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Since the early 2000s onwards, the well-being of children has been a central item on the agenda in both EU-level policies and the politics of individual nation-states across Europe. The renewed interest in children in past decades has also turned attention towards parental practices. Child raising has become an increasingly public rather than a private matter that is perceived to need the intervention of trained professionals (Thelen & Haukanes, 2010). Experts, parenting books, and online platforms that seek to give advice and at times intervene with what most people consider their private family life have multiplied. Moreover, policies that instruct parental choices and practices have become widespread, such as parenting training programmes, early intervention measures, restrictions on home/alternative schooling and pregnancy policing, to name but a few. The spread of conservative populist political forces across Europe has given further impetus to this renewed interest in children and the institution of the family, whilst also altering its normative elements and leading to further interventionist measures.

The way parents raise their children has been the target of national and professional concern for a long time. However, the current interest in parental practices and family life reflects a significant transformation in the importance of children and the role of child raising in society's welfare (Lee, 2014a). Neoliberal transformations have led to the re-evaluation of children, who according to this political-economic logic are considered an investment and potential future resource in economic production (Gillies et al., 2017). Such a re-conceptualization of children, however, has also led to the problematization of parental practices and the amplification of the latter's responsibilities in relation to raising the next generation of citizens.

Concerns about parental behaviour and the attempts of states to influence parental practices have been evident since the development of public child-welfare institutions in Europe (Schumann, 2010). Professionals in schools, kindergartens, and welfare offices have been in contact with parents, spreading dominant norms and seeking to intervene in family practices in line with political agendas as well as the dominant scientific approaches of given periods (see Barron & Siebrecht, eds., 2017, Schumann, ed., 2010). However, the degree and form of this interference, its normative elements, and its acceptance by wider society have

changed over time and varied across nation-states. Whilst in Central and Eastern Europe such forms of state interference into the private sphere have to a certain degree been more widely practised during various historical periods (cf. Varsa, 2021), in countries such as the UK, where the sanctity of the private realm has been strongly respected by the state, it constitutes a radically new approach (Macvarish, 2014). Regardless of whether the current trends are embedded in former practices or constitute a more radical shift, a more explicit political focus on parental practices is evident across Europe (Daly, 2013).

The thematic issue attempts to more closely examine these current tendencies through empirical studies from different European countries. States can influence parenting practices and norms through various channels: (1) policies and regulations (family support schemes, regulations pertaining to education, healthcare policies, etc.), (2) institutions (such as schools, medical services, and child protection) and, (3) the everyday practices of state officials or civil servants (teachers, welfare workers, medical practitioners, home visiting nurses/healthcare visitors) as they interact with parents. These state practices are often highly normative and seek to determine the 'best' ways of child-rearing, which reflect dominant social (often middle-class and 'White') values, and often lead to social differentiation. The studies in this issue address these different forms of state intervention and discuss their consequences for parents, their decisions, and their self-perception.

1 A re-evaluation of children and encompassing parental responsibility

The current intensification of state influence is partly related to the above-mentioned political-economic processes but also strongly linked to changes in the parenting approaches of the past few decades. Linked strongly to the advancements in the study of developmental psychology and neuropsychology, as well as to a growing risk consciousness in general, from the 1970s onwards parenting and the parent-child relationship have increasingly emerged as problematic and in need of expert assistance (Lee, 2014a). A pervasive belief that stems from the psychologization of parenting and increased risk awareness is the idea of 'parental determinism' (Füredi, 2002). Parental behaviour is construed as crucially affecting – in fact, determining – the future happiness and success of children. At the same time, parenting is viewed as an activity that cannot be naturally carried out anymore; it needs to be learnt and be guided by experts in order to succeed (Lee, 2014b). It is seen as a skill set that parents need to acquire in order to help their child best fulfil their potential and avert potential risks that would inhibit this.

Thus, studies that discuss the recent transformations of parenting culture identify two important developments that have proved crucial in relation to recent beliefs about the omnipotence of parental behaviour and its deterministic effect on children's well-being and future success (e.g., Füredi, 2002; Lee, 2014a; Macvarish et al., 2015). One is the shift in the general thinking about risk. Risk is no longer perceived as a probability (which could potentially lead to positive outcomes) but rather as an unwanted possibility; a dangerous outcome that should be prevented. A growth of risk consciousness and its institutionalization, as Füredi (2011) explains, can be linked to the weakening of cultural authority or moral value systems that are less and less able to provide meaning and clarity.

The second, parallel development, which has gone hand in hand with this growing and individualized risk consciousness, is the medicalization of harm and the spread of the psychological approach in different spheres of life (Illouz, 2007). In the field of parenting, potential harm is primarily construed through neuroscientific evidence and developmental psychology (Macvarish et al., 2015; Thornton, 2011). However, discussing potential harm in scientific language leaves little room for questioning or debate as it involves presenting often socially constructed and moralized statements about children and the parent-child relationship as scientific truths based on medical evidence (Hunt, 2003). The power of these approaches is so prevalent in policymaking and public discourse that such statements have remained mainly unchallenged, despite various studies pointing to the lack of scientific evidence to back them up (Macvarish et al. 2015, p. 250).

Transforming ideas about parenting are also linked to a broader shift that has resulted in the dominance of a 'therapeutic' or 'emotional culture' that 'anchors the self in childhood and in one's primary family relationships' (Illouz, 2007, p. 24). It corresponds with the shift in interpreting social phenomena through a psychological lens – i.e., as the result of individuals' emotional states, which are rooted in childhood experience. As such, the family environment and children's emotional relations with their parents are construed as the main determinants of the personality and success of future adults. This psychologization of social phenomena along with the scientification of harm have paved the way for the increasing problematization of parental behaviour and increasing intervention into parenting due to growing concern for the welfare of children and the separation of the vulnerable child's interests from those of its parents (Wyness, 2014).

Both trends have had important consequences for thinking about childhood and parenting. Children are increasingly construed as vulnerable and being 'at risk', which permeates all discussions about children, ranging from pregnancy to children's play and education (Lee, 2014a). Parents are consequently seen as managers of risk. But their main responsibility is not only to protect their children from immediate dangers, but also to foresee and prevent any threats that could inhibit the child's optimal development and future success (Faircloth, 2014). This not only leads to the enhanced monitoring of children's activities, but also makes formally mundane practices related to child rearing planned and conscious activities based on scientific evidence. Parents accordingly need to be informed about various threats to the well-being and development of their children and be able to make choices about their parenting practices in the midst of a multitude of pre-existing trends and expert advice.

At the same time, this increased risk consciousness and parental determinism not only posits parents as those primarily responsible for averting risks and therefore crucially influencing their children's development and future, but increasingly as the primary adults who can pose these risks through 'risky' behaviour, such as smoking or drinking during pregnancy or feeding formula to their children (Lee et al., 2010). However, a relatively new development is that parents are also seen as posing a risk to their children even if they do not necessarily indulge in risky behaviour but are simply unaware of possible harms – for example, that of the internet, too much television watching, or an unhealthy diet (Faircloths, 2014). This, in turn, makes parenting an increasingly debated, moralized, and publicly discussed issue.

These developments, however, have not only transformed the parent-child relationship, but also made child raising a more 'intensive' practice that requires ample resources, time,

effort, money, and involvement from parents (Hays, 1996; Lee, 2014a). As the 'stakes' of parenting have exponentially grown, it has also become a more stressful activity that can cause great anxiety and self-doubt amongst parents (Füredi, 2002). What is more, because not everyone has the required cultural, social, and financial resources to become intensively involved in the above-described way nor follow expert-guided practices (including paid-for after-school classes, development professionals, etc.), the new parenting ideals can lead to further social differentiation and inequalities.

2 New policy paradigms

The new approach to children and parenting is also mirrored in current policy trends, which increasingly focus on parental behaviour as a target of intervention. The early years of this century saw the restructuring of the welfare state and the emergence of the social investment paradigm that became the cornerstone of European social inclusion strategies and state reforms. In response to challenges of the post-industrial age, welfare policies turned towards 'ex-ante capacitating interventions' (Hemerijck, 2018) that focused on children and early childhood development services. Such policy approaches are rooted in the idea that 'investment' in children, especially in early childhood when external influence can be most effective, 'pays back' over a longer term (Jackson, 2014). Consequently, social investment policies that promote early intervention and prevention measures, in order to maximize children's potential and enhance their opportunities, became a major priority in both EU and national politics in Europe (Daly, 2013). These measures rest on the premise that the inter-generational transmission of social disadvantages may be ameliorated or compensated by the establishment of good quality early childhood development services and preventive programmes (Churchill & Clarke, 2010), while they situate the causes of disadvantages in the home environment and parental upbringing, leading to the stigmatization of poor parents and the closer monitoring of parental practices in general (e.g. Churchill & Clarke, 2010; Clarke, 2006; Gillies, 2008).

This reflects a shift from structural explanations of social problems to an individualized view of social ills, which are often explained by dysfunctional parenting (Gillies, 2013). Various studies have argued that this policy shift often enhances neoliberal agendas, as arguments for early intervention are used to justify welfare cuts, and reconstructing child raising as the solely individual responsibility of parents is part of the individualization of risk management and the self-responsibilization of individuals (Gillies, 2013; Gillies et al., 2017; Thornton, 2011). Such individualized approaches to social problems make the intimate aspects of family life of major public and political concern as they are linked to the well-being of the whole of society. This paves the way for increasing formal intervention into and surveillance of the private sphere, which is particularly apparent in the case of economically disadvantaged families (Gillies, 2013). Growing up in poverty becomes naturally equated with dysfunctional or irresponsible parenting (Gillies et al., 2017), making economically disadvantaged families the main focus of early intervention programmes. This has been particularly evident in the US and the UK and has materialized in various parenting support programmes (Dodds, 2009; Gillies, 2013; Gillies et al., 2017; Jackson, 2013; Macvarish et al., 2015; Picot, 2014).

Ideas about early intervention and social investment have become dominant policy prerogatives in various countries during the past decade, increasingly making parental behaviour the focus of welfare policies and often formally tying certain welfare provisions to 'good' parental behaviour (cf. Gillies 2013, p. 96). Moreover, a relatively new trend is for the parenting of better-off families to also be increasingly problematized and considered to be in need of professional advice and/or state scrutiny (Faircloths, 2014). Moreover, the intensification of the political focus on and intervention into family life have gained new impetus through the more recent rise of (neo)conservative political forces across Europe. The individualization of social problems and strong focus on the nuclear family have been also central themes in revived (neo)conservative political discourse. Related policy prerogatives often promote socially conservative values in areas such as traditional family structures, abortion, gay rights, patriotism, and religiosity (Cooper, 2017; Csillag & Szelényi, 2015).

The articles in this special issue explore the various ways this renewed interest in children and intensified state interference into family life have influenced parents, professionals, and child-focused institutions. Each paper uses rich empirical material and draws on qualitative research, thus offering insight into the mechanisms through which such interference works and the ways it influences day-to-day practices (of both parents and professionals), parental choices, and parents' self-perceptions. The special issue accommodates examples from various European countries that help illuminate the ways these currently dominant trends materialize in different institutional, socio-political, and historical contexts. The papers remark on the above-explained changes in the approach to parenting, each revealing the various ways it influences policies, parents, and professionals in specific national contexts.

Three main topics permeate the issue:

(1) State regulations and parental practices. As policies and regulations that target parents and seek to intervene in family life have multiplied, it is paramount to further understand their consequences for parents, their practices, choices, and self-perceptions. The former are the most apparent and direct way that states can intervene in parental practices and influence parental choices.

(2) The everyday practices of state professionals. State policies and regulations operate through the working of institutions and the everyday practices of professionals who work with families and children. These 'street-level bureaucrats' (cf. Lipsky, 1980) during their daily work not only mediate but also reinforce or contravene dominant norms about 'good' parenting and 'proper' childhood. Therefore, studying the work of these bureaucrats or public officials/professionals is as important as examining policies and regulations.

(3) Class and parenting. Some of the papers focus less on the state and more on the ways parental practices are used for social differentiation. The practices linked to *intensive parenting* require multiple (monetary, cultural, social, etc.) resources from parents. However, access to such resources and therefore the ability to partake in practices of *intensive parenting* are not equally available to all parents. Thus, the link between class and the 'new parenting culture' (cf. Lee et al., eds., 2014) appears to be an unavoidable issue.

3 State regulation and parental practices

Several papers in the thematic issue explore the links between the new parenting approach and current state regulations that target parents. In particular, they uncover the ways these regulations influence parental practices and decisions at the everyday level. Daily parental practices can be a 'space' for subversion, where parents find ways to subvert these regulations and shape them to their benefit. At the same time, they can also be the ground on which these regulations become integrated into taken-for-granted everyday practices. Pauline Proboeuf's paper gives an example of the former; she presents how the state regulation of home schooling has provoked resistance from parents in the French context. In contrast, the article by Dóra Szekulesz talks to the latter issue as she argues that Hungarian women internalize the medical and conservative political discourse about fertility, which emphasizes only women's responsibility in reproduction.

Proboeuf's paper argues that the increasing interference of the state in parental practices goes hand in hand with parents' loss of trust in the state. One of the signs of this erosion of confidence is that French parents are increasingly choosing to homeschool their children or to send them to 'alternative' independent schools. However, the state reaction to this trend is to tighten control of homeschooling and independent schools. The paper points out the tensions that the expansion of parental responsibility (linked to the re-valuation of children) causes between the state and parents. While intervention in parental practices is getting stronger, parents' trust in state institutions – mainly in the field of education and health care – is getting weaker. The parents in the study report that state schools obstruct the flourishing of children's personality and abilities, which is one of the main goals of *intensive parenting*. In state schools, the goal is to raise 'good citizens', not to cultivate 'happy individuals'. The choice of numerous parents to homeschool or opt for alternative schools thus becomes a political act; a kind of conviction; a conscious decision; a choice of values that goes against the state and the mainstream.

However, in the case study by Dóra Szekulesz state regulations and discourse are internalized by her interviewees rather than provoking resistance. Szekulesz' paper studies how the Hungarian conservative political discourse on fertility shapes the experience and self-interpretation of women who participate in assisted reproductive treatment. The paper argues that conservative political discourse about gender roles – which primarily emphasizes women's responsibility in fertility-related issues – deeply pervade the medical process of assisted reproductive treatment. Although women sometimes express criticism of such medicalization and the politically promoted conservative discourse on fertility which make them both vulnerable and responsible for (not) having children, they themselves also use these narratives when they interpret their experiences and processes of decision-making. The paper furthermore points out that various aspects of the new parenting approach, such as expert guiding and growing risk consciousness, appear even at the phase of conception.

4 Everyday practices of state institutions

Another important topic that the papers in this issue address is the ways the new parenting approach can influence the work of child-focused professionals in public institutions and how it can affect their relations with parents. More precisely, they uncover how currently

dominant parenting ideas can influence the way professionals construe 'good mothering' and delineate good and bad parenting practices along with the reasons for more direct intervention.

The paper by Alexandra Szőke uses the concept of 'street-level bureaucracy' (cf. Lipsky, 1980) to underline that policies and regulations are mediated, reinforced, or even contravened by public officials as they go about their day-to-day work. Thus, she argues, if we want to understand the novel aspects of the current intensification of state interference in child raising, we also need to examine the everyday practices of these officials. The author highlights that these professionals construe what 'good parenting' entails, consequently delineating 'good' and bad 'parents', which can have important consequences in relation to offering assistance to different groups of parents, or withdrawing it. The analysis draws on Lipsky's conceptualization of the discretionary power that street-level bureaucrats can wield in their daily encounters with clients based on their personal convictions, sympathies, and dominant norms. The paper examines how the new parenting approach and current policy directives have influenced the practices of child welfare caseworkers in Hungary. In particular, the paper studies how the latter have been transforming the evaluation of parental competence and identification of cases for child removal, and how current notions of 'good motherhood' have become further intertwined with dominant forms of social differentiation. She argues that the global transformation of parenting ideals, such as the individualization of social problems, parental determinism, and the early investment paradigm, have become integral parts of Hungarian state policies. However, these are embedded in the specific context of Hungarian childcare institutions, which have historically been vested in maintaining the dominant ideals of parenting.

Szőke identifies a significant shift in the reasons for initiating child removals that reflects the current spread of a psychological approach: while earlier child neglect and parental competence were assessed mostly in material terms, we are currently witnessing how they are increasingly discussed in emotional terms. However, the term 'appropriate emotional ties' is an extremely subjective and elusive one, and even more difficult to judge than material circumstances. This elusiveness opens up space for caseworkers to define and interpret what kind of parental behaviour can be identified as neglectful and endangering. What is more, the paper shows that the tendency towards child removal at birth also reflects the spread of a new approach to parental responsibility amongst professionals – namely, a move towards early intervention on the basis of preventing possible risks. The author argues that, although dominant norms of ideal parenting have changed in the Hungarian context, this only involves a relatively new way of making distinctions between middle-class parents and parents from lower social strata. The latter continue to be more likely to be the clients of child-welfare institutions, including child removal procedures, as they are less liable to conform to the norms and expectations linked to intensive parenting.

Laura Preissler studies the ways in which the new parenting approach has influenced child-welfare professionals in the Western European context, in Switzerland. Her case study on the daily work of counselling for mothers and fathers (MVBs) is a good example of the spreading dominance of the social investment and early development paradigm in state policies, as well as the growing importance of expert guidance in parenting. Preissler uses the Foucauldian concepts of 'governmentality' and 'pastoral power' as she highlights that the exercise of power is not a one-way process. In fact, the new parenting approach prevails throughout different levels of power relations within society – for example, between MVB advisors and parents.

The paper presents how advisors interpret and promote the new parenting paradigm as a 'technology of self' which parents have to acquire. The former often behave or think of themselves as 'good pastors' who lead parents – who have become puzzled/lost in the chaos of expert knowledge and cognitive approaches – to find 'their lost instincts'. As such, it could be argued (even though the author does not explicitly mention this), that the advisors in their daily work critically relate to some aspects of the currently dominant parenting approach (which in many other senses they otherwise promote). More specifically, they are rather critical of the fact that mothers often lose touch with their instincts in the midst of a fog of multiple sources of expert advice and knowledges. At the same time, their role is very ambivalent. Whilst the MVB advisors rarely use directly intrusive techniques such as child removals, Preissler argues that their practices nonetheless can be seen as techniques of power. According to their own interpretation, the advisors 'merely' teach the parents to recognize their own instincts. At the same time, it is advisors who decide what is considered a 'good maternal instinct' and what is not, thereby re-enforcing the importance of expert guidance for mothers. Accordingly, whereas the analyses in the two papers address professionals in very similar roles, their modes of interference and level of intrusiveness are very different in the two national contexts.

5 Class relations and intensive parenting

The links between the reproduction of inequalities and *intensive parenting* are highlighted in the literature that focuses on the new parenting approach (see e.g., Edwards & Gillies, 2011; Gillies, 2006; 2008; Lareau, 2003). Child-raising practices linked to the currently dominant parenting ideals require financial resources and immense time and effort, as well as emotional and cultural investment from parents (Hays, 1996). As such, related parenting practices are most dominant amongst the middle classes and with more educated parents (Lee, 2014a). As such, *intensive parenting* can be interpreted not only as a new mode of maintaining middle-class status, but also as a relatively new means of the (re)production of class distinctions (Gillies, 2008; Lareau, 2003).

At the same time, as the article in this issue by Irina Chereseva highlights, the link between the new approach to parenting and the reproduction of middle-class status is constructed in different ways in countries with differing positions in the global economy. Moreover, she argues that the concept of *intensive parenting* is based on the experience of the 'core' countries (but primarily that of the USA), thus the elaboration of the concept is strongly embedded in these political and economic contexts. Consequently, Chereseva argues for rethinking the concept from the perspective of peripheral or semi-peripheral countries, of which she provides a good example in the form of an analysis of Bulgarian middle-class parenting practices. Her paper argues that the construction of the Bulgarian middle class cannot be interpreted without considering the centrum-periphery relationship between European countries. Bulgarian middle-class parents align themselves with an imagined Western European middle class that they want to catch up with. They identify legitimate knowledge and practices related to 'good mothering' as 'Western' knowledge and practices. For example, emigration to Western European countries is one of the surest ways to impart a middle-class position to their children, so language learning has become a significant element of *intensive parenting* amongst Bulgarian middle-class mothers.

In addition, she argues that the new Bulgarian middle class significantly differs from its Western counterpart; the former has always involved a more vulnerable position in an economic sense. In the absence of economic capital, symbolic and social capital such as taste, habits, cultural consumption, and having 'proper' networks have become the most important factors in the reproduction of their class position. Using symbolic capital, they try to align with the imagined 'Western' middle class while striving to maintain a distance from the dangers associated with 'Bulgarian society'. The reproductive class strategies of her interviewees are 'based on imagining themselves as modern (as opposed to having a socialist past), Western (as opposed to involving "oriental backwardness") and culturally and morally superior to both the "poor masses" and the *nouveau riche*' (Chereseva, in this issue). The paper underlines that the link between intensive parenting and class relations cannot be studied without considering the given social historical, political, and economic contexts.

Kutrovátz's paper studies the links between class position and the parental mediation of teenagers' digital technology use, which is strongly connected to the new parenting approach. She argues that the use of digital technology puts further pressure on *intensive parenting* as an online presence is interpreted as a serious risk that can endanger the adequate development of teenagers, thus requires constant restriction or monitoring. However, parental mediation demands not only time and effort from parents but also special knowledge and skills, which can help children to develop appropriate online behaviour and improve their digital literacy. The required knowledge, skills and time, however, are not equally available to parents in different social positions. Kutrovátz experienced significant differences in parental mediation according to class position. Parents from a middle-class background placed more emphasis on active mediation: steering their children's online presence in the 'right' direction (one which could be useful in relation to their future), to organising family time as an alternative to screen use, and so on. In contrast, due to an absence of time and knowledge, lower-status parents' main means of influencing their children's screen time was restriction. In comparison to middle-class parents, the former perceived digital technology much less as an opportunity for their children. As such, parental mediation as a practice of *intensive parenting* can deepen pre-existing inequalities.

Overall, all the contributions to this thematic issue account for the spreading dominance of *intensive parenting* and the expansion of parental responsibility across Europe. The empirically grounded individual case studies call attention to the ways this leads to various forms of state interference in family life through policies and dominant discourses, as well as professionals' and parents' practices. The issue, however, shows that the content, the mode, and the societal consequences of such state interference are strongly embedded in the historical, institutional, and socio-political contexts of the studied countries. As such, the thematic issue should prompt further empirical research that points to the specific, contextually embedded character of these broader transformations. It furthermore advocates for further empirical research that can expose the ways in which these new tendencies influence parental practices, their choices, as well as the everyday work of child-focused professionals and relations with parents.

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Families enacting 'alternative' schooling choices and the State: A power relationship

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Abstract

In recent years, French parents have increasingly chosen to homeschool their children or to send them to 'alternative' independent schools. French President Emmanuel Macron, in reaction to this trend, announced on October 2, 2020, his desire to restrict home-schooling to instances when 'health imperatives' necessitate this option and, further, to reinforce state control of independent schools. A bill to this effect passed on July 23, 2021, survived a challenge before the Constitutional Court, and became the law of the land one month later on August 24, 2021.

The research for this paper was completed before the law took effect. Its aim was to understand the relationship between the State and those families who have made alternate schooling choices; that is, to explore the potential effects of implementing the new school policy. I relied on governmental data and, to capture how school policies were perceived by families, data collected in France that included interviews with parents, answers to an online survey, and one interview with a civil servant at the Ministry of National Education. The results of the research reveal that the dynamics that operate between 'independent schooling' families and the State have the markings of a power relationship that pits State authority against parents who tend to have low confidence in public schools and may identify with a counterculture. Finally, this recent legislation suggests that the French education system is moving from an educational model of 'inclusion through control' for children learning outside of public schools (Farges et al., 2018) to a model of exclusion through coercion.

Keywords: schooling choices; parenting; alternatives; compulsory education; public policy; social control

1 Introduction

Ever since the passing of the Jules Ferry Law on March 28, 1882, French parents have been obligated to educate their children, either by providing instruction at home or by enrolling them in a school. Until recently, public or private schooling was the norm, but a growing movement has been underway for some decades for 'independent' options – either home-

schooling or instruction in 'alternative schools'. *Homeschooling* refers to the situation of children who are educated within the family by their parents. By *alternative schools* we mean secular schools not funded by the State, which exercise considerable freedom in the definition of their curricula. For this reason, we call them 'independent'. It should be noted that in the literature the term 'alternative' refers to a category of recent establishments distinct from both traditionalist schools with strong religious ties (which would be chosen for ideological reasons) and schools that use traditional pedagogy (Poucet, 2002). However, as my field research shows, the distinction between ideological and pedagogical is often blurred, as these sources of motivation may overlap in parents' decision-making.

Recently, this movement for parental control of children's education in contrast to State control became an issue on the public agenda. On October 2, 2020, Emmanuel Macron declared his support for a bill designed to counter separatism[1] that would restrict homeschooling to cases of 'health imperatives' and tighten control on independent schools. The writing of the text was entrusted to a special committee appointed on December 16, 2020. The bill, Article 21, was presented to the Council of Ministers and registered with the Presidency of the National Assembly on December 9 and, after surviving a Constitutional challenge, passed into law on August 24, 2021 as the Law of August 24, 2021, reinforcing the respect of the principles of the Republic. We do recognize that it is necessary to question the effects of the privatized forms of education that the bill discourages, along with their relationship with public education, their varying degrees of integration into the global educational project, and the alternative visions of education they present. These options lead to increasing freedom of choice for parents while at the same time challenging the ideal of equality.

However, the primary goal of the August 24 legislation is to restrict alternate forms of education that are equated with school avoidance due to radicalization, an association not based on quantitative data. The implementation of this bill on August 24, 2021 thus marks the end of the purely declarative[2] regime to which parents were previously subject, and puts in its place a regime that requires parents to request conditional authorization for alternative schooling choices (Article 21). In effect, it replaces the previous obligation that parents provide *instruction* with the obligation that they send their children, most often, to specific government-sanctioned schools. This article scrutinizes the extent to which the relationships between the State and these families can be seen as power relationships. My research is not rooted in a sociology of public action (such as would read privatization as a political measure) or in market sociology (viewing privatization as a commercial activity) but looks instead at how these choices emerge in the context of the family and become anchored in individual lives. The paper aims to highlight the impact of public policies on families' choices and practices. Before exploring this question, we describe the French education system and the place of these schooling options in public thinking.

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[1] The bill was renamed the 'bill to strengthen secularism and reinforce republican principles'. It mainly aims to fight against 'radical Islamism' or 'political Islam'. It concerns the following points: the neutrality of public services, associations, a fight about schooling or the return to the principles of the 1905 law on religious associations.

[2] Before this bill went into effect, parents who decided to homeschool needed only to inform their mayor and the chief education officer (the director of the Ministry of Education's departmental services) of their decision by mail at the beginning of each school year.

2 Background: The French educational system

The history of French schools is strongly marked by the republican project's aim of separating school spaces from non-school spaces. This boundary, which is reflected in the concept of 'school form',[3] is both material and symbolic (Pachod, 2019). The French public school is mixed and secular, a sort of a secular republican sanctuary. The system further advocates the separation of the school from the family. As a result, education in France is highly centralized. While other countries, such as Canada and the United States, are more accommodating of schooling options such as homeschooling and schools outside the public school system, and have in many cases developed partnerships between public schools and the alternatives (Gerst, 2007), the French state remains largely committed to a uniform vision.

Since September 2019, French education has been compulsory for children residing in France between the ages of three and sixteen. The law entitled 'School of Trust' that established this requirement was passed in July of 2019. While most schools are state-run (*écoles publiques*), there are also private schools under contract (*sous-contrat*)[4] to the French government, in which case the government pays the teachers' salaries, the school follows the national curriculum, and fees are reasonably low. This type of school, formerly known as the 'free school', was created at the time of the secularisation of schools by Jules Ferry (at the end of the nineteenth century). There are also private schools (*écoles privées*) that are fully independent (*hors contrat*) of the State. They do not receive any financial support from the State, and though they are in some respects regulated, they have latitude to define their own curricula provided that a common core of knowledge and skills is included. As can be seen in Figure 1, these schools are mainly secular, but when they are religious, they are mainly Catholic (15.8 per cent) or Islamic (8.8 per cent).

The history of French schools is linked to the history of secularism and its conflict with the Catholic Church, which at first perceived the public school as a competing institution. The animosity ran in both directions. According to Jean Jaurès (1904), the president of the French Socialist Party, 'Catholic logic' is incompatible with the Republic, which is founded on freedom of conscience. He therefore considered it essential to firmly shut the doors of the educational establishment to the Church. In the mid-twentieth century, Catholic schools began, however, to request financial support from the government. The 1959 Debré law attempted to resolve the quarrel by agreeing to help private schools financially, on condition that they enter into a contract with the state and accept a degree of state regulation (Poucet, 2002). We should perhaps mention that Christian education is no longer a primary objective of these private institutions, nor is it the dominant reason why families choose a denominational school (Ballion, 1980). More recently, however, French schools have had to deal with new concerns arising from immigration in general, and in particular from the evolving view that Islam poses a special problem for schools (Bozec, 2020). To name but one of numerous controversies, there was the issue of whether Muslim mothers of students should wear the veil when accompanying school trips.[5] Secularism is redefined as a norm of religious neutrality and in-

[3] This concept was invented by Guy Vincent (1994) to describe how education has been organized in our societies since the seventeenth century. It implies, in particular, specific space and time dedicated to education and training, impersonal rules and the rationalization of learning through a curriculum with distinct content areas.

[4] In the article I will use the term 'private' schools to refer to those private schools that have a contract with the State.

[5] See, e. g., French government resists calls for school trip headscarf ban. *The Guardian*, October 16, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/16/french-government-resists-calls-to-ban-headscarfs-on-school-trips

visibility that no longer applies only to government employees but also to students and their parents. In France in 2018, 86 per cent of French primary-school pupils and 78.8 per cent of secondary-school students were registered in public schools. As we have noted, most French students have long followed a national curriculum defined by the Ministry of Education, but in May of 2015 the French government published reforms that gave both public and private schools the leeway to define 20 per cent of their curricula independently. In certain cases, parents could opt for an 'alternative' independent school[6] instead of public or private schooling. In the years before the August 24 law went into effect, the choice to enrol children in independent schools was growing in popularity. Independent schools were not bound by government contracts and therefore received no funding from the state. They enjoyed pedagogical freedom in the construction of their curricula. The number of children enrolled in these independent schools (at the primary level) increased by 222 percent between 2010 and 2019 (Ministry of National Education and Youth, 2020); a figure that nevertheless remained marginal in relation to the total number of children enrolled in France (growing from 0.23 per cent in 2010 to 0.75 per cent in 2019). The number of homeschooled children also increased by 99 percent in 2018–2019 compared to 2014–2015, according to recent figures from a government impact study conducted in the context of the bill of August 24 (Légifrance, 2020). In the United States, homeschooling is fairly common and a much older practice – it gained popularity in the late 1960s and early 1970s – and was largely motivated by parents' religious values (Van Galen, 1991; Mayberry, 1995). This phenomenon is often seen as a form of privatization of education (Verger et al. 2016), and has been observed by scholars in both rich and less affluent countries, though in different proportions.

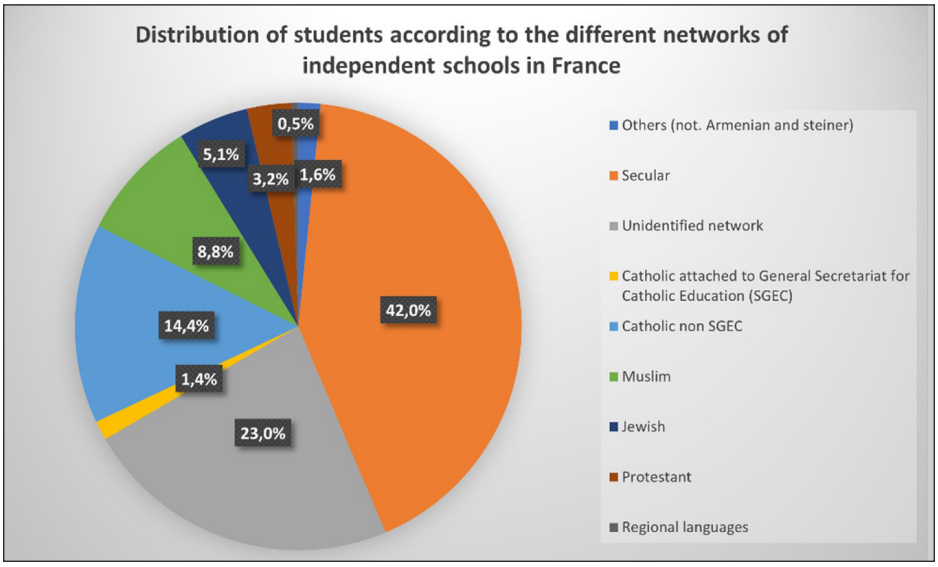

Figure 1

Source: Figure translated into English, originally written in French, from the Ministry of National Education. Report N°277 by Mrs. Annick BILLON, made on behalf of the Committee on Culture, Education and Communication, filed on February 7, 2018.

[6] In the article, I will use the term 'independent schooling' families to describe the families who opt for these options.

Three sets of causes explain the emergence and spread of 'alternative' schooling choices and parents' growing trust in them as a legitimate resource that would better serve their families than traditional by regular schools. First, since the 1960s and the rise of mass education, discontent with traditional schools has emerged. Critics came to see the latter as excessively bureaucratic and impersonal. Public schools came to be associated with poor academic performance,[7] and some parents felt side-lined by the State, as though they were no longer allowed a voice in their child's education. This family-school conflict was identified by Ballion (1982) as a factor driving the popularity of the private school choice; some parents simply could not accept the role of mere 'educational assistants' whose only function was to support the school's inflexible agenda. A logic of 'exit' (Hirschman, 1970) then developed which, in France, coincided with the changes in private education imposed by the State when, under the terms of the Debré law, private schools yielded up some of their independence in exchange for State funding. Another wave of discontent followed as people became unsatisfied with Catholic private education, and sometimes with 'alternative' private education as well. Private schools allowed parents greater investment in school management and were better able to individualize children's schooling. The former were attractive to parents who were dissatisfied with the academic shortcomings of State schools and frustrated in their desire to have an impact on their children's education. This discredit and distrust created a rhetoric based upon the ideals not only of 'free choice' and 'parental rights,' but also of 'children's rights'.

Another catalyst of the 'alternative' school movement is the new rhetoric that embraces all things that are considered alternative. The term (Badie & Vidal, 2017) is a blank slate that can be used in different ways to characterise all manner of aspirations. In today's society, choice has become a social value (Duvoux & Jenson 2011); and politicians have been quick to jump on the bandwagon. Going with an 'alternative' implies taking a step aside so as to perceive things 'differently,' though without always specifying what exactly it is that is alternative about any particular 'alternative.' It comes down to being able to choose something that is not the norm, while (most often) criticizing dominant values. However, in recent years the French middle and upper classes, through increasingly rigorous monitoring of their children's schooling, have brought into being a sort of French Parentocracy; that is, an approach in which 'a child's education increasingly depends on the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than on the abilities and efforts of students' (Brown, 1990, p. 66). The rhetoric of parental 'free choice' thrives in this environment. The fact that parents are increasingly involved in the education and schooling of their children expresses their desire to choose freely – or in other words, to exercise parental sovereignty. This rhetoric of 'free choice' has been well established in France since the major demonstrations of 1984, mostly by parents on the right, or even the extreme right of the political spectrum, to protest against Socialist education minister Alain Savary's efforts to turn education into a 'social welfare project.' Within this movement, there remains tension between the rights of parents and the rights of children.

[7] The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses the achievement of 15-year-old students, has revealed poor results for France (OECD, 2019). Compared to 2014, France dropped five places in the ranking of OECD countries and thus moved from eighteenth to twenty-third place out of 79.

The third factor contributing to the popularity of 'alternative' schooling is the change in parenting styles and the revival of the 'intensive mothering' model (Hays, 1998). Intensive mothering is a child-centred vision that sees selfless women spending a lot of time, money, and energy raising their children. Some scholars even suggest the concept of 'total motherhood,' describing a tendency that mothers are expected to become experts in a number of areas, including safety: they must protect their children from any and all threats (or possible threats) that might hinder the optimal developmental of their child (Wolf, 2007). Others suggest that the term 'good parenting' (Martin, 2014) in public discourse is promoting a certain vision of parenting. For instance, the European Council published in 2006 some recommendations encouraging 'positive parenting.' Both private and public actors are called upon to stand as parenting models.

3 Research question, outlines, and methods

In this paper, I address the following question: In what ways do the relations between the French State and the parents of school children qualify as 'power relationships'? My research was conducted prior to the implementation of the August 24, 2021 bill that placed such rigid restraints on parents' school choices, but during a period (2017–2020) of growing parental discontent. To understand the tension between the State and parental perspectives, I looked at public policy development at different levels. First, I will sum up the ways in which the French State regulated alternative forms of schooling as it continued to exert a growing level of control. Second, I will describe the level of confidence in the State attested to by respondents to a survey, with particular attention to the institution of the school. Finally, I will describe the militant trajectories of some mothers that I interviewed, highlighting how their schooling choices are key to understanding their mobilization.

To understand the way in which school policy was being implemented, I relied on institutional data (parliamentary documents and press releases). To understand how school policy was received by parents, I used data collected in France between 2017 and 2020 that combined interviews with parents (72), answers to an online survey[8] (714) conducted before the bill of August 24 was proposed, and an interview with a civil servant at the Ministry of National Education that was conducted in October 2020, shortly after Macron's announcement (1). Families were mostly recruited through social networks, via Facebook groups in particular, and through independent schools that afforded me direct contact with families. My contact with the parents of children in alternative schools was made via an online questionnaire. To participate, parents had to have at least one child being homeschooled or registered in an alternative school.

I chose to study families with fairly extensive experience of these schooling options, between four and five years on average, because my interest lay in situations where the parents had stuck with the option they had chosen, regardless of whether their choice was initially a

[8] The survey was sent to associations of homeschooling families, Facebook groups of homeschooling families, and directors of independent schools in France who forwarded it to the parents. For the analyses, parents who had enrolled their child in a religious independent school were removed.

positive one or made under some sense of constraint. I maintained a lasting relationship with the parents I interviewed, staying in touch with them by various means throughout my research. Some discussions took place after Macron's announcement.

Thematic analysis of the interviews was carried out using NVivo, and the interviews were also examined via historical timelines and portraits of a smaller number of respondents who represented ideal-types. The interviews were conducted with 59 women and 13 men and concerned 157 children of primary school age as defined by the French National Education system. Their average age was between seven-and-a-half and eight years, and the average family size was two to three children. Most of the families were white, heterosexual couples. Ten were single-parent families. Only one family was in a homosexual union. A few families were bi-cultural, but in only one case was there an ethnically mixed union (Brun, 2019). I made contact with one mother from an ethnic minority who had opted for home schooling but was unable to maintain it as she became unavailable. In addition, I observed Muslim mothers at homeschoolig meetings in Paris, but I experienced difficulty approaching them.

The parent population came mainly from the middle and upper classes and had a high level of education. In the qualitative study, 24 were executives and senior professionals, 16 were craftsmen, merchants, and entrepreneurs, 13 were mid-level professionals, and three were non-professional employees. Stay-at-home mothers made up the rest of the population. Among those who were employed, 11 mothers were 'mompreneurs' (Landour, 2015) and 18 parents (four of them male) were self-employed. Almost half (34) of the respondents had a master's degree, fifteen a bachelor's degree, seven a Diploma of Higher Education, and five a PhD. Four had high school diplomas, and seven had received a vocational training certificate. In the quantitative survey, 37.5 per cent were executives and senior professionals, 37.3 per cent intermediate professionals, 9.9 per cent non-professional employees, 7.5 percent craftsmen, merchants, and entrepreneurs, 1.5 per cent working-class professionals, and 0.9 per cent farm operators. Two-and-a-half percent had no employment status; they were for the most part stay-at-home moms.

4 Results

4.1 Regulating independent choices

Analysis has shown that private choice is much more strictly regulated in France than in other Western countries, such as the United Kingdom, where individual freedoms are more often and vigorously defended (Ollion, 2017). According to Ollion, 'If sects have been more problematic in France than in other countries, it is less because they have contravened religious norms than because they have transgressed state norms' (Ollion, 2017, p. 136). He concludes from this that the French government excels at establishing norms and enforcing them against practices deemed deviant. In this he follows Bourdieusian theory according to which the State has a 'monopoly on the imposition of ways of seeing and doing.'

Since 2007, deputies at the French National Assembly have discussed the issue of parental agency over their children's education. There have been amendments to laws proposing to increase regulations on families. In 2007, Mr. Fenech and Mr. Vuilque (respectively president and rapporteur of the Commission of Inquiry on the Influence of Sectarian Movements and the Consequences of their Practices on the Physical and Mental Health of Minors) tabled four amendments, which were not passed. One of them stated:

> Parents whose children are subject to compulsory schooling must, to benefit from homeschooling, justify a state of health or disability of their child, a displacement of the family or any other real and serious reason. No more than two families may receive instruction in the same home. The children concerned are subject, from the first year and every year, to an investigation by the competent town hall.

The Minister Delegate for the Family, Philippe Bas, declared his opposition to this amendment, which, in his view, went against parents' freedom of choice of education.

In 2016, right-wing deputy Éric Ciotti put forward a bill, which did not pass. It proposed, along similar lines, requiring prior authorization for homeschooling from the relevant academic authority that would be granted only in very specific situations: if there was a need for medical care; a disability requiring schooling in a medico-social institution; sports or artistic activities; if the parents were itinerant; or if geographical distance from a school made attending it impossible. In 2018, two amendments from various deputies proposed a system of prior authorization for independent schools (n°39) and homeschooling (n°42), as part of a bill aimed at simplifying and better regulating the establishment and functioning of independent schools. This bill was enacted on April 3, 2018.

Finally, after lowering the age of compulsory education to the age of three (by means of the Law for a School of Trust, 2019), Emmanuel Macron announced on October 2, 2020, the prohibition of homeschooling and the reinforcement of control over independent schools. The 2019 law seems to have foreshadowed Macron's announcement. In the preamble to that law, the Ministry of Education recognized school as being a place of emancipation. School was a collective concern that must be individually appropriated: 'Fulfilling this double republican promise is the condition of the cohesion of the nation as well as the freedom of each citizen' (bill of December 5, 2018, p. 3). The law called for the reinforcement of State oversight and control over instruction in families. Those parents who were more accepting of the school logic complied with the State, while others defended their pedagogical choices and resented this interference – in particular, families who adhered to a philosophy of natural education and argued that State oversight of academic matters should not become, in effect, State guardianship of children.

As most of the deputies had thus far failed to pass their amendments, the decision of the President of the French Republic was the first real engagement in the battle against what was viewed as a dangerous sectarian-type instrumentalization of homeschooling and independent schools. It is very difficult to measure the degree of actual peril that this movement posed to the State or how real was the abuse allegedly caused by these schooling alternatives, as we have no relevant data. In a brief interview a few days after Emmanuel Macron's announcement, a civil servant at the Ministry of National Education in charge of the academic oversight of homeschooling families in a department close to the Ile-de-France region where working-class families of foreign migratory origin are concentrated, expressed surprise.

> I think that there are a few [parents who do not officially declare that they are homeschooling their children], and now, precisely on account of Macron's announcement, there will be more. But they are few, and they have no interest in not declaring themselves. None. But… it's so out of context. I'm telling you, I've seen one. How long have I been doing this? Since 2014–2015? Yes, it's been five years. I had [experience of] one family that I have no doubt about anymore. There, we had frankly, we had certainties, we made a pedagogical report; besides, I remember that the report of the social worker was alarming. (Alexia, civil servant in charge of overseeing homeschooling families, Master's Degree in mathematics)

According to Alexia, noncompliance for religious reasons was in the minority, but a few such cases had been identified by the Minister of National Education (MNE). She also mentioned that there had been families who did not comply with French law to the extent that their names did not even appear in the population registers. Later in the interview, she told me that although she had met families whose religious beliefs were visible to the eye, their children's development was 'perfectly in line with the expectations of the program, including cultural openness and sport.' The normative requirements imposed on such sects, as described by Ollion (2017), seemed to operate in the same way as those imposed on families perceived as deviant by the State.

On a national news channel (LCI), the MNE, Jean-Michel Blanquer, also defended the bill: 'The idea is that there should be less instruction at home, because in previous times it has been used to the benefit of sometimes radical structures, so we give ourselves the instrument to fight against radicalism, Islamist in particular, when it leads to withdrawing children from school, which is an abuse.' Faced with Emmanuel Macron's republican project, parents expressed opposition to the notion that their children were the children of the Republic, preferring to retain the primary parenting role for themselves. They cited their right, as parents, to choose their children's education according to the terms established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates: 'Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children' (UDHR, Art. 26.3). This rhetoric of 'human rights' is a relatively new addition to the advocacy arsenal available to families. According to Aurinies and Davies, '"Choice" as a social cause avoids the imposition of ideals on others, and stresses commonalities rather than differences' (Aurinies & Davies, 2003). A recently published article by Júlia Mourão Permoser and Kristina Stoeckel has exposed how the conservative network uses of human-rights arguments to achieve its goals: 'Actors from all political traditions have started adopting the language and strategies of human rights to pursue their political aims, often in direct contradiction to one another (Perugini and Gordon 2015)' (Permoser & Stoeckel, 2020). This extensive use of one strategy by proponents of various hues, with different reference points, makes it difficult to sort out who is who, which of course further complicates the defence of independent schooling choices.

The two parties involved – the State and families – do not frame homeschooling the same way. The State talks about 'school avoidance,'[9] a factor that is not uncommon in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. To solve this problem, it has set up 'anti-avoidance schooling' units in certain places in conjunction with prefectures and specialized prevention associations with a mission to fight radicalization. Homeschooling families talk instead about seeking another form of education, one that does not take place in school. Parents invoke the 'right of parents to educate their children' as they wish, while the State invokes the 'right of children to demand' that the State protect them from parental abuse, ensure that their right to education is exercised, and protect their right to freedom of conscience. For instance, at the beginning of 2020, the parents of children attending the Carré Libre democratic school (Quimper, Britany) were ordered by the administrative court of Rennes to enrol them in another school within 15 days of this decision. Following a second review on December 13, 2019, the school, which had opened in 2016, had not provided sufficient evidence that the children

[9] In response to the terrorist threat, a public policy aimed at preventing radicalisation was developed under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior. Part of this policy is directed towards the school environment, both to prevent the radicalisation of young people but also that of their families.

would be able to acquire the common base of knowledge, skills, and culture that the law required them to possess by the time they turned 16. On Wednesday, January 22, parents filed a petition with the Council of State to challenge the decision of the administrative court.[10] This decision was especially difficult for those parents who had opted for the democratic school as a remedial solution to their child's difficulties in the Republic school:

> For many children, previously in a situation of school failure, or victims of harassment in their colleges, the Carré Libre even represents, as the inspectors themselves acknowledge in one of their reports, […] a possible source of new confidence for children who have left the school system due to serious academic difficulties and who need to reconstruct themselves. (Press release on January 10, 2020 by the European Association for Democratic Education)

Indeed, parents most definitely do sometimes make an alternative schooling choice in the hope that it will give their child a second chance (Legavre, 2020). According to the same press release, the decision to enrol their children in this school was a positive 'educational choice' made by families opting for 'an innovative pedagogy based on self-directed learning (Sudbury type).' In support of their argument, it was again Article 26-3 of the UDHR that was cited. As we have seen, these schooling choices, as often as not, place parents in a tense relationship with the State, thus creating a space for politicization. One mother interviewed after Macron's announcement thought that the only solution left for her would be more cooperation with the State:

> Either we should curtail our freedoms a little by accepting more control or present an educational project like that in Quebec[11] (Canada). In England, homeschooled children can participate in certain school activities, for example chemistry demonstrations, which are difficult to set up at home. (Brigitte, Muslim, homeschooling mum, Master's Degree, bookseller, four children aged 24, 20, 16, and 12 years)

Indeed, with every new proposal to limit independent schools and homeschooling, parents who seek these options find themselves entangled in new relationships with the State. It might be enlightening to look at their interactions with public institutions in general.

4.2 Alternative schooling choices in relation to attitudes toward other public institutions

Several questions in my survey, based on a non-probability sample, relate to the level of trust in public institutions of French parents who have opted for alternate education.[12] Overall, 56.7 per cent of respondents tend to have total or moderate confidence in public institutions[13] (Figure 2).

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[10] Le Carré Libre: les familles ont déposé un recours devant le Conseil d'État. *Le Telegramme,* January 22, 2020. https://www.letelegramme.fr/finistere/quimper/le-carre-libre-les-familles-ont-depose-un-recours-devant-le-conseil-d-etat-22-01-2020-12484981.php

[11] In Quebec, homeschooling parents must submit a learning project, a template of which is available on the government website: http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca

[12] The question of the mistrust of institutions (school, tax, politics) is studied within the ANR (French National Agency for Research) PROFET ('Practices and ordinary representations of the governed vis-à-vis the State').

[13] Nearly one third (32.9 per cent) of respondents declared themselves 'not confident at all' or 'somewhat unconfident,' 9.6 per cent responded 'I don't know, I can't say,' and 0.8 per cent did not answer the question.

Public schools seem to be a special case, however, as 68.6 per cent of respondents reported having 'no confidence at all' or 'little confidence' in them (Figure 3). This relationship of mistrust between French parents and schools has been widely studied by educational sociologists (Kakpo, 2013; Pagis, 2014; Lignier, 2012a), sociologists of religion (Raison du Cleuzious, 2019), and also by public authorities. The prominent failure of the voluntarist policy of school democratization in the 1980s and 1990s (Beaud, 2003) crystallized what was before a more diffuse criticism and brought attention, in 2019, to the deterioration of the public schools, often in concert with an elitist vision of the ideal education system. Sociologically oriented criticism of the French school continues, but alongside it there has arisen more recently what is termed an 'artistic' critique (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011) that charges schools with an inability to link success and personal fulfilment. This critique, which values the authenticity of the individual, is echoed by families who value self-expression in the school experience, giving a central place to individual flourishing. Mistrust between parents and the school institution is not new, to be sure, but the testimonies gathered in my research reveal some new sources of parental discontent. The people I interviewed did not so much contest the content of teaching as the way in which it was transmitted: that is, with the way the schools were run and the way children were treated.

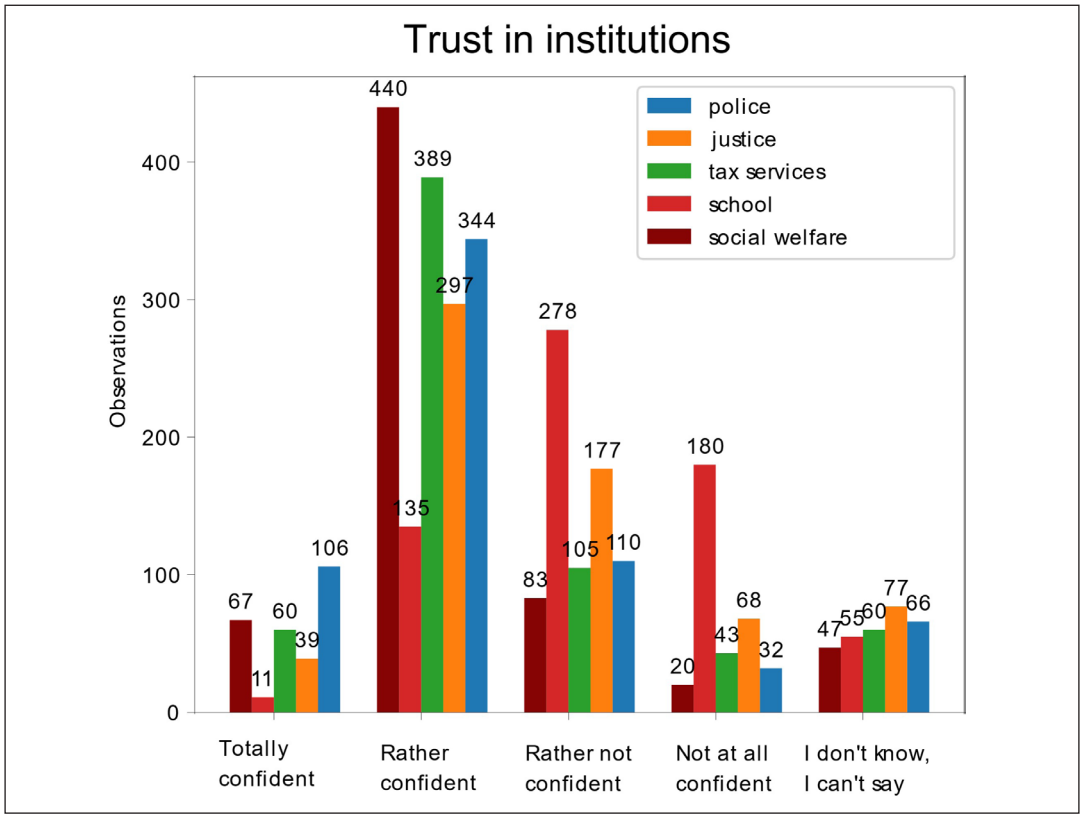

Figure 2

Source: Questionnaire Pauline Proboeuf. N = 666.
The question was: "Do you trust the following public services?".

Of all the institutions listed in the survey, however, the one that respondents trusted the least was the justice system: 36.7 per cent report having 'no confidence at all' or 'little confidence' in it. 'Total confidence' or 'moderate confidence' was reported by 50.5 per cent. Some of the respondents indicated in open-field responses to the survey a distrustful relationship with hospitals, an institution that was not even among the public services listed in the survey. A few respondents also mentioned hospitals in interviews. Lis was one of them:

> I come back to the fact that I was a nurse, I worked in a hospital, and for me the hospital institution and the National Education have the same functioning, the same problems, and what troubles me is that it's all political [...]. And, in fact, humans today are taken care of as if they were a car being restored, or [...] being built. It's budgets. It's completely dehumanized. And whether it's medicine, health or education, it's all dehumanized. (Lis, homeschooling mum, three-year university level, marital and family counsellor, four children aged 19, 17, 14, and 8 years)

Lis was talking to me about her dual experience as a civil servant and a parent. It seemed important to her to link these two statuses because it allowed her to justify her choice of homeschooling by placing the blame securely on the public service network. Her words illustrate the way in which mistrustful relationships can cross the border between different State institutions. Unfortunately, it is difficult to quantify responses of this nature.

Some parents go so far as to insist that education should be entirely separate from the state, recalling the position taken by nineteenth-century anarchist thinking (Wagnon, 2020):

> It's a political choice in the first place, in the sense that we don't want our children to be raised by the State. We really see the Ministry of National Education like that, an education of the State for the State. So that's the first thing, to help our daughter become an individual, not someone formatted by the State. (Chloé, three-year university level, stay-at-home mother, three children, 12 year-old homeschooled, 7 and 5 year-olds enrolled in a parental[14] Steiner school)

Parents also question the link between school and emancipation. Alternative schooling choices go beyond pedagogical matters to take in ideology. Many question whether the schooling of their children should fall to schools; whether this is the purview or the right of schools. Instead, they cite their rights as parents to make decisions about their children's education: 'Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children' (UDHR, Art. 26.3). According to Philippe Bongrand (2019), by participating in the publicization of homeschooling the State will in fact contribute to creating a defiant socialization of its citizens:

> On the one hand, the state's disapproval of this form of instruction, and the prevalence of security discourse in national public communication, allows families who choose to do so to perceive themselves as unjustly suspected. On the other hand, this peculiar form of nationalization is aimed, in a large number of cases, at parents who educate as a family by default, sometimes even as a last resort, after having requested or experimented with all possible schooling arrangements, because the State has not been able to meet their expectations. (Bongrand, 2019)

In fact, every experience of having their educational options called into question anchors parents more firmly in the common cause of 'school choice,' over and above differences

[14] This means that the school is managed by parents.

in their other positions and goals. Whether or not the sense they have of being under assault is fantasised or objective, it has real consequences. According to a press release issued by a national homeschooling association, their membership list has quadrupled since Emmanuel Macron's intervention.

4.3 Alternative schooling choices and political competence

Here we will focus on the links between educational choices and social movements. Some of the parents who participated in the survey may have quite idiosyncratic reasons for their choice of 'independent' schooling, quite close to a phenomenon known as 'school zaping' (Langouët & Léger, 1997). Others (27/64) reported strong political convictions that influenced their choice, though this consideration may not have been present from the beginning but rather have developed when later experiences altered their views.

Organizations and support groups play a watchdog role in alerting parents to the State's encroachments on their family freedoms. This alternative network constitutes a secondary space of socialization in which parents can assert their preferences and values and build up a stock of knowledge and know-how that enhances their political competence (Talpin, 2010). In addition to collective mobilizations, politicization can take place at the individual level: some parents undertake research on their own into issues related to education and use scientific sources to inform and enhance their positions. Not all become vocal activists in the cause of independent schooling options. Those who are closely integrated into a support group and who have a long history of independent schooling their own children are the most likely to take this path. They put in the most energy, and the mission then becomes a part of their identity.

For some mothers who were interviewed, involvement in homeschooling had consequences that took them beyond this one experiment with individual choice. The homeschooling network indirectly taught them the skills needed not only to advocate for 'the cause of children,' but also to engage more fully in other areas of civic life (Dolto, 1985). This led some of the mothers who were interviewed into professional retraining, as what began as a defence of educational choices took on wider significance. I saw non-politicized mothers move from a choice made for convenience to a political choice:

> For family life it [school] was not comfortable, we chose homeschooling at that time more for comfort than for political conviction. And then, little by little, you see, things came up, understandings came about, and today my choice is clearly political. But it was not from the outset. (Lis, homeschooling mum, third-year university level, marital and family counsellor, 4 children aged 19, 17, 14, and 8 years)

Lis describes here the shift from practical to political considerations. She had become involved at the national level in a homeschooling association, and her participation strengthened her sense of belonging to a community. She recalls her first meeting: 'we discovered another environment, another system of thought, a place where we felt welcomed there, you see for what we were, there is always a social viewpoint that we no longer perceived at all.' Interest in the public sphere seemed to assert itself alongside the choice to homeschool. And for Lis, as for others, involvement in homeschooling led to a long-term civic commitment.

