

Introduction

For a long time, leaders of Hungarian groups in the United States have urged that the responsible parties in Hungary undertake a scientific analysis of the current social and demographic conditions of Hungarian-Americans, their organizations, the way the organizations function, and the size and composition of their membership. Naturally, these leaders urged this project partly in the interest of gaining a better knowledge about their own organizations. In addition, however, some individuals also hoped that the result of this study might serve as a way to set up an “objective hierarchy” among their organizations, measuring their respective weight and importance to the community. We must note at the outset, however, that the current sociological study did not and could not consider such factors. Some of the Hungarian-American leaders evidently also hoped that in having the study commissioned by the Hungarian Government, it would impel the Government to give greater attention to the particular issues facing Hungarian-Americans. Thus, on one hand, expectations arose that based on this study, the Hungarian Government would gain a deeper and more thorough knowledge of the situation and problems of the Hungarian-American community, and thereby be able to shape, improve and make more effective official policy toward this community. On the other hand, given the rivalry among a number of Hungarian-American organizations, it seemed salutary to ensure that the research be carried out not by one of those organizations, but rather by the “neutral” employees of an institution in Hungary, who could not be accused of partiality, and so that no suspicion of partiality would arise with respect to the results of the study.

After several years of discussions, at the request of Ambassador András Simonyi, finally a Government decision gave the task of creating a comprehensive survey of Hungarian-American organizations to the Office of Hungarians Abroad (HTMH). The leadership of HTMH, on the advice of Zoltán Fejős, the well-known expert on Hungarian Americans, charged the Teleki László Institute with carrying out the planned research project, primarily based on the Institute’s background and expertise in carrying out similar sociological studies on Hungarian minorities in Central Europe. The

Teleki László Institute was given a one-year deadline, which –given the scope of the project, and from a strictly methodological point of view – would have entailed a very intensive pace. But as it turned out, the problems in meeting this deadline did not stem primarily from the unforeseen professional difficulties which did crop up. Instead, while the Institute’s employees were engaged in the carrying out the scientific and research management tasks as quickly and effectively as possible, in the summer of 2006 the Government made a decision to abolish the HTMH by the end of the calendar year. This means that already in the first phases of the research, the fate of the project became uncertain. Yet in addition to these administrative problems, it also became clear that to carry out the planned scope of research, even at a high level of intensity, would require at least a year and a half. In November of 2006, right when the researchers were in the United States doing their field work, it turned out that the Government had decided to abolish the Teleki László Institute as well, without naming a successor (unlike in the case of HTMH). This meant that not only the institution that had commissioned and funded the research (HTMH), but also the institution hired to carry it out (Teleki László Institute) had ceased to exist by the beginning of 2007.

Given this situation, the various officials in charge of the project several times considered the option of suspending work on it. One suggestion was that based on the research completed so far, short summaries should be created of the partial results and the project thereby administratively closed. This would have amounted to the initial research on the analysis of Hungarian-American organizations and their social-demographic relationships being filed in some archival office, there to peacefully gather dust. The time spent on the research would thus have been wasted, while the resources collected for the research purposes might have been put to good use on some other project.

We believe that no one would have blamed us if – given this situation (and, perhaps, after we had fought to get paid pro rata for the research carried out so far) – we had given it up. However, we decided not to; we did not want to see the research we had started go to waste. One reason was that the scientific challenge posed by the research problem appealed to us; another reason was that we had learned that the Hungarian-American organizations were counting on the research results. In sum, the professional challenge and the social value of the commissioned research, as well as a sense of responsibility, spurred us to keep the project alive.

However, our own decision would not have been enough to enable us to continue the project to its completion. In continuing the project, we received the support of many employees at HTMH, and subsequently of the Prime

Minister's Office which took over the HTMH's duties. We owe special thanks to András Király, György Czíkó, László Halmai, and Helmut König. We are also grateful to the Hungarian Institute for Foreign Affairs, which partially took over the duties of the Teleki László Institute, and particularly to its first director, Pál Dunai, for taking on the our project and formally becoming its "new owner." Just as importantly, the representatives of the Hungarian-American organizations, when the possibility of canceling the project arose, registered their concern with the responsible authorities. Special thanks to Max Teleki and Zsolt Szekeres of the Hungarian American Coalition for spearheading the American organizations' support on behalf of continuing the project.

