Formal and informal policy networks to cope with crisis
(with János Szántó)

short version from: European Transformations: Five Decisive
Years at the Turn of the Century. Ed.: Ronald Pohoryles,
Avebury 1994 pp.167-181

The present article deals with the policy networks developed to cope with the immigration of Transylvanian refugees into contemporary Hungary in the period between 1987 to 1989. Essentially, this policy network is a dualistic one with a 'loose mainframe sector' and a 'newborn grassroots' sector comprising independent, small and very active units. This has resulted from the way in which the state authorities - in response to the crisis induced by the emigration from Romania into Hungary - created a committee type control structure which was embedded into the system of inter-organizational networks among non-governmental social actors.

The number of refugees arriving to Hungary from Romania mainly ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania between 1987 and 1989 was approximately 25,000. By March 1990 the total number of Romanian refugees was about 34,000. This number continued to increase in the following years despite the fall of Caescescu, owing to the continuation of political repression and ethnic strives.

1987 marks the beginning of the 'grassroots' history. This coincided with the staging of the Formula-1 race in Hungary which provided the opportunity to many would-be migrants to travel abroad. By the end of 1987 the rapidly increasing number of refugees induced churches and private persons to set up charity committees. which tried to help the refugees by providing accommodation,. food and clothing as well as psychological support in terms of integration (cf. Report to the Hungarian Government, 1988, pp. 114-5).

The event which gave the first hint as to the birth of a 'mainframe' policy network was the famous Szűrös declaration issued at the end of January 1988. This for the first time, unambigously declared that Hungary would provide shelter for the refugees. In March, a resettlement fund was set up by Parliament and the government officials in charge were organized in the form of the Interministerial Committee with local branches - called Coordination Committees.

The development of this specific dual coordination system for coping with the refugee crisis - and of the interdependencies that came to characterize it - is associated with:

(1) the earlier connection between Transylvania and Hungary. Despite the fact that emigration out of Transylvania into Hungary was minimal during the eighties, there were both official and unofficial relations between the two regions. At the official level, due to the fact that both Hungary and Romania were members of the Warsaw Pact, and partly because of the historical and spatial proximity, there was a wide range of economic and political relations between government authorities. For the latter, however, the question of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania constituted a taboo subject. The official relations between the two countries were counterbalanced by a web of informal networks. The first thread in this web was the circle of intellectuals who maintained continuous contact with Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals; the

second element was the grassroots diplomacy. For decades Hungarian citizens regularly visited and supported Transylvanians – their support ranging from pseudo-marriages to the provision of medicine, food and cultural commodities. Often these activities were coordinated either by the intellectual networks mentioned above or by the church.

(2) the fact that the peak of the refugee crisis coincided with the breakdown of the country's socio-political institutional system which made obvious the structural deficits of its redistributional social policy. Despite these shortcomings, the Hungarian state was compelled to admit the refugees partly for humanist reasons, partly with very obvious economic and political interests.

The grassroots sector

The grassroots sector contained three main types of agents: on the one hand, the churches, and on the other groups oriented towards political and/or social activities. Of these agents, the churches comprise the most significant element. They displayed a developed internal organization and extended external networks, were expert in dealing with individuals in crisis and had clear moral and political incentives to become active in the refugee issue. It is, therefore, no surprise that the churches came to play the role of a coordinator in the grassroots sector. For this reason, we focus in the following exposition on the role of the churches in the caring of the Transylvanian refugees.

ReIigious institutions caring for refugees

The beginnings of support for refugees from Romania by religious organizations and churches began in the winter of 1987 although private initiatives were plentiful before this. The beginning of 1988 is particularly significant, because it was aroand that date that private and isolated actions started to become more organized as the state turned to the churches for support in coping with the refugee crisis. Consequently, church institutions engaged in caring for refugees started to mobilize broader organizational forces and engage in bureaucratic forms of organization.

The Roman Catholic and the Reformed Churches initiated the most complex activities. Consequently, both the Unitarian and the Orthodox Churches joined this work, the latter, however, with more modest possibilities than the others.

