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KÖZELKÉP

# Interpersonal relationships in Hungary – an overview

ALBERT, FRUZSINA[1] – DÁVID, BEÁTA[2,3]

*ABSTRACT*

*Our paper aims to demonstrate that social structure has significant impact on the formation of interpersonal relations. We review and analyse the characteristics of ego-centric interpersonal networks of Hungarians based on data from nationally representative adult population surveys between the mid-1980's up to 2015. We focus especially on core discussion networks, friendship ties and weak ties and analyse how the transition to market economy influenced interpersonal relationships. As expected, the large-scale social changes brought about by the transition changed interpersonal networks as well. During the first decade of the transition (in the 1990's) one could not witness a significant change of personal networks, nonetheless the adaptation process was easier for people supported by strong, traditional family ties. Non-kin ties, especially friendships seem to gain significance at the expense of kin relationships. Overall, resources available through weak ties seem to be decreasing.*

*KEYWORDS: Hungary, friendship, ego-centric networks, core discussion networks, weak ties*

*ABSZTRAKT*

***Személyközi kapcsolatok Magyarországon – áttekintés***

*Tanulmányunk demonstrálja, hogy a társadalomszerkezet jelentős hatással van a személyközi kapcsolatok alakulására. A nyolcvanas évek közepe és 2015 között készült országos reprezentatív felmérések adataira alapozva bemutatjuk a magyar ego-centrikus kapcsolathálózatok jellemzőit, különös tekintettel a bizalmas beszélgetési hálózatokra, a barátságokra és a gyenge kötésekre és elemezzük, hogy a piacgazdaságra való átmenet milyen változásokat idézett elő ezekben a dimenziókban. Előzetes hipotéziseinkkel összhangban a rendszerváltozással járó*

[1] Center for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences senior researcher, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Faculty of Arts, chair of Sociology Department MTA TK SZI tudományos főmunkatárs, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, BTK, Szociológia Tanszék, vezető.

[2] Center for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences research chair, Semmelweis University, Institute of Mental Health, director. MTA TK SZI tudományos tanácsadó, Semmelweis Egyetem Mentálhigiéné Intézet, igazgató.

[3] Grant numbers and/or funding information: National Research, Development and Innovation Office – NKFIH 108836: Integrative and Desintegrative Processes in the Hungarian Society.

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*jelentős társadalmi változások megváltoztatták a személyközi kapcsolatrendszereket is. A kilencvenes években még nem tapasztalhattunk radikális változásokat, bár az alkalmazkodást az új rendszerhez megkönnyítették az erős, hagyományos családi kötések. A nem rokoni kapcsolatok, különösen a barátságok az utóbbi időszakban úgy tűnik a rokoni kapcsolatok rovására kerülnek előtérbe. A gyenge kötéseken keresztül elérhető erőforrások összességében úgy tűnik csökkennek.*

*KULCSSZAVAK: Magyarország, barátság, ego-centrikus hálózatok, bizalmas beszélgetési hálózatok, gyenge kötések*

## Introduction

Interpersonal relationships of an individual – let it be family, friends or neighbours – represent a very significant resource. Still, the true value of such human relations is often noticed only in case we lack them. Several sociological expressions related to social integration, such as social cohesion, social capital or social inclusion/exclusion all refer to the fact that the stability, security and unity of a society can be maintained through relationships and interactions (Utasi 2002: 9). Social support is available through interpersonal ties (Coleman 1988) and can be provided by either kin (family and relatives) or non-kin (friends and neighbours) relations: these ties not only provide individuals with resources they may lack, but also build and strengthen feelings of trust and reciprocity in a society (Coleman 1988, Nowak – Sigmund 2000).

Nowadays it is a self-evident fact that human relationships are not static, either at an individual, or at a cultural level. The environment and the social structure have significant impact on the formation of interpersonal relations. This is true vice versa: the qualities and structures of interpersonal networks, one's position in broader social networks do not only influence subjective well-being, life-chances, the quality of life but also the functioning of society (Christakis – Fowler 2009). Besides large-scale international comparative surveys (e.g. the ISSP, ESSP and WVS, see Höllinger – Haller 1990, Utasi 2004, Ruan et al. 1997) the number of studies focusing on the dynamics of change of interpersonal relationships have also increased (e.g. McPherson et al. 2006, Tampubolon 2005, in Hungary e.g. Kopasz – Szántó – Várhalmi 2008), including a number of qualitative case studies (Pahl – Spencer 2004, Degenne – Lebeaux 2005, Bidart – Lavenu 2005). One can expect, that social changes such as the transition from socialist economy to market economy affect the individuals' personal network structure.

The present study aims to overview the changes in the characteristics and composition of ego-centric interpersonal networks by presenting findings regarding the number of friends and core discussion networks.

