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Residential Segregation and Social Tensions in Hungarian Settlements

Abstract

The paper discusses the incidence of residential segregation and social tensions in Hungarian settlements. The basis of the analysis is a questionnaire survey conducted among local government leaders by the TÁRKI Social Research Institute in 2003. In the survey, 1,754 local government leaders were questioned about the occurrence of residential segregation and social tensions in the settlements they control.

Of the different forms of residential segregation being examined (i.e. segregation based on ethnic, religious or political affiliation, income, and segregation of those newly arrived in the settlement), the most frequent are the segregation of the Roma population and that of the poor – however; it is very likely that there is an overlap between the two. The study reveals that marked differences characterize the regions, though part of them may be traced back to the differences between the typical settlement structures of the regions. The survey also provides information on the regional distribution of settlements characterized by the residential segregation of new-comers, and indirectly reinforces the main findings of the literature on suburbanization in Hungary.

Finally, the study examines the regional differences in the incidence of social tensions between certain social groups (i.e. those with different religious or political affiliations, those with unequal incomes, and conflicts between the new-comers and established residents).

Keywords: residential segregation, regional differences, ethnicity, income inequality, suburbanization, social tensions

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In 1995 the TÁRKI Social Research Institute initiated a series of reports whose goal was to examine Hungarian local governments, to analyse the economic and social conditions of towns and villages, and to track their developments. In addition to the systematically repeated queries, the 2003 questionnaire also contained questions about the existence of residential segregation and social tensions.

For the investigation, we used the technique of postal questionnaires. Unlike in previous years, the collection of data was done in phases. In order to have a representative sample of towns, we telephoned those leaders who had not responded on the first occasion, between September and December 2003. We also sent out the questionnaire again to those village authorities who had not responded. This technique of repeated questioning resulted in the proportion of replies totalling 56 per cent nationwide.¹

In this paper we present data on the incidence of residential segregation of certain social groups and instances of social conflict between these groups. Until now this kind of cross-sectional analysis has not been available for Hungary, and therefore the approach of the paper is decidedly descriptive in character.

The incidence of residential segregation in Hungarian settlements

The questions in the questionnaire touched on many forms of residential segregation—segregation based on ethnic, religious or political affiliation, segregation based on income, as well as segregation of people who had only recently moved into an area. Within the framework of this study it was not within our means to sketch the phenomenon of segregation using objective criteria, and so we asked the local government leaders who were completing the questionnaires whether, to the best of their knowledge, there were areas of their town or village where particular social groups lived in disproportionately large concentrations.²

Half of the authorities who answered (51 per cent) indicated that one or another form of residential segregation was evident in their town or village.

¹ We weighted the sample of 1,754 returned questionnaires on the basis of the list of settlements data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. The weighted sample then contained 1,749 entries, which was a representative sample of Hungarian settlements with regard to division along regional and settlement lines, with the limitation that it does not contain data for the Budapest districts. In the study we therefore use the term Central Hungarian Region to refer to Pest County. For further details of the study, see Kopasz and Simonovits (2004).

² The questionnaire contained—in tabular form—the following questions: *'In your judgment is there an area (or are there areas) in your town where there live a disproportionately large number of people who (a) belong to a particular religious denomination, (b) are members of a particular political party, (c) are rich, (d) are poor, (e) have recently arrived, (f) are Roma?'*

In 27 per cent of the towns and villages at least two of the forms of residential segregation on the list were present.

The data reveal that, among the various regions of Hungary, some form of segregation is most characteristic of Central Hungary and the Northern Great Plain region. Furthermore, in most of the towns and villages in these two regions there was more than one form of residential segregation present. Settlements in the regions of Central and Western Transdanubia make up the other extreme: according to the respondents, 60 per cent of these do not have any segregated neighbourhoods. Generally speaking, the larger the settlement, the more common is segregation. Thus, the regional differences in the incidence of segregation are at least in part explained by the differences in settlement structures between regions.

