Diaspora Engagement through Birthright Program: Hungarian-Americans Encountering the Homeland

by

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Abstract

The thesis investigates the impacts of the Hungarian birthright journey, ReConnect Hungary by conducting semi-structured interviews with its participants. The analysis points out two different attitude patterns of the respondents. Those who are not so remote from their Hungarian heritage (usually first and second generation Hungarian Americans, having living family members who emigrated from Hungary) were less conscious about the programs of the trip, had less factual knowledge about the country, remembered names and places to a lesser extent, emphasized the "fun side" and community events of the programs, and tended to be very enthusiastic about Hungary. On the other hand, those who are further away from their Hungarian ancestors (usually third and fourth generations Hungarian Americans) were more conscious about the program, prepared individually for the journey (e.g. learning about Hungarian history or current affairs), had a clear view on the aim and structure of the schedule, remembered names and places significantly better, and appreciated the "fun side" and the "learning side" of the program equally. The outcome of the program was also partly affected by the "generational difference": members of the first and second generation are more likely to develop (or reinforce) traces of symbolic ethnicity after the journey, but evoked interest in Hungary's actual affairs does not occur in their case. Conversely, third and fourth generation participants tend to be even more genuinely interested in Hungary's affairs after the trip, and they are more likely to develop effective engagement towards the country rather than (or besides) pursuing signs of symbolic ethnicity.

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1. Introduction

Concerning Hungary's nation building policies, it is usually the issue of „transborder Hungarians", that is, Hungarian communities (kin-minorities) living in the neighboring countries as a result of the redrawing of Hungary's boarders in 1920 that comes to one's mind. Indeed, Hungary has been pursuing a very active kin-state policy after the democratic transition of 1989, which sometimes even resulted in sharp debates with the countries affected (e.g. when Hungary adopted the Status Law in 2001 which provoked conflicts with both Romania and Slovakia, as well as when Hungary introduced the option of preferential naturalization for ethnic Hungarians who do not reside on the territory of Hungary, which caused tensions with Slovakia in 2010).

Interestingly, compared to Hungarian kin-minorities, Hungarian diasporas[1] outside the Carpathian basin enjoyed very little from the homeland's attention until quite recently, although they constitute a relatively large part of Hungarians abroad in terms of numbers (roughly 1.5 million in the US, the same number as Hungarians in Romania). A great shift took place after 2010 in this respect when the second Orbán-government introduced a totally new approach to the Hungarian diaspora, which was partly manifested in an opening towards those who do not speak Hungarian but still claim to be of Hungarian ancestry. This change was represented in institutional terms through the set-up of the Hungarian Diaspora Council, the consultative body made up of members of the diaspora communities. The Council serves as a forum of consultation between diaspora communities and members of the Hungarian Parliament. Besides, several government projects were launched in the past few years in order

[1] Some theoretical clarification is due here: throughout my thesis, the term „kin-minority" will be used to refer to Hungarian communities who live as minorities as the result of border changes, whereas the term „diaspora" will be used to refer to emigrant communities mostly in the Western hemisphere who later turned into diaspora communities.

to realize this new approach towards the diaspora, such as the Hungarian Register (a virtual database for the diaspora, including weekly media review about Hungarian politics in English), or the Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program, in the frame of which young Hungarians visit diaspora Hungarians all over the World and assist diaspora institutions in their work (most often in organizing cultural events). All of these initiatives have the agenda approach the formerly neglected diaspora Hungarian communities.

There is another new project designed for the Hungarian diaspora, which – although enjoys some governmental support and perfectly fits into the chain of programs in the new diaspora policy, but – was launched by a Hungarian-American cultural institution (Kossuth Foundation): ReConnect Hungary, the Hungarian Birthright Program. ReConnect follows the logic of classical birthright programs: it enables first-, second-, third- or more generation Hungarian-Americans to spend some weeks in Hungary in order to, as the program claims, "rediscover their Hungarian self". The project operates with sightseeing programs that aim to show an idealized picture of the "homeland", as well as tries to trigger the participants' interest in Hungary by e.g. introducing start-up entrepreneurs to them.

The limited academic literature available on Hungarian-Americans emphasizes that no such group as Hungarian-American diaspora actually exists. This perceived group is a result of successive emigration waves from Hungary triggered by different (economic, political) reasons, and the members of the different emigration waves did not ever succeed to merge into one community, so we cannot speak about the unified, coherent community of Hungarian diaspora in the US. Nevertheless, ReConnect Hungary addresses the younger generation of this "group" and aims to help them to jointly rediscover the "homeland of their ancestors" and by doing so, it tries to evoke a sort of identification with the "homeland".

This thesis aims to investigate the potential outcome of the Hungarian birthright journey by conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants of the 2012 and 2013

ReConnect Hungary programs. Besides analyzing the interviews, I examined the content of the cover letters of the applicants of the program as well. I was mainly interested in what effects that journey had on the participants' perception of and identification with "Hungarianness", as well as whether traces of engagement toward Hungary can be found from the side of the subjects on the basis of the interviews. Besides revealing the birthright trip's effect on the participants lives, the thesis likewise aims to situate ReConnect Hungary among birthright journeys by analyzing its structure and its primary goals.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1. Diasporas

Academic interest on diaspora studies has been growing in the last decades, which resulted in, as Rogers Brubaker argues, the confused use of the term "diaspora".[2] The numerous definitions of diaspora usually operate with notions such as dispersion, community, collective memory and/or myth of a homeland, idea of return to the homeland, lack of complete integration into the host country, and responsibility towards the homeland.[3] However, these descriptions of diaspora were adapted to the "various intellectual, cultural and political agendas" that became defined as diaspora, and thus the term has not acquired a consensual definition in the scholarly literature.[4] Brubaker therefore suggests that instead of thinking of diasporas as substantive entities and counting them as bounded groups we should rather use the term as referring to a "stance or a claim". In my thesis, the term diaspora will be addressed in this Brubakerian sense, since the target group of my research, "the Hungarian diaspora" in the USA and Canada does not exist as a coherent and homogeneous group; there are individuals who consider themselves – to varying degrees and intensity – of Hungarian ancestry, and who, rather as a projection and potential, are subject of the diaspora politics of the Hungarian government.

According to Tölölyan, four factors were central in the "popularization" of the term diaspora and thus contributed to the rapid growth of interest in diaspora studies: the success and aftermath of the civil right movement in the USA which raised public awareness to the "Black diaspora"; the rise of Jewish diaspora lobby during the 1967 war and the "re-

[2] Rogers Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 1–19.
[3] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83–99., James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1, 1994): 302–38.
[4] Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora."

diasporization of ethnicity" following it; the liberalization of the American Immigration Act which resulted in a great influx of migrants to the US; and finally the growing academic interest of notions of identity and diversity after the 1960s.[5] The proliferation of the use of diaspora resulted in the creation of numerous typologies. Based on the reasons of dispersal, Robin Cohen set up five categories of diasporas: victim, labor, imperial, trade, and cultural.[6] By victim diasporas he means classical groups which dispersed due to persecution (Jews) or to other traumatic factors such as famine (Irish). He handles trade, labor and imperial diasporas as subgroups of an umbrella category where the reason for emigration was social mobility and he mentions several examples, e.g. European migrants in the US at the end of the 19th century, Chinese traders, or the British imperial diaspora in the Southern hemisphere. As for cultural diasporas, his argument is that Caribbean people share the same experiences of colonization which manifest in shared cultural expressions. Although Cohen argues that the notion 'diaspora' has a strong biblical overtone and is not understandable without the Jewish archetype, he develops further categories which fit modern diaspora formations as well. Cohen's typology is useful if one wants to investigate diasporas from a historical perspective, however, it proves to be insufficient when analyzing contemporary diaspora entities which are results of various emigration waves that were provoked by different (political, economic) reasons – as is the case for many East-Central European diasporas in North America.

A contrasting typology is provided by Milton J. Esman, who argues that instead of defining the reason of dispersal of the given diaspora, one should categorize them according to their present function in the host country.[7] Thus he suggests three categories: settler, labor and entrepreneurial. Esman's definition may seem more applicable since the initial reasons of emigration have already lost its significance for many diasporas, however, Esman's typology

[5] Khachig Tölölyan, "Diaspora Studies. Past, Present and Promise. Working Paper" (International Migration Institute, 2012), http://www.migration.ox.ac.uk/odp/pdfs/WP55%20Diaspora%20studies.pdf.
[6] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).
[7] Milton J. Esman, "Definition and Classes of Diasporas," in *Diasporas in the Contemporary World* (Cambridge, UK, Malden, USA: Polity, 2009).

is just as limited as Cohen's inasmuch as they both treat diasporas as bounded and cohesive groups without internal diversity. Another typology is defined by Janine Dahinden, who approaches diasporas (or, in her own words, transnational formations) from the perspective of mobility and locality.[8] Mobility means the degree of physical mobility of the person with transnational ties, whereas locality means the degree of embeddedness of the person in the host country. The categories Dahinden defines are: localized diasporic transnational (where mobility is low but locality is high), localized mobile transnational (where both mobility and locality are high), transnational mobile (where mobility is high but locality is high), and transnational outsider (where both mobility and locality are low). Dahinden does not differentiate between diaspora and transnational formations, however, her article illuminates one of the definitive characters of diasporas, which is the presence of effective local ties in the host country. Dahinden's typology is the most effectively useable for this thesis since she manages to overcome the bounded nature of both Cohen's and Esman's "diasporas" inasmuch as her unit of reference is the individual and not the diaspora per se.

Diasporic identification is a waste topic, and it is addressed in more detail in the empirical part of the thesis, however, since it is important from the point of view of my own research, the major concerns of the issue have to be outlined here – though it has to be emphasized that patterns and strategies of diasporic identification differ significantly from each other, and are dependent largely on the context of the diaspora itself. Stuart Hall, based on his research on the African-Caribbean diaspora, argues that in the case of diasporas, identity construction works as a kind of "imaginative rediscovery", and as a result, the diaspora's "cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'."[9] He claims that the discovery of African roots of Jamaicans was the result of the impact of post-colonial

[8] Janine Dahinden, "Dynamics of Migrants' Transnational Formations: Between Mobility and Locality," in *Diaspora and Transnationalism. Concepts, Theories and Methods*, ed. Rainer Baubock and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

[9] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Johnathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990). 225.

revolution and of the reflection on their social status, which triggered the act of "imaginative rediscovery" of the diasporic identity. He concludes that "[t]he diaspora experience (…) is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference."[10]

The eventuality of diasporic identity is emphasized by Trandafoiu, who claims that the development of Romanian diaspora identity was the consequence of the fact that the group had to face stereotypical prejudices in the host country, which triggered intragroup solidarity on the one hand, and on the other hand, they had to work on the creation of boundaries between the Roma and Romanians in order to convince the locals that the stereotypes of the Roma do not apply to Romanians. As a conclusion, Romanian diaspora identity was not about identification with the "homeland", rather, it was a consequence of the recognition of self-interest of the group.[11]

The other aspect of diasporic identification which has to be mentioned is what Gans labels as "symbolic ethnicity".[12] Gans examined the strategies of identification of ethnic groups in the USA and concluded that they very often exhibit nostalgia, love and pride towards the home country, use the symbols of their ethnicity and have some rituals (e.g. keeping the traditional cuisine in some form), which means that they pick up elements of their "national identity" selectively, however, it is not paired with effective engagement and interest in the affairs of their former homeland.[13]

[10] Ibid. 235.
[11] Ruxandra Trandafoiu, *Diaspora Online: Identity Politics and Romanian Migrants*, 2013.
[12] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America*," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1979): 1–20, doi:10.1080/01419870.1979.9993248.
[13] Ibid.