The same pattern of discourse characterizes some parents whose children are in alternative schools. Naëlle, too, believes that her political position is expressed through her choice of school and defends her vision of society:

> It wasn't a choice… against…. It's just to… bring, contribute to ensuring that there are other models and that we can draw inspiration from them. That's my militant side where I really assume that my child is not in a regular school because I didn't mean like getting into a battle over what goes on in a public school. Instead, I wanted to create something that would be appropriate for me. I don't want to be… struggling. Uh… within a system. I don't have the energy for that. So I find it easier to put… even a lot of energy into a system where I know we're all going in the same direction than to struggle internally. (Naëlle, master's degree, co-director of a communication agency, one child aged four years old enrolled in a parental Steiner school)

Naëlle chose the Steiner school because she believed that it supported the development of body, mind, and, in particular, creativity. The latter she felt was not a focus in public schools. She had environmental convictions, too, and she wanted to see more attention paid to ecological issues in the curriculum.

As we see in the case of Lis, some parents found in the school choice movement an opportunity to invest themselves in a community project, in this case education. They became involved in 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 2008), which are composed of three dimensions: mutual engagement based on solidarity and trust, a joint enterprise centred on children's education, and a shared repertoire of organizational tools and methods that they themselves helped to develop. This is particularly true for parental schools, as it was in the case of Naëlle, where parents are integral part of the school project. We might compare this approach to the principle of decentralisation in political science. Rather than sitting by to watch a centralized State model operate, parents take an active part in a local model. Simply choosing differently signifies to others that it is possible to act differently, pushing against the famous dictum 'There is no alternative' (TINA).[15]

> The fact of getting involved, of putting my children in a democratic school… I consider that I'm participating a little bit in something. It's a form of militancy somehow. Hmm, because I talk about it around me, I try to explain, at work I talk about it… though not to everybody because I know that there are some people it's not worth talking about it to, I'm going to be rebuffed dryly, but then I respect that, but then there are people who are interested so… Here I am, broadcasting some little news… (Angélique, IT project manager, Master's Degree, two children aged eight and five enrolled in a democratic school)

The choice of an alternative school thus extends a pre-existing militant commitment to the educational sphere. The space of the school then becomes a space of contestation, allowing the parent to signify his or her allegiance to an alternative system of values. Lucia, for example, contrasts a technologized society with a society that glorifies nature and living things:

> Here we are, at a time when today's children are one or two years old, they have touch-screen tablets in their hands, well […] my daughter, she's building huts, she's learning to carve sticks, she's outside… she's listening to the birds singing, she recognises the flowers… she's becoming aware of

[15] 'TINA' was a slogan often used by the Conservative British prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

> that, I tell myself that's… that's the basic knowledge of things. How… How can you teach children to defend this planet if they don't even know what nature is? (Lucia, three-year university level, no professional activity, two children aged five and two years, the older enrolled in a parental Steiner school)

Protests of this nature take place on the left as well as on the right flank of the political chessboard. Indeed, some parents cite a desire for independence from the National Education System as their motivation for choosing an independent school. Catholic parents on the right have expressed worry over the issues of teaching using the analytic phonics method, learning history thematically, and education for gender equality. In 2014, this last issue sparked parental mobilisations in the form of 'school boycott days' (JRE) and – less immediately visible, but more wide-spread and permanent – protests against various social networks, leading the MNE to question itself and to reflect on the issue of 'educational' programs.[16]

With reference to Hirschman's model triptych 'exit, voice, loyalty' (1970) parents dissatisfied with the public system are opting to 'exit.' We have seen that this choice could, for some, be politicized. However, actors from independent school systems tend to depoliticize the choice of school by emphasizing the desire to offer parents diversified options. Eric Mestrallet, a business leader who is very active in the creation of schools in Priority Neighborhoods[17] (he founded the Alexandre Dumas course and the Espérance Banlieues network, among others), believes that schools should prioritize meeting parental demand over offering a standardized service.

5 Conclusion

In his speech on separatism in October 2020, Emmanuel Macron quoted Ferdinand Buisson, one of the main actors in the implementation of French school laws under the Third Republic:

> To make a Republican – he wrote –, you have to take a human being, however small and humble he may be […] and give him the idea that he must think for himself, that he owes neither faith nor obedience to anyone, that it is up to him to seek the truth and not to receive it ready-made from a teacher, a headmaster, a leader, whoever he may be.

In doing so, Macron reaffirmed the nation's attachment to the legacy of the Third Republic, which placed all its hopes on the institution of education as a factory of citizens capable of sustaining the Republican regime.

Alternative schooling choices contribute to blurring the lines between instruction and education, non-professionals and teachers. This legislative context places 'the school' in the field of political science (Barrault-Stella & Goastellec, 2015) by recalling that the relationship to school is always a relationship to the State. We show that those who choose alternative schooling are caught up in a power relationship with the State. Respondents tend to have less confidence in public schools than in most other public institutions, and not infrequently have a countercultural bent. This might well be due to State regulations fostering a defiant

[16] These programs refer to interdisciplinary training areas that allow for student engagement through experiential activities and aim to build reflective and psychosocial skills (Audigier, 2012).

[17] The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) define these as 'a new priority geography of urban policy, established by the planning law for urban affairs and urban cohesion of 21 February 2014'.

stance towards the State. By trying to silence divergent voices, the government risks further enflaming anti-institutional discontent and thereby widening the gap between families and the State. It risks moving France from a model of 'inclusion through control' (Farges & Tenret, 2018) to a model of exclusion through coercion. At the time of the legislative debates, some families, distraught, announced their determination to continue educating their children even if it meant disobeying or leaving France. Will these words be turned into action? Not enough data is available yet to justify a full evaluation of the effects of the new law that was just passed last year, but further research could be undertaken to determine how families will position themselves in the future.

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Dóra Szekulesz

'All planned babies must be born': Women's experience of infertility and assisted reproductive technologies in Hungary

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Abstract

In recent years, the issue of reproduction has been increasingly thematized in Hungarian political discourse. This has not only occurred at the discursive level, but the government has also introduced new policies regarding reproduction and family life, thus new regulations have been introduced concerning the medical practice of IVF and other ART which have affected practices associated with infertility. The article aims to discuss the ways that policies and discourses shape the views of women struggling with infertility. The medical and political discourse seems to emphasize the responsibility of women in relation to fertility-related issues, despite the fact that the problem also affects men. Furthermore, with the increased surveillance of women undergoing assisted reproductive treatment, the importance of the latter's self-reflexivity, discipline, and responsibility is emphasized. To discuss these issues, the article uses a multi-method approach. The primary data source is in-depth narrative interviews with IVF participants, supplemented by the analysis of political discourses about childbearing and infertility which help in the examination of how different policies and discourses shape individual experiences and desires. I argue that recent policies on IVF and related medical discourses and practices can potentially emphasize the responsibility of women. Women who cannot or do not want to reproduce may be presented as selfish or treated with pity, and these notions are intensified due to the government's explicit pronatalist agenda, which only supports those who conform to conservative heteronormative reproductive standards.

Keywords: infertility; assisted reproductive technologies; reproduction; biopolitics; population policy

1 Introduction

This article aims to describe different factors associated with participation in IVF treatment in Hungary; the main research question is whether policy changes and the conservative discourse on gender roles appear in participants' individual reasoning for choosing IVF. Another important goal was to show how different discourses and narratives about femininity appear in personal experiences regarding childbearing and IVF.

In recent years there has been a growing tendency to discuss reproductive issues in Hungarian political discourse. This interest in women's reproductive capacity not only has affected symbolic matters but has also appeared in policymaking. The new measures are often framed as family-friendly policies. In parallel, the government started a media campaign to popularize family life and values and declared 2018 the Year of Families. In 2020 a new ministry was created which is responsible for family and youth policy matters. The current President of Hungary, formerly State Secretary for Family Affairs, Katalin Novák explicitly stated that the government's motivation for supporting families is to stop the population decline, which is, according to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, one of the most crucial problems Hungary is facing today. Based on these tendencies, it is not surprising that infertility and assisted reproductive technologies (ART) have come to the attention of current Hungarian political discourse and policymaking. At the end of 2019, the government nationalized private IVF clinics and made infertility-related drugs free of charge. In parallel with this, a new scientific institution was created called the National Human Reproduction Laboratory, which received significant state support. The head of the laboratory stated that the institution aims to ease Hungary's demographic crisis; therefore, the main goal is to help make up for 'the missing 300 thousand children who cannot be born because of infertility'. The laboratory's mission is to conduct research about infertility-related questions and popularize new technologies to raise the success rate of ART. Members of Fidesz, the ruling party in Hungary, often refer to themselves as the only political force that prioritizes fertility. With the slogan 'all planned babies must be born', the government's explicit intention is to help people who struggle with infertility, while on the other hand having the broader motivation of stopping population decline.

However, they are not the first to attempt this, as discourses and policies on this matter have existed for a long time. For example, state-socialist Hungary adopted legislation such as an abortion ban in the 1950s; moreover, demographic issues were topics of intense public debate among intellectuals in the state-socialist era (Adamik, 2012; Heller et al., 1990). Hungarian discourse about the decline in the number of newly born children has often tended to place the blame on women's participation in paid employment, the eradication of traditional family values, and access to abortion (Kövér, 2015). Women are often portrayed as those responsible for the fate of the nation and humankind per se; thus, it is they who should be held accountable for demographic changes, according to this ideology (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991). From this perspective, examining discourses about infertility and associated technologies is crucial for understanding the country's reproductive regime, because this can show how (political) power treats women who do not reproduce 'as expected'.

This paper aims to analyse the relationship between personal experiences of IVF treatment and the public discourses that target infertility. The main goals of the research were to give voice to women who are participating in assisted reproduction procedures, to understand how the experience of infertility affects everyday life and practices, and to identify how these experiences are affected by the different agents that shape reproduction regimes.

Feminist methodologies emphasize the importance of inquiring into women's experiences and narratives because it is crucial to collect women's accounts of their own lives to understand how they construct their experiences with infertility (Oakley, 1981), thereby creating knowledge. Without this perspective we cannot fully understand how different discourses affect individual life decisions. In this regard, state legislation must be taken into account. State support has covered the cost of five rounds of IVF treatment per person since

2017, although the rate of support has increased since then because if a woman participating in an infertility program has a child due to one of the first five treatments, she becomes eligible for an additional four state-funded tries, given that she is willing to undergo the IVF procedure again.

Through the increase in support for fertility treatments and political discourse on population decline, the state encourages women to participate in infertility treatment. At the individual level, giving up on the option to participate in IVF treatment can potentially lead to self-recrimination because one may feel that one has not tried everything possible to successfully become pregnant. For the sake of understanding the connection between reproduction and different power relations, the article first briefly presents theoretical approaches related to the issue of biopower, then shows why it is crucial to examine patients' experiences in the medical field. In the second part of the article, ten in-depth interviews are analysed in order to understand how infertility-related issues interlock with wider social processes.

2 Why does reproduction matter?

The state has an interest in regulating private matters that affect individual life decisions, and in this regard Foucault (1990) argues such techniques could be defined as 'biopower'. The main task of power is to organize individual and collective forces to maintain economic development, the basis of which is the reproduction of the population; therefore, population policy is an essential political tool. According to Foucault, biopower not only creates regulations and legislation but has a strong influence on designating the worthiness of people in society. Furthermore, Rose (1990) points out that power practices that seek to influence mental inclinations and abilities (for instance, the social construction of institutions such as the family) can elicit strong emotional reactions and feelings at an individual level, and have the ability to shape identity. The new truth regimes are associated with subjectivity as they are intended to stimulate those who they affect and influence their desire to maximize individual capacity (Rose, 1990). As Memmi (2003) argues, biopolitics nowadays appears in new forms. State legislation exists in this regard but policies are typically not normative nor prohibitive; instead, they promote responsibility to their users. As a consequence, a discourse of surveillance appears in conversations with the representatives of different state-regulated institutions (Memmi, 2003).

In the case of infertility, the latter representatives belong to the medical field. Hence, medical professionals have a substantial role in individual decision making connected to reproduction since doctors have the proficiency to interpret what is happening in the patient's body and provide information and insight which form the basis of decision making. In this sense, medical professionals play an indispensable role in articulating individual choices – i.e., a doctor can suggest whether to continue IVF after unsuccessful treatment, but the final decision will be the patient's responsibility. Further analysing the phenomenon, Memmi adds that with the invention of new technologies which have made it possible to visualize what is happening inside the body (e.g. prenatal screening devices), new terrains of body surveillance have emerged. While discussing what can be seen on a monitor, medical professionals can also manipulate patients' feelings through how they formulate their sentences (Memmi, 2003; 2012; Petchesky, 1987). ART expands this visibility even more because the bodily processes of fertilization become visible long before conception, thus have the potential to extend patients' responsibility in time.

However, it is not only the state and its representatives that are concerned about these processes; reproduction is not only regulated by local powers but global market relations too, as some scholars who are interested in the capitalization of biomedicine have noted (Rose, 2009). As Russel (1994) argues, capitalism encourages the commodification of reproduction, which is particularly true in the case of ART. As several authors have shown, ART uproots the distinction between the oppositions of public and private, and of nature and culture, as it frames conception through an institutional lens (Franklin, 2013; Haraway, 1991; Thompson, 2005). The relations involved in this matter merge into a phenomenon which cannot be fully understood as a local and state-regulated problem, but rather as a global, transnational issue – as growing numbers of people travel abroad in order to participate in treatments which are forbidden or too expensive in their home countries (Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2008; Nahman, 2016). This shows how, with the technology of in-vitro fertilization, new agents with economic interests can enter the realm of reproduction. For instance, in the case of egg donation and surrogacy, the human body becomes an investment, and market relations and personal qualities shape the product's price (Malmqvist & Zeiler, 2016). One may rent one's own body parts to another, but the practices that have become available due to the invention of in-vitro fertilization usually involve a third party; namely, fertility clinics that intend to profit from such bodily exchanges.

It is also essential to examine how infertility is constructed in the medical field. Several authors have shown that the sciences related to the body can also be understood as cultural systems that reflect ideologies about how gendered bodies should behave (Ehrenreich & English, 2010; Laqueur, 1990). This cannot be separated from the medicalization process, which has also affected the construction of infertility. As individuals enter the realm of healthcare, the health-disease categorization, in addition to the individual perceptions and definitions thereof, becomes located within an institutional framework whereby medical authorities define health-disease on scales based on specific criteria. This process can also be viewed as a transition between the private and public spheres. The problem (illness) then ceases to appear as a personal matter but rather as the shared problem of several actors that requires collaboration for its solution (Thompson, 2005). In this respect, infertility is special because the individual does not become infertile or 'ill' until they decide to have a child, hence infertility does not usually become a reality for underlying pathological reasons but is instead declared when the desire for a child is articulated (Greil et al., 2011)

Another important consideration is how social conditions are constructed at the institutional level – i.e., within the reproduction clinic. According to Foucault, one of the characteristics of any medical environment is that the individual appears objectified within the medical context: during examinations undertaken at a clinic the patient is not usually present as an active participant but regarded as an objectified body to be examined (Foucault, 1994). Nevertheless, during the IVF process the individual or the couple need to attend numerous medical consultations at which, in addition to making decisions, self-presentation becomes an important aspect. According to Thompson (2005), part of the process involves how the couple applying for IVF treatment construct their own relationships in the institutional space. Hence, it becomes important for the couple to 'behave well' – i.e., to act according to social norms and be polite with each other as well as with doctors and assistants. It is also in the couple's interest to show that they have a stable and well-functioning relationship or they may be considered 'unworthy' of having a child by the professionals. If their beha-

viour does not meet the expectations of the professional staff, they may find themselves in a disadvantageous situation – which reveals another aspect of the power relations between the patient and the medical field.

The professional and scientific environment surrounding infertility is dominated by men, which may lead to women's perspectives and needs being less well articulated within the walls of such institutions. On the other hand, it is important to see that infertility can affect men as well, but related treatments such as IVF or insemination are performed on women, typically in the form of invasive interventions affecting the female reproductive organs. In contrast, male fertility treatments are performed outside the man's body, and if the problem is not localized in the case of the woman, she continues to be the focus of medical monitoring. It is she who has to become the patient, as the embryo(s) are implanted in her uterus during the IVF treatment. It is also the woman who needs to take more medication, undergo hormone stimulation, attend ultrasound check-ups, and then receive an implant, and – provided the IVF procedure is successful – give birth, or if there is a problem, have a miscarriage at the end of the process. Nevertheless, the medical discourses surrounding ART often do not reflect on women; instead, they tend to focus on the couple as a male-female ensemble; and what is more, the embryo, the future child, becomes the centre of attention (Van Der Ploeg, 2004).

Women who cannot or do not want to reproduce may be presented as selfish or treated with pity. The present conservative anti-liberal government strengthens the notion that for women the most sacred duty is to become a mother, thus the focus is not on women's well-being but on the usage of their reproductive capacities to stop population decline. Moreover, direct and indirect pressure to participate in IVF can also come from the microenvironment, such as from a partner or family members, but IVF-related legislation also shapes the related decisions (Throsby, 2004).

3 Methodology

Ten in-depth narrative interviews were conducted with women who had participated in IVF. In order to find participants, interview invitations were posted in thematic peer-support Facebook groups for women who were participating in IVF treatment. Despite the large group membership, only six women replied; the rest were found using the snowball technique. This may indicate that infertility is a stigmatized experience: some of the interviewees mentioned that they felt that talking about infertility is taboo, and they chose to give interviews because they wanted to make infertility and IVF experiences more visible. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews except for one were conducted online. The length of the interviews varied between one-and-a-half and three hours. Participants were asked to relate their life stories in the context of the infertility experience and IVF treatment. Most participants were in their late 30s or at the beginning of their 40s, the youngest participant being 33 years old and the oldest 44. Seven women were participating in the IVF process when we conducted the interviews; most of them had had several IVF and inseminations before. Three participants had biological children from a previously successful IVF treatment, and one had adopted a child. Six out of ten women were living in Budapest; the others in rural areas. Seven of them possessed college degrees, and three of them had a medium-level education. All of them were employed when the interviews were conducted. All of the par-

ticipants were married – two of them had decided to get married because they felt it was the easiest way to prove their relationship status, which is required for participation in the IVF treatment. Interviewees' names and personal information have been anonymized. In the individual narratives, infertility is almost always described as a stressful experience, which can destabilize the identity of the affected women. The analysis of the interviews aims to show how different actors and discourses interlocked with the individual narratives of infertility. In the analysis, thematic topics were outlined, including the reasons for delayed childbearing, the effect of state-funded IVF on individual decisions, financing IVF treatment, criticism of the medical field, and the effect of medical imaging throughout the treatment.

4 Discourse about family and the transformation of IVF regulations

Since 2014 Hungary has adopted new social policies and measures which mainly target heterosexual families who have or are planning to have children. However, several studies have shown that these new measures primarily address those in a better socioeconomic position, as they can only be claimed on the basis of insurance connected to income (Fodor, 2022; Szikra, 2018). Moreover, the so-called anti-liberal, conservative political agenda also strengthens narratives that focus on the demographic crisis, and as a consequence popularizes pronatalist ideologies and in parallel rejects immigration. As prime minister Viktor Orbán said at a Demographic Conference 'Our opinion is that we must solve the demographic problems by relying on our own resources'.

The main political narratives associated with gender equality have also been transformed. The conservative government has started an anti-gender discourse which has had numerous consequences such as the rejection of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, and a ban on gender studies in Hungary. The emphasis is not on gender equality but on the importance of family and traditional values. In the mainstream political discourse femininity is sentimentalized and connected to motherhood and carework (Fodor, 2022), For instance, State Secretary of Family Affairs Katalin Novák published a video entitled 'How can a woman be successful?' in which she said 'Let's experience the beauty and harmony arising from the difference between men and women. Dare to say yes to having children! Dare to be there where no one else can replace us!'. Womanhood, femininity, and gender inequalities are essentialized. Reproduction and care are shaped as women's responsibilities and childbearing is a simple matter of choice in this narrative. According to the Hungarian Constitution, the family is an ensemble of a woman and a man with their children. Those who do not reproduce are considered outside of the natural order of the sexes because they do not fit with the conservative heteronormative standards of the government.

The nationalization of fertility centres and the increase in state support for drugs fits the pronatalist ideology of the nation, yet access to fertility treatment is not open to every Hungarian citizen. According to the law, both heterosexual couples and single women may claim state-supported IVF, but the claimant has to present medical proof of their infertility, thus non-infertile single women cannot attend fertility treatment, and lesbian couples are also excluded. The maximum age of the applicants is also regulated: women cannot receive state-supported treatment at over 45 years of age, whereas there is no age limit for male participants. Gamete donation is allowed in Hungary but egg and embryo donation must

happen on an altruistic basis. On the other hand, sperm can be purchased from Hungarian and foreign sperm banks, but insurance does not cover the cost of this process. It is a well-known medical fact that the success of IVF and fertility decreases with age, while treatment for older patients is more liable to be successful if donor gametes or previously frozen eggs are used. However, egg freezing is illegal in Hungary except for in some cases when the claimant's reproductive health is at risk. The geographical locations of the fertility centres are also crucial in terms of examining access; there are twelve institutions in Hungary; seven are located in the capital Budapest and the others in bigger rural cities, but there are no clinics in Northeast Hungary where the population has a lower average income and socio-economic status (KSH, 2021), thus accessing fertility treatment may be more challenging.

5 Decisions associated with childbearing and the use of IVF and ART

Participant narratives reveal that even though public political discourses often blame women's emancipation for population decline, in reality the timing of childbearing is a multi-dimensional issue that cannot be reduced to simple explanations. It is a well-known fact that fertility decreases with age, but in Hungary, as in most European countries, the time of having a first child is increasingly being delayed. According to census data, in 2011 11.2 per cent of women over the age of 41 did not have children (Szabó, 2015). Highly educated women in the capital city of Budapest are overrepresented among the childless, but one should also note that they are not the only ones in this group, as unhealthy relationships, poor housing conditions, uncertain labour market prospects, as well as expectations regarding childbearing can also be important factors in having a child at a later stage of life, or not wanting offspring at all (Szalma & Takács, 2014).

Analysis of the interviews showed that delayed childbearing is related to fertility problems, but the reasons for postponement can vary from person to person; we cannot say that the only reason for this decision is higher education or socioeconomic status. Participant narratives highlighted that delayed childbearing often could not be described as a 'decision' because in many cases it was not a conscious choice, but certain circumstances had led to postponement. Six participants started childbearing after they turned 35. Seven out of ten women had, as they described it, a good financial status. However, this group cannot be seen as homogeneous; one woman claimed that the reason for her delayed childbearing is that she had been focused on her career before, while other participants said that circumstances had not been suitable; for example, they had faced expectations from within their microenvironment, while others had relationship problems such as infidelity, or issues with the substance abuse of a partner. Angéla (44), a highly educated woman who had gone through eight rounds of IVF before, mentioned that even though she had wanted children for a long time, her husband was not ready to start a family. Angéla now thinks that postponed childbearing is her fault. 'I could have been more determined'. She feels that she is responsible for the situation: 'I didn't pursue my own goal in this regard. Sometimes I think if I had really wanted a child… because, you know, they say it happens to you if you really want something. But that's just this new-age nonsense. At least this is what I'm comforting myself with' (Angéla, 44). Angéla's narrative illustrates rational explanations for postponed childbearing; she knows the reasons for the delay but still blames herself for the situation, even though it was

her husband who did not want a child earlier on. The responsibility for childbearing is associated with women, which manifests in individual reasoning and subjective experiences, as well as in public discourses that blame women for population decline and the low fertility rate.

5.1 Social expectations about childbearing

The discourse about the constraints of childbearing almost exclusively addresses women, although reproduction according to the traditional political narrative is only desirable within a heteronormative frame that designates the appropriate age of the women. For instance, the 'biological clock' is a female construction; women who wish to reproduce at an older age are often portrayed as irresponsible or selfish; however, older men do not face the same judgment (Thorsby, 2004). Teenage motherhood also falls outside the normative reproductive age, thus is constructed as a stigmatized experience (Yardley, 2008). Angela mentioned that she had experienced intense pressure from a young age to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Now she thinks that these warnings had implanted a sense of anxiety about getting pregnant later on in her life. 'But if I could do it all through once again, I wouldn't be so scared that I might – and I'm not saying this against my husband right now – I wouldn't be so afraid I might get pregnant [...], I wouldn't be as terrified of an unwanted pregnancy. Now I am just afraid that the desired pregnancy will not happen'. Angéla's narrative highlights how women are faced with norms about reproduction from the age they reach puberty. First, the taboo of teenage pregnancy can generate long-term fears about childbearing, as happened with Angéla. According to her, it was partly this fear that may be held accountable for her delay in childbearing. Later in her life she experienced this 'fear' from the opposite direction – namely, that she could not conform to societal norms and fulfil her subjective desire to have children and become a mother. These intense pressures, which range along the axis of prohibition and coercion of reproduction, primarily target girls and women and can manifest in self-blaming, as in the case of Angéla, who on the one hand rationally knows that her infertility is not her fault, but in her narrative acknowledges explicit feelings of shame and self-criticism.

Rebeka, a 40-year-old lower-class woman from a rural area, delayed childbearing because she felt the intense pressure to become pregnant at the age of 18 from her own and her husband's family: 'I was very young, and they always asked me when I would get pregnant: "why the wait!? You are an idiot if you don't want it yet!"' (Rebeka, 40). This excerpt shows how even though childbearing is an individual decision, societal norms affect decision-making. In the women's microenvironment, having children right after finishing school was almost obligatory; their reproductive decisions were under inspection by those who had already completed the normative task of bearing children. Angéla and Rebeka have very different societal backgrounds, thus the (micro)surveillance of reproductive decisions manifested in different ways; for Angéla, having children at a young age was not an option because she had to finish higher education and then start her career. For Rebeka, it was the other way round; she was expected to start a family after finishing mid-level education; this corresponds to the notion that delayed childbearing might be more usual for those of a higher socioeconomic status, but the women's narratives shows that we obviously cannot demarcate a homogenous group in this regard, in contrast to the government's primary discourse that infertility can affect any member of society despite educational or income status. What these two narratives have in common is that the respondents faced expectations about reproduction at both the micro and macro level.

Although Rebeka, at the age of nineteen, had not conceived for a year after trying, she started using birth control again. She wanted to wait with childbearing until she 'felt ready' – in a way, she was confronted with the expectations of her environment: 'We didn't even use birth control for a year, but I didn't get pregnant, and everyone was nagging me, and of course they didn't know that we hadn't been using contraception. It was so frustrating, and I decided that I didn't wanna get pregnant yet'. Nonetheless, Rebeka's decision can be interpreted as that she successfully managed to break through the expectations evinced towards her. However, she feels ambivalent about this choice: 'It was because of me that we started this [IVF process]so late, because I wasn't ready for it yet. I'm aware that if I had decided sooner we might not be here – but we might be as well; who knows? Because of this, I blamed myself a little bit, and sometimes I questioned what kind of woman I was that I didn't want a child when others already had a child or two. But I couldn't do it – it took me a while to get there, and I can't blame myself for that'. Fertility/reproduction, as stated before, is framed as women's responsibility; this can be seen in Rebeka's narrative when she questions her womanhood because of her desire to postpone childbearing. Motherhood in this narrative is inseparable from the construction of femininity. The notion that infertility means that one is not a 'real' woman is a recurrent topic in participants' narratives; for instance, one respondent said that 'I feel like a half-ready woman' because she cannot have a child 'the natural way'.

Most participants said they decided to have children when they had created adequate material and emotional conditions, such as having their own house and a stable long-term relationship. For example, one participant Judit (37), who had wanted to have children from a very young age, mentioned that she had had several long-term relationships, but none of her previous partners wanted to have a child yet; this was among the reasons she thought the relationships had ended. However, when she met her present husband, he had expressed that he wanted to have children with her very early on. 'That night was so memorable, and I said to him "okay, then I will stop smoking", and I did, and I started to take prenatal vitamins; overall, I started taking care of myself so that the baby could come, but it didn't [come]'. The woman's narrative shows that she was determined to have a child; she was only waiting for the right partner to come in order to conceive. She and her husband decided to have children together one month after they met. However, her partner was not willing to give up smoking and consuming alcohol; it was Judit who started paying attention to her health in the hope of a future pregnancy.

5.2 Micro effects of fertility policies

Discourses around IVF also involve prohibitions about quitting the treatment. As Thorsby (2004) argues, whether to proceed with IVF can hardly be described as neutral decision as several factors impact the process, including one's partner, family members, and the provision of funding. Stopping IVF is portrayed as a failure. In these discourses, successful IVF is only a matter of trying harder. For instance, in online forums one recurrent topic involves disapproval of stopping IVF before a successful treatment has occurred; with the available state support, the discourse of prohibition may become more potent because it manifest not only as a personal subjective feeling, but as giving up on a material opportunity. Even though some participants started to think about quitting IVF after several unsuccessful

treatments, they did not want to give up mainly because state-funded opportunities were available. For example, Szilvi, who has had four rounds of IVF, said: 'Yes, we are thinking about having a fifth [round of IVF], but I'll tell you honestly, I have gone through a lot of pain and misery, and I'm a little bit afraid of doing it again. I have my daughter now [adopted]. What will happen to her if I become ill or something? So I feel that I'm between two fires. My heart says that if I don't try it again, I will regret it later' (Szilvi, 33). Szilvi explicitly stated that she is only considering the subsequent treatment because she would not need to pay for it. She feels that if she does not try she will waste an opportunity, even though she has had two extrauterine pregnancies from the previous rounds of IVF, and her doctor told her that she has a significant chance of a high-risk pregnancy if she conceives. It can be seen that IVF, in Szilvi's case, is connected with anxiety, both bodily and emotional. These worries are linked to the well-being of her adopted child.

Another participant also reflected on the effect of state funding. After three unsuccessful rounds of IVF and several inseminations, Andi started considering adoption, but said 'I decided that as long as there is a state-funded option, I won't give up on having my own biological child' (Andi 35). This shows another effect of the state funding for IVF: namely, that it might strengthen the importance awarded to biological kinship. Kinship is a crucial question regarding IVF; the solution for infertility could be the adoption of a child, but in the main narratives a genetic relationship is usually constituted as 'real' parenthood. Seven out of ten participants expressed that they wanted to have a genetic connection with their future child, although three of the participants said that they would consider adoption if the next round of IVF were unsuccessful. Kata, a 36-year-old woman who has a biological child from previous IVF treatment, said, 'I would like to experience pregnancy and breastfeeding once again, and I would feel a little better if I had a child whom I could take care of, so to speak, from the start, during pregnancy, so that the baby's mental and physical well-being depends on me. With a careless pregnancy, you might get a child of an alcoholic, or a drug addict mother… so this also has [is associated with] its own mental and physical health risks.' Kata and her husband are now considering IVF using donated eggs, which is strictly regulated in Hungary, but the treatment could be done under market conditions in neighbouring Slovakia or the Czech Republic for a relatively low cost.

We can assume that such medical services have become more prevalent in the last few years among Hungarian couples; for instance, foreign fertility clinics in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and even in Ukraine have Hungarian websites and offer Hungarian patients translators. For Kata, the experience of bodily closeness and the prenatal period is extremely meaningful; this notion of closeness could substitute for a real genetic connection; this may be one reason to choose IVF with donated eggs instead of adoption. At the same time, Kata is not entirely against adoption because 'if all else fails, it will be adoption because the desire to raise a baby and diaper [sic] him and everything is strong in me'. For her, the issue is not only about biological kinship, but bodily connection is prioritized, thus adoption is a real, if final option. This shows that the experience of pregnancy is strongly connected to the process of becoming a 'real mother'. Other than that, we can see that there are normative ideals about optimal pregnancies, which, as many feminist scholars have shown, are linked to the medicalization process which has turned pregnancy into a highly surveilled phenomenon (Ehrenreich & English, 2010); accordingly, if a pregnant woman is not behaving in line with medical norms, she is perceived to be endangering her future baby.

5.3 IVF and conservatism

Another ambivalent factor that influences even individual-level decisions is the conservative and Christian orientation (support for religious norms and strong involvement of churches in public life and politics) of the current government. Despite the large amount of state funding, IVF is a controversial technology that has not always been supported by the government. Fidesz, the ruling party of Hungary, governs in coalition with KDNP; both describe themselves as Christian conservative parties, and their representatives constantly emphasize the importance of Christian values on a discursive level. Although we cannot say that they are connected to any specific Christian religion, they enjoy the support of the Hungarian Catholic Church, yet Christian dogmas do not have a direct impact on policymaking (Ádám & Bozóki, 2016). According to Catholicism, IVF and other ART treatments are sinful because they are acts against nature. The Catholic Church believes that life starts at conception; thus, one of the main issues with IVF treatment is that the process usually involves embryo freezing; after the treatment, the unimplanted embryos are often used in scientific research, or in some cases medical staff destroy the unused embryos, which runs counter to this religious dogma (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2018). One of the leading bishops in Hungary, András Veres, has expressed criticism of such state support and demanded a ban on IVF and other ART in Hungary. Orbán, the leader of the ruling party, stated that one of the reasons behind the nationalization of the fertility centres is that the government could then supervise what happens in these institutions. On the other hand, as mentioned before, the government also stated that they support IVF for demographic reasons. One participant who had had IVF before the increase in state support reflected on the political reasons for funding ART: 'They [government actors] said that IVF is from the devil, and it's artificial, and so on, so the whole political attitude was kinda religious. But they changed their attitude because there are hardly any Hungarians left, so it doesn't matter at what cost, the goal is to increase the number of Hungarians' (Hédi, 42). Based on this, it appears that several actors are shaping the discourse around ART; religious narratives are present in Hungarian society and affect the representation of IVF. In the end, the effect of religious dogmas in policymaking related to IVF is less influential than the demographic aspirations of the Hungarian government.

Three research participants mentioned the issue of the relationship between religion and IVF in the interviews; one of them described herself as Catholic, but she felt that having a child was more important to her than the Catholic opinion about IVF: 'I had this ambivalent feeling, is it ethical, is it okay to play God? But the desire to have a baby was stronger than this' (Hédi, 42). IVF is a good example of how religious discourse can lead to blame in relation to these techniques, yet the Church often states that life without children is worthless. Veronika, a participant who lives in a rural area, told me that she often hides the fact that she is participating in IVF because she feels that people judge her for this decision, although she was reaffirmed in her decision by her strongly Catholic relative: 'I told her that we want a baby, and she nailed the question: "are you using IVF?" and I was completely frozen and told her the truth. She told me that she knows it's not easy, and you need a lot of strength to do that.' The woman was relieved that even though her relative was Catholic, she was not against IVF and was compassionate. This shows that even though the Catholic Church is formally against ART, this does not necessarily mean that people who consider themselves religious are critical of the technology. For instance, one Polish study showed that while most Polish citizens are Catholic, 75 per cent of Poles can accept the use of ARTs in the case of infertility (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2018).

6 Women's experiences and the medical field

Even though IVF and other form of ART are state-funded in Hungary, most participants stated that they had spent a significant amount of money on the treatment, although most had started their first IVF cycle before the new legislation on ART had been introduced in Hungary. All women were participating in state-funded IVF, but some had to finance the treatments by themselves because they had completed the five state-funded rounds of treatment. Angéla, who has had eight rounds of IVF, said that 'other people invest in real estate, we invest in having a baby'. This illustrates how the usage of ART moves childbearing from a private individual experience to a public commodified process, which cannot be understood without acknowledging the processes of capitalization associated with childbearing. Moreover, these processes not only affect material practices but may transform the notion of childbearing at the individual level – for instance, in Angéla's narrative, we can sense that the project of having a baby has a price, thus childbearing might become objectified. In countries where ART is only available under market conditions, some authors theorize that it serves as an implicitly eugenic attempt to regulate the reproduction of 'unworthy' people (Daar, 2017). In Hungary, the construction of 'unworthy' patients is based on social class affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, and age. For instance, women older than 45 are excluded from state-funded IVF participation, but there is no age restriction regarding male participants. On the other hand, the chance of successful IVF at this age is meagre, and while some techniques could increase the chance of getting pregnant, these are strictly regulated. For instance, egg freezing is only available for women who work in dangerous environments or have an illness that endangers their reproductive capacity. Other technologies are also not available in Hungary, such as egg and embryo donation under market conditions.

Another aspect of having state-funded IVF is that there is that usually a long waiting list for the treatment; most research participants mentioned that they had to wait several months before their first appointment with infertility physicians, and most women reported that they applied to have additional examinations in the market-based medical sector to speed up the process. One participant, Judit, faced a year-long waiting list before she could be treated with IVF. However, her doctor offered her an opportunity: 'He said if I don't want to lose out on a state-funded occasion but I don't have enough money I am lucky because a Swiss pharma company is doing a study at the fertility clinic, and if I were willing to participate they would pay for the IVF and all additional costs. I would only have to take a pill before the IVF. We had spent almost a million [forints] by then, so I agreed' (Judit, 37). The woman's experience shows that there are actors other than the patients and the state who have an interest in infertility-related medical treatment. This correlates with the idea that under capitalist relations practices associated with childbearing are increasingly commodified, thus the private matter of wanting children may be transformed into a phenomenon of market interest. Pharmaceutical companies have financial interests in this area, so in this case we can say the female body becomes a new area of capital investment, with the patient's body being an object in this relation (Mies, 1987; Russel, 1994). The doctor's reasoning/role in persuading the patient to accept such support is unchallengeable, which fits the concept of delegated biopolitics, but in this case the physician represented the company's interests instead of those of the state.

State-funded IVF can be helpful for people struggling with infertility, particularly for those who have lower socioeconomic status. However, according to the interview parti-

cipants, there are several downsides to it. Most interview participants expressed some form of criticism towards the medical professionals and fertility clinics. The majority of participants felt that most doctors do not have enough time or interest to examine the causes of infertility and decide to start in-vitro fertilization before doing proper medical examinations. Participants described this as a highly frustrating experience because, in some cases, their infertility remained unexplained. Unexplained infertility is often the target of psychological discourse; four out of ten participants had unexplained infertility and three of them had started researching the psychological reasons that could lie behind their problems and had attended psychotherapy in the hope of solving their fertility-related challenges.

Mainstream psychological discourse about infertility may interpret the problem as related to women, which can lead to self-blame, even though the dysfunction of the male reproductive organs can cause infertility. Psychological discourses may target women because research has pointed out that infertile women display more distress than their male partners, thus they might need more support from psychological professionals (Deka & Sarma, 2010). Moreover, males are less likely to seek help when facing mental health issues (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). An analysis of practices associated with pregnancy and birth showed that discourse and information regarding childbirth and foetal development almost exclusively targets women (Rapp, 2000). This also seems to hold true in relation to the psychological practices connected to fertility issues. Emese, a 40-year-old woman who had unexplained infertility, said: 'I had a friend who had a closed fallopian tube – in her case it was evident and their first IVF was successful because they knew what had caused it, it had a real physical reason. But it's hard when you have no reason, and then you realize that it must be psychological'. After several unsuccessful rounds of IVF, Emese attended psychotherapy, where she mainly discussed questions related to her femininity; afterwards, she decided to quit her job at a multinational company where she was in a leading position. The reason for this decision was because she thought that she and her partner might have fertility issues because she was in a better financial and occupational position than her husband, which destabilized the 'natural' gender roles between them. This kind of psychological explanation involves a normative approach regarding gender roles and the gendered division of labour.

One participant who had unexplained infertility expressed her criticism of the medical field: 'Doctors don't really care about finding the reasons because it's probably too expensive, and in most places they think one round of IVF will succeed, and that's it'. These concerns regarding the quality of medical care are common, and show that medical and governmental aspirations may promote the use of ART instead of finding the cause of infertility and treating it with a less invasive procedure, thereby putting women in a less advantageous position (Ryan, 2009). For example, one participant mentioned that she had experienced long periods and strong menstrual cramps; she described these symptoms as almost unbearable, thus she went to her gynaecologist. 'He never examined me with a pelvic ultrasound, and he said that my symptoms must be psychological because I had had so much trauma in the past'. Feminist analysis has shown that women's pain is more likely to be seen as caused by psychological issues than biological ones. This respondents' narrative strengthened this notion, as she was later diagnosed with endometriosis, which in many cases is disregarded by medical professionals because cramps are seen as a natural part of menstruation (Cleghorn, 2021).

Furthermore, there were cases when infertility remained unexplained because it was due to male reproductive dysfunction, but doctors only examined issues with women and did not recommend semen analysis or any other tests on the men. 'I have to say, they were

absolutely careless. I had to apply for the semen analysis and a lot of other medical check-ups on my own account'. This shows that infertility and reproduction are often associated with women even by trained medical professionals; discourses and practices target women's bodies and construct infertility as a problem related to women's reproductive organs. This might have consequences in medical practice, such as not investigating male infertility properly. The blaming of women for infertility appeared in the context of treatment and in the participants' microenvironment as families and friends often suggested that the problem could be the women's fault. 'My mother-in-law said that it is certain that it is not her son who has the problem, but me, and this caused me such remorse that I cried for weeks' (Kata, 36). Later on, the doctors realized that the problem lay with Kata's husband, but the interview excerpt highlights that reproductive matters are constructed as women's responsibility, which can lead to severe psychological distress.

Criticism of IVF treatment is often targeted at the behaviour of medical professionals. Participants mentioned doctors' statements that devalued women and their experiences[1]; for example, when Hédi asked for help because she had had ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, which is a severe health complication, her first doctor said that 'women are always whining, I don't like that'. Most participants mentioned that the medical professionals were indifferent to the patient's situation. For example, while discussing an unsuccessful attempt at IVF one doctor used a football metaphor: 'he said it hit the goal post, but it will be a goal next time'. Another participant told me a story about her first visit to her new doctor: 'I asked the doc what kind of vitamins I should take – I had written down on a piece of paper what I had taken before, what my gynaecologist had said – and he said "you take whatever you want" in a very insulting way.' As described before, infertility-related medical professionals are typically men, who may disregard women's needs in the course of treatment. Participants often described the IVF clinic as a factory, and felt that their bodies were alienated while participating in the procedure.

One of the defining aspects of the experiences related to IVF treatment is that participants' bodies are monitored long before conception, which is inseparable from the medicalization of pregnancy and childbearing. IVF involves several stages; first ovarian stimulation, when patients are injected with growth hormones; after this, patients undergo egg retrieval; and at the end, the participant has the embryo implanted in her uterus. These processes are carefully (visually) inspected, not exclusively by doctors but also by the patients themselves. Several authors have noted that the effect of imaging technologies goes further than just showing the patient what is happening in her body; images about internal procedures cannot be interpreted without expertise in the medical field, thus when the patient sees, for instance, ultrasound pictures of her uterus, they need the help of the physician to decode the visual information.

Those who have the knowledge to make sense of the images do not just interpret but represent notions about bodily processes, hence these interpretations cannot be separated

[1] There are two women's organizations in Hungary that target mistreatment and violence against women in the medical field connected to the period of childbearing; the Emma Association and *Másállapotot a Szülészetben* (Change in Obstetrics). These organizations gather personal experiences, spread information, and provide support to women from conception to the postpartum period. The main goal is to establish a woman-centred medical system and highlight the problematic experiences women face in the field of obstetrics.

from the intentions and viewpoints of the medical professionals. This affects the patient's consciousness; subjective experience connected to one's own body is shaped by this medical gaze (Rapp, 1997). It can also be interpreted as the possibility to observe the internal processes of the female body. although the observed person is associated with more responsibility and is put under psychological pressure (Takács, 2015). Producing visual images has another consequence; the personalization of the embryo (Vicsek & Szolnoki, 2015): the interview excerpt above shows how this process is interpreted at the individual level: 'By default, a woman does not care for her follicles if she has a spontaneous pregnancy. No-one is looking at her follicles. Here, I can already see my baby in the follicle, my future baby. It's so interesting, it's important, it's there every day – all your thoughts are about whether the follicles are growing' (Rebeka, 40). Self-monitoring usually becomes extremely important in these cases, potentially leading to greater psychological distress and self-blame if the procedure is unsuccessful.

The desired pregnancy seems to come closer, with the possibility to see what happens before conception. The woman recognizes the difference between her situation and that of someone who can conceive naturally and reflects on how the IVF procedure is altering her consciousness through the powerful images that technological development has made possible. 'You can see them [the embryos] under the microscope. You see that beautiful blastocyst state, it's moving and it's evolving. And their only task is to implant, and if the IVF is unsuccessful, you die a little with them' (Judit 37). Here, it can be seen how the embryos are associated with human characteristics; this might be interpreted as meaning the attachment to the child-to-be-born starts early on in pregnancy, thus an unsuccessful IVF treatment can be similar to the experience of a miscarriage at the emotional level. One participant, Kata, described her feelings after an unsuccessful IVF in this way: 'I cried a lot every day for almost half a year, and I always said to myself "why is this happening to me? Maybe I don't deserve a baby, maybe we don't deserve a baby". We lost it very early on [after a week], but I couldn't let it go because it started growing inside me. I got a little chance, I saw that the baby was coming and wanted to come to us.' This narrative shows the difference between natural conception and childbearing with IVF. In the case of the former, women usually do not even know about the early stages of pregnancy, but with ART the monitoring of one's body is increased, resulting in severe emotional distress that usually affects the female member of the couple more.

7 Conclusion

The demographic aspirations of the Hungarian government are explicitly present in the political discourse around infertility. The increase in state support for ART can be beneficial for people struggling with infertility, but it is important to see that Hungarian policies associated with these technologies might not help those whose socioeconomic status is lower because the additional costs of the medical procedures can be high. Moreover, state legislation excludes groups (for instance, non-infertile single women, and lesbian couples) from treatment. This shows that the state has a strong influence on designating 'worthy' patients. According to the conservative political discourse, IVF should only be used to maintain traditional families that correspond to heteronormative reproductive standards. However, with the medicalization of childbearing-related practices, new territories of surveillance have

emerged. This has affected the construction of infertility: with the help of ART infertility has become 'curable', but one has to participate in medical treatment, which means that a private problem becomes a public institutionalized one that involves demands for an increase in responsibility regarding one's body. In the case of infertility this process mostly affects women, even though the problem can be the male reproductive organs. The analysis of the interviews was designed to show how different practices and discourse about infertility and ART affect the lives of women who participate in IVF treatment. The effect of state-funded IVF can be advantageous but we should note that medical practices and expectations about childbearing put women in a position whereby the problem is constructed as their responsibility. This can lead to self-blame and increased self-monitoring, thus for most women infertility becomes an extremely stressful experience.

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From the material to the emotional? Parenting ideals, social differentiation, and child welfare services in Hungary

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Abstract

The paper interrogates the recent intensification of state intervention in parenting by examining current tendencies in child-welfare caseworkers' practices in Hungary. In this country different institutions and welfare workers have existed for many decades who have sought to influence childrearing practices. The paper argues that in order to unravel the specific character and importance of current instances of state intervention we need to examine the everyday practices of caseworkers, which are guided not only by relevant policies, but also by dominant norms of ideal parenting. Based on year-long ethnographic research the paper shows how a shift in our approach to parenting have been transforming caseworkers' assessments of parental competence and explanations for initiating child removals during the past decade. While earlier neglect was assessed mostly in material terms, we can currently witness a shift towards the assessment of emotional ties between mothers and their children. However, these are extremely subjective and fluid notions that allow for the individual judgments and dominant values of social differentiation to play an ever more influential part in caseworkers' decisions.

Keywords: child welfare; caseworkers; parenting; neglect; social differentiation

1 Introduction

> A child needs a minimum of eight caresses a day, and on more difficult days even twelve! These can be hugs, a caress on the head, or a stroke on the face.
>
> A child needs at least one quality talk per day! When we talk with them in their own language about their problems.
>
> There are 3x3 minutes during the day, which have the most significant effect on a child: The first three minutes after waking up. The first three minutes after kindergarten/school. The last three minutes before going to bed/sleep.
>
> **Use these times for giving them hugs and for talking with them!**

The above recommendation was posted on the Facebook page of an early development centre in Hungary last year. The associated leaflet is one of many circulating on the internet

with similar pieces of 'professional advice' concerning what a child needs and how parents should relate to their children. Similar recommendations regularly appear on the Facebook sites of baby-mother centres, activity clubs, and even on the information boards of public child-welfare services, as the above example reveals. Whereas childcare and child-welfare professionals have, to some extent, been involved in providing assistance to families and in childrearing since the development of welfare institutions (cf. Barron & Siebrecht, 2017), the multiplication of platforms and experts, along with the modes and extent to which they seek to interfere in parental practices, point towards broader societal transformations (cf. Lee, 2014).

During the past decade, childrearing has become the focus of growing political interest and professional intervention in many European countries (Daly, 2013; Gillies, 2005). Policies aimed at influencing and monitoring parents' choices and private practices have become increasingly prevalent. While parental practices have been the focus of public concern for decades, the current attention directed to parents and their behaviour marks a significant shift in the importance of children and the role of childrearing in society's welfare (Furedi, 2002; Macvarish, 2014). Neoliberal transformations have resulted in the individualization of social problems as well as the re-evaluation of children as an investment and potential future resource for economic production (Gillies et al., 2017; Martin, 2017). These factors have led to the problematisation of parental practices, making them the target of policy interventions and leading to the claim that 'parenting deficit' is at the root of social problems (Gillies, 2005; 2008; Macvarish, 2014).

At the same time, ideas about what 'ideal childhood' and 'good parenting' entail have also changed in past decades. Rooted in the scientification of different spheres of life and greater risk awareness, childrearing has increasingly become a planned activity that is believed to need the guidance of experts (Lee, 2014). In parallel with this, the role and responsibilities of parents in the optimal development and happiness of their children have become substantially amplified. Consequently, mundane activities such as feeding, sleep, and playing with or even hugging children – as the poster mentioned above shows – have become part of conscious activity that needs to be planned and constructed in a way that facilitates children's well-being and development (Faircloth, 2014).

Even though these are globally evident tendencies, they materialize in different historical institutional, and social contexts. In Hungary, there is a long-rooted historical tradition of state interference in childrearing through various child welfare and childcare institutions (see Haney, 2002; Varsa, 2021), such as kindergartens, nurseries, child welfare and protection agencies, and the network of home-visiting nurses. From their very onset, these institutions aimed to compensate for parental incompetence and were imbued with strong professional authority, which was further strengthened during the socialist period when access to them became nationwide (see Varsa, 2014). At the same time, the norms they spread, the reasons for direct intervention, and the differentiation of parents along various lines have transformed over time (cf. Szőke, 2020). Thus, I argue that in order to highlight the specificities of current forms of state intervention, we need to examine how the reasons for assistance and intervention have transformed in relation to socio-political changes (Haney, 2002; Horsley et al, 2020; Varsa, 2021), as well as to dominant conceptions of ideal parenting (cf. Barron & Siebrecht, 2017). Childcare and welfare professionals are important actors who, through their daily interactions with children and parents, implement policies and reinforce or transform dominant norms. Thus, I argue that by examining the everyday practices, decisions, and

relations of these professionals with families, we can further crystallize the specificities of these recent transformations and can enhance our understanding of their social consequences.

My paper examines the ways that new ideals of parenting have been transforming the practices of child welfare services in Hungary. Specifically, it explores the ways dominant ideas about 'good parenting' and 'ideal childhood' have been modifying the reasons for child removal from families, along with the assessment of parental competence. Furthermore, I highlight the links between notions of 'good motherhood' and social differentiation in relation to recent policy directions. In the following, I first discuss the main aspects of the recent transformation in the dominant approach to parenting and its relation to current forms of state intervention. Then I outline the specific political and policy direction that has been evident in the field of welfare and family policy during the past decade in Hungary. Afterwards, I turn to an analysis of recent tendencies in the Hungarian child welfare system by first describing its main features, then by explaining the ways recent parenting ideals, along with policy directives, have been transforming caseworkers' everyday practices, decisions, and relations with their clients.

2 Changing parenting ideals and state intervention

The current intensification of state influence on family life is strongly linked to societal changes, which have influenced recent approaches to parenting (Jackson, 2013). The growing and individualised risk consciousness, the medicalization of harm, and the spread of psychological approaches in different spheres of life have transformed parenting from the 1970s onwards (Macvarish et al., 2015). As a result, the parent-child relationship has increasingly emerged as problematic and in need of expert assistance. It has become an unchallengeable conviction that parental behaviour crucially determines children's future success and happiness, particularly in relation to children's early years (Edwards et al., 2015). This has changed the role of parents, who are seen as facilitators of the fulfilment of their children's potential (Faircloth, 2014). Consequently, childrearing has become a child-centred, expert-guided, labour- and time-intensive, and emotionally and financially absorbing practice (Hays, 1996, p. 8), with serious class, ethnic, and gender implications (e.g., Gillies, 2005; Raffaeta, 2015; Shirani et al., 2012).

The psychologization of social phenomena and the scientification of harm have paved the way for the increasing problematization of parental behaviour and increasing intervention in parenting, through growing concern for the welfare of children and the separation of the vulnerable child's interest from that of its parents (Wyness, 2014). Children are increasingly construed as vulnerable and being 'at risk', which belief permeates all discussions about children, ranging from pregnancy to children's play and education (Lee, 2014). Parents are consequently seen as managers of risk, but their main responsibility is not only to protect their children from immediate danger but also to foresee and prevent any threats that could inhibit their optimal development and future success (Faircloth, 2014). This not only leads to enhanced monitoring of children's activities, but increasingly makes formally mundane practices related to childrearing planned and conscious activities based on scientific evidence. At the same time, parents are not only posited to be the primary persons who can avert risks, but increasingly as the primary adults who can pose these risks through

'risky' behaviour such as smoking or drinking during pregnancy, or feeding formula to their children (Lee et al., 2010).

This new approach to parenting is also mirrored in current policy trends, which increasingly focus on parental behaviour as a target of intervention. Early intervention has become a main policy prerogative in many places that is grounded on the belief that the state should identify potential risks to children and act on them pre-emptively (Macvarish, 2015; Smeyers, 2010). By targeting children/individuals/households 'at risk', it is believed that interventions can be more effective and less costly in the long term and can prevent future problems both for the individual and for society. This reflects a shift from structural explanations of social problems to an individualised view of social ills, which are explained by dysfunctional parenting (Gillies, 2008). Such an individualised approach to social problems makes the intimate aspects of family life of major public and political concern, as they are linked to the well-being of the whole of society. Consequently, it paves the way for more rather than less formal intervention in and surveillance of the private sphere, which is particularly apparent in the case of economically disadvantaged families (Gillies, 2008). Growing up in poverty becomes naturally equated with dysfunctional or irresponsible parenting (Gillies et al., 2017), making economically disadvantaged families the main focus of early intervention programmes.

The above-described orientation towards child-centred risk prevention has also influenced child protection and welfare practices, as has been highlighted in various contexts such as in the UK and Scandinavia (see e.g., Dodds, 2009; Featherstone et al., 2014; Hennum, 2014; Horsley et al., 2020; Lonne et al., 2009; Walsh & Mason, 2018).[1] These studies highlight that the prioritisation of risk assessment and aversion have led to more interventionist practices whilst assistance and family support are downplayed (Lonne et al.; 2009). Furthermore, research underlines that the focus on children's well-being can also result in looking at the family as a unit and may therefore be used for disciplining/moralizing (often ethnicized and/or poor) parents in society (Hennum, 2014; Smeyers, 2010).

3 The new parenting approach and family policies in Hungary

These global transformations are also evident in Hungary, where parenting practices and ideas related to the above changes have become increasingly apparent during the past decade (Kutrovátz, 2017), along with the growing number of experts and professionals seeking to assist parental practices. In addition, various policy measures have been directed at compensating for growing socio-spatial inequalities through early intervention and social investment programmes, with a clear goal of raising parental competence in the targeted population (Keller & Szőke, 2019). While in the early 2000s the focus was initially on complex programmes directed at solving structural problems, the emphasis increasingly shifted to the family or parents as the main and most important components of the environment in relation to children's upbringing. From the mid-2000s onwards policy directives and public discourse increasingly reflected an individualised view of social problems, identifying the

[1] Please see this in more detail in Szőke (2020).

root of the reproduction of social problems as the passing down of models of long-term joblessness, bad attitudes to work, and/or neglectful parenting (cf. Ferge, 2017; Vidra, 2018).

However, in the context of Hungary the main focus was not on individual parent guidance programmes (apart from Sure Start[2]), but on strengthening and widening access to pre-existing early childhood institutions, such as nurseries and kindergartens (cf. Ferge, 2017; Danis et al., 2011). In Hungary, the system of these institutions has been widespread and well-built out since the 1950s, with the stated aim of compensating for parental incompetence through professional expertise. As such, policy solutions to problems associated with the familial passing down of disadvantages and social exclusion are conceived as widening access to these institutions. Consequently, the main measures reflecting the social investment and early prevention approach have been the lowering of the compulsory age for starting kindergarten to age three; extending crèche services to settlements with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants; and institutionalizing Sure Start houses as one of the basic services financed from the public budget (Keller & Szőke, 2019).

In Hungary, these measures have taken place in a context of a conservative political shift and welfare state restructuring. The government in power since 2010 has put 'the support and defence of the family' at the centre of their political interest (Barta et al., 2020), and substantial resources have been dedicated to family support schemes and nationwide campaigns, such as the 'Year of the Family' in 2017. Family support has completely been separated from the system of means-tested welfare benefits, whilst the former preoccupation of family policies with improving the situation of poorer families has shifted to an approach of selective pro-natalism; i.e., to financially supporting the childbearing of the better-off (Szikra, 2018). Universal family benefits have considerably shrunk and new schemes target families with children (the amount of benefit rising with the number of children) and those in long-term formal employment (Fodor, 2022a; Geva, 2021).

At the same time, the Hungarian government has pronouncedly set out to replace the liberal welfare state with a work-based society, consequently disengaging with welfare provision for the most vulnerable groups, who increasingly face anti-poor and punitive measures (Szikra, 2019; Vidra, 2018). Furthermore, recent measures reveal more direct state influence in the private family realm, such as the inclusion of 'family life education' in the national core curriculum, the stricter sanctioning of school absences, and the most recent constitutional determination of what a family is. Through these financial measures and political rhetoric, however, conservative gender norms are promoted, and family ideals have been conflated with notions of deservingness (Fodor, 2022b). Through the government's measures, the basis of differentiation is now not only linked to formal work but also to family status, with the promotion of a particular notion of the family (Fodor, 2022a) that clearly differentiates between 'responsible' and 'irresponsible' families (Szikra, 2019).

