



Breaking down European Attitudes towards Migrant/Minority Stereotypes

Stereotypes, perception and discrimination in Hungary

Part 1: General introduction: on the methods applied and basic information on “open meetings”

1.1. General Experiences Collected During Preparation

The guiding principle for organizing the discussions was to find the typical trends and divergences arising out of the differences within the individual groups. During the actual organization process we tried to create homogeneous groups considering age, qualification, area of residence and interests but distinguish one from another. Thus we interviewed students from high schools, students recently graduated from high school, undergraduates, graduates in Budapest, people working in the media or advertising and people living in Balassagyarmat, a Hungarian city. During the conversations we questioned the participants regarding the four given matters (1. Employment and self employment 2. Discrimination and interaction in the social sphere, 3. Deviant or criminal behavior, 4. Self representation, known migrants), always bearing in mind their differences and the importance they attached to the above mentioned points.

In each interview we asked the participants to fill in a short and anonymous questionnaire in which we inquired about their age, qualification, language skills, place of work, knowledge or studies about migrants, where they most often meet, news stories about migrants and the news sources they follow (Internet, TV, radio, online social networking website). Each time we started the inquiry with a general inquiry finding out how much they know about the immigration conditions. The same set of questions resulted in different emphases: students could be involved in topics about education while those working in the media were more willing to talk about the role of the media.

Our experiences show that the willingness of participants to engage on a topic related to its importance in society itself: not all people were keen to spend a few hours answering questions about these topics. The level of motivation of a group greatly depended on whether their lives or jobs were in some way connected with migrants, minorities, handicapped or not, and also whether everyday news plays any role at all in their lives, as well as whether their work or studies was relevant or not. The most motivated proved to be those students freshly graduated from high school whose studies related to migrants and were perhaps themselves in some way affected, those studying international relations, and those working in the media. Graduates did not show any real



interest. Secondary school students took part in the work – encouraged to do so by their teachers – but their interest in the topic varied, mostly tending to the minimum. Their adolescent lives are far removed from this field.

Our general experience shows that disregarding the differences among the groups the question of the Hungarian gypsy minority came up every time, because the presence of the Romas is a much more present and pressing problem for everyone than that of the foreign migrants. We also find it important to stress in connection with the organization of the groups that we were unable to involve those migrants who speak Hungarian and have been living here for a longer time, however hard we tried. There were a few who would have volunteered but their number did not reach the minimum. Others refused these conversations. Organizations and media sources did not enable us to efficiently reach the migrants they target know. Organizations representing a range of different ethnicities (such as the one dealing with Asian culture or the institution looking after children arriving without adult company) were difficult to approach due to organizational difficulties. Migrants approached directly usually did not wish to be involved in the group interviews. In many cases they did not speak Hungarian which was a crucial aspect because during the interviews we always focused on the knowledge of the Hungarian media products and the reactions and thoughts they generate.

1. 2. The emphasis of the open meetings

The range of topics discussed in the different conversations is not completely uniform because, as already mentioned, we tried to take into consideration the individual features of the groups and focus on the points they were more interested in. This also proved to be useful because thus the specific focuses of the groups could be measured. This way we could determine which aspects of the topic they are really interested in due to their social background or age.

The differences became evident already when mapping their general view, namely their knowledge and opinion about migrants. During certain conversations we dwelled on these introductory questions, typically in case of such groups which, either due to their age or in case of adults due to their roles in the labour market, highlighted greatly differing knowledge, opinions and attitudes. Differences also came to light depending on how deeply they were interested in the further points or how worthwhile they thought these points were. Generally the questions of job access and integration proved to be most interesting for the participants, they expressed the most engaged opinions in these fields.

The presence of celebrity migrants was in each case such a colorful element of the conversations which they all found interesting and they all knew of them. Participants represented definite views both about these celebrities and the approach of the media. The groups all identified the two celebrities we examined as being well known. This way the conclusions of the interviews and the television programmes discussed with the participants were the links with earlier phases of this research (WS1). They unquestionably point to the fact that the so-called entertainment programmes of the popular media cause a deep embedding in the common knowledge even in case of sectors of society which define and feel themselves as being out of reach of the tabloids and popular media. However, there were large differences as regards the degree of criticism and the definition of the role of the media.



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Part 2. From production to perception

In connection with the media products we sought the opinion of the groups focussing on the two aspects which became our main guidelines through the media samples and interviews of WS1, namely the world of the celebrity migrants and the news and social echo relating to refugee centers.

2.1. The First Focus: celebrity migrants and their characteristics

In all the conversations participants mentioned Joshi Bharat and Black Pako as the two iconic migrants appearing regularly in the media, well before the direct question was posed. These two stood out emphatically from the media figures and further famous migrants took a long time to be remembered. This way our belief in WS1 that they are by far the best well-known persons in the popular media turned out to be correct. Other than these individuals, the applicants of talent contests were mentioned as were some transborder Hungarians perceived actually to be Hungarians. It should be stressed that each of the participants with different age, social and cultural backgrounds evaluated the two celebrities in nearly completely the same way, which enables us to conclude that the view suggested by the media generates more or less the same reactions and thoughts from the public, regardless of the mentioned background differences. As well as visceral reactions a critical approach could also be experienced and it was the strength and depth of this phenomenon which helped us differentiate between the groups questioned. The approach examined thoroughly in WS1 and its influence can definitely be found in these representative groups of society. It is also worth mentioning that the notoriety of these celebrities is overwhelming although they appear in programmes disapproved of and allegedly not watched by intellectuals. People who have no televisions also know them. Tabloids, online newspapers and social networking websites also discuss them thus transporting these programmes and characters to everyone. After naming the celebrities we wanted to find out what general characteristics the participants could identify these men as having. The stereotypical answers arrived as expected in great harmony with everything mentioned in the course of the interviews by both the editors and the interviewees.

