

# Imagined differences

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## A quantitative study of rural and urban communities and social relations

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### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The rural-urban division is a social construction according to the widely shared assumptions of contemporary rural sociology. The countryside is essentially constructed as a representation, and social differences cannot be linked to rural and urban spaces (Cloke 1997, Mormont 1990). Our aim is to test this hypothesis using a nationally representative survey by analysing the most important factors representing the rural-urban dichotomy, namely the importance of community and social capital.<sup>2</sup>

In the classical literature (e.g., Tönnies [2004] *Community and Society* or Wirth [1973] contrasting urban and rural lifestyles) the concepts of rural and community are linked. The community-based image of the countryside is also a key element of the contemporary idyllic representation of the countryside, which is associated with high levels of social capital, where both weak and strong ties are more numerous than in the city, and where both the general level of trust and interpersonal trust is higher. The city, in these theories, appears as a space of alienation. The available data allow us to test both the Tönnies' and Wirth thesis, i.e., that townspeople are characterized by a higher degree of individualization and fewer relationships, while rural people are characterized by a stronger link to the community and higher social capital. Our

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2 The study was prepared in the framework of the OTKA research project entitled Integration and Disintegration Processes in Hungarian Society (108836) and also connected to Rural resilience and local identity: OTKA 135676 and Sustainable consumption patterns, behavioural strategies and knowledge use in the Hungarian society OTKA138020 projects. Boldizsár Megyesi and Bernadett Csurgó were supported by the Bolyai János Post-doctoral Stipendium. and Bernadett Csurgó was supported by the ÚNKP-22-5 New National Excellence Program of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

aim is to test the images of the differences between rural and urban, especially one of the most important elements of it, which is related to community and social capital.

Our hypothesis is that the difference between rural and urban – objective and subjective – cannot be justified by analysing network differences, differences of community or social capital. We argue that the rural-urban dichotomy, which is present both in academic and everyday discourses, cannot be described in the space defined by categories of settlement structure, although using social capital and community perceptions some characteristic spatial differences can be found, but the rural-urban dichotomy intersects at several points with different types of space; the administrative settlement categories and the subjective residential typologies. Our aim is therefore on the one hand to explore the indicators of social integration related to the perception of the rural-urban dichotomy that create objective and subjective spatial differences and mappings in contemporary Hungarian society, while on the other to analyse whether the rural-urban dichotomy can be detected alongside certain indicators.

In the following, we will first look at the characteristic similarities and differences between rural and urban communities. To do this, we construct a ‘community importance’ index and then analyse whether the nature and extent of social capital differs between rural and urban spaces; this is examined using a “social capital” principal component. Moving on, we use the data to analyse spatial patterns of subjective integration and the spatial and social characteristics of subjective maps. We use these to find out to what extent spatial representations can be linked to social integration indicators (community, social capital, subjective integration) and to what extent these represent real spatial differences.

## **The tradition of the rural-urban divide**

In the next section we review how previous research has interpreted spatial differences of community. Rural-urban as one of the most fundamental spatial differences has traditionally been represented in the presence or lack of community. This notion is rooted in the perception of rural-urban contrast by Tönnies (2004). He formulated the theory of community and society in response to the modernization and urbanization processes of the nineteenth century. According to him traditional societies forming communities emerge organically, while modern societies are the product of human intervention. The theory of Tönnies describes these changes as a modernization process and states that in rural spaces the survival of traditional social institutions is more likely. These institutions are often linked by other authors to the strength of communities, or to a higher level of interpersonal trust (Füzér 2015). For Tönnies, the integrative forces of the communities are religion, locality and kinship. For him community means the village community. In contrast, the urban space is the space of alienation, where close interpersonal ties and elements of community integration are weakened. The

society symbolized by the metropolis is characterized by individualization, looseness of relations, and the predominance of politics and public opinion; the main integrating elements are institutions, economy and politics. Durkheim's theory of the social division of labour also refers to and draws on the difference between city and countryside in the contrasting pair of mechanical and organic solidarity. Premodern societies, i.e., rural communities, are characterized by mechanical solidarity, with a low level of division of labour, close community ties, little individualization, few but close and direct ties and the strength of collective norms. By contrast, modern societies, marked by cities, are characterized by organic solidarity, which implies a more developed division of labour and a higher degree of specialization and individualization. Urban societies are also characterized by a greater number of looser ties and the greater importance of institutions, according to Durkheim (Durkheim 2001).