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## PERSONAL NETWORK CHARACTERISTICS PRIOR TO THE TRANSITION TO MARKET ECONOMY[4]

In Hungary before 1990 there were only two nation-wide surveys that systematically collected data on interpersonal networks of the Hungarian population (Utasi 1990, Angelusz – Tardos 1991). These networks are comprised of different and often overlapping segments: kin ties (close or more distant relatives) and non-kin ties such as friends, acquaintances, neighbours, colleagues and a number of other identifiable categories. The results indicated that compared to Western European countries the ratio of family/kin ties was higher in supportive networks and also the average network size was smaller. This latter phenomenon was dominantly the result of fewer non-kin ties: in Hungary people tended to have less friends and acquaintances. More than half of the network of an average Hungarian was comprised of family and kin relations when measured by eight Fischer name generator questions (Angelusz – Tardos 1991, McCallister – Fischer 1978). Family (and not only the nuclear family) was a source of multiple types of support and security: for instance, in need of money the family served as a bank (providing loans to launch business in the "secondary economy" in the socialist period, in need of housing facilities relatives worked together on the construction site, or in case of emotional hardship mostly a female member of the family acted as a therapist. The ratio of kin and friendship ties shifted toward an increase in the proportion of friends by an increasing level of urbanisation: while in small villages 53% of the networks consisted of only kin ties, this was only 14% in the capital city (Angelusz – Tardos 1991).

The ISSP survey of 1986 facilitated comparisons with Australia, the former West-Germany, Austria, Italy, the USA and Great Britain (Utasi 1990, Utasi 1991, Höllinger – Haller 1990). From all the seven countries surveyed, the ratio of those claiming having no friends at all was the highest in Hungary (34%). Also Hungarian friends were recruited from the workplace in a very high proportion (53,6%). Together with Austrians, Hungarians had friendship ties providing emotional support in the smallest proportion (30,3%), that is, the instrumental and less intimate character of friendship was more dominant. Apart from Italians, Hungarians could expect major support from their spouse in the least extent. The average number of friends and the proportion of those having friends were significantly higher among highly

[4] A smaller portion of the data we use is from studies before 1990, ISSP 1986, 2006 and a local national survey, but the majority is derived from the Hungarian Household Panel Surveys in 1993 and 1997 and the Household Monitor Surveys in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2011, and two surveys financed from the Hungarian National Research Fund (OTKA) in 2004 and 2015, all collected by TÁRKI Social Research Center Inc.

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educated, more well-off, younger male respondents. Especially dramatic – even in an international context – was the decrease of the number of friends and the increase of those without friends in old age (Höllinger – Haller 1990).

## INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN HUNGARY AFTER THE TRANSITION

Since the transition of 1989, when socialist economy was replaced by market economy, different aspects of the Hungarian interpersonal network structures have been analysed with the same methodologies over the years (Albert – Dávid 1999b, 2004, 2007, 2012). Below, we analyse relationships in two dimensions: core discussion networks and friendship ties.

### The characteristics of core discussion networks – 1999–2015

The core discussion network (CDN) tries to identify the most intimate and confiding relationships of the respondents (Marsden 1987, McPherson et al 2006). Core ties are considered to be a good source of social support, including emotional, instrumental and emergency aid (Wellman – Wortley 1990).

The most common tool used to measure core networks is the "important matters" personal network name generator (for a critical review see Marin and Hampton 2007). Name generators ask participants one or a series of questions that elicit a list of network alters. The 'important matters'[5] (or GSS) name generator has been extensively used internationally (e.g. McPherson et al. 2006, Hampton – Ling 2013, Bennett et al. 2000, Ruan 1998, Gibson 2001, Mollenhorst et al. 2008, Boase – Ikeda 2012). Based on previous surveys we expected that this question generates strong, intimate and positive ties, those close to the "best friend" concept, but is less ambiguous than the concept of friendship. These studies found on national representative samples that that core network size ranged on average from a little less than two to about four alters.

[5] The Household Monitor Survey of 1999 used the core discussion network delienating question applied in the General Social Survey in the USA in 1985, which was also used in a survey of Angelusz Róbert and Tardos Róbert in 1997, thus data can be compared. "Most people sometimes discuss important matters with others. a. I you consider the past 6 months, who are the people with whom you discussed the most important things, your problems, sorrows, complaints?"

AFTER THE RESPONDENT LISTED THE NAMES: I would ask you some questions about these people!

b. Who is that person to you primarily?

c. How often have you talked during the past 6 months? Etc. Respondents could mention a maximum of 8/5 names and data was gathered regarding the alter's sex, age, educational level, relationship with the ego, thus the structure of core discussion networks can also be studied.

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The entire interpersonal network of an individual of course cannot be described by a single name generator. Hampton et al. (2011) found that when they asked after the GSS question another question regarding who else are very important for the respondents, 60% of them named at least one such person in addition (Hampton et al. 2011).

If we compare the characteristics of Hungarian core discussion networks in the 1980s and 1990s to Western European or American ones, we find that the rate of family/kin ties was higher, the average network size was smaller (because of fewer non-kin ties). In Hungary the number of friends in core discussion networks was almost insignificant: while in 1997 the proportion of family members and kin was 75%, in 1999 the same figure is 85%. That is, at the time of the millennium, most people discussed their problems with their closest relatives, that is their spouse or partner, parents, children or siblings. While in comparison friends played a much smaller part, the role of workmates or neighbours was insignificant in this regard. In 1997 the size of an average core discussion network was 2,23 persons, yet in 1999 only 1,8, which indicated a further decrease of the intimate social circles of individuals and an enhanced concentration of family members.

Hungarian women tended to have bigger core discussion networks then men, and also less women lacked such networks than men did. In the age group of those younger than 35 there was no statistically significant difference between the sexes, while amongst men older than 35 years there was a 20% decrease in the percentage of those who have at least two confidants. Among women no such tendency could be detected. Thus data indicated that married, middle-aged men could dominantly only share private matters with their partners or spouses while women, besides their husband or partner, discussed their problems with other family members, mainly their mothers or daughters. Highly educated, young and/or affluent people had the biggest core discussion networks, which was primarily due to the fact that in their case kin ties were supplemented with friendship ties as well. Core discussion networks were the least homogenous regarding age. Young (16–25 year-olds) and old (above 66 years) people discussed important matters mainly with their middle-aged family members instead of their peers. In case of family/kin ties, males mentioned their peers more often, which was because they tended to mention their spouses or partners in a higher extent.