Regarding Joshi's characteristics the following adjectives were mentioned by the participants of the open meetings: *patient, calm, open-minded, kind, believing, vegetarian, one with a psychological attitude, smart, wise, spiritual, emphatic, likable, pleasant, gentleman-like, humorous, finding the way with people, having a cute accent.*

In every group there were a few members who openly criticized Joshi's appearance on television, defining him as a liar and a hypocrite who only uses people. His most known appearance is in an afternoon talk-show in which downtrodden members of society, often Roma people, discussed their problems with one another and the presenter. Quite often these resulted in brutal verbal and sometimes even physical fights. Joshi's role as a presenter in this talk-show was highly criticized in the open meetings. Some even said:

“The fact that Joshi Bharat took part in such a show is disgusting, pitiful and should be prosecuted. One who takes advantage of such people's tragedy, what's more makes money of it, is to be



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condemned. Joshi Bharat is an acknowledged psychologist or psychiatrist or something, a smart guy. He is not an idiot, he knows exactly what he gives his name for.”¹

This quotation shows well that though the presenter became known in a universally negative programme, his previously acknowledged and generally accepted good features didn't fade, only his moral approach was questioned. It was this point that the participants started to talk about the responsibility of the media and about how someone's true character becomes transparent via these programmes. In some of the open meetings they also started to discuss at this point to what extent certain things are said and done because of the intentions of the editors or a possible team behind Joshi or Pako or whether these things arise from their own personalities. In case of both celebs this appeared more as a question than a proven fact.

When asked about Black Pako's characteristics the replies were again quite homogeneous: *stupid, sensationalist, monkey, exhibitionist, dumb, ugly, toothless, liar, funny, naive, pitiful.*

There is an interesting difference regarding the perception of Pako; how much he is considered to behave artificially and how little they sympathize with him, as well as how strongly they find the media responsible for his image. The high school students and those who have just left school do not deal with this question, it doesn't even occur to them. Those having participated in the Balassagyarmat open meetings were not very active either, although a few of them pointed out that these people are simply products used to entertain viewers.

His image radically changes with the growing of age and educational level. Already undergraduates appreciated the role of media as much more important. Graduate Budapesters and those working in the media and advertising dwelled on the question of whether Pako is a victim, and if so, if he is aware of this fact or not. Even they did not doubt that Pako is not known for his intelligence (only a few had heard that he arrived in Hungary to read law), still it is not him who they think responsible for his very negative image in the whole society. The words *pity, used and being a victim* were mentioned in connection with his presence. Participants in the groups where this topic was discussed were not in agreement on whether Pako is a well-designed and managed product or he is just a silly and naive man being exploited.

“It must be bad to be a court jester. Even if he supported the clear water programme in Nigeria he would still remain a clown his whole life. I'm pretty sure that this is not his fault. He had his weaknesses jumped on by the media saying: this man doesn't even speak proper Hungarian, how funny his silly mumbling is.”²

“The problem with this is that however bad he is at singing Hungarian folksongs forced on him, he is very good at performing African tunes. The latter last happened to him ten years ago on television. He can't be so stupid given he was accepted to join the faculty of law.”³

When questioned about the influence of the two migrant celebrities on society an interesting picture was drawn. The younger participants, who hardly differentiated between the celebrities' images and their real personalities, thought they were not affected by the media's intention and that only the

1 Open meeting: undergraduates, 24th of September, 2013.

2 Open meeting: media workers, 2nd of October, 2013.

3 Open meeting: Budapest intellectuals, 23rd of July, 2013.



uneducated or the old were. Some, who consequently demonstrated their open-mindedness and opposition to racism refused at the very beginning to make any connection between Joshi Bharat and Black Pako and the Indian and African minorities in Hungary. They were not willing to draw conclusions about the features of these minorities from the two celebs' performances. This inconsistency was typical of some of the other groups, too. Many of them mentioned that background knowledge plays a key role in distinguishing between the truth and the image suggested by the media about certain nations. The above mentioned features of the two celebs and the characterization of their minorities have no connection whatsoever according to the participants. When asked about their personal susceptibility to influence, they clearly drew a distinction between themselves and the layers of society influenced by the popular media. This also happened in the groups – e.g. n Balassagyarmat – where the participants closely linked the characteristics of the celebrities with that of their minorities.

