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Ethnicity and Economy. A Research Agenda for Transylvania

Abstract

This study briefly summarizes the major economic, sociological and anthropological theories on the relationship between ethnicity and economics, and examines how they can be applied to the economic situation of multi-ethnic Transylvania, and specifically the minority Hungarians, in its investigation. Following an institutionalist logic and a resource-based approach, two general questions are formulated, along separate paradigmatic trends: 1. How able is Romanian democracy and the development of its economic institutional system to exploit assets stemming from ethnic diversity? 2. What kind of cultural, structural and network resources do minority Hungarians possess, and to what extent and how do they succeed in utilizing them in the economy?

Keywords: ethnic diversity, economic development, ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania

I. POLITICAL ECONOMICS AND INSTITUTIONALIST APPROACH

The social science research of the relationship between ethnicity and economics has begun to make dynamic developments in recent decades. The bulk of political economics analyses deal with the question of whether there is a relationship between ethnic diversity and economic development, and whether the ethnolinguistic variety of people that live and work in a given country, community, or economic work-group, influences economic performance. In the logic of the marginal utility, the question arises as to what are the costs, as well as benefits of ethnic heterogeneity, considering a given group, community or the society as a whole (Alesina–La Ferrara 2005).

The costs stem from the fact that heterogeneity can signify differing lifestyle and consumption preferences. This, in turn, urges the actors more toward self-determination, and the production of private goods. The inclination toward contributing to common goods and collective action is significantly less. As a result, the quality of public institutions and public services (education, health care, justice, etc.) is lower, as is the legal control of transactions. This merely reinforces the fact that, instead of cooperative behavior, the pursuit of opportunism, rent-seeking and free-rider strategies prevail (Easterly–Levine 1997), which increases the transaction costs of economic control, and holds back economic development.

Ethnic diversity, however, can also have a positive effect on economic performance. On the production side, diversity of competencies and abilities, as well as confronting difference, usually brings forth creativity (Putnam 2007), and has a positive effect on innovation, and via mutual learning, on its rapid diffusion. At the level of workgroups, this implies the recombination of resources stemming from continuous knowledge generation, which increases the ability of the companies to adapt and compete. Beyond the production function, but still an impor-

tant source of returns, is the fact that in multi-ethnic locations, as a result of innovative strategies, products and services containing greater added value and thus more attractive to consumers, become accessible. This same positive effect can prevail in the development of public goods and public services as well, through which the amenity value of cities and regions increase (Ottaviano–Peri 2006).

In the logic of political economics, ethnic diversity can thus benefit the economy when the utility stemming from increased productivity outweighs the costs of the integration of diversity (Alesina–La Ferrara 2005). The following institutional conditions help ensure that the result of this trade-off is positive:

- the institutional control of economic transactions is efficient, as well as the enforcement of cooperation and the necessary collective action for the development of public goods; well-functioning bureaucracies are enforcing law and order, so that contractual non-compliance and the expropriation of public goods rarely takes place (e.g., via corruption: Knack and Keefer 1997). Thus, the presence of “good” institutions significantly mitigates the negative effects of ethnic diversity or it can even completely eliminate them. Contrastingly: “bad” institutions, alongside high ethnic diversity, can further spoil chances for economic growth and increase the risks of social conflict (Easterly 2001).

- efficient market coordination: resource allocation and economic transactions take place in a market whose operation is transparent, there are no major turbulences favoring opportunism, nor significant information asymmetries which can bring certain players an unfair competitive advantage.

- the service and creative industries are more developed: utility stemming from a diversity of competencies is more significant in complex societies (Alesina–La Ferrara 2005), and diversity principally increases productivity in the case of knowledge workers.

Along these dimensions, there is great variance among individual countries, regions and communities. Thus, the economic effects of ethnic diversity also vary greatly.

