

Circulation and Dissent in the Hungarian Cultural Elite

This research project aims to detect changes and continuity in the Hungarian cultural elite. We seek to explore how generational change and the circulation of the political elite after 2010 affected the cultural elite group, which had shown considerable stability and meritocratic recruitment patterns during the decades of transition and post-communism.

Theoretical background

Elite theory claims that the existence of an elite in society is unavoidable under any form of government (Michels, 1915; Weber, 2004). The elite paradigm argues that such a small but powerful group exists even in a modern democracy. It consists of autonomous social and political actors who are primarily interested in maintaining their own power. The decisions and power games of this group shape politics and affect the whole society.

However, this theoretical axiom does not imply that the role and function of the elite are the same in all political regimes. On the contrary, the internal action patterns of the elite differ in fundamental ways across different regimes. The level of trust and cooperation among elite groups is more important and more consequential for political stability and the quality of democracy than any constitutional or other formal institutional convention (Higley and Pakulski, 2012).

According to elite theory, the elite conditions of liberal democracy – consensus between elite groups about ‘the rules of the game’ and broad elite integration – are a rare and fragile phenomenon, and the line between democracy and authoritarianism can easily be blurred (Best and Higley, 2010; Higley and Burton, 2006).

Consensual elite unity has dissolved in contemporary Hungary and the elite is extremely polarized (Körösenyi, 2013; Kovách and Kristóf, 2012; Kristóf, 2015; Lengyel and Ilonszki, 2012). Political polarization has serious negative consequences on the economy (Stark and Vedres, 2012) and on culture as well (Kristóf, 2014). Thus, political patronage and, more generally, the composition and autonomy of non-political elite groups have become especially relevant from the perspective of the quality of democracy. As a result of our research project, we expect to observe significant effects of these negative trends on the cultural elite group. We consider our research to be especially important because while Hungarian political and economic elites are being studied by other projects, the cultural elite is an elite group represented and studied by quantitative methods only in our research stream.

Classical elite theory differentiates between two elite types (Pareto, 1942). The governing elite exercises the concrete governmental power or the control over it (e.g. as a member of parliament). The non-governing elite is composed of powerful and privileged groups whose members have no overt political positions but exercise influence on political processes and the governing elite itself. Members of the cultural elite can be placed into both categories. Politicians dealing with cultural affairs and institutional decision-makers in cultural policy belong to the governing elite. Other culturally influential actors like leading artists or scientists, who have great reputation but are not formally involved in decision making, belong to the non-governmental elite.

Hence, the cultural elite cannot be defined only by positional criteria. Restricting the elite to the holders of top cultural positions would be inconsistent with the structure of the cultural field. Field theory assigns an outstanding role to reputation. According to Bourdieu, reputation measures the state of competition for goods in a social field dominated by cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1983, 1996). In other words, it shows the position of an individual within the field. Several authors conclude that reputation is an essential prerequisite of a proper functioning of cultural fields (Martindale, 1995; Nooy, 2002). Each field has its special mechanisms that are responsible for the production of reputation. The autonomy of a cultural field is shown by the independent, internal production of reputation within the field, largely determined by the community’s internal system of norms. However, meritocratic reputation can be distorted by a lack of competition, which might be due to excessive hierarchy or centralization within the field (Bourdieu, 1983, 1985). Distortion may also

result from an external (economic or political) force that restricts the autonomy of the field. For example, the intervention of political power may decouple official and informal reputation in culture. The emergence of the elite within the cultural field has a generational logic; new and new actors take up elite positions. In the meantime, there can be great differences among how these actors use their meritocratic reputation they had acquired by their cultural activity, or they use other, external resources and legitimation.

