

Changes in knowledge about law in Hungary in the past half century*

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In 1965 Kálmán Kulcsár, the leading researcher of legal sociology carried out the first and for long the last questionnaire survey that aimed to assess the legal knowledge of the Hungarian population. In an omnibus survey representative for the adult Hungarian population we used several questions identical with those of Kulcsár's in order to answer some of his research question. These questions are for instance: how the knowledge of law (criminal, constitutional, procedural) differs; or how the knowledge level of various social groups (based on gender, age, social status etc.) varies; or how media consumption, civil activity or previous interaction with legal institutions (e.g court) influences knowledge level. Obviously, we had an additional major question: how all these have changed in the past almost half century? Our main finding is that the knowledge about law has certainly increased during this period; moreover, the main impetus behind this was the increase of the general educational level in the country.

1. Introductory remarks

The empirical study of the people's legal knowledge is among the basic problems of socio-legal studies. Needless to say, a sociological approach to law makes it possible to get a more nuanced picture of the everyday functioning of law. Legal scholarship focusing on either a general theory of legal phenomena (see, e.g. Kelsen, 1989) or a moral justification of the authority of law (see, e.g. Raz, 2009) has simply been ignorant of the social embeddedness of law and the consequences flowing therefrom. That is, a social understanding of law with a strong focus on empirical research has its proper and justified place on the map of legal studies, since it is able to shed light on the social dimensions of law.

Empirical studies of people's knowledge and opinions about law (KOL) had begun in Western Europe in the first half of the 1950s.¹ Two primary research interests were united in KOL studies; a part of the research focused on the empirical study of people's legal knowledge, while another part was devoted to an in-depth analysis of people's attitudes toward law. These two streams of studies could have never been separated completely, therefore they have been intertwined in most of the literature (see, e.g. Kulcsár, 1967b; Williams-Hay, 1972; N. N. et al., 1973; Givelber et al., 1984; Kim, 1999; Peay et al., 2001). Critical analysis of the knowledge of provisions of criminal law and peoples' attitudes toward criminality has always been an integral part of this field; however, discussion on possible attitudes toward punishment, criminality and the related moral questions has also been an integral part of criminology (e.g., Walker and Argyle, 1964). In sum, empirical KOL studies as a part of sociology of the law have a more than half-century long tradition in Western European and North American socio-legal scholarship that should be taken into account when designing the framework of an empirical research project on the legal knowledge of the Hungarian population.

Furthermore, it should also be mentioned that this tradition of empirical research has gradually been replaced by a more theoretical and conceptual understanding of legal knowledge in the last fifteen years. Legal knowledge as a general topic for scholarly

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¹ Interestingly Scandinavian scholars had played a prominent role in this development, while the English and American socio-legal scholarship joined this stream of research in the 1960s/70s. Kutchinsky provides a comprehensive summary of the efforts and insights until the 1970s (Kutchinsky, 1973). For a general discussion of KOL studies, see Podgórecki et al. (1973).

discussion still remained an issue within socio-legal studies; however its anthropological, critical and cultural analysis has been in the forefront in the 2000s (see e.g., White, 2002; Riles, 2007; Zumbansen, 2009). That is, current studies on legal knowledge have considerably broadened the scope of scholarly discussion, but at the same time, this transformation has led to weakening of the interest in empirical research.

1.1. The position of our research within the tradition of KOL studies

Although the current discussion of legal knowledge has a strong philosophical and postmodern nature, our research subscribes to the earlier, predominantly empirical tradition of KOL studies. This choice is justified by the fact that this way of research has a strong methodological basis composed of various methods of empirical research (e.g. correlation and regression models); furthermore, these studies have already been confronted with various problems when studying mass knowledge and attitudes. Thus, we can fruitfully rely on these experiences in the design of our research methodology and framework.

A prominent feature of this empirical trend within KOL research, as was highlighted above, is the overlapping nature of the research on both the peoples' knowledge of law and attitudes toward law. Almost all the studies referenced above are built around a general twofold scheme. They first introduce their survey methods, as well as the empirical data on legal knowledge, and then they start to discuss the relevance of this data in understanding certain attitudes toward law (see e.g., Williams-Hay, 1972; Givelber et al., 1984; Kim, 1999). Therefore, findings and insights concerning legal knowledge and attitudes toward law are mixed in most of the cases.