Forms of social care for the refugees as carried out by the churches can be relatively briefly summarized. They included basically cash emergency aid, food aid and clothing. These were the services which every group, and within them every operating basis, could, without exception, provide. Services which required a broader network of contacts and organization – such as employment, accommodation, property or loan acquisition, extensive forms of material help like furniture, machine tools or agricultural machinery, assistance with emigration if desired and the acquisition and distribution of medication – could. in general, be provided by communities which were closer to the capital since in Budapest much larger capacities were available, primarily with regards human resources. Moreover, that the recruitment of staff and helpers is easier and more successful in urban environment in comparison with the regions is not unrelated to the different character or style of religiosity which dominates in the countryside, especially among Roman Catholics. As was explained by Donald Southern (1987) in his book *Church and Society in the Middle Ages,* religious belief in the towns is always community oriented — a fact conducive to charity work –

while rural religious belief is characterized much more by traditionalism and ritualism, and hence formal involvement.

However, a form of service more important than the ones mentioned above is spiritual and psychological care. This was recognized early on by the various organizations which counted this as among their primary assignments: the associations operating within the churches in caring for refugees made an explicit attempt in create for them community-like spaces of insertion, hence, for example the Transylvanian multicraft artisan group' founded by a pastor of the Reformed Church. or the Roman Catholic group for the teaching of the Hungarian language. literature and history.

These activities received their funding from two main sources:

(1) Individual cash donations by members. These amounted to approximately 30 per cent of the total cash income,

(2) Donations from abroad. These derived either from foreign charity organizations or through Hungarian emigrées living abroad and other private individuals. Donations from abroad amounted to 70 per cent of the total cash income. In relation to this. mention should be made of the extensive network of foreign contacts of Hungarian church personalities and of the latter's ability to mobilize these networks. Not unrelated to this is certainly the external orientation of churches in Western welfare states, where charity has become an export commodity.

In addition to cash payments, also significant were deliveries and aid in the form of consumer goods, clothing. food and medication. These originated mostly (about 90 per cent) from abroad, again mainly from Germany, Holland and Switzerland, but also. surprisingly, from Poland. In this connection, an important source was the 'Integration Fand' established by the Roman Catholic Church in Germany and France.

The mainframe sector

Crisis in the mainframe sector

The delay in the development of the state policy network can be traced bank to several reasons. For one Hungary was never a country for refugees. At the beginning of the Second World War, Poles came to Hungary to escape the terror of the Nazi regime; these were followed in 1949 by some 3,000 Greeks and in 1973 by some 1.200 Chileans (Franka, 1988). In other words, the experience of the Hungarian state in dealing with refugees was rather limited. To that should be added the total absence of a legal framework on the subject and the excessive prevailing bureaucratization. The following two quotations are illustrative:

> While the Red Cross was active, legal advice had to be provided despite the fact that we were not fully qualified in this respect. At the beginning there were frequent complaints that doctors would not certify someone as ill, because the person had worked for only one, two or three weeks in Hungary, and the regulations were not well known. It also happened that a refugee gave birth to a baby two days after her arrival in Hungary, and only a few people knew that child care grants could be provided to the person, the only condition being that an application had to be handed in to the appropriate office. In general, there were rumours that no permission could be obtained for a refugee to buy a flat or to acquire real estate. In fact this was possible provided an application was submitted to the Ministry of Finance (Broadcast on the Petőfi rádió by Napközben, 13 December 1988).

It is worthwhile finding out how a Transylvanian can buy on credit received by the National Savings Bank. B*ranch A:* We can only provide credit if the person has a definite residence permit. *Branch B:* We provide credit even if the person has a temporary residence permit – on exactly the same conditions that pertain to every Hungarian citizen. *Branch C:* We provide credit for everyone, even if the person has a residence permit only for six months, as long as the person can produce appropriate security. Naturally, it is a basic condition for every loan that the applicant has a job (Peredi in *Népszava,* 24 December 1988).

