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\* [\[gero.marton@tk.hu\]](mailto:gero.marton@tk.hu) (HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest)

\*\* [\[kovach.imre@tk.hu\]](mailto:kovach.imre@tk.hu) (HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest)

\*\*\* [\[kristof.luca@tk.hu\]](mailto:kristof.luca@tk.hu) (HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest)

## Introduction

Recurrent crises of contemporary societies and radical political changes, such as the authoritarian turn and the decline of democracy in various parts of the world, including Hungary, are linked to new forms of inequalities accompanied by the growing importance of disparities, a renewed urban-rural divide, sharpening political polarisation and exclusive social identities. Under these circumstances, traditional approaches to social stratification provide a less and less satisfactory explanation for how new forms of inequity develop and reorganise our societies locally and globally. Furthermore, this transformation means not only the emergence of new forms of difference but also changing social forms and mechanisms of social integration. Understanding the realignment of social inequalities requires a novel and complex approach to social integration. This thematic issue looked for studies that explore reinterpreted theory and new processes of social integration and their relationship with new forms of inequality, especially those affecting the role of institutions and mechanisms of social integration, political integration, including civil society and social movements, redistributive policies, the territorial context of integration, employment, labour and the labour market, interpersonal relations, trust, values and the perceptions of society on the micro level. The special issue publishes papers that have emerged from a longstanding investigation in Hungary that aims to renew the concept and research method of social integration under the influence of Merton (1938), Parsons (1949; 1970), Habermas (1984; 1987) and Robert Castels (2017).

Huszár and Illéssy's study analyses the labour market integration of Hungarian society in the period after 2010, when employment became almost complete, and the financial situation of active labour market actors improved continuously until 2019. Labour market integration is both integrative and disintegrative, as it advocates entry into the integrative labour market by all means but radically weakens the social protection of those with weak social capital who are left out of it. The increase in employment after 2010 did not lead to an effective reduction in income inequality, and the authors instead identify a widening tendency to polarisation, pointing out that absolute poverty declined and relative income poverty increased.

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Gerő and Szabó look for the answer to why the non-reducing occupational class- and income differences do not cause manifest conflicts and political resistance and examine the role of political integration in de-democratization processes. Their novel concept is that politics is less the expression of conflicts and interests tied to the social structure but rather a field of political colonisation and re-essentialization of the Habermasian ‘lifeworld’ (1984). The Orbán regime aspires to integrate society through political participation, pacification, and neutralisation. According to the study, the forms of political participation in Hungarian society can be classified into five groups: traditional, direct, online, local, and consumer. The Orbán regime has multiple forms of support, which are present in all groups of social integration, but there is not a single integration group that exclusively supports the illiberal exercise of power.

The paper by Imre Kovách and Luca Kristóf links social integration mechanisms to the occupational class system. Based on Merton’s classic theory of social structure and anomie (Merton, 1938), they examine the processes of social integration in Hungarian society between 2015 and 2021. Using three representative surveys, they show how the mechanisms of subjective social exclusion, the number of weak ties, political participation and the acceptance of norm violation have changed in different occupational classes. Their results show a relatively stable class hierarchy in Hungarian society in terms of social integration.

Kristóf Nagy’s paper adds to another century-long body of literature that follows Gramsci. It investigates how authoritarian regimes – known for their attacks on civil society – set up and operate new forms of integration through civic organisations. By using the concept of recivilization, Nagy shows how the Hungarian government uses formerly independent yet conservative civil society organisations to strengthen its rule. Drawing on a year-long process of ethnographic fieldwork at the cultural flagship institution of the Orbán regime, the Hungarian Academy of Arts (HAA), this research engages with civic organisations often labelled ‘uncivil’, ‘dark’, or ‘illiberal’.

We publish three papers that focus on local forms of social integration. Judit Keller and Tünde Virág’s paper tells the story of a small town in Eastern Hungary where a particular group of social entrepreneurs, the local project class, eventually took charge of the local welfare system. The authors use the framework of strategic action fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011) to demonstrate how local elites were able to maintain their strategic positions in local social networks with the help of their social and cultural capital despite the changing institutional environment. The analysis is based on long-term empirical fieldwork. It contributes to the study of social integration by describing how local perceptions can shape local integration processes through the local elite’s framing of narratives. The outcome of these processes is the selective social integration of ‘deserving’ members of the local community, while both the central and local government eventually abandons ‘non-deserving’ Roma.

Kyra Tomay and Márk Hegedűs also examine local integration in a rural/small-town setting. They focus on local entrepreneurs in three different wine-producing regions. Using the classic sociological concepts of embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985), social capital (Coleman, 1988), and trust (Putnam, 2000), they show that local integration is indeed a factor in economic success. However, their qualitative data also show that cooperation between entrepreneurs must be accompanied by a supportive and stable institutional

environment in order to be sustainable in the long term. Consequently, the state dependence of small enterprises (Huszár & Berger, 2022) is a persistent source of difficulty for successful local integration.

Luca Bródy's paper focuses on a rarely studied aspect of civil society and social movements: rural local food production. Although the food sovereignty movement is sometimes seen as a primarily Western European concept, studies have already shown its growing importance in the Eastern European region as well (Jehlička et al., 2019). In her research, Bródy describes the various ways everyday rural practices contribute to sustainability. As a member of the critical feminist research collective HerStory Collective, she highlights the marginalised experiences of rural women through oral 'herstory' narrative interviews and auto-ethnography.

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