In contrast to this approach, we tried to focus specifically on people's legal knowledge as much as it is possible in both our empirical survey and the subsequent discussion. Therefore, the reader will find a detailed statistical analysis of empirical data with special regard to those factors which had a considerable impact on the evolution of legal knowledge in the longer run (a half-century). In other words, people's attitudes toward law will not at all be discussed in this article.

The majority of earlier research clearly focused on a specific field of law;² that is, it was not meant to represent a comprehensive survey of people's general legal knowledge. Only a few surveys were intended to research people's general knowledge at the country level (Kulcsár, 1967b; Williams-Hay, 1972; N. N. et al., 1973). These countrywide and general surveys encountered many problems, ranging from proper sampling to the correct formulation of survey questions. Furthermore, they also require much more funding as compared to "field- or provision-specific" empirical research projects.³ Our study is also a part of these

² A change in the approach of criminal law of suicide (Walker and Argyle, 1964); the impact of a seminal California Supreme Court decision on the work of psychotherapists (Givelber et al., 1984); the knowledge of certain labour law provisions on employee discharge (Kim, 1999); or the knowledge of mental health law by professionals (Peay et al., 2001). Kutchinsky (1973) collected further examples of the knowledge of agricultural workers about certain relevant legal rules or the impact of the law on the status of household employees on the everyday work of household employees in Norway.

³ Furthermore, it should also be mentioned that legal knowledge as a scholarly concept faced heavy criticism in the 1980s. This criticism was summarized by András Sajó (1986: 274–278), who argued that what we can acquire through empirical research are some conceptual constructions that are able to represent the social consciousness in a general manner (Sajó, 1986: 278) but not a clear-cut description of the reality. Even though Sajó's criticism is well-founded, we still see some relevance of statistical data to legal knowledge. First of all, one has to admit that Kulcsár's questions have no pure legal nature, but they have a situative and societal character too, e. g.: "Is a hand-written death-will without the signature of witnesses valid?" Furthermore, on the one hand, statistical data is capable of providing relevant information on the general attitudes of people toward law; on the other, it also has relevance when discussing the effect of political transition on the Hungarian society in its entirety.

countrywide of empirical research efforts, since it was realised within the framework of a research program dedicated to the study of the general legal culture of the Hungarian population. In sum, it does not focus on a specific field of law, but it intends to provide a general picture on people's legal knowledge as such.

1.2. The survey of Kálmán Kulcsár in 1965

Kálmán Kulcsár, a path-breaker in Hungarian legal sociology, conducted a countrywide survey, which was aimed at measuring knowledge about law among the Hungarian population. So far, this survey has been the sole attempt to conduct such an empirical research that addressed the society as whole.⁴ During the course of the survey, Kulcsár asked 80 specific questions about various legal rules and then he divided the answers into the categories of right or wrong.⁵ The questions were composed in a way that they contained 16-19 relevant questions from the three main legal areas.⁶ Moreover, six questions referred to the area of procedural law. As Kulcsár (1967a, 9) indicated, most questions referred to certain provisions of the so-called Socialist Law. These were introduced by the Socialist government following the regime change in 1949. That is, they examined the knowledge about rules that could be considered new during that period. One should admit that this was an intelligent choice methodologically – assuring the validity of the research – since, in reality, we rarely know and follow legal measures due to their specific legal nature, but we do so in accordance with their consistency with moral norms.⁷ The examination of the newly introduced provisions of Socialist Law one or two decades later offered fertile ground to eliminate the possible distortion stemming from the interference of morality and law.

In addition to questions concerning knowledge about law, Kulcsár included several possible explanatory variables in the survey. These were: gender, age, social strata (with three values based on the Marxist categorisation: agricultural physical, physical and intellectual workers)⁸, level of education, residence type (village, town, or Budapest), media consumption, political-organisational activity, and the three questions about interaction with the legal system (e.g. have you ever read a law).

Kulcsár published the results of his research in 1967 in a bulletin of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Kulcsár, 1967a), and we used this as the starting point of our research.

2. Methodology: difficulties in repeating the 1965 survey

Reconstructing the 1965 survey raised several issues, which can be divided into three groups: (i) the reliability of our indicators, (ii) the method of sampling in 1965, (iii) the lack of indicators for significance in the 1965 research.

⁴ In the following decades, András Sajó – the other important scholar of sociology of the law in Hungary – carried out various empirical surveys; however, these did not attempt at providing a comprehensive study but were only focused on specific strata of the society. For example a study on physical workers' legal culture (Sajó-Székelyi-Major, 1977)

⁵ For example: From what age is someone of legal capacity? The right answer was 18; everything else was coded as to be a wrong answer and considered as lack of knowledge about this piece of law.