2.2. Diaspora politics

Diaspora politics is a broad concept which might embody the politicization and political behavior of diasporas, their relationship with the home and the host country, as well as the efforts of the home country to engage its diaspora in its affairs (be it political, economic, social, etc.). The role of diasporas in international relations and ethnic conflict resolution has acquired academic attention in the past two decades as well.[14] Since this thesis is concerned with diaspora building (more precisely diaspora building through birthright journeys), among the various aspects of diaspora politics diaspora engagement policies are addressed in detail here.

One comprehensive set of diaspora politics (referred to as transnational political practices by the author) is given by Eva Østergaard-Nielsen. Østergaard-Nielsen argues that transnational practices can be initiated by both members of the diaspora and the home country as well. In the former case, political developments or environmental disasters in the country of origin can trigger the engagement of both recent migrants and "established diasporas" as well.[15] In the latter case, when diaspora politics is initiated by the homeland, the motivation can be often of economic nature, namely persuading the diaspora to send remittances back home or to support the homeland's economy through investments. Besides economic benefits, prospects for the diaspora's professional resources or political support (lobby in the host country) may be also appealing for home country governments. However, depending on the contemporary interest of the sending country, encouraging return migration has sometimes priority over the solidification of and keeping contact with the diaspora, as was the intent of former Turkish governments with Turkish diaspora in Europe (although currently Turkish

[14] Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth, "Diasporas and International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 57, no. 3 (July 1, 2003): 449–79; Yossi Shain, *Kinship & Diasporas in International Affairs* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Thomas Ambrosio, ed., *Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002).

[15] Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, "The Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 760–86, doi:10.1111/j.1747-7379.2003.tb00157.x.

governments rather prefer to make best use of its diaspora in terms of investments and political support as well).[16]

Further motivations can lay behind diaspora politics as well. For example, demonstrating the homeland's responsibility towards expatriates carries an important message for the "mainland" constituency and therefore can be considered as a way of reinforcing the electorate of the governing's party "at home". Moreover, the political incorporation of the diaspora after regime changes can serve as a symbolic restitution and compensation for those who left the country because of political persecution.[17] In certain cases the betterment of the situation of the diaspora in the host country may require efforts from the homeland government, which might be another relevant reason to initiate transnational engagement projects.[18] However, it is important to emphasize that sending countries should not be taken for granted as the sole initiators of transnational practices; these projects are more often reactive than pro-active, and furthermore, whether any of the attempts to engage the diaspora turns out to be successful is very much dependent on the "societal and political-institutional context in the receiving countries".[19] It is often argued that the longer a diaspora stays in the receiving countries, the less interest it has in the homeland's affairs,[20] however, factors like the reason of emigration as well as the cultural similarity of the emigrant group to the receptor population may also have a crucial impact on the degree of willingness to resonate to the homeland's calling.[21]

Alan Gamlen, who gives a concise summary of recent diaspora politics in his paper entitled "The emigration state and the modern geopolitical imagination", suggests that home

[16] Ibid.
[17] Szabolcs Pogonyi, "Four Patterns of Non-Resident Voting Rights," *Ethnopolitics*, November 2013, 1–19, doi:10.1080/17449057.2013.846041.
[18] Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, "The Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices. Working Paper" (Transnational Communities Programme, 2001), http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/WPTC-01-22%20Ostergaard.doc.pdf.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Kenneth D. Wald, "Homeland Interests, Hostland Politics: Politicized Ethnic Identity among Middle Eastern Heritage Groups in the United States," *International Migration Review* 42, no. 2 (July 1, 2008): 273–301.

countries can have two strategies to start the engagement of their diaspora: cultivating "diasporic identities and community structures" or "formally recognize existing diaspora communities".[22] To illustrate diasporic identity cultivation Gamlen mentions symbolic acts like the celebration of the "role of expatriates in the nation", delegation of diplomats to diaspora at national holidays, or hinting references to co-ethnics abroad in official statutes, and practical ones like financing national language media or broadcasting.[23] Formal recognition of the diaspora usually starts with statistical procedures or the establishment of official bodies in charge of the diaspora (consulate, government offices, etc.).[24] Gamlan separates diaspora engagement from diaspora integration, the later meaning the establishment of "reciprocal ties" between the homeland and the diaspora. It is usually manifested in the extension of political and/or social rights (citizenship, voting rights, availability of social benefits) to the diaspora from the side of the state, in turn of which it might expect political and/or economic benefits (investments, "expatriate tax", lobby, political participation at the homeland elections) from the diaspora.[25] The cases of two of the classic diasporas,[26] the Jewish and the Armenian in the United States demonstrate clearly that the diaspora's effective lobby can be a real asset for the homeland's political affairs,[27] which further explains the willingness of homeland's governments' to improve their ties with the diaspora.

Although birthright journeys do not appear among the popular "tools" of diaspora politics on Gamlen's list, these programs have been practiced by several countries with

[22] Alan Gamlen, "The Emigration State and the Modern Geopolitical Imagination," *Political Geography* 27, no. 8 (November 2008): 840–56, doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2008.10.004.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Anthony D. Smith, "Diasporas and the Homelands in History: The Case of the Classic Diasporas," in *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*, ed. Allon Gal, Athena S. Leoussi, and Anthony D. Smith (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010).
[27] Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000); Yossi Shain, *Marketing the American Creed Abroad: Diasporas in the U.S. and Their Homelands* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Patrick J. Haney and Walt Vanderbush, "The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Cuban American National Foundation," *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (June 1, 1999): 341–61.

significant diaspora as a remarkable step on the way of diaspora engagement. The essence of birthright journeys lies in a positive personal experience attached to the home country; these programs call upon young individuals in the diaspora who are of the given country's origin to join for a journey (usually free of charge, or requiring only symbolic financial contribution from the participant) in the frame of which the "home country" is (re)discovered by them. As Kelner argues, "[d]rawing on nationalist assertions of inherent connections between people, culture, and place these [birthright tourism] strategies seek to unite globally dispersed populations by fostering a sense of shared belonging in a common political community that is simultaneously territorialized and deterritorialized, rooted and uprooted."[28] The working mechanism of birthright journeys is clear: it operates with highly emotional experiences by presenting the idealistic "homeland" and by bringing together same-aged youngsters who have in common their ethnic (or religious) ancestry, the latter being crucial in creating and maintaining group boundaries.[29]

The pioneer of birthright journeys is Israel: it initiated its "home tourism" program for the diaspora in the 1990s, and by now more than 200 000 persons of Jewish ancestry have participated in it. Besides Israel, Armenia, Taiwan, China and India have a rather long tradition of birthright journeys as well. Initially, the Israeli birthright program targeted to combat assimilation in the diaspora and thus propagated inter-Jewish marriages. Obviously, the Israeli birthright trip has changed a lot by today, and although the explicit aim of birthright journeys is to reinforce (or initiate) national identification for diaspora members, one cannot neglect the program's implicit aim, which is political socialization.

One of the most comprehensive analysis of birthright journeys is given by Shaul Kelner, who devotes his book to the Israeli birthright program (Taglit Israel). Kelner

[28] Shaul Kelner, *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010). xvi.
[29] Jillian L. Powers, "Reimaging the Imagined Community Homeland Tourism and the Role of Place," *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, no. 10 (October 1, 2011): 1362–78, doi:10.1177/0002764211409380.

conducted participant observation for many years among the participants of the Jewish birthright program. Kelner argues that the Israeli birthright journeys are more about diaspora building than about building connections with the state of Israel or about fostering return migration, moreover, the aim of the program is political rather than ethnic or religious socialization. In his interpretation, the Israeli birthright program territorializes Jewish culture in Israel on the one hand, on the other hand, however, it also de-territorializes Jewish culture so that participants can "take it back home". Kelner concludes that the journeys are "open-ended" ways of socially constructing diasporas through tourism.[30]

The open-endedness of birthright journeys Kelner speaks about appears at other authors' works as well. For example, Audrea Lim – who gives a personal commentary on the Taiwanese birthright journey program which she attended at the age of seventeen - claims that although the program was subsidized by the Taiwanese government and obviously aimed to build a camp made up of diaspora Chinese who would be supporters of Taipei instead of Beijing, the program turned out to be a highly typical summer camp of American teenagers who hardly cared for Chinese culture. At the same time, however, the experience also contributed to the construction of a lovely Taiwan in the mind and heart of the participants by the positive memories of the journey. Moreover, she addresses several other birthright examples which resulted in the former participants' practical engagement in the homeland (investment, scientific cooperation etc.) or in developing effective lobbyist in the US. She argues that although the organizers deny the political nature of birthright programs, in reality they embody political socialization patterns.[31] Similar conclusion is drawn by Feldman, who – likewise as a former birthright participant – claims that the Israeli program succeeded in turning a dissent participant less critical of Jewish politics in the Middle East and moreover, it

[30] Kelner, *Tours That Bind*.
[31] Audrea Lim, "Birthright Journeys: Connecting Dots for the Diaspora," *Dissent* 59, no. 3 (2012): 59–65.

made every participant feel "more Jewish".[32]

Although the outputs of birthright journeys are difficult to measure, there are a couple of surveys which can be used as points of reference to evaluate homeland tourism projects. Cohen's survey was carried out in the 1990s amongst Canadian Jewish teenagers and young adults about the impact of the Israeli birthright journey. The survey's finding is that the Israeli birthright journeys prove to be effective in engaging diaspora Jews toward Israel as well as in stimulating stronger Jewish identification among the participants. The major conclusion of the report is that "one journey is not enough", that is, deep attachment to Israel is more likely to develop after the second visit to the country. Moreover, the survey points out that after one journey usually those who had had an a priori positive attitude to the state became interested in Israel, whereas those who had not shown interest in the country before the journey are likely to exhibit a lower level of engagement, which means that "pre-trip pro-Israel socialization affects the likelihood that the trip will have a positive and enduring impact upon the participants".[33]

[32] Kiera Feldman, "The Romance of Birthright Israel," *The Nation*, June 15, 2011, http://www.thenation.com/article/161460/romance-birthright-israel?page=0,2.
[33] Steven M. Cohen, "Committed Zionists and Curious Tourists: Travel to Israel Among Canadian Jewish Youth," April 1, 1991, http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=171.

3. Hungarian nation building policy

One of the most interesting aspects of the history of the newly democratic (post-1989) Hungary is the issue of reframed or returning nationalism, which in its "post-national" form became labeled as transsovereign (transborder)[34] or transnational (trans-state) nationalism.[35] Transsovereign nationalism denotes the form of nationalist political agenda that operates with nation building policies that reach beyond state borders, however, at the same time it does not aim to pursue border changes. Thus, it overcomes the traditional form of nationalism where the primary goal was to make the borders of nation and state congruent. Hungarian governments after 1989 were prototypical practisers of transsovereign nationalism as their vision was to unite or integrate the Hungarian nation through institutions (governmental agencies, foundations) that operate across state borders instead of pursuing the revision of state borders.[36] The following section introduces the most significant developments and the intensifying nature of Hungarian transnational nation building policy after 1989. The terms nation building policy, kin-state politics and nation policy (nemzetpolitika in Hungarian) are used as synonyms.