The refugee crisis in Hungary was further aggravated by two additional factors: first, the country's party-state control structure and communist heritage; second. and more important, the traditional tensions characterizing Hungarian-Romanian relations. These tensions spelled an "excessive politicization" of everything connected with Transylvania, which, in turn exacerbated irresponsibility, the blossoming of a culture of disinterest and ignorance and the spread of delaying strategies As a result of the political ramifications surroanding the subject, many restrictions were imposed with respect In the communication of relevant information which exacerbated the above problems even further. The latter were particularly evident in the beginning of the period ander consideration. At that time, all activities related to the Transylvanian refugees were covered by a veil of secrecy. It was thus that early in 1988, it was officially claimed that the refugees were in fact only Romanian citizens in the process of resettling – this only prolonged already endemic delays and deepened the crisis. The following quotation illustrates this well:

In the beginning nobody was allowed to do anything for the refugees, but our obligations of reporting were already elaborated. At the same time all material was regarded as highly confidential and handled in such a way that it did not even reach the authorities that were officially designated as its recipients. Local councils, for example, had to turn to the county governing office for every piece of information, because the confidential documents were locked in the county safe (Interview with a member of the Coordination committee, a council employee).

Another good example relates to how an article dealing with the refugees and published in Debrecen (the capital of a county close to the Romanian border) was dealt with:

(..) for several days the report was shelved, because the secretary of the local party committee expressed a very determined, *albeit* only verbal, ban on its publication. However, out of circumstantial reasons, this verbal instruction was not forwarded to the editor-in-chief who, unsuspectingly, proceeded to publish the material. The weekly was sold out. within hours. Later, a loud and shameful dispute was carried out about who had instructed whom to do what, but by that time nobody was prepared to shoulder responsibility for anything. Today, it would perhaps be impossible to find out what political or ideological considerations were concealed behind this case (...) at that time the matter was rather delicate; yet, in not being able to make any decisions, local party leaders chose the worse possible solution and endeavored to immobilize everyone. Fortunately, the churches and private individuals proved to be

exceptions (Ráthy, 1989).

The 'mainframe' policy framework for dealing with refugees contained a non-hierarchically organized set of committees. The central element of this system was the Interministerial Committee run by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and chaired by the First Deputy Minister, The committee involved all ministries which have something to do with refugees (Finance, Education, Social Affairs and Health, Justice, Labour) the Red Cross, the Mayor of Budapest (and occasionally of other towns where refugees are concentrated), the National Council of Trade Unions, the police and the State Office of Church Affairs. In the very beginning the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was also involved in the committee. Also engaged in the activities of the committee were various political parties that emerged during that period, including the Hungarian Democratic Forum which was later to win the first free parliamentary elections held in Hungary following the end of communist rule.

The Interministerial Committee refused to co-opt grassroots groups directly. Its task was defined as basically one of information transmission and coordination and not one of problem-solving. It was supposed to operate as a discussion forum for the development of policy. The committee decided not to meet regularly, but only when important decisions were to be made.

The lower echelons of the 'mainframe' system were the local Coordination Committees. Their structure and mode of operation were very similar to that of the lnterministerial Committee, *albeit* at the local level,

Interactions

Summing up, we have seen that loose organizational forms were applied both in the 'mainframe' and in the 'grassroots' sector. Nevertheless, along these loose organizational lines, a complex interactive 'unofficial' system of coordination developed. This largely relied on the personal networks of the various individuals engaged in these activities. The following examples illustrate this well:

> I went to the Red Cross, asking how we could cooperate. This was aroand Christmas. They had money which they wanted to distribute among refugee children We had the files and the staff. Thus one of our colleagues distributed 500 or 1,000 forints to each child. We also discussed our problems jointly with the Pedagogic Institute and exchanged opinions (Council worker and member of a local Coordination Committee).

> We maintained good relations, not only with refugee self-help groups in Budapest but with those in Miskolc, Debrecen and Gyor as well. We maintain considerable relations, and we discuss problems with their leaders and strive to coordinate them (Bethlen circle).

> The Roman Catholic Church received donations and clothing from abroad, Part of these they distributed on their own (..) They then made a request that we undertake to distribute the rest, as they had no room to store them. A priest came and asked for the names and addresses of potential recipients, insisting only that the families receiving the aid should have children, not be alcoholic and the like (Red Cross activist, member of local Coordination Committee).

> The leadership of the local Adventist Church visited me saying that the next day a concert would be held in the hall at the Chemical Industrial University in support of the Transylvanian refugees They explained that they lacked the experience in organizing such events (Member of local Coordination Committee).