Wirth goes even further in describing the rural-urban divide. He defines urban and rural lifestyles as two opposite poles of a scale. Metropolitan life is secularized, impersonal, heterogeneous, lacking group solidarity, with less important family and kinship ties, and characterized by loose relationships, and formalized rules and systems. In contrast, rural life is characterized by religiousness, close relationships, the importance of the family, a high degree of group solidarity and the importance of traditions (Wirth 1973).

The classic rural-urban dichotomy outlined above is still alive today, in both academic and lay discourse, and is still shaping social practices. The positive image of the rural community is a key motivator for rural-urban migration and rural tourism (Bajmócy 2000, Boyle–Halfacree 1998, Csapák 2007, Csurgó 2013, 2014, Csurgó–Légmán 2015; Csurgó–Szatmári 2014, Hardi 2002, Jetzkowitz–Schneider–Brunzel 2007, Kovách 2007). The interconnection between the countryside and the community is a fundamental element of the idyllic representation of the countryside (Bell 2006, Csurgó–Légmán 2015, Kovách 2007, Short 2006). Several studies show that the representation of the countryside is typically defined in relation to the city (Bell 2006, Csurgó 2013, Halfacree 1995, Kovách 2007). In the contemporary image of the countryside, there is a strong contrast between the negative characteristics of the city and the positive characteristics of the countryside, which are essentially idealized and valued. This representation of the countryside emphasizes safety, tranquillity, healthy living, the beauty of nature and the importance of community and traditions (Csurgó 2013).

More recent research, mainly using a post-structuralist rural sociological approach, has overcome the conceptual power of the rural-urban dichotomy and questioned the prominent role of structural differences in capturing the characteristics of rural (and urban) society. Recent research has shown that rural areas are not necessarily different or less developed than areas defined as urban. Researchers argue that both the modernization of agriculture and associated labour market changes, and the increasingly consumption-oriented use of rural areas (tourism,

nature conservation, rural migration), indicate that the rural-urban divide cannot be sustained (Cloke 1997, DuPuis 2006, Frouws 1998, Halfacree 1993, 1995, Kovách 2012, Mormont 1990). Mormont (1987) was the first to articulate that the question is not what the countryside is, but how different actors interpret and perceive the countryside and what this tells us about the structure and power relations of society. Mormont introduced the concept of rurality as a category of analysis, and representation and discourse as tools of analysis. Cloke (1997) argues similarly by emphasizing that the distinction between the rural and the urban has essentially been erased. The rural as a category no longer exists, but it is a socially constructed complex discursive category and therefore difficult to define. Halfacree (2007) also attempts to create a general descriptive model of rural space based on representations and characteristics of everyday life. The model is built up of three main elements. The first element is the specific socio-economic character of the locality, which represents the relatively different social and spatial practices, linked to consumption and production activities. The second element is the formal representation of the countryside, which is influenced by planners and politicians, and which in fact corresponds to objective (administrative, development) spatial categories and the discourses associated with them. The third element describes the everyday practices. These are subjective and varied, with different levels of coherence and fragmentation, and influence the other categories to a greater or lesser extent. The model above also shows that objective spatial categories and the discourses associated with them can only be one element of the description of spatial differences, as those are influenced by socio-economic characteristics, everyday practices and subjective notions of space.

It is an important Hungarian peculiarity that although both the discourse on rural-urban dichotomy and the positive (idyllic) image of the countryside, linked to the community, is present in Hungary, there is a clear and strong dissonance: besides the idyllic, there is also a rather problem-focused discourse, which reflects poverty, social tensions and the negative elements of living conditions in the countryside (Csurgó 2007, Kovách 2007, Megyesi 2007). Most researchers point out that the rural-urban dichotomy persists at the level of discourse and representation, even if it is not directly related to actual spatial-social categories (Kovács-Vidra-Virág 2013).

Based on a poststructuralist rural sociological approach, the aim of our study is therefore to use the data to confirm the theory that the rural-urban dichotomy is essentially a discursive category and does not follow administrative territorial categories. We aim to test the idea that the rural-urban dichotomy, although represented by the differences of different types of social capital and by the differences in the importance of community, does not show clear spatial patterns and is only one of, but not the main determinant of subjective perception of space. In our analysis, we argue that spatial integration cannot be captured in the rural-urban dichotomy.