3.1. Hungarian kin-state politics between 1989 and 2010

Hungarian minorities abroad became a central issue of Hungarian politics basically immediately after these minorities had been "created" by the redrawing of the borders of the country after the First World War by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. In the interwar period it

[34] Zsuzsa Csergő and James M. Goldgeir, "Nationalist Strategies and European Integration," in *The Hungarian Status Law: Nation Building And/or Minority Protection*, ed. Zoltán Kántor et al. (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, Slavic Research Center, 2004).
[35] Szabolcs Pogonyi, "National Reunification beyond Borders: Diaspora and Minority Politics in Hungary since 2010," in *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, vol. Volume 10, 2011 (European Center for Minority Issues, n.d.).
[36] Csergő and Goldgeir, "Nationalist Strategies and European Integration." 283-284.

was complete territorial revision of the lost territories that dominated the aims of Hungarian governments, and this aim was partly realized after Hungary allied itself with Nazi Germany; between 1938 and 1941 many of the lost territories with significant Hungarian population were given back to Hungary. After the Second World War all the re-gained territories were lost again, however, after the communist takeover in Hungary the idea of territorial revisionism never came again to the agenda of any Hungarian governments.[37] In the first decades after 1945, the propaganda of "automatic resolution" dominated the discourse exclusively; according to the communist ideology, all social problems (including national and ethnic conflicts) will be solved once classless society is realized,[38] therefore there was no need to address the issue of national minority communities for any of the Soviet satellite states. Although it is a common belief that transborder (or kin-minority) Hungarians were completely neglected by Hungarian governments until the democratic transition, it is worth to note that there was a very smooth, gradual shift in this regard since as early as the mid-1960s,[39] and by the late-1980s reform communists quite openly raised the issue several times publicly.[40]

However, it was not until the regime change of 1989-1990 that the institutionalization of Hungarian kin-state policy started. The first government after the transition led by József Antall laid down both the principles and the institutional grounds of Hungarian "nation policy" which more or less lasted until 2010, when the second Orbán-government radically reformed and re-structured it. In institutional terms, the Antall-government set up the Secretary of Hungarian Communities Abroad under the supervision of the Prime minister's Office (later turned into the Office of Hungarian Communities Abroad and supervised by the

[37] There have been radical parties which propagate irredentism since 1990, however, none of them has been part of any governments so far.
[38] Nándor Bárdi, "The History of Relations between Hungarian Governments and Ethnic Hungarians Living beyond the Borders of Hungary," in *The Hungarian Status Law: Nation Building And/or Minority Protection*, ed. Zoltán Kántor et al. (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, Slavic Research Center, 2004).
[39] See Bárdi's typology: Ibid.
[40] Pogonyi, "National Reunification beyond Borders: Diaspora and Minority Politics in Hungary since 2010."

Ministry of Foreign Affairs), as well as it established the first public foundations that managed the financial support of Hungarian kin-minorities.

Considering the principles of Hungarian nation policy, it was a very important step that the Antall-government incorporated the governmental support of Hungarian minorities among the three pillars of Hungarian foreign policy (besides Euro-Atlantic integration and good neighborly relations). Moreover, the amendment of the constitution in 1989 also introduced a symbolic reference to transborder Hungarians; it was incorporated into the law that "the Republic of Hungary bears a sense of responsibility for what happens to Hungarians living outside of its borders and shall promote and foster their relations with Hungary". Although to varying degrees and with stresses on different aspects (eg. the socialist government of 1994-1998 put more emphasis on economic development and on good neighborly relations while the first Fidesz-government took a more confrontative stance with the introduction of the Status Law),[41] the successive Hungarian governments had to, and indeed did take the Antallian foundations of kin-state policy as a point of reference, as a result of which it has never been challenged that Hungary cannot ignore its ethnic kins beyond the borders.

Although this thesis does not aim to discuss in detail the pre-2010 history of Hungarian kin-state politics, the major events and milestones have to be mentioned in order to clearly understand the post-2010 developments of the field. While the Antall-government was "ambitious" and wished to contribute to enhancement of the international minority protection regime (especially by taking a leading role in the OSCE talks), the Horn-government was more pragmatic and defined the stability of the region as its priority. The pragmatic attitude of the socialist government of 1994-1998 was manifested in the conclusion of the Basic Treaties with Romania and Slovakia, in the support of economic infrastructure and civil society of transborder Hungarian communities, as well as in the avoidance of interstate conflict with the

[41] Bárdi, "The History of Relations between Hungarian Governments and Ethnic Hungarians Living beyond the Borders of Hungary."

neighboring countries.[42]

The first culmination of Hungarian kin-state politics was the adoption of the Status Law (officially the Act on Hungarians Living in Neighbouring Countries) in 2001, which brought about not only the institutionalization of the relation between ethnic Hungarians abroad and the Hungarian government, but also raised conflicts with Romania and Slovakia, and finally even provoked the statement of the Venice Commission and of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on the rights of kin-states.[43] The Status Law offered quasi-citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living outside the territory of Hungary, which in practice meant benefits and preferential treatment in public transportation, education and health care. The law was criticized for having extraterritorial effects and thus violating state sovereignty by Romania and Slovakia, and the conflict was later resolved by a memorandum signed by the Hungarian and Romanian prime ministers, aiming to de-sharpen the ethnic criteria of the law.[44] The significance of the Status Law was that it made the relation between the Hungarian state and (non-resident) ethnic Hungarian individuals institutionalized by granting "Hungarian cards" for those who applied for it. Thus, holding the "Hungarian card" basically meant to have an official document issued by a "foreign" state, a state to which one is linked through ethnicity, culture or language, but not through citizenship. Moreover, the adoption of the Status Law brought about the Hungarian government's confrontation with other governments and even with international organizations on the legitimacy of a governmental policy concerning minority Hungarians, which can be considered as an exceptional instance in the history of the newly democratic Hungary.

Besides the adoption of the Status Law, the other novelty of the first Orbán-government was the institutional development of nation policy: it solidified the consultation forum between

[42] Ibid.
[43] Zoltán Kántor, "Status Law and 'Nation Policy': Theoretical Aspects," in *The Hungarian Status Law: Nation Building And/or Minority Protection*, ed. Zoltán Kántor et al. (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, Slavic Research Center, 2004).
[44] Pogonyi, "National Reunification beyond Borders: Diaspora and Minority Politics in Hungary since 2010."

Hungarian MPs and minority Hungarian representatives with the set up of the Hungarian Standing Conference. From 1999 the Hungarian Standing Conference was convened once a year with the participation of MPs of the Hungarian Parliament, members of the Hungarian government and minority Hungarian organizations that have parliamentary or provincial representation in their respective countries, in order to discuss actual issues and problems. The Conference played a major role in the drafting of the Status Law; however, the consultation forum came to a halt under the Gyurcsány-government in 2004, after the failed referendum on dual citizenship. In the campaign period before the referendum, the governing socialist and liberal parties encouraged their voters to vote against the initiative, playing out the "welfare chauvinist" card by implying that transborder dual citizen Hungarians would threaten the social benefits of "ordinary" Hungarian citizens. Due to the tense relation between the government and transborder Hungarian politicians after the failed referendum, the Hungarian Standing Conference was not convened until 2010.

3.2. Nation policy after 2010

The landslide victory of Fidesz in 2010 meant a huge turning point in many respects of Hungarian kin-state politics. The most significant step was obviously the amendment of the Law on Citizenship which enabled non-resident ethnic Hungarians to apply for Hungarian citizenship. The possibility of preferential naturalization was soon followed by the extension of political rights to dual citizens, which meant that non-resident citizens became eligible to vote at the Hungarian national elections. Besides these grandiose and politically motivated projects, the Orbán-government introduced many symbolic measures, furthermore, it laid down the foundations of Hungarian diaspora politics as well, which - in certain regards - became separated from kin-state policy.

3.2.1. Dual citizenship and the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens

The introduction of preferential naturalization for ethnic Hungarians was the first and (both politically and symbolically) most important step the second Orbán-government made after its electoral victory in 2010. It was symbolic for two reasons; first, it was the very first law adopted by the new Parliament in 2010 (submitted only three days after the inaugural session of the House),[45] thus it carried an important message, and second, the discourse on nation policy between 2010-2014 was almost exclusively dominated by the adoption of this law (commonly referred to as "dual citizenship of transborder Hungarians"). The law itself is the amended version of the Act on Citizenship, and makes it possible to obtain Hungarian citizenship without permanent residence in Hungary if two criteria are met; the applicant has to prove that one of his or her ancestors was citizen of Hungary, and must have a command of the Hungarian language (neither the required level of language knowledge nor the way of its bureaucratic checking are specified by the law). The legislation has been very often and harshly criticized for applying ethnic criteria,[46] however, in fact it requires formal legal ties (i.e. citizenship) to the state of Hungary. Nevertheless, the aim of the law is clear: it provides fast track naturalization for ethnic Hungarians living abroad. (Although persons who are of different ethnic origin but fit the criteria are not excluded; it is a well-known fact that both in Vojvodina and Ukraine many non-Hungarians obtained Hungarian (and thus EU) citizenship since 2011.[47])

[45] Ibid.

[46] Slovakia even introduced a „counter-law" as the effect of which Slovak citizens naturalizing in another country can be deprived of their Slovak citizenship. More on the Slovak-Hungarian tension about dual citizenship: Szabolcs Pogonyi, Mária M. Kovács, and Zsolt Körtvélyesi, *The Politics of External Kin-State Citizenship in East Central Europe*, EUDO Citizenship Observatory (Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, 2010), http://eudo-citizenship.eu/docs/ECEcompreport.pdf.

[47] Gábor Gergő Kiss, "Adják-Veszik a Magyar Állampolgárságot Szerbiában (Hungarian Citizenship Sold and Purchased in Serbia)," *Delmagyar.hu*, September 25, 2013, http://www.delmagyar.hu/szeged_hirek/adjak-veszik_a_magyar_allampolgarsagot_szerbiaban/2350791/.

As claimed earlier, the project of "dual citizenship" was the most important communication panel of the second Orbán-government's nation policy. Statistics on the number of people applying for Hungarian citizenship as well as on those who took the citizenship oath were systematically published, and leading politicians (ministers, state secretaries) attended citizenship oath ceremonies regularly. The measure itself was represented in political speeches as a long-awaited redemption, a compensation for the painful 2004 referendum (which at the same time became the symbol of left-wing parties' betrayal of the nation). Therefore, the law on preferential naturalization had a twofold agenda; it served to ultimately win the potential electorate of the newly naturalizing Hungarian citizens abroad, and at the same time it became a tool to solidify the national image of the Fidesz-government and, by doing so, reinforcing those of its mainland electorate who are sympathetic to transborder Hungarian communities.[48]

The enfranchisement of non-resident citizens was not a self-evident concomitant of dual citizenship, since after the adoption of the law on preferential naturalization leading politicians of Fidesz claimed that the extension of voting rights would not follow the measure.[49] However, by early 2011 this stance had been revised and the new slogan of the government became that citizenship and political rights are inseparable, and the electoral law was amended accordingly; voting rights thus were extended to non-resident citizens (though with limitation, since they can vote only for party lists but not for individual candidates).

Based on the tense relation of left-wing parties and transborder Hungarians since 2004 and the national politics of Fidesz between 1998 and 2002 as well as after 2010, it was widely expected that newly enfranchised non-resident citizens would overwhelmingly support the governing Fidesz party. Now, after the elections of 6 April 2014 we have evidence about it:

[48] Myra A. Waterbury, *Between State and Nation: Diaspora Politics and Kin-State Nationalism in Hungary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[49] On the governing party's changing opinion on political rights and dual citizenship see: Pogonyi, "National Reunification beyond Borders: Diaspora and Minority Politics in Hungary since 2010."

95% of those who participated at the elections voted for Fidesz. This fact might confirm a priori criticism of external voting, namely that the enfranchisement of transborder Hungarians is but one way of solidifying the governing position of Fidesz. However, taken into account the effective importance of the votes casted by non-resident citizens, it has to be admitted that their votes can be worth of 2 mandates as maximum (at the 2014 elections it was less than one mandate).[50] Therefore, we can claim that, just as in the case of dual citizenship, non-resident voting rights has more indirect than direct political profit; it rather serves as a tool to solidify and reinforce the engaged national image and the electorate of Fidesz than effectively to haunt votes from abroad.