Due to the unique nature of Hungarian relations and social structure it is important to emphasize that from undergraduates upwards the participants often underlined the similarity of this situation with that of the representation of the Roma in the media. They pointed out that Romas appearing in the news and entertainment programmes, and the way they are shown in them, have great influence on how society handles and thinks of the Roma minority. They feel the same in connection with the migrants. This also showed in the interview made in WS1 with one of the media researchers. The researcher pointed out that the news about the migrants show the same characteristics as the ones we have been experiencing in connection with the Romas for years (that they are mostly mentioned in negative context, e.g. criminal or deviant behavior, living on state benefits, avoiding work, etc). It was a general opinion that the difference between an instinctual response and conscious acceptance is made by knowledge, personal experience, education and critical approach towards the media. As for our two celebrities it was also often mentioned that they greatly differ in their levels of social consciousness. While Joshi often and willingly talks about his roots and family traditions, generally about Indian culture, hardly anyone can recall anything similar on Pako's side. This was considered a main difference in their attitudes.

In summary, we can conclude that the image living in society of celebrity migrants is almost totally identical with the one described in the interviews by the editors. It can be strongly appreciated that with age, greater knowledge and information, greater experiences and with the appearance of critical attitudes towards the media the gap between the well-intentioned acceptance and total refusal becomes more and more evident. Of course even bigger differences can be seen on an individual basis, due to the different individual values. The more sensitive someone was in connection with human rights, or prejudices in the fields of political and social consciousness, the less receptive they proved to be towards the image the popular media offered about the migrants, especially the celebrity migrants. They definitely refused to make any pejorative remarks about them. They only criticized the entertainment media and the men behind it, not the characters themselves.



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2. 2. The second focus: the refugee centers and public opinion

Public opinion on the refugee centers paints a more complex picture. There were big differences in how the news reached the participants. For high school students the topic was unknown, which is understandable given their age. Even in those groups where the participants followed news daily there were only a couple of people who could find the common link between the different cities on our list (these towns were the ones where refugee centers have recently been opened). The two Balassagyarmat groups were an exception of course because they were personally involved. They not only knew what we were driving at, their opinion was more well-defined. Nevertheless there were differences in the attitude of these two groups. All of the members of one of the groups were also members of the Facebook group called *Citizens' union against the refugee center in Balassagyarmat*. This Facebook group regularly shares news about immigration and migrants not only from Balassagyarmat but from all over the country. The intolerant and hostile attitude of the page was typical of the whole group. During the open meeting they listed many of the arguments and stereotypes commonly associated with xenophobes and those opposing all kinds of immigration. Therefore they disagree with the creation of a refugee center in their area, because they feel it endangers the inhabitants, as well as their personal safety and property. They consider their presence threatening and disturbing, they clearly believe there is a connection between the assumed worsening crime statistics and the presence of the refugees. They draw a connection between the migrants and the deterioration of public security, thefts, and stabbings and they also find annoying their gathering at public premises.

“ Their bad reputation preceded their arrival. Everybody knows they can't integrate into society. They don't even intend to.”⁴

“Maybe it is normal for them just to walk and attack someone. It is not regular here.”⁵

On the question of what aspects the locals considered irritating the locals' answers included, amongst other things, the stereotype about criminal behaviour, and they also criticized the institutional support from the Hungarian government. They said the government should not devote money and energy into providing shelter and food for refugees. They found it annoying that all decisions about this are taken without asking for their opinion. This is the reason why they have joined the Facebook page. They want to express their opinion; they want it to be visible. This attitude in this group was strongly against the centre. The other Balassagyarmat group showed a more sympathetic attitude. They criticized both the refugee centers and also those who protested against it. As for crimes they said refugees don't commit more than natives but it calls more attention. The locals did find the noise and garbage they make a disturbance. They also mentioned the question of financial support. The examples they mentioned were free public transportation and clothes supplies. They called the members of protesting Facebook group 'a bunch of losers', they understand the motivation behind it but disagree with the style and language used. Some said foreigners should be treated equally as they are not looking for trouble.

4 Open meeting: Balassagyarmat, group 1.

5 Open meeting: Balassagyarmat, group 1.



All these opinions become particularly interesting when compared with the experiences drawn from the other open meetings. The participants in those meetings were the ones who are well informed by the media, who are not personally involved therefore their attitude shows a more distant and theoretical approach. Of the four topics mentioned, it was this topic in particular where most negative and hostile stereotypes came up in connection with immigration, especially with refugees. This was mainly characteristic of the young generation whose instinctual reflexes have not been questioned yet. On the other hand they are not really well-informed in these questions. To the question of whether they would accept a refugee center in their area, near their homes the following comments, amongst others, arose:

“I wouldn't feel comfortable if a foreigner walked along the streets. I don't want him to speak a foreign language. We are in Hungary. I want him to talk in Hungarian.”⁶

“Nobody knows why they come here. I wouldn't go to Miami by accident. He comes to steal something or to buy a laptop or to see the sights. No one knows. I would definitely lock them up. I wouldn't check anything just ask for his papers and get him to take an immediate AIDS test. We don't need any diseases here.”⁷

A degree of spontaneous openness also appeared; there were some who said foreigners don't bother them. They also mentioned festivals and how they enjoy foreign company there. Some even went as far as suggesting they may give asylum to all refugees in need. In the context of the whole meeting these seemed to be just ad hoc ideas and emotions, not based on deeply held convictions. As previously noted, with age and greater knowledge greater awareness became more visible. The undergraduate group could clearly define the fears which inhabitants of the involved settlements (Balassagyarmat, Vamosszabadi) usually articulate, namely fear of crimes or diseases. They show serious understanding regarding the instinctual protest caused by personal involvement and changes in the local area. In this group and many others they jumped to the conclusion that the recent events in Szilvasvarad (inhabitants opposed the planned presence of the disabled in the village) showed a clear parallel with the problem of migrants. They found the link between the two affairs in the fear of the unknown, and decisions made by politicians without asking and informing the local communities. These elements logically influence public opinion in a negative way.