These transformations are relatively well explored at the level of policies and regulations both in the European and the Hungarian contexts. At the same time, we still know surprisingly little about the ways they influence various institutions and the professionals

[2] Following the British model, the Sure Start (*Biztos Kezdet*) programme was introduced in 2003 in Hungary and became part of the nation-wide child welfare system in 2013. The main aim of the programme is to compensate for socio-spatial disadvantages through early childhood development and prevention services for disadvantaged children of age 0–3 as well as through social assistance and childrearing guidance provided for their parents.

who work with families and children (cf. Szőke, 2020). This is despite the fact that they are the main conveyors of these policy prerogatives to parents (see Lipsky, 1980). During their daily encounters, these professionals often make discretionary decisions about cases and clients, differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' parents or 'deserving' and 'undeserving' families with serious consequences, such as withdrawing assistance or designating cases for child removal (see Haney, 1997). They mediate, reinforce, or contravene dominant norms and policy prerogatives about 'good' parenting, 'proper' childhood, and deservingness. In the following, I analyse the ways that child welfare service practices have been transforming in the past decade in Hungary in relation to changes in parenting ideals and policy directives. In particular, I examine how changing parenting ideals have been transforming caseworkers' evaluations of parental competence and the identification of cases for child removals, and how current notions of 'good motherhood' have become further intertwined with dominant forms of social differentiation.

The article draws on 12 months of ethnographic research in three locations in Hungary conducted during 2018–2019: an ethnically and socially mixed poorer district in Budapest; a Roma ghettoised neighbourhood on the outskirts of a small-scale city; and a small remote village with an ethnically mixed population in a disadvantaged region. During the research, daily observations were made in three early childhood welfare institutions in each location: the child protection/welfare service, the network of home-visiting nurses, and Sure Start houses. During my research, I accompanied caseworkers on their regular family visits and attended several meetings at which particular cases of potential child removal were discussed between the relevant families and the state officials involved. Furthermore, repeated interviews were made with various child welfare workers (home-visiting nurse, child-welfare assistant, early development specialists, Sure Start house employees, and kindergarten instructors) in the different localities about their jobs and about particular cases as well as with 40 families in each location.

4 Child welfare practices and changing parenting ideals

From its onset, child welfare and protection has involved two parallel organs; a 'punitive' one, which is responsible for monitoring and intervention, and an 'educative' one, which offers assistance and advice. Currently, Child Welfare Centres[3] (*Gyermekjóléti Központ*) represent the former and Child Welfare Services[4] (*Gyermekjóléti Szolgálat*) exemplify the latter. Families in most cases usually encounter the Service's caseworkers first, either by voluntarily asking for assistance with welfare or childrearing issues (such as accommodation problems, assistance with paperwork related to social benefit or (un)employment issues, or requesting immediate relief/aid packages), or by being reported by a public authority (usually

[3] *Centres* are usually based in a central town and have no regular contact with clients. They handle cases of child removal and define targets for families who are 'under protection'; i.e., subject to regular monitoring carried out by caseworkers at the *Service*.

[4] *Services* usually involve local caseworkers who are in daily contact with client families. Their main job is to regularly check and assist families with improving their living circumstances, administrational and welfare issues, and childrearing practices.

the home-visiting nurse, school, or kindergarten) due to the experience of problems with children. At this point, cooperation is not mandatory and involves various forms of assistance and regular monitoring through home visits by the caseworker. However, if the latter experience issues that might 'endanger' the child or witness the persistence of 'endangerment' and no willingness to cooperate, they report this to the Centre, which together with the Service's caseworkers draws up a parenting and action plan for the family. At this point, the child is taken into 'protection', home visits and monitoring become more frequent, and cooperation is made compulsory. Failure to cooperate with the caseworker and to conform to the action plan over a one-year period leads to more serious intervention that can result in the removal of children from the family.[5]

In addition, home-visiting nurses also play crucial role in the child welfare system. In close cooperation with doctors, their main goal is to monitor the optimal development of infants and young children, ensure the well-being of mothers, and assist mothers in relation to childrearing practices through regular home visits during the first few years of children's lives. The service is mandatory and covers the entire country. The former are historically vested with significant authority in relation to determining 'optimal' child development and disseminating 'proper' childrearing practices. Nurses are furthermore the most important organs in the alarm system regarding children's endangerment and the circumstances of the latter's upbringing. Thus, in the following I focus especially on the practices of these two types of professional. Although these child welfare workers do not have the formal authority to enforce legal decisions, they are important state representatives who can mediate, reinforce or contravene norms, values, and policy directives with families. Moreover, through their frequent family visits they have the most in-depth insight into family practices and most regular contact with families in Hungary. As such, it is they who initiate formal cases or delegate them to other authorities for further action, who often rely mostly on the information the former gather about families.

Although child welfare and protection offices have existed since the 1950s, with a similar division of labour between the different organs as of today (cf. Haney, 2002), it was the 1997 Act on Child Protection that laid the formal grounds for the operation of the current system. According to this, the main goal of the service is to ensure the healthy physical, emotional, and mental development of children and their upbringing in a family through prevention and intervention. Whilst these processes are clearly determined, the law and the professional protocols appear considerably vague about some of the crucial categories (Rácz, 2010; Vidra et al., 2018). Children's endangerment is defined as their being inhibited in terms of optimal physical, emotional, and mental development. However, what exactly 'inhibition' and 'optimal development' entail is undefined (cf. Szöllősi, 2003). Similarly, 'neglect', which is listed in addition to abuse and physical harm as the main reason for child removal, is not fully described in any formal documents. The vagueness of the regulations thus allows caseworkers considerable discretionary power to decide about how to proceed in particular cases (Szőke, 2020). Such decisions, I argue, are strongly influenced by caseworkers' ideas about what they believe the optimal development of children is, what the 'inhibition of development' could entail, and consequently, what parental neglect could mean. What is more, they have great discretionary power when deciding whether to deem the cooperation of families

[5] In comparison to protection cases, the actual number of removals is much smaller.

sufficient. In addition to individual convictions and sympathies, these beliefs are also influenced by dominant ideas about parenting and childhood (cf. Szőke, 2020), as well as by dominant lines of social differentiation (cf. Herczog, 2008; Rácz, 2010), as I will show below.

4.1 The assessment of parental competence: From the material to the emotional?

In different periods parents have been assessed by caseworkers on different bases, whilst the reasons for intervention and various forms of institutional regulation have altered in relation to changes in policy regimes, notions of ideal parenting, and socioeconomic challenges in Hungary (see Haney, 1997; Varsa, 2021). Lynne Haney (1997; 2002) identifies an important shift in both policy directives and institutional practices in the field of child welfare and protection that took place during the mid-1990s. During the late socialist period, a number of support schemes and agencies were introduced to secure the quantity and quality of motherhood. Part of the socialist state's population policies, these welfare apparatuses were universal and not stigmatized, fostering a sense of entitlement based on motherhood. However, the early 1990s marked a shift in welfare policies from addressing maternal needs to focusing on material ones. As the social inequalities and poverty that were already evident in the 1980s intensified with the 1989 political economic changes, welfare schemes became increasingly targeted and means-tested and welfare policies oriented towards the poor-relief of the 'needy'. Different schemes became established for those mothers who made tax contributions and those who did not, making welfare assistance and benefits for mothers (of the latter group) increasingly stigmatized.

This shift in the orientation of welfare regimes from the maternal to the material, claims Haney (1997; 2002), was also reflected in child welfare caseworkers' practices. Whereas during the late-socialist period caseworkers assessed mothers based on their domestic competence through careful domesticity tests and quantifying the time mothers spent with their children, in the 1990s the material situation and lifestyle of the client families came to the forefront. Material neediness became the main basis for becoming a client of child welfare services. As combating child poverty became a major policy directive, parents were assessed on the grounds of being capable of materially providing the basic necessities for their children. A regular practice involved looking into cupboards to assess the availability of food, checking for appropriate clothing for children (in terms of cleanliness and suitability for the season), and the existence of the basic necessities of childcare (such as nappies, a cot with appropriate bedding, and baby bathing facilities). Similarly strong emphasis was put on checking the general comfort of accommodation (presence of heating, condition of windows and doors, availability of running water), and living arrangements (recommended number of inhabitants per square meter).

As Haney (1997) highlights, this was also reflected in the number of child welfare cases. Material endangerment came to constitute the majority of cases, while poverty and material neglect became the main reasons for intervention.[6] Consequently, the stigmatiza-

[6] According to the statistics, in 1984 only 29 percent of child removal were initiated for reasons of material neglect, while in 1992 this proportion had grown to 87 percent (Haney, 1997, p. 230).

tion of the poor and the Roma[7] increasingly became evident amongst welfare workers. They were considered lazy, uncultured, simple and disorderly, which factors were believed to cause their poverty. Thus, when judging parental competence and offering assistance, caseworkers also regularly inquired about their clients' lifestyle choices (buying cigarettes and alcohol) and their daily spending (Szőke, 2015), which factors were used as the basis for differentiating between deserving and undeserving clients. Assistance to families often entailed advice on how to change their lifestyles and economize better. Thus, social class became the main means, in addition to ethnicity, of differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' mothers, and providing for children's material needs the basis of judging parental competence.[8]

Strongly resonating with the strengthening public sentiment towards the unemployed poor, these institutional practices have become so dominant that poverty and material neglect have been the dominant reasons for family intervention and child removals in past decades (Herczog, 2008). This is despite the fact that, according to child protection law, material circumstances cannot be the main reasons for separating children from their families. While this is still one of the dominant considerations amongst caseworkers, my research reveals an important transformation in child welfare practices that is also reflected in the available statistics.[9] In 2014, from the 140 thousand cases of child endangerment, the main causes were divided between family environment (62 per cent), behavioural problems (18 per cent), and material circumstances (14 per cent). Within the category of family environment, parenting problems (21 per cent), parental lifestyle (21 per cent), and family conflicts (13 per cent) were documented as the main reasons for endangerment.

Even though, as these numbers reveal, material circumstances still constitute an important consideration, family environment and parental practices are rising in importance in child welfare practice, which was also apparent at my research sites. Although material circumstances were assessed and considered an important factor, they were no longer named as the main basis for intervention. In comparison, neglecting 'parental duty' in two specific fields – school attendance and compulsory medical examinations/vaccines – rose in importance at the studied child welfare offices and constituted the majority of cases. This was also instigated by regulatory changes in 2012. In both fields, such cases (after a certain period of misconduct) have to be directly reported to the child protection authorities as well as to public authorities. Parental neglect of these duties leads to enhanced monitoring by child protection and financial penalties (a prison sentence if parents are unable to pay their fines), along with the loss of the family allowance in the case of school absence.[10]

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[7] Who are over-represented among the unemployed and the lower social strata.

[8] During the late socialist period, the notion of good motherhood did not clearly reflect existing class divisions (Haney, 2002). Working-class women often did better on the 'domesticity tests' than professional women, who were at times perceived as neglecting their housewife duties. At the same time, welfare workers were intolerant of the cultural differences in child raising and domestic practices of their Roma clients even during the socialist period, the latter who were pathologized and stigmatized as 'bad mothers'.

[9] According to the 2011 Population census, cases of child endangerment due to family environment increased from 2,524 in 1998 to 10,455 in 2011, and cases related to parental behaviour tripled between 1998 and 2011 (Statisztikai Tükör, 2014).

[10] According to the 2012 EMMI Decree on Public Education, after 30 hours of unaccounted school absence an offense associated with a fine is registered and issued against parents (exchanged for a prison sentence if unpaid). After 50 hours of unaccounted absence the child protection court is notified, a protection case is opened, and the family allowance is suspended. Similarly, a lack of uptake of compulsory vaccines for over two months leads to the opening of a child protection case, and if upheld for prolonged time, financial penalties and possibly child removal.

This shift in the orientation of child welfare practices is in line with the earlier-described transformation of parenting ideals and related policy prerogatives, which holds parents entirely responsible for the behaviour of their children (cf. Macvarish, 2015, p. 85). My research furthermore reveals a stronger professional focus on early development and risk awareness, which have become interlinked with notions of 'good' motherhood and responsible parenting in past years. Embedded in the professional discourse and policy environment of early intervention and balancing unequal opportunities, a major role has been accorded to identifying developmental problems at an early age and ensuring the proper professional services for their treatment (see Husz, 2012). This has been one of the main goals of Sure Start houses and has also become a priority in the praxis of home visiting nurses in the past years, as the check-ups that help monitor children's optimal development have multiplied, particularly focusing on infants' early years.

I observed similar tendencies in the day-to-day practice of professionals upon accompanying them on their family visits, especially to poorer, less educated parents (Szőke, 2020). In addition to checking families' material circumstances, strong emphasis was put on spreading knowledge about developmental stages and requirements for different age groups. Not only was the availability of food observed in the visited households, but the importance of a healthy and balanced diet that includes fruit and dairy products was also promoted. Similar practices targeted pregnant women, emphasizing the importance of 'pregnancy vitamins' for the healthy development of their foetus. Living space was not only checked to avoid over-crowding, but also space for ensuring the proper development of children. Thus, nurses and Sure Start staff regularly prompted client mothers to put their toddlers down instead of holding them to ensure their proper sensor-motoric development.

However, these discourses about optimal development have become entangled with notions of 'good' motherhood and responsible parenting, further strengthening lines of social differentiation. In general, professionals explained that poor, less educated, and often Roma parents fail to see the importance of these developmental stages and early professional intervention in the case of problems. As one nurse articulated:

> This type of thinking is really far from them, and it is very difficult to make them understand why this is so important. While you see middle-class, educated parents following week by week whether their children properly reach the developmental stages [and] reading all about them on the internet, the less educated have no idea about this. They simply can't see why it is a problem if their child misses the crawling stage and immediately starts walking, for example.

Judged against these professional standards that reflect the dominant middle-class values and childcare practices, the poorer and less educated who failed to identify with these views and missed check-ups or failed to follow up on developmental problems were often held to be irresponsible and neglectful parents (cf. Szőke, 2020). In some cases, caseworkers did address the wider structural hindrances that create extra difficulties for poorer and less educated parents to take advantage of such services – for example, financial difficulties with travelling or a lack of ability to organise such appointments, especially in the case of more remote places where professional services are lacking. While in such cases assistance was often provided to help families overcome such difficulties, the latter were still judged against these middle-class norms and were labelled as not (or less) responsible parents. Failure to comply to such norms, moreover, not only led to enhanced monitoring, but also further strengthened the links between deservingness and notions of 'good' parenthood. Resonating public discourses about the individual failures of poor and uneducated parents and their 'neglectful' behaviour was often

connected to the latter's inability to conduct their life as responsible citizens, at best due to their lack of knowledge and good family role-models from childhood, or at worst perceived as individual weakness and disinterest in their children (cf. Gillies, 2005; 2008).

Another aspect that is in line with currently dominant ideas of parenting was the stress on the need to spend quality time with children (cf. Kutrovátz, 2017). Assessments of parental care and the interest of parents in their children's lives have risen in importance amongst professionals, and are measured according to middle-class norms/practices. It was a major goal at the studied Sure Start houses (to which client families were often referred to by child welfare caseworkers) to teach parents how to relate to their children, to sing and play with them (preferably games that enhance cognitive and motor development), to talk with them nicely and attentively, to express love towards them, and practice positive parenting. In fact, when asked, caseworkers listed parental love and a secure home environment as the most important factors for children's happiness and optimal development. Many of them pointed out that even if parents were raising their kids in poverty, those who could provide a loving and secure family environment could be 'good' parents, reflecting an important shift in approach from the earlier emphasis on material circumstances (cf. Szőke, 2020).

In comparison 'bad' parenting for professionals involved physical disciplining, a lack of caring and love, a lack of involvement in or concern about children's lives, failure to spend quality time with them, and not showing interest in their education. In the account of a childcare professional that was replicated by numerous welfare workers:

> Children are important to them [referring here to Roma and poor families], but in a different way. You hardly ever see them hugging their children or caressing them or speaking with them in a nice caring way. You can see this every day they come and pick them up at the latest possible time from kindergarten. And when they arrive, you can see it on their children, they long so much for a hug or a kiss. But nothing, no hug, no kiss, not even 'how was kindergarten today, what did you do?'.

For the professionals, late pick-up from kindergarten (by parents without a job) and the lack of emotional expression signalled that these parents did not want to spend time with their children, thus they did not love them the way children needed (Szőke, 2020).

4.2 Transforming meanings of parental neglect and child removal

In Hungary, the removal of children can currently be initiated through one of two procedures. In the case of suspicion/report of abuse or other physical harm, authorities carry out immediate action and the child is placed in out-of-home care until an investigation is carried out. These cases constitute a rather small minority (around 6 per cent) of all removals. In most cases, removal is preceded by a long process during which the Service's caseworkers assist and regularly monitor the family's practices, as described earlier.

In the 1990s–2000s, material neglect constituted a dominant reason for intervention (Haney, 2002; Herczog, 2008), with particular focus on unsuitable clothing, poor housing conditions, and unhygienic circumstances.[11] My research, however, suggests a recent shift in

[11] This claim is also supported by a review of former cases at the field-sites, as well as by the interviews with caseworkers who had worked for child welfare services for a longer period of time.

the orientation of child welfare practice. Whereas caseworkers continued to check material circumstances and in some of the ongoing removal cases these might have been accorded a strong weight, the latter usually explained their decision to identify particular cases for removal using other reasons. One aspect was the importance attributed to the emotional relationship of the client mothers to their children (Szőke, 2020). In weighing various circumstances such as housing, hygiene, unaccounted-for school absences, or missed vaccines, the ultimate reason that appeared to lead to decisions in favour or against particular families in several cases was the mother's parental fitness. This signified her ability and willingness to establish emotional ties to her children and show an interest in them. This factor resonates with the orientation of various professionals, as described above, that reveals a shift from the material to the emotional assessment of 'good' motherhood that reflects predominantly middle-class ideals.

Two cases from my research particularly strongly illuminate this shift towards greater weighting of parental ties. Éva, a mother of four children in her forties, lived in the segregated Roma neighbourhood of the settlement. She had been a client of the child welfare service for years. At her previous place of living (another rural town) her two oldest children had already been removed and were living in foster homes. She had moved to the current settlement five years ago, to live with her new partner, the father of her two younger children. During the past few years, numerous reports had been made by various authorities about their living circumstances. The children were constantly behind with their vaccines, they lived in very unhygienic circumstances, the children repeatedly had lice and scabies, their house was infested by rats, and neighbours often reported disturbances at night.

During my research, the kindergarten again initiated the removal of children on the grounds that the extreme number of unaccounted absences would endanger the development of the older daughter. However, the caseworkers who were in daily contact with the family were reluctant to remove the children. They argued that it would break the children, as their mother loved them so much, and the tie between mother and children was so strong that such separation would cause them more harm than was being caused in their present situation. They explained it this way: 'She is a very good mother after all, she gives them lots of love and never raises her voice or hand against them'. The latter was considered important, as shouting at and slapping children was a typical and accepted practice in the neighbourhood. While caseworkers and professionals strongly discouraged this behaviour, they usually did not follow up on such cases, discarding it as a 'Roma custom'. They furthermore explained: 'if we would wanted to adhere to our norms, we would have to remove every child from this neighbourhood. And then what?! They would all grow up in foster homes without families. How would that give them a better chance?' In such a context, the fact that not only did Éva not shout at and slap her children but often cuddled them was one of the signs of being a very good, loving mother.

Second, caseworkers were aware of the fact that older children usually remained in foster homes until they grew up, which, as the previous opinion also reveals, would not provide them with a better chance for their future. In fact, due to increasing publicity about the ongoing abuse in and bad circumstances of foster homes, many caseworkers covered by my research were wary of initiating removal cases at a later age unless they thought the child was seriously neglected and physically endangered. Other caseworkers confirmed the opinion that growing up in a loving and caring family environment was still better than in a foster home, even if the former could not meet all the material needs and be the basis for optimal

development. In contrast, the dominant opinion among caseworkers earlier on was that 'for these children it will be better to grow up anywhere but their families', often in reference to the bad material circumstances and material deprivation.

At the same time, the case of Hajni reveals that the same arguments about parental ties could explain the separation of children from their families. Hajni was 15 when she gave birth to her first child, who was removed from the family seven months after birth, initiated by the very same caseworkers who insisted that Éva's children should not be removed. Hajni's family back then lived in a farm outside town, and Hajni received very little help with her first baby as her husband was at work and they lived too far from her family for regular help. From the caseworker's description and her own account, she had probably experienced postnatal depression. However, this was never discussed, and she did not receive the needed assistance. Instead, the nurse signalled to the Child Welfare Service that the baby was not growing well, and the caseworkers also believed that the family were living in an inappropriate (too small) place for raising a child. However, upon discussing the case with the professionals who had been involved, it turned out that the baby was not losing weight and was only at the lower threshold according to the growth chart. In addition, several families were living in similar or even smaller and less well-kept places, against whom no removal order was initiated.

Two important factors appeared, however, to play a role in the decision. First, teenage pregnancies are particularly strictly monitored by child welfare agencies and are always treated as protection cases, constituting a large portion of removal cases. In addition to this, the caseworkers who were involved concluded that Hajni was at that time not fit to be a mother, as she could not establish ties with her baby, and she was indifferent towards her child. At the time of my research Hajni was 17 and had a second baby, who was five months old, and although regularly monitored was permitted to remain with her. The caseworker explained to me that 'he is growing nicely, and Hajni has somehow changed. Maybe she grew up, but now she is very caring, holding the baby more often than her previous one, and she is breastfeeding her. Overall, she is very different with this second child'. The caseworker also mentioned that following their recommendation Hajni was regularly visiting the Sure Start house with her second child, where she was regularly observed and advised. Due to her change of attitude, the caseworker had also initiated a procedure to return her first-born to her.

4.3 Removals at birth: A new approach to risk and its consequences

The other issue that emerged from studying the ongoing child removal cases was the visible rise in the number of removals at birth (Szőke, 2020). At the rural research site a few years ago there were no such cases, but their number has slowly risen since then, and at the time of my research all of the ongoing cases were constituted of such early intervention. Albeit to a much smaller extent, a similar rise could be observed in all settlements under analysis. The reasons offered by caseworkers for such early intervention resonate with several aspects of the new approach to parenting (cf. Featherstone et al, 2014; Hennum, 2014; Horsley et al., 2020). The former argued that removing children at birth[12] was a less harmful and cruel way

[12] In terms of practice, this means that the child welfare service signals to the hospital that the family cannot take the baby home. The baby will be then placed with a foster family, and could be given up for adoption if the parents formally disavow their parental rights.

of improving children's life opportunities and chances as no attachment would have developed between mother and child, thus the separation would not emotionally affect the children. Second, it would mean a better chance of adoption, hence for growing up in a loving and caring family instead of a foster home.

While these explanations further exemplify the already discussed approach of child welfare caseworkers, child removals at birth mark a change in orientation in another respect (Szőke, 2020). Whereas child removals usually took place after the actual event of neglect or when prolonged endangerment was evidenced,[13] at-birth removals reveal an *ex-ante* principle – when future neglect is to be prevented. As such, at-birth removals are not initiated based on an actual practice or misconduct of the mother towards the child but on judgments of parental fitness predicted to happen based on other factors. One such factor that appeared to weigh heavily at my research sites was the mothers' attendance at prenatal examinations monitored by the nurse. The enhanced focus on foetal development along with the expansion of parental responsibility and consequent monitoring of mothers' behaviour during pregnancy are in line with the increase in risk awareness and the stress on the individualised role of parental practice concerning children's well-being and development (cf. Lee et al., 2010).

Another factor that is also linked to a transformed understanding of risk is the judgement of parental fitness not on the basis of actual practices but on the probability of harmful behaviour in the future (Szőke, 2020). This judgment in the offices under study was based primarily on the welfare history of client families. This involved teenage pregnancies, as well as enumerating cases of child removals from the wider family (from cousins, siblings, etc.) and the listing of former or ongoing welfare cases in the actual and wider family. These were major considerations in relation to which the future parental competence of the families in question was evaluated. However, since families from a lower stratum and the Roma minority are over-represented within welfare cases, this approach towards probable harm based on welfare history appears to further strengthen the social and ethnic orientation of child welfare in Hungary. At none of my research sites were at-birth removals initiated against better-off, educated families. As such, this practice further strengthens the links between deservedness and middle-class norms of 'good' and responsible parenthood, which are also apparent in recent family and welfare policies that support individuals from higher strata of society while mainly resorting to punitive measures in the case of the lowest ones.

5 Conclusion

This article has interrogated recent claims about the intensification of state intervention in family life by highlighting the importance of examining institutional practices. Based on research into child welfare caseworkers' practices in Hungary, the paper calls attention to a shift from assessing parental competence in material terms to bringing emotional ties and the involvement of parents to the forefront. This shift from the material to the emotional clearly resonates with various assertions about the currently dominant parenting approach, as well as related policy tendencies, and reinforces dominant lines of social differentiation.

[13] In earlier removal cases such 'evidence' was also often not based on objective judgment but influenced by personal convictions and dominant norms.

Child welfare practitioners appear to be replicating dominant notions of good motherhood that are still predominantly embedded in middle-class norms, involving focusing on the optimal development and intensive cultivation of children from the earliest possible age. From such a perspective less educated and/or poorer parents are often deemed irresponsible and uncaring if they do not focus enough on the education of their children and fail to spend enough quality time with them or to show them affection. However, emotional ties and parental involvement are extremely subjective and elusive concepts and are more difficult to judge than material circumstances. This is especially true when it is considered that in most cases such judgements rest on rather limited encounters (weekly or bi-weekly 30-minute visits) due to the often high number of cases assigned to each professional. In the paper I have shown that this leads to making judgements not only based on pre-existing notions of deservedness and 'good' motherhood rooted in middle-class ideals, but also on the former welfare history of clients and even of their broader family.

Consequently, in the current socio-political context, which strongly promotes middle-class norms, poor and less educated families are still the main focus of child removal and child welfare services (Szőke, 2020). Thus, my findings resonate with similar studies (e.g., Gillies, 2008; Hennum, 2014; Macvarish et al., 2015) in revealing that the amplified importance awarded parental behaviour, along with enhanced monitoring/intervention of parental practices, may represent a new form of moral governance disguised in legal and scientific terms (Szőke, 2020). This has particularly severe consequences for less educated families from lower social strata who are the main focus of behavioural reform, control, stigmatization, and pathologization. Thus, as Hennum (2014) also argues, child welfare services not only target children's well-being and appropriate development, but are means of reinforcing dominant norms in society and strengthening the existing social order.

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Accompanying parents through early childhood: The pastoral work of Mothers' and Fathers' Advisors

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Abstract

This paper explores expert guidance of parenting in Switzerland and discusses the work of the mothers' and fathers' advisors (MVBs), a state-funded service providing counselling to parents of preschool children. The data presented here draws upon ethnographic research which investigates parenting as a site of 'governance'. Based on semi-structured interviews as well as participant observation with MVBs and parents, this paper examines (power) relationships between early childhood experts and parents. The findings demonstrate that the practices deemed appropriate for the surveillance and guidance of parenting today are a clear example of what Michel Foucault dubbed 'pastoral power' and include the gathering and archiving of information, as well as hierarchical observation. Reconnecting insecure or overly intellectual mothers with their 'maternal instincts', which some advisors felt were at risk of being lost, involves the facilitation of technologies of self. The paper also explores 'resistance' against pastoral care, which is not necessarily perceived as well-intentioned or helpful by parents, who may strive not to implement advice or completely reject 'accompaniment' by advisors.

Keywords: parenting; early childhood; pastoral power; governmentality; advising

1 Introduction

> I am not exactly a friend, but I am friendly, nice, just as we should treat children. It does not mean that we don't set boundaries, we do set boundaries, but more in a nice tone, just being friendly. Kind of like: 'Did you notice that you feel better now?' Just saying in a reassuring manner, that she [the mother] is doing it well, and what she could do on top of that, so that things will go even better. (MVB Nina, recorded interview)

In the quote above, a *Mütter- und Väterberaterin* (mothers' and fathers' advisor, 'MVB') describes the way she converses with clients. She stresses her gentle, encouraging way of speaking to parents, which she compares to the ideal handling of children by adults. Her counsel, she claims, aims to improve the childrearing skills of a mother, whom she asks – at least in her example – to reflect on whether she is feeling better having implemented her advice. The *Mütter- und Väterberatung* (Mothers' and Fathers' Counselling, 'the MVB') oper-

ates as a state-funded service in the field of parental education and preventative healthcare in Switzerland and provides counselling to parents of young children free of charge. MVBs often describe their work as 'accompanying and supporting families on their paths', while being able to offer individualised expert guidance. 'Getting into families' before problems arise is a major concern of many MVBs.

This paper explores expert guidance of parenting in Switzerland in early childhood and discusses the work of the MVB, whose publicly-stated mission is to counsel parents with different childrearing related issues, while providing them with 'security' as well as childrearing skills (MVB Leimental, n.d.; MVB Region Brugg, n.d.). By describing the range of tasks that MVBs engage in as well as their perception of their role as advisors and their interactions with parents, this paper gives insights into the technologies of power at work in the landscape of early childhood programmes. Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' – through which populations can be governed – and his concept of 'pastoral power' (Foucault, 2009) represent the main focus of this analysis.

Practices developed within the Christian pastorate, such as confessing, serve as 'templates for governing conduct in other spheres' today (Mutch, 2016, p. 268). Modern modes of pastoral power are orientated towards 'salvation', such as wellbeing, longevity, economic security, or safety in the mortal world. In a secularized state, pastoral power 'officials' take the shape of, for example, social workers, who act as guiding 'pastors' and embrace as well as define the proper concerns of individual clients for the benefit of the whole community (Foucault, 1982, p. 784; 2009, p. 126; Nadesan, 2008, p. 24). The normalization and stimulation of the voluntary use of the MVB aims to avoid coercive child protection interventions, such as mandatory home visits by MVBs or – as a last resort – removing children from their families. Thus, it represents a 'preventive' approach to child protection (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011, p. 69), through the development of the MVB service, whose advisors offer long-term support to families with young children and which assumes that the wellbeing of children is an aim shared by the state and its citizens who are parents.[1]

2 Methods

The paper is based on a PhD research project exploring parenting in Switzerland. The data was collected during ethnographic fieldwork in Switzerland between March 2019 and March 2021. Eighteen MVB participants from different cantons were recruited via email and then interviewed in advice centres, after having given their written informed consent. The interviews were semi-structured, with 12 guiding questions that revolved around the tasks of MVBs and their relationships to parents. Two MVBs were accompanied throughout their working day for participant observation during consultations and a home visit. Furthermore, MVB reports, leaflets, websites, and job advertisements were reviewed to gain a thorough understanding of the organisation's aims, approaches, and services. In addition, a semi-structured interview was carried out with 24 mothers and two fathers who had at least one

[1] This paper does not aim to undermine the importance of public childcare services, which can prove invaluable to parents and children in need of assistance. The MVB also has the important function to prevent or disclose cases of child neglect or abuse.

child under the age of five, who were recruited through different channels, such as flyers distributed through MVBs as well as parenting online fora. Most of these parents were also interviewed for a second time online during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021.

3 Policy and early childhood

In *Governing the Soul*, Nikolas Rose characterizes childhood as the 'most intensively governed sector' of a person's life (Rose, 1999, p. 124). Childrearing, according to Rose, is linked to the 'destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state' (Rose, 1999, p. 123). This statement still holds true today. Schooling has been compulsory in Western states since the 19th century and, more recently, certain paediatric check-ups have become obligatory in several German states. In Switzerland, free services such as the MVB or home-visiting midwives providing postnatal care, offer new parents support as soon as their baby is born.[2]

Early childhood became a focal point of Swiss family policy in 2019 and is the subject of several recent parliamentary initiatives to expand early childhood programmes in order to ensure children's rights and protection from the moment of birth (Aebischer, 2019; Wasserfallen, 2019). In 2019, the Swiss UNESCO Commission published a report on early childhood, which they defined as a time in which the 'groundwork for the future of an individual is laid' (Stern et al., 2019, p. 13, my translation). This kind of phrasing is ubiquitous in early childhood policy documents and writings on parental education. Adequate early childhood education and care, argues the Commission, are an investment (by the state) in the future: children benefiting from early childhood programmes will achieve a higher level of education and will therefore not only be healthier, but also engage in fewer criminal activities. Thus, as adults they will be less of a burden on the health, social, and penal system and will contribute a higher tax revenue. Another stated benefit of early childhood programmes is the boosting of 'parental competences', which have a 'long-term and positive influence on the emotional and cognitive development of children' (Stern et al., 2019, p. 14, my translation). Thus, it is not only childhood that is governed, but also – and necessarily – parenting.

Studies of social work services argue that, since the end of the 20th century, policy makers in European states have abandoned a 'controlling' and 'repressive' child protection discourse[3] and moved towards a child welfare discourse. This approach is framed as taking a 'supportive' and 'empowering' approach towards families, in which social workers play a major role (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011, p. 69). In contrast to earlier 'coercive' measures, social workers are viewed as cooperating with parents in a partnership to ensure children's well-being (ibid.). Primary prevention in order to avoid child protection measures and state involvement in the first place are a central concern of the welfare discourse (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011, p. 71).

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[2] The support by the MVB is not only provided for first-time parents, but also after the birth of all subsequent children.

[3] In Switzerland, the now widely condemned project *Kinder der Landstrasse*, 'Children of the Country Road' comes to mind. Between 1926 and 1973, supported by government institutions, *Pro Juventute*, a private youth foundation, forcibly removed approximately 900 children from Yenish families and placed them in foster homes, reform schools, or psychiatric institutions, aiming to assimilate them into a sedentary lifestyle (Furrer et al., 2014, p. 15). Today, 30.000 Yenish live in Switzerland, where they are a recognized cultural minority. About 2000–3000 Yenish maintain a nomadic lifestyle, which the government attempted to eradicate until the 1970's (BAK, 2019).

While families do become subject to government intervention when childrearing in the home fails, the governing of parents is not generally 'imposed under threat by courts and social workers' (Rose, 1999, p. 213). Rose, inspired by Foucault's notions of governmentality and technologies of the self, suggests that experts have gained access to the home not only via various media, but also by providing subjects with self-monitoring routines:

> No longer do experts have to reach the family by way of law or the coercive intrusion of social work. They interpellate us through the radio call-in, through the weekly magazine column, through gentle advice of the health visitor, teacher or neighbour, and through the unceasing reflexive gaze of our own psychological educated self-scrutiny. (Ibid.)

4 Governmentality and pastoral power

The notion of 'governance' allows for fruitful strands of investigation into the exercise of power in neoliberal states (Shin, 2016, p. 304). Michel Foucault's engagement with forms of power in modern states gave rise to his concept of governmentality, which provided novel perspectives on how states govern populations with certain aims in mind, such as the 'welfare of the population' (Foucault, 1991, p. 100).

Foucault examined the (incomplete) dissolution of sovereign power relations in the 18th century and the rise of disciplinary power. Disciplinary power relations, according to Foucault, are oriented towards regulating and managing citizens of modern states more effectively. Here, the generation of knowledge through 'hierarchical observation' (Foucault, 1995, p. 170) of subjects as well as their 'examination' (Foucault, 1995, pp. 20, 184) plays a crucial role. 'Normalizing judgement' (Foucault, 1995, pp. 177, 184) in the sense of creating norms is another instrument through which, Foucault asserts, discipline is exercised (Foucault, 1995, p. 184). In the context of early childhood and norms, WHO child growth standards or detailed milestones for child development come to mind that can have a disciplinary effect.

Governmentality is the contact point of technologies of power – 'which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject' and technologies of self – 'which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault, 1988, para. 9).

While Foucault's writings include action-theoretical concepts of power in the sense that power is 'understood in terms of power-over relations' (Allen, 2016, para. 2), I am more interested in his writings that explore power as a set of relationships (Foucault, 1978; Vandenbroeck et al., 2011) which 'emerge from every social interaction and thus pervade the social body' (Allen, 2016, para. 33). While Foucault acknowledges that power can be repressive, he argues that it is mainly productive, especially when it comes to the production of subjects: 'the individual is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects' (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

A significant concept introduced by Foucault that is particularly relevant when thinking about how early childhood programmes aim to monitor and shape parenting practices is that of pastoral power, or pastoral care, to use the original church term. It is through the concept of pastoral power that Foucault joins the centralizing state with the individual (Carrette, 2013, p. 41).

The Hebraic/Christian idea of the pastor, a 'shepherd' who guides his 'flock' towards salvation, constitutes the cornerstone of pastoral power. It is both totalizing and individualizing, as the pastor not only looks after the flock as a whole, but also possesses specific knowledge about every single 'sheep' (Foucault, 2009, pp. 126–127). This is achieved by observation of 'behaviour and conduct', as well as the instruments of confession and self-examination. The Christian pastor acquires 'knowledge of conscience' and has the 'ability to direct it' (Foucault, 1982, p. 783). In this context, pastoral power links up to technologies of self, as the confessant, after a close self-examination of their conscience, must tell a truth that can only be found within him/herself (Foucault, 1985, p. 60).

In the modern state, pastoral power has been transformed and secularized in order to fit different purposes, such as the assurance of economic securitization, health, and wellbeing. In contrast to the Christian pastorate, salvation is sought after during this life, rather than after death (Foucault, 1982, p. 784). Today pastoral power practices can be found in public institutions like police, schools, and social welfare departments. Social workers and health visitors can be understood as 'officials' of pastoral power when they interact with clients in the context of home visits or counselling services (Nadesan, 2008, p. 24). Like Rose, who rejects a 'state-centred approach' (Rose, 1999, p. xxi) to political power, this paper does not understand officials of pastoral power as 'merely servants of power', but as agents who 'actively shape and transform objects, techniques and ends of power' (ibid).

Moreover, Foucault noted that 'where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95–96). Power is not unidirectional, and individuals embedded in power relations can resist by trying to escape, undermine or shape disciplinary practices (Foucault, 2009, pp. 204–214).

The power of pastoral officials is not founded on repressive measures and not intended to be coercive, but is founded on their devotedness to do individual clients (and society as a whole) good by guiding them towards a state of wellbeing. While Nadesan argues that only individuals failing to take responsibility for self-governance are subject to management from experts (Nadesan, 2008, p. 34), the MVB's mission is to reach every family. Being counselled and supported by an MVB advisor on a regular basis is not generally designed for 'unruly participants' (Peters, 2012, p. 418), but extends to all parents. While not every parent uses the MVB, it is not conceptualized as a place for 'problem families' to go, but a 'normal' part of early childhood activities.[4]

The following sections discuss the fieldwork findings in more detail and argue that the idea of a 'guiding pastor' is reflected in the MVB's position.

5 General information about the MVB

The MVB evolved out of private associations which aimed to curb Switzerland's high infant mortality rate in the early 20th century. Today, it is a nationwide service which is readily accepted by parents (Riedi, 2003, p. 12). Most MVBs train as paediatric nurses and then com-

[4] The MVB's trade association estimated that, in 2017, 58 per cent of parents had used the MVB at least once. The use varied according to region, as for example some providers – mostly in rural areas – counselled almost 100 per cent of all families with children under one at least once (FVMBV, 2017, p. 1).

plete an MVB post-graduate diploma. All the advisors are female, and the great majority of clients are mothers (FVMVB, 2018)[5]. There are different regional MVB providers, who are independent of each other. In 2016, there were 74 regional MVB providers in Switzerland, each of which operated a network of between one and 270 advice centres. According to an MVB report, on average, there are 2.5 advice centres per 100 new-born babies (FVMVB, 2017). The MVB is financed almost exclusively by the public sector. Any parent with a child under five can consult the MVB via telephone or email, or visit the advice centres, and can also request home visits. The MVB centres are usually equipped with a waiting area and a private room in which the counselling takes place. The counselling rooms are furnished with a changing table, a scale for weighing children, a desk with a computer which contains client data, and toys for babies and toddlers. The main topics addressed during consultations are breastfeeding, diet, nutrition, sleep, and child development.

First contact between parents and the MVB is made after a child is born: many advisors contact parents via telephone in order to arrange a first meeting. The MVB learns about the birth of a child in their local commune via two channels: Both the hospital in which the child was born as well as the commune in which the child's parents reside, sent parents' contact details to the local MVB centre.

MVBs are also charged with preventing or disclosing child abuse. Like doctors, MVBs have an obligation to maintain confidentiality, but also the duty to report parents to child protection services when a child's physical or psychological wellbeing is at risk because of abuse or neglect.

6 Accompanying parents

The MVB's service is framed in terms of *Begleitung*, an 'accompaniment' to families' efforts to raise a child. Mothers receive a leaflet informing them about the MVB's services during their stay on a maternity ward. Many of these, as well as MVB webpages, frame early parenthood as a time when guidance by an expert is needed, suggesting that, while it is 'lovely' and 'exciting', it can also be an 'exhausting' and 'challenging' time, prompting feelings of 'overload' as well as triggering many questions, which the local MVB is ready to answer. The MVB's monitoring of paediatric development is advertised as being preventative and health promoting (Spitex Höfe, n.d., my translation).

The idea is that parents should visit their local MVB with their children before any deep-seated 'problems' arise, such as parental exhaustion or developmental disorders. While some MVBs stated that the issues discussed during consultations are determined by the parents, others addressed certain unsolicited topics in order to comply with their prevention

[5] The fact that in the case of the MVB, women guide (mostly) other women reflects that both 'professional' care work, like nursing, and care work at 'home', is highly gendered; childrearing in Switzerland primarily remains mothers' work (BFS, 2019, p. 13). Further, the MVBs strongly focus on the mother-child relationship and maternal 'skills', such as breastfeeding. In her study on the Sure Start Programme in the UK, Clarke discusses similar findings and comments that 'despite the language of "parenting", and the acknowledgement of the role of fathers or other family members, the infant is seen primarily in the context of the mother–infant dyad […]' (Clarke, 2006, p. 718).

mandate. A field notes excerpt describes a consultation 'scene' during which MVB Beatrix[6] gives a mother hints about her child's future developmental steps and stresses which things she needs to consider:

> Beatrix asks the mother whether she can have a look at the baby, which is then placed on the changing table. After examining whether the baby can follow her head movements with his eyes, Beatrix tells the mother that her infant son will soon start to grab his feet with his hands and then begin to roll to the side, onto his belly. She then turns the baby from its back onto its stomach in order to demonstrate the movement. The baby starts protesting. Beatrix warns the mother that she must not leave him lying on the sofa on his own anymore. The mother affirms this. (Field notes, 24.07.19.)

Many MVBs said they sought and enjoyed having a close relationship with clients. MVB Fiona strongly emphasized her dedication to her clients, emphasizing that parents could 'count on her' for five years and that she carried out her work with a lot of *Herzblut*, 'the blood of her heart'. Many MVBs stressed that parents could come to them with 'everything', pose 'any question', and that they took every issue a parent brought up very 'seriously': 'This is the beautiful thing [...] when they [the clients] have the trust, when they know that they are being accompanied, are taken seriously, and can ask whatever they want' (recorded interview, 12.04.19). Accordingly, gaining the trust of clients played a major role in MVB-parent relationships, especially in sustaining the accompaniment for up to five years. A large majority of MVBs said they had chosen the profession not only because they had a fascination for counselling, but also because it allowed them to gain a durable relationship with their clients, in contrast to the brief contact they had with patients when working as paediatric nurses. This way, they could 'work on' issues with parents and 'really keep at it', as MVB Isabelle explained:

> Usually, you are in a relationship over a longer period, and I think that this has a lot of advantages, in order to work on something [...] when they come with many different topics and you can accompany the process, the developments, and strengthen and encourage parents with all their questions. (Recorded interview, 12.04.19)

This long-term accompanying was framed not only as safeguarding and promoting children's health by keeping track of their growth and developmental milestones, but also as a way to enable parents to reach a satisfactory state of autonomy. Here, the idea of the 'guiding pastor' is reflected in the MVB's position, providing 'salvation' by assisting parents to gain skills and confidence in childrearing. Like her colleagues, MVB Fiona considered it her job to ensure that parents achieved 'self-dependence' by mastering the issues that triggered a lot of conversations during consultations themselves (interview notes, 15.04.19). After what MVB Olivia called a 'transition phase', during which parents could contact her, she believed they would reach a sufficient level of competency so 'they can do it on their own' (recorded interview, 05.12.19). Thus, the accompaniment of families is supposed to come to an end, when parents are able to manage childrearing themselves. In this context, the MVB's approach to advising, which is individualized and facilitates technologies of self, plays a role, which the next section discusses.

[6] All research participants have been anonymized.

7 Individualized advice and facilitating self-reflection

The MVBs interviewed described their approach to counselling as individualized – they did not give the same answers to all parents seeking advice regarding, for example, how to deal with temper tantrums, but 'tailored' their counselling to the characters, wishes, needs, and resources of the parents.

To successfully accompany, MVB Hannah stated, 'you must find out where do the parents stand? What background do they have? And based on that, what [do] they need and what they themselves say they want from me' (recorded interview, 17.05.19). MVB Tina noted that the wide range of attitudes towards childrearing today made counselling especially challenging, as it meant always needing to figure out what attitude the parents had in order to provide suitable advice. For example, she could not advise a mother to let her child sleep in her bed if the mother believed this was unacceptable (recorded interview, 05.11.19). When counselling parents in order to solve a specific issue, such as helping parents who did not know how to calm a crying baby, many MVBs described asking parents what felt right for them, what they had already tried to address the issue, and what thoughts or feelings the applied practices had triggered in them. Often MVBs were consulted by parents who had been unsettled by conversations with older relatives who had different views on how to properly care for a baby. Intergenerational discussions, for example, revolved around the idea that babies might be spoiled if they were picked up too quickly when crying. MVB Anna noted:

> I usually ask them what they feel what is right for them and it is usually not the way that the [parent's] grandmother or mother wanted it to be. And usually, it is sufficient that they come here and talk about it and the MVB says that the way they want to do it is right. (Recorded interview, 17.05.19.)

MVB Zoe was convinced that 'the solution and the approach to a solution is within the client' (recorded interview, 23.12.19). Finding out what resources the client could draw on – for example, whether a parent who was exhausted could fall back on the support of relatives – was only possible through the clients themselves.

Self-reflection and, even more so, 'trust in yourself' also played a role when it came to notions of parental 'intuition', 'instinct' or 'gut feeling'.[7] Many MVBs believed that most parents know 'instinctively' or 'intuitively' 'what to do', that many parents would instinctively 'do the right thing', and that this was an innate ability. While some did not specify further what they meant by these terms, others referred to *Feingefühl,* literally a 'fine-tuned sensitivity'[8] that allows a mother to 'read' her child's needs. A recurring theme during conversations with MVBs was that this innate ability was at the risk of being lost because parents were attempting to become well-informed, and so were confronted with contradictory information

[7] Many MVBs used these terms interchangeably. There are many different concepts of 'instincts' but discussing this here would go beyond the constraints of this paper.

[8] None of the MVB interlocutors specifically referred to the psychological concept of 'maternal sensitivity' (translated as *Feinfühligkeit* in German), coined by Mary Ainsworth. Their elaborations on *Feingefühl,* however, came very close to Ainsworth's ideas about 'maternal sensitivity' and how it shapes the mother-child relationship and children's attachment 'style' (Ainsworth, 1969).

which could lead to feelings of insecurity. MVB Isabella described the contemporary approach to childrearing as overly intellectual, and defined the restoration of parents' trust in their own instinct or gut feeling as an important part of her work:

> Sometimes you need to lead the parents back to this instinct, because the way is so cognitive, the parents are so busy thinking and do not trust their gut feeling anymore, and sometimes the connection must be re-made or you can ensure them that no, they do not have to plug in a device so they can hear the child in the next room in the night, they will hear it, they may even be awake before [the child wakes up]. (Recorded interview, 12.04.19.)

In order to be able to, as MVB Hannah phrased it, 'draw on your intuition', the advisors stated that their clients needed to introspect what felt good, what felt right. The 'solution' again was conceived to be inherent within the clients themselves, while the MVBs' essential task was to assist in self-searching and subsequently provide 'reassurance' that the parents' realizations were 'right'. In this constellation, '"the expert" refuses to say what is "good", but facilitates the self-examination' (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011, p. 72). Ostensibly, this practice accentuates the cooperation between parent and advisors and installs the parent as expert in his or her own right. Nonetheless, the process of self-reflection is initiated and guided by the expert who subsequently gives her 'blessing' (or not) to the client's realizations. Inviting the parent to self-reflect also assists in the knowledge production about families, as it entails facilitating him or her to speak a kind of inner truth (Foucault, 1985, p. 60) and thereby puts the client 'in a submissive position within power relations' (Hennum, 2011, p. 539).

Although the counselling approach described above was depicted by many MVBs as common practice, more instructive advice-giving was also noted during participant observation, especially in consultations involving families enrolled in the MVB early intervention programme (*Frühförderung*, FF). The families enrolled in FF were believed to be in need of 'closer accompaniment' and consultations took place more regularly. Several MVBs stated that it was mostly migrants who were included in FF, whose parenting practices some advisors seemed to view more critically. In the context of FF, MVB Lisa, for example, noted that some migrant families from African countries needed to be instructed how to 'sit down and play with their children' (recorded interview, 03.05.19). Further, their ways of handling babies needed improvement:

> An African woman pulls up her child on one arm and I can hardly watch. And then I think – 'okay, you have learnt it this way' – and then they quickly throw it on their backs and tie it up. Or they can hardly put the baby on the floor, because the floor is dirty and then one can also just say 'it must learn to roll over' – that it is better to put it on the floor, than leaving the baby on the sofa. (ibid.)

In the context of cultural differences and childrearing, Riedi, who carried out a small-scale study of the MVB in Winterthur speaks of 'normalization work' The term refers to professional standards, which are, for example, mediated in MVB training courses, or child rearing practices specific to Switzerland, which the MVBs may impose on parents from different ethnic backgrounds (Riedi, 2003, p. 89). From a Foucauldian perspective, normalization work can be understood as 'normalizing judgement'. MVB guidance shifts from cooperation to a constellation in which the advisor clearly states what is 'right' and 'wrong' and attempts to correct practices perceived as harmful, exposing the MVB's position of authority.

The next section turns to another aspect of pastoral care: the observation of 'behaviour and conduct'.

8 Gathering knowledge and making observations

MVBs, like doctors, keep a file on every client family and document each consultation. An infant's weight, length, and head circumference are entered into a growth chart, while the questions asked by parents, and observations made by the MVB are noted down. Monitoring the development of children was usually done incidentally by MVBs and it was often not clearly communicated to the parents that it was taking place. The supervision of biological processes by gathering and storing data about children's physical and mental development allow bio- and anatomo-political interventions (Foucault, 1978). Their analysis of the child's growth curve enables the MVBs to exercise a normalizing gaze (Foucault, 1995) that supports the parents' (and the state's) efforts to produce a 'normal' child.

Even if MVBs left what was discussed during consultations up to the parents, they still observed and documented children's behaviour. MVB Fiona prepared her consultation room before every family arrived by arranging toys on the floor which she believed were appropriate for the age of that particular child, so that she could observe whether the child was playing 'properly'.

Many MVBs also observed mother-child interactions, especially when it came to 'attachment behaviour'. John Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, which stresses the utmost importance of a child's secure attachment to its mother as the basis of healthy development, was very prominent in the MVBs' work, with 'making' 'sensitive mothers' being a major concern[9]. The MVBs' notions of attachment were directly connected to those of 'instincts' described in the previous section, as some MVBs explained that intuitive competences enabled mothers to promote their child's secure attachment by displaying sensitivity. MVBs primarily defined maternal sensitivity as being able to recognize and cater to the needs of their child. Some MVBs described evaluating mothers' sensitivity when mothers undressed their babies on the changing table, explaining that they expected mothers to talk to their babies and make eye contact with them during this activity. Some MVBs described trying to motivate mothers who, in their view, were lacking *Feingefühl*, to display such desirable behaviour. By making parents aware of their child's behaviour, they hoped to trigger a reaction: 'I show them the perspective of the child, I say aha, look, he is looking at you, he likes your face so much. Informing parents what their child likes, what does their child good' (MVB Sophia, recorded interview, 22.05.19).

The MVBs did not directly communicate their evaluation of attachment to clients, especially if they perceived it as appropriate. Thus, the MVBs' mission in this context was not presented in a transparent manner, and these observations transpired in a highly hierarchical way. Furthermore, the question arises to what extent advisors are really capable to assess the relationship between mother and child within a 20 or 30-minute consultation.

[9] Ainsworth defined maternal sensitivity as a central determinant of the quality of attachment: Sensitive mothers' capability to accurately interpret and respond to their children's 'signals', according to Ainsworth (1969), results in the secure attachment of the child to its mother.

Many MVBs understood attachment behaviour to be an 'innate instinct', and usually referred to mothers. While to some extent this may be connected to gendered ideas regarding childrearing, in the sense that they thought mothers are 'naturally good' at it, it was probably also because the MVBs mostly dealt with women. Mothers who were perceived as being unable to display *Feingefühl* were believed to be suffering from a psychological illness, such as postnatal depression or trauma. In these cases, as MVB Rebecca phrased it, the woman's *Feingefühl* was 'submerged'. Lee et al. suggest that childcare advice today problematizes instinctive parenting:

> [P]erhaps the single most distinctive feature of expert commentaries and statements about today's parents is the tendency to reposition 'instinct' as either mythical or problematic. The transformation in expert discourse of the relationship between parents and a child into a set of skills that has to be learned and acquired, and for which instinct provides no satisfactory guide, stands out as a defining feature of today. (Lee et al., 2014, p. 53)

Lee et al.'s observations do not hold in Switzerland, where notions of 'instincts' played a prevalent role in the MVBs' counselling work. Many MVBs were in favour of mothers listening to their instincts when handling children, which may be connected to the fact that they seemed to be highly influenced by Bowlby (1969), who argued that attachment behaviour was instinctive. The idea that mothers can rely on their 'instincts', but still require the MVB for guidance, seemingly presents a glaring paradox. Nevertheless, the MVB's focus to reinstall trust in 'instincts' or assist those who struggle to 'access' them was underlined by several advisors. While offering (some) mothers reassurance that they intuitively know what is 'good' for their children may be experienced as empowering by (some) women, notions of maternal 'instincts' may present an even 'harsher task master for women than discipline and study had ever been' (Ehrenreich & English, 2005, p. 242) – especially if the women who do not fit into the scheme of proper attachment behaviour are pathologized. Ideas about 'innate instincts' promote highly essentialist views about women, as well as normative thinking about childrearing.[10]

9 Resisting pastoral care

MVBs were aware of the fact that their accompaniment was not welcomed by every family. This was reflected in their dealings with families who they felt may want to reject their *Begleitung*, especially families who had been ordered by child protection services to consult

[10] This is not to infer that Bowlby was wrong, in fact, this article agrees with Hrdy, an evolutionary anthropologist who rates Bowlby's theory as 'among the greatest contributions made by evolutionary-minded psychologists to human well-being' (Hrdy, 1999, p. xiii). However, Hrdy concludes in her book *Mother Nature* that parental emotions in humans can be highly 'flexible' (Hrdy, 1999, p. xvi). She argues that humans are what she calls 'cooperative breeders', as the 13 million calories needed to rear a child to maturity cannot be provided by one caretaker alone (Hrdy, 2009, p. 101–102). Thus, a mother's emotional and material investment in a child is dependent on the social support and material resources she herself can acquire '[…] a mother's love is contingent on her circumstances' (Hrdy, 2001, February 27–28, p. 97). In other words, mothers are not naturally hard-wired to love and nurture their children no matter what but, due to the great 'expense' that caring for children requires, they are also compelled to look after themselves. Thus, a lack of attachment behaviour is not necessarily caused by mental illness.

with the MVB regularly. Some MVBs pondered whether clients may want to resist their guidance by portraying a false picture of the situation in their homes. Often 'gaining the families' trust' or 'building a good relationship' was seen as an effective way to make the clients who had been ordered to work with them more cooperative.

The notion that parents may have a 'defensive attitude' towards the MVB was prevalent in interview responses around the context of the voluntary use of the service as well. Here, contemplating why parents do not use the MVB in the first place played a role, along with concerns that clients may stop using the service because they disagree with the advice they receive. Several MVBs lamented the fact that some parents had the wrong idea about the agenda of the MVB as an organisation, explaining that – instead of seeing the MVB as a paragon of prevention that primarily sought to enable parents – some people perceived the MVB as an organ of control and therefore avoided any contact with advisors. At least in the context of voluntary use of the MVB, the position of the pastor and her ability to acquire knowledge of conscience in order to guide, is highly dependent on her relationship with the clients. If parents do not like a particular MVB or disagree with her counselling, they may start following another advisor's guidance or cease using the service altogether.

Nicole, for example, a toddler's mother who I met during the course of my fieldwork, ceased consulting the MVB after she had gained the impression that the advisor was incompetent and wanted her to ignore her 'instinct'. Nicole had consulted the MVB when her son was four months old, because it took her a long time to get him to sleep at night. After learning that Nicole always breastfed her son in order to make him fall asleep more easily, the MVB advised Nicole to stop this, as it would prevent her son from ever learning to fall asleep by himself. Nicole then thought about this at home and came to the conclusion that breastfeeding her son to sleep was 'beautiful and nourishing for everyone', so she continued to do so until he was 18 months old (recorded interview, 24.06.19).

Other examples of parents resisting guidance, were observed at a rural MVB centre, when MVB Fiona counselled two families who were part of her regional MVB's FF programme.

The first family – Mandy with two (of her three) children – came to the centre to discuss several questions about her newborn baby. Fiona used to make home visits to this family, but Mandy's partner did not want her in the house. He allowed Fiona to support Mandy, but he wanted nothing to do with the MVB himself. When Fiona visited the family's home for the first time, the father had reacted negatively to her counselling. Whenever she commented on his children's behaviour or gave advice on a specific topic, the father had countered it by saying, 'ah, now you are referring to this theory', and began elaborating on it. While Mandy was still under Fiona's care and consulted her on a frequent basis, this had transformed the way the accompaniment was designed, as Fiona ceased to visit the family's home. This was a consequence of Mandy's partner, her children's father, having rejected Fiona's support and denigrated her observations and advice.