Among the forms of residential segregation we enquired about, the most common in Hungarian towns and villages is the segregation of the Roma population and the poor. In 29 per cent of settlements, respondents considered that there was a neighbourhood where a disproportionately large number of the Roma population lived.³ Nearly the same number of settlements (27 per cent) had segregation of those on low incomes. A substantially lower number (11 per cent) had segregation for the more affluent population. In 15 per cent of settlements there were neighbourhoods where the newly arrived predominate. In 11 per cent, evidence could be found of segregation on the basis of religion. Rarest of all is residential segregation based on political affiliation: only three per cent of authorities reported this. Partly because of restrictions on space, and partly because of the low number of settlements reporting religious and political segregation, we leave these forms of segregation out of our analysis. In the rest of the paper we will present results on the segregation of the Roma population and the separation of groups with dissimilar incomes.

Residential segregation of the Roma population

In three out of every ten towns and villages in Hungary (29 per cent), there are neighbourhoods where the bulk of the inhabitants are Roma. This amounts to 36 per cent of settlements which have some Roma inhabitants. The greater the proportion of the population who are Roma, the more likely is ethnic segregation. Among those settlements where the proportion of Roma in the population is above 25 per cent, in only about a fifth (18 per cent) do the Roma not live in segregation from other social groups.

³ In the survey we trusted the judgment of the council leader (the mayor, his or her deputy or the town clerk) who completed the form as to which of the town's inhabitants should be classed as Roma.

It is no surprise that the greatest proportion of ethnic segregation is found in those regions where the Roma population—based on the estimates of the local authority leaders—lives in the highest concentrations: in the Northern Great Plain and Northern Hungary. Most of the settlements where the proportion of Roma exceeds 25 per cent are to be found in these two regions.

At the same time it is noticeable that in Southern Transdanubia—where the proportion of the population who are Roma approaches that of the two regions mentioned above—residential separation of the Roma is less frequent. It is interesting to compare the data for Southern Transdanubia with those for Central Hungary. In those two regions ethnic segregation is found in the same proportion of settlements, though the proportion of Roma in Central Hungary is below the national average. One possible reason for this is the difference between the two regions in the settlement structure. As shown in *Table 1*, the bigger the settlement—everything else remaining constant—the more common is Roma residential isolation. For this reason, in the small villages of Southern Transdanubia segregation of the Roma population should be less likely. At the same time there is a relatively high proportion of settlements in the region where a significant proportion, or even the majority, of the inhabitants are Roma.⁴ It thus seems probable that the residential segregation of the Roma population does not only, or not principally, come down to the level of the microenvironment, but rather to the level of settlement. In contrast, in the settlement structure of Central Hungary the weight of more populated settlements is significant, which—all else being equal—is to a greater extent characteristic of the formation of residential segregation. Thus, despite the fact that the proportion of Roma in the settlements of the region is below the national average, there is a relatively high proportion of settlements where the Roma population live separated from the rest of society.

⁴ Our data show that in Southern Transdanubia almost half of those settlements with some Roma population have a proportion of more than 10 per cent, while in Central Hungary only in every fifth settlement does the proportion of Roma exceed this figure.

Table 1: The incidence of residential segregation of Roma in Hungarian settlements, according to region, settlement size and proportion of Roma inhabitants (%)

	Proportion of settlements with residential segregation of Roma (%)	Number of settlements responding (N)
Region		
Central Hungary (excluding Budapest)	31	99
Central Transdanubia	12	217
Western Transdanubia	13	342
Southern Transdanubia	31	353
Northern Hungary	43	322
Northern Great Plain	50	209
Southern Great Plain	27	136
<i>Total</i>	29	1678
Size of settlement		
Fewer than 1,000 inhabitants	19	875
1,000–1,999 inhabitants	35	365
2,000–10,000 inhabitants	40	353
More than 10,000 inhabitants	64	85
<i>Total</i>	29	1678
Proportion of Roma population, for settlements with some Roma inhabitants		
Below 1%	2	225
1–4.99%	18	388
5–9.99%	37	242
10–25%	57	303
Above 25%	82	174
<i>Total</i>	36	1332

Residential segregation based on income differences

In this section we present data on the incidence of residential segregation of the low and high-income strata of society.⁵ We also discuss here the question of the residential segregation of those recently arrived in the town or village, since experience shows that newcomers are characteristically groups with a different income situation to that of the original inhabitants.⁶

⁵ In the questionnaire the expressions used were 'poorer' and 'richer' inhabitants. In this instance, too, we entrusted the decision as to the membership of the groups to the subjective judgment of the local authority leaders.