The documents authorizing continued funding for the project were signed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office and the Institute for Foreign Affairs in summer of 2007, but due to additional administrative hurdles, the resources needed to continue and complete the work did not become available until the end of 2007. As it turns out, the actual project did require 18 months of work; the additional year over deadline is due to these administrative problems that were unforeseen at the project's start. In any case, given the domestic situation in Hungary, it is a small miracle that despite the fact that both the institution commissioning the research and the one carrying out were abolished, we have nevertheless gotten to the point of publishing this book.

Our original task was to carry out the research project originally outlined by Zoltán Fejős. His research plan adhered strictly to social scientific method. Consequently, though the project centered upon analysis of Hungarian-American organizations, in conformity with the request of the project sponsors, the project did *not* deal with factors that emerged from inter-organizational rivalry. The project plan encompassed three sub-tasks: (1) to create a database of Hungarian-American organizations; (2) based on this, to carry out a questionnaire-based survey of these organizations' functions and membership; and (3) to analyze the demographics of Hungarian-Americans (or Americans of Hungarian descent). The original plan envisioned field work in the U.S. over a period of several months, to achieve a more thorough knowledge of the organizations and how they work.

In creating the database, the plan was to make use of various databases that already exist on Hungarian-Americans. Above all, the National Szechenyi Library was thought to carry out data collection on this subject, and so the research plan was to cooperate with the Széchenyi Library. Employees at the Library did undertake to compile such a database, and we hereby would

like to express our gratitude for their efforts. However, it became clear that the Library did not, after all, possess the type of database on Hungarian American organizations that would have met the needs of our project. Thus, our researchers then turned to the database maintained by the Hungarian Press Agency (MTI). It then became obvious that in order to create a database that fit our needs, the next step was to confirm the validity of the data maintained by MTI, relying upon representatives of the Hungarian-American community who could use their local knowledge to update the information. In organizing this task, we relied on the assistance of Zsolt Szekeres. Thus, the second phase of the database creation entailed dividing the United States into territories, enlisting the assistance of Hungarian-Americans, and confirming and updating our data on the organizations, in many cases by telephone. As our research progressed, we continued to update these data. Finally, in early 2008, our researchers made one additional, intensive internet-based effort to gather information and update the database. Naturally, even this resulting database of 607 entries cannot be considered exhaustive¹ – it is likely that the database is missing some of the smaller, local organizations, or that it contains organizations that exist only in name, or that have only a few members, or that it contains some organizations which have ceased to exist. We address these problems in our more detailed analysis of the database. It is important to note that the Hungarian-American organizations are in constant flux, and certainly changes have taken place since we completed our work on the database. For this reason, regular updating of the database is recommended.

In October 2006, our organizational database included approximately 350 entries. Based on this status, we undertook our survey: we sent our questionnaire (in both English and Hungarian) to every one of the organizations listed in the database. Hereby we express our thanks to the Embassy of Hungary in Washington, D.C., for supporting this effort via its home page, on which the Embassy asked the organizations to respond to the survey. In addition, we are grateful to the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (New York), its President László Hámos, and in particular to Emese Latkóczy, for their help in managing the survey logistics in the United States.

¹ The database is constantly undergoing update. As this volume goes to press, the database stands at 682 entries. Naturally, the issue of how many of these organizations and institutions actually function remains an open question. The database is accessible from the Minority Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (www.mtaki.hu), and from the website of the firm Omnibus Ltd. (www.omnibus-srl.ro), which participated in this research.

In the end, 45 of the organizations filled out the questionnaire – this represents 12–13 percent of the database (as it stood then). For a realistic interpretation of this statistic, and in weighing the representativeness of the analysis based on this response, we must take several factors into account. First, most of the larger organizations did respond to the survey, including umbrella organizations and the leadership of national organizations (such as the Hungarian Scout Association Abroad), whose constituent groups were also listed in our database as separate entities. Second, the analysis of the survey data indicates that the responding organizations' membership totals about 36,300, which – if we take into account the last U.S. census – is about one-third of the number of individuals who speak Hungarian at home. Third, as indicated above, the database contained a number of organizations which either no longer exist, or exist in name only, or whose membership consists solely of the organization's founder-president. Nevertheless, we had hoped for a greater response, yet believe that with our sample of respondents, our analysis was able to contribute to a sociological understanding of Hungarian-American organizations; and that the response rate itself is a scientifically significant statistic.