In 1999 every tenth person could not mention anyone whom he/she could discuss important matters with during the previous 6 months. The majority, almost half of all respondents mentioned a single alter, every fourth person mentioned 2, every fifth person mentioned 3 confidants. Among those without confidants, the elderly, the uneducated, the divorced and widows/widowers are overrepresented. The ratio of those who claimed to have no confidants in 1999 dropped from 8% to

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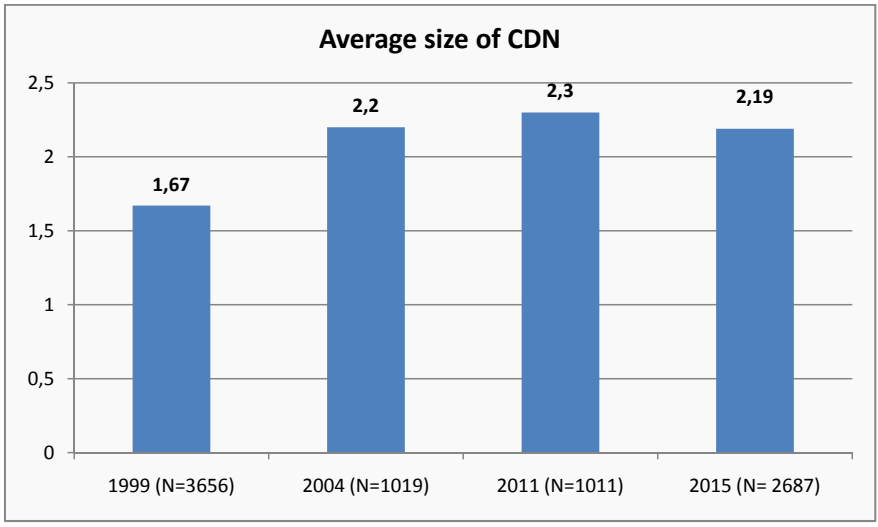
only 2% in 2011, but increased to 6,5 in 2015.[6] During this same time period, the average CDN size first increased significantly and then started to decrease by 2015. (Figure 1.)

*Figure 1.* The average size of core discussion networks 1999–2015 (number of people)




While generally women have fewer friends, the core discussion networks of women have been larger than that of men, although by 2015 this difference became statistically insignificant. Females have more kin in their network than males (Figure 2.). Education does not really matter: if it does, the more educated people have more non-kin in their network. Household size also – understandably – increases the number of kin. The kin number is significantly higher in case somebody has a partner, and there has been a growing importance to that over the years.

Gender was not a differentiating factor regarding the number of non-kin ties in one's CDN before 2015, but then men have significantly more non-kin ties. (Figure 3.) The older someone gets, the less non-kin CDN members they have. The number of available non-kin confidants are increasing with the level of education. Those without a partner have more non-kin in their CDN.

[6] We present detailed longitudinal analysis of the period between 1999 and 2015 because beforehand the questioned was framed a bit differently, e.g. maximum 8 alters could be mentioned while later only 5. Also, the significant structural changes of CDNs can be observed from 1999 on.

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*Figure 2.* The average number of kin ties in core discussion networks for men and women 1999–2015 (number of people)

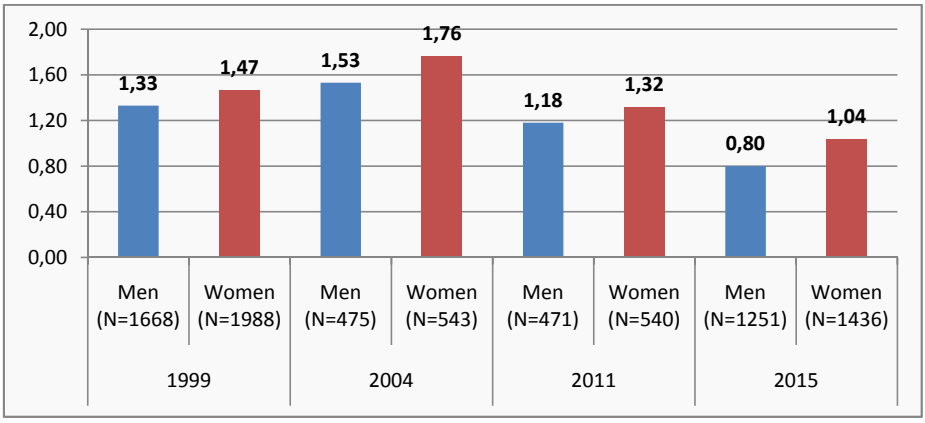
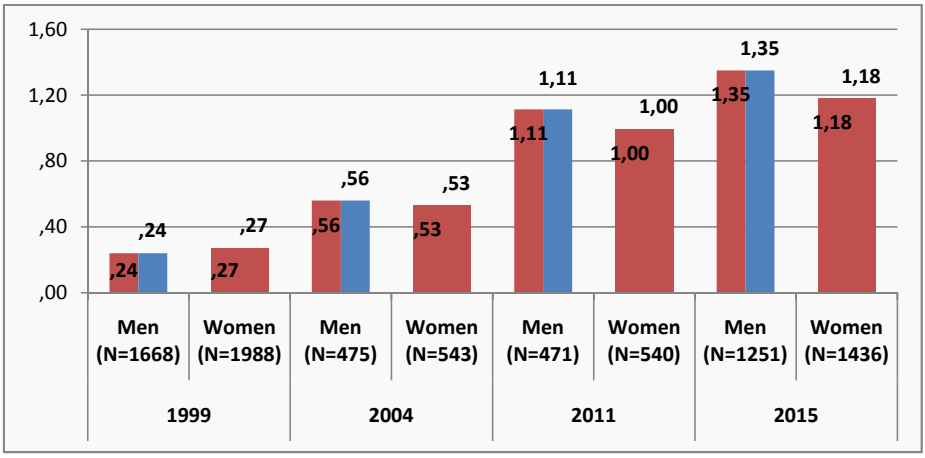