Besides dual citizenship and external voting rights, the second Orbán-government introduced several other measures and reforms as well. First, the previously existing Office or Department for Hungarian Communities Abroad became substituted by a separate State Secretariat within the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, and besides, one of the deputy prime ministers, Zsolt Semjén became responsible for the governmental policy for Hungarian communities abroad. Besides, an inter-ministerial body was also set up to coordinate the work of those public administration units that touch upon policy fields that overlap with kin-state politics (foreign affairs, education, health care, etc.). In terms of financial support, the previously existing foundations were ceased and a completely new one was founded (Bethlen Gábor Fund) which is now the only body to which Hungarian organizations, institutions and individuals can apply for funds.

In 2011, the Hungarian Standing Conference adopted the Strategic Framework for Hungarian Communities Abroad, which is the very first comprehensive and concise document of Hungarian kin-state policy. The document defines the priorities and main strategic goals of the Hungarian government in relation to Hungarian communities abroad, which might be

[50] However, delicate situations can happen anytime and "diaspora" votes can be decisive at close results, as it happened in Italy in 2006 (Pogonyi, "Four Patterns of Non-Resident Voting Rights.")

summarized as “prosperous communities”.

Furthermore, there were measures that are strongly connected to nation policy, however, their primary target group is not Hungarians abroad but “mainland” Hungarians. The introduction of the commemoration of the day of the Trianon Peace Treaty as the biggest national catastrophe is one of these steps. This measure evidently targets to strengthen the Hungarian population’s consciousness of transborder Hungarians, thus indirectly to legitimize the government’s kin-state policy. Similarly, the project “Határtalanul” (Borderless or Unbounded) launched for high school students to visit places in neighboring countries that are inhabited by Hungarians in order to establish personal contacts with transborder Hungarians also aims to raise the younger generation’s awareness of the issue of Hungarian minorities. These aims clearly appear in the rhetoric of the Hungarian government inasmuch as it overuses terms like “national unity”, and “single, united Hungarian nation”.

3.2.2. Diaspora policy

Although nation policy has been a central concern of Hungarian governments since 1990, interestingly, Hungarian diasporas (migrants in the Western hemisphere, whose number basically equals the number of kin-minorities in the neighboring countries) enjoyed very little attention from the homeland before 2010. The second Orbán-government has been the first to introduce a structured policy to call for or engage diaspora Hungarians, and these measures were inserted – at least rhetorically - in the logic of the revised nation policy.[51] One of the central mottos of post-2010 kin-state politics was the propagation of the “unified and single Hungarian nation”, which in the government’s interpretation refers to a spiritual and symbolic unification of the nation, without any revisionist (territorial) claims, and in which there is

[51] “Policy for Hungarian Communities Abroad - Strategic Framework for Hungarian Communities Abroad,” accessed April 7, 2014, http://www.nemzetiregiszter.hu/download/b/12/10000/policy_2013.pdf.

room for all Hungarians, regardless of their residence.

In fact, there is very limited knowledge about "diaspora Hungarians", partly because transborder Hungarians traditionally tend to dominate academic and political interest, and partly because it is very difficult to research these cohorts (due to the lack of reliable information on migrants). What we know about diaspora Hungarians is their estimated number (the largest group of diaspora Hungarians lives in the US and Canada, other larger communities live in Latin-America, Western Europe, Australia and Israel),[52] moreover, we assume that they dispose of huge sociological differences in terms of their level of integration in the host society as well as their level of knowledge of Hungarian language.

In my interpretation, the shift of attention to diaspora Hungarians had one more additional reason beside the already mentioned "unified nation" concept which determines the principles of the second Orbán-government's nation policy: the recently intensified waves of migration from the country directed the attention of politicians to a potential (and constantly growing) source of political and economic benefits, which has been absolutely unutilized so far. This "discovery" of the diaspora led to the launching of a bunch of programs addressing the target group, as well as to institutional reforms.

In 2010, when the Hungarian Standing Conference was convened anew for the first time after 2004, the government decided to set up a separate consultative forum exclusively for diaspora organizations. With that measure, the government basically separated the coordination bodies of transborder Hungarians and diaspora Hungarians (although the diaspora is still represented in the Hungarian Standing Conference by one person per region). This implies that the different characters, needs and approaches of the two kinds of "Hungarians abroad" have been officially admitted. Thus we can claim that Hungarian kin-state and diaspora politics became separated from each other in institutional terms after 2010.

Diaspora politics differ from kin-state politics not only in institutional terms, but in their

[52] Ibid.

objectives as well, and this claim can be best illustrated with the newly launched programs designed for the diaspora. One of the initial steps of diaspora engagement policy was the launch of Hungarian Register (Nemzeti Regiszter), a virtual database for Hungarians worldwide, which also provides weekly newsletter on Hungarian politics both in Hungarian and English. Its primary aim was to re-channel those who have lost contact with the homeland and to give them an up-to-date view about the country. Secondly, a cultural revitalization program (Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program) was launched in the frame of which young Hungarians travel to diaspora organizations and help them in organizing cultural events, heritage cultivation or language education. Interestingly, the program was welcomed with great enthusiasm and satisfaction by diaspora organization, and the budget of the program was doubled after the pilot program.[53] Another key programs are targeting at (physical) heritage cultivation; Julianus program aims to list all Hungarian "memories" worldwide (streets named after Hungarians, statutes, plaques, etc.), while Ithaka and Mikes Kelemen programs target to collect Hungarian bequests to transfer them back to Hungary. All these programs carry the symbolic message that Hungarian diaspora matters and the Hungarian government bears a certain kind of responsibility for diaspora Hungarians as well.

Interestingly, although the option of fast track naturalization is open not only for transborder Hungarians but for the diaspora as well, the latter's interest in obtaining Hungarian citizenship has been remarkably lower. Similarly, diaspora members exhibited little activism at the 2014 national elections; only a couple of thousands of persons in the diaspora registered for the elections. This fact implies that the Hungarian government can expect very limited political support from the diaspora. On the other hand, however, efforts to woe and win diaspora Hungarians can have similar goals in the direction of the home electorate as in the case of kin-state policy, namely to justify the nationally engaged image of

[53] Bálint Fabók, "Felrázták Az Elfeledett Magyarokat (Forgotten Hungarians Got Shaken Up)," *Http://www.origo.hu/*, accessed April 9, 2014, http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20131111-korosi-csoma-sandor-program-a-diaszporaban-elo-magyaroknak.html.

Fidesz. In this respect, Hungarian kin-state policy and diaspora policy can have the same implicit objective, even if we might instinctively think that slightly nationalist voters are more sympathetic to transborder Hungarians than to the diaspora.

4. ReConnect Hungary – The Hungarian Birthright Journey

Birthright journeys are effective and creative ways to engage the diaspora of a state. As claimed earlier, the essence of birthright journeys lies in a positive personal experience attached to the home country; these programs call upon young individuals in the diaspora who are of the given country's origin to join for a journey (usually free of charge, or requiring only symbolic financial contribution from the participant) in the frame of which the "home country" is (re)discovered by them. The aim of birthright journeys can be manifold, and where the emphasis is put obviously depends on the given country's goals defined by its actual circumstances.

ReConnect Hungary, the Hungarian birthright program is a special one among diaspora tourism journeys since the Hungarian American diaspora played a highly proactive role in the initiation of the project, whereas it is usually the home country's government that tries to reach its diaspora by launching such programs. In the case of ReConnect Hungary, it was George Pataki, former governor of New York (who is very proud of his Hungarian ancestry), and his daughter, Allison Pataki who suggested the idea of a Hungarian birthright program to some prominent persons of the American Hungarian diaspora. László Hámos, president of the Kossuth Foundation (based in Washington, DC) and of the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (based in New York City) immediately embraced the idea and started to work on the realization.[54] The first year when ReConnect Hungary was offered was 2012 and it was co-financed by the Hungarian government and by the Kossuth Foundation in approximately 50-50%.[55]

ReConnect Hungary targets young Americans of Hungarian heritage aged 18-26 who have not lived in Hungary past the age of 13. Those who do not speak Hungarian are equally

[54] Máté Vincze, ReConnect Hungary - from the perspective of an organizer, interview by Eszter Herner-Kovács, February 24, 2014.
[55] Ibid.

eligible for the program, and it does not matter how far one has his or her Hungarian ancestry. The organizers try to find those candidates who have no or only very limited knowledge about Hungary and few contacts to Hungarian culture. This also implies that the channels of advertisement have to be chosen carefully in order to reach optimal candidates. Beside the most effective networking sites such as Facebook, the organizers advertise ReConnect Hungary in the newsletters of the "old" Hungarian American organizations that were founded by (mostly economic) immigrants of the early 20th century.[56]

According to Máté Vincze, who was one of the organizers from the side of the Kossuth Foundation in both 2012 and 2013, the organizers considered the types of existing birthright journeys and concluded that instead of designing a student exchange or an internship program, a tourism-oriented journey would best fit the Hungarian case. When they put together the itinerary of ReConnect Hungary they had in mind the objective to display at least 3-4 things in Hungary that an American, who considers him- or herself Hungarian to a certain extent, can be proud of, and the main "narrative" of the whole program was the message that "Hungarians are innovative". This message was already planted in the preparation period when the selected participants had to read a book by Kati Marton entitled "The Great Escape – Nine Jews who Fled Hitler and Changed the World". The book presents the life stories of 20th century Jews who left Hungary, and some of whom played a crucial role in the scientific development of the mid-20th century, such as Szilárd, Wigner, Teller or Neumann. As Vincze claimed, the arc of the narrative was brought to its other end when the participants met Hungarian start-up entrepreneurs, innovative designers and directors of successful firms in Budapest while on the trip.[57]

The other highlights of ReConnect Hungary are the meetings with top politicians. The participants met Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, László Kövér, president of the Parliament, and

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

János Horváth, the oldest MP. According to Vincze, whatever political orientation the students have, the reception at a high-ranking politician's office is always a lifetime experience for them.[58] On the other hand, those receptions are good ways for the Hungarian government to demonstrate its real interest towards the American Hungarian diaspora, and thus to foster the more effective engagement of the participants.

All these aims are reflected in the program's structure. In my interpretation, the programs of the trip can be grouped in three main categories: classical tourist attractions (historical sites, cultural events), "introduction" to present day Hungary (meeting entrepreneurs, visiting firms), and formal (reception in the Parliament, meeting government officials). The first category consists of elements like visiting the "mainstream" tourist parts of Budapest (Buda Castle, Hero's Square, Opera, etc.) and the country (Szentendre, Tihany, Eger), museums that might be relevant for the family histories of Hungarian Americans (Holocaust Memorial Center and the House of Terror), as well as events like a folk "dance house" (táncház). The second group of programs incorporates events like visiting the Design Terminal (a public institution aiming to encourage and support creative industry), Graphisoft Park (R&D business center), premier wineries, a successful organic farm led-by a British entrepreneur, Budapest offices of international companies like PricewaterhouseCoopers. On the basis of the interviews conducted with the participants, the events where they were able to meet Hungarian students can be counted in the second category as well; many respondents claimed that getting in contact with local young people helped them to learn and understand contemporary Hungary. The formal type of programs includes meeting the Prime Minister of Hungary, János Horváth (a "Hungarian American" and oldest MP of Parliament), the state secretary for Hungarian communities abroad, and the director of Balassi Institute (government agency promoting Hungarian culture abroad).[59]

[58] Ibid.