In (particularly Sub-Saharan) African countries, the majority of transactions are settled outside the formal market, the legitimate institutional control of the economy is characteristically small, and creative industries are almost absent. Ethnic diversity, in such an environment, rather aggravates economic development: along ethnic fault lines, collaborative tendencies and social capital are low, and no consensus is reached regarding the development of public goods. This could significantly slow down or even stop the development of the education system, communal infrastructure, financial system etc.; political instability and social conflicts could become more common (Easterly–Levine 1997). Certain assessments even go as far as quantification. According to Collier and Gunning (1997), the ethnolinguistic fractionalization accounts for more than a third of Africa’s growth shortfall. Using the same index, Alesina and La Ferrara estimated that, going from perfect homogeneity to maximum heterogeneity would reduce a country’s growth rate by 2 percentage points (2005:9).

These analyses, however, also have their fair share of critics, who resent the fact that behind these studies is implicitly present the idea of unidirectional economic development, from the “traditional” to the “modern” (Jerven 2011), and the conviction that African countries must take the same steps to economic recovery, regardless of local endowments and conditions (Austin 2008). According to them, the development of economies must not exclusively be mea-

sured by the presence/absence, or efficient operation, of the aforementioned institutions (private property, free market, legal control, etc.), but also by those particular production practices which are formed in the relationship between individuals and their environments, always according to site-specific resources. Due to the diversity of resource supply, varying population density, and differing institutional legacy of colonial intervention, etc., it is impossible to isolate the universal determinants of development. Thus, estimations regarding the role of ethnic diversity are not reliable.

A critique with a similar, evolutionist approach is also formulated by Grabher and Stark (1997) regarding Central-Eastern European societies, where according to them, actors in the post-socialist setting – “born of necessity” and along a certain type of institutional path dependency – “are restructuring by redefining and recombining resources” (p. 745). Thus they succeed to build innovative, recombinant organizational forms, whose long-term adaptability can surpass that of those which are created via external pressure, in the wake of privatization and marketization.

In spite of the aforementioned divergences, there is a convincing consensus that compared to the African countries, more developed democracies and economies are rather able to productively “handle” ethnic diversity, and reduce or even nullify its negative effects (Collier 2000). Or, as Page (2008: 14) put it simply: “At the country level, we find that in advanced economies, ethnic diversity proves beneficial. In poorer countries, it causes problems.” Studies carried out in the United States of America, for example, demonstrated that in the long run multicultural diversity has powerful economic advantages (Putnam 2007) and its successful exploitation depends on the capacity to create new institutional forms of social solidarity which could dampen the short-term negative effects caused by it (low trust, social isolation etc.). In this respect, however, conditions have worsened in the last decades, the increasing income inequalities grew along with class gaps in socioeconomic mobility (Putnam 2015), which is a bad precursor for the prospects of economic growth in the future.

Research about major cities in the US confirmed the positive relationship between multiculturalism and economic prosperity: in cities where cultural diversity is greater, salaries and rents are higher. Diversity thus positively affects both production and consumption alike. As there is an increasing demand for varied, innovative services (e.g., in gastronomy, music, etc.) ethnic diversity can also generate a kind of positive amenity effect. As a result, these cities generally become attractive migration destinations. Diversity thus has a positive effect on the presence and productivity of businesses (Saxenian 1999), and via localized external effects, on consumer satisfaction as well. These effects are stronger among second- and third-generation immigrants, which means that a certain level of communal integration is necessary for them to unfold (Ottaviano–Peri 2006, Putnam 2007). These studies conducted in the United States were repeated in large Western European cities possessing similar diversity, and they arrived at similar results (Bellini et al. 2013). In parallel with these findings, however, there’s a constant concern about social problems caused by growing inequalities, increasing ethnic polarization and residential segregation (Musterd 1998, Marcuse–Kempen 2000, Brenner et al. 2011), which, in the long run could jeopardize economic development as well.

