> = 979)	<i>Romania</i> (<i>N</i> = 281)	<i>Ukraine</i> (<i>N</i> = 157)	<i>Serbia</i> (<i>N</i> = 63)	<i>Slovakia</i> (<i>N</i> = 129)
Father/stepfather ***					
Primary	37.22	38.10	18.40	26.98	31.43
Secondary	38.40	46.94	65.03	58.73	57.14
Higher education	24.38	14.97	16.56	14.29	11.43
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Mother/stepmother ***					
Primary	21.50	30.10	17.60	22.20	30.70
Secondary	43.80	52.40	57.60	60.30	51.40
Higher education	34.70	17.60	24.80	17.50	17.90
Total	100	100	100	100	100

The underlined figures indicate that their values are higher than it would have been expected in case of random distribution. The significance level of the correlation: $P = 0.000$.

Table 3. The proportion of working parents by country (%).

	<i>Eastern Hungary</i> (<i>N</i> = 979)	<i>Romania</i> (<i>N</i> = 281)	<i>Ukraine</i> (<i>N</i> = 157)	<i>Serbia</i> (<i>N</i> = 63)	<i>Slovakia</i> (<i>N</i> = 129)
Father/stepfather	84.68	78.29	70.06	69.84	82.95
Mother/stepmother	<u>81.70</u>	73.96	62.50	52.38	<u>84.67</u>

The underlined figures indicate that their values are higher than it would have been expected in case of random distribution. The significance level of the correlation: $P = 0.000$.

However, our data also showed that it was not unemployment but being a housewife – which does not provide any regular income – that accounted for the women’s side of the above statistics. Human capital theories attribute unfavorable labor market positions to a low level of education. Another possible explanation might lie in the value system of ethnic Hungarian families and their more traditional division of labor. The proportion of housewives in Ukraine, Serbia, and Romania was significantly greater than it was in the economically more developed regions in Hungary and Slovakia. It is important to note, however, that there is research evidence that mothers who are not employed (full time) outside the home are more efficient in bringing up their children, with more input into their children’s future (Coleman, 1988).

The students in the regions of the survey face considerable difficulties because of unemployment in their families; unemployment among fathers is especially high in Ukraine and Serbia. During our earlier research, we noticed that the proportion of fathers on disability pension has long been very high in Eastern Hungary and – according to our present data – in Slovakia as well. Although there is a connection between access to work providing a decent income and health statistics (Kopp & Skrabski, 2006), the above figures do not necessarily suggest that many more people in these two regions have a reduced capacity to work. Instead, they indicate what kind of escape routes from unemployment there are in each system. The differences between the regions depend on the given country’s economic situation, the strictness of work capacity requirements, and the range of work opportunities in the underground economy. It is important to note that these conditions are not only data on families’ social background but may also influence young people’s work-related plans and ambitions.

Regional diversity is further increased by students’ perceptions of their economic situation. Our database was suitable for the measurement of the different dimensions – objective, subjective, and relative – of economic status. First, we analyzed students’ objective financial status by asking them to mark the durable goods they owned from a list of nine. There were significant differences between the countries. Students from Slovakia appeared to be in the best position (6.56), followed by those from Serbia (6.06), Hungary (5.96), Romania (5.73), and Ukraine (5.47). However, objective financial status measured in this way is often more indicative of the family’s, and not the student’s own, financial status. The family’s house, holiday home, or other durable goods might have come from earlier savings, so we also found it necessary to measure students’ subjective financial status. Our findings confirmed the advantage of students from Slovakia: over 40% claimed to have everything they needed and could even afford extra expenses like traveling. This opinion was shared by 28% of students from Hungary, 30% from Romania, 22% from Serbia, and 19% from Ukraine (Table 4).

The differences between the data on the various dimensions of students’ financial status lead us to the conclusion that these variables can be presented only in a descriptive way. To interpret our results, we also have to find out about students’ and their families’ consumption habits and value systems. It is rather obvious that in a community where materialistic values have priority, hardly anybody is satisfied with their economic status. The differences in perception are also due to differences in the countries’ economic performance, both in the present and in the recent past. When evaluating one’s own financial status, one inevitably draws comparisons with the past or the status of other groups. It is important to clarify who students regard as members of their reference group. For that purpose, it is useful to look at the indicator measuring relative financial status in our

Table 4. Students’ subjective financial status by country (%).