It was frequently mentioned that many kinds of local establishments which have negative connotations, such as garbage dumps or nuclear plants cause understandable protest even on balance the benefits are positive. The creation of new jobs is one such benefit according to some members. The negative factors included changes and fear from the unknown. The participants even came up with personal examples and it was mentioned in several groups that with proper and conscious communication and politics the worst of the protests could be reduced. They mentioned that such changes as investment and development (like the renovation of the main square) led to inhabitants having a change of acceptance.

“As regards about refugee centers it's easy to see that their creation will surely bring along certain changes. We have to make people understand that it won't disturb their everyday life so much that it

6 Open meeting: newly graduated from high school, 14th of August, 2013

7 Open meeting: newly graduated from high school, 14th of August, 2013



becomes unbearable. There will be changes, it's true, but they must see they don't have to give up their earlier way of life. For examples as regards kurds fighting on the streets. They won't fight in your house neither in front of the kindergarten or the school but in front of the pub.”⁸

The responsibility of the politicians and political communication in general came up in different groups as a key driver for acceptance and tolerance. They also mentioned that it was the norm in the socialist era (which recalled bad memories) that political changes just happened to people without asking for their opinion. Besides the political communication the solution would be a fundamental change in the political attitude – said some of them. They not only discussed this in relation to the current issue but also as regards the hope of paving a way to a more accepting society. It was a general opinion in nearly all the meetings that a lack of knowledge and education is the main reason for hostility, and also the fear, frustration and not having answers for their questions. Undergraduates, those working in the media and the Budapest intellectuals were on the same wavelength about the above remarks. They markedly stressed personal experiences, possibilities for interaction, information, proper communication. In the long run only the involvement of such a conscious national political guideline can create a more accepting and open society which forms the ideology and lays down the paving stones of this road.

Part 3. From perception to attitudes

3.1. General questions

Besides the above-analyzed topics relating to media sources we tried to measure the general opinion through the given focuses. At the beginning of the open meetings we tried to assess the participants' basic knowledge about our main focus: the migrants and immigration itself. We asked if they really know who the migrants were, where they came from, why they were leaving their homes. The most simple and straightforward answers came from the younger generations. They said migrants are such people who were not born in Hungary and left their country for some reason. In the other groups participants often articulated the need to separate the migrants as a whole into more specialized and more accurate categories. They were not sure whether someone counts as a migrant if he came to Hungary for a certain amount of time to work or study here for a couple of years. They dwelled upon the status of refugees as well. In fact, the refugees were mainly the center of interest, they tried to figure out the reasons of leaving their countries, what opportunities they have in the host countries, how they can cope there and what kind of life they can expect. Our overall experience was that even when they have some background knowledge, people generally need much more information on the topic. It became quite clear that they wanted to be accurate and wanted to use the proper categories referring to certain people or certain groups.

"I think differences in legal status are really important, I don't think we should call someone a migrant for moving from one corner to the other within a federation. For example if someone

8 Open meeting: undergraduates, 24th of September, 2013.



*moves from Texas to Illinois he doesn't count as a migrant because his constitutional status is still American. It is a question though if we use the same definition in the European Union.*⁹

Participants also mentioned that they feel some kind of negative connotation regarding the word migrant and that people usually think of somebody colored coming from an underdeveloped country not someone coming from a European country with higher educational level.

*"It's true indeed, we tend to call them migrants. It has a pejorative meaning, nobody calls someone from Great Britain a migrant even if he stays here for fifteen years. On the other hand someone with darker skin or being a muslim will be identified as a migrant even among those who otherwise are not really interested in this question."*¹⁰

*"I don't feel my father counts as a migrant although he is British who has been here for 30 years. Not because it is shameful."*¹¹

It is clearly visible that right from the very beginning personal involvement and personal experiences came to the forefront. Many of the participants gave examples of different aspects, different cases of migration mainly inside the European Union. They often brought examples from their families or from their friends.

Regarding all the meetings and the replies given to further questions it can be declared that although a part of the groups perceived and could enumerate more reasons and aims of immigration they also talked about the Hungarian particularity that transborder Hungarians create the majority of migrants in Hungary. In their further replies they used migrant as a category reserved mainly for third countries. They often feel a sort of hierarchy between European and non-European migrants. To the question why migrants come to Hungary they clearly and typically marked economic and political causes. The high school group gave such explanations as:

" Because they were beaten up "

" This country provides new chances for them. "

*" They couldn't make progress in their own countries. Basically they came to work. "*¹²

It is interesting and important to notice that even in the most rejecting Balassagyarmat group some replies suggested they were aware of the causes of becoming a migrant:

"They come in hope of a new life."

"Not to die in their mother country."

*"Migrants often arrive illegally or were expelled from home or flee from war."*¹³

As for the origin of migrants besides transborder Hungarians and European citizens they mentioned Chinese, Vietnamese, Africans, Afghans, Kosovians, Libyans, Syrians, Turkish and Pakistanis but a few of them listed Russians, Ukrainians and Serbians, too. When describing the typical places they came from without naming nationalities they tended to paint the picture of a possible discharging country which is less developed than Hungary with fewer working opportunities and where the average living standard is lower than in Hungary.