[59] "ReConnect Hungary - The Hungarian Birthright Program," *Http://www.reconnecthungary.org*, accessed May

The participants of ReConnect are taken to Southern Slovakia for one day to meet representatives of the Hungarian minority Slovakia. This program is difficult to classify since it fits both the first and the second category inasmuch as it can be regarded as an element supporting the classical narratives of Hungarian history, however, according to the respondents' statements, the one-day trip rather serves to learn about contemporary issues such as bilingualism or interethnic tensions in the region.[60]

As for the expected outcome of the birthright journey, the organizers had two main goals in mind. First, - and which is at the same time the classical objective of birthright journeys, - to "win" the participants for the ancient home country in various possible ways. Vincze emphasized the need to have American citizens who sympathize with Hungary in the US and who can fulfill the function of "goodwill ambassadors". One of the possible scenarios of that can be the fostering of American investments or any kind of business activity in Hungary. Obviously, such outcomes of ReConnect can be measured in 10-year perspectives. Another manifestation of turning the participants into "friends" of Hungary might be their raised interest in current Hungarian affairs and their more sensitive attitude to such issues. In that case, former participants should double check the unfavorable news on Hungary and contribute to spread unbiased information about the country.[61] Indeed, during the 2010-2014 period the Orbán-government was harshly criticized by Western media (and politicians as well), and the Hungarian government claimed that the source of those critiques were the opposition left-wing and liberal parties who provided biased information to Western media. Therefore, the expectation to have Americans who are sympathetic to Hungary and are motivated to balance the eventually negative image of the country is timely and perfectly fits the Hungarian government's current needs and aims. Certainly, this output is even more

13, 2014.

[60] The participants' interpretation of the trip to Slovakia is developed in detail in the chapter analyzing the interviews.

[61] Máté Vincze, ReConnect Hungary - from the perspective of an organizer.

difficult – if not impossible – to measure.

The other major expected outcome of the birthright journey is to involve the participants in the cultivation of the Hungarian heritage in the United States.[62] The majority of the Hungarian organizations in the United States are linked to emigration waves; the different Hungarian immigrant groups faced different situations in the United Stated, and therefore their activities were characterized with distinct features. The first group of Hungarians that established its institutions was the economic immigrants of the turn of the 19-20th centuries. These institutions were typically so called fraternal institutions; the goal of these organizations was to tackle the basic social needs and to help the integration of the economic immigrants into the American society.[63] As members of the next emigration waves (interwar period, 1940s, 1947-1955, 1956) were politically more active than the economic migrants of the first wave, they gradually familiarized with the American political system and established their institutions which were more oriented towards politics than the previous ones. However, the majority of the Hungarian American institutions' management are facing the problem of generational change and are struggling to find successor leaders. ReConnect Hungary therefore aims to contribute to this process by encouraging the participants to get involved and to take a more active role in the life of the Hungarian American community and organizations in their home when they return to the US.

To realize these aims and to follow-up the participants' stake in the life of Hungarian American organizations, the organizers are building an alumni club and try to keep them as connected as possible to Hungary and Hungarian Americans. Besides the annual alumni dinner at the Hungarian Embassy in Washington, DC, participants are channeled to Hungarian American organizations as well through newsletters and invitations to various events. Moreover, as Vincze claimed, the organizers intend to launch an alumni program that would

[62] Ibid.

[63] Béla Várdy, *Magyarok Az Újvilágban (Hungarians in the New World)* (Budapest: A Magyar Nyelv és Kultúra Nemzetközi Társasága, 2000). 262-263.

offer internship opportunities at Hungarian companies in order to foster the participants' effective engagement towards Hungary.

As a final point in the chapter I would like to address the issue of how ReConnect Hungary is presented in the Hungarian media. As claimed earlier, in several interpretations Hungarian nation policy has a secondary or implicit objective: to solidify the governing Fidesz party's national image and thus to help stabilize the slightly nationalist electorate of the party.[64] In my view, this implicit objective might be a valid assumption for policies targeting "traditional" minority Hungarian communities in the neighboring countries, however, this strategy would work in the case of diaspora policy to a much lesser extent. As already introduced in the previous chapter, the Hungarian government initiated several projects in the frame of the newly "established" diaspora politics, however, there is only one which gained considerable public attention: the cultural revitalization project entitled Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program. There have been many articles published on the program which lets young Hungarians spend several months in diaspora communities to help organize and revitalize cultural events there. Right-wing newspapers praised the program for demonstrating that "every Hungarian matters" and for compensating the "forgotten Hungarians", and one of the journalists of right-wing daily Magyar Nemzet even published a bunch of articles after having visited the communities hosting the participants of the program.[65] Also, the positive feedbacks of the diaspora communities can have a reinforcing and legitimizing effect for the voters of Fidesz as well.

Unlike Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program, ReConnect Hungary received significantly less public attention even in the right-leaning media. My assumption is that since the birthright journey is not a project initiated by the Hungarian government, moreover, it is financed only partially by

[64] Waterbury, *Between State and Nation*; Pogonyi, "National Reunification beyond Borders: Diaspora and Minority Politics in Hungary since 2010."
[65] Csaba Lukács, "Wannabe Mátyás Király!," *Mno.hu*, June 19, 2013, http://mno.hu/kulfold/wannabe-matyas-kiraly-1167694.

the state, furthermore, it affects only a handful of people, and finally, Hungarian emigrants are judged rather controversially in Hungary (they are often described as traitors of the homeland who left the country in hard times), the birthright project cannot become one of the leading "national projects" of the Fidesz-government, which also explains why the program was not propagated in the media (its presentation is limited to a couple of articles summarizing the new directions of Hungarian nation policy,[66] to a radio interview and to a short report in the evening news). Consequently, ReConnect Hungary can hardly be counted among those programs which aim to demonstrate the Hungarian government's national commitment towards the homeland electorate.

[66] Bálint Ablonczy, "Amerikai Embereink (Our People in America)," *Heti Válasz*, January 2, 2013, http://hetivalasz.hu/vilag/az-biztos-hogy-az-elkovetkezo-evekben-is-boven-lesz-tennivalojuk-58963."A ReConnect Hungary Ösztöndíjasait Fogadta Répás Zsuzsanna (Zsuzsanna Répás Welcomes Participants of ReConnect Hungary)," *Mno.hu*, July 8, 2013, http://mno.hu/belfold/a-reconnect-hungary-osztondijasait-fogadta-repas-zsuzsanna-1171434; "Amerikai Magyarok Budapesten (Hungarian Americans in Budapest)," *Magyar Hírlap*, accessed May 27, 2014, http://www.magyarhirlap.hu/amerikai-magyarok-budapesten. Balázs Ágoston, "Szükségből Erényt (Virtue out of Need)," August 7, 2013, http://www.demokrata.hu/ujsagcikk/szuksegbol_erenyt/.

5. Empirical research

The main goal of the thesis is to investigate the outcome of the Hungarian birthright journey. The research is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with participants of the 2012 and 2013 ReConnect Hungary Program. It was a voluntary sample as the respondents self-selected for the interviews; 10 persons were willing to volunteer for the interview out of the total 22 participants. From the 2012 cohort 3 (out of 9) while from the 2013 cohort 7 (out of 13) took part in the research. 8 of the interviews were conducted via Skype and 2 in person in Budapest in December 2013 and May 2014, respectively. The respondents are of various "Hungarian heritage" background; some are more remote from it either in terms of generation or of conscious cultivation, while some are surrounded by lively Hungarian environment both through their family, language and community (e.g. attending Hungarian school, church, scout groups, etc.).

I used Atlas.Ti software for the analysis of the qualitative data. With the help of the program I identified small narrative units within the interview texts and coded them with keywords reflecting the content of the narrative unit. Moreover, codes with similar content were selected into families as well. This method helped me to process the interviews in a more focused way. Also, by looking at the code hierarchy I could easily point out the topics that were the most often discussed by the respondents.

Besides the interviews I had an additional source that was incorporated in the research: the motivation essays written by the participants to apply for ReConnect Hungary. In their essays, applicants had to write about their Hungarian roots (family stories), their motivations for the trip, and the possible outcome of the journey in their lives. In my analysis I focused on the last two aspects as well as on patterns of identification.

5.1. Essays

5.1.1. Motivations and expected outcomes

According to the code hierarchy, the most frequent topic in the essays written by the participants of ReConnect Hungary was how their family influenced their motivation to apply for the program. Comparing the "family factor" to others in their motivations, it is clear that pleasing family members of Hungarian ancestry as well as to show respect for the Hungarian ancestors was the most decisive reason for participation in the birthright journey. The role the family plays in shaping diasporic identities and the concept of one's ethnic belonging has been revealed by scholars; Christou claims that socialization in the family "constructs a concrete view of Greece as the ancestral homeland and the source of 'true' Greekness" for second generation Greek migrants in the US.[67] Some respondents stressed the importance to better understand the life of their ancestors by seeing where they had come from, which also echoes the findings of previous researches on the relation of diasporic identity and family[68]:

"She was the most important person in my life and the biggest reason why I chose to apply. (…) She taught me so much and I feel that I'd be better able to understand her and myself if I can understand where she came from."

Some had an emotional aspect to it as well:

"If I get into this program, I cannot even imagine the connection that I would feel with my Omami (my grandma). I miss her so much and I want to be able to experience this for her, for my mom, and for myself."

For some participants, "returning" to Hungary meant to pay one's duty for the ancestors:

"After just under 100 years, my family's journey would come full circle. My great-grandparents who fled Hungary for America would be juxtaposed with me returning to Hungary."

"My parents have done a great deal for me to still have a solid Hungarian foundation

[67] Anastasia Christou, "Deciphering Diaspora – Translating Transnationalism: Family Dynamics, Identity Constructions and the Legacy of 'home' in Second-Generation Greek-American Return Migration," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 6 (2006): 1040–56, doi:10.1080/01419870600960297.
[68] Ibid.

established in me even though I was born in America and raised in Canada. This program would be a reward for me and my parents for all the joint effort we have made to keep our Hungarian heritage in the family."

Finally, one of the participants thought of the opportunity as a way to help his father ameliorate his attitude to Hungarian heritage:

"I think to my dad, that mixture of hardship growing up and conflictory values and ideology with the then current communist government left my dad with a bitter taste of Hungary, one that made it hard for him to want to re-engage with his heritage. I think this trip could be an opportunity to start my real connections and for my dad, vicariously through me, to rediscover his."

Besides the family factor, another crucial reason for the application was to establish friendship with fellow Americans of Hungarian ancestry as well as with young Hungarians. This further reinforces the assumption that for the majority of the participants "Hungarianness" has been a private or family matter before the trip; the birthright journey offers a chance to meet fellows and thus to possibly widen one's room to cultivate his or her ethnic heritage. Moreover, the possibility to "rediscover" one's heritage with young fellows had an appealing effect as well:

"I anticipate meeting people that I will develop lasting relationships with, whether they are friends made within the cohort of Americans on the trip, or new Hungarian friends made on the journey."

"… also I will be able to meet fellow Hungarian Americans who, like myself, want to learn truly who they are and where they came from."

Furthermore, many applicants emphasized their will to learn more about Hungarian history and culture as well as to experience present day Hungary. Learning about Hungary and Hungarian culture appeared in many essays as a way of self-understanding and stronger Hungarian identification. The will to be able to cultivate one's Hungarian heritage more intensively appeared several times as well:

"The ReConnect program is the ideal experience to (…) become better educated in Hungarian culture and history, and to recognize how my Hungarian heritage has shaped and

will continue to shape my life."

" (...) Hungarian-Americans and whatever Americans that do have Hungarian lineage have either lost, forgotten or simply do not care about their background and have become fully Americanized; I do not want to be one of those people, I want to embrace my Hungarian self."

Other reasons for application appeared in the essays sporadically, such as the will to engage with the local Hungarian American community, getting involved in the activities of Hungarian American organizations and improving one's language skills.