⁶ In their study of people leaving Budapest during the 1990s, Csanádi and Csizmadý (2002: 33–34) showed that a significant proportion of those moving to the conurbations surrounding the capital were middle class, while those going further afield were more likely to belong to the lower-middle and lower classes. In other words, certain districts of the conurbation were residential targets for those with a high social status, while others were targets for the lower

Our data show that the incidence of residential segregation based on income levels—whether for the lower or higher-income groups—is connected with the size of the settlement and also with its regional position. As we had expected, the frequency of segregation for the lower-income groups increases with an increase in size of the settlement (*Table 2*). While nearly every fifth settlement with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants has areas where poor people live, this is the case in more than half of towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants. The connection between the size of a settlement and the incidence of segregation of the wealthy follows the same trend.

Previously we saw that many more settlements have a residential concentration of the poor than of the rich. This difference principally appears in the smaller settlements, where segregation of the rich is rarer. The data show that, in settlements where the rich live in separate neighbourhoods, there is also segregation of the poor in the overwhelming majority of cases.

The residential concentration of the poor is most characteristic of settlements in the Northern Great Plain, where it rises to 37 per cent of settlements. This clearly correlates with the fact that the Northern Great Plain is the area in Hungary with the highest levels of poverty, whether we choose to define poverty in terms of income, consumption or living conditions.⁷ In this region—and generally wherever there is a concentration of the Roma population—it may be assumed that there is a significant overlap between segregation based on ethnicity and that based on income. In contrast to this, residential isolation of the poor is most seldom found in economically developed Western Transdanubia, where only 13 per cent of local authorities reported that it was present. This is also not unexpected: the aforementioned poverty studies show that—besides Central Hungary, which includes Budapest—this area has the fewest poor. The considerable divergence experienced between the two regions may also be attributable to differences in settlement structures, as there are many more large settlements in the Northern Great Plain than in Western Transdanubia.

Segregation of the well-off is most common by far in Central Hungary, where it occurs in 28 per cent of settlements. Besides the significant weight of larger settlements in the settlement structure of the region, we may also be seeing the influence of suburbanization, which has accelerated in recent years, and in which members of the capital's middle and upper-middle classes are moving in significant numbers into the surrounding villages. It is conceivable that, in the settlements of Central Hungary, the rising residential segregation on income grounds is to a significant degree a product of suburbanization. Once again, the lowest incidence of segregation of high-income

status population. Investigating the suburbanization phenomena of the Győr district, Hardi (2002: 69) came to the conclusion that the strata moving out of the city had, in general, a higher income than the inhabitants of the suburban areas.

⁷ See Kapitány and Spéder (2004).

groups is found in the settlements of the similarly developed region of Western Transdanubia. This is at least partly due to the settlement structure characteristic of the region, with its high proportion of small settlements.

Table 2: The incidence of various forms of residential segregation in Hungarian towns and villages, according to region and size of settlement (%)

	The poorer...	The richer...	The newly arrived
	The proportion of settlements where it is the above groups who experience residential segregation		
<i>Total</i>	27	11	15
Region			
Central Hungary (excluding Budapest)	30	28	44
Central Transdanubia	20	10	16
Western Transdanubia	13	7	18
Southern Transdanubia	31	9	10
Northern Hungary	32	11	14
Northern Great Plain	37	14	7
Southern Great Plain	30	11	15
N	1679	1672	1674
Size of settlement			
Fewer than 1,000 inhabitants	22	5	10
1,000–1,999 inhabitants	25	9	17
2,000–10,000 inhabitants	34	19	23
More than 10,000 inhabitants	56	50	28
N	1680	1672	1672