Empirical studies on the emergence of the cultural elite focus on two main factors: the distribution of elite positions and the career trajectories that lead into the elite (Nooy, 2002; Verboord, 2003). Career trajectories are tightly attached to the institutions of the cultural field; recognition is hierarchical and guarded by the so-called “gatekeepers”, i.e. actors who supervise institutional access (Bielby and Bielby, 1994; Foster et al., 2011; Hirsch, 2000). The production of reputation and the emergence of the elite are the results of interactions between individuals and institutions; career trajectories usually consist of a sequence of institutional positions (Dubois and François, 2013; van Dijk, 1999). The institutional representations of reputation also include cultural awards (Anand and Watson, 2004; Gemser et al., 2007; Ginsburgh, 2003; Lampel et al., 2000). In the long run, acquired reputation creates a solid artistic or scientific canon (Martindale, 1995), shaping the whole structure of the cultural field.

Fligstein and McAdam use the concept of *strategic action fields* to model the process by which a field undergoes restructuring. They study the formation of *crises* that change existing power relations and the distribution of positions and resources. They find that the stability of fields are most often threatened by crises caused by external shocks. These kinds of shocks create opportunities for groups within the field who want to displace the incumbent elite. If these challengers recognize (or construct) the opportunity hidden in the crisis and are able to act in an innovative and organised way, they may obtain the circulation of the incumbent elite (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012).

Previous research results

Hungarian elite change in the post-communist transition period was studied extensively in the 1990s. Summarising the numerous empirical research findings, Iván Szelényi and his colleagues differentiated between the circulation of the political elite and the reproduction of the economic elite (Szelényi and Szelényi, 1995; Szelényi et al., 1995). From a comparative perspective, John Higley and György Lengyel (Higley and Lengyel, 2000) categorised the Hungarian (and also the Polish and the Czechoslovakian) system change as a classic case of elite circulation according to the model of Higley and Pakulski (Higley and Pakulski, 2012). (Wasilewski and Wnuk-Lipiński, 1995) The mode of circulation was gradual and peaceful, while its scope was wide and deep enough to filter out unfit elite members and allow new social groups to join the elite.

However, in line with the law of elite circulation (Pareto, 1942), elite segments differed in the extent of circulation during the system change. Regarding continuity between communist and post-communist elites, Ilonszki stressed that different elite segments of a non-democratic system show varying degrees of ability to survive, and members of the political elite compared to other elite segments have particularly weak chances to survive (Ilonszki, 2003). This explains the greater circulation of the political elite. At the same time, cultural (and economic) elites were not affected directly and dramatically by democratic transformation. However, according to the study of long term processes in different elite segments (Kristóf, 2012), a long term divergence between political and other elites could also be observed. After the great trauma of democratic transformation, further changes in the political elite did not keep up with changes in the other two segments. The social attributes of the Hungarian political elite barely changed after the period of political transformation and were characterised up to 2009 by the ‘survival of system transformers’. Meanwhile, the economic and cultural elites, originally affected less by the system change, underwent significant changes between 1993 and 2009, grew gradually less and less post-communist, and converged to the elites of stable democracies (at least in their basic social character) (Kristóf, 2012).

According to the evidence of our previous elite surveys (Kristóf, 2012), the cultural elite was the most closed and constant elite group in the last three decades. Its members could to a great extent rely on the cultural and social capital accumulated in their families. The educational level and occupation of parents and grandparents as well as the urban (and especially Budapest-based) character of the group were signs of the favourable social status of families.

At the beginning of the period, economic and cultural elites of the late communist era were the most educated and most male-dominated groups among all the elite samples studied during the two decades of elite surveys. They were composed almost exclusively of male graduates. Researchers of the transition period argued that the selection criteria of the Hungarian economic and cultural elites in the 1980s were rather meritocratic (with the exception of people openly criticising the communist system). However, the very low share of women in these elite segments questions the common belief that the period of communist modernization provided women with equal chances in career building. The share of female cultural elite members started to increase only in the second post-communist decade. Although still very low, it more than doubled from its starting level and seems to converge to West-European rates. (Table 1)

Table 1. Basic socio-demographic characteristics of the cultural elite

Cultural elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
share of female (%)	4.8	6.3	15	16.7
mean age (year)	57.8	57.9	57.2	58.9
share of graduates (%)	100	98.1	98,6	98,0
share of white collar fathers (%)	46.6	65.4	71.7	71.8
share of former Communist Party (MSZMP) members	71.2	54.4	34.7	30.4

As for education, the high proportion of graduates is continuous in the cultural elite. A university or college degree seems to be a permanent standard. While the cultural elite has become more open to women during the last two decades, it has become more closed in terms of social origin. The share of elite members with white collar fathers increased in the studied period. In this sense, there is a clear discontinuity between the communist and post-communist elites in all elite segments. In 1988, the share of blue collar fathers was above 50 per cent in all segments. This proportion fell dramatically after the system change: the new members clearly came from families of higher status.