We do not aim to explore and analyse either the indicators of social cohesion or the indicators generating the notions of space. Within the framework of the present study, we merely wish to examine and describe whether the differences that appear in the discourse on the rural-urban dichotomy can be justified in terms of objective and subjective differences between real rural and urban spaces.

### **Towards measuring the rural-urban dichotomy: the importance of community and social capital**

One of the most important elements of the rural-urban divide, as we have seen above, is community. While the countryside is usually identified with community and the importance of communities, the city is represented as a space of alienation and the falling apart of community (Tönnies 2004, Wirth 1973). We have created an index to measure the importance of community, adapted to the possibilities of the database we use.<sup>3</sup> In the survey, we asked respondents how important different communities were to them: (a) family, (b) friends, (c) work/school community, (d) neighbourhood, (e) networks at the place of residence and in the local community. Based on the responses to this question, we created the community importance index.<sup>4</sup> The mean of the community importance index was 18.78, which is above the midpoint of the scale, so in general we can say that the above listed communities are important to the respondents overall.

Besides the importance of communities, the rural-urban dichotomy is also represented in the difference of the characteristics in social capital. In the following, we present our theoretical considerations on measuring social capital, the variables we have in the survey to measure social capital and finally how we constructed our tool to measure social capital. Using the variables as proxies of social capital, we constructed a principal component. In designing the principal component, two aspects were kept in mind: the results of previous research and the nature of the data available. In this paper our definition of the concept follows the Bourdieuan tradition of social capital (Angelusz, 1997; Bourdieu, 1985; Megyesi, 2015, 2014). According to it, the effects of social capital can be understood at the level of an individual, while at the level of a group it can only be understood metaphorically. The source of social capital lies in the relationships and networks among people and in communities (Szreter–Woolcock, 2004: 654).

In the following, we examine how relevant previous research operationalized the concept of social capital. There are many ways of measuring social capital and authors are influenced not only by theoretical considerations, but also by the nature

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3 The sample is representative of the Hungarian population aged 18 and over by sex, age, educational attainment and type of municipality.

4 The variable measured the importance of the community on a scale of 1 to 5, and the index was a sum of the responses to each question, with the index ranging from 5 to 25.

of available data when working with the concept; we have to admit that we are also in a similar situation. A significant part of the papers emphasize the network nature of social capital and consequently use the method of network analysis, which can be considered as a separate field of research (Csizmadia 2008: 308). Network analysis became an independent paradigm in recent decades (Albert-Dávid 2004, Sík 2006, Tardos 1995). In the present study we apply an attribute-based approach to social capital, measuring the social capital at an individual level with well-known indicators. These are: trust, shared values, community characteristics, civic and political activity, volunteering, cooperativeness. This approach is based on the work of Putnam (1993), Fukuyama (2007), Grootaert & Bastelaer (2001), and Ostrom et al. (2011). They used traditional surveys and statistical data to assess the extent of social capital in larger communities by measuring the above indicators.

However, this approach has been criticized most for relying on indicators about which it is difficult to draw a clear line between the cause and the effect, i.e., whether the indicator is an indicator of social capital, or whether a given measure of social capital implies the value of that indicator (for example, crime rates or bureaucratization are indicators of such contested status). To overcome this criticism, we accept the argumentation that these indicators are proxies of social capital, signalling its presence (Grootaert-Bastelaer 2001: 27-30).

The *network approach* seems to be essential to grasp social capital, so the variables describing respondents' relationships were included in the main component.

On the dilemma between *trust and reliability*, Megyesi (2015, 2014) argues in his previous writings that Ostrom and Ahn's model is the most acceptable, which prioritizes trustworthiness over trust when it comes to describing the nature and extent of social capital. The authors argue that trustworthiness, which refers to the ability to reciprocate trust in someone regardless of the social structure, is an appropriate indicator of social capital. In this research, however, we had to make a compromise: trustworthiness is a difficult indicator to identify, and the questions of the questionnaire survey make it possible to capture the level of general trust, which is suitable for the present study to investigate the differences in the rural-urban dichotomy based on social capital.

Social participation can be an important indicator of social capital and is part of the rural-urban dichotomy discourse. Knowing and accepting the possible criticisms (see for example Sík 2006, or in detail Megyesi 2014), we built participation in elections, and being a member of different communities and organizations into the principal component measuring social capital.