Later in the afternoon, at the home of Amal, a mother of six, while in the living room chatting about Amal's children, a loud howling resounded from the boys' rooms. Her son Alan ran to Amal, his face awash with tears, and told her that his older brother Jiro had kicked him in the nose. Fiona started instructing Amal on how to handle the situation, advising her to ask Jiro to come out of his room, to tell him explicitly that she did not want him to hit others and that he had to apologize to his brother. Amal smiled calmly and explained that she did not see the point in this, as the boys would just start blaming each other. Fiona,

however, argued that Amal should counter that by saying that she was not a judge. Fiona asked Amal to call Jiro again, which she did, but rather quietly. She grinned while calling him and did not appear to take the situation as seriously as Fiona, who seemed to be upset. After a while, Jiro emerged from his room and immediately started defending himself. Fiona reminded Amal to say that she was not a judge. Jiro then apologized to Alan in a mocking way, which resulted in Fiona asking him to repeat the apology. When the boys continued playing, Fiona appealed to Amal to try out the approach she had described to her next time. Amal replied that she was already shouting at them a lot because of the hitting. Fiona, however, stayed adamant, which Amal countered with a laugh, exclaiming in a surrendering manner: 'yes, I am trying everything!' (field notes, 16.07.19).

One thing that was striking about the counselling of Amal, especially when contrasted to parents who were not enrolled in FF, was Fiona's style of advice giving, which was directive and problematizing and did not invite any self-reflection on the side of Amal. Fiona even took over Amal's position at one point and requested a second, more sincere apology from Jiro herself. Amal remained rather inactive and did not put much effort into implementing Fiona's instructions. While Fiona rendered Jiro's behaviour as something that needed to be managed urgently and appropriately, Amal visibly did not share Fiona's concerns, which represented a resistance to Fiona's guidance in this matter.

These examples show that the MVB's (pastoral) care is not necessarily perceived as 'redemptive' by parents. The pastor's stand is somewhat volatile, so getting involved with families and accompanying them must be exercised with deliberation and a readiness to assimilate to the clients' requirements. Parents, to a large extent, give the 'pastor' the power to guide, by allowing her insights into their conscience and conduct, and the pastor's power practices are transformed by clients' wishes, requirements and reactions to her counselling.

10 Conclusion

The aspirations and tasks of the MVB are clearly of pastoral nature. Framed as 'accompaniment', the MVB offers (usually) voluntary guidance by a committed advisor that is intended to be preventative, long-term and health promoting. The relations between a client and the MVB are ideally characterized by proximity – in order to receive guidance, clients provide their advisor with insights into their 'private' lives and access to their conscience by expressing their inner feelings verbally.

Advice is intended to be tailored to the specific needs and requirements of each individual family, which is carefully assessed by the MVB. The MVB's counselling facilitates technologies of self, such as self-reflection, in order to find out which way of handling events, for example, to calm a crying baby, feels right to the parents. This approach aims to equip parents with techniques that will enable them to eventually guide themselves. Through introspection parents are expected to be able to reach a state of autonomy in which they are confident about parenting. Even if (some) parents are encouraged to say what is 'right' themselves, the divide between client and expert remains clear-cut, as otherwise the expert's authority to provide guidance, collect data, and make observations would dwindle. Observing children's and parents' behaviours in order to recognize issues such as developmental delays or a lack of attachment that clients might have no knowledge of, supplements the promotion of technologies of self, or may reveal things that clients do not want to disclose.

As the recent parliamentary initiatives and the Swiss UNESCO Commission's publication show, early childhood continues to be a focus of policy makers, who advocate the support and expansion of programmes that boost parental education. At no time are parents more encouraged to make use of counselling and health services than during the early years of their offspring's lives. In Switzerland, a comprehensive public early childhood programme has been created over the last hundred years that reaches over half of all new families. Policy makers facilitate easy access to expert counselling by providing the MVB free of charge and ensuring that every family can be contacted and informed about the service directly by providing notice of every new birth in their community. By financing one-to-one MVB counselling sessions, the state can monitor children's development and encourage an expert-led way of 'parenting', which has been depicted as a modern way of childrearing with globalizing tendencies (Faircloth et al., 2013, p. 4).

Early childhood, thought of as a 'seminal' phase that will directly influence an individual's circumstances in later life, is a concern of the state, which has a vested interest in ensuring the 'wellbeing' of its citizens. Thus, the condition, behaviour, and practices of parents during early childhood, which are believed to have an immediate effect on children's health and development (Furedi, 2002), is subject to preventative expert monitoring and guidance. This way, undesirable outcomes stemming from, for example, a failure to thrive or a lack of maternal sensitivity, can be recognized and corrected before any deep-seated 'problems' arise. By encouraging a 'prophylactic' use of the service, the state invests in the 'risk management' of families with young children (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011, p. 76).

The practices deemed appropriate for the surveillance and guidance of parenting in Switzerland today are characterized by pastoral forms of power which aim to achieve families' 'salvation', that have both individualizing and totalizing effects. The MVB's pastoral work is future-oriented in the way that its promotion of health and positive parent-child relationships are believed to have beneficial effects reaching into adult life. While the MVB advisors themselves usually only talk about caring for the wellbeing of individual families, the report from the MVB trade association underlines the significance of their work for a prosperous future of the entire nation (FVMVB, n.d.). Thereby, the MVB asserts that it shares the state's (whose financing the MVB also wants to secure to sustain its own institution) concerns and responsibilities regarding the rights and wellbeing of young children, as well as the ambition to provide them with 'good' parents.

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Creating the post-socialist middle-class mother: Global hierarchies and local distinctions

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Abstract

This paper discusses the ways class distinctions are upheld through the performance of culturally valued childcare practices in a post-socialist capital: Sofia. It is based on 19 in-depth interviews, concerned with the mundane everyday lives of first-time middle-class mothers on maternity leave. I use feminist critical discourse analysis to trace the ways classed power shapes the meaning my interviewees attach to their experiences of motherhood.

Feminist academic literature on motherhood, generally originating in the global west, has long demonstrated how the labour-intensive, financially demanding and time-consuming practices of middle-class mothers historically inform the very idea of 'good' motherhood. Seeing the child as a project in need of managing, via an amalgam of diligent provision of organic home-cooked food options, skilful manoeuvring around pre-school selection and an endless supply of extracurricular activities, has been exposed as middle-class privilege and thoroughly critiqued. These practices are implicitly opposed to the more intuitive parenting styles of the working classes. However, automatically linking specific childcare rituals with a certain class standing is also a symptom of the global inequalities in knowledge production, which tend to naturalise western realities as universal truths.

My research shows that class distinction, rather than being produced by the exact practices parents engage in, is the outcome of processes of symbolic and material exclusion through which one imagines oneself as superior. The mothering styles of the socially privileged correlate with the norms enforced by childcare experts and state institutions around the world, but these styles are essentially 'glocal' designs. 'Good' middle-class mothers in post-socialist Europe anxiously manage their classed performance of motherhood with an awareness of their inferior position in the global class ladder. As such, Bulgarian 'glocally-appropriate' parenting merges two symbolic strategies in order to secure a relative and fragile economic privilege: mothers' preferred childcare styles deploy an array of technologies of exclusion of the socially marginalised poor as well as those perceived as nouveau riche; and they represent an attempt at imagining oneself and her children as 'civilised' and valuable Europeans, with a focus on rejecting the country's socialist past.

Keywords: middle class; motherhood; Bulgaria; post-socialism; glocal

1 Introduction

All motherhoods were surely not created equal. The intensification of parenting methods is a global trend (Furedi, 2013). Amid a growing global culture of expert-guided 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996), a more intuitive approach to mothering, typically associated with the lower strata of society, is often valued less by childcare experts than the heavily rationalised, labour intensive practices of middle-class women (Faircloth et al., 2013; Harman & Cappellini, 2015; Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2003; Vincent & Ball, 2007). However, even the literature critical to this trend is heavily biased towards western, and particularly Anglo-American, contexts. The problem is that defining class based on specific parenting practices observed in the global west obscures the fact that elsewhere middle-class parenting is significantly different and yet it creates local hierarchies in very similar ways. Thus, the lens through which researchers look at parenting outside of western contexts needs to be adjusted.

This paper adopts a Central Eastern European (CEE), feminist perspective to discuss the discursive exclusions Bulgarian mothers perform when accounting for their childcare choices to analyse the relationship between parenting and social class. This focus on discursive exclusions allows me to contribute to the critical literature on middle-class parenting styles and class formation by constructing a nuanced, 'glocal' approach to the relationship between parenting and social class that recognises both local specificities and universal trends in an unequal world. Only then can we start to truly understand how class is formed through parenting practices both within and without core countries.

In the next section, I provide a theoretical framework for the paper, with an emphasis on feminist sociological literature concerned with the relationship between social class and childcare practices as they relate to the post-socialist transition period. After a short elaboration of the methodology adopted, I discuss my findings in relation to the relevant theoretical debates. The article ends with conclusions, outlining both the contributions and the limitations of the research.

2 Classed motherhoods: Feminist approaches

Hays (1996) claims that parenting styles in the US are classed reproductive strategies: working-class women prepare their children for being employees, while middle-class ones try to foster in their offspring the skillset required for managerial work. The personal qualities valued by middle-class mothers are naturalised by childcare experts/psychologists as essential features of psychologically healthy individuals. Thus, compliance with the prevalent ideology of intensive mothering, which is only accessible to financially secure women because it is 'child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive' (Hays, 1996, p. 8), is what grants a woman the label 'good mother' in the US.

Other classed and raced practices exist but they do not have equal status with the dominant middle-class ones and women who mother in such ways are marginalised as less deserving. Black feminists (Hill Collins, 1990) have argued that feminist analyses of motherhood also privilege the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual mothers over those constructed as 'different'. Indeed, the anxious concerns of western middle-class mothers to secure the best start to their children have been (over)studied and labelled 'middle-class par-

enting': the provision of healthy, fair-trade feeding options (Harman & Cappellini, 2015), the right kind of formal schooling and playdate mates (Byrne, 2006), and extracurricular activities such as swimming, music and foreign language classes (Faircloth et al., 2013; Lareau, 2003; Lareau & Weininger, 2008; Vincent & Ball, 2007).

This paper takes a different route in exploring the relationship between social class and motherhood. I contest the straightforward equation of the practices described by the authors mentioned above with middle-class parenting. Knowledge produced in the 'core' is often taken as universally valid (Mignolo, 2000) but through focusing on the practices of middle-class mothers in a Central and Eastern European (CEE) country, I show that dominant practices are locally specific. Class is indeed performed through mothering and the practices of more privileged social groups have a higher chance of fitting the locally dominant idea of proper motherhood (Harwood et al., 1999; McMahon, 1995; Wallbank, 2000). However, material privilege is relative, and the locally specific intersections of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc. produce different regimes of domination. Instead of simply juxtaposing the particularities of contemporary Bulgarian motherhoods to the parenting styles described as middle-class in literature, this paper speaks about mothering normativity from a specifically CEE perspective. I draw light onto the historical processes behind the ways class distinction is produced via parenting in Sofia, Bulgaria, as part of a broader 'post-socialist' context, emphasising the implicit discursive exclusions within them. It is these nuanced, context-specific exclusions that research must focus on when looking into classed parenting, and not simply the parenting practices produced.

3 Class, cultural practices and reproductive strategies

According to Bourdieu (1987), social classes differentiate themselves via taste, and in a broader sense via cultural practices. Taste (in art, food, design and so on), often understood as a set of natural dispositions, directly correlates with people's educational level and social origin. The reason taste appears natural, however, is because it is embodied and continuously reiterated. This internalised set of socially desirable attitudes, dispositions and behaviours is what Bourdieu calls habitus: the embodied dimension of socio-economic class. Habitus is unconscious but significant; it is closely related to the ways cultural capital is (re)distributed between unequally positioned members of society. Cultural capital is one of the forms of capital Bourdieu recognises, together with social and economic capital. While economic capital relates to one's material wealth, social capital has to do primarily with valuable connections, which can help one get a prestigious job, marry into wealth etc. Cultural capital is the subtle hierarchical myriad of knowledges, tastes, values, hobbies and so on that form one's habitus. The different forms of capital are mutually transferrable. Social and cultural capital can be transformed into economic capital while high economic capital usually correlates with the privileged forms of cultural dispositions (Bourdieu, 1987).

From a Bourdieusian perspective, middle-class mothers' childcare practices, as reproductive strategies, aim at ensuring their children will grow up with the 'right' kind of tastes, beliefs, attitudes and even bodies. If examined through the lens of cultural capital, wealthier mothers' obsession with 'clean' and/ or organic feeding has to do with the development of particular tastes for expensive, gourmet kinds of food, while the 'correct' nutritional value

such foods supposedly provide will ensure their children end up in an optimal physical condition. Further, the 'right' kind of extracurricular activities secure the acquisition of socially valued hobbies and skills, whilst also ensuring children will grow up in the preferred social circle of like-minded (and usually relatively affluent) families (Afflerback et al., 2013; Byrne, 2006; Laureau, 2003).

Aside from a reproductive strategy, the aim of which is to sustain or improve the class position of the child, mothering can be approached as a Bourdieusian 'field' (Hilgers & Mangez, 2015). Within it, mothers perform their own class dispositions and aspirations, in a constant struggle to renegotiate the power relations between themselves, childcare and medical experts, local institutions and global knowledges, which structure the ideas about both children's needs and maternal contributions. Before analysing the classed meaning of those maternal performances, I turn to a discussion about the emergence of the middle class in Bulgaria.

Outside core societies, where the middle class did not emerge organically as a function of industrialisation, middle class formation is a multi-directional process (Liechty, 2002). In CEE, where the official ideology of state-socialism spoke of classless societies, the middle class became a topic of official discussion only after the fall of the regime in 1989. Regardless of what official party lines claimed, state-socialist societies were hardly equal or classless. Despite disagreements in the specificities of social stratification in the region, authors generally recognise four different 'classes' in socialist societies: the workers, the peasants, the nomenklatura (party officials and high-level technocrats), and the intelligentsia (university educated professionals, artists and intellectuals) (Buchowski, 2008; Róbert & Bukodi, 2000; Schröder, 2008; Tilkidjiev, 2002; Verdery et al., 2015). In their famous samizdat publication, Konrád and Szelényi (1979) argued that the intelligentsia was on the road to consolidating itself as the new ruling class. While this perspective has since been contested, the affective and ideological ties between the socialist intelligentsia and the emergent post-socialist middle classes are undeniable (Eber & Gagyi, 2015; Szelényi, 2013).

However, there are important internal differences within post-socialist Europe, when it comes to middle class formation. In the Visegrad countries, for example, which followed a more 'neoliberal' model of transition to capitalism, the continuity between the intelligentsia and the new middle classes had more material effects (Gagyi & Eber, 2015; Verdery et al., 2015). The liberalisation of market relations ensured that skilled labourers there could gradually translate their knowledge into a class standing.

In poorer Bulgaria, it was mostly social ties that determined the economic winners and losers of the transformation. Of course, those ties were deeply linked to class divisions under state socialism, which, according to Stoilkova (2003, p. 156), were not organised around wealth but 'along the lines of education, profession, administrative status, and the character of work (e.g. intellectual vs. manual)'. Apart from the nomenklatura, nobody possessed significant material resources. Instead, higher class was associated with different privileges: access to better holiday locations, cultural events, and healthcare as well as a belonging to semi-formal networks of exchange – of goods, favours and status. After the collapse of the regime,

> the status of the so-called 'mass intelligentsia' of socialism… the social group which was expected to constitute the 'middle class' after the fall of socialism – radically dropped in prestige, concurrent with a drop in their standard of living. (Stoilkova, 2003, p. 156)

This drop, however, was an untraditional one: it was not wealth per se that was lost but rather access to the privileges discussed above. One's status as a professional formally remained but it was now void of its material core; thus, a symbolic figure of the 1990s in Bulgaria was the university professor turned taxi driver to make ends meet (Raichev & Stoichev, 2004).

In light of this drastic loss of both symbolic and material privileges, focusing on immaterial values, which had its roots in state-socialism, as I will explain shortly, developed into a class-retaining strategy (Tsoneva, 2017; Valiavicharska, 2021). During state socialism, the intelligentsia saw itself as responsible for setting the moral and cultural compass of society, and its strong appreciation for arts and education served as a measure of human worth. On this basis, the Bulgarian intelligentsia differentiated itself from both the nomenklatura on the one side, and the workers, the Roma and the Turkish minority, on the other (Stoilkova, 2003; Gencheva, 2012). Spatial and occupational segregation in the capital city of Sofia in particular made sure members of the intelligentsia were rarely in contact with members of the peasantry or the working class. Hence, amid the state propaganda about social equality, they were unaware of the vast class differences existing in the country. For them, the uneducatedness of the lower classes was not a structural issue but a choice and therefore a moral, personal failure.

During late state socialism the intelligentsia, while not necessarily taking up an openly dissident stance towards the regime, culturally and ideologically aligned itself with the West (Stoilkova, 2003; Taylor, 2003). Left without options to retain its status, the Bulgarian intelligentsia realised its aspirations of upward class mobility through desired or actual emigration to the West (Stoilkova, 2003). The image of the emigrant exemplified a meritocratic, self-reliant subject, who had transcended the state socialist economy based on 'personal connections', which was blamed for the lack of economic opportunities.

Similarly to Stoilkova (2001; 2003), Tsoneva (2017) argues that the contemporary subjectivising strategies of the middle class in Bulgaria include a sharp focus on morality, coupled with a vilification of both the rich and the poor. In her analysis of the summer 2013 wave of anti-government protests, she claims that the rhetoric articulated by the protests juxtaposed 'the smart and the beautiful' (Tsoneva, 2017, p. 124) middle-class urbanites' demands for ethical and pro-European politics with the 'coalition' formed by the oligarchic government and the deliberately impoverished welfare precariat that supposedly sustained its power. Both oligarchs and the precariat were declared an anachronistic disgrace, belonging to another epoch, or even a different civilisation – that of state socialism. In the eyes of 'the smart and the beautiful' urbanites:

> [T]he (post)communist crisis we have to tackle is not material (utility bills, poverty, inequality, etc.) but cultural/civilizational/moral and aesthetic… Bulgaria is only formally a democracy, as its liberal institutions are lacking in substance. This substance is taste, 'citizen' culture, love for reading books, beauty, rigor, and as such it is immaterial, spiritual, and sadly lacking in the majority of the population seduced by the 'welfare populism' of the oligarchs. (Tsoneva, 2017, p. 117)

Tsoneva coins the term 'anti-citizen': the imagined 'uncivilised', 'uncultured', 'communist', 'Asian'[1] welfare recipient or, alternatively, the powerful oligarch, who tries to keep

[1] Note how the internal other is orientalised.

Bulgaria away from its rightful place in the European family of brotherly nations. Anti-citizens are systematically racialised, assumed to be primarily from the Roma and the Turkish minorities, and their supposed ethnic characteristics serve as an explanation for their lack of cultured habitus. In that sense, we could speculate that, even when distinctions are being made on the grounds of knowledge, culture and morals, as they happen to be in the narratives of motherhood my interviewees produced, the middle class implicitly imagines itself in opposition not only to those in power and the poor, but to ethnic minorities as well.

This dynamic, while having its local particularities, is of course not exceptional to Bulgaria. According to Owczarzak (2009), the so-called 'winners of the transition' in CEE – usually the educated middle classes – have adopted an orientalising discourse towards those who fared worse from the collapse of state socialism: the working classes, people living outside big cities, the Roma, pensioners, etc. Though the relative marginalisation of these groups is the direct result of a drastic restructuring of the economy (Ghodsee, 2005), dominant discourses tend to explain their misfortune through a moralising logic which equates the lack of economic success with the lack of positive personal qualities. At the same time, relative and often fragile economic privilege tends to get naturalised via its presentation as a matter of morality, individual strength of character, and appropriate lifestyle. Socially valued lifestyle choices, such as consumption patterns, cultural preferences and parenting practices have increased in importance as they serve to justify, enforce, and even create class distinctions.

These signifying performances of class occur in a constantly connected, globalised world where class is simultaneously local – constructed around specific events and institutions and the discourses which make sense of them, and global – based on economic, social and symbolic capital, distributed along power, colour, and poverty lines. The poor and the marginalised being internally orientalised in CEE is not random but rather a response to the cultural tensions within Europe, and the orientalising narratives which tend to symbolically exclude CEE from sharing a European cultural identity with the rich West (Balibar, 2003).

As such, peripheral and semi-peripheral societies like Bulgaria exist with acute awareness of their own culturally marginal position (Liechty, 2002). Within that global dimension, class performances are also civilisational claims of belonging to the 'developed' world (Fehervary, 2013; Liechty, 2002), and it is not at all random that the tropes around which the urban middle class in Bulgaria organises its understanding of the world revolve around being modern and liberal, European or Western, and being an involved citizen as opposed to being old-fashioned and communist, Asian or Oriental, and an anti-citizen (Tsoneva, 2017). Failing to adhere to the current desirable moral code of Bulgarian society is tantamount to both losing class privileges and to a personal 'third-worldisation'. In the words of Fehervary: 'The penalty for slipping out of the middle class now is to suffer the consequences of falling into the denigrated state of a Third World underclass of people that do not count as full-fledged citizens' (2013, p. 22). Thus, as I will show, the orientalisation of Eastern Europe is an extra layer around which my respondents design their mothering. Yet, because of their locally privileged situation, they find ways to 'pass this on' to their poorer or otherwise marginalised counterparts via a process of internal orientalisation. Before showing how this process occurs on an everyday narrative level, I turn to a discussion of the methodology deployed.

3 Methodology

The primary data this analysis builds on is comprised of 19 semi-structured interviews, conducted between 2011 and 2014 with mothers on parental leave in Sofia. The snowball method was used to gather respondents with a middle-class identity. Since my goal was to explore how middle-class was constructed via the performance of culturally appropriate childcare, I did not set extensive economic criteria as to who counted as middle-class but rather relied on the understanding of social networks as organic and reflecting the social identity of their participants (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Noy, 2008). Critically dialoguing with Bourdieu (1987), I contend that the symbolic, cultural and social elements of a class identity are at least as important as the economic ones, especially in societies where the middle classes have not been historically well-established as political subjects. As such, the only criteria set for my interviewees were that they had to have a higher education degree and be on parental leave from a paid job. Especially in Bulgaria, these seem to be the only 'objective' criteria in an otherwise "chaotic" class structure, where the usual markers of class identity: professional status, property ownership, real income and consumption patterns do not combine to produce a coherent class status (Raichev & Stoichev, 2008, p. 53). This sampling strategy, while leaving the criteria for ascription to the middle class to my already recruited respondents, produced a pool of first-time mothers on leave from professions traditionally understood as middle-class: lawyers, doctors, academics, managers, engineers, civil servants and so on.

To make sense of my respondents' narratives about everyday motherhood (Lazar, 2007), I used feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA). According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p. 258), language is a 'form of social practice', a conceptualisation which presupposes 'a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it'. Hence, CDA was deployed here to disclose the particular connections between women's various accounts of their own activities, the power relations embedded in these, the socio-historical context in which they unfold, and the classed subjectivities produced in the process (Fairclough, 1989).

The interviews were scanned for recurrent themes, activities, metaphors, and contradictions (Cameron et al., 2009; Lazar, 2007), which I later organised into 'codes', such as: the perceived material necessities for starting a family, public vs. private childcare, the participation of other kin members in childcare, the qualities of a 'good' mother, raising the child to be a good person, etc. I only organised these codes into categories of analysis after historicising and contextualising them by engaging with locally and globally important expert-guided literature on childcare, relevant academic literature and periodically reviewing mums' internet forums in Bulgaria. Once the contextualisation was achieved, I focused on tracing the ways 'power' was hidden in the stories that emerged around the delineated categories. Who benefited from state-of-the-art childcare practices in Sofia? Who was on the losing end? How did the status quo manage to sustain itself?

In order to make sense of the subtleties around constructing one's class position through parenting, I unpack the individual stories of several respondents in more detail, while illustrating some of the main points they are making with quotes from other mothers as well. In order for the diverse class-constructing rituals and rationalisations in Bulgaria to make sense to a non-local reader, they must be put into the larger context of an interviewee's

life narrative and their origin story in particular. Not all middle-class women are created equal and whether their class status is hard-earned or inherited correlates with different anxieties, aspirations and subjectivising practices.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that this is a relatively small, qualitative research and as such has no ambitions to present a conclusive account of Bulgarian middle-class motherhoods. My narrow snowball sample constructs its classed maternal superiority in markedly subtle ways. No explicitly racist or even outright classist remarks were made by my respondents, which, as a brief glance at any Bulgarian parenting Internet forum would suggest, unfortunately attests more to the inherent limitations of snowball sampling than to the inclusivity of middle-class mothers. To gain a better picture of those sadly widespread attitudes, more research is clearly needed.

4 The Bulgarian middle class: The endangered moral compass of society

In what follows, I show how the reproductive class strategies of the Bulgarian mothers I interviewed are based on imagining themselves as modern (as opposed to a socialist past), western (as opposed to an alleged oriental 'backwardness') and culturally and morally superior to both the 'poor masses' (including ethnic minorities) and the *nouveau riche*. The child-drearing practices my respondents engage in have both similarities and differences to the practices described as middle class in west-centric literature, which I will outline in this section. In order to make sense of these as class-building strategies, they need to be placed within the local socio-historical context.

The implicit construction of one's own childcare decisions as valuable through an emphasis on immaterial values and respect for high culture, as described by Stoilkova (2003) and Tsoneva (2017), dominated the accounts of my respondents, as we see in the following quote:

> At present it turns out that it is more important what kind of car you have, which Chalga club you frequent, literally, because I have the feeling that my son's whole environment will be like that, his classmates at school will listen to Chalga, I don't know what kind of stuff they'll like. And you still must show what really matters in life, that this outer glam, this simpleton lifestyle we have embraced… I would like to be able to make that *distinction* for him, to discern the truly valuable from the surrounding superficial bling. It sounds simple enough but in our Bulgarian reality it isn't. (Svetlana, 32, medical doctor, emphasis mine)

Chalga (coming from the Turkish word for musical instrument), the Bulgarian variation of a popular Balkan and middle-eastern music style, has a special place in national self-orientalising discourses, and its popularity is a source of both global and local cultural anxieties (Livni, 2014). The discourse on *Chalga* exemplifies the painful repercussions of an 'incomplete modernity' – a forever unfulfilled promise to catch up with a glorious yet elusive west. Conventionally, Bulgarian intellectuals understand *Chalga* to be a post-socialist phenomenon, epitomising the moral decay of Bulgarian culture: once the state withdrew its support for high art and left the cultural life of the nation to be decided by market forces, it was the 'masses' that made a civilisational choice to align with the 'orient' rather than the

supposedly culturally superior west. Politically Bulgaria declared its will to 'catch up' with 'democratic' Europe but the 'uncultured masses' turned to a 'primitive', 'eastern' music style. Thus, they sabotaged the true 'inner' transformation of Bulgarian society.

Jansen (2005) and Adriaans (2017) describe the same tropes structuring the fragile middle-class identity in Serbia and Armenia, respectively. These include an explicit distancing from the music style – and the related fetishisation of new money and the conspicuous consumption of designer goods and expensive cars. For the middle classes, *Chalga* becomes the imagined 'inner world' of the anti-citizen (Tsoneva, 2017). Liking *Chalga* is also attributed to the Roma and the so-called 'peasants', which in the Balkans tends to refer to anyone not from an urban centre (Jansen, 2005).

In that sense Svetlana's determination to protect her child from the 'dangerous grip' of *Chalga* is a reproductive strategy for retaining a middle class, urban status. Moreover, her child is only 1.5 years old, so the detailed description of the questionable tastes of his future classmates is pure fantasy, which speaks more about the middle-class imaginary of the socio-cultural divisions within Bulgarian society than of some objective reality her family is going through. The role of the 'good' parent, according to Svetlana, is literally to create 'distinction' as per Bourdieu: 'discern' the truly valuable from the both the ignorance of the 'simpletons' and the 'superficial bling' of the *nouveau riche*.

Indeed, one cannot start too early to set the scene for 'correct' socialisation and even physically separate one's children from the cultural patterns of the undesirable:

> I meet other mothers but only friends of mine from before. In our neighbourhood there is a park where many mothers gather, but they are of the type who just sit around all day, munching on sunflower seeds… I wouldn't want him to grow up in such an environment. With my friends I feel calmer, we have similar values and interests. (Nadia, 31, senior expert at a state agency)

The focus on values and intellectual interests is obvious in this quote as well. Sunflower seeds here are a symbol of the 'lazy ways' and the unrefined tastes of the lower classes, in particular the population from the countryside in Bulgaria.

Through their open denunciation of superficial glamour, low culture and lack of morality, Svetlana and Nadia construct themselves as an endangered minority, the social reproduction of which is truly valuable. Implicit in their accounts is the self-definition of the middle class as the moral compass of society, inherited from the socialist intelligentsia. Marina (32, translator at a sales company), while speaking about not yet owning a home, spells it out explicitly: 'The material is not so important.'

As I will shortly show, this explicit focus on the 'immaterial' does not mean that mothers from Sofia do not often make costly purchases to satisfy the perceived needs of their children, especially when it comes to nutrition. Yet, on a discursive level, what we see here is a conceptualisation of 'good motherhood', which is a far cry from the obligatorily financially expensive intensive motherhood (Hays, 1996) described in western literature. Regulating a child's environment and friendship circle isn't necessarily achieved via heavily structured playdates and private schooling (cf. Byrne, 2006). In my understanding, this is the result of both the socio-historical formation of the post-socialist middle class in Bulgaria as already discussed, as well as the economic discrepancy between the actual purchasing power of the middle classes in the global west and in Bulgaria. My data shows that class status is conceived as a set of personal, moral qualities, transmitted from generation to generation

(cf. Bourdieu, 1987), with several local specificities. This is visible in Svetlana's story, who claims that the best thing about motherhood is being able to 'transmit something valuable to someone else'. She continues, speaking about her mother:

> She has shown me what's worthy in life, the difference between good and bad, how to value the right things. My view on life is surely largely influenced by my parents and I am very happy about the way they raised me, let alone all the financial help which they gave and still give me.

In Svetlana's quote, however, a rare reference to the wealth underlying the moral and cultural sense of superiority is also visible. Her story of motherhood is one of comfort and self-worth, inherited from one's parents and projected onto one's offspring.

Svetlana, like many others of my respondents, relied on her mother for childcare and considered her influence on her child both inevitable and desirable. The words of Maria (29, researcher), whose university professor mother provides free childcare daily around her work schedule, confirm this: 'I don't want my child to spend time with my mother because she is his grandmother. I want it because I think of her as an intelligent person who shares my values.' With the scarce places in state-owned childcare institutions, and the unaffordable fees of private ones, the care work of the grandmother is indispensable – that is, if she lives in Sofia and can provide it. When this isn't the case, it is usually because the middle-class status (as understood in Bulgaria – urban, cultured and well-educated, and inherited from the family of origin) of the speaker is not as straightforward as with Svetlana.

In Gergana's motherhood narrative, for example, multiple tensions about class and the subjectivising processes around it are noticeable. She is one of the most economically privileged women in my sample, but her wealth is the result of successful upward class mobility. Neither she, nor her partner come from Sofia, which adds a layer of fragility to their claim to a middle-class, urban identity. Well-educated and self-proclaimed 'workaholic' Gergana is the epitome of the self-reliant post-socialist entrepreneur (Tsoneva, 2017). And not by chance, she is the only one in my sample to openly denounce the care of grandmothers as detrimental for a child.

> The grandmother is a grandmother, not a babysitter. [...] her experience dates back 28–29 years. They refuse to accept that things have changed, that children are seen differently, the whole attitude towards children has changed drastically... For the older generation a 'good mother' means the child is well-fed, with chubby cheeks, with changed nappy and nice clothes, but I don't think this is it. That's a basic requirement and doesn't even enter the category 'good mother'. The 'good mother' is higher up in Maslow's hierarchy of [children's] needs and one can only judge her by her child. (Gergana, 29, company owner)

Behind the apparently straightforward assumption that a grandmother would have old-fashioned beliefs about childcare, lurks the post-socialist young urbanite's will to distance herself from her parents' shameful, 'pre-modern' socialist past (Tsoneva, 2017). The less harsh words of Mira, whose mother-in-law that she is referring to here is also from the countryside, point to this as well: 'The older generation has a lot stricter attitude to children. They tend to extremely rigidly forbid things that are not that important at all. It's just that their ideas are old-fashioned' (Mira, 31, credit risk management expert at a bank).

Simultaneously to denouncing grandparental care, Gergana describes state-owned crèches and kindergartens as 'tragic' due to understaffing and the perceived resultant in-

capacity to provide the necessary attention to individual children. Yet, Gergana speaks of fostering independent problem-solving skills and self-sufficiency in her 5-month-old son by leaving him alone as much as possible.

> We are raising our child to be independent; it is not necessary to engage with him all the time… He doesn't need a constant hand there, to stick a pacifier in his mouth, to rock him or whatever. He has his toys. It's not that we neglect him, not at all, but he needs to be self-reliant and that also allows us freedom at home. (Gergana, 29, company owner)

The apparent contradiction reveals that childcare practices are empty signifiers – the same practice may be labelled beneficial or detrimental depending on the (class) status of the performer. Interestingly, even refusing to comply with expectations of intensive child-centred parenting ('he has his toys, it is not necessary to engage with him all the time') can be reclaimed as a moral, character-building childcare decision, when the right kind of middle-class values (self-reliance, independence) are invoked as a justification.

Gergana's anxieties about the quality of public childcare are not unique. The majority of mothers in my sample are concerned with the lack of outside play at state-owned institutions, which tends to be blamed on insufficient personnel or the laziness of women working in such institutions – often understood as a legacy of state socialism. In the words of Kalina (29, university lecturer), talking about public nurseries and kindergartens: 'I suspect lack of professionalism, uncleanliness, neglect'.

What is atypical is rather the solution Gergana has for the care of her son: hiring a private babysitter. Despite otherwise emphasising qualifications and professionalism as crucial for any job performance, Gergana is willing to overlook previous experience if she likes 'the person, their attitude and worldview'. Like-mindedness, which in essence has to do either with the sharing, or the uncritical acceptance of middle-class values, become the conditions of a childminder's acceptability. Instinctively, Gergana recognises that her beliefs in an entrepreneurial approach to life are to be systematically fostered in her child to ensure the reproduction of her fragile class status. As a first-generation resident of the capital and a self-made woman, Gergana does not experience the sense of comfort and relaxed attitude to life we see in Svetlana's life narrative. Her care is very much directed at instilling 'ambition' and teaching her child to be 'the change he wants to see in the world' – the same middle-class attitudes Tsoneva (2017) describes in her analysis of the wave of anti-government protests in 2013. Finally, we see how a dislike of the old-fashioned ways of her parents' generation, institutional deficit, and poverty are all conflated in the way she imagines appropriate parenting:

> There is a problem in the country, there aren't enough kindergartens, crèches, spaces in those. People can't afford private babysitters, it is clear why they fall onto the care of grandmothers in the end, this is the financial reality of many families… But I believe that, given the situation in the country, everyone must find their own way. From the point of view of the child's interest, I don't think the grandmother is the best option.

At first glance sympathetic to the struggles of poorer families, eventually Gergana not only advocates an individualist solution to the problem but narratively constructs her own class status as superior to that of the majority of the country's population. Despite claiming to recognise materialities as the root of the widespread participation of grandmothers in the organisation of childcare, Gergana ultimately frames the issue in moral terms: making a

choice in the best interest of the child. This elevation of children's needs, driven by the heavily psychologised widespread expert-guided literature on appropriate childcare, has long been discussed by feminist sociologists as the core of recent conceptualisations of classed 'good motherhood' (Lawler, 2000).

Indeed, my respondents did not rely on their gut feelings when it came to childcare choices. In the words of Ani (32, construction engineer):

> [In order to be a good mother] one needs to be an overall cultured person. Someone without broad general knowledge and culture, even if they are kind and well-meaning… one has to be well-informed as a parent, not to rely simply on her own opinions… I read a lot on the Internet, specialised literature around breastfeeding and solid food introduction, for example.

Here the intuitive approach to parenting by women who are perceived to be uncultured (i.e. not belonging to the urban middle class, in the Bulgarian context) is dismissed as inadequate. Middle-class good motherhood is expert-guided (Hays, 1996), indeed, yet not all experts are created equal.

Gergana, like almost all my Bulgarian respondents, claims to extensively read English language expert-guided literature on childcare, because in her opinion 'the best practices described there are lightyears ahead of what we do here'. Western knowledge is clearly considered superior. An obvious pattern of auto-orientalisation of Bulgaria and a simultaneous construction of one's own childcare decisions as western (i.e. modern) is observable in other maternal stories too, although some interviewees attested to reading local literature as well as relying on the advice of their paediatricians. Appropriate parenting is a 'glocal' construct, with global knowledge/power inequalities structuring it from within.

The preoccupation with being excluded from western modernity is also evident in my respondents' concern with early foreign language education, which is a must for many.

> My mother encourages me to speak to him exclusively in English, regardless of the way people stare at us because it will be so beneficial for him (Maria, 29, researcher).

Stoilkova (2003) argues that the newly formed Bulgarian middle class symbolically aligned itself with the west, performing or fantasising about upward social mobility by emigration. The alternative meant succumbing to a quality of life similar to that of the Third World underclasses. Raising a child to be bilingual in a western language then is 'the best thing you can give to a child' (Maria) because it is literally a ticket to First World status. Learning a western language is the number one extracurricular activity the mothers in my sample chose to invest in. Other practices such as music or dance lessons, described by western sociologists as typical of the heavily organised middle-class parenting were very rarely mentioned by my Bulgarian respondents.

Interestingly, the privileging of Western knowledge and lifestyle is evident even in infant feeding decisions. Apart from being concerned with organic feeding options, in line with a global trend (Harman & Cappellini, 2015) my respondents also clearly preferred western brands of baby food over local ones: 'I like an English brand of jarred purees, which are organic, tested and have many certificates. If I have [another] child, I'd wean on those, because I trust them' (Daniela, 37, dentist). Or, as Ani says, 'I buy organic jarred purees, or organic vegetables when I can get my hands on them. I have found this organic shop where they sell French chicken, it's supposed to be really good.'

Eating high quality healthy food is an important part of contemporary middle-class socialisation, which aims to ensure children have the right kind of attitude to their bodies. As Marina (32, translator) passionately puts it: 'I have never bought [my son] crisps, wafers and that kind of stuff and I never will!' In the words of Nadia, who puts healthy eating into a larger context:

> I like taking [my son] to the open-air gym in the park. There aren't any cotton candy stalls, merry-go-rounds and other traps for children over there. He seems to really like it and I hope this will foster an appreciation for sports later on. (Nadia, Sofia, 31, senior expert at a state agency)

Doing sports, and engaging in the 'right' kind of entertainment are supposed to ensure that my respondents' children will grow up to be self-reliant, educated, responsible, healthy, multilingual citizens of the world. Once again, like Svetlana's concerns about *Chalga*, the superficial pleasures of empty consumerism like merry-go-rounds and unhealthy snack options are perceived as a gateway drug that may eventually lead to a slip into lower class status and thus a personal 'thirdworldisation'.

Interestingly, all my respondents had travelled to the West and quite a few had studied or worked there. They were obviously aware of class divisions and poverty in the west; however, it was upper/middle-class opulence which they imagined to be preparing their children for. In that sense, Bulgarian middle-class parenting is always 'aspirational' – trying to reach a western middle-class standard of living, if not in reality, then at least in fantasy.

6 Conclusion

In this paper I have shown how global symbolic and material inequalities, coupled with different socio-historical construction of the middle classes in core western and (semi-)peripheral post-socialist societies, create an interesting amalgam of culturally dominant childcare decisions in Bulgaria, which both echo and differ from those critically described in western feminist literature. In Sofia, we see a lot of the global trends around healthy eating, outdoor play, and relying on expert advice to be able to adequately respond to children's perceived needs, but with an added twist of auto-orientalisation: the denigration of locally made jarred food, the expectation for lack of outdoor play at public kindergartens and reading primarily western parenting literature. Other local particularities take centre stage as well: the sharp focus on immaterial values and appreciation for culture as a spiritual endeavour is essential to Bulgarian middle-class parenting styles as a remnant of state-socialist intelligentsia's role as the moral compass of society. Importantly, however, these still function as an invisible barrier to achieving the status of 'good mother' for various segments of society, and thus help construct middle-class' parenting as valuable and important, resolving some of the tensions around not/belonging to western modernity. The reproductive class strategies of the Bulgarian mothers interviewed for this research are based on imagining themselves as modern (as opposed to a socialist past), western (as opposed to 'oriental' 'backwardness') and culturally and morally superior to both the 'poor masses' and the *nouveau riche*. But what are the larger theoretical implications of this Central and Eastern European-focused analysis of stories about the maternal every day for the feminist study of classed parenting?

While both motherhood and class have been studied in CEE, this paper contributes to the feminist literature on middle-class parenting styles and the interplay between class and

parenting around the world by providing an innovative Bourdieusian perspective of treating motherhood as a cultural practice essential to the construction of class distinction. The research also adds to the body of critical literature discussing class formation outside of core countries and more specifically, post-socialist sociological and anthropological literature on class. Linking the two fields of parenting and CEE class formation through contextualising and historicising the emergence of middle-class parenting styles in Bulgaria, I reconsidered mothering normativity from a specifically Central and Eastern European perspective. Rather than simply positioning my respondents' childcare accounts in relation to western research, which tends to describe a specific set of labour and emotionally-intensive mothering practices as the essence of middle-class parenting, I propose that class analyses of parenting require a move away from specific practices towards a focus on the exclusions produced through them instead. It is such a move that allows us to articulate the 'glocal' design permeating locally-privileged childcare styles.

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Parental mediation of adolescents' technology use: Unequal parenting practices

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Abstract

This study explores parental mediation – its patterns, purpose and intention, the intentions behind it, and related social inequalities – from the perspective of the ideal of intensive parenting. Parental mediation in the form of restricting or monitoring teenagers' technology use might mitigate the harm of the intensive or risky online behaviour. Moreover, active mediation strategies might improve the teenagers' digital literacy by obtaining specific skills that foster appropriate online behaviour. Therefore, the paper argues that parental mediation has become a highly relevant aspect of contemporary parenting practices.

The paper is based on thematic analyses of semi-structured interviews on children's screen time and parental mediation strategies. The interviews were carried out with 29 parents of adolescents in Hungary in 2019. The findings show that restriction and active mediation primarily aimed at protecting children from risks, as a resource-intensive practice, form part of the contemporary parenting skill set. This study contributes to understanding how these skills constitute a digital cultural capital, and thereby how parenting can enhance the digital inequality.

Keywords: parental mediation; intensive parenting; adolescence; digital inequality

1 Introduction

Entertainment technologies such as videogames and content consumption on various screens as well as social media play a pervasive role in teenagers' lives (Gardner & Davis, 2013; Pew Research Centre, 2018). Adolescents' intensive technology use might be risky (Livingstone et al., 2017), such online behaviour and problems related to privacy are a well-researched area (e.g. Bányai et al., 2017; Prievara & Pikó, 2016; Király et al., 2014) – while it may have a negative impact on teens' mental health, too (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; Cao et al., 2011). However, digital devices can help with the acquisition of knowledge and improving cognitive skills of children, and the conscious use of technologies can enhance their digital literacy. Since the contemporary cultural norm of parenting emphasizes the parental omni-

potence (Furedi, 2001), and it has become a parental responsibility to improve children's digital skill and, enhance their ability to manage technologies (Yuen et al., 2018), it might be a crucial dilemma for parents how to navigate adolescents' technology use. The concept of parental mediation describes those strategies that aim to maximize the benefits and mitigate the harm of use (Livingstone et al., 2017). Therefore, we argue that conscious parental mediation might be a specific domain of intensive parenting.

Moreover, the pandemic has alerted us about the embeddedness of technology in parenting practices and education, while pre-existing digital inequalities have grown in society. Consequently, parental mediation is considered a significant field of parenting through which digital resources may be transferred to children to ensure their competitiveness. In this study, we integrate the concept of intensive parenting (Furedi, 2012; Lareau, 2011; Nelson, 2010; Hays, 1996) with parental mediation theory (Clark, 2011; Valkenburg et al., 1999) to explore the unequal features of contemporary parenting. Therefore, we seek to explain how intensive parenting shapes the parenting practices in the area of mediation, investigating the patterns, mechanisms and intentions behind these practices.

The paper is based on the analyses of semi-structured interviews carried out with 29 parents of 12–16-year-old teenagers in Hungary in 2019. The study contributes to understanding how skills to use smart phones constitute digital cultural capital, and thereby how appropriation of these skills that differentiates families of different social status may lead to the emergence of new kinds of social inequalities.

As a point of departure, we introduce the ideal of intensive parenting and its relation to parental mediation concepts. In the next section we provide an overview of the inequalities involved in parental mediation. This is followed by the description of the sample and the methodology. Afterwards, we discuss the results. The paper ends with the main conclusions.

2 Literature review

2.1 Inequality of contemporary parenting standards

The notion of 'parental determinism' (Furedi, 2001) indicates that parental behaviour and intervention is the main determinant of children's future. Accordingly, the related parenting approach, intensive parenting, conceives parents as being totally responsible for their children's social and emotional outcomes and educational success (Faircloth, 2014; Hays, 1996).

Connected to this, parental investment has become of great importance. Anette Lareau (2003; 2011) investigated the cultural logic of childrearing and identified 'concerted cultivation' as an intensive parenting approach of the middle class in the US. This form of parenting enables the transmitting of parents' advantages to their children. High level of parental investment is reflected in many activities which are seen as indicators of good parenting (e.g. helping with school-assignments, attending cultural programmes) (Dermott & Pomati, 2016). Additionally, there is a growing importance of expert-guidance (Gauthier et al., 2021) too: parents are increasingly expected to listen to experts' knowledge about how best to raise children.

The increasing risk awareness has also contributed to the changing of parenting (Furedi, 2001). The culture of fear resulted in parental concerns that are dominated by the

need to ensure children's safety. Therefore, parental monitoring and supervision have also become important elements of the new style of parenting. The term 'parenting out of control' describes the relevance of surveillance in modern parenting (Nelson, 2010).[1]

These changes are not independent of parents' social positions. In terms of parenting behaviour, there is consistent empirical evidence that social class might divide these practices (Ishizuka, 2019; Lareau, 2011; Nelson, 2010). Economic resources, human and social capital can influence how individuals meet the requirements of the ideals of intensive parenting (Dermott & Seymour, 2011).

Lareau (2003; 2011) finds that parents in the middle class are more likely to give children choices and to prepare them for success by encouraging them through the use of structured enrichment activities and verbal interaction and reasoning. In addition, they are more likely to negotiate with them about proper behaviour and offer reasoned explanations. In contrast, the 'accomplishment of natural growth' – the child-rearing style of the working class and the poor – involves providing basic care for children and allowing them to mature. Further, there is a clear distinction between adults and children: children of less privileged parents are more likely to acknowledge parental authority; these parents are more likely to use directives as the basis of parental discipline (Lareau, 2011). Similarly, Nelson (2010) also proposes that professional middle-class parents demonstrate an intensive parenting style. These parents intend to extend and defend childhood, while among lower status parents' 'parenting styles draw on concerns about concrete dangers, an awareness of youthful indiscretions' (Nelson, 2010, p. 175).

Consequently, the cultural norms of parenting and class differences in parenting behaviours might predict a range of outcomes for children and thereby contribute to comprehending the role of the family in the intergenerational reproduction of inequality (Ishizuka, 2019; Lareau, 2011).

2.2 Parental mediation strategies as intensive practices

In the current discourse of parenting, parental mediation of teenagers' technology usage might be an important practice to promote teenagers' expertise and also to mitigate the harm of intensive or risky use and ensure the children's mental health (Livingstone et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2010). In this section we apply the same approach as our previous quantitative analysis (Nagy et al., 2022), to discuss the types of mediation strategies.

Technical devices might provide new skills and knowledge and advance the cognitive development of children. On the other hand, the time displacement approach[2] suggests that screen time for social media use or entertainment might challenge other enrichment activities such as school-related or extracurricular tasks (Camerini et al., 2018). Besides, there is a current debate about the effect of screen time on children's mental health in the academic

[1] The parenting practices are highly gendered and can lead to more stress and frustration for women than for men (Ishizuka, 2019; Faircloth, 2014). The detailed discussion of gender differences in parenting are outside the scope of this paper.

[2] The time displacement hypothesis (Putnam, 1995) proposes that the time that is spent on watching television relates negatively to civic engagement. In other words, screen time might erode social capital at the expense of other leisure activities.

discourse and some empirical findings prove that screen time correlate with lower level of subjective wellbeing (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; Cao et al., 2011) that might further increase the parental concerns. These concerns are also reinforced by the generational digital divide: adolescents' usage is very intensive and related patterns significantly differ from those of adults (Aarsand, 2007): they perceive themselves to be more proficient than their parents (Fletcher & Blair, 2014), thus they also value the social technology more in their life (Lee, 2013). In line with this, parents' 'lack of awareness' based on their lower level of knowledge emerges in the discussions about the threats of technology usage. Connected to this, parents are construed to be 'out of touch', which strengthens the idea of the intensification of parenting expectations (Lee et al., 2010).

The concept of digital cultural capital grasps the phenomenon of the reproduction of the competence of managing technology and points out the relation between parental digital literacy, patterns of digital media use, and children's digital skills (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Yuen et al., 2018). Related to this, parental attitudes towards technologies are defined by their social relations: parents that possess digital skills – because of their jobs – can more easily improve their children's digital literacy (Hollingsworth et al., 2011).

The notion of parental mediation refers to the communication and behavioural strategies applied in parent-child relations regarding children's technology and internet use. Moreover, it involves parents using interpersonal communication and setting rules to mitigate the harmful effects and maximise the benefits of media use (Fletcher & Blair, 2014; Clark, 2011). Based on the classical approach to control over watching television (Valkenburg et al. 1999), three main forms of parental mediation can be differentiated: active mediation, restriction, and co-using strategies. Nevertheless, recent investigations focus on the mediation of internet and mobile device usage.

Active mediation, often accompanied by the co-use of technology, is aimed at educating to promote proper behaviour on social media and negotiating, as well as interpreting and discussing about buying and accessing content. The restrictive strategy refers to limiting access, content, social media use, or buying affordances and applying rules related to the use of technical devices (Kutrovátz et al., 2018; Zaman et al, 2016).

Beside these strategies, a recent systematic literature review (Kutrovátz et al., 2018) identified two further parental mediation strategies: monitoring and deference. The strategy of monitoring involves controlling-type activity connected with social media platforms and checking content consumed or shared thereon. Moreover, monitoring might include checking children's electronic devices, browsing histories, interactions etc. With the strategy of deference, children are educated to engage in independent and responsible online behaviour without direct parental intervention concerning technology usage (Kutrovátz et al., 2018; Zaman et al., 2016; Sasson & Mesch, 2014; Padilla, Walker et al., 2012).

We can witness further changes in the theoretical landscape in relation to the concepts above. Livingstone and her colleagues (2017) identified a new strategy called enabling mediation. This form of parental practice allows children to take an active part in setting up rules through parent-child interaction. Therefore, this more complex category not only includes the attributes of the active mediation strategy, but also utilizes technical control and monitoring.

In terms of intensive parenting, active and enabling mediation allow negotiations and encourage reasoned explanations in parent-child interactions; thus, these strategies support the child's agency. Therefore, these are ideal approaches to improve digital literacy by

enhancing the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge (Nagy et al., 2022). Moreover, enabling mediation empowers children, supports their active engagement and strengthens the positive uses of the internet (Livingstone et al., 2017). Besides, the aims of the strategy of deference – autonomous and responsible online behaviour – are also consistent with those of intensive parenting; however, this form rather highlights the relevance of the parents' media usage patterns, and it is not an active one in terms of practices. Therefore, this strategy is very relevant in the period of adolescence (Nagy et al., 2022).

In contrast, restrictive practices hinder the opportunities to promote digital skills and threaten the child's agency in their relationship with their parents (Mascheroni et al., 2018). Concerning reducing screen time or online risks, restrictive mediation might be incredibly effective, however, the authority of parents might greatly influence its effectiveness (Naab, 2018), which might conflict with contemporary parenting standards.

Lastly, we argue that monitoring children's online activities might be a relevant practice of intensive parenting since surveillance is a crucial norm of contemporary parenting (Nagy et al. 2022).

It is important to note that adolescence is a challenging period concerning communication and interaction because of the latter's expansion (Fletcher & Blair, 2014; Lee, 2013). The teenagers strive for autonomy and the difficulties of this period (Nomaguchi, 2012) might hinder parents in their intention to mediate the children's digital media use. Therefore, Steinfeld (2021) argues that the combination of restrictive strategy and active mediation contributes to establish teenagers' future self-regulation.

2.3 Empirical findings

Literature on parental mediation is very diversified and inconclusive. It is mostly psychological and communication research that has examined this topic, thus a sociological perspective is still lacking (Kutrovátz et al., 2018). Therefore, the topics of risk, problematic online behaviour, and mental health dominate this research area (e.g. Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; Bányai et al., 2017; Prievara & Pikó, 2016; Király et al., 2014; Cao et al., 2011). Additionally, most qualitative studies remain at the general, explorative level: studies focus mostly on exploring strategies and the related individual-level factors and the effectiveness of the strategies (Kutrovátz et al., 2018). How the skills of technology management and thereby the mechanisms of parental mediation are highly dependent on social position is still an underresearched question (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Yuen et al., 2018).

In connection to this, the digital literacy of parents appears to be an important individual factor that defines parental attitudes towards technologies and their choice of strategies. Daneels and Vanwynsberghe (2017) investigated this question in Belgium from the perspective of parents and adolescents. They report that while parents had a low level of technical competency, those with a critical attitude primarily used active or enabling mediation, with a focus on risks and safety associated with social media, but allowed adolescents some autonomy. They also found a new manifestation of monitoring: parents use mobile applications and social media accounts only for monitoring purposes.

Bartau-Rojas and her colleagues (2018) suggest that parental mediation is rather reactive, and that parents do not consciously plan their strategies in advance because of their lower level of digital knowledge. Therefore, parents are more likely to prohibit and restrict

their children's use due to concerns about their inappropriate online behaviour. Similarly, Fletcher and Blair (2014) also argue that parents' lack of digital skills might be related to general parental attitudes towards mediation: parents focus on what children should not do when they use screens, rather than on how they can effectively moderate their use.

Similarly, Shin (2015) found that parents in their sample in Singapore preferred using restrictive strategies – especially time restriction. The author argues that parents' feel high confidence managing and regulating their children's digital media use and this fact resulted in less engagement in active mediation.

Despite the empirical results concerning the relations between parental digital literacy and parental mediation, there is little empirical knowledge about what role parental resources play in reproducing digital inequity. Yuen and his colleagues (2018) investigated students in Hong Kong, revealing the relevance of parental mediation in creating cultural capital. The authors argue that parents with a higher level of ICT skills effectively support and guide children's media use in a way that helps them build their own competences.

In connection to digital literacy, mostly quantitative studies point out the inequalities in parental mediation based on parents' educational level and socio-economic status: the range and forms of parental mediation also differ according to diverse social groups (Nagy et al., 2021; Livingstone et al., 2017; Mascheroni et al., 2016). Accordingly, parents of higher social status navigate children's media use more frequently (Cingel & Hargittai, 2018; Mascheroni et al., 2016). Generally, higher status parents – in terms of education and income – are more likely to choose active or enabling mediation strategy (Livingstone et al., 2015; Gee, 2014). Hungarian data also support this differentiation in relation to parents: parents with lower education have been found to be rather permissive about children's media use, while higher-level education correlates with active mediation. Moreover, lower educated parents are more likely to apply strategies inconsistently (Nagy et al., 2021).

In terms of restriction, however, there are rather paradoxical results. De Haan and his colleagues (2018) suggested that technical restriction are more common among less well educated than among higher educated parents in the Netherlands. Similarly, Nelson (2010) showed that upper- and middle-class parents disapprove of the use of parental controls and filters. In contrast, other empirical findings show that restrictive mediation is applied regardless of the socio-economic status of parents: higher status parents also apply restrictions frequently (Nagy et al., 2021; Mascheroni et al., 2016).

The role of other factors linked to parental mediation is also not unequivocal in the literature. One exception to this 'rule' is the variable of the age of children: it is a general pattern that parents mediate older children less frequently. However, parental mediation of teenagers' technology use is crucial since teenagers cannot still think critically about their privacy, but their risky online behaviour increases (e.g., providing data when downloading/using applications) (Vanweesenbeck et al., 2016).

Drawing on prior theoretical concepts and empirical research, the paper seeks to answer the question how intensive parenting shapes the parental mediation strategies that parents apply to navigate their teenage children's technology usage in Hungary based on qualitative data. More precisely, we will look at: (1) how parents purposely mediate teenagers' digital media use, what kind of strategies they use, what are their intentions behind these strategies; and (2) how parental mediation differs according to the socioeconomic status of the family and what are the socioeconomic differences of these strategies and mechanisms.

The relevance of this research is twofold. Investigation of parental mediation from the perspective of intensive parenting enables a sociological perspective to be applied to the research that might reveal the unequal mechanisms of parental mediation and highlight the difficulties and contradictions associated with these practices. Moreover, most of the research projects that have explored social differences apply a quantitative approach and empirical results are quite ambiguous and inconclusive. In addition, the inconsistent use of terms makes comparison of the data difficult. The main contribution of this study is its qualitative exploration of the features of parenting practices in Hungary in a complex way that enhances the understanding of the relationship between parental mediation and intensive parenting.

3 Methods: Research framework, sample and data collection

This qualitative study is part of a broader mixed methods research project[3] that investigates parental time and parental mediation from the perspective of parents and their children. The target group of the research was working-age parents and their teenage children aged between 12 and 16 years. This study is based on parental interviews.