In this respect, changes in the cultural elite resembled those in the political rather than the economic elite: the elite group became socially more closed after the system change but the rate of members of a lower social background did not much change afterwards. From the aspect of discontinuity, the cultural elite can be placed in between the economic and political elites. It was affected less by the system change than the political elite, and the share of former Communist Party (MSZMP) members gradually decreased in the first decade of post-communism and subsequently halted at a level higher than in the economic elite. This difference may be caused by the permanent presence of a distinguished ‘great generation’ detected in the political as well as the cultural elite (Kristóf, 2012).

During the whole period, cultural capital has been the most important element of the elite status of the cultural elite. Elite universities in Budapest have been especially important institutions in the selection of the cultural elite. In this respect, homogamy and status transmittance could also be observed (Kovách, 2011).

In the third and fourth wave of our elite surveys (2001, 2009), informally influential members of the cultural elite received a special focus. We examined comprehensively those elite members who had

the greatest reputation according to other elite members. Reputation was related to age, public life participation and artistic activity. Artists were more reputed than scientists; the older they were and the more they published in the media not related to their profession, the more reputation they had. The reputation of those elite members who engaged in public intellectual activity was also politically determined: leftist and rightist intellectual canons exist side by side (Kristóf, 2011, 2013, 2014). In a later, qualitative study we examined political intervention in the cultural elite with the help of the case study of theatre. We identified processes such as attempts on rewriting the cultural canon; the occupation of existing elite positions in the cultural field; founding new cultural institutions and elite positions, and creating or strengthening parallel/alternative structures alongside the existing ones in the cultural field; and also by changing the financial system of culture in favour of new loyal elite groups (Kristóf 2016).

Research objectives

The objective of our research project is twofold. First, we aim to continue the series of elite surveys carried out at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences since 1993. The first wave of the series was connected to a comparative international survey led by Iván Szelényi to test elite continuity, relying on data from six Eastern-European countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Russia), (Böröcz and Róna-Tas, 1995; Szelényi and Szelényi, 1995; Wasilewski and Wnuk-Lipiński, 1995). In 1997, 2001 and 2009 Imre Kovách and his research group carried on the surveys (Csite András and Kovách Imre, 1999; Csurgó et al., 2001; Kovách, 2011; Kristóf, 2014). The sampling has been designed so as to sustain comparability with the original survey in 1993 (Table 2).

Table 2: Elite Surveys between 1993 and 2009 (N)

Studied elite group	1988	1993	1997	2001	2009*
Political elite	523	194	-	142	407
Economic elite	102	578	582	482	457
Cultural elite	187	159	-	449	501

*In 2009, the surveys, supported by NKTH and OTKA, also covered elites of the Hungarian minority in Romania and Slovakia.

Our main comparative question is the following: What are the main changes in the character and the composition of the cultural elite?

In more detail, we pose the following questions:

- Previous analysis showed an incipient generational change in the cultural elite: the ‘great generation’ started to lose its dominance by 2009. Has this process been completed by now? What are the similarities and differences between the new co-opted generations and their predecessors in terms of status access, mobility and possession of different capitals?
- Has the cultural elite remained closed and homophile in its social and institutional origins? Is institutional cultural capital still central to status access in the form of graduation from elite universities? Has the elite become more international in terms of education and network? In the era of growing outmigration from Hungary, can we observe significant migration trends among the children of the elite?
- Previous research showed that the share of women in cultural elite positions started to increase very slowly in the last decades. Are the gender characteristics of the cultural elite changing now? Do everyday opinions and attitudes towards career and family affect family status and

family trajectories of elite members? Are the main characteristics of cultural elite's family values determined by gender differences? More generally, are the general attitudes and identities of the elite determined by its dominantly male character?