	<i>Eastern Hungary</i> (<i>N</i> = 1008)	<i>Romania</i> (<i>N</i> = 297)	<i>Ukraine</i> (<i>N</i> = 163)	<i>Serbia</i> (<i>N</i> = 62)	<i>Slovakia</i> (<i>N</i> = 143)
We have everything we need and can afford extra expenses.	28.60	30.00	19.00	22.60	44.10
We have everything we need but cannot afford extra expenses.	58.70	61.60	72.40	64.50	54.50
Sometimes we cannot meet our daily expenses.	11.10	6.70	7.40	8.10	0.70
It often happens that we cannot meet our daily expenses	1.60	1.70	1.20	4.80	0.70
Total	100	100	100	100	100

The underlined figures indicate that their values are higher than it would have been expected in case of random distribution. The significance level of the correlation: $P = 0.000$.

questionnaire. We asked respondents to mark their financial status on a scale from one to nine in relation to that of other families in their country. On the whole, students considered their own status to be slightly above average, but there were considerable differences between regions. At one end of the scale were Hungarians from Slovakia, who felt they were somewhat better off financially than other families; at the other end were Hungarians from Serbia, who thought they had average financial status. The other ethnic Hungarian communities were in between, that is, above average. On the whole, among indigenous minority students in higher education, it was students from Slovakia who – in spite of their parents' low level of education – had the best financial status by several measures. This was primarily due to the country's favorable economic situation (Table 5).

How one's permanent place of residence is ranked in the hierarchy of settlements is an important indicator of social status. This is so because residence in a small settlement means less access to education institutions and cultural and employment opportunities. Ample sample data from earlier CHERD-H surveys (2003, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012) showed that the vast majority (almost four-fifths) of Hungarian students from Ukraine came from villages, whereas the majority of students from Romania came from cities. The survey area was extended in 2016. In Romania, students from county seats continued to predominate. The proportion of Ukrainian students from low-status settlements was still outstandingly high, and the same was the case with Serb and Slovak students. Comparison to institutions from Eastern Hungary reveals that minority higher education institutions are more open to students coming from villages (Table 6).

Owing to the context-dependent interpretations, it is difficult to compare the circumstances of students from regions so distant from one another. Yet there appear to be a few possible conclusions. There are significant differences between minority Hungarian students of the different countries in terms of parents' level of education and position in the labor market. Minority existence does not necessarily mean a disadvantaged position in every respect. On the whole, students look upon their families' situation as favorable, but there is a significant diversity among the regions. Students from Slovakia indisputably have a higher financial status, while students from Serbia and Ukraine are the most disadvantaged. We can conclude that the level of assimilation did not correlate with parental education and settlement type, but the labor market position of parents and family economic status was better in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more.

Academic career and choices in regions with different degrees of assimilation

Students' previous school choices are important points for analysis, as there may be differences in the extent to which they can make use of the knowledge, values, and norms acquired during secondary

Table 5. Students' relative financial status (average values).

<i>Eastern Hungary</i> (<i>N</i> = 972)	<i>Romania</i> (<i>N</i> = 289)	<i>Ukraine</i> (<i>N</i> = 156)	<i>Serbia</i> (<i>N</i> = 58)	<i>Slovakia</i> (<i>N</i> = 133)
5.18	5.07	5.07	4.67	6.33

Significance level of the variance analysis: 0.002

Table 6. Settlement type of students' places of residence at the age of 14.

	<i>Hungary</i> (<i>N</i> = 1031)	<i>Romania</i> (<i>N</i> = 300)	<i>Ukraine</i> (<i>N</i> = 165)	<i>Serbia</i> (<i>N</i> = 63)	<i>Slovakia</i> (<i>N</i> = 141)
Village	21.40	24.00	60.60	52.40	56.0
Small town	29.90	7.00	6.10	23.80	38.30
County seat	48.00	68.70	33.30	23.80	2.80
Capital	0.70	0.30	0.00	0.00	2.80
Total	100	100	100	100	100

The underlined figures indicate that their values are higher than it would have been expected in case of random distribution. The significance level of the correlation: $P = 0.000$.