Studies carried out at the level of workplaces show that the relation between diversity and performance is highly dependent on the organizational context in which the work takes place

(Kochan et al. 2003). For example racial diversity may enhance performance only if organizations foster an environment that promotes learning from diversity, and group leaders build on team members' creativity and information (p. 7, 17). De Vaan et al. (2011) in their study about the video game industry conclude that team performance is higher only if stylistic diversity¹ is accompanied by high social cohesion, these teams "are better able to harmonize the noisy cacophony of an (otherwise) excessive plurality of voices, thereby exploiting the potential beneficial effects of cognitive diversity" (p. 1). Unequivocal evidence was found, however, in some very interesting fresh research that revealed that ethnic diversity contributes to a more efficient functioning of financial markets. It turned out that traders in ethnically heterogeneous markets show less confidence and scrutinize other's decisions more often and thus are less likely to accept prices that deviate from true values, preventing the occurrence of price bubbles and devastating market failures. (Levine et al. 2014)

Beyond the scholarly efforts presented above, the European research tradition on diversity displays numerous particularities as well. One of the reasons for this is that the European Union is a multilingual entity and its rhetoric regards ethnic and cultural diversity as a resource to be conserved (Gazzola 2006), similar to biodiversity (for this parallel, see Maffi 1999, Skutnabb-Kangas 2003). Hence, to protect the rights of ethnic and linguistic minorities, numerous measures and non-statutory policy proposals are in effect. However, due to the continuous and recently increasing flux of immigrants, it becomes more difficult and costly to enforce them, and societal support for them varies as well. In this context, researchers search for a sensible compromise, an optimal trade-off between the utility stemming from the free flow of labor, and the costs of creating multi-lingual inclusion and social cohesion (Grin-Marác–Pokorn–Kraus 2014).

Another characteristic of this research tradition is that there is a greater concern for the socially constructed nature of ethnicity. Accordingly, instead of the ethnic variable, they rather prefer to operate with more objectively measurable indicators, like the mother tongue of the subject, language use, language diversity etc. Thus, the constructivists' worry about the reification of ethnicity and "groupism" in ethnic research (Brubaker 2004, 2008), is at least partially, avoided. On the other hand, the nature of the relationship between language and ethnicity is left unclear, and it remains a subject of debate if in particular research contexts the dominant and systematic use of categories such as "linguistic" or "ethnolinguistic groups" instead of the more potentially conflict loaded "ethnic" concept, should be considered a euphemism or not.

Certain representatives of a strongly interdisciplinary approach known as the economics of language consider that multilingualism, by itself, generates value and can have a positive effect on economic development. For instance, according to Grin, Sfreddo and Vaillancourt (2010), about 10 percent of Switzerland's GDP is due to linguistic diversity. Thus, the 0,5 percent that is spent on children's multilingual education appears to be a rather good investment (Grin–Vaillancourt 1997), even if the development of multilingual communication in institutions may incur further costs.

1 In their conceptualization of stylistic diversity, the ethnic or racial heterogeneity was not included since the majority of the participants in the field was young white male.

Econometric evaluations similar to those in Switzerland, however, are not too common. The reason for this is not just that – due to continuous immigration and growing linguistic diversity – there is no sufficient empirical data, but also that the local institutional conditions which play a role in mediating the relationship between diversity and economic development are extremely varied, and are themselves constantly transforming. Thus, the cost implications of multilingualism can vary greatly.

Because of this, another group of economics of language experts is rather skeptical about the economic rationality of multilingualism, and instead considers the use of a common language (*lingua franca*) in official communication to be a better compromise, even if this is clearly a surplus expenditure and economic liability for those who need to acquire it (Van Parijs 2002). Namely, if we regard the common language as a public asset (Taylor 2014), those whose mother tongue is the dominant language unfairly end up in an advantageous situation (and become “free-riders”), because (Grin 2004: 197-199):

- They save on the costs of learning the common language. In total, thousands of hours of study, education and language exposure is required to attain near-native knowledge of a language, which is accompanied by significant expenses, only partially covered by public funds.