Our demographic analysis relied primarily on the last U.S. census, from 2000. The analysis presented in this volume points out the uncertainties surrounding the question of how many Hungarians live in the United States. Although it is difficult to name an exact number (especially since recent censuses and other related surveys no longer ask about native language), we believe that our analysis, as well as the two appendices on demographics, does provide detailed data based on new information. The statistics shown in the appendix rely partially on the database provided to the Teleki László Institute by the *Minnesota Population Center* (IPUMS), which in turn is based on a 5% sample of the 2000 census (that is, 14 million entries); the other source of our statistics is the *American Community Service* data gathered by the Census Bureau of Washington, D.C. With these data – despite the myriad statistical and methodological uncertainties – we believe we can gain a quite detailed and current demographic snapshot of the American population of Hungarian descent. In the 2000 census, a total of 1,398,000 individuals reported themselves to be Hungarian, or of mixed Hungarian and other descent, but of this number, less than 120,000 speak the Hungarian language at home, in a family setting. Use of the Hungarian language on the one hand, and an explicit self-affiliation with the Hungarian community on the other hand, naturally do not coincide completely. Yet given the demographic data, we must emphasize that our research, which

centers on Hungarian-American organizations, necessarily focused on this particular Hungarian-speaking segment.

We do not possess exact data on the percentage of Hungarian-Americans who affiliate with one or another Hungarian-American organization. We address this problem in detail in connection with our discussion of how Hungarian-Americans active in organizational life see this issue, as well as their estimates of the total number of Hungarian-Americans. In sum, our research did not attempt to determine the number of Hungarian-Americans, or Americans who indicate Hungarian roots, but rather we sought to analyze the views on these sociological issues held by those Hungarian-Americans who are active in organizational life.

The greatest change with respect to the original research plan was that instead of the envisaged several-month stint of field work in the U.S., we had to limit our U.S. visit to four weeks in the Fall of 2006, due to a shortage of time and financial resources. In planning our trip, we attempted as much as possible to reach the most important centers of Hungarian-American organizations, and to conduct as many in-depth interviews as possible with the organizations' leaders and members. We consulted a number of Hungarian-American organizations in choosing the targeted cities, and based on this input, we set our final route as follows: Los Angeles – San Francisco – Sarasota – Chicago – Cleveland – Washington – New York – New Jersey. During this trip, we conducted 49 interviews, each of which lasted several hours, and carried out four more similar interviews with Hungarian-American individuals in Hungary.

Based on our interviews, we carried out not only a large quantitative social-statistical and sociological-demographic analysis, but were also able to add a qualitative analysis taking a look behind the mere data and numbers to find out exactly who participates in Hungarian-American organizations, and how. To use a sociological term: we completed partially structured in-depth interviews. With each interview partner, we started by stating the topics about which we wished to ask questions, but then posed additional questions depending on the way each interview developed. The first question for every interview partner requested some personal background, with particular attention to how the individual came into contact with Hungarian-American organizational life. Then we asked them about their opinions on the Hungarian-American community: how they view the community in general and their local community in particular. The third predefined question asked their opinions about Hungarian-American organizations and how they function, and their own relationships to these organizations. With respect to

organizational life, we usually also posed the question of how the participants view the ties between Hungarian-American organizations and the Hungarian Government, including the Hungarian diplomatic corps in the United States. Finally, we asked each participant about their views on Hungary and about the Hungarian nation in general.

We believe that these interviews allowed us, in the end, to discover a great deal more about the Hungarian American community than was envisioned in the original research plan. In addition to examining the particularities of these organizations' functions, we were able, through these interviews, to gain insight into the everyday life and way of thinking of individuals active in Hungarian-American life. In addition, the material is very informative on issues of minority identity and the forms and expressions of social identity, and on issues related to an individual's ties to multiple cultures and societies simultaneously. Finally, we offer a summary of different possibilities for analyzing the organizational universe of Hungarian-Americans and the construction of their ethnic identities in terms of the theoretical frameworks of the professional literature.