education. For minorities, the choice of schools is even more important, since it has been proven that students educated in their mother tongue are more successful than those who opt for schools with majority-language instruction (Papp, 2013). Mother tongue education also serves the survival of the communities in the long run (Papp, 2012b). Our database contained data on secondary studies revealing that over 90% of students in mother tongue higher education were also educated in their mother tongue at secondary school. This led us to the conclusion that those who chose mother tongue education at lower levels of schooling were more likely to be admitted to Hungarian-language higher education institutions. Secondary schools qualifying for higher education are typically run by the state, the local government, or a church, but there are significant differences between the countries in this respect. The proportion of students coming from church-run secondary schools was the highest in Ukraine (over 40%); it was also relatively high in Romania (15.2%) and about the same proportion in Hungary. Our data showed the strongest presence of church-run institutions in mother tongue secondary education in Ukraine. Hungarian minority population has significantly different religious affiliations than the majority populations in Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine. Unlike for the Orthodox Church, running schools are a priority for the Catholic and Reformed churches, which are both closely connected to the Hungarian minority. It was these churches that took swift action after the democratic transformation to correct the deficiencies of the network of mother tongue education institutions (Pusztai, 2008).

As well as revealing students' behavior regarding school choices, the fact that families in each region find it necessary for their children to attend paid private lessons signals their ambitions for higher education and their families' readiness to sacrifice. However, the purpose and frequency of this phenomenon differ by region. It is parents from Ukraine, who otherwise have the lowest financial status, that spend on this most frequently (66%) and parents from Slovakia who spend on this the least frequently (41%). It is remarkable at the same time that minority students attending church-run schools in Ukraine and Romania are significantly less in need of private lessons. Comparing these data to students' financial status, we find that ethnic Hungarian families spend a considerable amount on their children's private lessons in proportion to their means. In other words, they not only realize the importance and value of higher education but are also willing to make material sacrifices for the sake of their children's academic careers.

Another important survey question inquired about the purpose of higher education studies. The questionnaire contained 12 statements on higher education decisions to map students' motives. We asked our respondents to mark how much a given factor motivated them in their decision to continue their studies and in their choice of the institution and degree program. Then, we put the items in order according to how frequently they were marked. We classified the motivations into five orientation types with factor analysis. The first type consisted of students who sought to position themselves best for the labor market. The second type was characterized by "collective investment" and following patterns and advice from family and friends. Relationship- and knowledge-oriented students were motivated to acquire new knowledge and build new relationships. The type labeled "free of charge in the mother tongue" was motivated by studying in their mother tongue. Finally, work-postponing students were motivated to delay entering the workforce.

The comparison of orientation types by country showed that while majority students in Hungary were driven by labor market factors in their decisions, minority students from every region ranked the opportunity for mother tongue education at first or second place. Being motivated by the opportunity for acquiring new relationships and knowledge was more typical in Romania and Serbia, while the following patterns were more widespread in Ukraine (Table 7). Among students in a wealthier and more assimilated Slovakian community, the delay of entering the workforce was a chief motivator, typical of the generation that entered university at the time of the expansion of higher education (Clark & Trow, 1966). Despite our hypothesis, in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated less, parents made greater efforts to educate their children in private schools, and the students expressed stronger intentions to acquire new relationships and knowledge.

Table 7. The proportion of students living in dormitories and elsewhere by country (in percent).

	<i>Eastern Hungary</i> (<i>N</i> = 1023)	<i>Romania</i> (<i>N</i> = 294)	<i>Ukraine</i> (<i>N</i> = 164)	<i>Serbia</i> (<i>N</i> = 62)	<i>Slovakia</i> (<i>N</i> = 142)
Lives in a dormitory	<u>33.50</u>	23.80	<u>42.10</u>	19.40	27.50
Lives elsewhere	66.50	<u>76.10</u>	57.80	<u>80.60</u>	<u>72.40</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	100

The underlined figures indicate that their values are higher than it would have been expected in case of random distribution. The significance level of the correlation:

Attitude towards work in regions with different degrees of assimilation

As anticipated, plans for higher education, ideas of one's future work, and attitude to work are not independent of one another. In the next part of our analysis, we have identified the pattern of students' work values, keeping in mind the possible regional differences. The best-known work-value classification – extrinsic and intrinsic – can be interpreted in minority–majority relationships. Extrinsic work values can be observed when a person wants a high income, stable job, good working conditions, and adequate vacation time. In this case, work is only a means of achieving a goal. By contrast, intrinsic work values are based on autonomy and initiative, individual development, and achieving the highest performance. Self-expression and self-fulfillment dominate here (Ester, Braun, & Vinken, 2006; Schwartz, 1999). Schwartz (1999) supplemented the typology, adding power-oriented and community-oriented types. The first helps to improve the position of the individual, while the second emphasizes the individual's relationship with the community and the integrity of the individual. We hypothesize that work for the lower-social-status minorities is of extrinsic character and is directed toward the community, while that for the high-status majority is characterized by intrinsic values and is power-oriented.