The study aimed to reveal socio-economic differences more comprehensively, thus respondents first were recruited through schools because we assumed that school management and class teachers would have sufficient information of the pupils' social background. In addition, we offered shopping vouchers in exchange for participation to increase willingness to respond. Despite this, recruitment was rather slow. For this reason, during the interviewing process we also employed snowball sampling to increase efficiency. Ultimately, we conducted interviews with 29 families during school time in 2019, from January until June.

Table 1 shows the distribution of parents in the sample. Mothers are overrepresented, and the mean age of the parents was 46 years. Most of the families (20) were living in Budapest; the others were also from nearby. Five were single-parent households. While the distribution of parents by educational level was balanced, this factor did not totally grasp their social position because white-collar workers were overrepresented in the sample. Therefore, besides the educational level, we included employment status and type of occupation to distinguish two groups of parents by socioeconomic background. Consequently, we considered those individuals as higher status parents who had white-collar positions, or were managers, or self-employed. All blue-collar workers and unemployed or retired parents – in early retirement due to illness – were defined as lower status parents. In the analyses, we refer to the social status of parents based on these categorisations that include the aspects of education and occupation too.

We implemented semi-structured interviews with parents and their children, each between 40–80 minutes long. Parental consent for their child's participation and informed consent for both parties concerning their voluntary participation, anonymity, and data management were obtained. The interview guide was structured according to two thematic blocks: parental time, and technology usage. Interviews begun with the discussion of the perception

[3] The project has been funded through the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund project ('Race against time' NKFIH K120086; head of the project team: Beáta Nagy, CSc.)

of parental time, then interviewees described the household's infrastructure with regard to info-communication and entertainment technological devices, the patterns of their teenager's usage of the latter, and the diverse strategies employed to control or influence their screen time.

Table 1 Sample characteristics

	N/Mean	***Min***	***Max***
Adolescent			
Boy	12	–	–
Girl	17	–	–
Age	14	12	16
Parent			
Father	7	–	–
Mother	22	–	–
Age	46	41	55
Number of children	2	1	5
Type of settlement			
Budapest	20	–	–
Town	1	–	–
Village	8	–	–
Highest educational attainment			
Secondary	14	–	–
Higher	15	–	–
Subjective economic welfare			
1 Poor	–	–	–
2	4	–	–
3	17		
4 Well-off	8	–	–
Type of family			
Two-parent families	24	–	–
One-parent families	5	–	–
Employment status			
Active	24		
Inactive	5		

Table 1 (Continued)

Type of occupation			
Blue-collar	6	–	–
White-collar	9	–	–
Self-employed or manage	9	–	–
Socioeconomic status			
Higher status	19		
Lower status	10		

The qualitative part of this study draws on thematic analysis following the definition of Braun and Clark (2006), which enables the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns – 'themes' – within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The current study follows a theory-driven analysis. The themes are related to the specific research questions that are based on the theoretical approach, such as the diverse forms of parental mediation or parental attitudes and intentions. However, we took all data into consideration and strove to be reflexive and open-minded in order to be able to identify important themes (i.e. themes other than those implied by the research questions, but which were embedded in the theoretical framework). The interviews were analysed using NVivo software.

4 Results

In this section, we describe how purposely parents mediate teenagers' technology use, pointing to socio-economic differences amongst our informants. First, we describe parental intentions in relation to their overall perceptions of children's technology use. Then we demonstrate the main forms of parental mediation. We identify four main features: the dominance of restrictive strategies (1) (we discuss threats and punishments as a sub-theme), a diverse mix of forms of parental mediation (2), permissive mediation (3), and family time as an alternative (4).

4.1 Risks or benefits: Parental intentions

In general, parents perceive the intensive technology use of children as a risk: it is mainly the negative effects of such usage on physical and mental health and on social skills of children that are highlighted in the interviews.

The pessimistic overall view of teenagers' technology use is illustrated in the following quote:

> I consider every single minute using the phone to be too much, so if I could, I would destroy it, and mine too.... It is [phones are] necessary but bad in today's world. (Lower status father, 44; daughter 13)

Lower status parents were more likely to be pessimistic about the new technologies; they typically compared their children's life with their own tech-free childhood in a nostalgic way. However, higher status parents were more aware of the diverse and concrete risks of online activities.

In the case of girls, fears were remarkably different according to the social status of parents. The subjects of fear were the intensive use of social media and the passive activity of watching videos among higher status parents – the following quote by a father is a good example of this. The latter considered such activities uncreative and a waste of time.

> …so, I don't really like this introverted, passive, very passive activity. Because we also talked about it – that if she used [her phone] actively, so for educational programs, or she also made videos on TikTok, we could talk about it – it wouldn't count towards her time limit…. (Higher status father, 51; daughter 13)

Lower status parents tended to refer only to the safety of private accounts on social media sites, or to importance of not contacting any strangers, or the fear of addiction.

> I think they still can't judge what they share, what they ask [other people about] and unfortunately that is a problem… and very often they recklessly ask things and share things with the world that they should not. (Lower status mother, 41; daughter 14)

In the case of boys – especially in relation to video gaming – the issue concerning children's mental health was thematized in both groups.

Consequently, the potential benefits – such as obtaining information, creating content, or improving English skills – were also mentioned more often by higher status parents. Moreover, in some cases these parents also showed open-mindedness and curiosity about the related changes or of the new social habits of teenagers.

However, the benefits of digital media use were mostly associated with the importance of school assignments. Digital media use appeared as an enrichment activity, in the form of co-use. The goal of the shared interpretation of content (mostly videos or films) or a common experience of co-playing was important among higher status respondents.

There is a further difference in parents' digital media use: higher status parents were more likely to be using digital devices for work, and they expressed their difficulty with managing media in their lives in terms of their own health or limiting their own screen time. Therefore, their own experiences motivated them to control their children's use.

It was also an interesting experience that, when searching for interviewees, higher status parents were recurrently motivated to participate in the research in the hope it would justify the relevance of this topic to their children. This also shows how much parents struggle with the issue of parental mediation in everyday life.

4.2 Forms of mediation

4.2.1 The dominance of restriction

Restriction is the most dominant parental strategy aimed at controlling adolescents' use of technology in our sample. This restriction-based approach also involves the constant disapproval of online activity. However, parents' restrictions showed a great variability: their

range, consistent application and effectiveness were very diverse. The mildest forms of restriction involved limiting the child's use of devices in the evening – for instance, ensuring that they leave their gadgets in the living room, or banning the use of smartphones during mealtimes. These restrictions are very typical among the families we investigated.

In some cases, restrictions are only associated with playing video games, and parents do not tend to control smart devices. Playing video games is rather typical of boys, and defining gaming time is very common among parents who have sons. However, it is important to note that parents tend to restrict younger children's access to media devices. The most refined and rigorous case involved parents specifying times at which internet access is available at home.

> He can play for two hours, then stop for an hour, there is Internet from 8 to 10, from noon to two, and from 3 to 5, but within this period he has training too, so, there are some limitations of ours, but also there is training when there is no access… (Higher status mother, 49; son 15)

However, when children's media use is more diverse, or their smart phone use is most dominant, imposing restrictions might be rather challenging for parents. It is typical of girls, because media use is highly gendered among teenagers: girls are more likely to spend time on social media, while computer gaming is more typical among boys (e.g. Kutrovátz, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2018). Restricting smart phone use requires a higher level of digital skill, involving the employment of technical controls. Also, some parents mentioned that they considered smart phone use to be a private matter.

> …well, a phone is very difficult to take away… because she thinks it's hers, so, I can't take it away what belongs to her, I have heard this several times […] but I can limit the smart TV more easily, because she doesn't say then that it belongs to her. (Higher status father, 42; daughter 14)

In connection with restrictions, we defined a further subtheme: *threats* to restrict the devices and *punishment* with restriction are also typical parental practices. However, in this case decreasing media use is only an instrument and not the goal of the parental strategy: parents rather aim to increase learning time, or to convince children to complete chore such as cleaning their rooms.

> …because he just had a maths test, and he got a two [a 'D' grade], so for now we have a deal with him, that he cannot use the computer for a month… (Lower status mother, 31; son 12)

The use of restrictions, and even more frequently threats and punishment, are typical, regardless of the social status of the families. However, higher status parents are more conscious in terms of their navigation of teenagers' media use, whereas lower status parents' practices are rather inconsistent. Accordingly, they restrict technology use occasionally – for instance, as a punishment, or they reprimand their children for spending too much time with a screen (or for inappropriate use such as during mealtimes). The above-mentioned rigorous restriction systems are typical of higher status parents.

Moreover, among higher status parents restrictions can conflict with parental values. On the one hand, the latter strategy questions support for self-regulation; on the other hand, it is inconsistent with the desired parenting style. Therefore, doubt about the appropriate form of parental mediation is very typical among these parents.

> …it's a fact that it's effective: we achieve a limited amount of video gaming. But whether this is the best educational strategy in the long run, I'm not sure… but I don't have a better idea, honestly. (Higher status mother, 55; son 13)

Restrictions primarily concern the amount of time, and focus on video gaming. Consistent restrictions on specific online content are not typical at all in relation to this age group. Regarding the central concern of privacy, in some cases creating a Facebook account is forbidden for younger children, although they can use any other social media platforms.

Ensuring the consistency of restrictions is also very difficult, since these rules constantly change, showing the importance of negotiations involving children's desires and parents' goals. Therefore, parents are not always aware of their own rules. Moreover, despite the time restrictions, such rules need continuous surveillance for their effective enforcement.

> We set up a clock with a beeper for him.... But there was always something, five more minutes, and then the five minutes was half an hour... and there was a period when we were constantly fighting, ...so it's quite tortuous – it's damn hard, I think! (Higher status mother, 42; son 13)

4.2.2 Mixed strategies

A restriction approach is very dominant, but is rarely applied alone; rather, it is combined with other forms of parental mediation. All the classical forms – co-use, active mediation, and monitoring – appear among the investigated families, but typically parents mix these forms and none of them are as significant as restriction.

As mentioned above, the co-use of digital media was applied mostly to spending some quality time together and helping a child with school assignments. However, these patterns of co-use primarily do not target the effective media use or management of technology; therefore, they cannot be considered a purposeful mediation strategy.

Some of the parents had regular discussions with their children about the appropriate and effective digital media use. Generally, these parents also referred to experts and scientific research about the effects of screen time, as the following quotes illustrate:

> We also discuss it a lot, sometimes I share articles with her, we talk about the use of devices – what are the advantages and disadvantages. (Higher status father, 51; girl 13)

These forms of active mediation are typically combined with consistent restrictions of digital media use.

There are differences in the level of digital literacy: higher status parents typically know of applications and programs that can be used to control or monitor teenager's media use. They may also participate in workshops or read scientific articles about the effects of digital media use. Therefore, they combine a typical strategy of restrictions with active mediation or monitoring, while regular active mediation was not mentioned by parents in lower status families.

In some families monitoring was also adopted as a strategy, but rather occasionally. For instance, when a cyber-bullying incident occurred at school, parents checked their children's messages or browser history. Parents also typically checked their social media profiles when children register on these sites for the first time. Additionally, monitoring was common when children went alone for the first time to school or to an extra-curricular activity. For this reason, parents typically used phones and applications to ensure that children are safe, not to monitor their technology usage.

4.2.3 Permissive mediation

Most of the lower status parents and older children's parents in our sample appeared to be passive concerning parental mediation. These parents often explain their 'no mediation' approach by referring to the trust in the relationship they have with their child, or they argue that their child is well-raised and does not behave inappropriately at the online forums.

It is worth underlining that most parents expressed disapproval about monitoring their child's media use. This is considered an intrusion into the teenager's private sphere that endangers the trust in their relationship. In relation to this, the teenagers' better digital skills were mentioned by many parents (accordingly, children often teach parents how to use the smart phones). However, higher status parents also refer to their desire to be role models in terms of technology use, especially when their children are considered to be too old for restrictions on their technology use.

Parents' permissiveness might also be influenced by the fact that the enforcement of rules is a time-intensive activity – as discussed above – that requires the parents' continuous surveillance and availability. Both groups struggle with this, but lower status parents might lack these resources to a greater extent.

> ...Unfortunately, it might be, or certainly is, my weakness. I don't have the energy and patience... every time I go into her room, the phone is always there, and I always have to listen [to her telling me] that only it was required for the lesson. Well, it also created extra conflict, quarrels – she is addicted, addicted! (Lower status mother, 46; girl 13)

4.3 Family time as alternative

We identified a further theme concerning parental mediation: the parental strategy to decrease screen time, which focuses not on the media use directly, but is related to the effective or enriching or developmental use of children's time. Accordingly, some parents regard parental time – especially family time – as an alternative to screen use. Some parents in the sample – generally those with a high level of education – perceive such activities or household tasks as a conscious parental strategy for decreasing their teenager's screen time. Therefore, this strategy works as a form of reversed time displacement if teenagers' time is filled up with alternative programs, they cannot spend too much time with technological gadgets.

Similarly, if teenagers have a lot of extracurricular activities or their parents consider that they are spending a great amount of time on enrichment activities or performing in school exceptionally, they do not strive to control their usage significantly. The following quote, on the one hand, illustrates the mother's uncertainty about their teenager's screen time, and on the other, it is a very typical attitude when adolescents are busy on weekdays:

> So I think that's too much time, but if I consider that she goes to school in the meantime, she has training for two-hour... why not let her to chat with her friends in the evening? Well, and she reads a lot of books..., so I don't think I should restrict her... But obviously, well, I don't have a problem with that, I don't think it's too much. (Higher status mother, 46; girl 14)

5 Discussion

Given the shifts in cultural expectations associated with parenting (Furedi, 2001; Hays, 1996) and related to this, socially unequal parenting practices (Lareau, 2011; Nelson, 2010), we explored parental mediation of technology usage – one specific domain of parenting – among Hungarian parents of adolescents. Since teenagers spend a significant amount of time with digital devices (Gardner & Davis, 2013), parents might have dilemmas concerning how to best handle their technology use.

Overall, we found that parents were more aware of risks than opportunities – as is consistent with some previous findings (Bartau-Rojas et al., 2018; Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017). In line with this, parents typically aim at decreasing screen time and minimizing the potential harm of usage, while maximizing the opportunities of technology use was not a goal. Additionally, their own difficulties with digital media use also motivated them in their choice of strategies. Some of the benefits of digital media use were mentioned, but rather to justify parents' lack of no mediations, and not to encourage the effective use of digital media. However, the importance of school performance and enrichment activities in relation to screen time was remarkable. This supports the time-displacement hypothesis (Putnam, 1995) that screen time is considered risk eroding social capital. We found that higher status parents more likely provide alternative programs for the teenagers and to increase enrichment activity or motivate creative offline activities instead. They use this approach as a proactive strategy for decreasing adolescents' screen time. These activities are considered quality time among them, which is not equally available to the diverse social groups of parents (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

In connection to this, digital media use is also considered an enrichment activity when co-playing or co-use is discussed, highlighting the socially diverse attitudes towards technology use. However – in line with the findings of Daneels & Vanwynsberghe (2017) –, co-use as a strategy was not typical with this age group.

In terms of other classical parental mediation approaches, we found that parental mediation showed great variability in terms of type, range, and frequency in our sample. However, since parents' perceptions are dominated by their risk awareness, our results – in line with Shin's (2015) findings, – show that restriction is the preferred form of parental mediation. Parents especially use time restrictions, and often restrict the media use of children as a form of punishment. Restrictions were applied regardless of social status, consistent with previous quantitative findings (Nagy et al., 2021; Mascheroni et al., 2016), although higher status parents followed this strategy more consistently and more frequently.

Similarly to Bartau-Rojas and her colleagues' (2018) findings, we found that inappropriate behaviour – mostly in relation to school performance – might result in prohibition. The threats and punishment that we identified are rather reactive strategies. We also found that among lower status parents ad-hoc tactics – consistent with Naab (2018) argument – were more typical than consistent strategies.

In contrast, our results show that restrictions might work in the form of mutually preagreed conditions of use (i.e. a consciously applied strategy), typically employed by higher status parents. Parents take this approach because of its effectiveness at decreasing screen time (Naab et al., 2018). However, we argue that, despite the effectiveness of restrictions at mitigating risks, this strategy contradicts contemporary parenting values, particularly in the case of supporting the autonomy of adolescents and reinforcing their capacity for

self-regulation (Steinfeld, 2021). Therefore, similarly to Shin's (2015) finding, our results also show that parents struggle with the contradiction of 'what they do' and 'what they think they should do'. Since the ideal of the contemporary parenting standard involves negotiations about proper behaviour and explanations, this conflict is reflected in the higher status parents' accounts. However, enforcing regulations about media use and controlling children's screen time are very resource-intensive activities and require parents' surveillance. Further, higher status parents involve children in decisions about rules that constantly change and need to be renegotiated. This result strengthens our assumption that a strategy of restrictions is a specific component of intensive parenting, despite its conflicting nature.

Active mediation was typically applied by parents with a high level of education and economic resources, typically living in the capital – typically those who were being self-employed or managers, which is consistent with previous quantitative findings (Nagy et al., 2021; Livingstone et al., 2015; Gee, 2014). Moreover, the latter not only discuss online risks and opportunities with their teenagers, but also co-use screens purposely for enrichment activities. Their active meditation is also expert-guided – in line with intensive parenting model (Hays, 1996) such parents are comprehensively informed; they know of related scientific findings and experts. These parents also have the advantage of supportive educational institutions that organise workshops and thematic programs about proper online behaviour and parental mediation practices for both parents, and children.

In spite of this, these parents also report that they need guidance and information about how to teach their children about the smart use of devices. This reflects Blum-Ross and Livingstone's (2018) critical views of screen-time guidelines, which are considered insufficient for helping parents or promoting children's opportunities.

Monitoring as a classical form of parental mediation was not typical. Generally, many parents disapproved of monitoring, as it is perceived to conflict with their parental values, consistent with Nelson's finding (2010) – especially when teenagers do not know of this. Notwithstanding this, higher status parents had more knowledge about the technical opportunities of this type of control (about new forms of monitoring) – similarly to the result of Daneels and Vanwynsberghe (2017). It was more typical that parents used devices to monitor children than for them to control their online behaviour this way.

Our findings support the hypothesis that the higher level of digital literacy and the patterns of technology use of higher status parents might motivate their strategy of proactive parental mediation, as previous empirical results show (Yuen et al., 2018; Hollingsworth et al., 2011).

We also identified a passive strategy: parents – mostly those of older children and those 's parents and those with lower social status – were rather permissive about children's screen usage. This permissiveness can be differentiated from a strategy of deference – well discussed in the literature (Zaman et al., 2016; Sasson & Mesch, 2014; Padilla, Walker et al., 2012) –, since parents apply the latter to help their children develop their autonomous digital media use. However, in our sample parents rather seemed to lack any tools for influencing their children, which is reflected in their overall perception of digital media and in their resignation about their ability to influence their child's digital media usage. However, it was an important difference that higher status parents seemed to be confident with their permissiveness because of the significance of showing examples to the child in technology management or their earlier navigation with digital devices.

6 Conclusion

We can conclude that the intensive parenting ideal shapes parental mediation in a way that parents use high level of control and conscious mediation – with the desired form of active mediation – strategies, and provide alternative programs to screen time to protect their children from harm, and cultivate their development, while fostering their autonomy and independence. Moreover, as these practices are typically employed by higher status parents, our results indicate that navigating children's media use is a resource-demanding field of parenting, and the competences and resources are unequally divided according to the social status of parents. The remarkable social differences in parental mediation practices show how compliance with this parenting norm can reinforce pre-existing inequalities associated with adolescence and may generate new kinds of social inequalities regarding children's future development. The research highlights that digital inequity is more liable to involve knowledge about technology management. Moreover, our study highlights the interrelation of screen time and enrichment activities: a strategy of decreasing screen time by providing alternative programs might also reinforce the reproduction of social capital.

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BOOK REVIEW

Varsa, E. (2021). Protected Children, Regulated Mothers: Gender and the 'Gypsy Question' in State Care in Postwar Hungary, 1949–1956. CEU Press

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This volume emerged from Eszter Varsa's doctoral research and dissertation completed in English for international audiences. It scrutinizes everyday practices of child protection institutions in post-war Stalinist Hungary embedded in the politics and social tensions of the emerging state socialist regime, such as catch-up industrialization, women's rising employment rate and an accompanying restructuring of the relationship between paid work and care work, state intervention in the private realm and an assimilationist policy towards those identified as 'Gypsy', meanwhile providing a comparative international perspective. In this regard, Varsa's book dovetails with ongoing academic discussions of recently renewed political interest in children and parental practices evidenced in the collection of articles in this special issue.

Eszter Varsa's book broadens this discussion with a historical account of children's placement in state care and women's experiences within the context of child protection policies and institutions at the onset of early state socialism between 1949 and 1956. In her account the institution of child protection fulfilled specific regulatory functions in early state socialist Hungary since it was intended not only to influence the behaviour of children but also that of parents, especially mothers. In this regard, Varsa's book demonstrates that intervening in parenting and family life is part of the institutional continuities and change that describe social and cultural transformations across space and time.

Varsa's book, consisting of five chapters, traces three areas of life where the regulatory function of child protection was manifest and caseworkers tried to effect change in the lives of parents and children: parental employment, female sexuality and the work activities and everyday life of children in residential homes. The first chapter provides a brief introduction to the historical context of the period between 1949 and 1956 before moving on to a thorough review of the social and institutional background of child protection in this period. The discussion of the early state socialist period is embedded in a historical overview of child protection in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which is a pivotal element of Varsa's *longue-durée* approach. She argues that the system of child protection institutions and children's homes that authorities inherited from the first half of the 20th century, affected the course of change in the field of child protection in state socialist Hungary. For instance, the existence

of a state-wide system of child protection institutions (former state asylums) was unique in comparison to other state socialist countries in East Central Europe, which enabled Hungarian authorities to rely on a network of child protection institutions formerly run by private welfare organizations. The socialist state's response to the so-called 'Gypsy question' can also be understood only in a long-term perspective since preconceptions about Roma's work-shyness and the practice of placing Romani children in state care dated back to the assimilationist policies of Maria Theresia and Joseph II. It is in this context that the rest of the chapter spells out the restructuring of the child protection system in the late 1940s and early 1950s and presents the difficult conditions – overcrowding, lack of personnel, food, health supervision – in child protection institutions.

The second chapter analyses ways children were placed in state care and highlights tensions between women's productive and reproductive responsibilities that appeared with state expectations about women's participation in the labour force during state socialism. As the authorities' wish to increase women's labour force participation was not coupled with an adequate supply of childcare services, employed mothers/parents often actively sought to institutionalize their children to secure their care while they were at work. On the other hand, unemployed mothers' children were placed in state care by the authorities because children were seen to hinder mothers' employment.

Women's marital status and female sexuality were also in the centre of public discussions and policies in post-war Hungary. The third chapter presents conflicting views and tensions about unmarried women and female sexuality that existed between policies based on communist ideology and prevailing social norms. In an international comparative perspective Varsa demonstrates that women's changing social roles as wage earners triggered anxieties about their sexuality and sexual morality. While the Constitution of 1949 and the Family Act of 1952 legally equalised single mothers and illegitimate children and declared that women's rights are equal to men's, pre-war traditional attitudes of stigmatising single mothers prevailed in child protection practices and children's placement in state care often served purposes of regulating their mothers' sexuality. Overall, women's unmarried status in a relationship was seen to aggravate the endangerment of their children and served as means to evaluate motherhood. Varsa's extensive research of case files indicates the gendered nature of these processes as there was only a limited mention of fathers, or fathers' sexual behaviour in these documents.

Whilst focusing on the analysis of Hungarian child protection institutions, Varsa consistently places her discussion in a global comparative context. In the fourth chapter she investigates daily practices of residential homes of the early 1950s in Hungary, which she argues, cannot be understood without paying attention to the long-term and cross-national history of these institutions and the evolution of pedagogical reforms in the early 20th century in Europe. Varsa submits that education for work, which remained part of the daily practice of residential homes for children, can be traced back to two distinct pedagogical schools: reformatory corrective education in work schools in Germany in the early 20th century and Marxist education based on the Soviet pedagogy developed by Anton Semyonovich Makarenko. Both schools believed in the formative power of work for children through which they aimed to educate obedient members of society. The parallel existence of the two pedagogical ideologies manifested in the practice of Hungarian residential schools at the onset of state socialism and shaped the evolution of particular institutional continuities and changes within the system of child protection. While in the context of regular public education (primary schools and kindergartens) the concept of education for work was hardly

translated into practice, in the new residential homes opened for children in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was part of children's daily routine. In Varsa's Foucauldian account, it provided techniques of surveillance and fulfilled disciplinary functions to educate these children to be useful and docile members of a Communist society, albeit education for work practices and rigid daily schedules did not represent a radical break with earlier periods in the fields of progressive and reform pedagogy.

Arguably, the most intriguing piece is the fifth chapter, which discusses the history of the Lóczy infant home and the reform pedagogy of its founder the famous paediatrician Emmi Pikler, embedded in state care practices of the Rákosi regime and the political persecutions of the era. It addresses controversies around the home by examining its progressive pedagogy and professional work in connection with political purges through the cases of two children of persecuted politicians, who were placed in the infant home between 1949 and 1951. Distinctive of Varsa's global long-durée approach, the institutional history of the infant home and Pikler's professional career is not only presented within an international historical context of different reform movements of infant care since the turn of the century but also through the retrospective criticism of the period by the opposition movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Based on the recollections of two mothers in the 1970s and one of the children – an adult by the 1980s and a political figure of the opposition movement interviewed by the author in 2009 – Varsa reveals the way personal recollections joined methodological criticism of the infant home with criticism towards the political system of the Rákosi regime. This negative evaluation of the Lóczy and Emmi Pikler's role in placing persecuted politicians' children into state care, contrasts sharply with the recognition of the highly progressive methods of care applied in the infant home that appear in some of the same interviews. Varsa's central argument is that it was one of the unintended consequences of political purges rather than the particular methodology of infant care developed along progressive and socialist educational principles, that the Lóczy infant home retrospectively became an object of criticism and a negative symbol of the communist regime in the 1980s leading to the closing down of the home in 2011. The history of the Lóczy infant home demonstrates a continuity in theories and methodologies in residential care of children globally as Pikler's methods are being followed in institutes across Europe and the United States. By the time Pikler died in 1984, her philosophy of early childhood care development had acquired international fame and her methods are being followed in institutes across Europe and the United States. Thus, while Varsa acknowledges Pikler's historical collaboration with the Stalinist regime, she distinguishes between Pikler's philosophy of infant care and her politics as a director of a children's home during the late 1940s and the 1950s. As she points out, critical sources of Pikler's behaviour need to be contextualized and her relationship with the communist movement must be further researched.

Varsa's research for this book was based on a variety of written as well as oral sources from multiple locales. These include policy documents issued by various ministries, 630 children's case files documenting the placement of 797 children from three counties' child protection institutions and semi-structured interviews with retired teachers, employees of child protection authorities and former residents of children's homes. Case files included statements from the police, a psychologist, a physician and a school director of the local welfare authorities, which Varsa also analysed semantically in order to gain insights about social norms and conventions that shaped case workers' motivations and actions about requesting state care. In particular, the analysis of the Lóczy infant home was informed by the Oral History Archive of the 1956 Institute and the archives of Capital City Child Protection Centre.

The book fills a gap in the historiography of early state socialism by discussing Stalinism in Hungary in light of social problems – such as employment, housing, financially related difficulties or war-related problems leading to children's placement in state care – rather than political repression of the Rákosi era. Varsa's analysis demonstrates that the array of problems teachers faced in the 1950s were not predominantly connected to the Stalinist politics of the Rákosi regime but rather to the wide variety of social problems that children, their parents and representatives of the institutions of child protection struggled with. One of the major findings of the book is that the institutional system of child protection of early state socialism evolved as a result of spontaneous developments in existing institutional patterns, social norms and conventions inherited from earlier political periods, rather than a critical juncture induced by the new communist state. These sequences of occurrences were just as important in the evolution of state socialism as social engineering. In this regard, Varsa challenges some of the commonly accepted divides in the periodization of 20th century European history by allowing us to see early state socialism through institutional continuities and changes.

Despite her groundbreaking discussion of institutional continuities and change, Varsa's book lacks theoretical references to incremental institutional change, a widely discussed topic in historical institutionalist scholarship. The analysis of continuities in child protection institutions, in the treatment of Romani children, in the conventions about women's sexuality and the 'culture' of education for work could benefit from a review of various modes of incremental institutional change, such as *layering, conversion, drift, displacement* or *exhaustion* (Streeck & Thelen, 2005; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). For instance, the way the category of 'moral abandonment of a child' became extended to include parents' lack of concerns for their children's health and, in line with communist ideology of being a productive worker in a socialist society, their unemployment contrary to their ability to work would constitute institutional *layering*, a process in which new institutional elements are added to existing ones, thus changing gradually their status and structure. Similarly, the way education for work comprising the tradition of corrective reform pedagogy and Marxist education went through *conversion*, i. e., institutional practices of education for work became redeployed to serve new purposes of educating obedient members of the new socialist state. The rich empirical background of Varsa's research paves the way for further research in this direction, i. e., on the way institutional elements, practices of child protection and family policies continued to live as slightly modified or regaining new meanings across various political regimes in twentieth century Hungary. Any future research in social history, however, should pay tribute to Varsa's meticulous empirical work, her groundbreaking analytical approach and the illustrious selection of archive photos from the free online collection of Fortepan.

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BOOK REVIEW

Anti-social socialization of the middle class?

McDermott, N. A. (2020). The Problem with Parenting: How Raising Children is Changing Across America. Praeger

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Intensive parenting as a childrearing strategy and practice has gained territory in families of the Western world in recent decades and its ideologies have infiltrated popular culture and social policies. It has received an unprecedented amount of journalistic as well as academic attention. Nevertheless, little do we know about how these social practices and underlying ideologies are shaping the generations of children who are experiencing them (see, e.g., Schiffrin et al., 2014; Yerkes, et al., 2021). We know even less about how, in consequence, intensive parenting may influence the societies these children shall later inhabit as adults. Nancy McDermott's *The Problem with Parenting* teases apart these recent childrearing practices that form a characteristic pattern she refers to as 'Parenting', with a capital P. The author traces how they have emerged in response to subsequent turning points in the development of the American (middle-class) family and how they have become woven into the fabric of late twentieth and early twenty-first century American (and Western middle-, and upper-middle class) society.

McDermott is a long-time affiliate of the Centre for Parenting Culture Studies at the University of Kent, an interdisciplinary unit that integrates fellows from the fields of sociology, social policy, social research, and psychology. The author has been actively involved in creating and advising Park Slope Parents, an online parents' community in Brooklyn, New York. Park Slope Parents has become a hub for thematizing challenges raised by contemporary childrearing and has provided a rich empirical basis of qualitative information for McDermott's attempt to assess the roots of parents' experiences and anxieties in the US.

The author defines 'Parenting' with a capital p as 'the peculiar ways in which Americans raise their children today' (p. 5). She argues that modern parenting is fundamentally different to the childrearing of the past, and that it emerged spontaneously out of family instability in the 1970s, at a time when the so-called therapeutic values of personal fulfilment and self-actualization replaced more communal values of earlier eras. As parents are unwilling or unable to make children follow social rules, an entitled, narcissistic generation has emerged. McDermott considers this shift 'a decisive break from the values and institutions of modernity – one that occurred so stealthily that we are hardly aware of it' (p. XI), suggesting also that 'the entitled Millennial threatens democracy' (p. 6).

The book employs the term 'Parenting' to refer to a specific, new mode of children's socialization in the US. McDermott attributes the original coinage of the verb 'to parent' to a 1970 parents' how-to manual authored by Fitzhugh Dodson to mean 'raising a child as a parent'. McDermott amplified the meaning of the expression by tying it to a pattern of parental behavior well-defined in time and space (the 2000s and 2010s, the US urban upper-middle class). As easy to understand and inspirational a word as it is, her usage could be misleading from an academic perspective. One may wonder whether parenting as a term and an academic notion has legitimacy in the scientific field as it has become too value-laden to be a useful analytical tool. *The Problem with Parenting* is not intended for a strictly academic audience; it targets a wider, more general readership. At the same time, McDermott's insights into the problems generated by contemporary American parental behavior raise awareness of and reflection on social phenomena perceived by parents as natural. Her work seeks to find answers to the following questions. What are the new values of contemporary parenting? How are they reproduced in people's private lives? What institutional changes perpetuate and reinforce this type of childrearing? And finally, and very importantly, how is the new style of parenting changing society?

Her volume comprises eight chapters organized in two thematic blocks, completed by conclusions and an index. The first four essays define the social phenomenon McDermott labels 'Parenting'. The four essays in the second part of the book scrutinize conflictual problem areas related to the excesses of intensive parenting in the US.

In Chapter One, McDermott grounds her central argument as she traces the emergence of parenting through changes and important turning points in the development of American marriage and family from the 1950s. Taking the bourgeois family as point of comparison, she argues that, historically, raising children was built into the fabric of family life. She describes the American family of the 1950s as a product of disillusionment with traditional American and mostly religious values, characterized by a lack of a sense of belonging. The chapter emphasizes that the classic balance between individualism, freedom, and civic responsibility receded as the post-war family began to embrace the more therapeutic pursuit of self-fulfillment, a shift in mentality that occurred between 1957–1976. The 1960s' counterculture set the scene for the emergence of 'Parenting', as Boomers' primary concern became the experience of rebellion. McDermott points out that social norms were not communicated to Boomers' children, and that the latter's parents' casual indifference and incomprehension of children's needs set the scene for the emergence of intensive parenting. She notes that contraceptive pills, the legalization of abortion, and the liberalization of sex complemented by women's increasing employment and rising divorce rates contributed to family instability. By the 1980s a change of spirit had occurred in the family. Families were not as much organized around the needs of children as before; instead, they became reoriented around the happiness and fulfilment of adults.

One of the gravest propositions in McDermott's work is argued in the second chapter on the impact of excessive intensive parenting on children's socialization. According to her, this disrupts the natural process of socialization, as children do not learn to negotiate social situations by themselves. The chapter identifies four main areas of impact: Millennials' reluctance to assume the responsibility of becoming a parent; their reliance on expert advice in all personal matters (including a spirited section on the role of life coaches); their ambivalent attitude to gender (discussed in detail in Chapter Seven); and their treatment of intimacy as risk. To argue the last point, she elaborates on thought-provoking examples, such as the phenomenon of 'backward dating'.

Chapter Three draws attention to the changing notions and definition of family in contemporary American society. It emphasizes that until recently all forms of family were associated with children. Recently, it has been generational belonging that influences one's notion of family in the US. While the over-64 age group ('Exclusivists') tend to identify family with legally married heterosexual couples with children, the 'Moderate' 30-64-year-old age group accepts same-sex and cohabiting couples with the possibility of having children as family. For the under-thirty entitled Millennial generation, referred to as the 'Inclusivists', a feeling of belonging and the quality of emotional relationships are the primary components of a family. The final chapter on the new rules of parenting culture in the first thematic bloc revisits fundamental traits hinted at previously. Parenting culture as discussed by Nancy McDermott cultivates the suspicion and hostility towards pre-existing social norms and replaces them with new therapeutic norms grounded in science. It prioritizes expert opinion over intimate knowledge and intuition and provides children with curated instead of unstructured experiences. And finally, it validates children's sense of self over other aspects of socialization.

The second part of McDermott's book contains four individual essays on heated topics related to parenting culture: pregnancy, infant feeding, gender-neutral parenting, and a comparison of an extreme intensive parenting style called 'helicopter parenting' and a contrasting parental movement labelled 'free-range parenting'. Chapter Five connects the medical discovery of fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) with the transformation of notions related to pregnancy. It convincingly demonstrates that, besides being a real phenomenon, a preoccupation with FAS can be interpreted as the medicalization of social anxiety about whether parents can be trusted to care for their children. Chapter Six scrutinizes the moralization of fetishized infant feeding and follows how women's personal preference for breastfeeding in the 1970s evolved into militant breastfeeding activism ('lactivism') by the 2000s. Chapter Seven scrutinizes gender-neutral parenting as a style that is gaining momentum, and its fight against social norms. McDermott argues that the elimination of gender as a social category is transforming American society in unforeseen ways. The last chapter studies parental movements that have emerged as a critical reaction to the negative consequences of excessively intensive parenting, and its underlying system of values.

To sum up, *The Problem with Parenting* puts forward a series of bold and intriguing hypotheses. The author proposes a connection between the excesses of intensive parenting and the rejection of parenthood among young American people, many of whom regard this as a selfish choice at a time when marriage is seen as a route to self-actualization. She also argues that it has been parents' urging of children to 'be themselves' that has generated hostility to social norms and values associated with the past. One of her examples of this is 'gender-neutral parenting', which aims to deemphasize gender, thereby allowing children to choose their own, free from social pressure. McDermott also claims that the suspicion of social norms that have lost much of their ability to govern relationships has led to their replacement by bureaucratically imposed rules. She emphasizes that this mode of socializing a new generation affects how Americans think about childhood, adulthood, and the relationship between the individual and society.

Nancy McDermott has drawn on her personal experience with Park Slope Parents' community; she refers to content produced by journalists when reflecting on problems inherent to the new phenomenon of 'parenting'; and she has made ample use of the academic results of social-science scholarship. The book's thesis follows a plausible line of argumentation with the clear agenda of raising awareness about the new American way of bringing up

children and understanding where it comes from. McDermott's assessment of the development- and value-related changes associated with the American family and the changing goals of parental socialization outline the genesis of intensive parenting set against a backdrop of the therapeutic culture of the last couple of decades.

The volume focuses on parental practices that have emerged in the US, and McDermott shows convincingly how deeply embedded these are in the nation's social history. Nevertheless, excessive forms of intensive parenting have appeared outside the North American continent, too, suggesting the presence of global trends in childrearing practices and ideologies.

Little attention is given in the volume to the variation in this pattern of behavior according to social class or ethnocultural background. Class as a factor that influences attitudes to becoming a parent is discussed in the chapter on socialization; otherwise, it is missing from the discussion. It is important to point out that the book's perspective on intensive parenting is primarily one of the east-coast upper-middle class – a very influential position with a strong mediatized presence. Casual mentions of the role of sociocultural factors in childrearing practices are present, giving the impression that the costly exercise of upper middle-class parenting exists among all social groups in the US.

The Problem with Parenting uses simple language that will make its popular science easy to read and understand for a wide audience. The author has made a few concessions to academic referencing and includes simplified statements that may have needed further support in the text. Nevertheless, Nancy McDermott's bold argument is sharp and thought-provoking, and her hypotheses will likely challenge family scholars. Throughout the book, she handles complex and extensive phenomena and aims at drawing a big picture of how American parenting has changed during the last 40 years, and how it is changing American society.

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Ágnes Virág

Emotional parliamentary lions: Evaluative metonymic complexes in editorial cartoons

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Abstract

Various cognitive linguistic studies (e.g. Riad & Vaara, 2011; Riad, 2019; cf. Feng, 2017) indicate that the conceptual metonymy NATIONAL BUILDING FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP or A POPULATION[1] can emotively frame activities and facilitate the creation of stereotypes and political attitudes. The article reconsiders this assessment by evaluating a multimodal corpus of editorial cartoons that depict the parliamentary lions that are usually personified and express emotions to voice different positions. Fifty-one editorial cartoons were retrieved from Hungarian dailies and coded according to their political topics, the related emotions they depict and the tropes (metonymy, metaphor, and irony), as well as their evaluative functions. Overall, the compression of PART FOR THE WHOLE and MEMBER FOR CATEGORY metonymies occurs; thus, THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS STAND FOR THE HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENT that STANDS FOR POLITICIANS/THE GOVERNMENT or THE PEOPLE/THE MINORITY. These emotionally saturated metonymies cooperate with metaphorical and ironical processes by supporting the identification of those whose voice can be heard, but at the same time it also reduces the responsibility of the persons or the group hidden in the form of the lion.

Keywords: democracy; parliamentary lions; editorial cartoon; emotion; visual metonymy; evaluation

1 Introduction

The neo-Gothic building of the Hungarian Parliament is known as a 'national monument' (Sisa, 2018, pp. 61, 63), but it is also seen as the 'symbol of Hungarian statehood' (Kerekes, 2016, p. 107). The Parliament is an iconic emblem of the capital of Budapest (ibid.). Its elegant Eastern entrance consists of a grand staircase flanked by two proudly seated lions, and has become a popular photo spot among tourists (Figure 1). These bronze lions (made by the

[1] Capitals are used to highlight the conceptual status of the expressions, which is a common practice in cognitive linguistics.

sculptor Béla Markup) were inspired by the medieval lions that often stand guard at churches, in reference to the Temple of Solomon the Wise (Kerekes, 2016, pp. 104–105). Their prominent position reflects their symbolic representation of values such as courage, strength, power, and justice (Pál & Újvári, 2001).

Figure 1 Tourists around the lion at the parliamentary entrance, 1973 (Fortepan/Tamás Urbán)

Nevertheless, these characteristic values are diminished in political cartoons due to the complexities of various cognitive processes, and in particular, conceptual metonymies. According to conceptual metonymy theory (Littlemore, 2015; Panther & Radden, 1999), a metonymy is a conceptual process whereby a target domain is replaced by another closely related source domain (A STANDS FOR B). Like other conceptual processes, a metonymy can occur in various modalities (e.g., verbal and visual) across diverse genres (e.g., cartoon and film). Similar to metaphors, a conceptual metonymy provides a certain perspective of the target domain in question (cf. Benczes, 2019; Pérez-Sobrino, 2016; Forceville, 2009).

The aim of the present paper is to contribute to visual politics research by evaluating the visual and multimodal metonymies in the genre of editorial cartoons (depicting the Hungarian Parliament specifically) and to demonstrate their evaluative framing character and potential with regard to stereotyping both politicians and citizens.

Visual politics research has shown that visuals can influence political attitude; however, the former mainly focuses on contemporary digital content. Various studies, for example, have examined the attractiveness of politicians or their facial expressions and gestures during debates, which can metonymically stand for their (in)competence (Bleiker, 2018, p. 24). Research on complex metonymies within editorial cartoons, however, is scarce. While visual factors like attractiveness and behavior can be crucial in cartoons given that the emotional perception of politicians is at stake, the cartoons represent a very different genre to televised political debates or magazine covers. For example, it is hard to imagine an attractive politician in a cartoon since distortion is inherent in the cartoon genre. A politician may, for instance, be represented with lion-esque features. Simultaneously, assessing emotions within cartoon images may be additionally complex, as a simple smile, for example, can be understood in many ways, including '[whether it is] posed, controlled, [or shows] enjoyment, amusement, and contempt' (Dumitrescu, 2016, p. 1659).

The present article investigates the roles and emotions represented by the parliamentary lions and their functions in evaluative metonymy complexes in Hungarian editorial cartoons in order to validate the observation that

> NATIONAL BUILDINGS can metonymically stand for THE INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP or A POPULATION and these can offer emotive framing of activities through which the metonymies facilitate the creation of national cultural differences and stereotypes. (Riad & Vaara, 2011, p. 746)

We aim to answer two main questions. First, whose voice(s) can be heard through the expressed emotions of the parliamentary lions, and second, what tropes are applied during the conceptual processes? Specifically, the paper explores the use of tropes that express criticism of the political elite or the people within a specific corpus of editorial cartoons, and assesses how disapproval is articulated by the parliamentary lions, originally seen as the guardians of the law and in charge of the supervision and surveillance of parliament. We want to understand the underlying mechanisms, which emotions are mediated by the parliamentary lions, how their attitudes represent political criticism, and what frameworks are perpetuated in this way.

The paper starts with a theoretical section that locates the research within a broader academic context before expanding on the salient cognitive complexes (metonymy-metaphor and metonymy-irony relations) identified during the qualitative corpus-based research. The methodological section discusses the essential features of the corpus and the analytical process. Subsequently, we present the results by discussing how the metonymic targets (POLITICIANS, GOVERNMENT, PEOPLE and MINORITY/MIGRANTS) are linked to the source of THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS, and give examples of the evaluative metonymy complexes. The final section defines some wider implications of this metonymy research for the broader political discourse.

2 Theoretical overview

2.1 Visual politics

The field of visual politics investigates 'how the visual content of political communication aims both to inform and influence what information voters rely on in their decisions by promoting stereotypical thinking or by highlighting certain aspects of a candidate's persona'

(Dumitrescu, 2016, p. 1658). Visual politics research (Bleiker, 2018; Veneti et al., 2019) draws attention to the socio-political power of images, whereby politicized visuals are able to legitimize or discredit certain narratives, policies, and actions (Bleiker, 2018). In her paper, Dumitrescu (2016, p. 1668) observes that 'influencing decisions is based on associations of candidate images and political qualities' (ibid.), whereby, for example, a candidate with a flag 'activates nationalist and group dominance attitudes' (Dumitrescu, 2016, p. 1662). Dumitrescu (ibid.) also notes that, 'political visuals generate emotions, which in turn orient attention and cognitive responses.' We consider both of these aspects – namely, the prominent role of associations and the emotional influencing of audiences, in relation to conceptual metonymic processes presented in this paper.

Icons such as the building of the Hungarian Parliament 'shape public opinions because they are part of the collective fabric through which people and communities make sense of themselves' (Beliker, 2018, p. 8, referring to Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). As such, the critical depiction of this iconic building (and all related concepts e.g., the political elite, etc.) in editorial cartoons is also likely to affect public opinion (Szabó & Oross, 2018)[2] in the eyes of those who have already negatively judged the former (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008). Thus, political cartoons typically do not change viewers' attitudes but may confirm and encourage them.

2.2 Metonymy in political discourse

Within political discourse, metonymies can be used to obscure ideologies (Charteris-Black, 2014, p. 203) as governments can introduce particular social imagery which legitimizes their action and garners support from the wider public (Catalano & Musolff, 2019, p. 11). Visual metonymies help shape people's thinking about the role of the government (Bleiker, 2018) and political power (Riad, 2019, p. 506). Through MEMBER-FOR-CATEGORY metonymy, metonymy can collectivize, homogenize, and at the same time evaluate the target entity (Salamurović, 2020, p. 181). This type of perspectivization (Benczes, 2019) leads to the creation of stereotypes. These oversimplification strategies (through MEMBER-FOR-CATEGORY and CATEGORY-FOR-MEMBER metonymies, Feng, 2017, p. 456) can facilitate the creation of national identities through place-for-people metonymy (e.g. the name of the country can stand for its institution but also for the population) (Benczes, 2019).

By facilitating the recall of common knowledge and confirming social relations (Littlemore, 2015, p. 1), metonymies are crucial in cultural representation and collective memory processes (Salamurović, 2020, p. 184). Furthermore, metonymy is a finely tuned device with a polysemic character (Salamurović, 2020, p. 188); thus, its references are often implicit, and there is uncertainty and vagueness about what exactly it refers to (Forceville, 2009, p. 83). Metonymies are usually chain-like, whereby multiple metonymies are connected to each other (A STANDS FOR B and B STANDS FOR C), combined with conceptual metaphors (e.g., A STANDS FOR B and B is C) or with irony (A STANDS FOR B, where A is contrasted with B).

[2] In their sociological polls, Oross and Szabó (2018) have pointed out that concepts such as politics, parliament, and democracy, among many others, are closely linked in Hungarian people's minds.

2.3 The dynamic interplay of metonymy and metaphor in political discourse

Visual and multimodal metonymy complexes such as metonymy chains and the relationship of visual metonymies with conceptual metaphors have scarcely been discussed in political discourse (Benczes, 2019; Riad, 2019; Negro Alousque, 2013). By definition, metaphor represents a conceptual process in which the target domain is understood in terms of a conceptually distant source domain, and can be expressed as A is B (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The domains can occur in various modes (e.g. verbal, visual), as well as in multimodal versions (with domains in different or mixed modes) (cf. Pérez-Sobrino, 2017; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009) presented within different genres (e.g. cartoons, etc.).

Both Benczes (2019) and Riad (2019) cite unique examples of metonymy-metaphor combinations in which metonymies create the groundwork for metaphor scenarios (Musolff, 2006). A metaphor scenario usually involves a specific scene with a well-structured schema (e.g., participants, roles, action, and its outcomes, etc.), which build upon conventionally known assumptions but preserve their dynamic nature. Musolff (2006, p. 36) claims that narratives can be created more easily with the help of scenarios in order to evaluate and assess sociopolitical issues. In doing so, he considers that

> [s]cenarios appear to dominate public discourse not just in terms of overall frequency but also in that they help to shape the course of public debates and conceptualizations of political target topics by framing the attitudinal and evaluative preferences in the respective discourse communities. (Musolff, 2006, p. 28)

2.4 Ironic metonymies

Irony is a crucial feature of political cartoons, but it has been almost entirely neglected in the field of multimodal cognitive studies (except for in El Refaie, 2005, and Conradie et al., 2012). Unsurprisingly, given that irony is assumed to be a verbal trope, it has so far been primarily investigated in verbal corpora (Pedrazzini & Scheuer, 2019).

Based on spoken and written corpus-linguistic data, irony is defined as involving 'an implied reversal of evaluative meaning' (Partington, 2000, p. 1560), and is mostly used for argumentation and criticism. Hence, saying 'he did a good job' ironically means exactly the opposite – namely, that he did not do a good job. Partington emphasizes the emotional functions of irony, including the desire of the speaker 'to be interesting, incisive, dramatic and memorable' (Partington, 2000, p. 1566). Burgers et al. (2011, p. 193) build on Partington's definition (2016, p. 417) by noting that irony allows both for changing a relatively stable frame by revealing a no longer valid problem, causation, expectancy or norm, as well as for maintaining certain frames. Like a metonymy, it usually does not introduce a new frame but comments on an existing one.

The interaction between metonymy and irony can make an evaluation process more complex, as studies have shown that the dissonance caused by irony affects conceptual metonymical processes (Barnden, 2018; Riad & Vaara, 2011). According to Barnden (2018, p. 108), metonymy can be linked to irony in different ways, depending on the type of contrast that is used. He differentiates between four types of contrast in ironic metonymies, which we refer to during our analysis. Barden's typology is as follows:

> (1) *A devaluation-based ironic metonymy* in which there is a contrast between the feature of the chosen source and the more relevant aspects of the target – e.g., saying 'She is wearing Primark,' whereby A LOW-COST BRAND STANDS FOR AN EXPECTED HIGH-COST BRAND. (p. 109)
>
> (2) A *stereotype-based ironic metonymy* in which there is a contrast between the metonymic target and common expectations – e.g., saying 'pretty-face is speaking' when a professor is presenting at a conference, even though her beauty is not relevant at all. (p. 110)
>
> (3) An *oxymoron-based ironic metonymy* in which there is a contrast between the metonymic source and target – e.g., saying 'our friends the cockroaches,' based on the metonymy FRIENDS FOR ENEMIES. (p. 110)
>
> (4) A *causal ironic metonymy* in which there is a contrast between the literal and metonymic meanings (cf. Littlemore, 2015) – e.g., saying 'What are the French army doing in Mali?' despite the speaker knowing that French army should not be in Mali, triggering a contrast between the speaker's concerns about the source (action) and target (reasons). (p. 111)

In their corpus research, Riad and Vaara (2011) investigated the use of metonymy and metaphor in combination with irony, pointing out that this approach is able to overturn and resist national and cultural stereotypes. In their examples, irony has a moral or political tone, and acts as a warning against deception (Riad & Vaara, 2011, p. 742).

3 Corpus and methodology

3.1 Corpus selection

The corpus included fifty-one editorial cartoons retrieved from printed Hungarian national dailies:[3] *Népszabadság* (1989–2016), *Magyar Hírlap* (1989–2014), *Magyar Nemzet* (1989–2017) and *Népszava* (1989–2019) (available at *arcanum.hu*[4]). The selection was carried out manually, and only those depicting the parliamentary lion(s) were kept for further research. The present investigation solely focuses on the emotional metonymic representations of the parliamentary lions, which trigger evaluative conceptual processes. Seven editorial cartoons did not meet this criterion and were therefore excluded. In these cartoons, the parliamentary lions were faceless or static, hence did not express any emotion. These parliamentary lions are the sources of referential metonymies' examples based on PART FOR THE WHOLE metonymy wherein THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS STAND FOR THE BUILDING OF THE HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENT.

The corpus covered cartoons published between 1989 and 2019, given that the depiction of the Hungarian Parliament in political cartoons became a hot topic after the fall of the party-state system, and the establishment of multi-party political system in 1989 (cf. Csillag & Szelényi, 2015, p. 19). Although political cartoons are strongly influenced by ongoing political circumstances, any historical or political contextualization goes beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, the date for each of the highlighted examples is always noted.

[3] The selection of these sources was based on the following criteria: (1) cover the longest possible period, (2) available nationally in a similar number of copies (Juhász, 2003), (3) include print editorial cartoons, and (4) cover a broad political spectrum, but be balanced enough.

[4] Hungarian Digital Database of Periodicals, https://www.arcanum.hu/hu/adt/

3.2 Corpus annotation

THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS as a source entity semantically belong to multiple domains – namely, THE PARLIAMENT or THE GOVERNMENT (as institutions), THE POLITICIANS (who are the members of the institution), and the people (who are represented by the democratically elected politicians). In this, THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS can metonymically stand for these domains based on the part for the whole and the PART FOR THE PART metonymies.

The physical position of the parliamentary lions at the doorstep visually implies the same metonymic target based on the container schema of the Hungarian Parliament. The parliamentary lions can belong to the 'in-group' domain (i.e., the political institution and its participants), or to the 'out group' domain (the people). The duality of roles suggests that they play the role of well-informed, omniscient guards given their proximity to political actors and people. In line with Riad and Vaara (2011, p. 746), we hypothesize that

> the source of THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS as part of a NATIONAL BUILDING can metonymically STAND FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP or A POPULATION and their personification can offer an emotive framing of political activities through which the metonymies facilitate the creation of stereotypes and political attitudes.

The annotation procedure takes into account that 'visual images lack a clear vocabulary system and many interpretations rely on context' (Feng, 2017, p. 444). This is especially true of visual metonymies where the mapping of the source and target domains are not as strongly conventionalized as their verbal counterparts. While subjective, this approach is far from arbitrary as the annotation was guided by the following questions:

Q1 *What type of political topic is being commented upon?*

This involved establishing the cartoon's political focus (e.g., having multiple positions at the same time) based on relevant articles that were published around the same time as the cartoon (max. three days prior to publication). Using classical content analysis, sub-themes were re-categorized into general thematic categories (e.g. ABUSE OF POWER) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278).

Q2 *Whose emotions are mediated by the lions?*

This involved identification of the metonymic targets when the source is THE PARLIAMENTARY LION(S). This was primarily[5] a top-down process based on the potential targets discussed above (e.g., POLITICIANS). Identification was supported by contextual knowledge (based on Q1) and also by co-textual elements. Displays of emotion were determined on the basis of visual (mimics and gestures) and verbal markers (e.g., the emotion was mentioned verbally).

[5] Two additional metonymic targets (migrant and minority) were also identified.

Q3 *What are the evaluative functions of the metonymy complexes?*

The investigation of tropes was limited to the study of metaphoric scenario and irony, which are often combined with metonymies in evaluative composites. The evaluative edge of the metonymy complexes was discussed on the basis of activated evaluative metonymies (Littlemore, 2015), the operation of metaphoric scenarios (Musolff, 2006), and ironic metonymies (Barnden, 2018).

4 Qualitative results

4.1 Political topics and targets

As the first step of the analysis, the following overarching themes were identified: criticism of politicians' behavior (eight[6]), abuse of power (seven), (various) protests (seven), equal opportunities and human rights (six), the introduction of new laws (five), personnel changes in public offices (four), political elections (four), provisions for the state budget (three), and communism (three). Corruption, a weak economy, the parliamentary summer break, and the election of the first president appeared only once in the corpus, suggesting that the entrance of the parliament (with the lions) is probably least related to these political subjects. If a cartoon featured two overlapping categories, for instance immoral behavior and abuse of power (which is also immoral), then the more concrete category (here, abuse of power), was chosen.

For the second step, we identified the specific targets for which THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS operated as their source entities. On the basis of the following activated metonymic chains:

PART OF THE BUILDING FOR THE BUILDING FOR THE INSTITUTE
PART OF THE BUILDING FOR THE BUILDING FOR EMPLOYEES
PART OF THE BUILDING FOR THE BUILDING FOR THE PEOPLE/MINORITIES,

the most referenced target entities were POLITICIANS (21), and THE GOVERNMENT (14), and these were followed by entities such as THE PEOPLE (seven) and MINORITY GROUPS/MIGRANTS (two).

In the role of POLITICIANS, the parliamentary lions show complex and intricate emotions through their mimicry and gestures. Emotions of OPPOSITION/TENSION (11) (Figure 2) and, by extension, anger, were most characteristically reflected through various visual schemas, including face-to-face, back-to back, and top-down positionings. Opposition is visually represented in a more static form by means of seated but complaining lions, while the intensity of anger is expressed by snarling lions in motion such as jumping off the stairs and leaving their guard posts. Another common feature associated with politicians – as parliamentary lions – is SELF-CONFIDENCE (three) (Figure 3). This is characterized by overflowing serenity and calm portrayed through smiling lions or lions with their heads raised high but with closed eyes and mouth curving downwards (as if they were looking down their nose). In addition, other emotional expressions of the politician-lions included PUZZLEMENT (two) (por-

[6] The numbers indicate the number of occurrences.

trayed by a clumsy face with rounded eyes), DISAPPOINTMENT WITH JEALOUSY (two) (either verbally stated or visualized through 'green' coloring), FEAR WITH SURPRISE (one) (portrayed through wide-open eyes, a sudden turn of the head and a painful roar because someone had suddenly stepped on its tail), IGNORANCE (one) (portrayed with clenched eyes and mouth, suggesting the inability to see, know, or speak about certain political issues), and SOFTNESS OR WEAKNESS, possibly IRRESPONSIBILITY (one) (showing small cats, one of which is licking its paw).