⁶ These are: (i) state law – state administrative law (with current terminology: constitutional law-administrative law); (ii) criminal law; and (iii) civil law, including family law collective farm law, which is not so relevant today.

⁷ E.g. do not kill and do not steal. For accounts of correlations between following the law and the different norm systems see Sajó (1986: 156–172).

⁸ Although this terminology is certainly outdated nowadays in order to assure the comparability of the data coming from both 1965 and 2013 we kept Kulcsár's original categorization and we transformed the more detailed 2013 data into this simplified categorization. The intellectual workers are a narrower category than white-collar workers, as it includes only workers with university degree.

2.1. Reconstructing the questions

The 1965 survey could not be repeated in its entirety. We had to reduce the number of questions. The reason behind this is twofold. First, it would have been unreasonable to ask most of Kulcsár's questions due to their content, because they referred to particular socialist legal institutions (e.g., having foreign currency as crime, management rights on collective farms). The other reason was our restricted budget. We tried to choose those questions from Kulcsár's survey which we considered to be the most proper ones for a comparison that had to be carried out 50 years apart and within differing cultural contexts (1965: Socialism, 2013: a post-transitory period). This also meant that the reliability of the indicators generated from less data is considerably lower. In sum, we argue that the timely comparison lead to methodologically well-founded and reasonable, understandable results, considering the half-century which passed between the realisation of the two surveys.

2.2. Sampling

It seems that in 1965, there was no method available to conduct a countrywide, representative survey. There was not even an institution established that was capable of such research. Thus, the researchers recruited interviewers from among the students of the three Hungarian law faculties (Budapest, Pécs, Szeged). On the one hand, this might mean that the way of questioning was not really professional; however, as most questions were simply asking about knowledge (rather than values, attitudes, etc.) this did not have a negative impact on the reliability of the answers.⁹ Along with the three above-mentioned cities, only four other nearby villages were selected into the 1217-person sample. All of this means that the sample was rather misrepresented according to the (place of) residency type. The category of small and medium towns was completely absent from the data collection; we also found two big cities in the town category. Almost half of the entire sample was selected from Budapest, while the smaller settlements, represented by four villages, comprise only one-fifth of the whole sample. The misrepresented nature of the sample clearly and largely affects the indices of knowledge about law calculated by Kulcsár: they reflect a higher level of knowledge than was actually. This defect was corrected by a 2013 weighted sample distorted in a way that is comparable to Kulcsár's, as indicated below as well as by model calculations not presented here.

Another restriction in the survey was that only people with a job were included. Given that our survey, like most in these days, applies to the whole adult population, the comparison was also quite problematic in this respect.

These problematic issues were handled by working with two samples for 2013. One is the 'normal', representative sample and the second was a 'distorted' one that was designed to mirror the 1965 sample by omitting certain groups (residents of small towns and old age pensioners) and weighting others according to the proportions in the 1965 sample. This sample was applied in all cases requiring comparison (in most analyses, reported in Tables 1-3), whereas the 'normal' sample was applied when analysing solely 2013 data (e.g. for the regression analysis reviewed in Table 5).

2.3. The reliability of the statistical co-variance

⁹ In connection to some other questions, however, there might have been data collection errors. For instance, the number of people reading daily newspapers, or the positive answers given about the interaction with the legal system seem unrealistically high.

The 1967 publication understandably does not contain any test of significance referring to the relationship among various variables. We could only improve this situation by performing chi-squared tests on the contingency tables published in 1967.

3. The general survey of 2013 on peoples' legal knowledge

In 2013, we had the opportunity to partially repeat the 1965 research. We asked 13 questions, which were basically identical in their wording to the 1965 survey questions, and out of which 10 focused on the subject's knowledge about law and three were about the interaction with the legal system. (These questions appear in Table 1.) We also used the variables provided in the omnibus survey, from which all of Kulcsár's explanatory variables could be reconstructed, although media consumption is measured with a method reflecting on the technological changes since 1965 (e.g. TV, internet.).

Kulcsár created common indicators for some legal areas – state law (constitutional and administrative law nowadays), criminal law, civil law and procedural law – and he created a 'complete knowledge' indicator as well. All of these showed the ratio of right answers to all answers on a 0-1 scale. Similarly, we also created three legal area indicators, although with fewer questions. Our state law indicator consisted of four constitutional law questions and one on public administration law, while our civil law indicator consisted of two and our procedural law indicator had three questions. We did not ask questions about criminal law. In the 'complete knowledge about law' indicator, we counted constitutional law questions with a 0,5 weight because they drastically outnumbered all the others.