Our analysis also covered students' ideas on what they regarded as ideal work. Having compared students' expectations about their future work, we found significant differences between the regions. We used factor analysis to reduce the data we recorded with the work value adapted to the age group. We were able to define five distinct factors closely correlated with the original variables. One of our new factors was named the *altruistic* concept of work because of the core variables it is composed of: responsible, socially useful work that involves helping people. Dealing with people, teamwork, and a performance-centered attitude are also weak components. The second concept of work was tagged *experience-oriented*: the emphasis is on work as an interesting, eventful, and varied activity that gives one a sense of success. The need for a pleasant working environment takes priority over the organizational aspects of work, and, instead, work is dominated by features of leisure activities. The *career-oriented* approach unites the variables expressing the need for a high income and career progress; it emphasizes the ambition to maximize the material profit to be gained from one's work. The fourth factor contains elements of aspiration for the greatest possible amount of *independence* of the organizational aspects of work: the need for flexible working hours and independent decision-making. The fifth factor unites variables that all have to do with avoiding conflict-ridden, exploitative workplaces that destroy family ties, that is, minimizing the risks of harming one's permanent *relationships* by being employed.

It is obvious that the five orientation types cannot be ranked according to the values they represent, but they still give us a subtle picture of the cultural differences between the regions. To find out how popular those ideals of work were with students from the different regions, we examined which concept of work they identified with the most. The decisive preference of students from Serbia was the altruistic concept, and they were also definitely career-oriented and wanted independence. Hungarian students in Romania primarily opted for the altruistic and experience-oriented concepts, and relationships were also an important factor to them. Students from Ukraine were attracted by independent and flexible work as well as the altruistic ideal, and they were unmoved by either the experience, career, or relationship-oriented approaches. Slovakian Hungarians also valued the ideal of independent and flexible work. Majority of Hungarian students

from Eastern Hungary identified with the experience and career-oriented concepts to an above-average extent. Our categories cannot be equated to the Schwartz typology, but most components overlap. There is no connection between work concept and ethnic identity; instead, the perspective of different work values for students in different regions can be related to their different economic and cultural situations (Table 8).

When we looked at the connection between students' motives for enrollment in higher education and their concept of work, we found that those who chose their institutions and degree programs with labor market factors in mind had a consistently career-oriented concept of work; that is, they took a steady, individualistic, and materialistic approach. Work-postponing students tended to have an independence-oriented concept of work; this was quite often the case in Slovakia. Those who were motivated in their choices by establishing relationships, acquiring knowledge, and making family decisions had a markedly altruistic concept of work. This attitude was typical of all ethnic Hungarian student groups except in Slovakia. Those who considered mother tongue education a priority – like the majority of Hungarian students in Serbia and Romania – wished to preserve their family ties and establish good relationships at work. The dividing line regarding career decisions and concepts of work is not minority/majority but individual/collective. The altruistic and community-oriented approach toward work was less popular in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more.

Goals in life, trust and religiosity in regions with different degrees of assimilation

Students' ideas of their goals in life and world views are indicative of the minorities' perceptions toward life prospects (at a time when their populations are gradually decreasing). We focused on three areas: meaning in life, a general feeling of trust, and religiosity. Students' views on the meaning of life were surveyed with the 10 items of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ-H) adapted to Hungarian conditions (Martos & Konkolly Thege, 2012; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). The reliability of the questionnaire is outstanding (Cronbach-alfa = 0.95). Its two essential components are the identification of those who have a meaningful goal in life and those who are in search of their goal, but it also indicates the condition of existing without a goal. According to Frankl (1988), if individuals do not find meaning in their life, they initially experience existential frustration. In the best case, they search for meaning. In minority status, the feeling of meaninglessness can lead to majority-minority conflicts.