As for the potential outcome of the birthright journey in the individual's life, it was the plan to spread the good image of Hungary and Hungarian culture that was most frequently brought up in the essays. Besides, the plan to engage in the work of local Hungarian American organizations and communities appeared very often as well:

"Being more involved in Hungarian youth groups and sharing my stories with everyone will provide lots of knowledge to Hungarian youths in the Toronto area (...) Once we can get them interested then it can be a great beginning to more young Hungarians to keep the culture alive and experience their motherland."

The possibility to "return" to and live in Hungary appeared in two essays, and even there only as a very tentative consideration.

5.1.2. Identification

As Edensor argues, "national identity has become detached from the nation-state, proliferates in diasporic settings far from its original home, appears in syncretic cultural forms and practices and exists in 'hyphenated' identities."[69] Edensor's definition highlights the unbounded nature and dynamism of identity in diaspora, which is very well reflected in my empirical research on the identification patterns of the participants of the birthright journey. Anthony D. Smith claims that national identity and culture is "both an inter-generational repository and heritage, or set of traditions, and an active shaping repertoire of meanings and images, embodied in values, myths and symbols that serve to unite a group of people with

[69] Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2002). p.29.

shared experiences and memories and differentiate them from outsiders".[70] His definition is useful to examine diasporic identities since he stresses, on the one hand, the intergenerational transferable nature of "national heritage", which in the case of second, third and fourth generational diaspora members – who usually lack the institutional background of ethnicity – is the only relevant way to reproduce national culture. My empirical research is in line with Smith's theory; for many respondents, family narratives and family traditions are significant "elements" of the individual's (diasporic) identification patterns. On the other hand, Smith highlights how dynamic the construction of national identity is, which – especially in the case of diaspora communities – resonates to Gans' theory on symbolic ethnicity. Gans claims that third and fourth generation ethnics in the US, after having lost ethnic "surroundings" (segregation, occupational specialization, institutions), but because they still "perceive themselves as ethnics", started to find new ways of ethnic belonging. This is manifested in expressing national belonging through - voluntarily and selectively chosen - symbols and signs.[71] The symbols and signs help to make ethnic identity visible, however, they do not require "undue interference in other aspects of life".[72] Food, national holidays, celebrations, folk dance are thus ideal element of symbolic identity; these are "transportable identity rituals"[73] that do not demand effective engagement and at the same time help to maintain (or reconstruct) community boundaries. As my research shows, symbolic ethnicity is definitely the term that applies for the identification strategies of the respondents.

As mentioned earlier, the extent to which each participant had been exposed to Hungarian culture before the journey is varying, therefore, the patterns of Hungarian identification and the perception of "what makes a Hungarian" are very complex in the essays. One core element of it is definitely the love for Hungarian food; it appeared in almost

[70] Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998).
[71] Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity."
[72] Ibid.
[73] copyright Szabolcs Pogonyi

every writings, regardless of how remote the participant is from his or her Hungarian ancestors.

Food has long been considered as an ethnic marker which carries "productive meanings recognized by the members of the same group, who through food-related rituals celebrate their belonging".[74] As Rabikowska claims, food projects the concept of "home" for migrants as it fragmentarily – but materially – reconstitutes the meaning of home.[75] Certainly, my sample does not consist of migrants who could be reminded of the "home country" by consuming national food, however, in their case Hungarian food is associated with "home" in its narrower sense as national food is mediated by the (ethnic side of the) family. Based on my analysis, consuming Hungarian food is basically the most common and evident way how the respondents live and "cultivate" their Hungarian identity, and obviously it is strongly connected to their family, many times it is even limited to family occasions. This partly contradicts to Rabikowska's argument who claims that consuming the national food is not only private but political performance of migrants since it delineates their otherness in the host society – in my sample, consuming Hungarian food appeared as a private (or family) experience of national identity. In one of the essays, food explicitly appeared as a "tool" to reconnect with one's lost roots:

"Mostly, I want to bring Hungary back to my life in Toronto. Sharing Hungarian foods with others who may have lost touch with their Hungarian roots or introducing others to the Hungarian heritage."

Another dominant feature that was brought up in connection with being a Hungarian American was the description of one's Hungarian environment. For most of the cases it was limited exclusively to the participant's family, however, some of the – mostly first or second generation – respondents reported about Hungarian Sunday school attendance, scouting or

[74] Marta Rabikowska, "The Ritualisation of Food, Home and National Identity among Polish Migrants in London," *Social Identities* 16, no. 3 (2010): 377–98, doi:10.1080/13504630.2010.482432.
[75] Ibid.

going to Hungarian church. The dominant medium of Hungarian culture (just as in the case of national food) is however one's family for all of the cases, which also means that "being a Hungarian" is a private rather than a public, an individual rather than a social identity for the respondents.

Some essays reported about how the respondents see Hungarians through the family narratives, family traditions or through their individual readings and research. These narratives are centered on the ethos of the nation's bravery and desire for freedom and are illustrated with the freedom fights of 1848 and 1956:

"She told me how Hungarians were polite, hard-working, courageous, and wise. I learned bits and pieces of Hungarian history like the desire for independence from Austria and the lives lost in the struggle to achieve it during 1848. (...) I researched the great Hungarian Lajos Kossuth. His commitment to freedom and democracy were very inspiring."

"I learned the incredible work ethic that Hungarians have. Additionally, I was introduced to the Church at a young age. These combined to give me the Hungarian attitude that although we have and are still experiencing tough times, we will always be hopeful for the future."

"That book [James Michener's The Bridge at Andau] *and the story of the 1956 revolution are so powerful and meaningful that they have shaped my intellectual pursuits, career path, and have become part of my personal narrative - the will for freedom, the courage to act against those who would break you, and an unyielding hope for a better future are core principles that should be universal to the human experience."*

"(...) my parent's generation cared for their aging relatives at home - as is the Hungarian tradition."

Effective ties to Hungary – citizenship – as an element of Hungarian identity appeared in only one essay:

"Originally my parents came from Transylvania where they lived under Romanian authority. They were Hungarians, but they never lived inside the present border of Hungary. It was a great privilege when last year we all finally received our Hungarian citizenship."

Here, the significance of receiving Hungarian citizenship has obviously a symbolic layer as well: it serves as a remedy for the parents who have been Hungarians but never were allowed to be citizens of their mother country.

5.2. Interviews

The interviews conducted with the participants were semi-structured. My questions aimed to get information on three broader topics: the respondents' background (life story, family, ethnic ancestry/ancestries, cultivation of Hungarian heritage, previous experiences with Hungary), the respondents' impressions about the birthright trip and about Hungary, and the outcome of the program in their personal lives.

As it was already mentioned, the participants of the program came from very diverse background in terms of their "Hungarian heritage". Out of the 10 respondents 4 were first generation Hungarian Americans, meaning that the parents or at least one parent was born in Hungary (in one case in Transylvania), 3 respondents were second generation, meaning that it was their grandparents who migrated to the USA or Canada, and 3 respondents were third or fourth generation Hungarian Americans. The distance from the Hungarian ancestors greatly influenced the self-definition of my respondents; those who had had personal experiences with their Hungarian family members tended to identify as Hungarian more easily (even without effective ties to Hungary or speaking Hungarian) than those who have not been surrounded by Hungarian speaking relatives:

"I'm Hungarian-Israeli." (a first generation respondent)

"So actually I understand the language perfectly. I just can't really speak all that well. (…) Whenever anyone asked me what my nationality was I always said Hungarian. All the time." (a second generation respondent)

"Because that was the only thing we have in common when we first met; the only thing we knew about each other was that we were all Hungarian." (a second generation respondent)

"(…) when I was little I remember we had these huge parties and they all cooked these Hungarian food, and all the bigger holidays like Easter or Christmas, that all come over, it was sort of part of my life growing up, but definitely more removed from it (…) I considered myself very American." (a third generation respondent)

The diverse background of the participants was examined and noted by almost all respondents; the intragroup diversity was registered as interesting and something that could enrich the experience of the journey:

"Yes, everyone was from a different background, so it was interesting… There were some participants whose immediate family, his father had escaped the communist regime and came to America, these were close to the country, and some were more removed in time and generations… so we each had different perspective to share. (…) So I think they tried to pick a diverse group so we would all get something different from the trip."

"For me it was interesting the fact that some people looked clearly more connected to it than others. There was a girl from Canada and her parents actually were both from Hungary and she spoke fluent Hungarian and then there were some other people whose grandparents or parents were also from Hungary but they didn't speak as much Hungarian and, you know, there were people like me, who had this quite a few generation back who didn't really consider themselves Hungarian really at all outside of a bit of "heritage" and this was actually interesting to see the mix of everyone."

Moreover, even if the diversity of the participant in terms of their Hungarian ancestry was significant and visible, it did not affect the respondents' perception of their commonality; many respondents talked about their "common Hungarian heritage" as a "link" between them, which created a sense of familiarity, an instant group cohesion:

"It was definitely like a big part because that's why we all were there. And we all talked about how Hungarian…like Hungary was a part of us, why we are here, how was that. It was cool also to talk about what everyone does in his life and how like Hungarian ancestry influenced that. And how that all brought this together."

"They are amazing, I love them all, we were like a family, we were all so close."

"It was nice to see someone in the group with the same last name. Because growing up in New York, in that part of New York there weren't really any Hungarians in the neighborhood. (…) And to see someone with the same last name besides my family was nice. Then I messaged them: 'Hey. Nice to meet you. Good to see you. We have the same last name.' And we became friends..."

"It was definitely the one thing we had in common the fact that we had some sort of Hungarian ancestry. (…) So that was definitely the key topic on the whole trip."

I was interested in learning the participants' a priori knowledge about Hungary and the family narratives about the ancestors' homeland. Although I was aware that from a

methodological point of view this is rather problematic, I still tried to reveal what information the respondents had had about Hungary before they went on the birthright journey. Basically, I could identify two major patterns in this respect: those who had a "stronger" Hungarian environment in the family (i.e. those whose parents or grandparents used to live in Hungary) could talk about family stories but exhibited little knowledge and interest in the country itself (in terms of history, politics, etc.), while those who were more remote from the Hungarian ancestors had a more conscious interest in Hungary even before the trip:

"He told me about growing up in a village. Everything that he used to do with his grandfather. He loved Balatonfüred (…) he would tell me the history and everything about his father, and my grandfather passed away in World War II." (a first generation respondent)

"I didn't care about my Hungarian heritage. (…) She [the grandmother] *always told me stories about the war, but I never really cared because I was younger, and I never really listened."* (a second generation respondent)

"Right, my exposure to Hungarian history was through the book called The Bridge by James Michener, that my dad actually got for me when I was thirteen. It tells the story of the revolution of '56 and the atrocities that were going on there. So until the ReConnect program that was my knowledge of Hungary." (a fourth generation respondent)

When asked about their Hungarian ancestry, many respondents emphasized how much their Hungarian family members loved Hungary, how enthusiastically they had spoken about the country and how they regret not having been able to return to the homeland, and, similarly to the essays, many respondents claimed that to "understand" the life of their ancestors was highly influential in their decision to apply for the ReConnect program.

Most of the respondents – as Americans in general – do not dispose of only one ethnic background, therefore I wanted to detect whether the participation in the Hungarian birthright journey caused any "ethnic rivalry" within the family. As it turned out, for most of the participants it was the Hungarian side of the family that was dominant in cultivating the "ethnic" heritage, and – as it was revealed by the essays already – this cultivation is most often manifested through gastronomy. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is the fact that

Eastern European emigration waves started later than Western European emigration, so those who have Irish, German or Swedish ancestry are even further away from these cultures than from Hungarian. The other explanation is that those who dispose of other Eastern European heritage (e.g. Polish, Lithuanian) simply happened to live closer to the Hungarian side of the family.