The survey was conducted by the well-known Szonda-Ipsos company on a representative sample of 1000 people chosen from the adult population living in Hungary.¹⁰ In this paper, due to limitations on length, we will present the most important data only. The database based on our own data and that of Kulcsár will be published on the website of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Center for Social Sciences.

3.1. The basic data

First, let us look at the answers given to the 13 chosen questions:

Table 1. Basic data: Ratio of positive/right answers

Question	1965	2013¹¹
<i>Getting in connection with the legal system</i>		
1. Have you ever read a law?	76,7%	43,9%
2. Have you ever asked for legal counselling, help from an attorney, notary?	32,9%	44,0%
3. Have you ever participated in a judicial procedure, a trial?	44,5%	26,4%
<i>Questions on knowledge about law (proportion of right answers)</i>		
1. Does the court accept the excuse that someone has not been familiar with the law?	74,6%	83,6%
2. Can testifying in front of the court be denied?	52,4%	55,9%
3. Is the participation of an attorney compulsory in a judicial trial?	57,4%	59,0%

¹⁰ The survey was conducted within the frame of a so-called omnibus research. In addition to the 13 questions raised by us, we received all the general questions asked by the research company, more than a 100 altogether. We received the data in SPSS file format and we used this software to process them.

¹¹ As indicated above, here and in all other comparative analysis between 1965-2013 data, we review data from the 'distorted' 2013 sample against the 1965 sample.

4. Who or which organisation creates statutes in Hungary?	44,9%	76,0%
5. For how many years do members of parliament get elected?	63,9%	98,1%
6. Who elect(s) the ministers?	36,2%	42,4%
7. Who elect(s) the mayor?	32,3%	87,5%
8. When does someone become of legal age?	86,9%	98,2%
9. Where is the register of birth, marriage and death administered?	90,5%	93,9%
10. Is a hand-written death-will without the signature of witnesses valid?	29,9%	23,2%

Out of the three questions about the interaction with the legal system, the 1965 value was much higher than 2013 for two of them. We do not know the reason behind this; however, several factors not to be discussed here (e.g. actual lawsuit data of the era) suggest that there might have been a data coding error in the background of the survey of 1965.

Regarding our questions related to the knowledge about law, in most of the cases a definite improvement can be observed. This tendency is especially striking in the case of questions on constitutional law. This most likely is the consequence of two decades of democratic functioning. In the 1960s, the population sensed that the substantive decisions were made in the Communist Party offices and not in the elected political bodies. The election was, in fact, only a voting for show. With the transition to a democratic, multi-party system started in 1989 this has fundamentally changed, and the citizens felt this in their everyday lives. This change was clearly reinforced by the advent of political marketing done by the newly established parties in 1990s.

In other areas, the increase in legal knowledge was more modest, but still apparent. There was a clear decrease (22%) in only one respect: “the validity of the will” question.¹² It is somewhat surprising as it goes contrary to the ordinary presumption of how many people knew (and know) that the court does not accept a plea that someone was not familiar with the law. In 1965, Kulcsár also asked if respondents thought that this practice was just. Only one-fifth considered it unfair, and of these, the physical workers marginally outnumbered the intellectuals. There is a high ratio of right answers for the question about legal age; in 2013 basically everyone knew the answer. The place of administering the birth and marriage registers is known by more than nine-tenths of the population and this value further increased over the past half century. This is surprising because Kulcsár and his group expected something different.¹³

Table 2 presents those indicators that serve as constructed indices for legal knowledge. The indicator is constructed in the following way: the number of right answers divided by the total number of questions in the given field of law. The closer this value is to 1,0, the higher the level of knowledge. The purpose of generating these indexes was, on the one hand, to compare our results to the data of Kulcsár, and, on the other hand, to use them as starting points for later analysis.

Table 2. Overview of constructed indicators

Type of the knowledge about law index	1965	2013
State law (Constitutional, public administration)	0,46	0,82
Civil law	0,59	0,62
Procedural law (clearly wrong, see below)	0,78 (?)	0,64

¹² We have formed several hypothetical explanations of this phenomenon; however, we could not test them based on the available information.

¹³ The choices for this question were: at the council, by the priest, both, does not know.