*Figure 3.* The average number of non-kin ties in core discussion networks for men and women 1999–2015 (number of people)




The average ratio of same-sex ties increases due to the increase of non-kin ties. As non-kin ties in the core discussion networks are mainly friends which tend to be homophilous genderwise as well, their growth results in the growing gender homophily of CDNs. In case of females, their kin ties in the CDNs are also often with other female family members.

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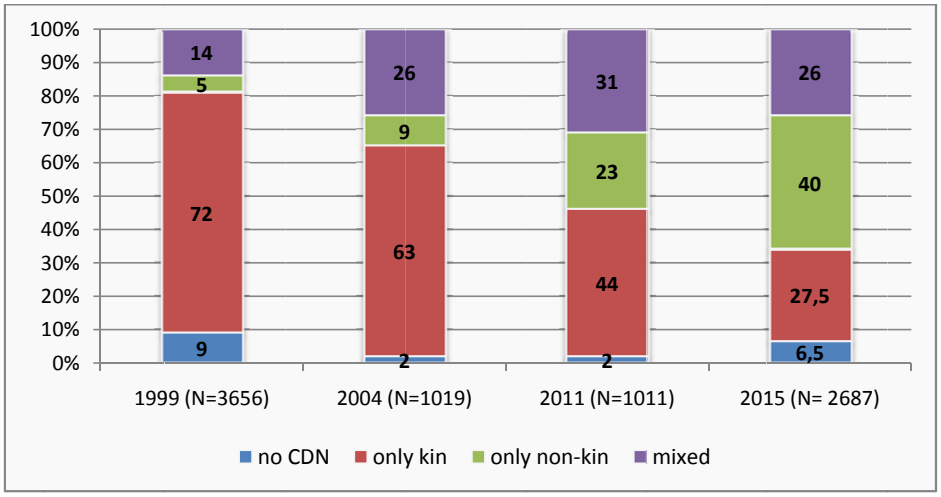
*Figure 4.* The typology of core discussion networks (CDN) – 1999–2015, %




In a time perspective we can see mixed patterns: as to size, after an increase core discussion networks started to decrease (Figure 1.) and also the number of isolates increased significantly. (Figure 4.) While the number of kin ties in CDNs clearly decrease and the number of non-kin ties increase, the proportion of those with only kin CDNs also clearly and significantly decreased from 72% in 1999 to only 27,5% in 2015, and the proportion of those only with non-kin CDNs also significantly increased from 4% in 1999 to 40 % in 2015. The ratio of those with the most diverse CDNs including both kin and non-kin ties increased, however since 2011 a decrease is indicated by the data.

It seems the importance of friendship has increased over the past decades. While in 1999 the ratio of friends among core discussion network members did not reach 15%, in 2011 it was 39% and in 2015 50%. The importance of partners (marital or cohabitation) decreases, only 28 % of the total sample mentions his/her spouse or partner when talking about their problems. As nowadays modern familes are based on a mutual attraction, trust and confidence between partners, this finding probably indicates the weakening and instability of this bond. In the early nineties, especially among middle-aged men the only confidant they had was their partner, or a female family member. As kin relations have not only been supplemented but probably increasingly replaced by non-kin relations, primarily friends, the gender composition of core discussion networks also changed and has become more homophilic.

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**Friendship**

In Hungary over the years several national representative surveys collected data concerning the number of friends. The whole concept of friendship is quite blurred and subjective, individually differently interpreted. There is no consensus whether spouses, siblings are to be counted as friends, or only close intimate non-kin ties? Or even looser acquaintances, pals? The distribution of the number of friends also indicated this problem. Those mentioning 3 or 80 friends probably did not use the same definition. Maybe the socio-demographic differences we find regarding the number of friends only reflect the differences in the interpretation of the term which may also be socio-demographically determined? Probably an urban male with university degree uses the term "friend" for different ties than an old uneducated lady from a village. So friendship research is made difficult by the versatility and longitudinal change of the concept of friendship in a given society. We have limited knowledge on who exactly is considered a friend in Hungary, yet we are certain that friendship-schema contain systematic differences along a number of dimensions such as gender, educational level, social status, place of residence. In addition to that, it is not a static but a dynamically changing concept (Dávid – Albert 2005). If we try to link this concept to some objective criteria (e.g. in case of the core discussion network question), we disregard a number of relationships our respondents may consider to be friendships (see Allan 1989). That is why often researchers let the respondents decide who they consider to be friends. Although the concept of friendship may have also changed with time, as we have comparable data for the question „How many friends have you got?" since the mid-eighties, it may justify that we use this data for analysis despite the above mentioned concerns. Two aspects are worth highlighting: friendship network size and the proportion of isolates, who claim to have no friends at all.