9 Open meeting: Budapest intellectuals, 23rd of July, 2013.

10 Open meeting: undergraduates, 24th of September, 2013.

11 Open meeting: undergraduates, 24th of September, 2013.

12 Open meeting: high school students, 30th of October, 2103.

13 Open meeting: Balassagyarmat, group 1.



During the introductory phase we asked the participants whether in their view we need migrants. The direction of the replies completely split along two distinct lines in connection with the two Balassagyarmat groups and the opinion of the other groups. Those living in close proximity of refugee centers said an unhesitating no, and the so-far hostile group also named the reasons why we don't need them. They again connected their presence with criminality, they simply called them parasites who cost a lot and give nothing in return.

"We need people who do something for this country but they just prey on us, so they are just not needed."

"They don't know our culture, for example they might not find it disturbing if they follow someone for half a day but here it is rather dodgy."

"Criminality has increased since they have been here so we don't want them here. I think they don't work but wrong-doing is growing."

"They have more privileges than us."¹⁴

Even the other Balassagyarmat group which opposed open xenophobia was of the opinion that Hungary doesn't need migrants but they also pointed out that as we are members of the European Union we are obliged to house migrants. They thought some of them are exceptions who can be useful for the country but the present way of their life, in particular the fact that they don't work, is not wanted. In these two groups personal experiences could definitely be felt, this determined their replies. They couldn't think beyond the state of affairs regarding the refugee center and did not extrapolate to everyday life or find any other links. In contrast with this the participants of the other meetings were of the opinion that Hungary needs migrants, their presence is useful for us. They underpinned it basically with two causes, one is culture, the multicultural life, others stressed labour market aspects. Migrants' importance in cultural diversity appeared in a positive way, some of them even remarked:

"They introduce new points of view, new information about places that we hardly know or wouldn't think about. It is great when people show things from foreign cultures."¹⁵

"It's cool because they are not Hungarians, they weren't born here they don't know this culture and it's fun to see theirs."¹⁶

3.2. Discrimination and interaction

As an opening question of this topic we asked them to enumerate situations where in their everyday life they may come into contact with migrants. They named public places, streets, pubs and cafes, restaurants, catering services. They also mentioned cultural events and the media as a transmitting channel. We also focused on the openness of the participants regarding the migrants' culture. Therefore if the migrants live here, do the participants believe they should become acquainted with the migrants' culture.

14 Open meeting: Balassagyarmat, group 1.

15 Open meeting: undergraduates, 24th of September, 2013.

16 Open meeting: undergraduates, 24th of September, 2013.



With the exception of the extremely hostile Balassagyarmat group the participants generally thought it is important to know more about their imported culture. Everybody argued in favor of this in different ways. The more accepting Balassagyarmat group for example were of the opinion that this could really help the understanding of their community and thus its acceptance. They said if they don't know where the migrants have come from, what their religion is then locals will not be able to understand their behavior. At other meetings the young seemed to be really curious about different cultures and they also mentioned that this would be useful for the society because in this way the public's way of thinking will not be as introspective. A high school student expressed the commonly mentioned statement that the migrants' culture "kills" the natives' one, this opinion immediately generated a fierce fight at the meeting and finally he was isolated in supporting his radical point of view but he didn't step back from it.

The Hungarian culture and its conservation arose in the second youngest group as well within those who just left high school. A long lasting conversation started about the optimal balance between learning the host country's native culture and preserving and practicing the migrant's own.

"In my opinion whoever comes here should get to know our culture, our holidays, what Easter or Christmas are. If you want to settle in somewhere you should know the way of their living."

*"It's a personal choice whether someone keeps his customs but should also know ours. It's important. Not that I celebrate all of them but at least I know when they are."*¹⁷

The Budapest graduates also agreed that getting to know different cultures is important because of social usefulness and individual experiences.

*"Knowing migrants' culture living in Hungary can be useful because this way it's easier to cooperate with them. It's also important from cultural, economic or other aspects basically for mass value production."*¹⁸

At many open meetings participants emphasized the role of gastronomy, the popping up of more and more national restaurants which create the simplest link between migrants and natives.

3.3 Acceptance or rejection?

If we consider the previously examined social attitudes, we can find serious divergences of view especially among the Budapest groups. According to statistical surveys Hungarian society as a whole is significantly unwelcoming. The TARKI survey¹⁹ examining what ethnic groups Hungarians expect to arrive in Hungary in the near future found that, 40-50% of those questioned had a hostile reaction to Arabic, African, Jewish and Chinese people, and that they wouldn't be happy for them to be neighbors. In our research the same attitude didn't come up to the same extent. The reason may be found in the dynamics of the conversations at the meetings which greatly influenced the participants. But the main reason is the composition of the groups because undergraduates, graduates, intellectuals in general were appreciably more on the liberal side rather than the far right side. Moreover the questions put were not directly referring to the personal sphere,