To sum up, the following variables are built into the principal component measuring social capital:

The nature and extent of the *relationships* are captured by the following variables<sup>5</sup> :

- number of strong relationships<sup>6</sup>
- number of weak relationships<sup>7</sup>

The number of strong and weak ties, in addition to being a key component of social capital, is also a fundamental element of the rural-urban divide. According to the classical discourse, rural areas tend to have strong ties, while urban areas tend to have weak ties. And the quality of the weak ties that can be mobilized are more characteristic of the rural areas, than of the alienated city.

Trust is an important indicator of social capital. In the rural-urban dichotomy, interpersonal trust<sup>8</sup> is more rural, while institutional trust is more urban. The trust variable is captured by a variable formed by averages of the variables measuring interpersonal trust and institutional trust<sup>9</sup> .

Participation and institutionalized relationships in general are seen as an urban specificity, where individuals become part of the community and society through institutions, as opposed to the direct, interpersonal relationships that characterize rural areas (Durkheim 2001, Tönnies 2004, Wirth 1973). We aimed at capturing social participation and the impact on local and national issues with questions on organizational participation<sup>10</sup> , willingness to participate in the elections<sup>11</sup>, and in public affairs.<sup>12</sup>

In constructing the variable measuring social capital, we aimed to give the three dimensions approximately equal weight, so we created a principal component. The

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- 5 The variables that were created jointly by the members of the research team are not described in detail in this paper.
  - 6 The variable shows the number of strong relationships, i.e., people with whom the respondent has discussed important things and problems, with whom he or she can do things together, go out, have fun, get together for recreation, or even visit when he or she has some free time, or get help from.
  - 7 The variable measures the number of weak relationships, i.e., responses to this question: please tell me if you personally know people in this profession. Personally known here means they are on good terms; they know each other by name.
  - 8 In general, what would you say? Most people can be trusted, or rather that we can't be too careful in human relationships.
  - 9 How much confidence do you have (a) in the Hungarian Parliament? (b) in the Hungarian legal system? (c) in the police? (d) in politicians?
  - 10 Has the last been involved in (a) a religious or church organization (not a congregation), (b) a political party, (c) a trade union, (d) an association or foundation, (e) any other organization? Number of activities in which the respondent was involved.
  - 11 If the elections were this Sunday, would you go to the polls?
  - 12 In the last 12 months, have you (a) been in contact with a politician or local government representative, (b) been active in a political party or participated in its events, (c) been involved in the work of another political organisation or political movement, (d) worn or displayed political badges or symbols, (e) signed a protest letter or petition, whether in traditional or online form, (f) participated in a demonstration, (g) deliberately not bought or boycotted certain goods, (h) donated money to a non-governmental organisation?

table below shows the average values of each dimension on the principal component measuring social capital:

**Table 1**  
**Dimensions of the social capital principal component**

Dimension	Sub-dimension/variable	Average value
<i>Relational dimension</i>	<i>Number of strong bonds (num_st):</i>	<i>2.42</i>
	<i>Number of weak ties (num_wt):</i>	<i>8.40</i>
<b>Contact index</b>	Average value (strong bonds are double weighted)	33.1
<b>Confidence index</b>	Average value	13.31
<i>Civic participation</i>		<i>0.024</i>
<i>Political activity</i>		<i>0.74</i>
<i>Participation index</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>7.64</i>

**Table 2**  
**Weight of the indexes for the social capital principal component**

	Factor weights
<b>Voting, participation in organizations, political activity index</b>	0.751
<b>Combined trust index (institutional + interpersonal)</b>	0.476
<b>Number of weak and strong bonds</b>	0.734
<i>Extraction method: main component</i>	



## Empirical analysis of rural-urban differences

The main variables used in the analysis are:

Table 3  
Basic distribution of the variables under study

Importance of communities index	N=2249
<i>Average:</i>	18.78
<i>Standard deviation:</i>	3.50
According to administrative classification	N=3553
<i>Percentage of urban residents (%)</i>	70
<i>Percentage of people living in municipalities (%)</i>	30
Subjective self-assessment	N=3541
<i>Proportion of people living in urban areas (%)</i>	47.3
<i>Percentage of people living in a rural environment (%)</i>	52.7
Municipality size (by population)	N=3553
<i>Average:</i>	43804.56
<i>Standard deviation:</i>	52233.4

## Rural-urban dichotomy

The central issue of our analysis is the rural-urban dichotomy, which can be captured by two variables (1) administrative classification and (2) subjective perception of place of residence (self-classification of the residential environment).