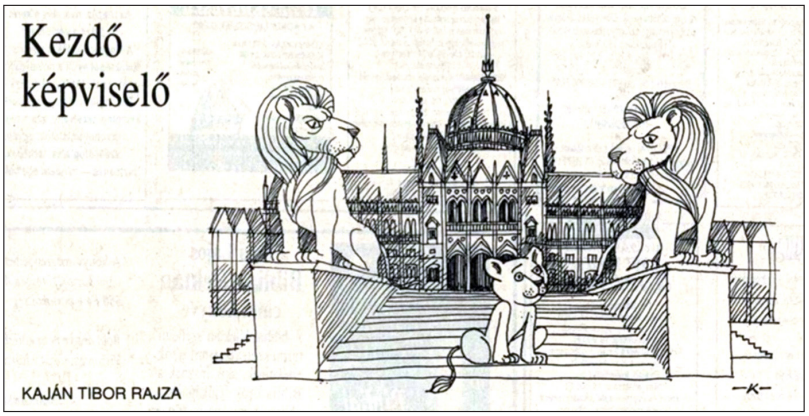

Figure 2 Emotion: opposition

Title: 'Novice representative' (12.7.1994, *Magyar Hírlap*, drawn by Tibor Kaján)

Figure 3 Emotion: self-confidence

Verbal text: 'Based on my knowledge, he is already a member of four boards and a chairman of the board of trustees at two foundations…' (20.6.1996, *Népszava*, drawn by Marabu)

Figure 4 Emotion: self-confidence
Title: 'Tax morale is improving' (3.2.2001, *Magyar Hírlap*, drawn by Tibor Kaján)

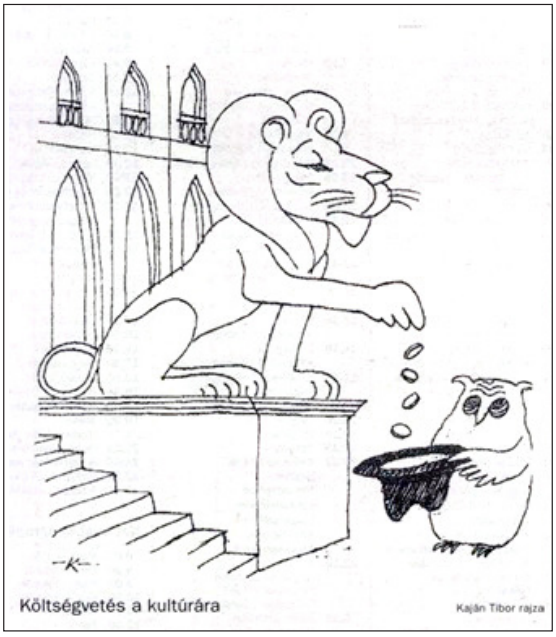

Figure 5 Emotion: fake generosity/stinginess
Title: 'Budget for culture' (15-16.11. 2003, *Magyar Hírlap*, drawn by Tibor Kaján)

The second most common target is THE GOVERNMENT, in relation to which the parliamentary lion mostly expresses PUZZLEMENT (four) through a clumsy face and rounded eyes. Interestingly, while the parliamentary lion shows GENEROSITY (three) by donating money to the poor, the emotion is reversed when it is related to sharing the state budget, by contributing to culture for example, and as a result displays fake generosity/stinginess (Figure 5) due to the ironic twist. The government-lion can also perform ANGER (two) through an indignant facial expression and growl. In other examples, SELF-CONFIDENCE (two) (Figure 4) is shown by a firm, stony posture with an unwavering face when the parliamentary lion assists a cowboy in the role of a horse. In a CIRCUS scenario, the parliamentary lions seem DISCIPLINED WITH FEAR (one), as illustrated by their blue color (a physiological effect) and their rounded eyes (a behavioral effect) (Figure 3). Pride (one) was displayed in a cartoon depicting the new government. Another, more conventional emotion – MALAISE/UNHEALTHY CONDITION with dizziness (one) – was also represented in the corpus (Negro Alousque, 2020, p. 9; Bounegru & Forceville, 2011, p. 219) in reference to the weak economic situation of the country caused by the governing party.

The third target is THE PEOPLE, when the parliamentary lions echo the voice of the population. Interestingly, their mimicry and gestures are limited compared to the previously discussed metonymical targets (THE POLITICIANS and THE GOVERNMENT). The parliamentary lions show DISAPPOINTMENT (seven), and it seems that they are totally fed up with the respective political events. They usually lie down (instead of their original proudly seated position) and often put their paws in front of their eyes. This gesture activates the conventional metaphor KNOWING/UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980); however, in this case the act refers to the fact that the people do not want to see and do not want to know or understand what is going on right now in politics.

Finally, a fourth metonymic target was determined (as it appeared in two examples) – namely, the minority/migrants. In these instances, the parliamentary lion expressed hunger by pointing towards his open mouth, and fear through occupying a crouched position in the background (Figure 8).

4.2 Evaluative metonymy complexes in political cartoons

In the third step, the metaphoric scenarios were identified. Due to the dynamic nature of the metonymies involving the parliamentary lions (source), they can be combined with metaphoric scenarios (19) more generally. Within commercial scenes (five), the government-lion is shown as a salesman who is selling political issues (e.g., Agent Reports) at a mobile desk, suggesting that Parliament can be understood as a store with goods for sale. In BEGGING-scenarios (three) (Figure 5), the government-lion donates money to the poor (e.g., cultural or scientific sector), which is symbolized by an owl holding out a hat reflecting that the government has full power over the allocation of the state budget and manages it as personal property. In the circus scenario (two), Parliament is depicted as a circus, and influential politicians are animal trainers. The implication, however, highly depends on the metonymic target. In one of the cartoons (Figure 7) THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS STAND FOR THE PARLIAMENT while in the second example, THEY STAND FOR THE PEOPLE. In WESTERN SCENES (two) (Figure 4), the government-lion plays the role of the horse while the Hungarian Financial and Control Administration is depicted as a little cowboy riding on it and chasing the 'cattle'

(people who avoid paying taxes) with a lasso. Some scenarios only occur once in the corpus, e.g., CLEANING, PARENTING/KINDERGARTEN, FIGHT, PRISON (Figure 6), TALE, and BEAUTIFICATION.

Irony turned out to be a frequent trope in the corpus, challenging the evaluative edge of the metonymies in metaphorical scenarios; thus, irony was able to question the original statement, make it ambiguous, or entirely reverse it. Twenty-eight cartoons out of the fifty-one were identified as ironic.

The examples within this corpus show that contrasts found in verbal modes (Barnden, 2018) can also be found in a multimodal genre like editorial cartoons. The present research focuses on ironic metonymies where A stands for B with a contrast between them. Based on the analysis, the contrast in most cases (seven times) was that the verbally expressed statement was contradicted visually. For instance, the title of one of the cartoons says 'Tax morals are improving,' while the image shows people (like cattle) running away from the tax authority (cowboy). This is a type of oxymoron-based ironic metonymy, whereby the positive statement is contradicted by the negative image.

The next most common contrast (six times) involved cases in which the verbal statement is multimodally ironic. Consider, for instance, the example of the Secretary of State, who is depicted as a master of the stage in the circus and is called the Secretary of State for Clown Affairs (expressed by an ironic verbal addition in the title). While this image is motivated by the fact that Péter Fekete, Secretary of State for Culture, was the director of The Capital Circus of Budapest, it also reflects the well-known political discourse metaphorical scenario of circus. Thus, it is a humorous, ironic combination of a specific biographical detail with a common metaphorical scenario, wherein the source is stated verbally while the target occurs multimodally. The example belongs to the category of devaluation-based ironic metonymy, whereby the serious role of the Secretary of State is questioned.

Less common (occurring five times) are examples when the source is expressed visually, but the message is contradicted by the verbal statement. In one example, the viewer sees a positive visual image of the lion who is giving a little change to a beggar, making the lion seem generous. Yet this positive attitude is overwritten by the cartoon's caption ('Budget on culture'): the verbal content indicates that beggar represents 'culture,' on which the lion, or in this case parliament, spends only a small part of the annual budget. As such, the image may at first glance appear to suggest 'generosity,' while it instead displays 'stinginess.' This is again an example of ironic metonymy based on oxymoron.

Overall, the analysis indicates that the ironic contrast occurring between the various modalities includes the following patterns: verbal-for-visual, verbal-for-multimodal, and visual-for-verbal. In addition, the analysis showed that the source is usually a positive (and mostly verbal) statement, while the target is often a critical statement that is likely to be displayed visually. Both modes are needed for the ironic metonymy to be decipherable. Following Barnden's typology of contrast (2018), the next subsections discuss examples of the devaluation-based (seven), stereotype-based (two), oxymoron-based (nine), and causal ironic metonymies (ten).

4.2.1 Devaluation-based ironic metonymy: UNVALUED FEATURE FOR A VALUABLE ONE

In Figure 6, the two lions have been replaced by two small green cats, while a woman and a man in formal attire look surprised by the change as they walk up the stairs. One of the kit-

tens is licking its paw. The inscription of the cartoon – 'Well, at first glance, the policy seems a little different' – overtly indicates the entry of a new party, LMP (Politics Can Be Different) into parliament in 2010. The green color of the cats may be a reference to the party's sense of responsibility towards the environment. In the article published with the editorial cartoon, István Elek (23.4.2010, *Népszabadság*) predicts a more critical era and thinks that LMP has the potential to change the unsophisticated public language, shape democracy, and become a postmodern eco-party which can be a rival to Fidesz (Alliance of Young Democrats and Christian Democratic People's Party).

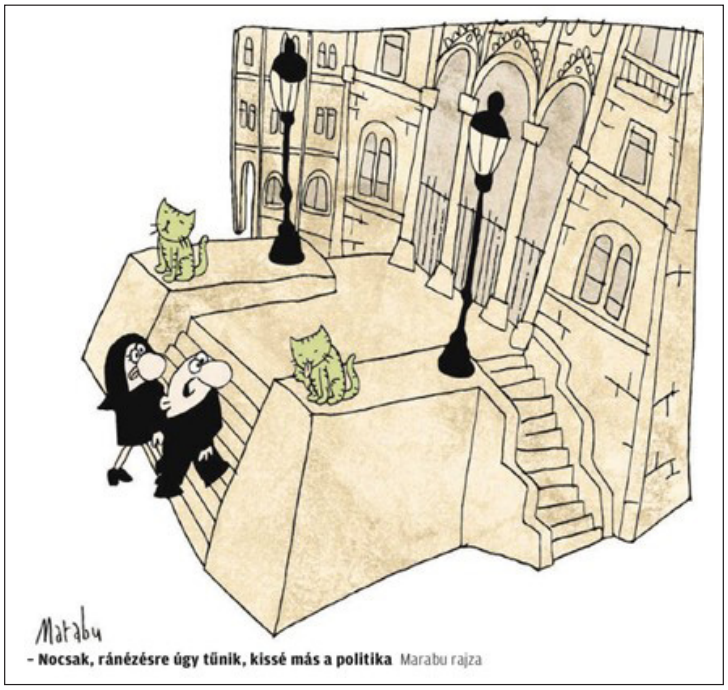

Figure 6 Metonymy: cats stand for the lions that stand for politicians (members of LMP),

Expressed emotion: softness or weakness, perhaps along with irresponsibility
No title (23.4.2010, *Népszabadság,* drawn by Marabu)
Verbal text: 'Well, at first glance, the policy seems to be a little different.'

According to the potential metonymical chain, green cats stand for the parliamentary lions that stand for certain representatives of parliament (the members of the LMP Party) that stand for change in politics. Ordinarily, the viewer might expect the two parliamentary lions to be featured with attributes associated with the wilderness. A wild lion could be seen as a good symbolic representative of a determined, confident, and brave politician. In contrast, even though a lion and cat may both belong to the family of felines, the emphasis on a cat washing itself is more indicative of a soft and delicate movement. By presenting the Members of the LMP Party as cats, they may seem weak and too gentle. Furthermore, the washing has a negative meaning in a figurative sense, traceable back to Pilate's washing of hands, and can therefore be suggestive of someone (or some group) who does not want to take responsi-

bility for his (their) decisions. By introducing a feline feature at the forefront that devalues the politicians, the cartoonist has applied a devaluation-based ironic metonymy.

Under the given political circumstances, the inscription itself is ambiguous as it says 'Well, at first glance, the policy seems a little different.' The phrases 'at first glance' and 'little different' suggest that while it may look like policy has changed, this is not reflected in reality. The ambiguity of the verbal statement is transformed into humorous irony by the depiction of the green cats. In this case, the source (the cats) are visual, while the political targets (the lions that stand for the members of LMP) are indicated multimodally.

4.2.2 Stereotype-based ironic metonymy: STEREOTYPICAL FEATURE INSTEAD OF A NON-STEREOTYPICAL FEATURE

Figure 7 depicts two big blue lions who are looking at a small figure representing the current Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán. He plays the role of a lion tamer, holding a trainer's stick in his left hand and pointing towards a typical circus pedestal as he commands the lions to jump. While the circus can be easily identified as the metaphorical scenario, its target can only be inferred from the accompanying article. An independent parliamentary representative, Zoltán Kész (14.10.2015, *Népszabadság*) claims that the governing coalition Fidesz-KDNP (Alliance of Young Democrats and Christian Democratic People's Party) only uses expatriate voting rights to obtain a mandate, and does not allow for any truly independent representation in the parliament.

Figure 7 Metonymy: lions stand for politicians (representatives of the parliament), circus lions stand for the false representatives of the parliament

Expressed emotion: discipline and surprise
No title (14.10.2015, *Népszabadság,* drawn by Marabu)
Verbal text: 'Jump'

In this case, therefore, THE BLUE CIRCUS LIONS metonymically STAND FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS which STAND FOR (THE REPRESENTATIVES OF) THE PARLIAMENT. The blue color of the circus lions characterizes the physiological effect of fear (Kövecses, 2000). Their rigid, motionless pose and their rounded eyes suggest concentration or DISCIPLINE as well as the expression of surprise. However, these features are not what one would expect from truly independent parliamentary representatives. The parliamentary lion ought to be wild, able to act on his own, and able to represent the people by whom he was elected. Instead, in line with Barnden's (2018) stereotype-based ironic metonymies, this cartoon depicts a more stereotypical take of parliamentary representatives. The cartoon places the emphasis on the stereotypical features of circus lions – namely, disciplined and controlled behavior – instead of on the features of lions in the wild (instinctual and independent behavior, steadfastness). It appears to be a critique suggesting that parliament (the blue lions) act according to the Prime Minister's will. While the example shows the importance of contextual knowledge, it also requires a basic understanding of the implied irony based on the difference between the behavior of lions in the wild and circus lions. The characterization of the blue lions acts as both a critique of the parliament itself as well as of the character of the prime minister.

Irony occurs in multimodal form in how the source of the circus appears multimodally (through the depiction of the circus lions and the speech bubble 'Jump' attached to the prime minister), while the target domain of the parliamentary lions is indicated by the visual environment (staircase), and the position and placement of the lions (sitting on pedestals).

4.2.3 Oxymoron-based ironic metonymy: an entity for the opposite of the entity

In Figure 8, the parliamentary lion can hardly be seen as it is presented in a crouching position, trying to be as small as possible. Visual features such as a faceless expression, opacity, size and background positioning are conventional features of newspaper photo publications of refugees, especially when migrants are considered negatively (cf. Catalano & Musolff, 2019). While the visual image of the crouching lion draws on similar features, the scenario is made more concrete by the wild boar placed at the forefront of the image (replacing the second lion), which says: 'At least I am not an immigrant like the one over there.'

Figure 8 Metonymy: lion stands for a migrant, Expressed emotion: fear

No title (19.1.2015, *Népszava,* drawn by Gábor Pápai)
Verbal text: 'At least I am not an immigrant like that one over there.'

Given that the wild boar is a well-known native animal, it is likely THAT THE PARLIAMENTARY LION STANDS FOR AN IMMIGRANT and possible that the WILD BOAR STANDS FOR A LOCAL RESIDENT. Lions are not natural to Hungary, which is why the depicted lion can be seen as a foreigner, or more specifically, as an immigrant. In contrast, the wild boar can be found in Hungary. Nonetheless, it is somewhat debatable to what extent the wild boar can be considered a typical symbol of the local population, as it is not an indigenous species (in this case, the Hungarian Vizsla would have been more logical, for example). It is also possible that the wild boar is a reference to gypsy culture as it is a common character in Hungarian gypsy tales and jokes. The credibility of the speaker depends on how the reader interprets the character of the wild boar (as a local resident belonging to the majority, a person identifying himself as a local resident, or a gypsy who is local but belongs to the minority).

The choice of the wild boar may also have a more layered symbolic meaning. Wild boars are often used to highlight negative moral values such as rudeness, violence, impurity, ignorance, gluttony, and adultery (Tóth, 2013). Thus, here the typically 'bad' figure wants to represent himself as 'good' or 'the lesser evil.' If the viewer recognizes this irony – based on the metonymy GOOD FOR EVIL – then the wild boar's comment can be seen as hate speech. As for the modality of the oxymoron-based ironic metonymy, 'goodness' (more specifically local patriotism and national thinking) is expressed verbally, while the 'evil' is represented multimodally through the visual choice of the wild boar and the verbal differentiation of 'us' versus 'them.'

4.2.4 Causal ironic metonymy: effect for the cause

An example of causal ironic metonymy is shown in Figure 9, where one of the male lions has been replaced with a lioness (illustrated by the lack of a mane and large lashes). They are both sitting firmly, their eyes closed. Three people are staring at the lions, looking clueless and confused while the image is captioned by a question: 'The lioness is done, but how do we put another ten percent leopard in here?' The article published alongside the cartoon discusses the necessity of a gender-based quota among parliamentary representatives. Hence, the lions metonymically STAND FOR FEMALE AND MALE PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATIVES.

Causal ironic metonymy usually focuses on the effect instead of the cause, and contrast occurs between the literal and the intentional meaning. In Figure 9, the effect shown is an artificial solution to ensuring women's equality, namely a fifty-fifty split which takes into account two biological sexes. The question regarding the leopard is a rhetorical one aimed at critiquing excessive political correctness. Additional emphasis is placed on the perceived impossibility of hypercorrection by expressing the number of leopards as a percentage. The placement of the lions only provides two possibilities, one on the right and another one on the left side of the staircase, mimicking the bipolar view of the sexes, which excludes the possibility of adding a percentage.

The metonymical source of the possible solution, namely the literal meaning, is shown in a multimodal way (two sexes are depicted visually and the option of a third sex is presented verbally), while the target of the intentional message (the political issue) is kept silent; it appears neither verbally nor visually. In the case of causal ironic metonymies, this approach is common, most probably because the cartoonist can compensate for the lack of a target by expressing the different source aspects through two different modes (i.e., the cartoonist avoids repeating the same content twice).

Figure 9 Metonymy: lions stands for politicians (of opposite sex)

Emotion expressed: sturdiness
No title (30.7.2007, *Népszabadság,* drawn by Marabu)
Verbal text: 'The girl lion is done, but how do we put another ten percent leopard in here?'

5 Discussion and conclusions

This corpus-based empirical research is intended to show that the source of THE PARLIAMENTARY LIONS AS PART OF A NATIONAL BUILDING can metonymically STAND FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP or THE POPULATION and their personification can offer an emotive framing of political activities by which the metonymies facilitate the creation of stereotypes and political attitudes.

The use of the PARLIAMENTARY LIONS follows two main patterns and ultimately STANDS FOR THE POLITICAL ELITE (POLITICIANS, GOVERNMENT, OR PARLIAMENT), and also for THE PEOPLE. However, the 'speaker' (designated by the lion) can only be identified by its (or their) behavior and gestures. These suggest that politicians are stereotypically linked to opposition and tension, while disappointment features among the people. This is confirmed by the related political topics, which are often transformed into metaphorical scenarios. Mocking politicians' behavior, abuse of power, and demonstrations are among the most frequently depicted political topics. These appear in COMMERCE and CIRCUS-based metaphorical scenarios, to name a few, allowing an interpretation of the politics at hand through the following conceptual metaphors: POLITICS IS TRANSACTION/SHOW/CONFLICT, and also EDUCATION. This gives rise to a social imagery in which people are mostly seen as indifferent and uninterested, an audience for the politicians' show, helpless demonstrators, or as children who need to be taught and cared for, thereby legitimizing narratives that see people as powerless, passive members of society. This, in combination with homogenization and ste-

reotyping processes, suggests that metonymy complexes can contribute to the creation of a political attitude in which people are perceived as not really playing a democratic role. Through dynamic meaning-making processes, the viewer, triggered by compassion, is likely to identify with the 'little man' in the cartoons. The viewer might easily laugh at the helplessness of this little man or feel the same sentiment – namely, that they are also fed up with politics. This generates emotions and creates a kind of cohesive force among members of society, albeit not a mobilizing one. Instead, it appears to confirm a cultural representation of a passive society. When the parliamentary lions represent the people, their emotive behavior devalues polity-related issues as well as the role of the people in parliamentary democracy. People are not portrayed as playing a role in upholding the principle of checks and balances within a democratic system; thus, they do not function as 'guards' of Parliament.

If we take a closer look at the rendering of the parliamentary lions as politicians or the parliament, opposition and tension, overconfidence, puzzlement, and fake generosity are among their characteristic features. In the assessed metaphorical scenarios, they are selling suspicious things, abusing their power, acting as teachers or parents who can educate the people, or simply performing a show. Overall, the parliamentary lions in their role as the political elite do not appear democratic as they do not take into consideration the views of the opposition parties, and they treat people in a derogatory manner by treating them as children or an audience. These stereotypical representations of the powerful political elite are supplemented by ironic interpretations including devaluation-, stereotype-, oxymoron-based-, and causal ironic metonymy. Within the editorial cartoon genre, the multimodality of ironies seems to be a must, where verbal elements usually position the humorous content and the visuals deliver the punch line.

In sum, the results show that the almost conventional metonymic chain which has been recurring regularly over the years is so flexible that is able to appear in diverse metaphorical scenarios and cooperate with context-dependent ironies that strongly change the evaluative procedure. The metonymic complexes within this corpus can produce stereotypes of two major complementary narratives, with – on the one hand – the narrative of an inoperable democratic system maintained by a passive society, and – on the other – the narrative of a repressive power. These narratives are not directly obvious to the viewer, however, as the speaker represented by the parliamentary lions is fundamentally expressed through metonymies and shaped by ironies, which may be a vague cognitive tool that triggers different associations. Hence, it is likely that viewers will only laugh at or be triggered by the situation if the narratives match their preexisting views and knowledge, leading to the reinforcement and maintenance of these narratives.

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The dependent Industry 4.0 development path of the Visegrád countries

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Abstract

The dependency of the Visegrád countries on foreign direct investment has been emphasized in the typologies of capitalist models. Today, the question is whether this development path can be sustained. In past years democratic backsliding and a change towards more inward-looking policies have taken place in this region that may also change their attractiveness to foreign investors. The general slowdown in capital flow can weaken the dependency of these countries on FDI, but the fourth industrial revolution can conversely strengthen it. Based on interviews we conducted with business and academic experts in the Visegrád countries, it is shown that the implementation experiences of Industry 4.0 point to the reinforcement of the duality of firm-level developments and dependency on foreign-controlled enterprises. Therefore, we argue that the FDI-based economic growth path of the Visegrád countries has led to the development of FDI-led industrial transformation.

Keywords: Industry 4.0; Visegrád countries; FDI; Varieties of Capitalism

1 Introduction

The slowdown in global trade and investment flows and the reorganization of global production chains have been further intensified by the pandemic. The Visegrád countries are strongly integrated into these global value chains (GVCs) based on labor-intensive activities. Foreign multinationals have established subsidiaries in the analyzed countries since the 1990s. Scholars have recognized the dependence of the Visegrád countries on foreign capital (FDI) and even created a separate model of capitalism (the Dependent Market Economy; DME model) for them. Other authors have used or simply abandoned the 'Varieties of Capitalism' concept (VoC), but the determining role of FDI is widely acknowledged.

Digital transformation may fundamentally alter the landscape of international production with important consequences for those economies which are highly integrated into GVCs. The main aim of this article is to map these consequences and the most important factors that influence them. We would like to contribute to the literature through analyzing

this problem in general, and in the case of the Visegrád economies. The reference point of our article is the Varieties of Capitalism approach – mainly, the aforementioned DME model. We assess the potential effects of Industry 4.0 on the strategic interactions between various actors in the economies, which are basic pillars of the VoC approach. However, the DME model considers neither the impact of technology changes, nor pays attention to the modifying impact of political changes which have happened in the past decade. These are the two gaps in the literature we address in this article.

Although the slowdown in international capital flows and the rise of nationalistic ideas may even question the DME model, according to our hypothesis Industry 4.0 can maintain or strengthen the dependence of the Visegrád countries on foreign capital – although perhaps this dependence will take a different form. We rely on the methodology of semi-structured questionnaire-based interviews conducted with representatives of companies and various organizations, which reinforce this opinion. To weaken the latter dependency, or benefit from it, a well-grounded economic and education policy would be necessary. Policy changes from the perspective of Industry 4.0 are important, because the interests of the increasingly autocratic Central European regimes can contradict economic rationality. Therefore, these countries may not significantly benefit from the development-related effects of this new type of FDI dependency.

The structure of the article is the following: first, we briefly summarize the VoC literature and experiments aimed at creating development models for the Central-European countries. Then we describe the essence of the Industry 4.0 concept. Based on statistics we also show the relative position of the Visegrád countries in terms of Industry 4.0 adaptation. In the second part we present the results of our research based on interviews, and then finally draw conclusions.

2 Theoretical and literature review

This article relies on three main strands of literature. First, the VoC approach is presented; and second, concepts related to Industry 4.0 that are important from the point of view of our analysis. Third, we present the results of the research, which deals especially with Industry-4.0-related developments in the Visegrád countries.

The 'Varieties of Capitalism' literature is large. The original work of Hall and Soskice (2001) founded the concept of 'coordinated' and 'liberal' market economies based on institutional coordination mechanisms. Strategic interactions (corporate governance, industrial relations, inter-firm relations, training and education, employees) among economic actors are the focus of this theory (see Table 1). Regarding the Central-European countries, a study by Nölke and Vliegenthart (2009) introduced the new concept of the Dependent Market Economy (DME) model, creating a separate model for this region. They pointed out that the economic development of these countries depends on foreign capital, foreign-owned firms, and investment decisions by multinational corporations. Indeed, foreign-owned enterprises play a determining role (have a 35–60 per cent share)[1] in production, value-added, exports, and employment. At the beginning of the transformation process, the social, economic, and

[1] Eurostat 'fats' (foreign affiliates statistics) data, 2018 [fats_g1a_08].

political characteristics of the Visegrád region together with external factors (FDI, international organization, integrations, financial markets, level of foreign debt) determined to a great extent the development path of these countries (Bohle & Greskovits, 2007). Considering this, pursuing the DME model was not a question of choice, but practically the only possibility.

Nölke and Vliegenthart (2009) claim that multinational enterprises (MNEs) prefer to hierarchically control local subsidiaries from their headquarters as an alternative mode of finance and governance rather than accept financing by international or domestic capital markets. MNEs prefer to maintain the most innovative activities at their headquarters. Innovation takes place mainly via the transfer of technologies within firms, resulting in a passive innovation system. Dependent market economies are used mostly as assembly platforms; the interest of foreign investors is to maintain rather low labor costs and take advantage of considerable tax breaks in DMEs. For the Visegrád countries, the dependency on intra-firm hierarchies within global value chains serves as a coordination mechanism.

The VoC concept has had many followers who have applied this analytical framework to various economies, but it has also received criticism (see a summary in Farkas, 2018 and Jasiecki, 2018). Especially for the Central and Eastern European (CEE) economies, other capitalist models have been created. Bohle and Greskovits (2012) distinguished three versions of capitalism: a purely neoliberal type in the Baltic states, an 'embedded' neoliberal type in the Visegrád countries, and a neo-corporatist system in Slovenia. They analyzed welfare state institutions and labor relations, structural changes, macroeconomic stability, political systems, the legacy of the socialist system, EU accession, and FDI. Farkas (2016) used a wide range of indicators to create clusters of the CEE countries. The conclusion was that the CEE countries represent a distinct model, even if there are very substantial differences among them.

The DME model was also criticized because it regards FDI as a powerful explanatory factor that determines overall relations between Western investors and the Visegrád countries and which is shaping these linkages in the form of pure dependence instead of more asymmetric interdependence (Farkas, 2016; 2018).

Drahokoupil and Myant (2015) also criticize the word 'dependent' because foreign ownership does not always mean dependency. They suggest the denomination 'FDI-based market economy' for these countries. Following the financial and economic crisis of 2008/9, the thus-far established development model of the Visegrád countries began to change. The role of the state strengthened, and *democratic backsliding* and the spread of *illiberal* or *hybrid* regimes became evident (first in Hungary), and model typologies were questioned. Kornai (2015) wrote about Hungary's 'U-Turn' that began in 2010, meaning a turn away from democracy and to some extent from a free-market economy. While the timing and extent of these trends have differed among Visegrád countries, in all of them more autocratic political parties and anti-Western, anti-liberal discourses and policies have strengthened.

The literature on democratic backsliding in Central Europe is huge; however, few scholars have touched upon the question whether the decrease in democracy (increasing nationalism) translates into a decrease in dependence on foreign capital. With political changes the economic policy of the Visegrád countries has also changed (Sallai & Schnyder, 2018), and state intervention has increased. The Hungarian and Polish governments have decreased foreign ownership in certain domestic market-oriented services. At the same time, export-oriented sectors were not affected (Hunya, 2017; Sass, 2017) – on the contrary, foreign companies in the latter still receive a high level of state support. We can say that nationalistic

policies – with some exceptions – have not manifested against foreign capital, and the path of dependency has remained FDI-based (Bohle & Greskovits, 2019), and this can be shown by the statistics that are available (Sass, 2021). For this reason, foreign investors have not reacted negatively to political changes that have harmed democracy.[2] Foreign affiliates have adapted themselves to the political changes and built their own lobby networks and contacts with the prime minister (Sallai 2020). Financial dependence on non-domestic resources is still a given fact; political changes have not modified this significantly; and foreign capital even contributes to the maintenance of the oligarchic systems. This can also be connected to the fact that, apart from 'traditional' Western capital, Asian (South Korean, Indian, Chinese) investors are increasingly active in the region.

These were just some examples of explanations for the political turn that has occurred in the Visegrád region. Together with the above-mentioned political changes, international FDI flows have slowed down. Apart from this, a new kind of economic revolution has also taken place: a boom in Industry 4.0, which represents a kind of external shock for the Visegrád countries. The reactions of the latter's firms and policies can influence whether they remain stuck in their present dependent/asymmetrically interdependent model or create a new path. The question is if a new path is possible at all. Based on the concept of in-betweenness by Szűcs (1983),[3] Farkas (2018) argues that the historical legacy of the region does not support a change to a knowledge-based economy with more symmetrical interdependencies. Let us see what the characteristics of the Industry 4.0 concept are, and why the phenomenon represents a challenge for these countries.

An increasing body of theoretical and empirical literature deals with the emergence and proliferation of Industry-4.0-related technologies. The definition of Industry 4.0 is complex and composed of many pillars (like robotization, the Internet of Things, additive manufacturing, cybersecurity, and cloud computing). Today it is acknowledged by scholars that the Industry 4.0 concept refers to a whole ecosystem, including labor market, innovation and production networks. Industry 4.0 requires model-based enterprise manufacturing, simulating every production process.

In our article we regard terms such as *digital business transformation, Industry 4.0, I4.0,* and *the fourth industrial revolution* as largely synonymous, while remaining, of course, fully aware of the fact that they do not stand for exactly the same issues. Yet our intention was to move beyond other types of studies which intentionally pick up on and focus only on selected Industry 4.0 technologies (like 3D printing, or the Internet of Things or robotics); rather, our ambition in this research project was to cover a full range of related technologies and aspects of the wider term I4.0, not limiting our study to some predefined and narrowly defined technologies.

The fourth industrial revolution can be associated with the emergence and diffusion of advanced digital production technologies that radically alter manufacturing, blur the boundaries between physical and digital production, and accelerate innovation. This approach

[2] Sallai et al. (2020) concluded based on interviews with German CEOs that foreign investors have no moral problem with the Hungarian authoritarian regime because they separate their own personal opinions from their role as company managers.

[3] Szűcs (1983) positioned Central Europe as lying in between Eastern and Western Europe and as having been different for at least one thousand years.

modifies preexisting definitions of the vertical integration of companies and the importance of this in the strategy of enterprises (Cséfalvay & Gotskis, 2020). It is also difficult to define in which industry it occurs, because only a synergy of activities creates final value for the client. Szalavetz (2020a) showed that digital transformation may facilitate integration into global value chains (GVCs) for so-called factory economies, including the Visegrád countries, which are specialized in labor-intensive processes. On the other hand, labor-intensive processes are now not necessarily transferred to lower-wage countries as they can be carried out by robots. Therefore, automation has increased the phenomenon of backshoring or nearshoring from low-wage (Asian) countries. Studies have also proved that automation slows down the offshoring process (De Backer et al, 2018). Backshoring initiatives imply that some firms have relocated manufacturing activities back to their home country (Dachs et al., 2019), which is claimed to reduce costs and enhance quality control and customer responsiveness (Ancarani et al., 2019). Nearshoring, on the other hand, denotes transposing previously offshored activities closer to the home country or neighboring region, hence facilitating the management and supervision of value creation.

Digital transformations impact international production in different ways on different levels. Thanks to big data, firms can better anticipate and commit resources. The Internet of Things and 3D printing help reduce transaction costs and simplify GVCs. Industry 4.0 can speed up productivity growth and production improvements, and thus help firms to catch up. Therefore, we could argue that the application of Industry 4.0 elements can help to decrease the inequalities between domestic and foreign firms. Robotization, for example, reduces the investment outlay for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) – e.g. by avoiding the need to build large warehouses.

However, there are also arguments that, on the contrary, Industry 4.0 exacerbates the dependency and differences among firms. An analysis by Veugelers et al. (2019) confirmed the trend towards a digitalization divide between European companies. Several SMEs so far have not implemented any digital technology, and have not even developed plans to start investing in digitalization. (Certainly, the coronavirus pandemic gave significant impetus towards digitalization, but small firms are coping only poorly with this.) The main risk of such polarization is a further accumulation of differences and the widening of the digital gap. As demonstrated by Veugelers et al. (2019), persistently non-digital firms are less likely to be innovative, to generate new jobs, and to apply higher mark-ups compared to digitalization frontrunners. Smaller firms are also generally slower to adopt Industry 4.0 data-driven technologies. Key barriers include a lack of awareness, limited risk-taking, and sparse financial resources for investing in ICTs and a lack of human resources and capabilities (OECD, 2020a).

A World Bank report (Hallward-Driemeier et al., 2020) focuses on three types of process technologies within Industry 4.0 whereby differences can be observed according to the size of firms. *Transactional technologies* (like digital e-commerce platforms, and blockchain) reduce transaction costs and therefore can strengthen globally fragmented production and help firms' market inclusion. The use of digital platforms by SMEs in the EU is not notably different from that of large firms. Transactional technologies have been useful in pandemic lockdowns because they enable many services to be undertaken virtually. *Informational technologies* exploit the exponential growth of data and the reduced cost of computing; examples include business management software, cloud computing, big data analytics, and machine learning. Their use is uneven among European countries and firms; over time, the newest

information technologies are deployed in a pattern more reminiscent of operational technologies, with benefits being realized by larger firms in leading regions and knowledge hubs. *Operational technologies* combine data with physical automation; examples include smart robots, 3D printing, and the Internet of Things. According to the report, operational technologies tend to weaken market inclusion, while the installation of robots entails high fixed costs and is thus likely to benefit larger enterprises. Scale matters for 3D printing too, and this is also used more by large firms.

Similarly, Stiebale et al. (2020), based on firm-level analysis, concludes that robotization seems to disproportionally benefit the top firms in an industry. Firms with initially high productivity and profitability can profit from a higher degree of robotization, while for others this may have insignificant or even negative effects. Thus, the size of the firm matters in terms of the intensity of the use of Industry 4.0-related technologies. This is important for the Visegrád countries, as domestic firms are predominantly SMEs, while large firms are often foreign owned. Industry 4.0 thus may deepen the productivity and innovation gap between them.

Industrial associations and governmental organizations have launched programs in the Visegrád countries to inform and help SMEs to apply elements of Industry 4.0. Regarding the use of certain information technologies of companies/organizations (like ERP and CRM software, and Big Data analytics), the latter countries, just like a decade ago, are situated in the bottom half of the European ranking (see Figures 1–3 in the Annex) with Hungary in last position. Regarding fast broadband internet, the situation is somewhat better (see Figures 1a–d in the Annex). In the case of operational technologies, Visegrád countries have rapidly increased their industrial robot stock and density,[4] but are still among the laggards. Most of these robots, however, have been installed in the automotive and electronics industry, dominantly in foreign multinational affiliates.

Only a small number of studies have addressed Industry 4.0 related technologies in the Visegrád countries in international comparison. These studies usually underline the similarities of the four countries compared to their more developed Western European counterparts and less developed competitors from Eastern and Southeast Europe. On the other hand, they highlight differences within the Visegrád countries in terms of the Industry 4.0 intensity of various industries.

Naudé et al., (2019) analyzed the Industry 4.0 readiness of the CEE countries. The study analyses three dimensions: (1) technological competencies, (2) entrepreneurial and innovative competencies, and (3) governance competencies. In each dimension, the authors evaluate several international indices and rankings, and a composite normalized score is calculated. The study finds that Czechia and Hungary are more ready for Industry 4.0 than Slovakia and Poland.

Cséfalvay (2020) states that the development of robot stock and robot densities in Central Europe (CE) cannot be understood without GVCs and FDI. These stimulate robotization in these countries and give rise to 'dependent robotization'. According to Cséfalvay (2020), this can take place at two levels; as sectoral dependence on a single industry (e.g. car

[4] The industrial robot stock per 10,000 employees increased 3 to 6-fold between 2010–2020 (Industrial Federation of Robotics data).

manufacturing), and as a structural category, as robotization in a region mainly relies on the localization decisions of MNEs. Regarding sectoral dependence, automotive specialization obviously supports the introduction and adaptation of robots and training of employees. However, robotization could become dependent on the automotive sector and changes/challenges in this industry might block the deployment of robots in the future. Regarding localization, as is known, the Visegrád region has become an automotive production hub, but it is possible that in the future low-skilled, labor-intensive production activities might continuously be offshored to these countries, while complex production processes (capital-, skills- and R&D-intensive activities) could be reshored in the most developed European countries.

Szabo (2020) points out that leaving aside the foreign-controlled automotive industry, the Visegrád countries are less prepared for the transition than many of their Western European peers. More than half of all industrial robots installed in the V4 are used in car manufacturing (in Slovakia, the share of robots in car manufacturing reaches almost 80 per cent of the total). Robot density and digital transformation in manufacturing remains rather low.

Szalavetz (2020b) focuses precisely on the digital transformation of firms based on a sample of 24 large, export-oriented companies, subsidiaries of global automotive companies, and main suppliers operating in Czechia, Hungary, and Poland. Results show that because of labor shortages, additional investments have been made in the automation of production and support processes. The motivation for automation is remaining competitive and the decreasing price and improved features of robotic solutions. The present semi-automated or manual production technologies in CE are obsolescent; there is no specialization in advanced activities or increasing unit value added. (At some of the companies, however, functional upgrading has intensified.) The study concludes that while there are no signs of digital-transformation-induced new drivers of growth, the traditional engines of growth in Visegrád factory economies are eroding.

Considering the Visegrád countries individually, the literature on Industry 4.0 is more abundant. Slovakia Johanesová et al. (2019) assess that two-thirds of companies realize the importance of Industry 4.0 and also apply such technologies in some form. However, a relatively large proportion of respondents consider the importance of Industry 4.0 applications to be less critical to their company's future. The barriers to Industry 4.0 are generally the low level of innovation, and a lack of financing. Papula et al. (2019) found that the greatest need for the application of Industry 4.0 in Slovak companies is in the automotive and electrotechnical industry, and the main challenges are corporate culture and in the information of people. Ulewicz et al. (2019) implemented a survey among Slovakian and Polish SMEs that showed that Slovak companies use robots and predictive maintenance to a much greater extent than Polish companies, but Polish firms use large amounts of data, and mobile devices. The survey also defined some mistakes with the application of Industry 4.0: a lack of IoT synchronization with communication infrastructure and the ability to process big data, a lack of compatibility with pre-existing solutions, excessive system complexity, the generation of unnecessary data, a lack of specialists and appropriate training. Regarding the Polish automotive sector, Stawiarska et al. (2021) assessed the maturity of Industry 4.0 implementation and posited that the main objective of implementing Industry 4.0 has been increasing efficiency and effectiveness, and less often, product innovation. The highest level of maturity was achieved by large enterprises and chassis manufacturers, while tire and wheel manufacturers had the lowest level of maturity. Gajdzik and Wolniak (2022) analyzed the effects of

implementing Industry 4.0 in the Polish steel sector and found that it increased the quality and the level of customization of products. Apart from this, there was greater speed and agility of operations. The survey of Rosak-Szyrocka et al. (2021) in Poland showed that the main barrier to the implementation of Industry 4.0 in companies is low awareness, high cost, and a lack of support for implementing the concept. Regarding Czechia, Krajčík (2021) examined the digitalization of SMEs and found a slow transition, lack of strategy, and lack of funds. Olšanová et al. (2021) revealed that most large Czech companies have already implemented Industry 4.0 elements and the critical threat is a lack of skilled labor. Managers expect some state incentives. Vrchota et al. (2020) examined the preparedness of human capital for Industry 4.0 in Czechia and pointed to mixed education results and relative computer illiteracy compared to the rest of the EU. In Hungary, Nick et al. (2019) described the results of a survey that showed that most Hungarian companies have recognized that data collection is indispensable if they want to remain competitive in the future. However, the entire volume of data that is collected is not evaluated, and Hungarian companies are not strong at offering special services based on the data they collect. Nagy et al. (2020) point out that at Hungarian SMEs the application of Industry 4.0 could be supported by highly qualified employees who have possibly obtained experience at multinational corporations. Without skilled labor, the inherited disadvantages of SMEs will be strengthened, further increasing the gap between large corporates and medium-sized companies. Spatial differences may be reinforced based on the manufactured products that influence the possibilities associated with Industry 4.0. More developed industrial clusters and cities can gain additional benefits.

Altogether, Industry 4.0 may have a mixed effect on the dependent Visegrád economies. Table 1 shows specific dimensions of these effects, concentrating on the main analytical areas (strategic interactions) of the VoC approach. Industry 4.0 can reinforce pre-existing coordination mechanisms (the role of multinational companies) but can change the connections and strategic direction of companies. As is obvious from Table 1, the directions of such changes are not clear and straightforward in all the areas.

In this paper we argue that the dependent nature of the Visegrád model will further be strengthened not only by robotization, but by all Industry 4.0-related technologies. Thus, we can speak of a 'dependent Industry 4.0' (meaning the modern production-control process) economic model of the Visegrád countries. We base this argument on the fact that, according to Table 1, the gap between foreign and domestic firms regarding Industry 4.0 has increased and is increasing further. Consequently, a kind of vicious circle can be created whereby foreign firms lean less and less on technologically laggard domestic companies. On the other hand, the continuous development of employees' skills and knowledge will be increasingly valuable with the application of new technologies. Company- and technology-specific knowledge – because of the traditional focus of educational systems – can be created and utilized mostly at foreign firms, further deepening the gap between the two groups of companies. To test this hypothesis, we conducted survey-based research among company, academic, and industrial experts.

Table 1 Strategic interactions in dependent market economies [DME] and possible changes due to Industry 4.0

	Dependent market economies	**Possible impact of Industry 4.0**
Distinctive coordination mechanism	Business-led	
	Multinational companies	Further strengthening of the role of multinational companies in the absence of a high number of competent domestic firms; possibly: emergence of new domestic innovative companies.
Corporate governance	Headquarters of multinational companies	Headquarters of multinational companies, but Industry 4.0 may decrease coordination costs or necessity of coordination, and may decrease risk of certain activities (Buckley & Strange, 2015).
Location of production	Visegrád countries	Industry 4.0 technologies may result in further slicing of GVC processes, further decoupling of labor-intensive activities and their transfer to lower-wage countries. Additive manufacturing (3D printing) with the decrease in presently high costs (Laplume et al., 2016) may result in reshoring of the production of certain components produced in small series back to developed countries (Strange & Zuchella, 2017); Robotization and automatization may lead to concentration and economies of scale in the fore and thus change the regional structure of industrial production (UNCTAD, 2020); With the increase in the speed of data flows, specific data-related activities may be relocated to other countries (Strange & Zuchella, 2017) Industry restructuring due to the impact of Industry 4.0 (UNCTAD, 2020); Big data and customization of production will push the majority of value added to the end of the GVC (UNCTAD, 2020), thus the relative share of value added of companies operating in the middle (production) of GVC will decrease further; The net impact on various industrial locations is unclear (Ferrantino & Koten, 2019).
Industrial relations	Plant-level and company level coordination in the areas of wages and working conditions	The bargaining power of local workers will decrease due to Industry 4.0 (e.g. robotization [Strange & Zuchella 2017]; automatization [UNCTAD, 2020], changes in working conditions, mental problems [Kovács 2017a; b]).

Table 1 (Continued)

	Dependent market economies	**Possible impact of Industry 4.0**
Vocational training and education	Few vocational training opportunities at the workplace; Relatively high education level	Further increase in the importance of vocational training, but still little of this at the workplace. In international comparison, relatively low educational level from the point of view of disseminating use of Industry-4.0-related technologies (Nick, 2018; Szabó et al. 2019).
Inter-firm relations	Standard market relationships between subsidiaries of multinational firms and indigenous firms	Standard market relationships of the subsidiaries of multinational firms with indigenous firms – due to the low number of competent local firms, the number and intensity of such relations may decrease; Industry 4.0 (e.g. IoT; 3D printing) (Strange & Zuchella, 2017) may reduce these relations further; at the same time, digitalization may enhance modularity – changing requirements for suppliers.
Employees	Firm-specific skills Long-term tenure	Firm-specific skills and long-term tenure in certain areas; in other areas less skills and more flexible tenure; Increase in number of jobs in certain auxiliary industries (Mandel, 2017 or Ferrantino & Koten, 2019); Unclear net impact of relocations on the labor market (Ferrantino & Koten, 2019).

Source: authors' compilation based on the literature

3 Methodology

The semi-structured questionnaire-based interviews were conducted between December 2019 and August 2020, live, or via Skype or phone. To assure confidentiality, all respondents remain anonymous. Phone-call interviews were taped, and the interviewers took notes. The analysis of collected data was conducted in three steps – data reduction, data display, final conclusion-drawing and verification.

In Poland, 16 interviews were conducted with seven experts, five scholars, and four companies. The sample contains persons representing academia, business, and public authorities; from small and large firms such as IBM and Microsoft, governmental bodies, as well as Polish universities. In Hungary, 13 anonymous interviews were conducted. The respondents were the following: four representatives of Hungarian subsidiaries of foreign MNEs (three large-sized and one mid-sized company); four representatives of Hungarian-owned firms (two SMEs and two large firms operational in various industries, including automotive, electronics, and financial services); three academic experts (working in aca-

demic institutions or universities) and two industry experts (a leader in one EU-financed Industry 4.0 program, and a representative of an industry association). The interviewees were selected on a different basis in the two countries. For academia, we had a look at publication lists and contacted those experts who had recently published articles on the topic of Industry 4.0 and FDI or competitiveness. In terms of business, we tried to include companies of different sizes and ownership (foreign and local) – here, the attitude of companies (not all were welcoming) and the size of the project proved to be a major limit to the number of the interviews. Industry experts were selected from membership lists of relevant organizations. Government representatives were chosen based on their participation in various related fora.

For Czechia we use the results of Bič and Vlčková, (2020), whereby interviews were conducted with six experts, including two CEOs of multinational technological companies operating in Czechia, one of Czech origin, and one foreign citizen. One respondent was an entrepreneur and at the same time the head of an association representing companies. Two respondents were from a governmental organization, and one respondent was a researcher in a big international organization. In Slovakia, six interviews were conducted, as explained in Ferencikova and Zacharova (2020), with representatives and experts from government, business and academia: the state secretary of the Ministry of Economy, an HR director of a global pharma company, a professor of international business, a head of a local car industry manufacturing association, and two SME owners. We have thus a relatively small sample, but one which includes representatives of many different institutions, companies, government, agencies, etc., so we had access to the opinions and standpoints of various groups with different relationships to Industry 4.0.

4 Results and Discussion

Our results reinforce the tendencies we perceived based on statistics and previous surveys. On the one hand, most domestic firms in all Visegrád countries are not really prepared for the application of various Industry 4.0 related technologies, and they usually lack strategies for addressing Industry 4.0. On the other hand, most foreign-controlled firms and multinational subsidiaries are way ahead in terms of implementing Industry 4.0. in all Visegrád countries. Below, we summarize the opinions of the experts who were interviewed, grouping them into four major topic areas.

We evaluated the *Industry 4.0 related maturity, opportunities, and challenges* of the countries. According to the interviewed Polish experts, the adaptation of Industry 4.0 is time-consuming, requires accompanying changes and appropriate preparation, and piloting and testing are essential. Changes in human resources and psychological adjustments at the executive level are critical. It is a challenge that the classic factory is disappearing, being replaced by distributed service-oriented production. Similarly, a Hungarian industry expert also pointed out that Industry 4.0 is part of a longer-term strategy, as related costs arise immediately, while benefits occur only a significant time lag. Most Hungarian companies are not applying new technologies or new modes of organization. However, many firms are in the process of generational change (old owners are retiring and transferring their companies to their successors), leading to the overview and inventorying of the firms' characteristics, assets and flaws. This process of firms' 'self-discovery' can be helped by Industry 4.0 related

technologies, especially big data. Otherwise, if there is no such important change in the life of the company, it does not change by itself; an ongoing culture of development is lacking in Hungarian firms (unlike in foreign ones).

Hungarian academic experts think that especially the digitalization of local SMEs is below the EU average, while the related infrastructure is well developed. Further efforts are needed to increase the digital maturity of domestic firms and skills and education to maintain the international competitiveness of Hungary in the future. The importance of lifelong learning was also emphasized, which is still missing from Hungarian business culture. Company representatives found the lack of skills and education to be the most pressing problem, mentioning that the lack of available and properly skilled workers induced them to introduce robots.

Concerning the digital maturity of Czech firms, two institutional respondents consider this to be good (Bič & Vlčková, 2020), but business representatives were more critical, qualifying it as rather poor. The generational change which is now taking place in many firms heralds not only a threat but also an opportunity, similarly to in Hungary.

In Slovakia, business experts think that Industry 4.0 is not yet perceived as a necessity, and a large proportion of companies are just beginning to think about related solutions. The main barriers to the introduction of Industry 4.0 are risk capital exposure, low R&D corporate expenditure, and the innovation capacity of SMEs. The low level of innovation can result from the existence of various other barriers such as a lack of financial resources (Jeck, 2017). Respondents agreed on the fact that Industry 4.0 will require a growing amount of investment into services and knowledge-intensive industries. They expressed their worries about whether Slovakia is prepared enough, given the underdevelopment of the educational sector and infrastructure in the country. They also believe that changing nature of the investments will result in a war for talent that is becoming more and more visible in the country (Ferencikova & Zacharova, 2020).

Our results show – in line with previous surveys – that there is still a lack of proper preparation and a kind of incompetence in the case of domestic firms, which contradicts policy makers' rhetoric and ambitions. The respondents confirmed the cited studies in Table 1 regarding the increasing importance of education in Industry 4.0.

Another topic was the relation of *multinationals (MNEs) and local firms* concerning Industry 4.0. In Poland, respondents think that in the long-term classic business models and GVC cooperation will inevitably change due to the application of various Industry 4.0 technologies. In the spread of Industry 4.0, not only is a willingness to share the knowledge of parent companies essential, but also a willingness to adopt new technologies by subsidiaries.

For Hungary, industry experts emphasized the differences among companies according to their activities and sectors/areas of operation. Experts emphasized that MNEs try to cope with Industry 4.0 related developments and R&D needs on their own, but they are ready to share the results within the network of the respective multinational company, thus Hungarian subsidiaries will benefit from this process. Decisions about the use of Industry 4.0 related technologies are made locally by the management of the subsidiaries in question. Hungarian respondents agreed that foreign companies bring in organizational and technological culture, and they develop themselves constantly, partly due to pressure from customers.

In Czechia, the capabilities of foreign subsidiaries are considered good by all respondents (Bič & Vlčková, 2020). They mention that there is often pressure from the parent com-

pany and that automatization has been ongoing for over 15 years. The situation is very similar in Slovakia too, thus our results confirm the problem indicated in Table 1: a further decrease in the contact between multinational subsidiaries and domestic firms.

The topic of *production location* was also raised in the interviews. Responses are similar to the indications in Table 1, with the net effect uncertain. Some Hungarian respondents expect more backshoring to Hungary, but according to others, no mass backshoring can be forecast, but some more nearshoring may take place. In Poland, respondents think that no massive relocation and closing of factories will happen due to path dependency and sunk costs. Instead, according to the experts, current investors can transplant modern solutions. Czech respondents (Bič & Vlčková, 2020) believe that Industry 4.0 will give more power to MNEs (through concentration and the market dominance of the few).

The location decisions of investors are influenced by several factors related to the *countries' attractiveness*. According to the respondents, Poland's attractiveness to FDI remains high because of a stable macroeconomy and the digital competencies of the whole society. Hungarian academic experts emphasized that there will surely be a change in location-based advantages – more concentration can be expected, with capital cities leading in terms of attracting FDI, thereby increasing polarization and inequalities. They emphasized the primary importance of education, training, and skills. Regarding Slovakia, all respondents agreed on the fact that Slovakia is an attractive investment location because of its good development, eurozone membership, stable legal and political environment, the central location of the country, and educated and skilled labor force. However, they stated that there has been a brain drain of the best talent, there is a lack of specific kinds of labor force in some regions, lower digital literacy compared to the neighboring countries, big regional differences, and shortages of infrastructure (Ferencikova & Zacharova, 2020). In Czechia, respondents consider the infrastructure to be rather poor; backbone data lines are missing, and digital communication with the public sector is insufficient and the quality of education is inadequate (Bič & Vlčková, 2020).

Based on the interviews, we can observe a duality concerning the application of Industry 4.0. This duality is partly the same as everywhere else (see OECD, 2020a): i.e., between SMEs and large firms. But foreign ownership and control adds a further factor to this, as the features of domestic and foreign firms are quite distinct in terms of understanding and applying industry 4.0. In general, domestic firms are not prepared enough, while foreign firms are the leaders in Industry 4.0 technologies (see Table 2). The relation between multinational headquarters and local suppliers is asymmetrical in terms of the advantage of the former in know-how and knowledge development.

Thus, Industry 4.0 strengthens foreign dependency and duality in the Visegrád region. Supported by this study we argue that 'FDI-based economic growth' or the DME model of the Visegrád countries, has led to developments in 'FDI-led industrial transformation' too. No real modernization of technologies and of corporate organization/governance system is possible without foreign capital and multinational companies.

As we have written before, populist tendencies and governments have appeared in the past decade in the Visegrád region. These usually use nationalist and anti-foreign arguments in their rhetoric. However, real economic processes – like global production and the spread of Industry 4.0 recently – contradict these arguments and reinforce foreign dependency. This dependency is neither purely bad nor good. In our opinion, however, it is critical to ensure

the positive external effects and spillovers from these more advanced foreign firms to local companies. Accordingly, the transferal to local economies of the advantages of Industry 4.0 created by FDI should be encouraged. The consequences for economic policies are straightforward and mentioned in numerous studies: the relevance of a smart policy environment and adequate incentives and education cannot be overestimated in this respect.

Table 2 Industry 4.0 – local and foreign firms, main points of interviews

	Poland	**Hungary**	**Czechia**	**Slovakia**
Sample (no. of interviews)	16	13	6	6
Introduction of Industry 4.0	Mostly foreign and domestic large firms	Mostly foreign firms	Mostly foreign firms	Mostly foreign firms
Preparedness of domestic firms	Lagging behind. Innovation is weak, few enterprises have a plan.	Poor. Local firms usually do not have strategy	Poor, improving	Not enough
Opportunities for domestic firms	HR changes, mental adjustments at executive level	Generational change	Generational change	Concentration of RD centers, better use of EU programs
Challenges, problems	Needs time, benefits later, Inadequate education system	Skills needed; managerial capabilities are mostly not adequate	Lack of skilled labor	Low level of innovation, lack of finance, high labor costs, brain drain, obsolete education
Reshoring of foreign firms	Not strong backshoring from Poland	No mass backshoring from Hungary, possibly some nearshoring	Backshoring to Czechia and nearshoring	Automotive industries and services can be affected
MNE headquarter – local supplier relationship	Not only is willingness to share knowledge on the part of mother companies needed, but also subsidiaries' desire to adopt new technologies.	I4.0-related R&D is rarely conducted in local subsidiaries. Decisions about the use of I4.0 technologies made locally by the management of the subsidiaries.	MNE headquarters keep know-how to themselves, appropriation dominates. Industry 4.0 gives more power to MNEs	MNEs retain know-how and there is little sharing with local subsidiaries

Source: authors' compilation from the interviews

It is not one of the aims of this article to provide detailed economic policy recommendations. There is, however, one area where we found consensus among experts in every country: the significant importance of education. Here, the thorough reform of the primary and basic education system and better remuneration and education of teachers is necessary, because those competencies that are important for adapting to Industry 4.0 develop in the first decade of education. Pató et al. (2021) show that the latter competencies are the ability to learn, cooperation, flexibility, problem-solving, and creativity. At present, Central European education systems are not reinforcing these competencies[5] and their reform would only create long-term results.

5 Conclusion and further research

The development of the Visegrád countries – as part of the CEE region – has attracted interest among scholars who deal with models of capitalism. Not long after the former's EU accession, it became evident that this region represents a new kind of model in the VoC approach. Nölke & Vliegenthart (2009) coined this as the Dependent Market Economy model, putting the growth-engine role of FDI into focus. Dependence on foreign capital has been a fact for these countries, but in the past decade the sustainability of this FDI-dependent model has been questioned because of the deceleration in investment flows and globalization. There has been a populist and antidemocratic shift in these countries too, mostly in Hungary and Poland, which the VoC approach has not yet addressed.

At the same time, the fourth industrial revolution is taking place and becoming widespread due in part to the declining price of industrial robots. The Visegrád countries also had to react to this phenomenon and policy makers recognized its importance. Governmental organizations in all countries launched strategic papers and campaigns about Industry 4.0. The foreign-owned multinational subsidiaries present in the Visegrád countries had already been active in introducing Industry 4.0, mostly in the automotive and electronic industries.