Our analysis revealed that students frequently found meaning in their lives. Although this experience was characteristic of the majority of our total sample, there was a significant variance among the different countries. Having a meaningful goal in life was most common among students from Serbia and least common among students from Slovakia. Students from Romania and Hungary were around average with respect to finding their goals in life; Ukrainians were below average; and Slovaks were the least able to do so. Among those still in search of their goals, the largest number is from Slovakia and the smallest is from Serbia. Students from Romania are slightly above average in this category, whereas Ukrainians are slightly below average. Although students who had no goals classified themselves as still searching for them, it should be noted that students from Slovakia topped this category as well, and students from Romania and Ukraine were slightly above average (Table 9).

Table 8. Students' orientation types regarding higher education, choice of institution and degree program by country (average values of factor weights).

Motivation orientation types	<i>Labour market</i>	<i>Collective investment, following patterns</i>	<i>Knowledge and relationships</i>	<i>Mother tongue, free of charge</i>	<i>Moratorium oriented</i>
Hungary (N = 1056)	0.164	0.029	−0.077	−0.101	−0.001
Romania (N = 304)	−0.389	−0.196	0.246	0.111	−0.210
Ukraine (N = 167)	−0.220	0.242	0.039	0.254	0.155
Serbia (N = 63)	0.041	0.150	0.392	0.268	−0.044
Slovakia (N = 145)	−0.134	−0.139	−0.146	0.103	0.302

A significance level of the correlation: $P = 0.000$.

Table 9. Students' concept of ideal work.

	Concept of ideal work				
	Altruistic ***	Experience-oriented***	Career-oriented ***	Independent ***	Relationship-oriented ***
Hungary (N = 1056)	0.495	0.562	0.542	0.490	0.539
Romania (N = 304)	0.605	0.572	0.444	0.438	0.602
Ukraine (N = 167)	0.539	0.389	0.335	0.575	0.437
Serbia (N = 63)	0.810	0.556	0.556	0.571	0.667
Slovakia (N = 145)	0.469	0.448	0.448	0.579	0.455
Total	0.528	0.537	0.497	0.499	0.538

A significance level of the correlation: *** = .000. ** < 0.03.

We have concluded that the differences in finding meaningfulness in life are not connected with the majority-minority opposition; nor do they depend on the population size, cultural capital, economic situation, or standard of living of the given minority. The differences may be influenced by the strength of assimilation trends: in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more, they were less likely to find meaning in life.

To measure trust, we applied the three-item scale of the European Values Study on generalized trust to compare students from three aspects. They were asked to mark the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: people can be trusted, the majority of people try to be honest, and people try to help one another (Tóth, 2005). The post-communist countries of Central Europe are classified by comparative studies as generally distrustful. However, it is important to find out about the opinions of minority students, as those who live in an ethnically homogeneous environment tend to have more trust in general (Delhey & Newton, 2005). On the whole, the students of our sample were slightly closer to the positive end of the trust scale, but their answers in the different areas were not always consistent. The most accepted statement was that most people try to be honest rather than take unfair advantage of one another. The students were not equally certain that people can be trusted. The least accepted statement was that people try to help one another. Instead, the students thought that everybody minds their own business. The statement about honesty was most widely accepted by students from Romania and Ukraine, followed by students from Serbia and finally from Slovakia. The statement about trust in people was most widely accepted by students from Ukraine, followed by students from Serbia, Romania, and Slovakia. The statement about people helping one another was generally accepted by students from Romania and Ukraine, whereas relatively few students from Hungary, Serbia, and Slovakia agreed with it. As far as trust, in general, is concerned, Hungarian minority students had altogether higher scores than those students who lived in Hungary in a homogeneous environment. Young people had a lower level of generalized trust in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more; students from Romania could rely on this resource the most and students from Slovakia the least (Table 10).

In the multiethnic countries of Central Europe, religious and ethnic characteristics are intertwined, and national identity serves as the basis for denominational affiliation (Doktor, 2007). We examined religiosity on the basis of students' self-identification in terms of their denominational affiliation, religiosity, and collective and individual religious practice. The denominational composition of students was different in every region, which had to be taken into consideration during the analysis. Students from

Table 10. Students' attitudes to life goals.

	Has a meaningful goal in life**	Is in search of a goal in life	Does not have a goal in life **
Eastern Hungary (N = 1056)	0.640	0.606	0.457
Romania (N = 304)	0.634	0.614	0.478
Ukraine (N = 167)	0.608	0.601	0.491
Serbia (N = 63)	0.742	0.568	0.425
Slovakia (N = 145)	0.584	0.646	0.535
Total	0.635	0.608	0.469

Significance level of the correlation: ** < 0.03.