If we look at the average number of friends, the data seems to fluctuate. (Figure 5.) From a low number of 3,1 in 1986, in a 1993 representative panel survey the average number of friends reported was 7,28, which by 1997 dropped to 3,71 among the very same respondents (Albert – Dávid 1999a). However, between 2004 and 2011 a significant expansion could be detected not only in core discussion networks, but regarding the number of friends and the informal use of interpersonal relationships in arranging various tasks (Albert – Dávid 2012), which then seems to drop again. As during the nineties, the decade after the transition, our data came from a longitudinal panel survey, we could analyse the changes at the individual level (Albert et al. 2008). The parameters of the distribution changed dramatically during the analyzed period. There was a slight general shrinking, which affected everybody. But there was a well-defined subgroup whose members were the real loosers of the social change, and they are responsible for the dramatic changes in distribution parameters. These people had some friends in 1993 but claimed to have

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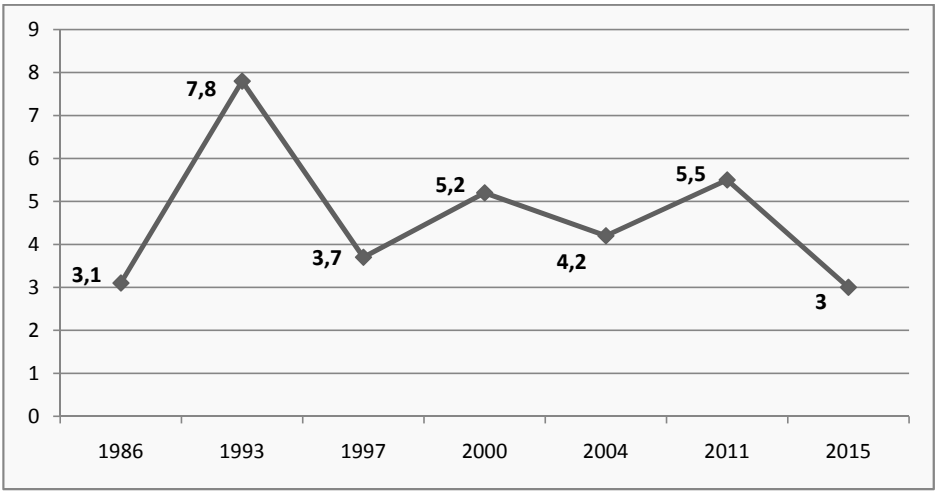
no friends at all in 1997. Variables significantly influencing this loss of friends were: type of settlement, per capita income, trust in the future, decreasing income and age. So those from small settlement, with low or decreasing income levels, older, having low levels of trust in the future were most affected by the loss of their friendship network.

Active, young, highly educated people from Budapest[7], with an income in the top quintile were the least affected by the decrease of friendship ties. Among those who had no friends in either year women, those having no employment, living in 1-2 person households, poorly educated, 56 years and older and those in the 2nd and 3rd income quintile were over-represented. Employed, educated urban people from the highest income quintile had the highest chances to have friends in both years.

Other authors, partially repeating their survey in the eighties a decade after, also concluded, that there is an increase in the role of employment status, the material aspects of maintaining a relationship, political affiliations and income regarding the formation in personal networks (Angelusz – Tardos 1999).

Data from 2000 indicated 5,4 friends on average, 6,9 for men and 4,2 for women. Every fourth man, while every third woman claimed to have no friends at all. This indicated that the significant decrease of friendship ties registered by the Hungarian Household Panel Survey seemed to have stopped by the end of the century.

*Figure 5.* The average number of friends between 1986–2015 (number of people)




[7] Capital of Hungary.

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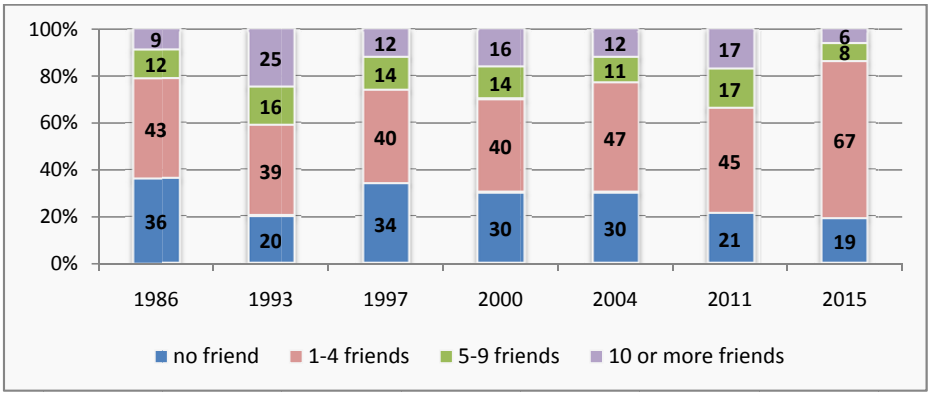
The most typical friendship network size in Hungary has been 1-4 friends, and the proportion of those having such friendship networks seem to have increased significantly, to 67% in 2015, while the share of those with big or especially very big friendship networks also decreased significantly, especially recently. (Figure 5. and 6.) If we look at the same data in categories of those without any friends, those having a small, big and very big friendship network, we can see a little bit less fluctuation: the share of isolates decreased from 36% in the mid-eighties to 19 % in 2015. (Figure 6.)