Criminal law	0,59	--
Complete (All questions with constitutional law weighted)	0,55	0,70

It can be confidently stated that knowledge about state law increased considerably, although we have to take into consideration the fact that in our analysis this indicator mainly contains knowledge about constitutional law. In the case of civil law, there has been a modest but evident increase. In the case of procedural law, the alleged knowledge decrease is most probably the consequence of a data collection error, in 1965, detected already by Kulcsár (1967: 18).¹⁴ It is apparent from other data sources (i.e. from the original questions on procedural law) that there has been a substantial increase (larger than in case of civil law) in this field.

To sum up, having analysed the constructed indicators, we can argue that the level of legal knowledge, at least in the case of our measured questions, has clearly increased over the past half century. The growth is outstanding in the case of constitutional questions, which are directly linked to the political system, and moderate in other areas.

3.2. Legal knowledge as a dependent variable – influencing factors

In the paragraphs below, we will review in three points how the factors affecting the knowledge about law ‘functioned’ in 1965 and how they impact knowledge in 2013. Our starting point is again Kulcsár’s analysis, which examined the effect of the following general factor groups:

1. Socio-demographic factors (out of which Kulcsár examined five factors in detail)
2. Factors influencing general public awareness
3. Interaction with the legal system

3.2.1. The effect of socio-demographic factors

Table 3 presents the means of complete knowledge indicators in detail, broken down by socio-demographic data. The F value and the associated significance (hereinafter: p^{15}) value of ANOVA tests¹⁶ carried out on the 2013 data appear in the left column below the name of the independent variable in question.¹⁷ As a general rule, if in 1965 the difference between the group averages was greater than in 2013, then it is likely that the statistical relation (the F value) might also have been stronger.

Table 3. The average scores of the complete knowledge indicators by socio-demographic variable values

Type of distribution	1965	2013
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¹⁴ Kulcsár pointed out that the procedural law index did not function well (e.g. the lower the social status the higher this knowledge index is) and for that reason he completely omitted this index from further analysis. As it can be reconstructed from the aggregated data available, some or all questions regarding knowledge of procedural law were wrongly (in a different direction) coded.

¹⁵ For those who may not be familiar with this methodology, we emphasize that the lower the p-value, the more certain we may be that the found statistical relationships exist in social reality. Typically relationships below $p=0,01$, sometimes $p=0,05$, are accepted in sociology as significant.

¹⁶ ANOVA test (instead of t test) was applied for binary variables as well for the sake of simplicity and in order to the comparability of the five variables.

¹⁷ As the original statistical database is not available for the 1965 survey (only contingency tables with the results were at hand) we could not carry out ANOVA test for results of 1965.

Gender <i>F=0,02</i> <i>p=0,897</i>	Male	0,57	0,70
	Female	0,53	0,70
	<i>Total</i>	0,55	0,70
Age <i>F=5,62</i> <i>p=0,000</i>	18-29	0,57	0,67
	30-39	0,55	0,70
	40-49	0,58	0,72
	50-59	0,56	0,68
	Above 60	0,52	0,72
	<i>Total</i>	0,55	0,70
Social strata <i>F=23,89</i> <i>p=0,000</i>	Intellectual worker	0,61	0,74
	Physical worker	0,53	0,67
	Agricultural physical	0,50	0,66
	<i>Total</i>	0,55	0,70
Level of education * <i>F=13,44</i> <i>p=0,000</i>	Did not go to school	0,36	**
	Elementary school 1-7. Grade	0,47	0,63
	Elementary school	0,58	0,64
	Secondary school without matriculation	0,69	0,67
	Matriculation	0,73	0,71
	Attended university (college) but no graduation	0,73	**
	University (college) degree	0,77	0,75
	<i>Total</i>	0,60	0,70
Place of residence <i>F=2,01</i> <i>p=0,134</i>	Budapest	0,55	0,71
	Town	0,56	0,69
	Village	0,52	0,69
	<i>Total</i>	0,55	0,70

* Data calculated from original questions published in Kulcsár 1967, as no indicators were included in Kulcsár's written analysis.

** No comparable group existed in 2013. No people without any education were included in 2013, and those attending university but who did not graduate were included in the "matriculation" category.

The indicator mean by *gender* showed a clear difference in favour of men in 1965. We find no strong relationship in this regard in 2013 ($p=0,9$). If we look at specific indices (e.g. knowledge about civil law or knowledge about state law),¹⁸ we can come to a similar result in terms of gender. The reason behind this might be the fact that nowadays the level of education among women is the same as that of men or even higher, while in 1965 men were more educated generally.