There was only one instance in which the "other ethnic side" of the family disapproved the child's growing interest in Hungarian culture:

"He doesn't really like Hungarian food, he doesn't like Hungary, 'cause he is very Italian. (...) He didn't like it [the application for ReConnect], *just because he is protective, and he doesn't like how I put Hungarian before Italian heritage. He doesn't like that. (...) He just wishes we would be paying more attention to our Italian heritage. But I did it for my whole life, so it's like I want to change."*

5.2.1. Perceptions of the birthright journey

The major part of the interviews was about how the participants evaluated and remembered their birthright journey to Hungary. I let the respondents talk freely about the programs they enjoyed or did not enjoy, how they saw Hungary and Hungarian people, and what their impressions were about the program itself. It is clear that all of them had very positive feelings and opinions about the program; the classification "lifetime experience" was frequently used to describe ReConnect Hungary. However, an interesting finding of the research is how differently the participants relate to and remember certain programs.

When asked about the trip, the respondents randomly listed the programs which came to their minds. One of the programs that occurred in almost all of the interviews and that was labeled as favorite was visiting an organic farm and cooking open-air gulyás together. This was a program that was highlighted in the interview with one of the organizers as well, however, the aspect of the respondents on this program differs greatly from that of the organizers. Interestingly, the organizers think of the organic farm as a successful foreign investment in

Hungary (it is owned by a British citizen) which can demonstrate the development potential of the country as well as the ideal geographical and climatic conditions for organic farming in Hungary, which, given the popularity of organic food in the US, might be appealing to young aspiring American businesspeople. On the other hand, the participant univocally emphasized the "community aspect" of this program, praising the atmosphere of chilling together around the fire and picking the vegetables themselves for the meal. None of the respondents talked about the biofarm as something that might have an economic relevance; even those interviewees who were more receptive to learning about business opportunities in Hungary did not list the organic farm among those programs. The fact that the respondents unanimously put the organic farm on the top of their list is perfectly in line with the literature on birthright journeys that emphasizes the positive shared experience with fellow youngsters in the working mechanism of this tool of diaspora engagement.[76] For some, the organic farm also worked as a reminder of their family or represented a place where family narratives can be encountered:

"When I went to the farm… (…) I heard many stories from her about her childhood, growing up after she experienced the war (…) She did talk about her childhood, she talked about living in a farm. So when I was there, it was like 'wow, this might be something that she saw and where she was growing up'."

"One of my favorite things was when we got to an organic farm and learned about Hungarian farming a little bit, prepared meal and it really reminded me of my childhood."

The other often mentioned and highly popular program was the day spent at lake Balaton, which included a visit to a winery as well. Usually the latter element was described as a program that was refreshing and relaxing and where everybody "had fun", while Balaton was remembered for the beautiful scenery and landscape.

Besides the abovementioned programs - that served "community building" rather than

[76] Kelner, *Tours That Bind*; Feldman, "The Romance of Birthright Israel"; Lim, "Birthright Journeys."

getting familiar with Hungary, - meeting politicians was another central topic that came up in almost all of the interviews. The majority of the respondents remembered these occasions as very special and privileged, however, when asked about the persons they actually met they had difficulties to recall the names. The 2012 cohort had a reception in the Prime Minister's Office, and obviously, this occasion remained a lasting memory for them (although not all of them could recall Viktor Orbán's name). The 2013 cohort met László Kövér and János Horváth, the latter being the oldest Member of the Hungarian Parliament and a former Hungarian emigrant in the USA. Probably for the latter reason, János Horváth made a great impression on the participants, and besides his "Hungarian American" background he was remembered for being "inspirational" and "nice".

"So many things we did: we went to Parliament, we got to meet Prime Minister Orbán, we got a tour in Parliament. We got to meet János Horváth, talked with him. That was really cool."

One respondent stressed how appealing the example of János Horváth for an American with Hungarian roots was:

"I can't remember his name, but we met with the oldest member of the Parliament. A man who had left during the revolution and lived in the States for I don't know maybe 50 years (...) And he was just a really nice person, he talked about his Hungarian roots, he begin to ask questions like 'could you be in Parliament even if you spend so much time in the US?' and he was very much like 'I am as much an American as I am a Hungarian' (...) and so to hear that was refreshing. You don't know if they accept multiple cultures (...) So that was something great."

However, the official parts of the birthright trip, especially the meetings with government officials were not appealing to all the participants; some claimed that they found these occasions boring and overwhelming, and could not recall whom they met and why they met them. Despite the critical remarks, however, the majority opinion was rather positive about the parliamentary visits, because, as one respondent argued, *"you don't just go to any country and just meet with the top political leaders".* Meeting top politicians in the frame of the birthright journey is definitely an important phase of diaspora engagement process for the

state itself, as it serves at least two goals; first, it can be interpreted as a form of what Gamlen labels as "diaspora identity cultivation",[77] and second, it also demonstrates the homeland government's real commitment towards its diaspora.

There was one more aspect of the birthright trip that was very popular with the respondents: meeting local Hungarian people. Many interviewees appreciated that some Hungarian students accompanied the participants of ReConnect for most of the programs and thus they could get in touch with "ordinary" Hungarian people. The respondents found this opportunity great for two reasons: first, they could find friends in Hungary with whom they still can keep in touch, and second, they had the chance to learn from "authentic source" how Hungarian students live their lives. Also, one respondent appreciated that he was able to meet Hungarians at his age, because previously he had met Hungarians only from the older generations. Many of the students exhibited genuine interest in learning about Hungarian students' lives, moreover, the evening when an open-air party was spontaneously organized with Hungarian students was also very often listed as a favorite program.

"And then definitely one of the pieces that lasts in was just getting to meet the Hungarian students when we were there, I thought that was frankly the best part of entire experience, because when I was in Germany I still stayed in contact with some of them and when I was in Germany and got to come back for a past few weekends I got to stayed with one of my friends and had we not met them I don't think the experience would have been the same and it wouldn't have been as memorable. (...) And I also think by introducing us to the students we could meet real people and saw the day-to-day life."

"At the táncház [folk dance house] *we met some people. What I really liked was that when I tried to speak Hungarian to people, they got really excited because I was from North America. And they were like 'wow people over there know my language, this is amazing' and whenever I go to Montreal (...) I tried to speak French to them and they gave me the dirtiest look 'wow you're not speaking proper French'. But when I went to Hungary, they just 'Wow, look at that she is trying to learn our language'. And it was just so welcoming and open. I loved that."*

Similarly to the general positive opinion on local people, the respondents made emotionally charged statements about Hungary as well. For example, one respondent recalled the moment

[77] Gamlen, "The Emigration State and the Modern Geopolitical Imagination."

when she glimpsed "Hungary" from the airplane and claimed that "*it was the most amazing view I had ever seen*" and that "*I was so overwhelmed with happiness and sadness too because I couldn't share it with my grandma*", her actual Hungarian ancestor who always wanted to return to the mother country. Besides praising the beauty of Hungary and Budapest, which appeared in almost every interview, some participants claimed that one of the most appealing things in Budapest was that "there is so much history in the city". Others emphasized the originality and uniqueness of the country:

"I was surprised how original Hungary was, because I have been to Austria and I spent some time in especially German-speaking countries, they are different certainly from the US, they also seem very westernized, but they are not that different. But Hungary was just something completely different, but it seemed so genuine and I really loved it. (…) I really love it, it's one of my favorite cities."

The contrast between "typical Western European cosmopolitan cities" and Budapest appeared elsewhere as well:

"But Budapest, even though it's the capital city of Hungary still seems very like local and Hungarian, and you heard Hungarian everywhere, and you met people who live there and not everyone worked in the tourism industry. Like real French people don't actually live in Paris but real Hungarian people do live in Budapest."

Typical rural landscapes have become in many cases attached to nations and have acquired a central place in national symbolism (e.g. the pampas in Argentina or the Highlands in Scotland).[78] Although Hungarian tourist industry usually applies the Great Plain or Puszta as the prototypical Hungarian landscape, however, my respondents did not exclusively associate the countryside with the "national". Although the peacefulness of the countryside appeared in many interviews as a factor that makes the country unique and valuable, Budapest was likewise often described as "genuine" and as less bustling than other European capital cities. Thus it seems that the contrast between "cosmopolitan" Western cities and the "original" or "local" Budapest appeared to the participants to be sufficient to link national associations to a

[78] Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*.

place, and so Budapest as well acquired a national image in the eyes of the respondents. Certainly, rural places were also often remembered as "truly Hungarian"; one respondent claimed that whenever she thinks of Hungary she sees a "*field full of sunflowers*".

I was very interested to see how the participants related to the programs which aimed to introduce contemporary Hungary through successful entrepreneurs or by providing information about the country's business opportunities. Even if the target group is too young to seriously consider business opportunities in Hungary, some of the participants found these occasions useful and interesting, especially those who either have business aspirations for the future or those who were more conscious about the whole birthright trip.

"We went to, I don't know how it's called a 'design school' [Design Terminal] *in the centre of Budapest, so all of these Hungarian entrepreneurs …were doing great things, we got to hear all about that, it was something that I personally enjoyed a lot."*

"We met with PricewaterhouseCoopers in Budapest. I particularly enjoyed that, learning the legal regime and starting the business in Hungary etc. Some of the other participants didn't like that as much..."

As it turns out from the latter quotation, "professional" programs like meeting the representative of the Budapest office of a global legal firm was appreciated by only one of the respondents. It is also telling that a second generation respondent, who otherwise was very enthusiastic about the trip, talked about the occasions when they had been introduced to entrepreneurs as unnecessary and boring, or as she formulated it: *"this is not why I came here".*

Based on the respondents' reports about their favorite programs, it can be stated that the most memorable experiences were those which had a community building aspect (e.g. cooking gulyás together, meeting Hungarian students, going to Balaton) moreover, though less evidently, the meetings with top politicians also got a high rank on the respondents' lists. Interestingly, they exhibited little interest in the programs which aimed to get them closer to

Hungarian history; few references were made to historical places (e.g. Buda Castle, Visegrád), and the museums they visited (House of Terror, Holocaust Museum) were evaluated in a contradictory manner; some claimed that the House of Terror was highly interesting while others said they had not enjoyed it at all (and not necessarily because it is hard to face the brutalities of the past, but simply because they were not interested in it).

The one-day trip to Southern Slovakia is an interesting point among the programs that were designed to "teach" Hungarian history. Although the trip itself was remembered by the majority of the respondents, the focus of the reports was on meeting Hungarian scouts there and the stories they had told about their contemporary struggles with e.g. undeveloped bilingualism in the region. The word "Trianon" was used by two respondents only, and the narrative of the "national trauma" was not brought up. On the contrary, most of the respondents admitted that they had been unfamiliar with the existence of Hungarian minorities outside of the country, and even those who had known before the trip that the borders of Hungary were redrawn in 1920 claimed that they had had only vague ideas about the issue. The participants' difficulties to comprehend the situation are well illustrated here:

"As Americans and Canadians I think it was hard for us to grasp, well, 'why don't you just move?'. Crazy I know but I mean just, here we move around all the time, like now I live in New York and after the college I'm sure I'll move somewhere else, (…) These people have lived in these towns for like hundreds of years I guess and so they consider themselves Hungarian, they consider this towns part of Hungary even like the modern borders say sort of opposite of that, so that was also very, very interesting. Part of it hard to grasp, I guess."

However, even if the whole issue of Hungarian minorities in the neighboring countries was not fully clear to them, the respondents mentioned in the interviews that it was certainly good to learn something about the difficulties such a minority is facing these days. For this reason, the one-day trip to Slovakia better served the aim to present contemporary Hungary and Hungarian people than to give a "historical narrative" about the ancestral homeland.