- They don't have to reckon with the opportunity costs of learning the common language either. Instead of learning the common language, they can dedicate their time to other productive activities, recreation, etc. The same applies also to those who assist in learning the language.

- They can save on communication costs. These costs are present in any interaction where people with different mother tongues come into contact, since the message must be translated into the dominant language. Thus, in formal communication, often a concrete payment must also be paid.

- They are at a legitimacy and rhetorical advantage. Those who speak the common language at a native level have an advantage in every argumentation and bargaining. This tendency will most likely become stronger as the common language becomes dominant, while the status of the local/minority languages decrease.

In other terms, if minority language speakers have to learn the dominant language to have an equal access to resources, the majority causes a negative externality for the minority (Wickström 2007). Insufficient knowledge of the common language generally results in worse labor market opportunities. This, in turn, could lead to income disadvantages.

These inequalities not only turn up in countries with linguistic minorities, but are also valid for supranational entities (e.g., the European Union) where a group of experts push for the use of a *lingua franca*, characteristically the English. To even up the odds – in the name of fairness – they propose compensation solutions in multiple areas: e.g., putting the linguistic minorities in a free-rider position in other areas, partially taking on the educational costs of learning the common language, preferential access to publications issued in the dominant language, etc. (see. Van Parijs 2002).

Another important additional asset of the economics of language analyses is that they make us see the relationship between diversity and economics not only from the point of view of the entire society, but also from the perspective of minority/majority. Their results can thus fruitfully be utilized in areas of research belonging to other fields of science as well, which are specifically focused on the economic practices and strategies of ethnic minorities.

2. RESOURCE-BASED APPROACH

The theories outlined above argue that the positive or negative outcome of the relationship between ethnic diversity and economic development is fundamentally determined by the development of democratic institutions. However, there can also be significant differences within the same society. Cultural characteristics and social organizational patterns of individual minorities in the same region can lead to varying economic strategies and outcomes.

In the United States, especially in the 1990s, the “new economic sociology” paradigm was enjoying a great popularity since it started to analyze the entrepreneurial activity and economic performance of immigrant minorities from the perspective of social networks. (Aldrich–Waldinger 1990, Granovetter 1995, Portes–Sensenbrenner 1999, Light–Gold 2000). These analyses sought the answer to why certain immigrant groups thrive more economically, while others less so. Since they typically arrive without assets and are received by similar conditions, the presumption that their varying achievements are fundamentally explained not by economic, but social factors, is justified. Researchers have thus been afforded a good opportunity to chart and examine those minority community resources which could represent a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other immigrant minorities, as well as the already integrated majority. According to Mark Granovetter (1995) – one of the most important representatives of this paradigm – these advantages are the following:

– cultural advantages: As an ethnic group, certain economic activities can fall under varying moral judgment. Some can be prohibited by social norms relevant to the majorities, but not to the minorities, which creates an unadulterated market opportunity for the latter. Another factor at least as significant is that for certain ethnic groups, the cultural and cognitive embeddedness and the social formation of entrepreneurial habits is more comprehensive. Karády (1989), for instance, referring to the embourgeoisement of Eastern European Jews, writes that their relationship to writing, the presence of reading and text interpretation in their daily religious practice conveyed an advantage in their educational, and later in their commercial careers.)