17 Open meeting: newly graduated from high school, 14th of August, 2013

18 Open meeting: media workers, 2nd of October, 2013.

19 <http://www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2011/kitekint/20110801.html>



i.e. the problem of living together but to their attitude regarding the social presence of migrants in general. Therefore beyond the understanding and possible usefulness of such direct, often ordinary, relations we were eager to know what they thought about the society's general attitude. In most cases we didn't even have to put direct questions about the question of acceptance because participants instinctively began to analyze this issue. Usually this arose at the beginning of the open meetings when drawing the general image about the migrants' presence in Hungary. At this point the majority of the groups described Hungarians as a rejecting and xenophobic nation. But the above-mentioned distinction also appeared that migrants from Europe are received with much more understanding than those arriving from a third country. They created a totally different category for the white, well-educated, in the labour market more highly positioned migrants regarding social acceptance than those who arrived from a visibly different culture. In this regard the participants seemed to sense some kind of hierarchy and they even differentiated among the positions of the non-Europeans mainly on a utilitarian basis. That is the members of those nations who are regularly seen working have a greater chance of acceptance than those who are less visible from this point of view.

“I think it's very diverse. I've never heard anyone on the bus insulting someone saying 'You stinky, dirty, useless Chinese migrant' because we all have the routine of going into a Chinese shop if we want to do cheap shopping. We are more tolerant and accepting of those groups who are considered to be useful from a personal experience or from the public opinion than with the blacks, for example. With the Arabs too we have the same feeling that they are useful but not with the blacks. By looking at them it occurs to us that they are lazy, dirty, stinky. It doesn't matter if he has a store they are more likely to be looked down on.”²⁰

It was interesting to see that the high school and undergraduate group members see Hungarians as a more tolerant nation, than members of the older and more educated groups. The reason might be that they live a much more closed life and wide social opinion does not reach them so easily. The young gave examples mostly from their personal acquaintances to illustrate that even in small settlements people accept the presence of foreigners:

“Close to my grandparents' village with 150 inhabitants there is a bigger one and the local veterinarian is from Nigeria. I don't think he has experienced anything negative. The local dentist is American, an african American, who I think hasn't been offended either. I have a friend in Nograd county who told me that a Chinese buffet opened in the village and he thought it was great. I think everybody is judged on his actions. If somebody doesn't want or cannot integrate and is not willing to behave in a constructively way they may easily claim this is as a result of racism. But I don't think racism is typical of people as there are very few who really are racists.”²¹

At the meeting with the media workers, they also brought up family examples also from the countryside and added the point that acceptance is not by all means instinctual and obvious. A foreigner suddenly stepping into our everyday life can indeed be challenging for many:

20 Open meeting: undergraduates, 24th of September, 2013.

21 Open meeting: undergraduates, 24th of September, 2013.



“My grandmother had a serious operation and afterwards she said in a shock that she just came out from the ultrasound examination carried out by a black woman. I asked her, granny, but did she treat you like your 'normal' doctor? She said of course there was no problem but she was black!”²²

So typically when they discussed the question of what challenge the acceptance of migrants means for the majority of the society they brought mainly personal and environmental experiences. In the young groups it was indicated at this point that in the lives of Hungarians it is much more the Romas who experience rejection. Conflicts can be experienced between them and the members of the majority of the society, they said. Moreover in another group a media worker added that migrants are more easily accepted than Romas because they are and will be at the very bottom of the social hierarchy. *“There is a gypsy girl who keeps lying to everyone except her close friends that her father is Venezuelan, her mother is Hungarian. Acting like an exotic migrant she is more easily accepted and can get on better than if she confessed being a Roma.”²³*

The question of acceptance or rejection of migrants was raised at several meetings. They thought refusal and aversion is typical of the older generations. As for the younger generations their social lives, their opportunities and their personal experiences make them predestined to a more open attitude. In particular, they can travel abroad, meet foreigners in Hungary, learn languages, create relationships via the internet. The group members referred to the influence of the socialist era toward the older generation several times pointing out the dictatorial aspects and the relevance of the strictly closed borders. The impossibility of traveling and moving freely across countries resulted in a more closed way of thinking in the older generation. They are the ones who suffer from not knowing different languages and this barrier truly separates them from the foreigners and makes it impossible for them to be welcoming and accepting. According to the group members speaking foreign languages is a key element regarding the acceptance. Other members highlighted the reciprocity considering the possible migrant status of their own that one day maybe they will be the ones leaving their country:

“I've been thinking about emigrating and if I weren't welcomed there together with my own culture I would feel an idiot so I might be more open for those who have come here.”²⁴

To summarize the views about social acceptance: beyond the above-illustrated personal examples and experiences at certain meetings participants expressed general thoughts in connection with the Hungarian situation. A common feature was the historical past of Hungary and its consequences. Many of them compared the situation of Hungary to the accepting attitude of the so-called western societies. As a result they wish there was such an adult social behavior and maturity from Hungarians, which would allow for a possible degree of aversion but not its open declaration in public.

They mentioned such countries to illustrate this theory as the United States or the Scandinavian countries where they think it would be impossible for people to express or act on their xenophobia or any aversion towards anyone, saying this goes beyond social standards. It was also mentioned

22 Open meeting: media workers, 2nd of October, 2013.

23 Open meeting: media workers, 2nd of October, 2013.

24 Open meeting: media workers, 2nd of October, 2013.



that countries seriously involved in immigration, such as Germany or France, this liberal persuasion seems to turn around due to the seemingly uncontrollable number of migrants. Here public communication has been increasingly critical recently.