Table 4  
Correlation between administrative and subjective  
place of residence classification

N=3541		Administrative classification	
		City	Countryside
Subjective classification	Urban	67.2%	0.9%
	Rural	32.8%	99.1%

*Sig=0.000, i.e., the relationship between the two variables is significant.*

Our data show that the administrative rural-urban classification and the subjective perception of place of residence, i.e., whether the respondent feels rural or urban in the municipality where he/she lives, do not coincide. There is a significant

difference in the case of urban areas, with 32.8% of those living in an administratively urban municipality perceiving the municipality where they live as rural, while 99.1% of residents of rural municipalities (communes, large villages) consistently perceive their place of residence as rural and only 0.9% as more urban.

Our data therefore indicate that there is a substantial difference between subjective perceptions of place of residence and administrative classification. In the remainder of the paper, we will examine the relationship between administrative classification and subjective perceptions of place of residence and the indicators describing the rural-urban dichotomy presented above.

First, we examined whether the social capital of individuals and the importance of the community differed according to the administrative classification of the place of residence as rural-urban:

Table 5  
Correlation between the social capital principal component and the administrative and subjective classification of residence

Administrative classification		Social capital principal component (N=3070)	The role of community in an individual's life (N=2251)*
City	Average	0.008	18.611
Countryside	Average	-0.020	19.167
Total	Average	-0.000	18.784
	Sig	0.475	0.000
Subjective classification		Social capital principal component (N=3062)*	Role of community in the life of the individual (N=2244)*
Urban	Average	0.043	18.553
Rural	Average	-0.041	18.992
Total	Average	-0.005	18.788
	Sig	0.021	0.003

*\*significant correlation*

As shown above, the social capital of individuals does not depend on the administrative classification of their place of residence, but community is more important (even if only to a small extent) for rural residents than for urban residents.

When we examine the extent to which the two variables differ according to respondents' perception of their living environment as urban or rural, we find that there is a relationship, albeit weak, between subjective classification of residence and social capital. Perceptions of residence as urban are positively linked to social capital, while perceptions of residence as rural are negatively linked. Similarly to the findings for

administrative classification, community is perceived as more important by those living in a rural residence.

The correlation between the population size of a settlement and the importance of social capital and community was also examined, and a weak correlation was found between the level of social capital and the size of the settlement. It is interesting to note that the correlation is reversed here, i.e., we find that social capital increases with the increase in population size of a settlement, but there is no correlation between settlement size and the importance of community.

Since there is no or only a very weak correlation between social capital and settlement type, which contradicts the traditional discourse, and the existing literature suggests that some dimensions of social capital may have different values in urban and rural areas, we have examined the relationship between some dimensions of social capital and the administrative classification of the settlement and subjective perception of place of residence separately.

**Table 6**  
Correlation between each dimension of social capital  
and administrative classification of residence; mean of each value

Administrative classification	City	Country-side	Total	N	Sig.
Interpersonal trust	4.87	4.47	4.75	3542	0.000
Institutional trust	4.20	3.86	4.10	3349	0.000
Number of weak ties	8.15	8.99	8.40	3517	0.000
Number of strong ties	2.46	2.34	2.42	3553	0.052
Percentage of weak ties that can be mobilized	0.61	0.56	0.59	3423	0.000
Organizational membership	0.02	0.028	0.02	3539	0.078
Participation in	1.95	1.93	1.95	3248	0.681
Direct participation	0.22	0.15	0.20	3533	0.000
Traditional participation	0.06	0.13	0.08	3536	0.000