This research stream has been documenting processes in the Hungarian elite for more than two decades. However, since the last wave of the surveys in 2009, comprehensive changes occurred and numerous new processes could be observed. Consequently, our second objective is to study the cultural elite of 2017 with a new focus of inquiry.

Recent literature on Hungary has suggested that elite consensus has collapsed and the elites' norm-breaking behaviour has become prevalent (Bozóki, 2015; Kristóf, 2015; Lengyel, 2014). It is also recognized, that governmental elite has been gaining increased influence and power over other elite groups. Since 2010, the ruling political elite reallocated property rights, public and EU funds to new loyal economic elites who are in a much closer control of the political elite (Csillag and Szelényi 2015). Though less in the focus of scientific inquiry, the field of culture has seen a similar process ; the incumbent political elite aspires to eliminate old cultural structures in order to redistribute cultural positions and resources (Kristóf 2016).

Our main hypothesis is, that these actions of the political elite create a *crisis* in the Hungarian cultural elite, with uneven consequences for different elite groups. Reputational elite members (i.e. the group of most acknowledged artists and intellectuals) cannot be changed with political measures, while positional elite members are easier to replace. The uneven circulation of the elite causes an increasing dissent in the attitudes, norms and identities of the re-composed cultural elite. We assume that the new members of the elite have significantly different career trajectories, and the composition of the resources they use to reach their elite position is also different: they rely on *external* resources in a greater measure.

Hence, besides continuing to examine elite recruitment, career history and social mobility, economic, cultural and social capital, attitudes and reputation, we add a stronger focus on the questions of political patronage and the network relations of the elite, both in terms of strong and weak ties.

- How did politically created circulation affect the reputational elite? Did political intervention and generational change affect the cultural canon? Who are the most reputed contemporary intellectuals?
- How did the same processes affect the positional elite? To what extent can we observe political patronage in the positional cultural elite?
- How did the attitudes, norms, political values and identities of the cultural elite change? Is there really an increasing dissent?
- How are members of the cultural elite attached to each other and to other elite groups through personal ties? To what extent is their network diverse and open to other social groups?

Methodology

Derived from the theoretical background, our definition of the cultural elite is twofold: we differentiate between positional and reputational groups within the cultural elite.¹

The original (1993) sample of the cultural elite was entirely positional, i.e it was composed of members of the Academy of Sciences, leaders of scientific and cultural institutes and leaders of the media. From 2001 on, the positional sample was complemented with the 'market elite' (bestselling authors) as well as recipients of the most prestigious state awards (Kossuth award, Széchenyi award,

¹ Of course, the two categories are not disjunct: one can be a member of both groups.

Ybl award, József Attila award, etc.). The assumption behind this latter addition was that in the cultural field, elite membership is in a large measure not positional but based on formal and informal reputation. Hence, snowball sampling was also included in the sampling process: cultural elite members were asked about ‘the greatest figures of contemporary Hungarian culture’ and a *reputational elite group* was formed according to their votes.²

Our planned sampling method will follow the principle of comparability (Table 3). However, a new group will be included in the positional sample. The Hungarian Academy of Arts became an important new actor in the cultural sphere, due to its new extended resources and delegated power from the government.

Table 3 Cultural elite samples

	2001		2009		2017 (planned)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Members of the Academy of Sciences	49	11	50	10	42	10
Members of the Academy of Arts	-	-	-	-	42	10
Leaders of scientific and cultural research institutes	63	14	52	10	42	10
Leaders of institutions of communication	27	6	27	5	22	5
Leaders of universities	14	3	15	3	14	3
Leaders of daily papers (incl. online, from 2009 on)	8	2	8	2	8	2
Leaders of weekly and monthly papers	52	12	52	10	50	10
Recipients of state awards	150	33	150	30	145	30
Bestselling music performers	24	5	25	5	20	5
Bestselling literary authors	20	5	22	4	20	5
Reputational elite	42	9	100	20	45	10
Total	449	100	501	100	450	100