– networking advantages: minority members of the society could be well positioned for inter-cultural (economic) relationship building. They can more easily occupy bridging or broker positions, which has numerous advantages: they can cultivate more, and more varied economically useful “weak ties” and relations, through which they can acquire valuable market information and opportunities (Granovetter 1972); they can provide mediator-integrative functions; they can call upon resources from both sides (Burt 1992); they can help stimulate commerce between ethnically homogeneous regions and countries (Alesina–La Ferrara 2005). These network resources – which other authors also call “bridging” social capital (Putnam 2000) – from the perspective of economic development, also contribute to the creation of one of the most important public assets, generalized trust. And where there is trust, trade and work management will be substantially cheaper, less will need to be spent on discipline, monitoring, enforcement, contractual compliance, sanctioning economic deviances, etc. Transactions costs spared in this manner can thus be turned to more productive investments, innovation, and welfare programs. These relationships are thus extremely important from the perspective of further economic development and integration. Not to mention that it is simply better, more pleasant, and safer to live in a society integrated by trust and consensus.

– advantages stemming from solidarity: This alludes to the fact that more densely interwoven relationships, common traditions, customs, culture (or merely the collective experience of constraints imposed by the majority), contribute to a greater social cohesion, and to a more powerful “*bounded solidarity*” among the members of the minority (Portes 1998). The resource also known as “bonding” social capital (Putnam 2000) creates “enforceable trust”, because of which, within the group, the institutional operation of the economy becomes cheaper, the management of public assets can be more efficient and the chances of success of community projects can be higher. Excessively strong bounded solidarity, however, can have negative consequences as well, since there stands the danger that the relationships will become too inward, and outward-reaching “bridge ties” will not form, which can lead to the enclavization of the minority and its economic fall-back. Moreover, if the interaction density between ethnic groups is chronically low, it can also have a serious disintegration effect on the society as a whole, and can contribute to the growth of prejudice and racism, which can create a legitimizing foundation for more serious political conflicts, open ethnic aggression, or even civil war.

– advantages arising from marginal situations: In some cases the minority is not bound to satisfy local traditional obligations. It can employ new, more competitive commercial techniques without risking the danger of (further) ostracism and sanctioning (since it is already a marginal actor).

Granovetter’s opinion (1995) concerning the use of these resources is that for these minority communities neither excessively great, nor excessively low levels of internal solidarity is advantageous for their economic development. To be successful, they must find the fine balance of how to connect to, as well as disconnect from, the majority’s network structures and normative system (“a balance between coupling and decoupling”).

Granovetter’s theory on the social embeddedness of economic processes contains numerous elements that also appear in economic anthropology analyses. (For economic anthropology literature in this domain, see: Eriksen 2005, Sárkány 2010, Letenyei 2002).

Trends built upon Polányi’s (1994) substantive economics, for instance, emphasize the diversity of forms of economic coordination in societies directed by dominantly self-regulating markets as well, where ethnicity can be one of the relevant dimensions of economic activities and the social embeddedness of institutions. Here, such research questions arise as: how does ethnicity influence these coordination practices, from systems of reciprocity (e.g., participation in voluntary cooperative work, and rotating credit associations) through hierarchies (e.g., division of labor within companies) to more formalized market transactions (e.g., business collaboration networks). Their common feature is that they are built upon the structure, architecture and resource-nature of the relationships, and in this – similar to Granovetter’s new economic sociology – ethnicity is treated as a kind of social capital.

In economic anthropology case studies, this “structuralist” approach is generally accompanied by arguments which trace back the varying economic performance of ethnicities to their specific collective values and norms. According to this, the economic adaptability of ethnic groups is by and large determined by the type of collective mental and habitual resources the members of the group have; what they think about work, rules of management, entrepreneurship, money, risk taking, success, etc. (Kuczai 2011, Schwartz 2011). Analyses built on Webe-

rian traditions explain economic prosperity with the rationalization of organization culture, a propensity toward saving, personal ambition, diligence, work-related technical know-how, etc.

In the social science approaches presented earlier – particularly those from the study of economics – ethnic groups are usually regarded as “objective categories”, in which individuals can easily be classified through their exogenous characteristics. Contemporary economic anthropology approaches, however, often question the objectively palpable reality of ethnicity, and regard it as a socially constructed, “imagined” variable entity, which is formed in competition over economic resources, power, or various social endowments (Brubaker 2004, Kovács 2004).