Regarding *age*, we found a clearly significant correlation with the complete knowledge indicator. Two parallel tendencies can be detected in both 1965 and 2013. On the one hand, middle-aged people had a level of knowledge that was higher than the average. At the same time, while in 1965 young people seemed to be more informed, in the comparable 2013 sample, the older people appear to have a higher level of knowledge. We have detected a similar correlation in the case of specific indices (e.g. knowledge of state law and civil law).

¹⁸ Due to the length limitations these data will not be presented in a table.

The significance was at least ‘one percent’ ($p < 0,01$) or stronger and these specific indices pointed to the same direction in all cases. This phenomenon is particularly strong in the case of the state law category, where older people clearly seemed to be the most informed ($p < 0,001$); interestingly, in 1965 this was the area where this age group was the least informed. This difference may be explained by the fact – reinforced by several surveys not to be treated in depth here – that presently young people neglect politics, whereas older people are especially interested (see e.g. Angelusz and Tardos, 2005).

Social strata categories were highly emphasized in Kulcsár’s analysis – obviously not unrelated to the ideology of the Marxist, class-based socialist state. Kulcsár found exceptionally high differences among the three strata; not surprisingly, the intellectuals (white collar workers) were the most and the agricultural physical workers were the least informed. This statistical relationship appears in our data as well. Out of the five examined variables, this variable shows the highest F value. The data, at the same time, show a moderate decrease in the difference in the level of knowledge among the various social groups. Further analysis shows that this change is due mostly to the fact that knowledge of state laws is currently widespread in all strata of the society, whereas there were large differences exactly in this area in 1965. In the other two areas (civil and procedural law), although the differences radically decreased over the past 50 years, they are still clearly present.

In 2013, *the level of education* shows the second highest F value. We have found a close, significant relationship also with all specific knowledge indicators as well.

Seemingly, differences among education levels (especially if we take out the very small group of people who haven’t finished elementary school¹⁹) significantly decreased. Looking at specific knowledge indicators, in the case of state law and procedural law as well, this decrease in difference is radical. In general, the complete knowledge index shows a close, but perhaps a bit weaker correlation with the level of education in 2013 than in 1965. We detect a substantial increase in the knowledge level and a decrease in differences among educational groups, although this is also primarily due to changes regarding the knowledge of state law.

The variances based on *place of residence* categories were also detectable in 1965. It seems, however, that this difference ‘disappeared’ by 2013. It is surprising that the residents of villages (generally older and with lower levels of education) perform similarly to those of towns. The ANOVA analysis indicates no significant relationship between this independent variable and the complete knowledge indicator. However, we find a significant relationship between place of residence and all *specific* knowledge indicators ($p < 0,001$ for state law and civil law indicators and is 0,006 for procedural law indicator). This finding may be explained by presuming that the impact of various indicators neutralize one another (e.g. villagers are most informed in state laws, town residents in procedural laws and Budapest residents in civil law). We could not, however, find a plausible explanation to these unusual patterns.²⁰ To sum up, the disadvantage in legal knowledge of village residents in 1965 disappeared by 2013.

In analysing the effect of the five factors on the complete and specific knowledge indicators, some general and important tendencies can be discovered. One such tendency is a general increase in the level of knowledge. This growth was especially large in the case of state law (132%), and smaller in the cases of procedural (108%) and civil law (105%). However, a trend of general growth was also present regarding the socio-demographic groups. Altogether, we generally experienced the decrease of differences. This is particularly visible in case of gender and place of residence, but it is present in all areas. It is least discernible in the ‘Marxist’ social strata categories and presumably in the case of education.

¹⁹ Ten persons out of the 1217 person sample.

²⁰ ‘Normally’, residents of Budapest seem to be better informed in most fields.

3.2.2. The effects of other factors, such as political knowledge or personal interaction with the legal system

Besides the above independent variables, we also examined the supposed effect of the following variables, analysed by Kulcsár in 1965:

- level of political knowledge
- media consumption (its areas and extent)
- membership in organisations (as the indicator of social activity)
- interaction with the legal system²¹

Moreover, in 2013 we examined the alleged effects of wealth and income (which did not appear in Kulcsár's analysis). Table 4 summarizes the relationship of all these variables with the 2013 knowledge indicators and it also indicates the alleged changes from 1965 to 2013. This table provides a verbatim summary of quantitative analyses. For the 2013 data we applied ANOVA test and, where applicable, Pearsons correlation test. The published contingency tables of 1965 were analyzed by the chi square test.