*Figure 6.* Changes in the size of friendship networks of the adult Hungarian population between 1986 and 2015 (%)




In Hungary we have found statistically significant differences between men and women by almost all parameters in favour of men. In 1993 25% of women had no friends while among men it was only 14%. In 2015 male friendship networks were still bigger than the female ones, with the sole exception of women with college or university degree. Other studies also found differences between the two sexes regarding the number of friends (Drobnic – Techen 2013). One reason for the differences can be that the friendships of males are rather based on common interests and activities while female friendships are characterised by personal sharing and high emotional investment (Rubin 1985, Bruckner – Knaup 1993, Fehr 1996), and the quality difference of these relations is reflected in the number of friends. It has also been a general finding internationally, that the more traditional a society is, the higher proportion of female networks consists of kin relations (Fischer 1982, Fischer – Oliker 1983, Angelusz – Tardos 1991, Utasi 1990, 2004, Höllinger – Haller 1990, Drobnic – Techen 2013). On the other hand, when controlling for occupational status, age and family size these differences disappear (Moore 1990), which is supported by the Hungarian data of men and women with college/university degree as well.

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On a local sample, we analysed Hungarian friendship definitions (Dávid – Albert 2005), and also tested how much men and women had a different opinion about friendships. We found only few differences among the characteristics used to define a friend. Women and girls highlighted conversation, listening to one another and linked to it, keeping secrets. For men, the basic characteristic feature of a friend was providing help. Women emphasised the importance of love in friendship while men the past and shared experiences. Young boys mentioned having fun together most. These results fit the line of research concluding that "male friendships are less tight and self-disclosing, they tend to build relationships based on activities, (…) while women mostly gain intimacy in the relationship from self-disclosure." Yet our analysis did not support the finding that "friendships for women provide more emotional support than for men" (F. Lassú 2004: 55–56). For all interviewed men and women, boys and girls, it was equally important to share their feelings and emotions regarding friendship.

It makes us wonder however, that while women in general have significantly less friends on average and more of them lack friends completely, they receive support via both their kin and non-kin ties in the same ratio as men do[8]. What is more, in the analysed dimensions men were statistically over-represented in the group of those receiving neither kin nor non-kin support: while 46% of men, only 40% of women could not expected support in the surveyed dimensions. That is, while men seemed to have more friends, the fewer friends of women (and their other interpersonal relationships) provided the same level of support for them. Although based on the data we could expect men to be in a more favourable situation in this regard, women seem to have at least the same amount of emotional, supportive, intimate ties and similar access to network resources as well.

As Hungarians get older, they tend to lose friends, in the eighties the most drastic decrease could be observed between those who are younger and older than 26. A possible explanation for that was that starting a new family is such a burden for this generation that interpersonal ties must be tailored considering instrumental goals (Utasi 1990). The average age of starting a family has increased significantly, 8 years over the past decades, since 1990. In 2013 women were 29,5, men 32,3 years old at the time of their first marriage. In 1990 20% of women and 26% of men were at least 30 years old when getting married for the first time – the same proportion was 54% for women and 70% of men in 2013 (Murinkó – Spéder 2015: 9). In 2015 those in their twenties had on average 5 friends, in their thirties only 3, and up to their sixties around 2,5.

[8] Based on data from the 2000 TÁRKI Household Monitor Survey surveying inter-household transactions.

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Those having higher educational level tend to have more friends. In case of women, higher education has an even stronger effect on increasing the number of friends, in fact women with tertiary education have slightly more friends than men with the same educational attainment. The role of friends also differs by educational level and friendships with an emotional-intellectual character are more characteristic of higher status groups (Utasi 1990). The better financial situation someone has been in, the more friends one has tended to have. Those in the highest income quintile are in a significantly better situation, but this can be partly attributed to the combined effect of age, level of education, marital status etc. In 2015 students mentioned the most friends on average, while pensioners the fewest. For men, it does not matter what kind of settlements they live in, however, women living in towns have significantly more friends than women living in villages, for example. Interestingly, having a partner does not influence the number of friends for men, but in case of women, those having a partner (or husband) have significantly more friends than those who have not.

To put this all in context, based on data from the Social Networks Module of the 2001 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the number of close friends in Hungary was 4.71, ranking the last but one among the 22 participating countries, overtaking only Latvia while in the top ranking Norway people claimed to have 15.65 close friends on average (Drobnic – Techen 2013). This comparative study also found that in almost all participating countries men mentioned more friends than women, and that the friendship networks of men are not only bigger but more goal-oriented. The difference between men and women living in partnership relations was smaller regarding their friendship networks, possibly because women can harmonize their parental duties with their friendships better, or the parental role itself provides enhanced access for women to new social relations. Different factors seem to influence male and female friendships and female friendships depend more on socio-economic circumstances (Drobnic – Techen 2013). The ratio of those claiming to have no friends at all was the highest in Hungary in 2001 (25% versus less than 10% in all the other countries). In Hungary still a significantly higher proportion of women had no friends, but the difference as compared to men seems to diminish (Utasi et al. 2004).