The residential isolation of those newly arrived in a town or village also shows marked regional differences. Here, the region of Central Hungary stands out, as segregation of those strata moving out of the capital city is observed in almost 44 per cent of settlements. It is known that suburbanization of the provincial towns began later than suburbanization of the capital and has taken place to a substantially lesser degree.⁸ This is reflected indirectly in our data, which show that 16 to 18 per cent of the settlements in Central and Western Transdanubia are marked by concentrations of newcomers. Similarly, isolation of newly arrived residents can be observed to a certain extent in the regions of the Northern Great Plain and Southern Transdanubia.

⁸ See, for example, Hardi (2002).

The incidence of social conflict between certain groups

In the survey we also asked the local authority leaders if they felt any tension in their own town or village between certain social groups—namely, between Roma and non-Roma residents, those with disparate incomes, the established residents and those newly arrived, as well as between those with various religious and political affiliations.⁹

In total, 45 per cent of the settlements that replied reported the existence of one or other of the social tensions listed above. Almost one quarter of settlements reported a plurality of tensions (with at least two sources of tension noted).

It was mostly the regions of Western and Central Transdanubia where social conflict is absent. There, two-thirds of settlements were free of any of the tensions under examination. In contrast, Central Hungary and the Northern Great Plain had the most settlements with multiple social conflict.

Among the forms being investigated, the most common form of social tension that occurs is between the Roma and non-Roma population: 26 per cent of local authorities reported that this was present. That means that the level of ethnic conflict in those settlements where there is a Roma population is 31 per cent. In 23 per cent of settlements, tensions between the rich and poor were noticeable. Strained relations between newcomers and established inhabitants were reported in 15 per cent of settlements. In one in five settlements, there exist tensions between people belonging to different political parties, while conflict between people of different religious denominations is fairly rare. In the more detailed analysis that follows, we shall restrict ourselves to discussing the ethnic and income-based conflicts.

Ethnic conflicts

The proportion of settlements with tense relations between Roma and non-Roma is highest in Northern Hungary and the Northern Great Plain (36 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively). These are precisely the regions with the highest proportions of Roma, and also with the highest proportions of settlements where Roma live in residential segregation. In contrast, ethnic tensions are least common in Central and Western Transdanubia.

The incidence of conflict between Roma and non-Roma increases as the settlements increase in size. We also investigated how the relative size of the Roma population affected the formation of conflicts between Roma and non-

⁹ We asked the following questions: *'In your judgement, in your town or village are there tensions (a) between those of different religious denominations, (b) between those belonging to different political parties, (c) between the rich and the poor, (d) between those residents who are newly arrived and the established residents, (e) between Roma and non-Roma?'*

Roma. As can be seen in *Table 3*, an increase in the proportion of Roma inhabitants leads to a rise in the likelihood of social tensions, although there is no significant difference between the 10–25 per cent banding and those settlements with over 25 per cent Roma.

Table 3: The incidence of ethnic tensions in Hungarian settlements, according to region, settlement size and proportion of Roma inhabitants (%)

	Incidence of ethnic tensions (%)	Number of settlements responding (N)
Region		
Central Hungary (excluding Budapest)	30	101
Central Transdanubia	16	219
Western Transdanubia	16	344
Southern Transdanubia	26	356
Northern Hungary	36	330
Northern Great Plain	34	211
Southern Great Plain	26	140
<i>Total</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>1701</i>
Size of settlement		
Fewer than 1,000 inhabitants	21	886
1,000–1,999 inhabitants	27	373
2,000–10,000 inhabitants	33	359
More than 10,000 inhabitants	38	85
<i>Total</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>1703</i>
Proportion of Roma population, for settlements with some Roma inhabitants		
Below 1%	8	226
1–4.99%	20	392
5–9.99%	32	245
10–25%	50	315
Above 25%	53	177
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>1355</i>