Table 4. The analysed variables and their most important characteristics

Variable	Relationship/Effect in 2013	Change since 1965
Gender	Minimal	Men are not better informed anymore.
Age	Perhaps weaker	Changed: the youngest age group seem to be less informed, while the oldest age group seems to be better informed
Social strata	Strong, linear, positive (the higher the status, the higher the knowledge about law)	Its effect decreased a bit.
Level of education	Strong, linear	Its effect is strong generally
Place of residence	Minimal to complete knowledge about law, huge variance between legal areas	Significant decrease: It is present in certain legal areas, but it is not clearly linear.
Political knowledge	Present, linear, positive	Its effect apparently decreased significantly.
Media consumption	Weak, contradictory, not necessarily/always positive ²²	Measuring is more difficult. The definite and strong effect detected in 1965 is not visible anymore
Membership in organisations	Perceptible, linear, positive, but also dubious relationship (as its content differs) ²³	The effect can be shown clearly statistically, but the affected legal areas are different (state law then, procedural law now).

²¹ Based on questions 1-3, presented in Table 1.

²² The entertainment media (commercial TV channels) usually have a negative effect on the knowledge about law, while some politicised media can decrease the state law knowledge, but the correlation is only slightly significant ($p=0,05$).

²³ In 1965, this referred to leading positions in municipalities (soviets), in the Party, or in labour unions, while in 2013 it meant simple membership in any type of civil organisation.

Legal experience	Clear-cut, strong, linear, positive effect – but only in procedural law	Correlation suspected in 1965 – not tested but plausible. Not comparable. It seemed to have bigger effect on state law then.
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In sum, we experienced that:

- (1) Besides the general increase in the level of knowledge about law,
- (2) The correlation detected with the explanatory variables seems to be decreasing in most cases.

Putting these variables into an ‘ENTER’ regression model,²⁴ we aim to find the answer to the following questions: (a) taken together, to what extent can the above discussed independent variables explain the level of legal knowledge and (b) within this, how big is the effect of the certain individual factors, taking into consideration the effect of collinearity. The R^2 value of the regression model created in this way is 0,135 ($R=0,368$), which is not particularly high but can be considered acceptable. This is proven by the fact that the value of significance is below one permille. The most important characteristics of the model are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. The regression model ($R^2=0,135$)

Explanatory variables (according to the order of appearance in the text)	Beta value	P	Correlation coefficient		
			‘Normal’	Partial	VIF
		,000			
Gender	-,092	,067	-,088	-,090	1,188
Age (Centred)	-,055	,270	-,134	-,054	1,178
Level of education (5/7 category)	,245	,000	,328	,186	1,939
Social strata (intellectual - physical)	,058	,306	,213	,050	1,510
Village resident	,021	,744	-,035	,016	1,901
Town resident	-,010	,868	,004	-,008	1,862
Media (informative)	,023	,662	,138	,022	1,264
Organisational participation	,014	,777	,107	,014	1,201
Legal experience indicator	,099	,049	,204	,097	1,203
Income (Z score)	,018	,734	,167	,017	1,340

Regarding the values of significance, we have only found one clear partial correlation with the complete knowledge index: the level of education. Legal experience can also be taken into consideration, though its significance level is close to the minimally expected 0,05 value. Gender gets close to this significance level, whereas the negative Beta value suggests that

²⁴ We have applied several technical changes, not to be discussed in detail here, in order to create a suitable model. For example, we transformed nominal scale variables with three values into variables with two values, and we left out wealth because, while it does not contribute to the explanatory value of the model, it causes large data loss (due to the high number of people not answering this question). This way only 442 people got into the model from the 1000-person sample. Naturally, we used the normal, not distorted sample for this analysis.

women possess a higher level of knowledge.²⁵ The reason behind this data lies in co-linearity, which can be detected in the often radically divergent value of the ‘normal’ and partial correlation. The former shows what kind of direct correlation exists between the given variable and the knowledge index. The latter demonstrates what happens when we filter out the effects of other factors. Co-linearity is visible, for instance, in case of social strata, where the partial correlation coefficient is only one-fourth of the normal correlation value once the impact of other variables (i.e. education) is excluded. In the case of media, the difference is even larger: one-sixth. All variance inflation factor (VIF) values are below 2,0, which is a sign that the model is acceptable.