As surveys and experience show, local firms lag behind foreign companies, not only because of their lack of financial resources. This statement only reinforces the results of previous studies (as listed in the review of the literature) and is partly related to the specialization of the analyzed countries in the automotive and electronics industry and the significant participation in foreign-led GVCs in the latter (Cséfalvay, 2020; Szabo, 2020). Our expert interviews reinforced the claim that Industry 4.0 is not just a set of technologies but a complex production-organizing system, which is more difficult to adapt. So far, most domestic firms in the Visegrád countries have not been able to absorb or catch-up in this regard, thus their managerial mentality must be changed. According to our interview respondents, generational change at domestic companies may represent a chance for this change in the longer term. Based on previous surveys, as listed in our article, and on our own results, we presume that the duality between domestic and foreign firms will remain, and Industry 4.0 will maintain or increase the dependency on foreign capital in the Visegrád countries. This dependency is not necessarily a problem if advantages for the local economy can be secured, too.

[5] See OECD (2020b) for more details.

The recent coronavirus crisis will probably further exacerbate this dependence because state resources have decreased and global FDI flows have fallen dramatically. The recovery and development of the Visegrád countries will need foreign capital later on, and FDI dependency will prevail. It is a question, however, whether democratic backsliding will reach such an extent that it disturbs the investment environment and weakens the attractiveness of these economies considerably. In our opinion this is not probable because on the one hand significant tax advantages and allowances for foreign investors continue to exist, and even if Western investment has decreased, Asian investors – being less sensitive to democratic backsliding – will still be interested. What, however, could seriously endanger the attractiveness of Visegrád countries is the lack of labor force, and skills-related problems. (The emphasis is on skilled workers, because less skilled workers can be replaced by robots but for high value-added-production skills are necessary.) Autocratic regimes usually do not aim to strongly develop education, and the emigration of talented young people from the region may further increase. Without educated and skilled people, however, these countries cannot be integrated into modern industrial systems.

Our study's limitations are mainly related to the small number of interviews. Further research could be conducted through increasing the number of interviewed companies and experts, and embracing more types of activities and industries in each country. Furthermore, creating a larger dataset that involves more interviews would enable the authors to conduct statistical analysis as well. Having a much larger sample would enable researchers to highlight country-related differences and country specificities even within such a relatively homogeneous group of countries as the Visegrád group. A larger dataset may enable researchers to study differences between companies of different sizes, in different regions, and those which engage in different activities. Furthermore, another potential avenue for further research would be the analysis of the impact of the COVID pandemic on the relationship between the reorganization of GVCs and application of Industry 4.0 related technologies, and the consequences thereof for the Visegrád countries. Because our 'interview period' only partly coincided with the crisis, we could not address this problem. Additionally, our article did not go into detail about the economic policy consequences of the change to FDI-led industrial transformation. Besides education policy, as mentioned in our article, there may be many other economic policy areas that are deeply affected by this change, and a science-based elaboration of an economic policy agenda that tries to enhance the positive consequences of this change is without doubt necessary. Further studies may look more closely at the internal heterogeneity of the V4 group. Although sharing many similarities, these four countries differ in many respects even in terms of critical macroeconomic levels (such as Slovakia being the only member of the eurozone). Such factors deserve special attention in further studies. Besides the specific limitations of our analysis that might derive from the unified general approach, we hope that our exploratory study and reflections on the V4 region may provide fresh insight and impetus for further analysis of the socioeconomic and political evolution of the Visegrád economies in digital times.

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ANNEX

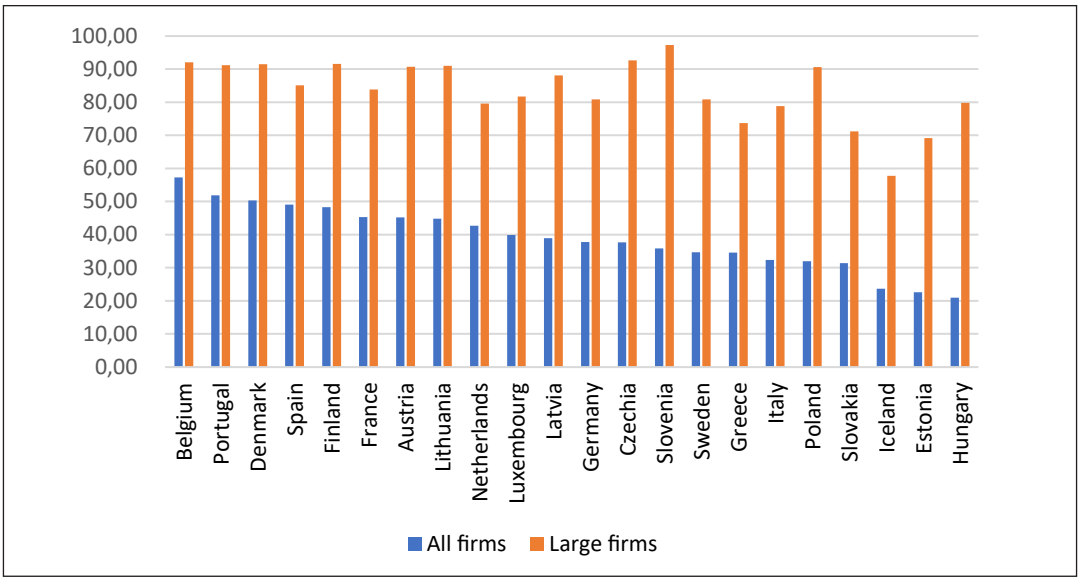

Figure 1 Businesses using ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) software (per cent), 2021

Source: OECD dataset 'ICT access by business'

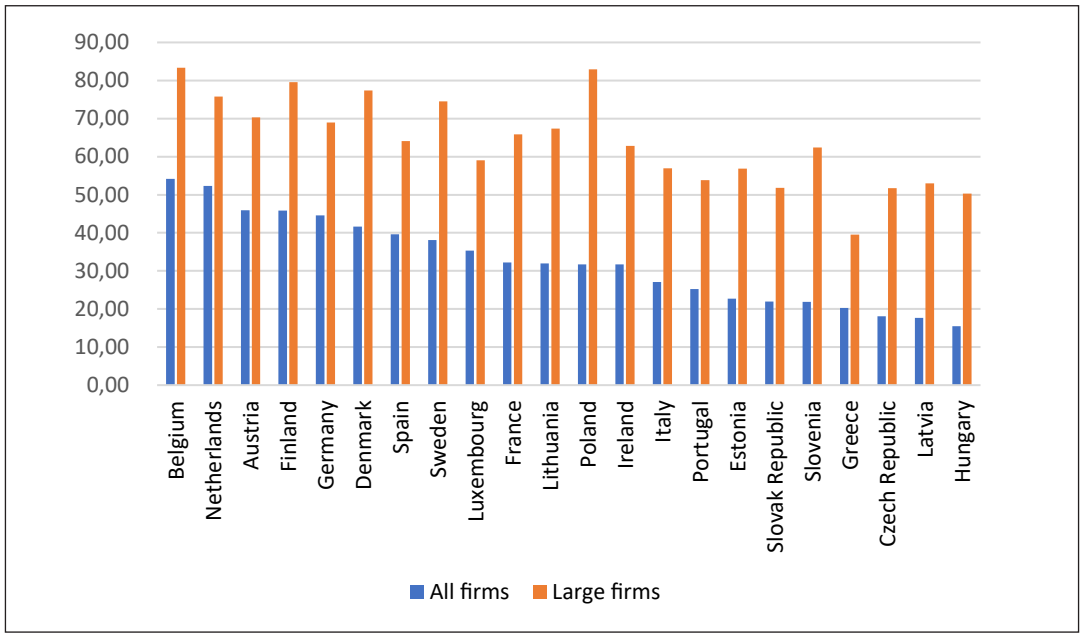

Figure 2 Businesses using CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software (per cent), 2021

Source: OECD dataset 'ICT access by business'

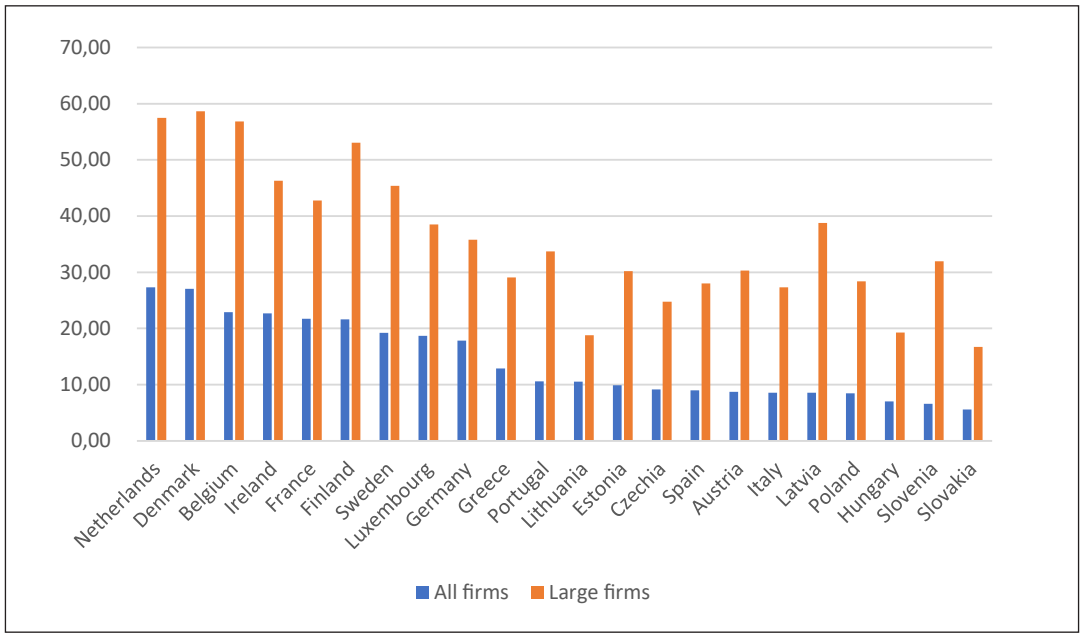

Figure 3 Businesses having performed Big Data analysis (per cent), 2020

Source: OECD dataset 'ICT access by business'

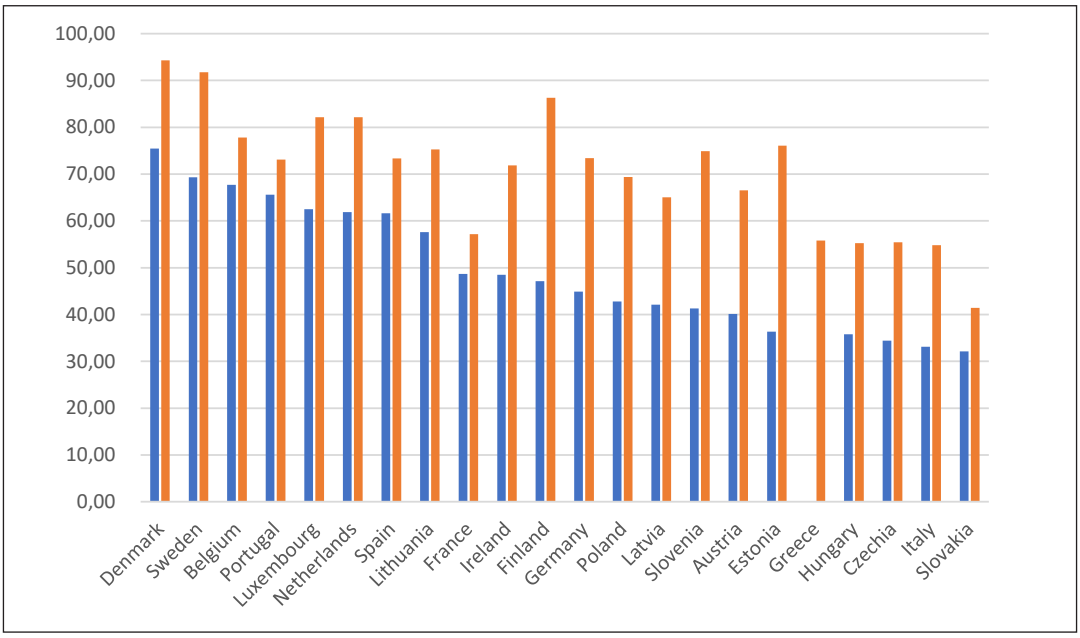

Figure 4 Businesses with a broadband download speed at least 100 Mbit/s (per cent), 2020

Source: OECD dataset 'ICT access by business'

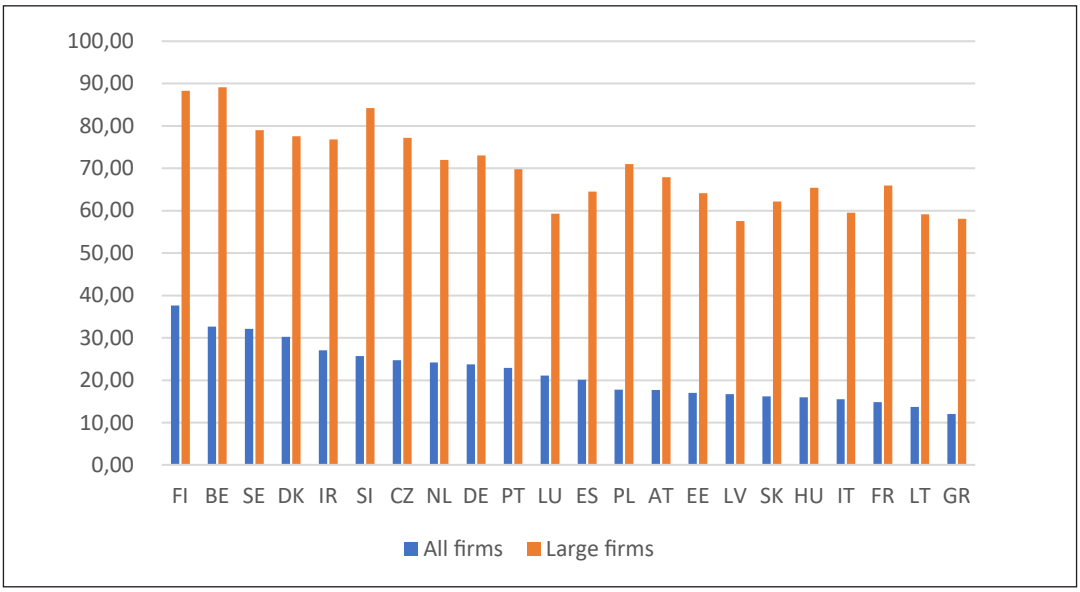

Figure 5 Businesses that provided any type of training to develop ICT related skills of the persons employed, within the last 12 months (per cent), 2020

Source: OECD dataset 'ICT access by business'

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The Chinese model of development: A special East-Asian path of development for avoiding the middle-income trap?

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Abstract

Over the past couple of years, China has made formidable efforts to shift to new sources of economic growth, modernise the structure of its economy, accumulate human capital, and boost local innovation in order to graduate to a high-income economy. However, the pace of growth has slowed down in the past few years, entailing the risk of the country being stuck in a so-called middle-income trap (MIT). This paper reviews China's chance of avoiding the MIT by analysing four groups of factors – three quantitative and one qualitative – and using Japanese and South Korean development as reference points. The paper concludes that China is likely to be able to avoid the MIT and is expected to move into the high-income (HI) band within 7–8 years thanks to its achievements and structural reforms that have already begun. However, the paper also raises the question whether China will be able to avoid the 'post-trap' situation – the high-income trap – that has already trapped Japan and South Korea in the HI band.

Keywords: middle-income trap; Varieties of Capitalism; development; China; 'third way'; Chinese model

1 Introduction

Japan in the 1950s and many other developing countries in Asia and Latin America in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s produced spectacular and rapid economic growth and development, partly through government-led measures to promote exports and to protect certain industries. A few decades later, China took similar steps to develop its own economy. However, some of the growth of the above-mentioned Asian or Latin American economies sooner or later slowed down, then stagnated. The official name of this phenomenon – the middle-income trap (MIT) – was coined in the twenty-first century (Gill & Kharas, 2007; Kharas & Kohli, 2011). While MIT as an analytical framework is the subject of intense scholarly debate, avoiding the MIT has become part of official Chinese political discourse, and the question whether this is avoidable under the current state-led model is at the heart of analysts' concerns (see for instance Lin & Zhang, 2015, or the 13th Five-Year Plan [2016–2020]).

However, to date China is far from having reached a status of economic stagnation, although economic growth has undoubtedly slowed down, triggered by several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Now the question is whether China – as a result of its domestic problems such as an aging society, regional inequality, public debt, and the current pandemic – will suffer the same fate as Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia, and will not be able to cope with structural problems and maintain productivity growth.

The main question explored in this article is whether China will be able to avoid the MIT. The analysis is based on both quantitative and qualitative factors and uses Japanese and South Korean development as a reference point. Drawing on a systematic review of the literature, the author maps existing easy-to-measure indicators that quantify China's progress in shifting to a new development trajectory, as well as some hard-to-quantify factors that can only be circumscribed using general and qualitative terms. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the burgeoning literature and analyse the chances of Chinese development leading to a high-income economy. The paper also raises the question whether China will be able to avoid the 'post-trap' situation – the high-income trap – that has already trapped Japan and South Korea in the high-income (HI) band: this involves slowing growth, an aging society, increasing inequality, a decline in innovation potential, polarized society, and political tension.

The article is structured as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical background, with particular reference to the MIT and the Varieties-of-Capitalism (VoC) literature. This is followed by a brief description of the methodology. Drawing on the framework presented in the theory and methodology sections, the next section presents the four groups of factors of Chinese development. The main arguments are then brought together in the discussion section, and this is followed by a short conclusion and description of implications.

2 Theoretical background

In this section, the author outlines the theoretical background, with particular reference to two theoretical frameworks, the middle-income trap phenomenon, and the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) concept.

2.1 Framing the middle-income trap concept in East Asia

The term 'middle-income trap' was first mentioned by Gill & Kharas (2007) to refer to the examples of Latin America and the Middle East in connection with the economic renaissance of East Asian countries. In line with later authors (Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2009; Ohno, 2010), the former pointed out that maintaining growth in middle-income countries can pose serious challenges that can only be overcome with appropriate economic and institutional reform, including innovation, new technologies, and education. Since then, several authors (Eichengreen et al., 2011; 2013; Kharas & Kohli, 2011; Lin, 2011; Felipe et al., 2012; Didier et al., 2016; Jayasooriya, 2017) have attempted to explain why countries are stuck in the MIT. According to the majority of them, the underlying reasons are that countries run out of economic growth factors as determined by Lewis's dual sector model on sectoral change (1954) – that is, cheap labour and the opportunity for technology adoption.

The term 'middle-income country' therefore generally refers to countries that have produced rapid growth over a long period of time and thus have become middle-income countries relatively fast, and within this category they have quickly moved from the lower to the upper level. Nonetheless their further catching-up to the high-income level has not always been successful and a majority of them are stuck at the middle level. Most studies do not provide a precise definition, but rather describe the potential characteristics of MIT. For example, Aiyar et al. (2013) mention five groups of factors as possible attributes of MIT: the quality of institutions; demographic characteristics; infrastructure; the macroeconomic environment and policies; and the structure of the economy. Felipe et al. (2012) also highlight the role of trade, including diversified and qualitatively sophisticated exports, as well as the role of structural transformation. In addition to demographic and macroeconomic variables, other authors (e.g. Eichengreen et al., 2013; Jayasooriya, 2017; Glave & Wagner, 2017) also mention the role of human capital and education, as well as the role of innovation and new technologies.

The author took the World Bank classification thresholds[1] as a basis for this study, assuming that China is in the upper-middle income (UMI) band, but is gradually approaching the high-income (HI) category (see Figure 1).

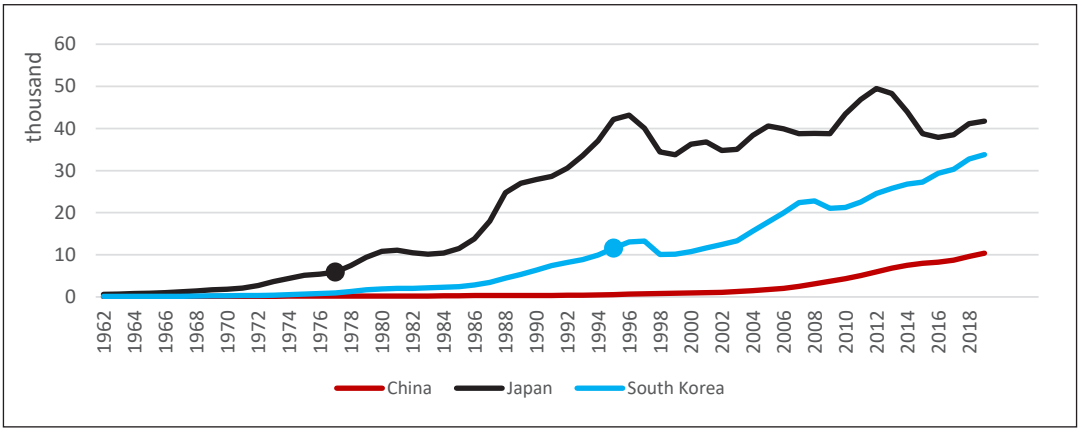

Figure 1 GNI per capita in Japan, South Korea, and China, 1960–2019 (thousand dollars)

Source: World Bank
Note: points indicate the year of entering the high-income band.

Asian Development Bank economists (Felipe et al., 2012) examined the growth of 124 countries based on the Maddison (2010) database, supplemented by the World Economic Outlook (WEO) 2011 growth data. According to their findings (see Table 1), when focusing on East

[1] According to the classification of the World Bank, we can differentiate between low income (LI), middle-income – including lower-middle income (LMI) and upper-middle income (UMI) categories – and high-income (HI) countries. Based on the current thresholds, a country is in the low-income category if its Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is below $1,036; countries in the middle-income group are those where GNI per capita is between $1,036 and $12,535 (in the LMI category if GNI is between $1,036 and $4,045 and in UMI category if GNI per capita is between $4,045 and $12,235); while all countries with a GNI per capita of above $12,535 are considered high-income countries.

Asian cases (although in different periods), South Korea was able to climb up from the LMI to the UMI category within 19 years, while for China this process took 17 years. Japan, on the other hand, spent 35 years in the lower-middle income band. China has been in the UMI band since 2009. Accordingly, one of the next challenges the Chinese government is facing is managing the transition to the HI category, a challenge that has been identified in various statements by Chinese leaders in recent years. According to Lin (2021), by 2025 China will likely cross the threshold and enter the high-income economy band.

Table 1 Japan, South Korea, and China: entry into different income categories

	Year of entering LMI band	Year of entering UMI band	Year of entering HI band
Japan	1933	1968	1977
South Korea	1969	1988	1995
China	1992	2009	(?)

Source: World Bank and Felipe et al. (2012)

2.2 An East Asian variety of capitalism?

The VoC approach tries to understand the systemic variation in developed capitalist economies' politico-economic institutions (Amable, 2000). As opposed to the Washington consensus and traditional neoclassical approaches that assume convergence among economies, it emphasizes the existence of different capitalist trajectories (Hall & Soskice, 2001) and distinguishes two main types of national political economies: Liberal Market Economies (LME) and Coordinated Market Economies (CME). The literature, however, does not provide conclusive evidence concerning the applicability of the VoC approach to Asian economies, while a few authors try to position these economies in – or in between – the aforementioned types of capitalism. Witt and Redding (2013) claim that only Japanese capitalism can be integrated into the VoC approach, while the economies of other countries are fundamentally distinct to Western types of capitalism. They underlined the large diversity of Asian economies according to various factors related to VoC. As far as the analysed countries are concerned, China belongs to the (post-)socialist category, Korea is an advanced Northeast Asian economy, while Japan forms a group in itself. Other authors highlight further factors that influence Asian capitalism: for example, Andriesse et al. (2011) propose a link between regional VoCs and global value chains in Asia, while there are papers which locate one (Korea: Condé & Delgado, 2009; China: Witt, 2010) or more (Hoen, 2013) Asian economies on the spectrum of either the LME–DME line, in an extended VoC model, or analyse them according to the areas defined in the VoC approach.

Regardless of their fit (or lack thereof) with pre-existing VoC types, the East Asian development that unfolded from the 1960s onwards, including the Japanese, Taiwanese, and Korean economic miracle, opened a new chapter for economic theories: the concept of the developmental state was born, and the concept of various ways of 'catching up', wherein

state intervention and support play an important role, became gradually accepted (see Johnson, 1982; Amsden, 1989; Wade, 1990; Birdsall et al., 1993). After the Asian financial crisis in 1998, the popularity of the developmental state model began to decline (Ricz, 2019), but the subsequent analyses often highlighted the importance of the economic engagement of the state in East Asian economies.

East Asian countries indeed share several similarities in their development. Significant investment in human resource development, as well as the ability to absorb new technologies, are just a few of these common features. Although a high population density and scarcity of natural resources are thought to be a disadvantage rather than an economic advantage, during the twentieth century these factors have conditioned these countries to act and develop, preventing complacency or the postponement of the decisions necessary for development. Furthermore, East Asian countries share additional, non-economic commonalities, including ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, being relatively compact – i.e., undivided – geographical units, having a manageable population size, and Confucian traditions

3 Methodology

A number of characteristics have been mentioned above that can play a significant role in avoiding MIT through strong potential or effective economic policies. The majority of these indicators need to be considered when answering the question whether China will be able to avoid the MIT and shift to a new development trajectory. Drawing on a systematic review of the literature – considering the relevant MIT and VoC literature, the author's knowledge of the East Asian region, as well as the main features of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean development – the author maps pre-existing indicators that both quantify and qualify China's progress in this endeavour, drawing parallels with previous successful examples of the development of Japan and South Korea. For the latter purpose, current Chinese data is compared with data from Japan and South Korea in 1977 and 1995, respectively, given that the two countries became HI countries in these years. In addition to the reference years, we also compared Chinese data with the latest Japanese and Korean numbers to obtain a more nuanced picture of the magnitude of China's backlog. We used datasets from international organizations such as the World Bank and OECD, as well as national statistics.

Regarding the methodological steps, first, the author created three quantitative groups of factors to be analysed through the lens of the MIT framework. These are (1) the characteristics of structural transformation; (2) demographics; and (3) the role of education and innovation. Irrespective of China's current growth deceleration, these quantitative indicators suggest the highly effective implementation of a seemingly over-ambitious roadmap of catch-up and achievement of high-income status. The author found, however, that besides these easy-to-measure indicators that are used in international comparisons, some hard-to-quantify factors that can only be circumscribed in general and qualitative terms also need to be considered. Therefore, the author decided to pick a fourth – qualitative – factor: (4) the role of the state; that is, the analysis of institutional and political aspects using the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) approach (see Table 2).

Table 2 Quantitative and qualitative approaches in the analysis

quantitative		**qualitative**	
framework: middle-income trap (MIT) literature		framework: Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) literature	
1) Specificities of structural transformation	• structure of economy • share of trade, consumption and investment • savings, public debt and capital inflows	4) Role of the state: the analysis of institutional and political aspects	• political system • role of direct state intervention in the economy (state ownership and informal control) • various mechanisms of economic coordination (market, bureaucratic, ethical)
2) Demographic characteristics	• population growth • aging • activity rate		
3) Factors of education and innovation	• PISA results, secondary and higher education indicators • R&D expenditure, TFP, high-tech export, patents		

4 Chinese development factors in the light of Japanese and Korean examples

Drawing on the framework detailed above, this section reviews each of the four groups of characteristics in four subchapters, presenting the current situation in China, and drawing parallels with Japanese and Korean development or highlighting the absence of related factors.

4.1 The characteristics of structural transformation: the structure of the economy and the drivers of productivity

According to the structuralist school of development economics – Lewis (1955), Kuznets (1966), Kaldor (1967), and Chenery and Taylor (1968) – economic growth represents the process of the structural transformation of production. This includes the transfer of resources – labour and capital – from lower to higher productivity sectors, typically from agriculture to industry and services. Considering the above, in its own specific way all the three examined East Asian economies are in an advanced stage of development, as the predominance of the secondary and tertiary sectors shows (see Figure 2). Comparing the current Chinese data with those years that Japan and Korea became HI countries – 1977 and 1995 –, the primary, secondary, and tertiary sector to GDP ratios are at comparable levels. In the context of structural transformation, it should be noted that according to the International Labour Organization the share of people employed in agriculture is still significant in China, at least 27 per cent of total labour force (compared to 3.7 and 5 per cent in Japan and Korea, respectively) – i.e., the surplus of labour from the agricultural sector has not moved to the industrial sector (as predicted by the Lewis model).

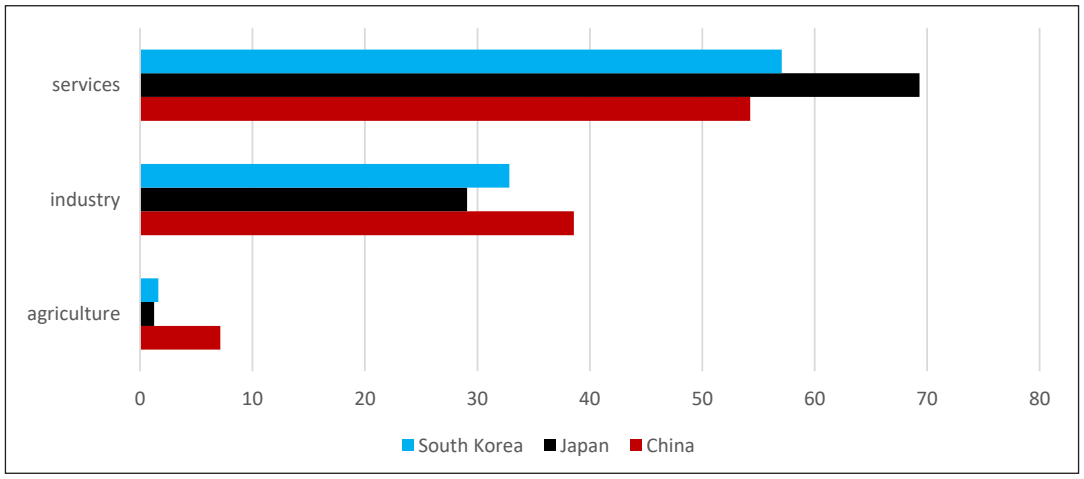

Figure 2 Sectoral contribution to GDP in Japan, South Korea, and China, 2019 (per cent)

Source: World Bank

For Japan and South Korea, when entering the HI band the productivity growth required for continued economic growth was primarily driven by innovation and new technologies, while structural transformation had already occurred. The Chinese economic miracle was, however, driven mainly by structural transformation – the redistribution of the above-mentioned production factors and investments; i.e., the transfer of labour from low-productivity to high-productivity sectors, or from state-owned to privately-owned companies. Similarly, the Chinese leadership is addressing the current economic challenges through structural transformation, and transforming the economy from an export- and investment-driven one to a domestic consumption-driven economy that is based more on the tertiary rather than the secondary sector (see, for instance, the 13th Five-Year Plan [2016–2020]).

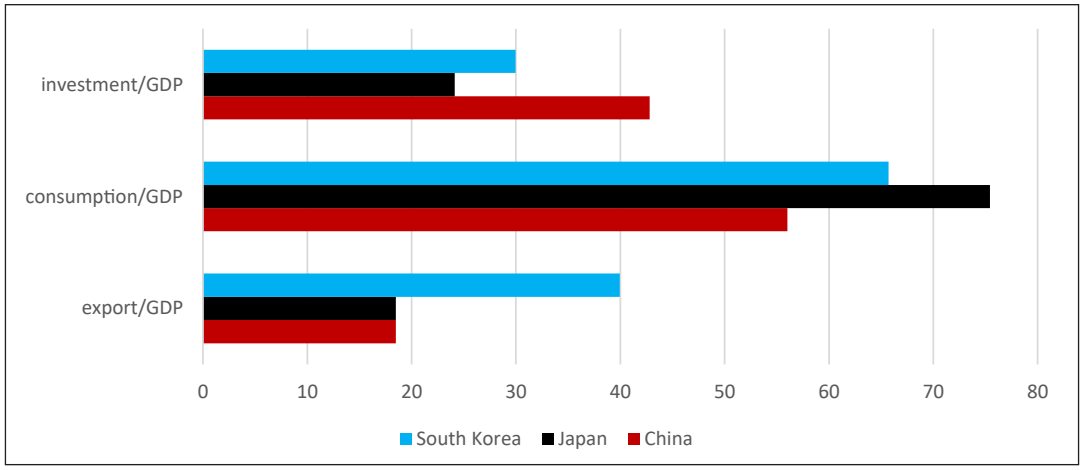

Figure 3 Savings, investment, consumption and exports as a percentage of GDP in Japan, South Korea, and China, 2019

Source: World Bank

Consumption-to-GDP ratios stabilized at around 50 percent in Japan and Korea several years before reaching the HI level, while the ratio of investment-to-GDP steadily declined in the years prior to reaching the threshold. For China, there has been some decline in the investment-to-GDP ratio since 2014, but is still at a much higher level than in the other two East Asian countries currently, and even higher than in those countries in 1977 and 1995 (31 and 37 per cent, respectively) when they entered the HI band. In the case of the export-to-GDP indicator, it should be noted that – in terms of trade-to-GDP ratios – Japan was a much less open economy in 1977 than Korea in 1995 and in both countries exports started to increase significantly after they entered the HI band. In the case of China, however, this ratio has been decreasing since 2006, with the exception of some minor rebounds. As far as gross savings are concerned, China is well ahead of the other two, even it used some of its reserves following the 2008 economic crisis to avoid a more severe economic slowdown.

According to Felipe et al. (2012), the more diversified a country's exports and the more capable it is of producing and exporting sophisticated products, the more likely it is that the country will be able to develop, compared to those countries that are successful in a single sector. A positive example is Korea, which became a successful exporter in several sectors, unlike, for example, the Philippines or Malaysia, which have only been successful in certain segments of electronics. Therefore, with regard to commercial structure, there are many parallels in terms of composition and proportions in Japan and Korea: computing and ICT devices, machines, and various transport equipment account for more than half of exports, but chemicals, metals, and precision equipment also represent a significant share. There are a number of similarities with China, although China remains competitive with many low-cost, labour-intensive products, too, resulting in a significant share of such products in Chinese exports. Consequently, although China's largest export products are electrical machinery and equipment, metals, furniture, and textile products continue to play a major role.

The biggest challenge for China in terms of further development is perhaps the large amount of investment in the internal market, which – unlike in the Japanese and Korean case – does not necessarily stimulate efficiency and competitiveness, but serves political – state, corporate or party policy – goals (Szalavetz, 2010), such as the preservation of the stability of the state and the Communist Party. Consequently, support for state-owned enterprises has, in many cases, ignored real economic performance.

4.2 Demographic characteristics

In East Asia, the engine of rapid growth was always fuelled by the young and increasing labour force, therefore the age distribution of the population is a factor that indeed determines development (see Bloom et al., 1999; Mason, 2001; Aiyar et al., 2013). An aging society is challenge common to all three countries, despite the fact that their roots are different: while it was the natural consequence of development in Japan and Korea, it has been artificially triggered in China with the 'one child policy'. However, the author assumes that even without the one child policy China would probably have reached the current population level and age distribution somewhat later.

For Japan and South Korea, when entering the HI band, the annual growth rate of the population was around 1 percent, and this then declined further (see Figure 4). In Japan, the rate is already negative, while in Korea and China it is expected to peak in around 2030. However, there has been a slight positive shift in China, thanks to the government's new policy of 'one family, two children'.

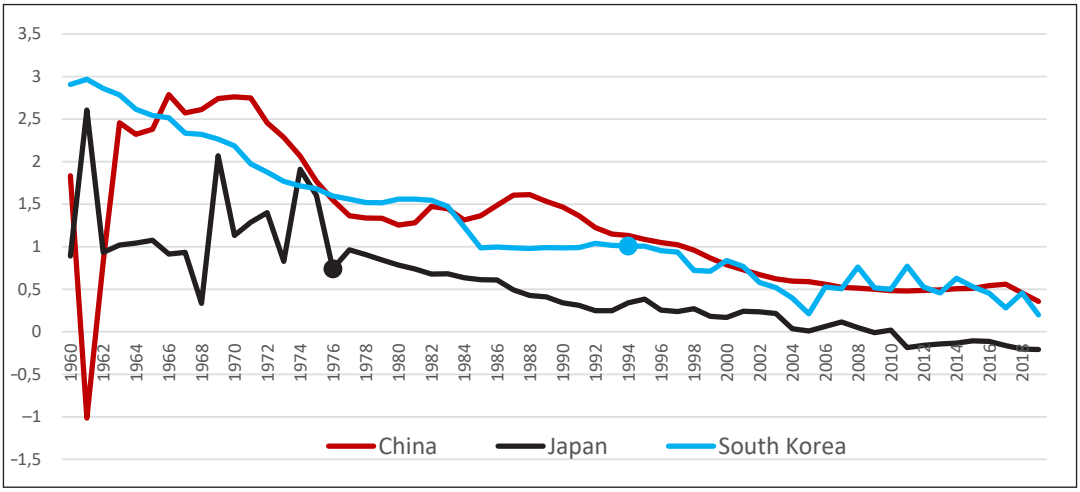

Figure 4 Annual population growth rate in Japan, South Korea, and China, 1961–2019 (per cent)

Source: World Bank

Note: points indicate the year of entry into the high-income band

In addition to the differences in the major triggers of aging, the degree of aging also differs between China and the two HI East Asian economies. In China, only after 2050 will a quarter of society be made up of people over the age of 65, while in Japan this is already a sad reality, and Korea will soon face similar problems, as indicated in the most recent census. If we compare the three countries according to current data, the age dependency ratio is the most favourable in China while the worst in Japan. As Figure 5 shows, the aging of the population is relatively slower in China, but its rate is already worse than in the other two countries at similar stages of development, i.e., in 1977 and 1995. The situation is similar for children (0–14 years), only the trend is declining – i.e., there are fewer young people for every 100 elderly citizens: 24.5 in China, 21.3 in Korea, and only 18 in Japan. However, for Japan and Korea, this indicator was well over 30 when they entered the HI category.

As a result of the growing number of elderly people and decreasing number of young people in the population, the active working-age population (15–64-year-olds) is also decreasing in all three countries. In China, this group has been declining since 2010 and currently accounts for 72.2 per cent of the total population. According to IMF estimates, over the next three decades the size of the working age population in East Asia may fall by hundreds of millions. For China, this means approximately 170 million fewer workers (Amaglobeli & Shi, 2016), which is likely to influence the rate of productivity growth.

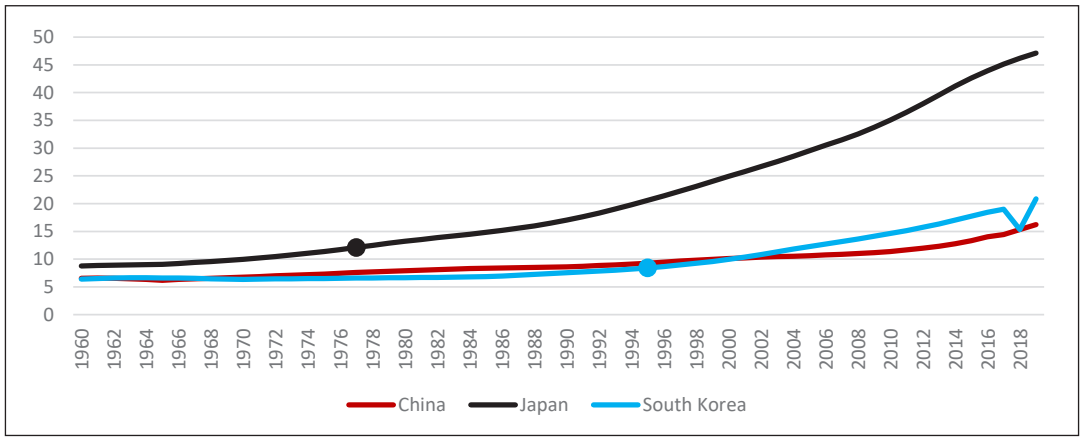

Figure 5 Age dependency ratio (old) in Japan, South Korea, and China, 1960–2016 (per cent)

Source: World Bank

Note: points indicate the year of entry into the high-income band

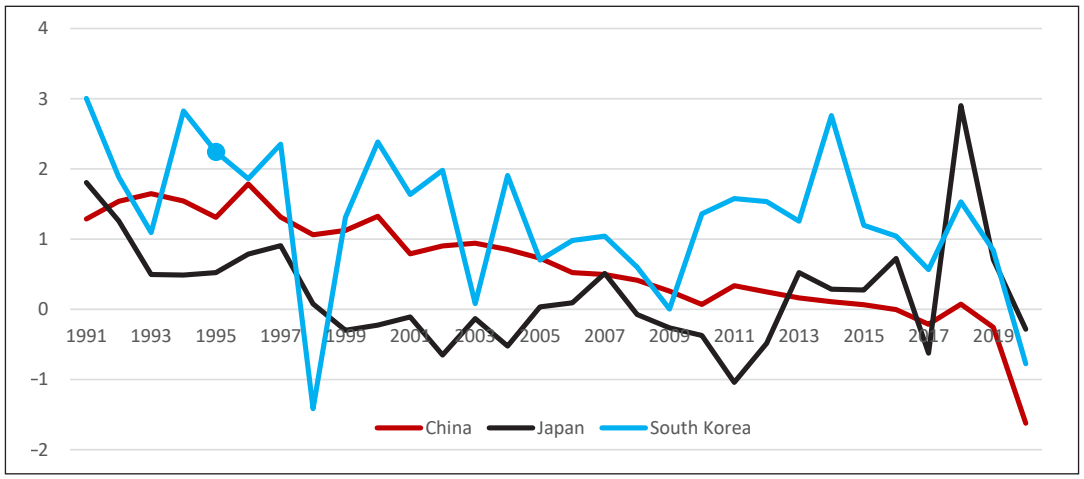

Figure 6 Labour growth rate in Japan, South Korea, and China, 1991–2020 (per cent)

Source: World Bank

Note: points indicate the year of entry into the high-income band

Regarding the decline in labour market participation in China, it should be noted that this is not only the result of population decline, but may also be influenced, for example, by the rapid expansion of higher education in the 1990s, the previous withdrawal of women from the labour market, as well as a general decline in labour market participation with all age groups. For example, with the expansion of higher education, young adults will enter the labour market later, but with better qualifications and, as a result, will contribute to future productivity growth. Furthermore, this process can also increase the mobility of the workforce, which also implies the possibility of increasing economic efficiency. In the case of

China, the labour market inactivity of some active-age people, for example women, is clearly the result of the development of the last ten to fifteen years, which has enabled Chinese families to reach a certain level of prosperity. In this regard, China has also been following in the footsteps of Japan and Korea.

The Chinese labour force will indeed continue to decline in the long term, but at the same time its productivity is growing at a rapid pace, as the accumulation of human capital in China is close to that of the developed economies, not to mention the positive effects of robotization, which is also spreading China-wide.

4.3 The role of education and innovation

Eichengreen et al. (2014) have shown that slower growth is less common in countries where most of the population has at least a secondary education. They also emphasize the role of 'high-quality human capital' (as opposed to 'poor quality'), which is indispensable for high value-added activities and for the successful management of structural transformation (see also Tho, 2013, p. 110). Likewise, Flaaen et al. (2013) as well as Jimenez et al. (2012) found a correlation between avoiding the MIT and the spread of secondary education and, as a consequence, a stronger middle class.

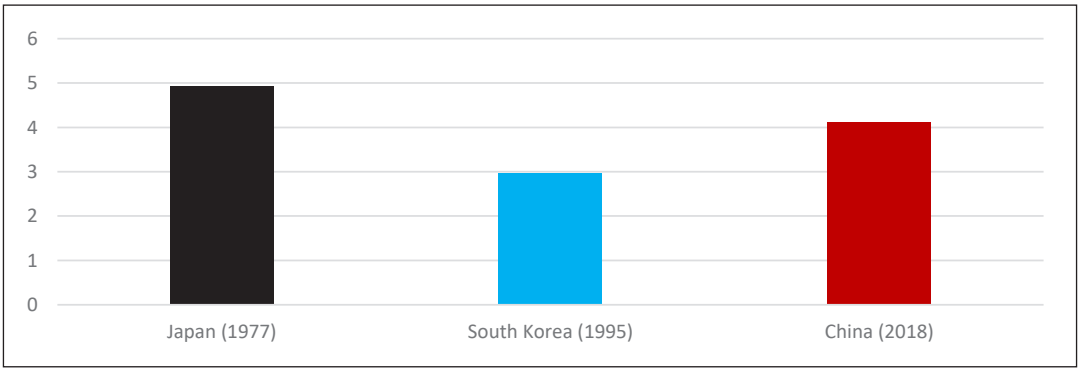

Figure 7 Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese spending on education as a percentage of GDP

Source: World Bank (for Japan and South Korea), National Bureau of Statistics and OECD (China)

With regard to government spending on education (see Figure 7), China has made significant progress since the beginning of the twenty-first century: while in 1999 less than 2 percent of GDP was spent on education, in 2016 the figure was already 5 percent. If we compare this with respective data for Japan and Korea when entering the HI category, we can conclude that China is not lagging behind at all. Regarding participation in education (see Table 3), enrolment rates are traditionally high in East Asia, typically above the OECD average. China's figures for 2010 are close to those of the previous Japanese and Korean reference levels, but below them, while 2015 OECD data for China show more development. However, in terms of the level of education, catching up by 2010 was not so obvious in terms of secondary and tertiary education (see Table 4).

Table 3 Enrolment rates in Japan, South Korea (percentage of total population)

	Year	Primary education	Secondary education	Higher education
Japan	1975*	99	90.47	24.60
South Korea	1995	95	96.00	52.00
China	2010	100	83.00	23.00
China (OECD)	2015	100	94.29	43.39

Source: Barro-Lee Educational Attainment Dataset and OECD

* Data for 1977 was not available

Table 4 Level of education in Japan, South Korea, and China Education Ratio (per cent)

	Year	Age group		Uneducated	Highest completed level of education					
					Primary school		Secondary school		Higher education	
					total	completed	total	completed	total	completed
					(as a percentage of 15-to-64-year-olds)					
Japan	1975	15	64	0,2	40.9	28.9	46.5	27.3	12.4	6.7
South Korea	1995	15	64	2.7	12.4	11.9	60.7	45.9	24.1	12.9
China	2010	15	64	2.6	20.8	13.1	71.8	24.7	4.8	2.6

Source: Barro-Lee Educational Attainment Dataset and OECD

* Data for 1977 was not available

Although more recent data on Chinese education was not available at the time of writing this paper, based on the author's own experience there has been significant development in China both in the field of secondary and higher education since 2010. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, China, eight million students graduated from Chinese universities in 2017, nearly ten times as many as in 1997. Fresh graduates are almost immediately absorbed by the labour market: over 90 per cent of them are employed within six months. Behind this significant increase a combination of several factors can be found: the new requirements of the growing middle class and the demands of economic growth have had the same effect as government policies explicitly aimed at broadening higher education. Nevertheless, the share of graduates in secondary and higher education in China is still lagging behind the reference data for Japan and Korea. One of the potential explanations for this is the relatively large proportion of people – 27 per cent – employed in the primary sector, since there is probably less demand for secondary and tertiary education. In the long term, however, the proportion of people working in the agricultural sector will decrease, while the proportion of graduates in secondary and higher education is expected to increase further.

In order to measure the quality of skills acquired in education, the author used the results of PISA surveys in the three countries. The first such survey was conducted in 2000 and China did not participate that time, but only from 2015. Although it is not possible to compare the current Chinese data with the usual reference data of 1977 and 1995 for Japan and Korea, respectively, it is hard to find any backlog, since China's scores were already above the OECD average (see Table 5) according to 2015 data, and ahead of those of Japan and Korea by 2018. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that PISA results may show a more positive picture of the quality of education than the reality, while the students who are surveyed do not necessarily represent the whole country.[2]

Table 5 Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese PISA results, 2018 (2015)

	Science	**Reading**	**Mathematics**
OECD average	489 (493)	487 (493)	489 (490)
Japan	529 (538)	504 (516)	527 (532)
South Korea	519 (516)	514 (517)	526 (524)
China	590 (518)	555 (494)	591 (531)

Source: OECD

In addition to the PISA results, the quality of the education system can also be measured by the recognition of educational institutions, such as the position of universities in international rankings. Here, too, China performs well: in the 'World University Rankings 2020' – for example, two Japanese universities (University of Tokyo – ranked 36, Kyoto University – 65) and two Korean universities (Seoul National University – 64, Sungkyunkwan University – 89) were listed together with three Chinese universities (Tsinghua University – 23, Peking University – 24, University of Science and Technology of China – 80) in the first 100.

As mentioned earlier, apart from the spread and quality of education, the MIT literature highlights the role of innovation, too. Lin & Zhang (2015:45) emphasize that innovation is a 'key driver of long-run growth, one that is particularly important for middle-income countries'. Zhuang, Vandenberg and Huang (2012) also conclude that, in order to avoid the MIT, continuous industrial development can ensure innovation and the shift from a low-cost to a high-value-added economy. There are dozens of books and studies on the innovation capacity of the East Asian countries and the relationship between innovation and economic growth, therefore the author limits the analysis to those factors that are relevant based on the MIT literature and draws conclusions on the basis of total factor productivity, R&D expenditure, number of patents, and high-tech exports.

Technological development and innovation can be illustrated by total factor productivity (TFP), which measures productivity calculated by dividing total production by the weighted average of inputs, i.e., labour and capital. Eichengreen et al. (2012) explained 85

[2] This is especially the case for China because, with the permission of the OECD, the sample is selected from the most developed and urbanized regions of China (Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang) rather than the whole country.

percent of economic slowdown as due to a decline in the growth rate of TFP, while the decline in labour and capital played a relatively minor role. Bulman et al. (2014) and Jitsuchon (2012) also found that countries that successfully avoided the middle-income trap showed relatively high TFP growth; consequently, TFP-driven growth – rather than input-driven growth – could be one of the cornerstones of economic growth in developing countries (Tho, 2013).

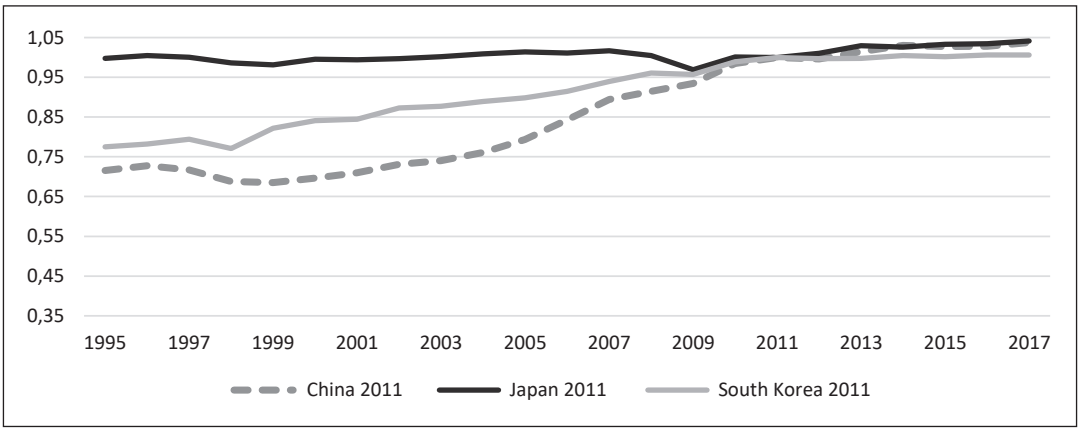

Figure 8: Total factor productivity (TFP) growth at constant prices (2011 = 1) in Japan, South Korea, and China, 1995–2017

Source: University of Groningen, Penn World Table (Feenstra et al. 2015)

The TFP data calculated – and collected up to 2017 – by the University of Groningen support the above-described conclusions, as Chinese TFP has indeed been growing steadily in recent decades (see Figure 8).[3] Chinese TFP growth exceeded that of its competitors until 2010, when the pace of TFP growth started to slow down sharply in all countries. However, as far as the level of TFP is concerned, Figure 5 shows that, despite this relatively rapid growth, catching up has not started yet: China still lags far behind both its US and East Asian competitors, although the latter – i.e., Japan and South Korea – have not caught up either.

R&D expenditure, which has a strong effect on TFP growth, is also a significant element based on the literature that maps the results of economic development: this expenditure is mentioned in connection with and independently of TFP. Figure 9, using data from the World Bank, shows Chinese R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP: the progress over the past two decades is striking. Although China's performance is still lagging behind, for example, Japan and South Korea, where R&D spending is traditionally high, China's R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP is close to the levels of the European Union, Australia, and Singapore.

[3] It should be noted, however, that the TFP database compiled by the University of Groningen is one of the most optimistic databases, especially when it comes to Chinese data, so this result is more of an assumption than a clear conclusion. For instance, according to the OECD (2019), there was a significant decline in TFP starting from 2012.

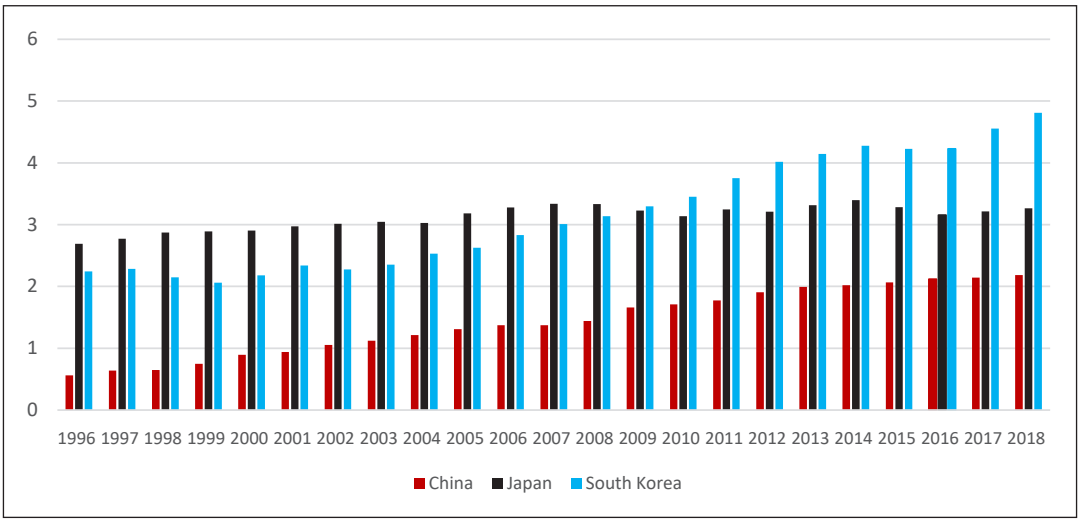

Figure 9 R&D spending as a percentage of GDP in Japan, South Korea, and China, 1996–2018

Source: World Bank

Although differences among government policies and the domestic regulatory environment make it difficult to compare patent applications and cross-country subsidies, it is worth noting that in 2016, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), China's State Intellectual Property Office (SIPO) processed 42.8 per cent of global patent applications. With more than 1.3 million registrations, China processed more than twice as many registrations as the United States, four times as many as Japan, and six times as many as South Korea.

Finally, it is also worth examining the development of China's high-tech exports (Figure 10). According to Felipe et al. (2012), the more diversified a country's exports and the more capable it is of producing and exporting sophisticated products, the more likely it is that the country will be able to develop, compared to those countries that are successful in a single sector. A positive example is Korea, which became a successful exporter in several sectors, unlike, for example, the Philippines or Malaysia, which have only been successful in certain segments of electronics. Eichengreen et al. (2013) concluded that the chance of a growth slowdown is lower among countries that produce high-tech products, while Felipe et al. (2012) also found that countries that managed to avoid the middle-income trap are characterised by a relatively more diversified and sophisticated export basket.

As far as the share of sophisticated products is concerned, according to the latest available Chinese data, nearly 24 percent of manufacturing exports are exports of high-tech products. This proportion is well above the world average (16 per cent) and also exceeds that of developed countries (in the case of the USA, the EU, and Japan, it is around 13–14 per cent).

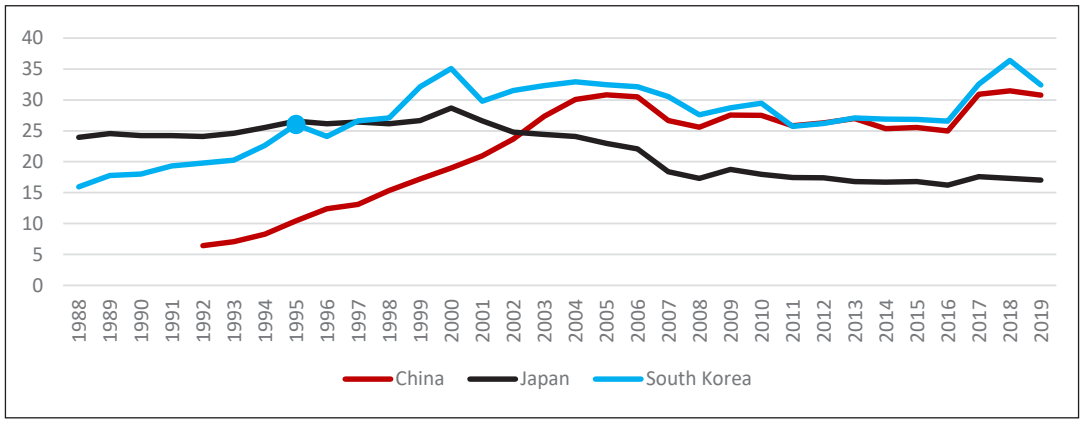

Figure 10 Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese high-tech exports as a proportion of manufacturing exports (per cent), 1988–2016

Source: World Bank, own calculations

Note: points indicate the year of entering the HI band

4.4 Role of the Chinese state: An analysis of institutional and political aspects

As mentioned in the theory section of this paper, most states in Asia may be defined as developmental states or predatory states (Johnson, 1982; Evans, 1995), with some of them representing hybrid cases. According to Witt & Redding (2013), China, for example, combines predatory elements, in which top leaders and their families use the state to enrich themselves. Based on this study, only Japanese capitalism can be integrated into the VoC approach, forming a group in itself, while China belongs to the (post-)socialist category and Korea is a so-called advanced Northeast Asian economy.