Moreover, on the level of the larger unit, the whole structure of the Hungarian birthright journey was more successful in raising awareness and interest in contemporary Hungary and in connecting the participants to other Americans of Hungarian ancestry than in "lecturing" on Hungarian history. Interestingly, this assumption of mine was implicitly reinforced by a participant who had had the chance to go to the Israeli birthright program. He compared the two birthright trip and concluded that he had better impressions on the Hungarian one because it was "less structured and more liberal", meaning that he felt much more like an adult with personal freedom during the Hungarian trip while the Israeli resembled "a summer camp where you have to do what you're told to do".

In overall, it can be stated that the two patterns discovered in the identification and general consciousness of the participants could be traced in their perception of the birthright journey's experience as well. While those (usually first and second generation Hungarian Americans) who were not so remote from their Hungarian heritage were less conscious about the programs, remembered names and places to a lesser extent, emphasized the "fun side" of the programs and tend to be very enthusiastic about Hungary, those (usually the third and fourth generations) who were exposed to their Hungarian heritage to a lesser extent were more conscious about the program, had a clear view on the aim and structure of the schedule, remembered names and places considerably better, and appreciated the "fun side" and the "learning side" of the program equally.

I also asked the respondents about what they think the goal of ReConnect Hungary was. The typical answer to that question contained phrases such as "reconnect to your roots", "experience Hungary", "rediscover and learn about your heritage", however, when asked about what the program effectively brought in their personal lives, they gave very different answers.

5.2.3. Outcomes

Perhaps the most comprehensive summary on the long-term effects of birthright journeys is provided by Saxe et al. who made a systematic follow-up on the Jewish birthright program. Although the Jewish and the Hungarian birthright trips differ in many respects (primary aim, methodology, etc.), the findings of the research can still be used as point of reference. Saxe et al. found that the most obvious effect of the birthright trip is a positive attitude to the visited homeland and to its nationals. Moreover, the raised interest and will to learn more about the homeland proved to be a long-term outcome of the trips as well. On the other hand, the research found that the journey made little effect on Jewish religious identity and on the participation in "organized Jewish life" in the diaspora.[79]

Concerning the ReConnect birthright journey, its outcomes strongly correlate to the findings of Saxe et al.'s report on the Jewish birthright journey. Based on the interviews, the most frequently mentioned interest that was raised by the trip is learning Hungarian language. Interestingly, the will to learn the language was expressed both by those who had spoken it to some extent previously and by those who had not have any command of it before. Two respondents talked about their plans to attend intensive language courses in Hungary; one of them has already won a scholarship for a summer school for 2014 and the other one is planning to have a gap year after graduation and to take a one-year language course in Budapest. Others reported about attending Hungarian courses or practicing it more often than before the journey:

"I enjoyed it so much I learned so much and it actually made me want to take Hungarian

[79] Leonard Saxe et al., *Evaluating Birthright Israel: Long-Term Impact and Recent Findings*, Birthright Israel Research Report (Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2004), http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/pdfs/evaluatingbri.04.pdf.

again so right now I'm actually taking a semester of Hungarian at my school…"

A general enthusiasm and a certain pride for Hungary was traceable in all the interviews:

"I remember I used to make fun of my mom all the time (…) every time she saw someone Hungarian or she… just anything to do with Hungary, she was so excited. I would laugh at her and said: 'You are so patriotic'. And now I do exactly the same thing. Whenever I meet someone …like I was at the bar the other night and I met this girl and we were talking and she said: 'What's your nationality? - I'm Hungarian.' And she: 'Get out, so am I'. We literally talked for like 2 hours about Hungary. I told her about the trip. It's just new, this sense of family with anyone you met that is Hungarian."

Several respondents claimed that since the trip they have been more aware of Hungarian names and have been ready to start conversations with unknown people whom were supposed to be Hungarian:

"People who I know that identify as Hungarians, definitely, I try to talk about the program, and even just to random people as well. I saw a guy on the subway the other day wearing a hat with 'Hungary' on it and so I talked to him about the program. It's something that I am passionate… if I see someone that's Hungarian, I'll absolutely talk to them about the program."

Encouraging family members to visit Hungary or to make more effort to cultivate their Hungarian ancestry or integrate in the local Hungarian American community was also frequently mentioned by the respondents:

"(…) my father, he never would go to the Magyar Ház to any event. Now that I get emails all the time and after I am taking a language course, (…) whenever they have events, I bring my father, which is good. I want him to go. (…) So I bring him to certain events (…) so he can be around his people. The only time he would hear Hungarian and talk it was his family members on the phone, he has no one else here, so I like to bring him."

"My parents, this summer it's their wedding anniversary and they going to do a big trip, and one of the places they are thinking to go is Budapest, because I constantly talk about how beautiful it is, I talked about all my experiences and they were also very interested in it, they thought it was just really cool."

The idea to return to Hungary appeared also quite often, and three of my respondents actually have already realized the return trip. Similarly, some of them are considering joining ReConnect 2014 as escorts to have another opportunity to visit the country.

"I don't wanna be one of those people who come to Hungary once in a few years, I wanna come as often as I can. When I have an opportunity, I'm going to come."

The "generational gap" which was discovered in relation to self-identification, in the attitude to the programs and in the degree of consciousness about the trip is more difficult to find when examining the outcomes of the project. As stated earlier, the will to learn Hungarian did not show correlation with the generation, neither did the increased enthusiasm for the country or the plan to visit Hungary again. The only thing that was typical exclusively for the third and fourth generation was the conscious search for opportunities to learn more about Hungary:

"It definitely created a bigger interest and stronger feeling of connection. (…) I am also interested in politics, and so I can say that Hungary right now, is certainly an interesting political atmosphere now, I do pay more attention to that, and being in New York or at the university of Columbia, where actually there are quite a few opportunities to meet Hungarian professors or authors of Hungarian literature, so I definitely try to take advantage of opportunities, such as those. Had I not found out about the trip I'm not sure … I am sure I would have been interested, but…I don't know if I'd search out experiences like that quite as much as I do now. (…) So I think I'm definitely more involved than I would have been."

"I've done a little bit of reading on Hungarian politics before going on the trip. I was familiar a little bit, but definitely going on the trip and then learning afterwards and I'm much more tuned with the political system in Hungary. "

Enhanced interest in Hungarian-American relations was exhibited by one participant (fourth generation); although this case is exceptional, it is still worth to mention:

"And I know one of the Members of the Congress who is co-chair of the Hungarian Caucus in the US House of Representatives. He unfortunately isn't participating that much time… Try to motivate him to get more involved in the Hungarian Caucus. I'm trying to stay as connected as I possibly can."

On the other hand, exhibiting stronger symbolic ethnicity (e.g. looking for Hungarian restaurants in the neighborhood) after the trip was more typical for first and second generation respondents.

The general conclusion of my research concerning the difference in the attitudes of the respondents of different generations to the birthright trip and partly in the outcome of the journey as well is in line with a previous research on the impact of the Jewish birthright journey. According to Cohen's survey results, the Israeli birthright journey proved to be more effective in engaging participants to Israel if they had had an interest and positive attitude to the country before the journey.[80] Although long-term effects of the birthright journey cannot be measured in the Hungarian case, a similar pattern is traceable here as well; those participants who had a more conscious preparation for (e.g. pursuing individual research in the country's history or current politics) and participation in the journey are more likely to exhibit stronger connection after the journey as well (e.g. becoming more familiar with the country's current affairs) than those who are more emotional but less conscious and interested about the country.

An interesting asset of my research is that it reveals that the two groups happen to be separated among "generational lines": first and second generation diaspora members are more passionate about the birthright trip (especially its community aspects) and Hungary but tend to have significantly less factual knowledge about it, and after the trip they are more likely to develop (or reinforce) traces of symbolic ethnicity, while third and fourth generation participants had exhibited interest in the country before the trip as well and tend to be even more genuinely interested in it after the trip, and they are more likely to develop effective engagement towards the country rather than (or besides) pursuing signs of symbolic ethnicity. Therefore, I conclude that diaspora engagement through the Hungarian birthright program is more likely to be effective with the involvement of diaspora members who, despite being more remote from their Hungarian ancestors, are willing to "invest" in the experience through individual preparation and more conscious presence during the trip.

[80] Cohen, "Committed Zionists and Curious Tourists."

6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate the impacts of the Hungarian birthright journey by conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants of the 2012 and 2013 ReConnect Hungary programs. With the help of the interviews and the participants' application essays I examined the respondents' identification patterns, motivations and the outcome of the journey in their lives. Also, I gave a detailed discussion on the structure of the birthright journey and argued that the primary aim of the program is to raise the participants' interest in the country, which on the long run is expected to bring about effective engagement, most importantly in economic terms. Moreover, by positioning the focus of the program on the introduction of present day Hungary it can also be argued that ReConnect Hungary propagates neither homecoming nor intra-ethnic marriages (as some of the classic birthright programs do), but tries to reach potential future stakeholders for the country.

The interviews with the participants of the birthright journey and their essays revealed that family plays a central role in the shaping and cultivation of diasporic identity, moreover, the respondents' Hungarian "identity" appears overwhelmingly as a private matter and it does not have any public (communal, political) aspect. Hungarian heritage is typically cultivated through symbolic measures, most often by consuming Hungarian food at home - therefore, the concept of symbolic ethnicity is applicable for the respondents of the research. The central role of the family in relating to Hungary was traceable in the motivations for applying to the birthright journey. Many participants considered the trip as an opportunity to better understand the life of their ancestors, and thus indirectly to learn about themselves: who they are and where they come from.

The analysis of the interviews pointed out two different patterns of attitude of the participants. Those who are not so remote from their Hungarian heritage (usually first and second generation Hungarian Americans, having living family members who emigrated from

Hungary) were less conscious about the programs offered by the trip, had less factual knowledge about the country, remembered names and places to a lesser extent, emphasized the "fun side" and community events of the programs, and tended to be very enthusiastic about Hungary. On the other hand, those who are further away in time from their Hungarian ancestors (usually third and fourth generations Hungarian Americans) were more conscious about the program, prepared individually for the journey (e.g. learning about Hungarian history or current affairs), had a clear view on the aim and structure of the schedule, remembered names and places significantly better, and appreciated the "fun side" and the "learning side" of the program equally.

The "generational difference" was traceable in the respondents' self-definitions as well: first and second generation Hungarian Americans identified easily as Hungarians without effective ties to Hungary, without language knowledge or without interest in the country's current situation, while third and fourth generation Hungarian Americans were more hesitant to declare themselves as Hungarians and preferred to identify as Americans of Hungarian heritage. Moreover, the outcome of the program was also partly affected by the "generational difference": members of the first and second generation are more likely to develop (or reinforce) traces of symbolic ethnicity after the journey, but evoked interest in Hungary's actual affairs does not occur in their case. Conversely, third and fourth generation participants tend to be even more genuinely interested in Hungary's affairs after the trip, and they are more likely to develop effective engagement towards the country rather than (or besides) pursuing signs of symbolic ethnicity.

As a conclusion, the primary goal of ReConnect Hungary can be predicted to be most probably reached in the case of participants who are perhaps far remote from their Hungarian ancestors, but are willing to "invest" in the experience through individual preparation and more conscious presence during the trip, as they are more likely to respond to the call for

effective engagement of the birthright program. However, as the prediction on the success of the birthright journey is based on speculation according to the results of the research carried out one and two years after the journey respectively, a research measuring the actual outcome of the birthright trip in 10-year perspective would be useful to conduct. The future research would be also useful in exploring whether symbolic ethnicity can be effectively mobilized for the engagement towards the homeland, or whether the intensive post-trip enthusiasm (e.g. in learning Hungarian) fades away with time.

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