3.3. Studying, integration, languages

Language as a means of relations

While analyzing the access to the labour market and institutional education of the migrants we included the question of languages. We wanted to find out how important this is when considered from the point of view of the migrants and that of the host society. The overall opinion was that it was vital for the migrants to learn Hungarian but the reasons behind it varied.

Even the representatives of the younger generations think that those planning to stay here for a longer period should by all means learn to speak Hungarian otherwise their chances to find their way of life is impossible. Many even declared that this is a must towards society if someone wants to settle down and build his future here. Although most of the reasoning argued that knowing Hungarian is useful for the migrant but as an afterthought it could be perceived that this is expected as a reward for the possibilities provided for them in Hungary.

Many think this is also inevitable in connection with Hungarian culture as well to achieve respect and acceptance in the society. The two younger groups and the two Balassagyarmat groups were quite on the same wavelength considering this issue. As for the other groups they mentioned more reasons, and from undergraduates upwards it was a returning element that in a country where the majority of the population is unfamiliar with foreign languages it is extremely important that migrants do the hard job. Thus here we can experience a change of view: migrants are expected to learn Hungarian not just for their own benefit but also for our comfort. Participants said they would also do all this, were they in similar situation. It would be natural for them to learn the language of the country they have settled in. It's not only important for the sake of communication, a given culture can be more easily comprehensible through the language.

“In Holland even the greengrocers can speak English. My brother lives there and he says if you want to integrate this is vital. Not because you know Dutch and you cannot communicate in any other way but because thus you get to know such segments of their culture you would miss otherwise.”²⁵

The above-mentioned hierarchical classification once again came to surface. The expectations regarding language skills were not as strict towards the Western-Europeans, saying they came here for the kinds of jobs which don't really need to know the local language. Contrary to this, for migrants arriving from a third country these expectations are more stringent. They also mentioned personal experiences at this point. Many criticized this reluctance in connection with Europeans who haven't learnt Hungarian even after a long staying here.

25 Open meeting: media workers, 2nd of October, 2013.



“This is laziness. My sister-in-law is British, they have been living here for ten years and he doesn't speak a word of Hungarian. This is absolutely irrational. He can't even talk to his mother-in-law.”²⁶

During the open meetings there was only one person who believed this issue was a matter purely of personal preference and decision. We cite his words because of its peculiarity:

“I think everyone has the right to be idle or whatever you call it. If he can cope without knowing Hungarian I don't expect him to learn it and I don't think it is disrespectful if he doesn't. I don't think it is my task to burden his life with saying 'I think it is your interest to speak Hungarian, this is why I think you should do it.’”²⁷

The importance of employment

Regarding the position on the labour market we have experienced similarly homogeneous opinion. Participants all agreed that it is entirely to be expected that foreigners should work, pay taxes and take part in the local system. Many of the participants underlined the fact that in Hungary everyone has to face grave unemployment. Many Hungarians have no jobs and the Hungarian government should offer jobs to the natives in the first place.

The classical stereotype that the migrants take the jobs from the natives only scarcely came up. In most cases this was not an accusation rather a statement that due to this situation in Hungary migrants can get a job with more difficulty. The TARKI survey from 2011²⁸ showed that the negative attitude towards migrants is due to the fears for job security and similar financial worries. According to their findings more than 60% of those questioned was hostile towards the foreign workforce and slightly more than 30% disagreed with the statement that migrants deprive locals of jobs.

Mainly the two Balassagyarmat groups echoed these stereotypes. Generally they said it is better if migrants don't work here or rather don't even come here. It is vital that Hungarians should find work in the first place. Even those who accepted that with suitable qualifications and skills migrants could be allowed to work here think with reservation about the level of trust of Hungarians. They are of the opinion that in personal jobs (babysitting, housekeeping) it is unimaginable to employ migrants and let them in their homes or personal environment. Other groups shared this opinion. They compared the Hungarian situation to the British one saying they are more tolerant with foreigners and employ migrants mainly for such jobs.

The intellectuals from Budapest and the media workers appeared to be the most accepting and supportive in this topic, due to the global migration and emigration from Hungary they mostly agreed that there are a lot of empty workplaces which could be filled in by migrants. What's more they stressed the job creating power of immigration:

“I realize that migrants have a strong work ethic and entrepreneurial attitude. This is a complex affair, there certainly are examples when somebody is not satisfied unless they are employed but all

26 Open meeting: Budapest intellectuals, 23rd of July, 2013.

27 Open meeting: Budapest intellectuals, 23rd of July, 2013.

28 <http://www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2011/kitekint/20110705.html>



in all I think the system is well-balanced especially within the EU. There are jobs which migrants are better at than natives thus creating workplaces.”