There is a difference between settlement categories on most dimensions of social capital (Table 6). It can be seen that interpersonal trust, institutional trust, the number of weak ties and the proportion of weak ties that can be mobilized differ significantly between urban and rural areas. Both the overall interpersonal trust and the institutional trust indices show that rural residents are more distrustful than urban residents. Institutional trust is also an urban trait, as previous research has shown. The number of weak ties is significantly higher for those living in rural areas, while

there is no difference in the number of strong ties between those living in rural and urban areas, so the data could not confirm the rural image including the image of closer ties, closed communities and interpersonal relationships. While the traditional rural-urban discourse suggests that the number of weak ties is higher in rural areas and lower in urban areas, the proportion of weak ties that can be mobilized is lower in rural areas, which also contradicts the alienated city and more tightly-woven rural community thesis. The data do not show any difference between rural and urban residents by administrative classification in the case of participation and organizational membership, but when political expression is further disaggregated into direct and traditional participation, significant differences are found, and they are also in line with the pattern expected: participation considered as traditional is more common in rural than in urban areas. However, overall, the data tend to contradict the image of the alienated city and the traditional representation of rural-urban dichotomy.

The following table analyses the relationship between each dimension of social capital and the subjective nature of the settlement.

**Table 7**  
**Correlation between each dimension of the social capital index**  
**and subjective classification of residence: mean of each value**

Subjective classification	Urban	Rural	Total	N	Sig.
Interpersonal trust	4.96	4.57	4.76	3530	0.000
Institutional trust	4.38	3.85	4.10	3339	0.000
Number of weak ties	8.00	8.78	8.41	3505	0.000
Number of strong ties	2.57	2.30	2.42	3541	0.000
Percentage of weak ties that can be mobilized	0.61	0.58	0.59	3411	0.054
Organizational membership	0.02	0.03	0.02	3528	0.103
Participation in	1.97	1.92	1.95	3237	0.255
Direct participation	0.24	0.15	0.195	3521	0.000
Traditional participation	0.06	0.11	0.08	3524	0.000

For subjective spatial representations, we also find differences between perceived urban and rural space (Table 7). As in the case of the administrative rural-urban classification, both the interpersonal trust and the institutional trust indices show that rural residents are more distrustful than urban residents, which contradicts the image of an alienated city. The number of weak ties is significantly higher for those living in a place perceived as rural, while the number of strong ties is lower, contradicting the classic rural-versus-urban discourse. Subjective perceptions of place of

residence and the proportion of weak ties that can be mobilized, in contrast to place of residence by administrative classification, show no significant relationship. Neither do participation and organizational membership, as before, but here again we find that, when (political) participation is broken down into dimensions, the prevalence of traditional and direct forms of participation already differs significantly in relation to the space perceived as urban versus rural. The patterns of the previous table are repeated and slightly strengthened: the presence of traditional forms of participation is more frequent in rural spaces, while in urban spaces, the practice of direct forms of participation is more likely, although both are very small.

### **Alienation and subjective perception of place of residence**

Through the analysis of the dimensions of social capital and the importance of communities, we have not been able to confirm that there are differences between urban and rural spaces as the literature suggests: the differences are possible but do not form a clear pattern, so we have had to include additional variables. In the following, we analyse how respondents perceive their place of residence and analyse in more detail the forms of social participation. First, we examine the differences between urban and rural respondents in terms of the administrative classification of residence, and then we look at the effect of subjective classification of residence.

To capture the rural-urban dichotomy, our database offers further affordances beyond the dimensions of social capital described above. In the rural-urban dichotomy discourse, the city appears as a space of alienation, while the countryside appears as its opposite pole. The database offers the following questions to test this notion.

Alienation is measured by a perceived social exclusion index based on the extent of agreement with the following statements:

- I feel marginalized by society.
- Life has become so complicated that I can hardly find my place.
- I feel that the people I meet don't recognise the value of what I do.
- Some people despise me because of my job or because I don't work.

The opposite pole can be measured by the subjective social inclusion index:

Overall, to what extent do you consider yourself an important and useful member of society?

The database also contains information on the subjective assessment of the place of residence.

Please answer how typical you think the following characteristics and phenomena are for the place where you live!

- Everyone knows everyone
- Neighbourliness
- Envy, competition
- Working together, helping each other

- Openness, acceptance
- Malice, enmity
- Preserving and fostering cultural traditions

According to the classic rural-urban dichotomy discourse, the idyllic image of the countryside is of everyone knowing everyone else, neighbourliness, cooperation, openness, acceptance and the cultivation of traditions. In contrast, the alienated city is characterized by competition and hostility, and the absence of all mentioned above. In addition, the community-based rural idyll is associated with the perception of rural residents as an integral part of society, while the image of the alienated city is associated with social disintegration, for which the indicators of subjective social importance and perceived social exclusion are the appropriate measures in our database. Using the above questions, we can test whether the above-mentioned stereotypes correspond to the administrative categories and whether the subjective residential image categories correspond to the classic rural-urban image.