In this interpretation, it is not just ethnicity that can be the organizing principle for economic actions and practices. Economic relations and consumption patterns can also determine aspects of ethnic classification and how strong the ethnic boundaries are, and where they move (Stewart 1994, Berta 2010). This approach has opened up productive perspectives on the further research of the relationship between ethnicity and economics.

Relevant here, for example, are analyses which deal with the marketing of cultural products that can be tied to ethnicity. In the expanding and globalizing tourism industry, the demand for variety and the exotic is ever increasing, which motivates developers of industry to make ethnic customs, architectural and material culture accessible to visitors in a digestible, hygienic form. This places diversity in a different economic policy perspective. Many state/regional authorities responsible for the national/regional image have realized that ethnic minorities – whom they perhaps earlier regarded as primitive, or treated as an adversary during modern nation building, or wanted to free themselves of, or attempted to assimilate – can contribute to the development of the economy via tourism (Leong 1997). In other situations, members of the ethnic group themselves attempt to showcase those elements of their cultural and ethnic heritage which best correspond to the wants and consumer tastes of the visitors. Leftist anthropological critique sees in this the commodification of ethnicity, in which the instrumental rationality of the tourism marketing technocrat prevails, and the care for diversity as a public asset and the effective revitalization of cultural heritage remains secondary. This new situation thus changes little in the asymmetry of the majority-minority relations (cf. Comaroff–Comaroff 2009).

3. INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT, ETHNIC RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG HUNGARIANS IN TRANSYLVANIA

The research trends and conceptual frameworks presented above can also be productively used in the examination of multi-ethnic Transylvania, and specifically the economic conditions of minority Hungarians. Regarding this, along the two outlined paradigmatic trends, two broader questions can be formulated: 1. How able is Romania’s democratic development and economic institutional system to exploit the advantages stemming from diversity? 2. What kind of structural, networking and cultural resources do minority Hungarians in Romania possess, and to what extent and how do they succeed in utilizing these in the economy?

For the time being, few economic and sociological surveys have been conducted that would examine the effect of diversity on the economic development of individual regions. An article dealing with the regional differences of entrepreneurial activity has demonstrated that the ethnic composition of villages – in a model which includes the whole Transylvania – has no effect on the variance of the number of businesses per 1000 people. (Csata 2012). At the level of counties and smaller regions, however, in some places there are differences that are connected to the varying ethnic composition of the villages (for example, in Mureş/Maros county). A further analysis (Csata et al. 2011) shows that in smaller towns in Szeklerland, where the Hungarians are in majority, there is a greater entrepreneurial activity. However, due to the poor explanatory power of regression models, as well as the significant territorial disparity in the density of businesses, the conclusion is that locality in Transylvania still plays a significant role in the formation of social conditions for entrepreneurship. It is for this reason that comparative anthropological case studies examining the connections between ethnicity and economics at the level of communities or small ethnographic regions are essential.

In a comprehensive synthesis study on the matter, Töhötöm Á. Szabó (2010) arrives at the conclusion that “in the case of Transylvanian villages today we can talk about ethnic determination of the economy only with reservations” and that “belonging to an ethnic community could be an organizing element of the economy, but ... not solely, not primarily and not exclusively” (p. 7). He gives illustrative examples of traditional occupations (sheep herding, ox raising, wine production, etc.) which at first glance appear to be ethnic. Yet if we examine them more thoroughly, it turns out that in practice they are not. The same applies to certain forms of work organization and community management practices (voluntary cooperative work, forestry commons), which could get an ethnic reading. But this, first and foremost, functions as one of the tools of symbolic demarcation, in fact, it legitimizes asymmetric power differences and resource access differentials. These strategies are typical for the relations between majorities and the Roma (cf. Biró–Oláh 2002, Fosztó 2003, Oláh 1996, Péter 2005, Szabó 2002, Toma 2009), but they arise in relationships between Hungarians and Romanians as well (see e.g., Peti Lehel [2006] and Töhötöm Á. Szabó’s [2013] writings on the transformation of wine chivalries along the Târnavă/Küküllő river in Transylvania.)