Serbia were almost entirely Roman Catholic (96%), whereas, in the Slovak sample, almost 60% (59.9%) were Roman Catholic, and only one-fifth belonged to the Reformed Church. Half of the students from Romania (49.2%) were Roman Catholic and over one-third Reformed, and the proportion of other Protestants was over 5%. In Ukraine, over 60% of the students were Reformed and almost one-quarter (23.4%) Roman Catholic. The denominational makeup of the sampled students in Eastern Hungary differed considerably from Central and Western Hungarian statistics: two-fifths of them were Reformed, over one-fifth were Roman Catholic, and one-tenth were Greek Catholic. The proportion of those who did not belong to any denomination was the highest in Eastern Hungary (23%) and Slovakia (11%).

Religious self-identification was measured with the scale created by Tomka (1990) (Table 13). We found that half of the students from Ukraine and almost one-third of the students from Romania claimed to adhere to the teaching of the church, while in Serbia, Slovakia, and Eastern Hungary, the corresponding rates were below one-fifth. The proportion of students who claimed to be “religious in their own way” was the highest in Serbia, Romania, and Ukraine. Relatively many students in Serbia were uncertain about their faith, and relatively many in Eastern Hungary were non-religious (Table 11).

With regard to both the personal and collective aspects of religious practice, students from Ukraine and Romania stood out with their regular prayers and churchgoing. In Serbia and Slovakia, the majority prayed and went to church only occasionally. Eastern Hungary was similar to them regarding individual religious practice, but those who did not go to church – who, in other words, had no collective religious practice – were overrepresented there (Table 12).

Owing to its integrative nature, collective religious practice can play an important role in the life of a minority community. It is students from Romania and Ukraine who can rely on this resource the most, while for their peers in Slovakia and Serbia as well as Hungary, the religious community does not function as an integrative force to such an extent. The fact that students from Slovakia lag behind the other groups regarding goals in life, trust, and religious relationship networks, and the fact that students from Romania have the highest figures in these areas, suggests that it is not the majority-minority division that makes the difference.

Conclusion

Our study gave a picture of the social background, education choices, work attitudes, and world views of indigenous Hungarian minority students studying in four countries at higher education

Table 11. Students’ level of general trust by region.

	People can be trusted **	People try to be honest **	People try to help **	General trust***
Hungary (N = 1056)	2.768	3.017	2.813	7.715
Romania (N = 304)	2.793	3.194	2.989	8.188
Ukraine (N = 167)	2.984	3.096	2.838	7.373
Serbia (N = 63)	2.902	3.036	2.596	8.063
Slovakia (N = 145)	2.407	2.766	2.656	6.975
Total	2.767	3.034	2.826	7.708

Significance level of the correlation: **< 0.03.

Table 12. Students’ religious self-identification by region.

	Eastern Hungary (N = 1016)	Romania (N = 296)	Ukraine (N = 165)	Serbia (N = 63)	Slovakia (N = 139)
Follows the teaching of the church	13.1	<u>32.1</u>	<u>50.9</u>	17.5	15.1
Religious in their own way	41.5	<u>53.0</u>	35.2	57.1	52.5
Uncertain	8.5	5.1	8.5	<u>15.9</u>	<u>7.2</u>
Non-religious	<u>27.7</u>	7.4	4.8	9.5	15.1
Has other convictions	<u>9.3</u>	2.4	0.6	-	10.1

The underlined figures indicate that their values are higher than it would have been expected in case of random distribution. The significance level of the correlation: *** = 0.000.

Table 13. Students' religious practice by region.

	<i>Eastern Hungary</i> (<i>N</i> = 1016)	<i>Romania</i> (<i>N</i> = 296)	<i>Ukraine</i> (<i>N</i> = 165)	<i>Serbia</i> (<i>N</i> = 63)	<i>Slovakia</i> (<i>N</i> = 139)
Personal religious practice***					
Prays frequently	31.4	<u>78.8</u>	<u>83.3</u>	46.8	36.8
Prays occasionally	31.3	<u>16.0</u>	<u>11.7</u>	41.9	38.2
Never prays	<u>37.4</u>	5.1	4.9	<u>11.3</u>	<u>25.0</u>
N =	995	293	162	62	136
Collective religious practice***					
Goes to church frequently	19.0	65.1	<u>75.3</u>	19.0	29.7
Goes to church occasionally	44.8	<u>32.2</u>	<u>20.5</u>	76.2	42.8
Never goes to church	<u>36.3</u>	2.7	4.2	4.8	27.5
N =	1001	295	166	63	138