### Changes of the dominant sources of friends

Characteristically, a very high ratio of Hungarian friends is recruited from one's workplace. In 2000 52% of respondents mentioned friends from his/her place of work. In 1986 this proportion was 53,6% (Utasi 1990). This is especially characteristic of males and those living in cities or the capital. Those with vocational education (skilled workers) and university or college degree have such friends in the highest pro-

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portion. Maybe the current labour market situation facilitates that these groups change jobs more rarely and thus have a higher chance to form personal ties on the job. Age and employment status is also decisive, of course: it is surprising, but in the group of the inactive the ratio of work-mates within the network is higher than in case of the unemployed. Maybe pensioners can still keep their former collegial ties more, even if out of work, than someone who was forced to leave the job. But also it is possible that this finding is influenced by the data of young unemployed people who never had a job before.

The second most important source of friends in Hungary is school: 48% of people mention such friends. This is a significant increase as compared to data from 1986, when this rate was 39%. A possible explanation for this change maybe the general rise of educational attainment: as more people go to school for longer, this increases the ratio of friends acquainted with in educational institutions. Most of these relationships however seem only to last approximately up to the age of 35 (or starting a family) and afterwards they drastically fade away from personal networks. Men, people living in the capital, with higher education and in the top income quintile have school friends in a higher proportion.

The ratio of friends from the neighbourhood is 44 percent. Mainly the elderly, those living in villages, and those with lower educational level have such friends in higher proportion than the sample average. The higher educated someone is, the more likely to have school-friends in his/her ego-centric network, while neighbour-friends tend to be more prevalent among the friends of those with low educational attainment, especially women. Friends from the workplace especially dominate in case of skilled male workers.

Friends from only these three domains characterise the networks of those with low educational level, at least middle aged or widowed. 34 percent of the sample population had friends from "unidentified" domains. These respondents are more likely to be young, single and highly educated.

### Weak ties

To measure weak ties (Granovetter 1982) one of the most widespread methods is the occupational position generator instrument developed by Lin and Dumin (1986), which assesses the social embeddedness of the individuals and their access to social capital based on how many and how prestigious people they know from a list of occupations, and whether these acquaintances are available for providing help or not[9]. Although this method has been applied in Hungary several times, often with different occupation lists, which makes longitudinal comparisons difficult. We may still

[9] On the theoretic background of the method see in detail Kmetty and Koltai (2015).

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## KÖZELKÉP

*Table 1.* Frequency of mentioning the various occupations in the given surveys (%)

| **Nexus diversity 1. (Do you know...?)** | ***2004 (N=1019)*** | ***2014 MTA-GFK (N=1000)*** | ***2015 (N=2687)*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| clerk | 77 | 61 | 51 |
| Book-keeper | | | 33 |
| nurse | 60 | 51,5 | 49 |
| Car mechanic | 67 | | 58 |
| banker, financial manager | | 22 | |
| interior designer | | 9 | |
| security guard | | 46 | 48 |
| shop-assistant | | 86 | 77 |
| hair-dresser | 81 | 81,5 | |
| college/university professor, researcher | | | 19 |
| manager | | 41 | |
| soldier | 28 | | |
| salesperson | 77 | | |
| entrepreneur | 78 | 69 | |
| secondary school teacher | 71 | 49 | 44 |
| bricklayer | 66 | | |
| locksmith | 59 | | |
| agricultural enntrepreneur | 43 | | |
| engineer | 47 | 36 | 30 |
| doctor | 80 | | |
| local covernment representative (in 2015 including the mayor) | 54 | 38 | 38 |
| priest | 43 | | |
| farmer | | 46 | 39 |
| waiter/waitress | | 53 | 40 |
| politician | | 15 | |
| postman | | 81 | |
| policeman | 58 | 33 | |
| surgeon | | 20 | 18 |
| unskilled worker | | 77 | 63 |
| driver | 74 | 65 | 62 |
| skilled worker | | 92 | |
| IT specialist | | | 45 |
| actor | | 9 | 13 |
| teacher | 69 | | |
| tractor driver | 41 | | |
| scientist | | 7 | |
| journalist | 17 | 14 | 12 |
| lawyer | 43 | 38 | 30 |
| CEO, manager | | | 29,5 |
| restaurant or small shop owner | | 62 | |
| district nurse | 50 | | |
| electrician | 72 | | |
| plumber | | | 54 |
| In general how many occupations do you know? | 13,5 (out of 23) | 12 (out of 26) | 8,5 (out of 21) |

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get a broad picture of the trends regarding weak ties in Hungary over the past years from Table 1, for which we used survey data from 3 nationally representative surveys.[10]

*Table 2.* Mobilisable resources in the given socio-demographic groups in 2015 (averages)

| | Mobilisable weak ties (Nexus diversity 2.) |
|---|---|
| Sex | |
| **male** | 5,79 |
| **female** | 5,07 |
| Educational attainment | |
| Maximum 8 primary school s | 3,55 |
| Vocational school | 4,99 |
| Secondary | 5,81 |
| Tertiary | 7,65 |
| Age | |
| **18--29 years** | 5,03 |
| 30–39 | 6,11 |
| 40–49 | 6,08 |
| 50–59 | 6,24 |
| 60–69 | 4,99 |
| 70+ | 3,70 |
| Self-rated class affiliation | |
| lower class | 3,95 |
| working class | 4,63 |
| lower middle class | 5,59 |
| middle class | 6,68 |
| upper middle class and upper class | 6,14 |
| Ethnicity | |
| Non Roma | 5,53 |
| Roma | 3,76 |
| Settlement type | |
| **Budapest** | 3,90 |
| County town | 6,04 |
| town | 5,50 |
| village | 5,85 |
| Total sample | 5,4 (N=2687) |

[10] OTKA F 42 859 from 2004, focusing on the analysis of interpersonal ties based on ethnicity, in 2014 „Osztálylétszám 2014" by MTA TK and GFK Hungária, in 2015 OTKA 108 836: Integrative and Disintegrative Processes in the Hungarian Society.