The survey will be carried out with the help of a 45 minute long personal questionnaire, CAPI technique, and analysed by SPSS software. Interviewers will be trained about the specific features of elite-interviewing by the research team, and a pilot survey will be carried out and analysed before the main data collection. A high rejection rate is a general problem in elite surveys but our previous experience suggest that members of the cultural elite are easier to reach and much more willing to take part in scientific research than the political or economic elite. In our previous waves of surveys, the prestige of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the cultural field helped a lot in the persuasion of the interviewees. Nevertheless, the accidental decrease of cooperativeness will be handled by two supplementary samples: a total list of 1350 cultural elite members will be compiled in advance, in order to reach the planned sample size. In other words, every elite member fallen out from the sample

² Numerous classic elite studies combined positional and snowball sampling (see Higley et al., 1991; Higley and Moore, 1981; Kadushin, 1995, 1974).

due to rejection, should be replaced by another, and then another as needed. Considering the packed agenda of elite members, we reduced the length of the interview to the minimum (previously we used a 60 minute long questionnaire). We will also offer the opportunity to fill the questionnaire independently, on-line, as we did in 2009.

As in the previous wave of research, the quantitative survey will be supplemented by interviews: 20 semi-structured interviews will be conducted with old and new members of the elite of a carefully selected cultural field (most probably literature), to be analysed narratively (Reissman, 2013) to help the interpretation of quantitative data.

Expected results

We expect both theoretical and empirical results from our research.

Empirically, we will document changes and continuity in the Hungarian cultural elite in the last eight years, in terms of recruitment, status access and the possession of different capitals, comparing our data to previous datasets. We will detect the effect of political elite circulation, political patronage and generational change on the cultural elite. Our research is especially important because while Hungarian political and economic elites are studied currently by other projects as well (InTune, ENEC), cultural elite, though equally important, and currently experience important changes is represented only in our research stream.

Theoretically, elite composition and circulation are important factors in the democratic system, and the question of the autonomy of the cultural elite is relevant for elite theory. With this research, in the frame of democratic elitism, we aim to contribute to the debate on the quality of the Hungarian democracy and on the dissolved elite consensus leading to autocratic tendencies.

Another expected theoretical result is the better understanding of mechanisms of reputation production. These processes shed light on the functioning of the cultural field. We will thus contribute theoretically also to the sociology of culture.

The results of the project will be published in Hungarian and international journals and presented at national and international scientific conferences. We plan to publish 2 journal articles in Web of Science journals and 2 articles in Hungarian peer-reviewed journals. We plan to present two Hungarian and two English conference papers.

Research infrastructure

The research will be based on the work of three researchers in the Institute of Sociology at the Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Luca Kristóf will coordinate the research as a PI. She is responsible for the design and construction of the survey, the analysis of the data, the conduction of qualitative interviews and the reporting and dissemination of the results.

Bernadett Csurgó and Imre Kovách as senior researchers will take part in the analysis of the database and in the preparation of publications presenting the results. Ms. Csurgó will also conduct qualitative interviews.

For quantitative data collection, we will contract with a research institute that has a network of interviewers and experience with elite surveys. The PI of the research will be supervising the training of the interviewers. The cost calculation of data collection is based on the three estimates attached.

Reflections on the previous (2016) reviews:

1. One referee criticised the definition of the cultural elite. In this updated research plan, we explain more exactly and in detail the necessity of the double (positional and reputational) definition with the help of field theory.
2. We discuss the difficulties of data collection, with special emphasis on the treatment of high rejection rates.
3. Referees criticised the excessively descriptive research questions coming from survey methodology, and one referee even suggested additional interviews. Consequently, we supplement the research plan with 20 semi-structured interviews, digging more deeply into a selected cultural field, to help the interpretation of quantitative data.
4. One referee pointed out the absence of a sharp, theory driven hypothesis. Hence we re-defined research objectives: besides the resumption of previous research series we set up a concrete hypothesis on this new wave of survey that is connected to current discourse on the elite of the cultural field.

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