The underlined figures indicate that their values are higher than it would have been expected in case of random distribution. The significance level of the correlation: *** = 0.000.

institutions where the language of instruction is Hungarian. The point of reference was the subsample of majority Hungarian students from a higher education region of Hungary where students' social background seemed to be similar to that in the minority regions. We also compared the minority groups with different degrees of assimilation to one another. We concluded that there is no uniformity among the various countries regarding ethnic Hungarian students' family backgrounds. Minority institutions are very open socially: over three-quarters of their students are first-generation higher education students. Parents' position in the labor market is the best in Slovakia and the worst in Serbia, which correlates with these states' economic situation. Students in Slovakia have the best positions in all aspects of financial status too. The labor market position of parents and the economic status of students' families was better in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more. These data confirm our first hypothesis.

Different indigenous minority groups share similar educational choices. The opportunity to enroll in mother-tongue higher education takes priority among them. Where Hungarian families' have relatively low financial status, the number of students who have private lessons is high. This seems to confirm the paradox of assimilation: that more assimilation does not correlate with stronger parental effort and ambitions toward learning.

Ethnic Hungarian students are willing to gain work experience, but paradoxically, the more well-to-do students from Hungary and Slovakia do more paid work, whereas students from the poorer regions tend to do more voluntary work. This may be one of the reasons why students' ideas of their future work show similar patterns, and why the altruistic work concept – the essence of which is a sacrifice for the common good – is ranked the highest by students from Serbia and Romania, and the second-highest by students in Ukraine. The community-oriented approach toward work was less popular in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more.

Having identified students who had a meaningful goal in life or were just in search of it, we found it noteworthy that it was members of the economically successful minority communities who tended to feel they had not found their life goals. The responses were the same when we examined general trust and asked students whether honesty, reliability, and helpfulness were universal traits among their societies: Hungarian students from Romania and Ukraine were always very optimistic, whereas their peers from Slovakia were the least so. In our search for factors other than social status to explain the presence of a life goal and general trust, we presumed that various aspects of religiosity might play a role. It seems to confirm the paradox assimilation hypothesis that in countries where minority Hungarians assimilated more, they had a less positive attitude toward the meaning of life and weaker generalized trust. Therefore, our second hypothesis is rejected.

There was obviously some correlation, as Romania and Ukraine also ranked well above the other regions regarding religious and denominational identity as well as a collective and personal religious practice. There is a stronger church-related religious identity and more active religious practice in regions with multiple denominations, which suggests that religiosity is made more active and efficient by a multiconfessional, rather than a merely multiethnic, environment.

The majority-minority division does not make the difference in the meaning of life, trust, and religious networks. Students from regions with a higher degree of assimilation perform worse in this respect, which is presumably due to the effect of the assimilation spiral and the accelerated tendencies of individualization in today's consumer society. These data confirm our third hypothesis.

In a wealthier and more urbanized country, the vast majority of minority populations believes that joining the dominant groups' economy required getting rid of ethnic identity, and attendance in minority schools is lower. Their linguistic disadvantage has not diminished, their educational career and social mobility have fallen short of expectations, but they have been separated from their communities, their identity has become more uncertain. This can be explained by the theory of assimilation paradox.

The significance of our paper is that it brings attention to indigenous groups that are under-represented in the literature. Our study pioneers in comparing ethnic minority students in different countries and in kin state to test the impact of assimilation in minority communities. Our purpose was to identify inequalities among the Hungarian minority in different countries. We pointed out that in addition to minority status further factors can cause inequalities.

Our results should not be generalized to all minorities. Further studies are needed to determine the causational relationship between the assimilation and economic success. Besides the majority group, students in all different countries should be compared to the minority groups. On the bases of recent data we suggest an interpretation that in the case of minorities receiving mother tongue education – who display positive results in trust, the meaning of life and working attitudes – the lesser extent of assimilation prevents the risks of the globally dominant, highly individualistic worldview, which may contain a kind of uncertainty. To avoid the negative consequences of assimilation paradox it is wise to support the mother tongue education, and ensure the instructions of the official language as a second language in order to achieve a higher level of proficiency to provide equal opportunity in higher education and in the labor market. The expectation for the minority students in state language schools to achieve the same results as the majority students increases the side effects of assimilation.

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