Tensions between those with differing incomes

We anticipated that tensions between the rich and the poor would be most characteristic of those regions where the relative poverty rate¹⁰ is highest (Northern Great Plain and Northern Hungary), and least characteristic of those regions where it is lowest (Central and Western Transdanubia, as well as Central Hungary). In large part, the results correspond to our expectations, even though the regional differences are not particularly sharp. The greatest

¹⁰ For comparison we referred to the relative poverty rates published in Kapitány and Spéder (2004: 15). The authors drew the poverty threshold at half of the equivalent average income.

proportion of settlements with conflict between rich and poor is found in the Southern Great Plain (29 per cent) and the Northern Great Plain (28 per cent), while the smallest proportions are found in Central Transdanubia (15 per cent) and Central Hungary (17 per cent). The situation in the Southern Great Plain is perhaps surprising, as the proportion of settlements with income tensions is the highest, despite the fact that the region occupies a middle position among regions in terms of the poverty rate. If we investigate at the level of counties, we can see the situation in greater detail: income tensions are most common in Tolna, Békés, Hajdú-Bihar and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok counties, while Fejér and Veszprém have the lowest rates.

Tensions between the various income groups across the country were independent of the size of settlement (*Table 4*).

Table 4: The incidence of tensions between certain social groups in Hungarian settlements, according to region and size of settlement (%)

	Between rich and poor	Between newcomers and established inhabitants
	Proportion of settlements characterized by tensions	
<i>Total</i>	23	15
Region		
Central Hungary (excluding Budapest)	17	31
Central Transdanubia	15	19
Western Transdanubia	21	12
Southern Transdanubia	26	14
Northern Hungary	23	12
Northern Great Plain	28	14
Southern Great Plain	29	14
N	1710	1703
Size of settlement		
Fewer than 1,000 inhabitants	23	13
1,000–1,999 inhabitants	24	16
2,000–10,000 inhabitants	23	21
More than 10,000 inhabitants	21	8
N	1709	1705

Social conflicts generated by newcomers to a settlement—unsurprisingly—were most noticeable in the settlements of Central Hungary, where suburbanization is in progress. Here, it was present in nearly every third settlement. The source of the conflict could easily be that the newcomers have become the dominant social group within a short period of time, or else that the large numbers of incomers have endangered those values which had been the main attraction of the town or village (e.g. clean environment, quiet,

security etc.).¹¹ There are a greater than average number of settlements with conflict between new and established residents in Central Transdanubia (19 per cent), and within this region particularly in Komárom.

These social conflicts occurred in the greatest proportions in settlements with more than 2,000 and fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, and, within this range, particularly in those with between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants. (Most of the settlements in Central Hungary fall into this category.)

Some conclusions

The results of a simple bivariate analysis suggest that the incidence of the observed forms of residential segregation is closely linked to the size of settlement, and the effect of this can certainly be seen in the differences present at the regional level. Nevertheless, we can establish in broad outline that a smaller than average proportion of settlements in Central and Western Transdanubia are subject to segregation based on ethnicity or income. In contrast, residential segregation in all its forms is more common than average in Central Hungary, as is segregation of the Roma, the poor and the rich in the Northern Great Plain, and of the Roma and the poor in Northern Hungary.

Among the social conflicts under investigation, ethnic conflicts were most pronounced in Northern Hungary, the Northern Great Plain, and Central Hungary. Tensions between the rich and the poor were most common in settlements in the Great Plain and also in Southern Transdanubia, while tensions connected with suburbanization most commonly affected settlements in the region of Central Hungary. Fewer than average settlements in Western and Central Transdanubia had to deal with social conflicts.

Though the question arises as to whether the residential segregation of social groups increases the chances of conflicts occurring among them, a multivariate statistical analysis—with which we could clarify this question satisfactorily—remains well outside the boundaries of our present study.

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¹¹ See, for example, Kovács (1999), Váradi (1999).

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