For their support in the successful completion of our field work in the U.S., we are grateful to the Hungarian Embassy in Washington, D.C. We express our thanks to the organizational assistance provided by Károly Nagy, Zsolt Szekeres, László Hámos, Cleveland's Honorary Consul László Böjtös, András Ludányi, Edith Lauer, Erika Bokor, and Csizinszky Sándor. We are most grateful also to those who provided us with housing and hospitality during our trip: Miklós Pereházy, President of the Los Angeles Hungarian House, András Rékay (San Francisco), József Megyeri and Erika Bokor (Chicago), Zsolt Dömötörffy (Cleveland), Attila Kirják and Melinda Boros (New York). Special thanks to Melinda Boros for agreeing to design our book cover despite being a very busy mother. Naturally we are also grateful to each of our interview participants, without whom this volume would not have been published in this form.²

In editing this book, we had to decide in which order to present its constituent chapters: should we start off with the demographic analysis and then go into the organizational descriptions, or vice versa? In the end, for both technical and content considerations, we opted for the second version. By technical considerations, we mean that since the organizational descriptions are based on much longer studies, they deserve to be put in the first half of the book, and this way the demographic analysis is followed immediately by the

² For a list of interviewees, see the Appendix of this volume.

Appendix, which is largely composed of demographic statistics and therefore easily follows from the previous chapters. The content considerations which favor this order of presentation are that the potential reader should first be introduced to the complex labyrinths of the Hungarian-American organizational universe, from which, we hope, the reader will emerge with new information with which the quantitative summaries as well as the demographic data will be that much easier to understand. Then, having gained this information, the reader will find the *Summary*, with its occasionally abstract descriptions, easier to follow. Naturally, the various chapters and sub-chapters of the book are each self-contained, so that the reader may pick and choose among them depending on any particular area of interest.

Naturally, it is not our task to determine to what extent our work, to which we dedicated our best efforts, has met the expectations of the Hungarian-American organizations and those of the offices of the Hungarian government which commissioned it. Since it is likely that active participants in Hungarian American life, the members of the various Hungarian-American organizations, and decision-makers in Hungary all have differing interests with regard to this project, which in turn are different from our own research logic dictated by social scientific factors, it is likely that our work does not fully meet the expectations of all parties. It follows that none of these affected parties will be in full agreement with every single statement in our report, that they will find it incomplete in certain respects, or be disappointed in certain of their expectations.

This is only natural, since there are many ways of talking about the United States and about Hungarian-Americans. America is the land of promise and of freedom not only for immigrants; it also represents, for the visiting researcher, a wide range of possibilities for analysis. When discussing the ethnic groups living in the U.S., it is usually in the context of telling, introducing or recording the success stories of immigrant/emigrant individuals. In our analysis, however, we did not present the life stories of the various generations of immigrants: this task would warrant a separate research project, and in any case these stories are a well-known and well-documented phenomenon.³ In fact, the American success stories of immigrants are the subject not only of thorough analyses, but also of more „light” fare. Accounts of the „self-made”

³ See, for example, the work of Julianna Puskás (especially Puskás, Julianna: *Ties that bind, ties that divide. 100 years of Hungarian Experience in the United States*. Holms Meier, New York / London, 2000), or Szántó, Miklós: *Tengeren túli magyarok* [Hungarians Across the Ocean.]. Akadémiai Publishers, Budapest, 2001.

successes of individual Hungarians in America are frequently published, for example in the Panorama series,⁴ or the recent volume of interviews by Kati Marton, recently published in Hungarian.⁵

Thus, our own efforts must be seen as *one* Hungarian-American story, which makes no claim to be more accurate than the other Hungarian-American stories in circulation, whether of scientific or journalistic style. Using social scientific and demographic tools, our team of researchers came up with this particular Hungarian America - a universe, *a world* we were able to recreate through interviews, statistics, and generally through *words and language*.

Because of, or despite these considerations, we are confident that our social scientific analyses will prove to be useful. We hope that the contents of our volume will inspire contemplation and debate, and thereby contribute to Hungarian-Americans' knowledge of their own community, and to the decision-making undertaken by Hungarian-American organizations or responsible parties in the Hungarian government to strengthen and support this community.

⁴ Dr. Tanka, László (ed.): *Magyar Amerika. tengerentúli magyarok mai élete történetekben és képekben*. [The Current Situation of Hungarians in America in Stories and Pictures.] Médiamix, Salgótarján, 2002. Dr. László Tanka (ed.): *Amerikai Magyarok arcképcsarnoka* [Portraits of Hungarian Americans]. Médiamix, Salgótarján - New York, 2003.

⁵ Marton, Kati: *Kilenc magyar, aki világgá ment és megváltoztatta a világot* [Nine Hungarians Who Escaped Hitler and Changed the World.] Corvina, Budapest, 2008. It is interesting to note the original title of the book: *The Great Escape: Nine Jews Who Flew Hitler and Changed the World*. (Simon&Schuster, New York, 2006)