**Table 8**  
**Correlation between neighbourhood characteristics**  
**and administrative classification of residence: the average of each value**

Administrative classification	City	Country-side	Total	N	Sig.
In the neighbourhood, everyone knows everyone	3.22	4.17	3.51	3525	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by neighbourliness	2.54	3.06	2.7	3528	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by envy, competition	2.31	2.65	2.42	3205	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by cooperation and helping each other	2.96	3.20	3.04	3377	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by openness, acceptance	2.96	3.24	3.04	3400	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by malice, hostility	2.29	2.48	2.35	3222	0.000
The area is characterized by the preservation and cultivation of cultural traditions	2.28	2.94	2.48	3237	0.000
Subjective social importance	6.56	6.42	6.52	3470	0.999
Perceived social exclusion	4.01	5.05	4.31	3299	0.000

Those living in rural areas according to administrative classification consider that their place of residence is more characterized by positive rural image features such as “everybody knows everybody”, neighbourliness, openness, acceptance and cultural traditions than those living in urban areas. This would seem to support the rural image of the classical discourse. At the same time, those living in administratively rural areas also tend to perceive competition and hostility as more prevalent, which seems to partly contradict traditional rural-urban images – although these elements can also be seen as negative effects of community enclosure. However, and more importantly, the main indicator of alienation, perceived social exclusion, is not, as expected, a characteristic of urban dwellers but rather of rural dwellers, which is in complete contradiction with the contrasting image of rural-urban. And there is no significant relationship between the subjective social importance indicator and administrative residence classification (Table 8).

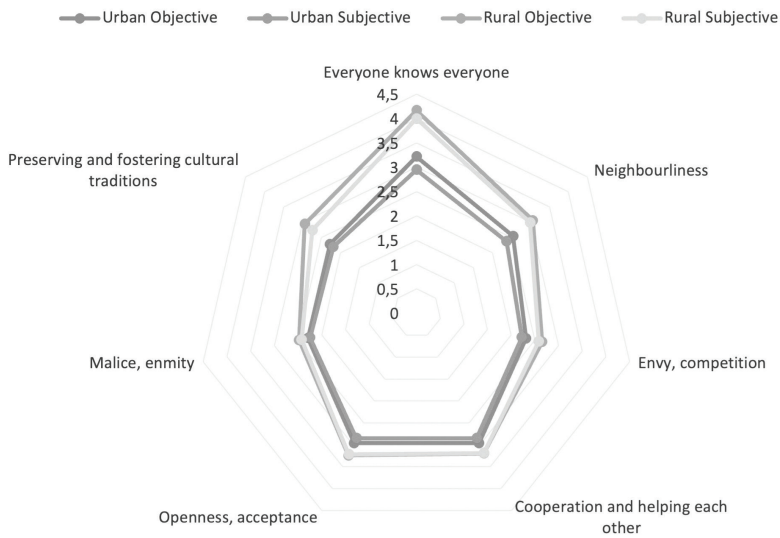
**Table 9: Correlation between neighbourhood characteristics and subjective classification of residence: the average of each value**

Subjective classification	Urban	Rural	Total	(N)	Sig.
In the neighbourhood, everyone knows everyone	2.95	4.00	3.51	3513	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by neighbourliness	2.37	2.99	2.70	3516	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by envy, competition	2.22	2.58	2.42	3194	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by cooperation and helping each other	2.85	3.19	3.04	3367	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by openness, acceptance	2.85	3.22	3.04	3389	0.000
The neighbourhood is characterized by malice, hostility	2.25	2.43	2.35	3211	0.000
The area is characterized by the preservation and cultivation of cultural traditions	2.19	2.74	2.48	3228	0.000
Subjective social importance	6.65	6.39	6.52	3458	0.000
Perceived social exclusion	3.76	4.82	4.31	3288	0.000

The results connected with subjective classification of residence and perception of residence are consistent with the administrative classification. Positive characteristics, such as the fact that everyone knows everyone, neighbourliness, openness, cooperation, and the cultivation of traditions, which are less characteristic of the living

environment of people living in urban areas, appear as features of rural residence. At the same time, negative characteristics such as envy or malice are more characteristic of the rural dweller. At the same time, the image of the alienated city at the level of subjective residential classification is not borne out by the data. Perceived social exclusion is lower for urban dwellers and subjective social importance is higher. At the same time, perceived social exclusion is higher and subjective social importance is lower for those living in rural areas.