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If we consider the eight occupation items which were present in all three surveys, there is a clear tendency that a decreasing proportion of respondents can mention at least one acquaintance from any given occupation, except for local government representatives where the rate remained unchanged in 2014 and 2015 as well, though including the mayor in the last survey year may have extended the circle of eligible. Network diversity values thus refer to a decrease in the volume of social capital accessible through weak ties. While in 2004 respondents could on average access 59% of the occupations on the given list, in 2014 46%, while in 2015 only 40%.

If we consider only data from 2015, respondents know the least journalists, surgeons, actors, university professors and researchers while most respondents know someone who is a shop assistant, an unskilled worker or a driver. In 2015 respondents mentioned on average 8.5 occupations from the list containing 21. 2% did not know anyone from the listed occupations and only 1% of the had acquaintances from all 21. 13% of the respondents has no one they could ask for help from the list.

Based on table 2, men have more weak ties they could mobilise than women. Increasing educational level coincides with more mobilisable ties, which is also supported by self-rated class identifications. Those who claimed themselves Roma can also mobilise less resources, undoubtedly due to their low educational level and social and labour market status and disappears if the Roma are compared to similar non-Roma groups. (Albert – Dávid 2004). If we compare those with maximum primary education, the non-Roma have slightly more resources they could mobilise ($p=0,022$), but among those with a vocational education no difference can be indicated.

**Summary**

Surveys carried out before the transition indicated, that Hungarian interpersonal networks were characteristically traditional, that is, family (including extended kin) ties were dominant, interpersonal networks were small in international comparison and the character of ties often instrumental. As expected, the large-scale social changes brought about by the transition changed interpersonal networks as well.

Data clearly shows that mainly the first years after the transition affected personal networks very negatively: they brought along an increasing level of isolation and atomisation of individuals, and personal networks shrank. The reasons for this may lie in altered usage of time, subsistence problems, increasing unemployment, and unfortunately in the increasing role of affluence. Despite the fact, that after the transition from a legal point of view the civil society (NGOs, trade unions, etc.) could flourish and get stronger, other processes that took place in the 90's, e.g. a general atmosphere of distrust and insecurity did not enhance the strengthening of non-

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kin ties, but on the contrary, partially contributed to the weakening of such, already existing ties. Hopefully it is not an exaggeration to say that a prerequisite of adapting to the new system was the existence of a strong family background. Those without family support, who even lost their friends, got into a more disadvantaged situation. This situation was made even worse by the phenomenon which is indicated by all network studies carried out in the nineties, that a better social position coincided with more extended interpersonal networks, and this is not only true to non-kin ties, but kin ties just as well. This was unfortunate if we consider, that as a result network capital can only minimally make up for the lack of other types of capital (e.g. economic or cultural) as primarily those lacking other types of capital have only limited access to network capital, too (see also Albert – Hajdu 2017). Thus during the first decade of the transition one could not witness a significant "modernisation" of personal networks, nonetheless the adaptation process was easier for people supported by strong, traditional family ties.

On the other hand, since 1990 family relations have also undergone significant changes: the ratio of married people decreased dramatically (by 46% between 1990 and 2010) while that of single and divorced people increased while the rate of widows has remained unchanged. The prevailing dominance of partnership relations without marriage characterised the 1990's, while that of young single people the 2000's. The average age of getting married increased 8 years for both men and women. The total marriage rate for women dropped from 0,77 in 1990 to 0,44 in 2013 (Murinkó - Spéder 2015). The divorce rate peaked in 2008 with 0,46, in 2013 on average out of 5 marriages 2 is expected to end in divorce, on average after 13 years spent together, and 60% with young child(ren) in them. The most recent trend is that the proportion of marriages ending in divorce after at least 20 years increases (Földházi 2015). The total fertility rate is very low, 1,4 and 52% of children were born out of wedlock in 2014 (Kapitány – Spéder 2015). These changes, together with the increasing prevalence of patchwork families and other living arrangements made the institution of family more fragile and unstable.

The "modernisation" of ego-centric networks, can be detected in the trend that non-kin ties, especially friendships seem to gain significance at the expense of kin relationships based on most recent data, especially those on core discussion networks, in which the ratio of non-kin ties has significantly increased since 1999. From the point of social integration, however, we should evaluate this change positively for enhancing the diversity of accessible resources and increasing social cohesion by connecting individuals from various social strata only if the increase of non-kin ties does not happen at the expense of family relations. From this aspect our data is not conclusive yet. Although friends appear as confidants in growing numbers, kin ties are decreasingly present, which supports that in this sense networks are becoming less traditional, but this happens at the expense of family ties. If we consider the

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number of friends, it does not indicate growth in this segment of interpersonal relationships, but it seems that the content of friendship is changing, especially its intimate character becomes more prevalent and accepted among men as well. Other negative aspects, namely various (political, financial, racial) cleavages with a disrupting effect on social networks, can be identified. Support accessible through one's weak ties seem to become more limited.

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