In this section, the author briefly analyses whether the Chinese political model is a fixed and static system or a flexible and dynamic one – a hybrid solution with its own values – that reflects its ability to address the challenges associated with the transition to high-income status. To answer this, the three main elements of the system paradigm (Kornai, 2000) should be examined; that is (1) the political system, (2) the role of direct state interventions in the economy, and (3) various mechanisms of economic coordination. Nölke et al.'s (2015) state-permeated market economy model uses five elements to analyse the impact of the state: labour relations, education, and the transfer of innovations have already been analysed in previous chapters, while we briefly analyse corporate governance and finance here.

Regarding the political system, there is a broad debate about China's politico-governmental form, with contributions from around the world. When summarizing the opinions about this, different approaches are identifiable. According to one of them, China has for a long time possessed the main characteristics of a capitalist system, although the size of the state-owned sector remains huge, while in its politico-governmental form it is clearly a dictatorship in all respects (Kornai, 2016). China has an authoritarian regime that scores

14 according to Freedom House's Freedom in the World ranking[4] (its East Asian neighbours, Japan and South Korea score 96 and 84, respectively). Kornai (2016) emphasizes that capitalism is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy, but he also adds that there is no clear sign that China is displaying more democratic tendencies, although the transition from socialism to capitalism began decades ago.

A different view is that China began a transition from socialism to capitalism and from dictatorship to democracy long ago, but it did so very slowly and cautiously. Therefore, this process will take a long time, but the final form will be more capitalist than socialist. This interpretation does not exclude the possibility of a slow transition towards less repressive politico-governmental forms. Indeed, the most optimistic expectation is that the transition ends in democracy, or as the author of this paper calls it, *'sinocracy'* – that is, democracy with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese themselves – together with other scholars – consider the Chinese system to be a unique formation that is semi-socialist and semi-capitalist at the same time. According to Kolodko (2018, pp. 21–22) the 'capitalism versus socialism' distinction is becoming more and more deceptive, as it is not the various '-isms' that provide the key to understanding the heart of the matter, but the '…with Chinese characteristics' element. Naughton (2017, p. 21) also adds that China can be viewed as moving towards a 'very particular flavour of socialism that is authoritarian and top-down, but with a market economy based primarily on private ownership'. This formation indeed differs from autocracy or dictatorship – therefore, China can be considered the main manifestation of a *'third way'*. The Chinese *'zhongti xiyong'* principle – that is, the idea that the traditional Chinese elements are the base; the practical solutions can be taken from the West – also supports this idea, but a famous pronouncement of Deng Xiaoping's can also be referred to: 'It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice.'

Concerning the role of direct state intervention in the economy, the concentration of economic power is indeed significant in all of the East Asian countries, but China is paradigmatic in terms of the state control of major corporations. As Székely-Doby (2017) points out, while the economies of East Asia, including Japan and South Korea, have created economies of scale through genuine international competition with their 'national champion' companies, in the case of China – with time-varying intensity – the preservation of the stability of the state and the Communist Party of China appears among the guiding aspects, and as a result the support of state-owned enterprises has, in many cases, ignored real economic performance. Nölke et al. (2015) emphasizes that the case of China is unique since there is neither classical top-down control nor a 'single guiding enterprise' model such as the South Korean Chaebol or Japanese Keiretsu models.

The Chinese model is characterized by multiplexity; i.e., the presence of multiple business systems: besides the often non-competitive and indebted state-owned enterprises (SOEs), there are profit-oriented and competition-driven state-controlled enterprises (such as *China Mobile*) as well as private firms (*Huawei, Lenovo, and Geely*) that have also been able to became successful companies on the Chinese market as well as globally. Moreover, such non-

[4] A country or territory is awarded 0 to 4 points for each of 10 political-rights indicators and 15 civil liberties indicators, which take the form of questions; a score of 0 represents the smallest degree of freedom and 4 the greatest degree of freedom. The aggregate score of a country is between 0 and 100, where 0 is the least free, and 100 is the most free.

state national firms are considered 'national champions' in China (Naughton, 2007; Ten Brink, 2013). Apart from the IT sector, which is deeply integrated into global production networks, most industries in China are dominated by national (state-owned, state-controlled, or Chinese private) capital, not by foreign multinationals. Chinese firms primarily use domestic funds and bank credit for their operations, partly because major banks are also not privately, but state-owned. As a result, global capital markets play a minor role in funding new investments (Nölke et al., 2015).

There are different views about the characteristics of the above-mentioned Chinese state control. One refers to the already-mentioned state-permeated market economy (Nölke et al., 2015), wherein mechanisms of loyalty and trust between members of state-business coalitions are based on informal personal relations. Witt & Redding (2013) consider the Chinese system to be one which combines predatory elements with personal relations. Informal relations – so-called *guangxi,* the network of mutually beneficial relationships which can be used for personal and business purposes – indeed play a unique role in Chinese corporate as well as political relationships.

Regarding mechanisms of economic coordination, the decision-making in most Asian states is usually statist. Statist, however, does not necessarily mean purely top-down decision-making in the case of China, which is characterised by a mixture of top-down statism with a strong bottom-up element. These bottom-up elements are provided by the local variations of central institutions – or even informal institutions – which often supersede formal institutions (Witt & Redding, 2013), making the whole system more flexible. Successful institutional innovations diffuse across different localities and inform national-level institutional change (Xu, 2011).

5 Discussion

When reviewing China's chances of avoiding the MIT, we have shown that the current development – based on the large internal market, accompanied by the development of human capital and business incentives – is indeed suitable for transforming the Chinese modernisation trajectory. However, it is not necessarily accelerating China's economic growth. So far, the Chinese economy's performance indicators are determined by traditional drivers (such as infrastructure investment and new export-oriented production capacities) rather than by new growth drivers. In addition, the shift to more resource-efficient, higher value-added production will result in significant structural losses, which could adversely affect growth rates.

When analysing the first group of factors (structural transformation), the paper has pointed out that while productivity growth was primarily driven by innovation and new technologies in Japan and South Korea, China's economic miracle was mainly driven by structural change: the redistribution of production factors and investment, such as redirecting labour from low- to high-productivity sectors. Based on the data and processes analysed in this section, we can conclude that China is still in the process of structural reform, and this is expected to continue for a long time. By contrast, Japan and Korea were already successfully restructured when they entered the HI band. Consequently, the paper concludes that since the surplus of labour from the agricultural sector has not yet been completely

transferred to the industrial sector, China still has reserves to fuel its structural transformation. However, investment in the internal market can endanger efficiency and competitiveness.

In the case of the second group of factors (demographic characteristics), even if the three countries are at different stages of development, similar trends can be observed, especially when it comes to the ageing of societies. However, the very nature of ageing is different: it was artificially induced in China (the 'one child policy'), while in Japan and South Korea it was a natural consequence of development. The level of ageing is not the same, either: although the Chinese workforce will continue to decline in the long term, this trend might be offset by rapid growth in labour force productivity.

The most prominent as well as promising group of factors are those of education and innovation. China has made formidable efforts in recent years to improve the quality of and access to education, showing that it is definitely on the right track and is likely to be able to provide – and even expand – the human capital needed for further development, while its chances in the field of innovation are exceptionally good, as China is not lagging behind Japan or Korea at all.

When it comes to the fourth group of factors, in terms of political as well as institutional aspects China seems to operating differently from pre-existing models and represents a unique model on its own. This model can be characterized by a sustained – or even never-ending – transition from socialism to capitalism / from dictatorship to democracy. State control over corporations is significant is all areas, but this rather involves a mixture of top-down and bottom-up control, wherein multiplexity, informality, and personal relations also play an important role. Since this system is not borrowed from other nations but a 'specialty' of Chinese development and provides sufficient flexibility in the system, it might be able to provide internal stability in the long term – a vital element in the catching-up process.

6 Conclusions and implications

The study contributes to the theory and literature about the uniqueness of Chinese development by analysing four groups of factors – (1) the characteristics of structural transformation; (2) demographic characteristics; (3) the role of education and innovation; and (4) the role of the state, including the analysis of institutional and political aspects – and uses Japanese and Korean development for comparison. The paper concludes that, overall, and based on the analysed groups of factors, China is likely to be able to avoid the MIT, and is expected to move to the HI band within 10 years, thanks to its achievements and structural reforms that have already begun. The findings enhance the understanding of the Chinese way of development, highlighting both the specificities that differ from other East Asian ways of development, as well as similarities to these.

During the analysis of the above-mentioned groups of factors, relevant observations have been made as regards China's forthcoming challenges that future research should definitely address: namely, whether China will be able to avoid the 'post-trap' situation that trapped Japan and South Korea in the HI band. Stagnation, negative growth, and deflation have affected Japan for a quarter of a century, and are increasingly threatening South Korea, too. This 'high-income trap' (HIT) can be characterized by slowing growth, an aging society,

increasing inequalities, and a decline in innovation potential, and often lead to a polarized society and political tension, all of these being major challenges for governments. The HIT does not really differ from the basic problems of the MIT: growth in advanced (East Asian) countries has run out of steam; their development has stalled while economic and institutional reforms have either proved to be ineffective or have only given temporary momentum to the economy.

For the time being, China is benefiting from these processes: while high-income countries are lagging behind in, for example, innovation, China is constantly moving up global value chains. The Chinese economy has undergone profound changes over recent years, both in terms of objectives and structure. While we do not yet see the results of the structural reforms that have been introduced gradually over the years, their impact will certainly increase the quality of the country's economic development. With the 'new normal' of Chinese growth (6–6.5 per cent), in line with World Bank estimates, China's development will continue to be twice the world average and a multiple of the growth rate expected in developed countries – at least for a while: China, although currently an upper-middle-income country that is just knocking on the high-income door, already shares many of the attributes of countries in the high-income trap, as listed above, and a stagnating/slowing Chinese economy will definitely have a direct impact on both developed and emerging regions.

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Attitudes and relations between the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority in Slovakia

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Abstract

The article concerns relations between Slovaks and the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. The aim of this study is to determine current Slovak attitudes towards the Slovak Hungarians and to analyse differences in attitudes held by Slovaks in regular direct contact with the Hungarian minority and those with almost no contact. Another aim is to map current attitudes among the Hungarian minority towards the Slovak majority, and to find out how Slovak attitudes are perceived by the minority. The data collection methods were a survey (N = 107) and focus group interviews (N = 36). The results show that Slovaks in regular contact with Slovak Hungarians have significantly more positive general feelings, are less socially distant, and feel less anxious about the Hungarian minority than Slovaks with almost no contact. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of trust and behavioural intention. Group interviews with Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians showed that the biggest obstacle in relations between Slovaks and the Hungarian minority is first language use and the language barrier.

Keywords: intergroup attitudes; Slovakia; Slovak majority; Hungarian minority; contact hypotheses

1 Introduction

To prevent extreme forms of negative behaviour towards outgroups, it is crucial to understand how we can reduce negative attitudes between various groups. In Slovakia, Hungarians constitute the biggest national minority group. Although Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians[1] appear to co-exist in Slovakia without major problems, Slovaks still have negative attitudes towards this minority (e.g., Šoucová, 1994; Benkovičová, 1995; Krivý, 2004; Gallová-Kriglerová, 2006; Gallová Kriglerová & Kadlečíková, 2009) and the relationship be-

[1] Slovak Hungarians (also referred to here as the Hungarian minority with no change in meaning) have Slovak citizenship and Hungarian ethnic identity.

tween Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians has never been conflict-free. This can be seen from the conflict in 2019 over the adoption of a law prohibiting the playing or singing of another state's national anthem at public events in Slovakia unless an official state delegation is present. This law on state symbols was proposed because the Hungarian anthem is played and sung at home games of the football club DAC Dunajská Streda in Slovakia and forms an important part of the club's Hungarian identity. Research by Gallová Kriglerová and Kadlečíková (2009) shows that Slovaks' negative attitudes towards Slovak Hungarians relate mainly to the expression of their identity, especially Hungarian language use and Hungarian ethnicity (i.e. characteristics, signs, and symbols reflecting a common origin and culture). Historical traumatization and different perceptions of history are also sources of mutual tension and negative attitudes between the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority (Chmel, 2004).

In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of attitudes and relations between the two groups, we used a mixed-methods approach. We first examined Slovak attitudes towards the Hungarian minority through a questionnaire and then explored the reasons behind these attitudes in more detail using the focus-group method. The aim of Study 1 was to explore the current attitudes of Slovaks towards the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia and whether they differ depending on the direct contact with this minority. Although some studies have confirmed the positive effect of contact on the perception of Slovak Hungarians by Slovaks, no studies have directly examined the effects of contact focusing on different variables of attitudes, such as social distance, anxiety, trust, or behavioural intentions, which we focus on in Study 1. In Study 2, we mapped the attitudes of Slovaks towards Slovak Hungarians in more depth and scrutinized minority attitudes towards the majority using focus groups. We additionally focus on how Slovak attitudes are perceived by the minority itself to obtain a more complex picture, since minority perceptions tend to be overlooked in mainstream research. As there is little qualitative research on Slovaks' attitudes towards the Hungarian minority and vice versa, our research offers a new perspective on the attitudes and relations between the two groups and the relations between majority and minority groups in general.

2 The Hungarian minority in Slovakia

Members of the Hungarian minority are citizens of the Slovak Republic who identify as Hungarian and have a Hungarian ethnic identity (Lampl, 2013). Their roots go back to the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, when part of the Hungarian population found itself on the Slovakian side of the border (Šutaj et al., 2008). The Hungarian minority therefore inhabits a relatively cohesive area in southern Slovakia. Based on the findings from the Carpathian Panel, members of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia actually speak two languages: their mother tongue, and Slovak, although they speak the Slovak language with minor errors (Lampl, 2007). Nevertheless, part of the population in the southern areas is still of Slovak ethnicity, therefore many public interactions are bilingual. Moreover, in cases of ethnically mixed-marriage families not only are both languages used to some extent, but we can even talk about a hybrid Slovak and Hungarian identity (Árendás, 2011), which is difficult to generalize as being Slovak or Hungarian. The last census in Slovakia gave citizens the opportunity to declare their identities, including having a dual ethnic identity, which could be useful especially for mixed families. According to

the most recent census from 2021, the Hungarian minority accounts for 7.75 per cent of Slovakia's population, another 0.6 per cent of the population chose Hungarian ethnicity alongside another ethnic identity, and Hungarian is the first language of 8.5 per cent of Slovak citizens (Štatistický úrad SR, 2022). The Hungarian minority in Slovakia is still the largest minority, even though the data show that the assimilation of Hungarians in Slovakia continues.

Empirical research has shown that the Hungarian minority has a strong ethnic identity and sense of belonging, and this is reflected in regional and national policy mechanisms (Šutaj et al., 2008). The Hungarian national minority receives institutional support in Slovakia: there are Hungarian-language newspapers, radio stations, television channels, cultural clubs, theatres, primary and secondary schools, and Hungarians can study in Hungarian at the tertiary level in some universities. They also receive cultural support from their kin state – Hungary (Stroschein, 2018). Minority members have a double sense of belonging: a formal one, to which they are linked by citizenship, and a cultural one, through which they are emotionally attached to another nation (Culic, 1999). Lampl (2013) examined the opinions of Slovak Hungarians concerning what determines whether someone is Hungarian. According to 93 per cent of respondents, the basis is that one considers oneself Hungarian (a sense of personal belonging) while the following criteria were Hungarian mother tongue and sympathy with Hungarian culture. When asked what they perceive as their homeland, 35 per cent of respondents stated their birthplace. However, the birthplace could mean a municipality, region, or Slovakia. Furthermore, 33 per cent of participants consider Slovakia to be their homeland, 21 per cent mentioned '*Felvidék*',[2] and 3–4 per cent perceive the entire Hungarian language territory or Hungary as their home. These data show that although Slovak Hungarians have a Hungarian identity, they consider Slovakia or the southern part of Slovakia to be their home rather than Hungary. The results of research conducted by Lampl (2013) therefore confirm the double sense of belonging described by Culic (1999). Based on the results of the Carpathian Panel, 85 per cent of the respondents have no or rarely a problem with living in Slovakia as part of the Hungarian minority and have weak migration intentions (Lampl, 2007). Veres (2013) found that members of the Hungarian minority from various countries (Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine) have the strongest sense of belonging with Hungarian minority members from other countries and perceive a greater social distance to the majority population of a particular country compared with Hungarians from Hungary. The sense of belonging to the Hungarian ethnic group and strong ethnic identity of the community are important to the survival of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, but reduce opportunities for contact with the majority population and for fostering close intergroup friendships. However, based on the findings of Csepeli et al. (2002), mixing of the Hungarian minority and the majority is typical in South Slovakia – e.g., the children of more than one-third of the ethnic Hungarians make friends with children from the Slovak majority; also, Slovak university attendance is frequent among Slovak Hungarians.

[2] A relatively cohesive area in southern Slovakia close to the Hungarian border where the majority of Slovak Hungarians live (together with the Slovak majority).

3 Intergroup attitudes

Contact theory (Allport, 1954) holds that intergroup contact can significantly contribute to reducing prejudice between groups, especially if the following conditions are met: equal status, institutional support, opportunity of personal contact, cooperation, and common goals. Intergroup contact works primarily through three mediators – knowledge, empathy, and anxiety (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). The strongest of these is intergroup anxiety (Barlow et al., 2012), which increases prejudice, while empathy and being more knowledgeable about the outgroup reduce it (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). More contact can reduce anxiety and consequently prejudice. In a meta-analysis of over 500 studies, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found that intergroup contact significantly improved majority attitudes towards various minority groups. On the other hand, a lack of contact leads to other groups being perceived as alien and distinct and to an inability to understand and empathize with individuals in other groups (Stephan & Stephan, 2017). However, some researchers claim that while attitudes towards outgroups become more positive through contact, behaviour often remains unchanged (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Quillian et al., 2017), although in research conducted by Koball and Carels (2015) direct contact also contributed to approaching behavioural intentions beyond improving attitudes. Davies et al. (2011) document that prejudice reduction is particularly effective when the contact takes the form of close intergroup friendships.

Pettigrew et al. (2011) included growth in mutual trust among the positive outcomes of intergroup contact. Tam et al. (2009) found that via increased trust and more positive attitudes towards the outgroup positive contact with outgroup members predicted stronger behavioural tendencies to approach the outgroup. Work by Bastian et al. (2012) as well as research by Gyárfášová et al. (2000) has confirmed that direct contact contributes to reducing social distance between groups. In addition, contact effects appear to be universal – between nations, genders, and age groups (Pettigrew et al., 2011) – but Miles and Crisp (2014) point to contact having weaker effects on attitudes towards ethnic minorities. This may be due to the cultural roots of prejudice or the normative acceptance of prejudice by peers from the majority group or society (Forscher et al., 2015).

Relations between the Slovak majority and Hungarian minority largely meet Allport's criteria for fruitful contact. Slovak Hungarians are institutionally supported and have similar status and the same standard of living in Slovakia as the majority population (Stroschein, 2018).[3] The criteria of personal contact, cooperation, and common goals are met on the regional/community level, where Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians have the opportunity to meet, achieve common goals, and to build friendships (i.e. school and working environment, urban/neighbourly relations). Concerning cooperation and the achieving of common goals, the political activity of Slovak Hungarians can be perceived as conflicting with the interests of the Slovak majority and arousing mistrust. Mistrust is often present in intergroup relations (e.g., Kramer, 1991; Kramer & Messick, 1998) as the other group perceives a threat to its 'status legitimizing worldview' (Vorauer et al., 1998; Plant, 2004). Moreover, minority members that strongly identify with their ingroup experience greater distrust and prejudice from

[3] However, some parts of the minority are disadvantaged, such as in education (lack of educational content in the language of the minority, i.e. translations of pedagogical documents and textbooks) (Burjan et al., 2017), or the lack of guarantees of Hungarian language use in official communication.

the majority than do weakly identifying individuals (Major et al., 2002; Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). On the other hand, shared social identity can improve relations and facilitates the building of trust in the other group (Brewer & Kramer, 1986).

As no studies have explicitly measured the effects of direct contact between the Slovak majority and Slovak Hungarians on various intergroup outcomes, in our study we sought to verify contact theory in more depth and provide a qualitative analysis of the attitudes and relations between the two groups.

4 Research findings on Slovak–Hungarian relations

Research has repeatedly shown that the significant part of the Slovak majority exhibits negative attitudes towards the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. In 2003, 25.6 per cent of a representative sample of Slovaks had reservations about the Hungarian minority (Krivý, 2004). In research by Gallová Kriglerová and Kadlečíková (2009), young people (eighth and ninth grade) expressed negative attitudes towards the Roma, the Hungarian minority, immigrants, and LGBTI people. Related to the perception of this minority, up to 63.3 per cent of Slovak people agreed with the statement 'Hungarians should speak Hungarian at home only, in public they should speak Slovak' and this response was strongly correlated with responses agreeing with the second statement 'Slovakia is the country of Slovaks, and so it should remain' (Gallová Kriglerová & Kadlečíková, 2009). Similarly, members of the Hungarian minority stated that they had experienced discrimination based on speaking Hungarian as their first language and their Hungarian identity (Mészárosová-Lamplová, 2009). Lampl (2013) carried out several sociological studies on representative samples of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. According to her results, 84 per cent of Slovak Hungarians consider it important to declare their national identity. Of these, only 70 per cent of Slovak Hungarians admit to their Hungarian identity in all circumstances, 15 per cent declare it only if they do not feel threatened, and 15 per cent report that they do not deal with the issue of the declaration of personal identity (Lampl, 2013). These results indicate that some members of the Hungarian minority feel threatened or fear discrimination, preventing them from disclosing their identity in certain situations. Bordás et al. (1995) noted that conflict between Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians arise mostly because of the Hungarian language use and the poor Slovak skills of minority members.

However, Slovak attitudes to ethnic Hungarians and relations between the two groups are perceived much more positively than those with either the Roma or immigrant community (Gallová Kriglerová, 2006; Bieliková et al., 2013; Bútorová & Gyárfášová, 2019). Mutual cooperation is more prevalent as conflicts at the residence level of living (Lampl, 2007). Surveys and research conducted in Slovakia have repeatedly confirmed that direct contact has a positive effect on intergroup relations. Slovaks in regular contact with the Hungarian minority have more favourable attitudes towards the minority, and evaluate relations between the Slovak majority and Hungarian minority more positively (Rosová & Bútorová, 1992; Šoucová, 1994; Gallová-Kriglerová, 2006). According to Šutaj et al. (2008), interethnic relations are best at the regional level where there is direct natural contact between people. Gallová-Kriglerová (2006) found that 60 per cent of the respondents who had direct contact with the minority evaluated relations between the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority as very good on a four-point scale ranging from 'very good' to 'very bad'. However, almost

60 per cent of participants with no direct contact with Slovak Hungarians rated mutual relations as very bad. According to Kambara (2015), most residents in the ethnically heterogeneous areas emphasize the peaceful everyday life between majority and minority members, in spite of some incidents of ethnic tension. Moreover, they maintain internal solidarity and respect by using narratives of a peaceful community (Kambara, 2017).

Although sociological research measuring attitudes between the Slovak majority and Hungarian minority at a general level suggest that the attitudes of Slovaks are more favourable in the case of direct contact with the minority, most of the studies conducted so far do not offer a deeper examination of the constituents of intergroup attitudes. The aim of our research is to obtain a more complex and in-depth view of intergroup relations in Slovakia through the prism of general feelings, social distance, intergroup anxiety, intergroup trust, and behavioural intentions. Moreover, the perception of the minority itself and their view of majority prejudices have often been overlooked in previous literature. In this respect we provide a perspective that is still under researched.

5 Quantitative study

The main aim of the study was to identify whether direct contact with the Hungarian minority is associated with Slovak attitudes towards the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. We assume that Slovaks in close contact with the Hungarian minority have fewer negative attitudes towards the Hungarian minority than Slovaks who do not have direct contact with the Hungarian minority.

5.1 Methods

The research sample was drawn from the adult population of Slovakia, divided into two groups – Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians. The original research sample of 146 Slovaks was obtained by convenience sampling. The sample consisted mostly of students from across Slovakia studying at universities in western Slovakia and some working people. An adult sample was used, as adults are more likely to move from their birthplace to cities and thus have greater access to people from different ethnic groups. They may therefore have more nuanced opinions and attitudes towards different minorities.

Participants completed an adapted version of Intermin (Lášticová & Findor, 2016), a questionnaire designed to measure attitudes towards the Roma. Subsequently, we divided the sample into two groups based on direct contact, which was the independent variable. Direct contact was measured by averaging responses to two items: frequency of communication, and frequency of time spent with members of the Hungarian minority. Respondents answered both questions on a seven-point scale: 1 – never, 2 – several times a year, 3 – once a month, 4 – several times a month, 5 – once a week, 6 – several times a week, 7 – every day. We excluded all those who selected '4' ('several times a month') in relation to any two items and whose score after averaging the two items was 3.5 or 4.5 so there was a greater contrast between the groups. The remaining participants were then divided into two groups: those with minimal or no contact with the Hungarian minority ('3' or less) and those with relatively regular contact ('5' or more). This reduced the sample to 107 respondents (22 men,

85 women), of whom 67 Slovaks (17 men, 50 women) were in regular contact with the Hungarian minority and 40 Slovaks (5 men, 35 women) had almost no contact with Slovak Hungarians.[4] Ages ranged from 19 to 40 years (*Mdn* = 22; *IQR* = 2).

The original validated Intermin questionnaire examines pupils' prejudices and attitudes towards Roma using five dependent variables: attitudes, social distance, intergroup anxiety, intergroup trust, and behavioural intentions. For the purposes of our research, we modified five items slightly for use with an adult population. Subsequently, we verified the comprehensibility and adequacy of the new items on a sample of 30 participants using cognitive interviews (Willis & Boeije, 2013). The target minority group was also changed. The original questionnaire measures prejudices and attitudes towards the Roma so we changed references from the Roma minority to the Hungarian minority in each item. Based on the cognitive interviews (N = 10), we concluded it was suitable for use with the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

General feelings were measured on a feeling thermometer on which respondents expressed cold to hot feelings towards the Hungarian minority on a scale of 0 to 100. Social distance was measured by three items on a scale similar to the Bogardus social distance scale: To what extent would the following situations be acceptable or unacceptable to you?: 'If a member of the Hungarian minority were your colleague at your workplace; 'If a member of the Hungarian minority would work with you in the office'; 'If a member of the Hungarian minority would go with your crew somewhere in the evening'. For each item, respondents could respond on a seven-point Likert scale from '1' (not acceptable at all) to '7' (entirely acceptable). Intergroup anxiety was measured by four items responding to the question 'How would you feel if a new employee who is a member of the Hungarian minority started at your workplace?'. The items were: 'I would feel fine'; 'I would feel weird'; 'It would make me nervous'; and 'It would bother me'. For each item respondents responded on a scale from '1' (does not describe my feelings at all) to '7' (completely describes my feelings). Trust was measured using three items measuring the general level of trust in Slovak Hungarians: 'Most Hungarians can be trusted'; 'I would trust an unknown Hungarian as much as any other unknown person'; 'In general, I trust Hungarians'. For each item, participants could respond from '1' (I disagree completely) to '7' (I totally agree). Behavioural intentions were measured by three responses to the question 'How would you react if a new employee who is a member of the Hungarian minority started at your work?'. The responses were: 'I'd like to learn more about him/her'; 'I'd like to talk to him/her'; and, 'I'd like to spend some time with him/her'. As in the previous case, participants could respond to each item selecting from '1' to '7'. Before data analysis, we re-coded all responses in reverse on the social distance scale so that higher numbers indicated greater social distance. For the anxiety scale, we reverse-coded only the values in one item ('I would feel fine'), so that higher values indicated greater anxiety. On the trust scale higher numbers point to higher levels of intergroup trust, and on the behavioural intentions scale higher values indicate approaching behavioural intentions (as opposed to distancing behavioural intentions). We took the average of the items in relevant variables to create a single number per variable.

[4] The sample size is in concert with the opinions of Borg and Gall (1979) who suggest that a survey research should have no fewer than 100 cases in each major subgroup and twenty to fifty in each minor subgroup.

We processed and evaluated the data obtained from our questionnaire using IBM SPSS Statistics. The intrinsic variability of dependent variables was measured using Cronbach α[5]. We also tested whether the dependent variables are normally distributed.[6] The results of the normality test are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Normality of dependent variables

Variable	**Regular direct contact**			**No regular contact**		
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	*df*	*Sig.*	*Statistic*	*df*	*Sig.*
General feelings	0.217	67	0.000	0.936	40	0.025
Social distance	0.491	67	0.000	0.664	40	0.000
Intergroup anxiety	0.345	67	0.000	0.797	40	0.000
Trust	0.181	67	0.000	0.887	40	0.001
Behavioural intentions	0.138	67	0.003	0.932	40	0.019

The variables do not have a normal distribution (*Sig* < 0.05) in either group. Therefore, we treated all dependent variables as ordinal variables. In the data analysis, we used the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test (M-WU) to determine the differences in the dependent variables between the two groups. We also explored the intercorrelations between the variables. Table 2 illustrates strong correlation between social distance and intergroup anxiety, moderate correlation between each variable with the feeling thermometer, and weak correlation between trust and social distance, trust and intergroup anxiety, trust and behavioural intentions, and social distance and behavioural intentions. As social distance and intergroup anxiety indicate negative attitudes, these variables negatively correlate with the other scales. All correlations were statistically significant, which indicates that the construction of the questionnaire meaningfully reflect various components of attitudes.

[5] The intristic reliability test indicated a good level of variability for intergroup anxiety and trust (α > 0.7) and an excellent level of variability in terms of social distance and behavioural intentions (α > 0.9).

[6] Given the size of the groups, we used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the group in direct contact with the minority (n = 67) and the Shapiro-Wilk test for the group not in direct contact with the minority (n = 40).

Table 2 Intercorrelations between the dependent variables

Variable	Spearman's rho			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
1. General feelings	–	–	–	–
2. Social distance	−0.471**	–	–	–
3. Intergroup anxiety	−0.451**	0.630**	–	–
4. Trust	0.497**	−0.329**	−0.244*	–
5. Behavioural intentions	0.449**	−0.319**	−0.319**	0.394**

Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$, ** indicates $p < 0.01$; $N = 107$

5.2 Results

General feelings. We tested contact theory on feelings towards Slovak Hungarians using a feeling thermometer. Table 3 illustrates our data. The difference between Slovaks in direct contact with the Hungarian minority and Slovaks with almost no contact with the minority is statistically significant and small. In accordance with the hypothesis, feelings towards Slovak Hungarians are more positive among Slovaks who are in regular contact with the Hungarian minority than among Slovaks not in regular contact with the minority.

Table 3 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the general feelings variable

	Attitudes					
	Q1	*Q2 (Mdn)*	*Q3*	*M-WU*	*Sig.*	r_m
With contact ($n = 67$)	50	70	90	898.5	0.004	0.28
Without contact ($n = 40$)	50	50	70			

Intergroup distance. The difference in intergroup distance between the two groups is statistically significant and moderate (see Table 4). In line with our hypothesis, Slovaks in regular direct contact with Slovak Hungarians had a lower social distance from Slovak Hungarians than Slovaks with almost no contact with them.

Intergroup anxiety. We also tested contact theory in the case of intergroup anxiety. According to our data, the difference between Slovaks with and without contact with Slovak Hungarians regarding the intergroup anxiety variable is statistically significant and small (see Table 5). Slovaks in close contact with the Hungarian minority feel less anxious about ethnic Hungarians than Slovaks who have almost no contact with them.

Table 4 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the social distance variable

	Social distance					
	Q1	*Q2 (Mdn)*	*Q3*	*M-WU*	*Sig.*	r_m
With contact (n = 67)	1	1	1	982	0.002	0.3
Without contact (n = 40)	1	1	2			

Table 5 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the intergroup anxiety variable

	Intergroup anxiety					
	Q1	*Q2 (Mdn)*	*Q3*	*M-WU*	*Sig.*	r_m
With contact (n = 67)	1	1	1.5	988	0.013	0.24
Without contact (n = 40)	1	1.375	2.5			

Trust. The difference between the groups in terms of trust in the Hungarian minority is not statistically significant. The direct contact hypothesis regarding trust was therefore not confirmed. Table 6 illustrates this result.

Table 6 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the trust variable

	Trust				
	Q1	*Q2 (Mdn)*	*Q3*	*M-WU*	*Sig.*
With contact (n = 67)	5	5.67	7	1123.5	0.157
Without contact (n = 40)	4.67	5.67	6.33		

Behavioural intentions. The difference between the groups in terms of behavioural intentions is not statistically significant, indicating that Slovaks in contact with the Hungarian minority do not demonstrate more approaching behavioural intentions towards them than Slovaks with almost no contact with Slovak Hungarians (see Table 7). For that reason, the hypothesis regarding this variable was not confirmed.

Table 7 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the behavioural intentions variable

	Behavioural intentions				
	Q1	*Q2 (Mdn)*	*Q3*	*M-WU*	*Sig.*
With contact (n = 67)	4	5.33	6.33	1131	0.174
Without contact (n = 40)	4	5	5.918		

5.3 Discussion

The results show that, consistent with contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015), Slovaks who are in frequent direct contact with Slovak Hungarians have more positive feelings towards Slovak Hungarians than do Slovaks with almost no contact. Similarly to the results of research by Gyárfášová et al. (2000) and Bastian et al. (2012), majority members in regular contact with minority members exhibited significantly reduced social distance from this minority than did people with almost no contact with the minority. Furthermore, Slovaks in regular direct contact with the Hungarian minority felt less anxious about them than Slovaks who did not have this direct contact.

However, we did not find support for contact hypothesis in all variables that were examined. There was no significant difference in trust levels towards the Hungarian minority among Slovaks who had direct contact and those who did not. Researchers claim that it is difficult to develop trust across group boundaries because people perceive people from other groups as different and as having conflicting goals and beliefs (e.g., Kramer, 1991; Kramer & Messick, 1998). People therefore tend to perceive ingroup members as more trustworthy than members of other groups (Kramer & Messick, 1998). This may be why Slovaks in direct contact with members of the Hungarian minority have more positive feelings towards them but not higher trust levels than Slovaks without direct contact with Slovak Hungarians. Moreover, Slovak Hungarians are emotionally attached to their kin-state (Culic, 1999), and feel a greater sense of belonging with Hungarian minority members and Hungarians than with the Slovak majority population. This can reduce the opportunity to foster close friendships and intergroup trust despite the contact between them. According to Brewer and Kramer (1986), shared social identity could improve relations and build trust between the two social groups, which might not be the case in this context.

We found no significant difference in terms of behavioural intentions between Slovaks in regular direct contact with Slovak Hungarians and those not – in contrast to, for example, Koball and Carels (2015). Tam et al. (2009) discovered that via increased trust and more positive attitudes towards the outgroup, positive contact with outgroup students predicted stronger behavioural tendencies to approach the outgroup. In our research, Slovaks' contact levels did not affect trust towards the Hungarian minority. This may be one of the reasons why contact hypothesis was subsequently not confirmed for this variable. We should point out that, compared to attitudes, the impact of intergroup contact on intergroup behaviour has also been found to be less consistent in other studies. Some studies have found that while

attitudes towards outgroup members become more positive, behaviour towards outgroup members remains largely unchanged with contact (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Quillian et al., 2017).

6 Qualitative study

The aim of this study was (1) to map the current attitudes of the Slovak majority towards the Hungarian minority in more depth, (2) to explore the attitudes of the Hungarian minority towards the Slovak majority, and (3) to identify how Slovak Hungarians perceive the attitudes of Slovaks. We used qualitative methods to explore how Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians perceive each other, how they feel about each other, how they get along, and how members of the minority perceive Slovak attitudes towards them. With Study 2, we wanted to obtain a more comprehensive picture of attitudes and relations between the two groups.

6.1 Methods

Fifteen Slovak respondents from Study 1 (five men and ten women) voluntarily participated in focus group discussions. There were three focus groups, each containing five participants. One focus group consisted of individuals with almost no contact with the Hungarian minority, the second group consisted of people in regular direct contact with the Hungarian minority, and the third group contained a mixture of individuals in/not in direct contact. All participants identified as Slovak, while 12 of them were studying at university and 3 working in Bratislava – the capital of Slovakia (all between 20 and 30 years old). Each participant came from an urban area, but from different regions: participants with no regular contact with the Hungarian minority came from the north or eastern part of Slovakia (except for one participant from Bratislava) where almost no Hungarians live. Participants in regular contact with the minority come from southern or western Slovakia, while some of them grew up in city with around 20 per cent Hungarians, and others have experiences with Hungarians through the school or work environment.

The Hungarian group consisted of 21 participants (11 men, 10 women) divided into three focus groups, each with seven people. They were reached through acquaintances or social networks to obtain a more varied sample from different regions of Slovakia. The criteria for participation in the focus groups was Hungarian ethnicity and a minimum age of 18 years. Ages ranged from 18 to 38 years old (*Mdn* = 22; *IQR* = 3). All Slovak Hungarian participants identified as members of the Hungarian minority and come from an area where a minimum of 20 per cent Slovak Hungarians live.[7] Some of them come from rural, and some from urban municipalities. Each participant had finished high school with Hungarian as the language of instruction, while 13 participants were continuing their studies at university in Slovakia, and 8 participants were already working. All participants but one had at least weekly contact with Slovaks (due to work, studies, or friends).

[7] If the citizens of the Slovak Republic who belong to a national minority make up at least 20 per cent of the population in the municipality, they may use the language of the minority in official communication in this municipality.

The focus groups were asked basic questions about their perceptions and the characteristics of the other group, their attitudes, feelings, and relations with members of the other group. We also asked members of the minority how Slovaks treated them and whether they perceived any advantages and disadvantages related to their Hungarian ethnicity. The focus groups with Slovak Hungarians were conducted in the Hungarian language as Hungarian is their first language so they could engage in discussion without a language barrier. First, we transcribed the group interviews verbatim and then analysed them in accordance with the principles of thematic content analysis (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). The categories thus created were then quantified according to the number of respondents whose statements belonged in that category, and/or using qualitative terms such as 'majority' (more than half the participants), 'some' (a third to half the participants), and 'a few' (less than a third of participants).

6.2 Results

Mutual perception. Some Slovak participants perceived Slovak Hungarians through the ethnic difference which is associated with symbols that are specific to Hungary or Hungarian ethnicity – e.g., the Hungarian language, Hungarian cuisine, thermal spas, and so on. The majority of participants viewed members of the Hungarian minority as ordinary people who speak Slovak with an accent or have to think more about Slovak words: 'I know a few people from the Hungarian minority, but really the only difference is the accent, otherwise they are normal people' (FG2SM4[8]). Slovaks in regular contact with members of the Hungarian minority also mentioned elements that distinguish Slovak Hungarians from Slovaks. These included greater national pride, or being proud of their identity, and being more direct and thinking about history differently.

Most members of the Hungarian minority perceived Slovaks as ordinary people that have some different characteristics to members of the minority. For instance, being less open, less prompt, less aware of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, and having different historical knowledge. A few participants mentioned that when they think of Slovaks, Slovak cultural symbols or country specifics appear to them, such as the Slovak language, mountains, Slovak folk costumes, or greater attachment to Slavic languages. Some participants claimed that Slovaks are same as the Slovak Hungarians and there is no need to categorize people: 'In my opinion, [it is] just the language. Personally, I don't think there is any difference. Just that they think in another language. When I talk to a Slovak, I sometimes imagine that if I was growing up in their environment, I would be the same person as I am now, I would just speak a different language' (FG3HM1).

Mutual feelings. A few Slovak participants felt positive emotions towards the Slovak Hungarians. They said that meeting a Slovak Hungarian was interesting as it was new, a chance to learn something about another culture: 'Positively, I learned a lot of Hungarian words at school, but I have forgotten them. In my opinion, it's good to get to know a different culture,

[8] We coded the participants based on the focus group they attended e.g. 'FG1' - focus group 1, followed by the ingroup they belonged to: i.e., 'H' – Hungarian or 'S' – Slovak, and their gender 'M' – man or 'W' – woman, and allocated a number to each participant in the focus group.

a different language, different customs, and I would like to work somewhere there is a multicultural mix' (FG2SW1). The majority of participants had neutral feelings towards Hungarians and did not single them out because of their nationality: 'I take it that they are our people [one of us], that's the way it is, I don't feel one way or the other about it' (FG1SM5). Some Slovaks in frequent contact with ethnic Hungarians said that when they are somewhere where there are more Slovak Hungarians than Slovaks, Slovak Hungarians speak Hungarian, and it makes them feel excluded: 'As I said, I'm the only Slovak in that group of friends, they are all Slovak Hungarians, so they tended to talk to each other in Hungarian and I couldn't understand a word' (FG3SW3). Some participants talked about having mixed feelings towards the Hungarian minority. Three respondents recalled having real concerns about what their family would think about them being in love with a Hungarian: 'It made me wonder what my family would think about it, I'm from the north and there is a slightly different mindset towards the Hungarians. From the beginning there were stereotypical views and prejudices that made my parents more cautious, but once they discovered he was exactly the same as the Slovaks and maybe even 100 times better, friendlier, then it was okay' (FG1SW1).

Hungarian feelings towards Slovaks fall into two major categories: neutral feelings, and a range of feelings related to the language differences. Some respondents had neutral feelings towards the majority, as they did in relation to the Hungarian minority. These participants did not perceive otherness on the basis of ethnicity or first language, and did not feel anxious or pressured in Slovak settings: 'I have no problem with the fact that I have to speak Slovak so I don't worry – sometimes being able to speak Hungarian was positive when we were supposed to translate a document from Hungarian to Slovak and they were glad. At work, they don't treat me differently because I am Hungarian' (FG2HW1). By contrast, some participants were anxious that the majority group would not accept them because of their identity or language skills. They used illustrative phrases such as 'how dare I speak Slovak?', 'what will he say when he finds out I'm Hungarian?', '[I don't know] whether he will accept me', and '[I don't know] how much he will accept me'. In addition, some participants felt unsure of themselves or stressed when communicating with Slovaks because they could not express themselves properly in Slovak.

Relationships. All the Slovak participants thought their relationships with members of the Hungarian minority were as good as their relationship with Slovaks. They stated that the person's personality was important in determining whether they formed a closer relationship, not whether the person was a Slovak Hungarian: 'Yes, I have Hungarian friends where I grew up, but I'm fine with that, I have no problem with it, and we don't disagree on things, have different opinions, we are friends and being Hungarian or Slovak makes no difference' (FG1SW3). A few respondents noted that Slovak Hungarians who have difficulty speaking Slovak have problems communicating with Slovaks, so do not interact closely with Slovaks because of the perceived language barrier: 'Personally, I have a colleague from somewhere in the south, and I have no negative or positive feelings when communicating with him. He is very uptight because his Slovak isn't very good and when we've had to deal with things he needed to understand, I could see he had a problem, that he didn't understand what I was saying, and so we had to give up' (FG3SW4). Three respondents recalled having negative experiences of some Slovak Hungarians – for example, they had shouted at Slovaks, or because they were unwilling to speak Slovak or worried about doing this.

Most members of the Hungarian minority claimed to be on just as friendly terms with Slovaks as they were with Hungarians. Respondents pointed out that this was in the context of friendly, day-to-day relationships: 'It also very much depends on how well the person knows you, because I have very good friends, those normally, I haven't noticed them treating me differently because of my ethnicity' (FG2HM2). Some participants said they had good relations with Slovaks but feel there is a barrier because of the differences in language, ethnicity, or history: 'I mean, I seem to be a very different person when I'm speaking my native language, I am much more [myself] than when I'm speaking Slovak or German. I feel that when we start a discussion that the other person can't truly understand me as a person because I'm not speaking in my native language' (FG1HM5). Three participants had encountered contempt or conflict for speaking Hungarian in the company of Slovaks or because of linguistic otherness (accent): 'I have a former classmate from Eastern Slovakia, and we are friends and seven of us go out almost every month, old college classmates and [it's] all right, but when I talk to her, it always ends in her saying "When will you learn Slovak?"' (FG1HW6).

Slovak Hungarians perceptions of Slovaks' attitudes towards them. Some participants mentioned that Slovaks had neutral attitudes towards them. They stated, for example, that 'they do not distinguish between us', 'they have no problem with it', 'I haven't noticed that they have prejudices', or that 'they understand me'. Some respondents thought some Slovaks had positive attitudes and said that some Slovaks had praised them for speaking good Slovak despite being Hungarian, or helped them out. On the other hand, some participants said they felt that some Slovaks kept their distance and were not interested in befriending members of the Hungarian minority. This type of attitude was particularly common at the getting acquainted stage, when some Slovaks preferred not to engage with Slovak Hungarians, and were not interested in getting to know them properly: 'they find out you're Hungarian, and "Aha!" and then they don't talk to you [except] when they have to… they welcomed me, and then when they had had a drink and learned that I was Hungarian, they didn't talk to me so much, they kept their distance' (FG2HW3). Some participants have already met with contempt for not being able to speak Slovak or for making mistakes. Such situations were experienced mainly by members of the Hungarian minority who do not speak Slovak well: 'Once I worked as a lifeguard in Štúrovo [in Slovakia] and Esztergom [across the border in Hungary]; there were lots of Slovak and Czech tourists, and in Štúrovo many tourists hated hearing me make mistakes when speaking Slovak and could hear my accent, while in Esztergom they were glad I could understand them and that they didn't have to speak English and could rely on me because I spoke Slovak' (FG2HW7). Some respondents had encountered negative statements and contempt because of their Hungarian identity; for example, when they were speaking Hungarian, for wearing a T-shirt with a Hungarian slogan, or for having a Hungarian name. These comments were made by strangers who seemed to have strong prejudices against the Hungarian minority: 'Well, once I was on a high school trip in Spišská Nová Ves [north Slovakia] and an elderly gentleman stopped us and said what were we thinking of, speaking in Hungarian, and then he spat at us, that is a really extreme case, but it happened' (FG1HW7).

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of having Hungarian ethnicity in Slovakia. All the focus group participants thought they were disadvantaged because of their Hungarian ethnicity, and this related to the language difference. These disadvantages can be divided into emo-

tional (symbolic) ones and real ones. The first category includes feeling stressed or anxious because they cannot find the right word, or use the wrong word ending; in other words, because of their Slovak language skills: 'I didn't notice the disadvantage, it was more a feeling that when I talk Slovak I am more frustrated and stressed, although when I hear myself making a mistake I correct myself right away, it's harder to find the right word when speaking' (FG2HW1). The second category consists of real disadvantages that are linked to the linguistic shortcomings of some ethnic Hungarians when studying at a Slovak university or in work situations: 'Yes, we have found ourselves at a disadvantage several times – for example, if you want to be a driver and are sent to Žilina for the psychological testing [for your driving test]. There are 500 questions in Slovak, and when you start reading and realize you don't understand some words … and out of the 500 questions I often came across a word I didn't know' (FG1HM3). On the other hand, participants thought the greatest advantage of being a Hungarian in Slovakia was speaking two languages: Slovak and Hungarian. Individuals also perceived other personal benefits of their identity, such as having a wider horizon or more friends: 'I think the advantage of being bilingual is that we are not attached [solely] to Slovakia or to Hungary. So you can imagine your future anywhere in these countries because we were born here' (FG2HM6).

6.3 Discussion

The discussion in the focus groups revolved mostly around language. There are two issues associated with the language barrier in relations between Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians. Participants from the Hungarian minority said they had good relations with Slovaks but felt there were some problems resulting from the different language, ethnicity, and history. They either felt the barrier was the result of their own language difficulties or their identity, which prevented them from revealing their 'true self', or they felt the barrier was constructed by Slovaks – some of whom do not fully accept the Slovak Hungarians because of their different identity or language differences (accent). A few Slovaks and Hungarians talked explicitly about the other group having different views of history. The common history of the Slovaks and Hungarians, or more precisely the differences in how that history is perceived, lead to negative attitudes and tensions between the two ethnicities (Bordás et al., 1995; Chmel, 2004).

One of the main reasons why Slovaks are so sensitive to and intolerant of Slovak Hungarians not speaking Slovak fluently may lie in their shared history in Austria-Hungary. At that time, the state language was Hungarian, and ethnic Slovaks were forced to declare themselves as Hungarian for existential reasons, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (a process known as 'Hungarianization') (Šutaj, 2012).

On the other hand, for the Hungarian minority it is important to declare their national identity (Lampl, 2012), but they cannot always admit it. We also examined how the Hungarian minority perceives Slovaks' attitudes towards ethnic Hungarians. Slovaks mainly have neutral attitudes towards the Hungarians, while some members of the Hungarian minority encountered contempt for not speaking Slovak fluently or because they expressed their Hungarian identity (speaking Hungarian, wearing T-shirts with Hungarian slogans, having a Hungarian name). This finding is in line with research by Mészárosová-Lamplová (2009) which found that members of the minority felt discriminated against mainly because they were Hungarian-speakers and of Hungarian ethnicity. Speaking Hungarian, wearing

Hungarian slogans, and having a Hungarian name are symbols of identification with the Hungarian ingroup, and Slovaks who identify strongly with the Slovak ingroup may perceive these phenomena as disapproval of their Slovak 'status-legitimizing worldviews' and feel threatened by them (Vorauer et al., 1998; Plant, 2004). This corresponds to the finding by Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt (2009) that negative attitudes tend to be expressed towards minority groups with strong identities.

Members of the Hungarian minority perceived the most serious disadvantages associated with ethnicity to be real problems related to the Slovak language skills of Slovak Hungarians, be they studying at a Slovak university or in work situations. Research by Lampl (2013) has shown that some members of the Hungarian minority still have negative feelings about getting a job on the Slovak labour market, although this sentiment declined in strength between 2001 and 2011. In contrast, participants perceived the Slovak Hungarians' greatest advantage to be the ability to speak both languages.

7 General discussion

The relations between the Hungarian minority and the majority population in Slovakia is under researched. Previous literature suggests (e.g., Šoucová, 1994; Gallová Kriglerová & Kadlečíková, 2009) that Slovaks in regular contact with the Hungarian minority have more favourable attitudes to the minority than Slovaks with no contact with the minority, but the mechanisms behind this phenomenon have not been explored in depth so far. Therefore, our research was designed to obtain a more complex overview of the attitudes of Slovaks towards Slovak Hungarians, testing contact hypothesis by explicitly examining various components of attitudes: feeling thermometer, social distance, anxiety, trust, and behavioural intentions. Moreover, using focus group discussions we offer a more in-depth view of the relations of Slovak Hungarians and Slovaks, and we identify that the main obstacle to the better coexistence of the two groups is language. Further discussion is based on mixed-methods research.

Our result shows that consistent with the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015), Slovaks who are in frequent direct contact with Slovak Hungarians have more positive feelings and exhibit less prejudice against Slovak Hungarians than do Slovaks with almost no contact. Previous research carried out in Slovakia has also confirmed the effectiveness of direct contact between the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority (e.g., Gallová-Kriglerová, 2006; Rosová & Bútorová, 1992). A more fine-grained picture shows that Slovaks in regular contact with the Hungarian minority exhibited a significantly reduced social distance and lower anxiety from the Hungarian minority than did Slovaks with almost no contact with the minority. The results of the focus groups also show that there are no serious barriers between Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians that would lead to an increase in social distance. We found differences in the knowledge level of participants with regular and almost no contact: Slovaks in regular contact with the Hungarian minority were more aware of the latter group's characteristics. Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) rank knowledge among the primary mediators of positive intergroup contact, so the lack of knowledge among respondents not in regular contact with Slovak Hungarians could have resulted in less positive attitudes being reported in the questionnaire.

Moreover, Slovaks in regular contact with minority members had more nuanced perceptions and attitudes towards them, while Slovak participants without contact with Slovak Hungarians perceive them mostly neutrally. In particular, participants without contact with the minority only briefly stated that they have no experience with Slovak Hungarians and the only thing which they perceive is the lack of language skills or different pronunciation. On the other hand, those with direct contact with Slovak Hungarians could fully describe some specifics of the minority group, involving their pride in their ethnic identity, adhering to traditions, or watching Hungarian television channels. Lampl (2007) also found that in terms of reading newspapers and watching TV the Hungarian language still dominates. Part of the participants in regular contact with Hungarians, for example, added that in some situations when they are with Hungarians they feel excluded. However, they treated these experiences as exceptions to the mostly neutral or positive relations they have with their colleagues or friends. Another share of the Slovaks who reported to having regular contact stressed that Slovak Hungarians usually speak in the Hungarian language between themselves; however, if there is someone present who does not speak Hungarian, they usually translate into the Slovak language. Mutual contact also creates space for Slovaks to spontaneously learn some Hungarian phrases. The need for mutual understanding and acknowledging individuals' own identity (by teaching Hungarian words to Slovaks, for instance) to create friendship-based relations were also highlighted in discussions with Slovak Hungarians. Efforts made at improving mutual understanding explains the findings we obtained in the quantitative study in that regular contact reduces social distance and anxiety and at the same time improves general attitudes towards the out-group, in line with the findings of Kambara (2015, 2017).

Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) argue that intergroup anxiety increases prejudice. In the focus groups, the Slovak participants did not explicitly express feelings of anxiety towards members of the Hungarian minority. Rather, their negative feelings were more the result of the anger they felt at the language barrier that occurs in situations when Hungarians cannot speak Slovak well, or who speak Hungarian in the company of Slovaks. Based on focus-group discussions with both Slovaks without regular contact and Slovak Hungarians, it can generally be said that even if there are concerns on the side of people who have not yet met members of the Hungarian minority, they often dissipate after getting to know them better. Friendship-based relationships were rated the most positive, which is consistent with the results of Pettigrew and Tropp (2006).

Further, we found no significant difference in trust levels, nor behavioural intentions towards this minority between Slovaks who had direct contact and those who did not. Feelings towards the other group – i.e., the emotional dimension of attitudes – were mostly neutral on both sides in focus-group discussions. Neutral feelings are not motivating enough to evoke a desire to approach the minority and to build trust. However, both groups mentioned specific feelings resulting from the linguistic otherness of the groups. Most negative feelings were associated with Slovak reactions to poor Slovak skills among Slovak Hungarians. The language barrier which occurs between the groups can additionally inhibit the behavioural intentions of Slovaks towards the Hungarian minority. Moreover, in the qualitative part of the research, ethnic pride was identified as a specific characteristic of Slovak Hungarians (either being proud of one's ethnicity or having a strong identity), in line with empirical research by Šutaj et al. (2008), Homišinová and Šutajová (2008), and Gallová Kriglerová and

Kadlečíková (2009). Emphasizing ethnicity usually exacerbates differences between groups and does not lead to improved trust between them. In concert with the findings of Bordás et al. (1995), all the Hungarians stated that they had experienced contempt for not speaking Slovak well or for speaking Hungarian in public. They encountered these remarks mostly from strangers who seemed to be prejudiced against the Hungarian minority, although a few of them had experienced some comments from classmates or colleagues. Participants who do not speak Slovak well mentioned feelings of doubt or anxiety regarding whether the members of the majority would accept them because of their identity or language skills. However, Slovak Hungarians pointed out that in the context of day-to-day relationships with some Slovaks, these feelings evaporate.

In conclusion, the overall picture of the coexistence of Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians is currently more positive than negative. Together with Gaertner et al. (1996), we argue that intergroup contact creates space for exploring similarities between the groups rather than differences, resulting in better attitudes. If there were more opportunities to form intergroup friendships and a shared identity through joint (professional) activities, the language barrier would spontaneously gradually decrease.

As Slovak language skills seems to be the most important topic, this should be addressed in more detail. Bakošová, the author of several modern Slovak textbooks for primary school children learning in a Hungarian environment, points out that it is necessary to learn Slovak as a foreign language. She claims that instead of teaching various rhymes in which archaic words occur, it is necessary to use modern stories that will help children learn modern vocabulary (Gdovinová, 2021). Moreover, being engaged in ordinary conversation is extremely important for children to understand the composition of sentences and reduce the shame or anxiety of speaking Slovak.

For this reason, we must mention a program similar to Erasmus+ called *Rozumieme si – cseregyerek* (We understand each other – exchange child), which aims to build mutual understanding and reduce the language barrier between Slovak and Slovak Hungarian pupils. The program involves Slovak families hosting Hungarian children for two weeks, while the Hungarian pupils visit school, classes, and afternoon activities together with the Slovak pupils. Most emphasis is placed on fostering cooperation between Slovak-Hungarian pairs who can keep in touch and choose from joint online and offline activities according to their nature and interests to make the friendship stronger and win prizes (*Az új évad* – rozumieme.si). This program not only meets Allport's criteria for fruitful contact – personal contact, similar status, cooperation, common goals, and institutional support (from schools) – it is a best practice example for overcoming language barriers and breaking down the stereotypes and anxiety experienced on both sides.

8 Limitations

Our results support the claim of an association between direct contact and prejudice. However, this tells us nothing about causality. As our study is not experimental in design, based on our results we cannot conclude whether contact is the cause of or the result of less prejudice. The limitations of our study involve sample selection. Respondents were not randomized, and the sample is not representative. Most of the respondents were university students

(individuals with an above-average educational level), which may have contributed to more complex answers from respondents but reduces the generalizability of the results. Therefore, our conclusions would be better understood as pertaining to young people in Slovakia (who belong to the middle or upper social class). In addition, we examined direct regular contact between Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians in relation to the frequency of communication and time spent together. It would be worthwhile attempting to verify our results about the attitudes of the Slovaks towards the Hungarian minority by operationalizing direct contact as 'having intergroup friendships' or 'being in a community with high percentage of Hungarians' – e.g. in a working environment, or school clubs (to fulfil the criteria of common goals and cooperation) or to focus on direct but superficial contact, such as living near Slovak Hungarians. Last but not least, when speaking about Slovak Hungarians one should keep in mind that this is very broad and general social category that includes individuals and groups with varying degrees of Hungarian and Slovak identity. Moreover, many of these people have dual attachments and their proximity to one or the other ethnic category is context dependent and situative. Those individuals with multiple attachments are liable to have more positive attitudes towards 'the Slovaks', and vice versa.

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