**Figure 1**  
Neighbourhood characteristics and subjective and objective place of residence classifications (average of each value)



As Figure 1 shows, there is a significant relationship between both the positive image of the countryside and the objective and subjective classification of rural residence, while the negative image of the city does not appear and is not associated with any of the classifications of the settlements. Based on the above, it seems that our data show a combination of positive perceptions of the countryside and feelings of exclusion, i.e., feelings of exclusion, disregard, misunderstanding and insecurity, which seem to support a dual perception of the Hungarian countryside.

It should also be stressed that there is no significant difference between objective and subjective residence classification and neighbourhood characteristics as a kind of place perception. Based on the available data, the subjective perception of one's own residence, i.e., the representation of one's own place of residence, does not seem to confirm the classic rural-urban dichotomy, and elements of the rural image are not more strongly associated with the perception of residence as rural than with the



objective settlement categories. To understand how perceptions of place of residence are related to social indicators and, most importantly, what might be the reasons for the perception of place of residence as rural by a proportion of people living in urban ranked settlements, further research is needed, but is beyond the scope of this study.

Perceived social exclusion and importance differ similarly for both objective perceptions of residence and subjective perceptions of residence. The discursive elements of the rural-urban dichotomy cannot be justified by either the objective or the subjective rural-urban difference in residence.

## **Conclusions**

In our study, we investigated whether the hypothesized differences between urban and rural communities, individual relationships and trust can be confirmed by an empirical data survey.

Our analysis suggests that although the rural-urban dichotomy is strongly present in the discourse, it cannot be clearly linked to either the subjective perception of place of residence or to any of the administrative residence categories. On the variable measuring social capital, there is no clear correlation with either the objective rural-urban administrative classification or the subjective rural-urban classification, but individuals' social capital increases with settlement size, which partially contradicts our hypothesis based on the literature presented.

Based on previous research, we also assumed that the discourse of the rural-urban dichotomy can be captured in the importance of community and the characteristics of social capital, and therefore we analysed in detail the dimensions that constitute the main components of social capital. Two important results of this analysis emerged: on the one hand, we found that some of the indicators included in the main component of social capital are higher in cities (e.g., trust index or number of strong ties), while others are higher in rural settlements (e.g., number of weak ties). Some of our results are consistent with the literature's idyllic image of rural areas as the home of communities, while others are contradictory.

Another important finding is that there are no significant differences between urban and rural characteristics in subjective perceptions of place of residence and in administrative rural-urban classification. Residential representation and administrative classification show very similar results for the social integration and residential perception indicators examined. The perception of the rural-urban dichotomy (Tönnies 2004, Wirth 1973) cannot be linked to either subjective or objective residential classification.

The classical discursive elements, such as the image of rural community, are somewhat more pronounced in the case of subjective rural residence classification but are also observed for those living in an administratively rural residence, while the image of an alienated city is not confirmed. These results support our initial

hypothesis that the traditional rural-urban contrast cannot be justified on the basis of residence classification.

An important finding, consistent with the existing literature, is that despite the strong presence of certain image elements, people living in rural areas have higher perceptions of social exclusion and lower perceptions of social utility than people living in urban areas. This is a significant difference for subjective residential classification and for administrative classification.

Our analysis seems to confirm once again the dual character of the Hungarian rural landscape (Csurgó 2007, Kovách 2007, Megyesi 2007). Elements of a positive image of the countryside are present, but only in their details; they are overridden by the social problems and the feeling of social disintegration that are perceived as typical of the countryside.

All in all, then, we see that the thesis of the post-structuralist school is justified. Spatial representation and spatial segregation are complex phenomena that cannot be linked to a single characteristic of a community. Rural-urban differences are captured in the representation of the two types of space and cannot be linked to specific spatial categories. When describing rural-urban differences, the image, the specific socio-economic situation and the everyday practices (Halfacree 2007) are the guiding principles. It is therefore worth exploring the differences through more subtle analyses, for example of the different types of space or countryside (Kovács 2005) and by analysing the relationships between the studied variables.

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