“The most common advantage is that migrants offer a cheaper workforce. Evidently this is the greatest motivation for employing migrants. It depends on the viewpoint but this can be a win-win situation. In the hosting country there is a vacancy which he fills for a lower wage. This is the case with Hungarian doctors. The model is effective to a certain level. He works cheaper but at home it was even worse. Whether he settles in the country afterwards is a different story but the system works for a while.”²⁹

These groups analyzed the labour market more consciously than the others and many opinions were expressed to the effect that with proper organization immigration can be transferred into an undoubted advantage from the point of view of employment and economic efficiency. Participants were able to list most advantages when asked how it may profit society if a migrant seeks to find employment. Most groups identified the importance of knowledge of a language i.e. that they speak one or more languages besides Hungarian which definitely means advantage for them. Work morale was also mentioned both as an advantage and a handicap. Personal examples were mentioned about positive discrimination which meant advantages for someone due to his difference. One participant talked about an African migrant who got a job in the participant's father's business because he realized that as a sales agent he would surely become a memorable, easily recognizable figure.

29 Open meeting: media workers, 2nd of October, 2013.



4. Main conclusions and recommendations

In the course of the discussion of the two main issues in the open meetings we identified certain conclusions worth further considering. One of them relates to the possibilities of education of the young, the other to statements and suggestions about the role and consciousness of the media.

4.1 The role of education of the young

We find it particularly significant and fortunate that during the meetings we experienced the importance and strength of personal involvement and the power of experience in overriding instinctual responses, because thanks to this we are able to draw conclusions more easily regarding the impact of education and information in the fight against stereotypes and xenophobia.

We must, however, note that good intentions and theories will only work until an issue becomes personal. During the meetings even regarding theoretical questions there were big differences among the generally accepting and the definitely hostile groups, therefore we cannot forget about the role of education and sensitization. All in all the most important means in the fight against stereotypes and xenophobia is education – this is the conclusion of the meetings. On the one hand it means institutional education is needed because the longer someone takes part in the system and the broader the scope of knowledge they acquire, the less likely are they to be susceptible to the hostility and rejection arising out of a lack of education or of information. In the youngest age group among 17-18 year-olds it is still possible to perceive that they live and move in a relatively closed sphere and represent the attitudes brought from home and also that due to their youth they have had few chances to rely on their life-experiences.

Among those who have left high school the spectrum of conversations became wider, partly because due to the particular nature of their school they were not 1 or 2, but 3-4 years older than the average students. Their former school typically educates children who, in certain respects, are marginalised, either due to their social position or because of their behavior. Therefore these classes show a much more heterogeneous picture. The special educational system of the school also offers opportunities for students to become aware of some socially important issues within the framework of different projects. The impact of this could definitely be felt in the group, as earlier they had already taken part in a thematic week dealing with migrants. The knowledge accrued there in many cases resulted in a more sensitive attitude. Proper, fact-based knowledge appeared and it could also be seen that they were able to join the conversation and were willing to do that. They were willing to discuss their opinions which sometimes were instinctual and sometimes conscious. This kind of mature thinking was even more perceptible among undergraduates reading international relations. They often stated quite clearly that they don't think of themselves as average people because their knowledge is far beyond the average level regarding world politics and minorities. They were eager to show their knowledge of the topic and did everything to analyze the given questions in the widest possible range. Yet personal experiences again represented a more instinctual level. This way the contrast between the visceral level and their studies became more evident which they wanted to present for their own advantage. The adult graduates and those working in the media expressed



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their opinion according to their own theoretical position and their personal experiences served only to illustrate these.

Therefore we can state that individuals' curiosity and the varying fields of interest offer a great opportunity and this can be used to form the approach for future generations by means of concrete experiences and encounters. As has become clear during the meetings, if encounters with migrants happen when participants are unprepared and lack the proper background knowledge it is too late to change the instinctive reflexes. Previously acquired knowledge can help and increase empathy in situations which can cause conflicts in the lives of smaller or bigger communities. A knowledge of foreign cultures, understanding the causes of migration, seeing migrants' fates on a personal level, and the rational rebuttal of stereotype fears can be useful for society in the long run. Especially so if, as became clear from the meetings, the younger generations of Hungarian society are inherently more open regarding differences and foreigners than their parents are. The key elements are the knowledge of languages, traveling possibilities and evident visibility of migrants in everyday life.

4.2 The role of media

We did not previously mention the statements of media workers regarding their own field but as they shared their experiences about the practical aspects of their job we think it is worthwhile to sum these up as a conclusion. The most important and universally-mentioned remark is that however sensitive a journalist may be towards an issue, it is the editors and chief-editors who make decisions. The latter aim to satisfy the desires of readers, the target audience being as wide as possible to result in a bigger advertising income. Editorial decisions therefore tend towards satisfying social demands, and readers and viewers seem to be more interested in negative news at present. Therefore positive stories for example the successful life of a migrant are much less interesting than news dealing with crimes or sensationalist statistics. Readership statistics are illustrative. Participants mentioned many examples about what difficulties they faced at work when they wanted to write an article with the intention of consciously forming public opinion because they met a steady objection on the part of the editors. Therefore increasing the sensitivities of editors and editors in chief can be an outstanding task for the future, so that ethical principles and content guidelines can leak down into the press as a body. An important factor can be the responsibility of the advertising market because they also play an important role in the formation of public opinion.

As the group had a participant from advertising we could see here an example of an international telecommunication company that won an award with a campaign which aimed to break down walls between different social layers. It is a bit disappointing that they achieved this object not with publicity but on a parallel level through a CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) campaign. The intention can be perceived at a so far invisible field, the challenge being that these companies and media products should be interested in being pioneers in forming public opinion. They should be proactive in their own right and not simply follow existing societal tendencies.



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