Naturally, Kulcsár could not carry out such statistical analysis at the time of his original survey. However, our educated presumption is that in Kulcsár’s analyses, there must have been similar hidden statistical relationships that, if discovered, may have changed the overall picture and explanations at that time as well. The level of education is closely related to the social strata, especially in the form used in this analysis;²⁶ it is also related to gender, age, and (through age and strata) to the place of residence. Presumably, co-linearity applies to the case of reading daily papers and slightly less to organisational membership and legal experience. The social strata variable, which played a key role in Kulcsár’s research and results, has very little significance in ours, so this raises the question of how this factor would have behaved in 1965 using our same regression modelling. Legal experience allegedly could have had a more significant effect, as could organisational membership, due to its specific meaning then (labour union, party or council leadership).

In addition to the simple comparison of data, regression modelling may be the way to reach a more complicated, but somewhat more realistic scholarly picture of historical comparison.

4. Conclusion

Our aim in this study was to provide a historical comparison of (a) the knowledge of legal provisions in Hungarian society and (b) the potential impact of socio-demographic and some more specific variables on this knowledge between 1965 and 2013 (roughly a quarter of a century before and after the transition took place in 1989-1990). After solving several methodological problems we were able to provide relevant information on both the similarities and changes in the past half century in this respect.

There are three major observations that may be worth mentioning in this part.

First, it can certainly be argued that the Hungarian population’s legal knowledge has significantly increased in the past five decades. Knowledge of basic constitutional questions (referring to the functioning of a democratic society) increased substantially, and growth can be detected in all other fields. (We detected increased knowledge level in 9 out of 10 questions.)

²⁵ The same regression model was examined separately for the three specific indices. We cannot reveal details – again, due to the length limitations –, but we can only sum up the ultimate findings below:

The regression analysis for the *state law* yielded a very weak explanatory power ($R^2=0,047$). Only the level of education has significant effect. For all other variables, $p>0,1$, for most of them $p>0,5$. (This is presumably due to the low standard deviation of these data.)

For *procedural law* the model provided a strong explanatory power ($R^2=0,155$) in which, besides education, social strata ($p=0,014$), income ($p=0,036$) and maybe the gender ($p=0,059$) have independent explanatory power.

The explanatory power of our model for civil law is very weak again ($R^2=0,041$). The effect of education cannot be detected ($p=0,58$), instead the media consumption ($P=0,027$) and perhaps the village residency ($p=0,055$) show correlation; the latter a negative one.

²⁶ I.e. three categories; one category purely refers to higher (tertiary) education, and non- or under-educated people concentrating in agriculture.

Second, analyses then and now pointed out the role of explanatory factors such as gender, social strata, level of education etc. Nevertheless, the impact of these explanatory variables seems to be lower in 2013 than it was in 1965. Furthermore, we detected some changes in this regard as well. Most importantly, gender, which was a significant explanatory variable in 1965, due to the lower level of legal knowledge among women, has ceased to have such an impact. More importantly, the three-category social strata variable that seemed to be by far the most important explanatory variable for legal knowledge has slid to “second place”, well below education. Moreover, the regression model applied to the 2013 data reveals that it is the level of education which has a primary explanatory value for legal knowledge, whereas social strata and most other factors have ceased to provide significant explanatory potential, as it can be seen well in the partial correlation and Beta values of the model. Unfortunately, such instruments were not available in 1965, and similar analyses cannot be made on the available data from that time. Nevertheless, we may reasonably presume that education could have been a crucial determinant at that time as well.

The combination of these concluding points inevitably raises a *third* question: To what extent can the detected growth of legal knowledge be attributed to the fact that the level of education has significantly increased since 1965,²⁷ on the one hand, and to other influencing factors (such as potentially increased interest in law) on the other? For answering this question, we have built a model that uses the knowledge indicators for the education categories measured in 2013, and calculated a ‘virtual knowledge indicator’ with the 1965 data on educational stratification of the society. This calculation tells us what the result would have been in 1965 if each education-level group was exactly as informed at that time as they are in 2013. The result was shocking. We found that the overall knowledge-change indicator calculated in this way is only 106%. In fact, under these circumstances, growth can be detected solely in the field of constitutional law. In other words, the positive change is due almost entirely to the general increase in the educational level among Hungarian society (except for constitutional law, which is the result of the emergence of a democratic political system). From a practical point of view, or in order to formulate a positive final message, we may conclude that an increase in education level is expected to result in an increase in knowledge of legal rules.

²⁷ For data see: Statistical Office Census data; Education (http://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tablak_iskolazottsag), Table 1.1.1.

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