Tamás Kiss (2004) arrives at a similar observation in his analysis of narratives appearing in the life histories of Hungarian entrepreneurs in Transylvania. He highlights that ethnicity is not a central element to narratives on entrepreneurship and when it does show up, it commonly alludes to the fact that it was utilized as symbolic capital in resource acquisition.

Further research is necessary on the economic situation of Transylvanian Hungarians as well. What we do know from the descriptive analyses on social stratification and social structure is that Hungarians are under-represented in better paying (technical, commercial) occupations (Veres 2013) and that Hungarian university graduates get hired in the competitive private sector at a lower rate (Csata–Dániel–Pop 2010). This has a decided impact on the fact that among Hungarians salaries are lower and income inequalities are smaller as well (both the proportion of the economic elite and the poor are behind the national average, see Kiss 2010). It is also important to find out how much of these differences can be explained by the dissimilar economic structure of different regions and how much by the variations of individual competencies, and how much of a role the opportunity disadvantage that economics of language ex-

perts speak of plays in this. Relating to the latter, Horváth (2008) found that among Hungarians there is a significant relationship between the frequency of use of the Romanian language and wealth-income status (asset endowment of the household, size of income), which is a sign that knowledge of the majority language is an important tool for mobility among Transylvanian Hungarians.

Particularly in light of the new economic sociology approach and conceptual toolbar, the examination of how social resources attributed to the minority status of Transylvanian Hungarians are utilized in the economy is a very exciting and important research area. In Transylvania there is an increasing number of entrepreneurial initiative underway, which, appealing to the ethnic solidarity of Hungarians, attempt to gain a competitive market advantage (Gáll 2011). The popularity of local products specifically positioned as Hungarian brands in Szeklerland, for example, shows that consumer ethnocentrism is not only present at the level of dispositions, but rather increasingly determines the purchasing decisions of locals as well. Furthermore, on the basis of recent survey results (Csata–Deák 2010), we have good reasons to presume that similar practices turn up in other markets as well (labor market, rental market, etc.)

In these examinations it also comes to light that ethnocentric market preferences are most characteristic of those who live in the Hungarian countryside in an “ethnic shell”, and who are more distrustful of Romanians. It does not depend, however, on the gender, age, educational level or wealth status of the consumers. A later examination – which included Hungarian students from Cluj Napoca/Kolozsvár – also demonstrated that a lack of Romanian language competency also significantly influences whether consumers make decisions on an ethnic basis (Csata 2014). These results show that Transylvanian Hungarians (and particularly those from Szeklerland) enjoy advantages stemming from “bounded solidarity” and it seems that the “bonding” type of social capital has an increasing economic utility. Moreover, from an anthropological perspective, it is particularly interesting that viable Hungarian companies, brands, products and economic cooperation practices also contribute to the further reinforcement of ethnic-regional identity.

However, the exploitation of positional advantages is substantially lower: Transylvanian Hungarians (particularly those who live in the countryside) are relationship poor with the majority. Thus, the validation of their network-wise advantageous, potential bridge roles lags behind what is possible. Another survey (Csata et al. 2011) demonstrated that among Hungarian SME owners in Transylvania the tendency to cooperate is generally lower, which is also accompanied by a higher level of mistrust of Romanians. So it seems that there is much more unexploited economic potential to be realized through the “coupling” to the majority society. In this respect, especially evocative are the studies on Szeklerland tourism, in which it is explicitly expressed that besides the “ethnic tourism” coming from Hungary, a larger opening toward the Romanian clients could dramatically improve the state of the industry (Horváth 2010, Kiss–Barna–Deák 2010, Csata–Pásztor 2015).

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