> In our town the manager of a fashionable coffee-house who also originates from Transylvania came up with a very smart idea. The coffee-house had a banqueting hall, and he suggested that if we were to inform the Transylvanians, he would undertake to invite them and their children (Member of a local Coordination Committee).

> We made personal contact with the members of the Catholic Church. We became acquainted with their work with refugees. I hope that this personal relationship will continue and I believe that all of this has to be safeguarded; we have to get in touch with other organizations and groups, for social policy gives us a lot of common tasks, in addition to dealing with the refugees (Red Cross, member of a local Coordination Committee).

We would not like to create the impression that there were no conflicts among the agents in the system. On the contrary: there was a lot of intrasectoral rivalry both within the 'mainframe' and the 'grassroots' sector. Illustrative in this connection is that in some regions certain refugee self-help groups did not cooperate with the local committees or that in others grassroots organizations joined only the activities of the churches, while governmental institutions took part only in actions organized by the Coordination Committee. Furthermore mutual suspicion dominated intersectoral relations. It is no surprise that disputes broke out in connection with the distribution of aid (especially between the Red Cross and the self-help groups):

> The central Red Cross gets donations from abroad, but nobody gives us anything; I only found out through my personal networks that there is a consignment. and it is only by explicit partisan actions that we bring a van full of clothing (Transylvanian Circle).

As can be judged from the examples above, the main prerequisite for the development of networking both within and among the two sectors was the existence of highly differentiated local structures.

The following example illustrates the importance of networking in the process of establishing and running a new grassroots group. This comprises extremely different 'mainframe' and 'grassroots' agents and actions. The example clearly shows, on one hand, to what an extent the two sectors came to be intertwined in the course of action and, on the other, how important personal networking was in shaping the policy network of the various organizations.

> The Club of Young Lawyers has been operating since February 1988 (.) The Club became involved in activities concerned with refugees from Romania. It was decided to organize a fund raising campaign among lawyers' associations in Budapest, with the operation of the Chamber of Lawyers. Individual

donations amounted to almost 600.000 forints (...) The Chamber of Lawyers insisted that the money be transferred to the Red Cross, whereas several of the donors expressed a preference for the churches Finally, a compromise was reached: it was agreed to directly forward the money to the refugees but involve also the churches in the distribution. The Club of Young Lawyers requested from the Interministerial Committee and the Ministry of Finance that the donation be treated as public expenditure and waived from tax. During the spring meeting of the club, several members suggested that in addition to fund raising the refugees be supported in other ways and procured a list of lawyers who volunteered to provide free legal advice fur the refugees. The list containing 65 Budapest lawyers; a working group was set up in Szeged (a town close to the Romanian border) with similar aims (...) On 5 .July 1988 the Club of Young Lawyers launched a campaign under the name 'Lawyers for the refugees" and requested the provision of appropriate and topical information. The president of the Interministerial Committee promised to fulfill the request (X.Y., 1989).

Finally, an example is cited which clearly exemplifies the advantages but also disadvantages of networking:

On December 18, eight men attempted to cross the border from Hungary into Austria (...) the next day only six of them had returned. Istvan Nagy who had already twice before attempted to cross the border. was caught by border guards and handed over to the police along with Levente Balazs. Both were informed that on 2 January 1989 they would be expelled from Hungary and handed over to the Romanian authorities at Nagylak. The remaining six men were allowed to go free; they were the ones to bring the news about the arrest to the brother of Levente Balazs, who together with a friend sought consultation from a lawyer dealing with refugee affairs. The lawyer wrote a letter of appeal to the county police chief, in which he asked him to ignore the expulsion order (...); the letter was 'driven' to Gyor by the brother and his friend. The policeman on duty look the document and said that he would report it to his superior; meanwhile the car with the two prisoners left for the Romanian border. In Budapest the lawyer had alerted his colleagues, the radio station and acquaintances from whom he could expect some assistance (...) The Aliens Registration Office of the Ministry of Interior did not show much willingness to help (...) A telephone call was made to the Szeged regional studio, and both radio and television teams left for the frontier between Hungary and Romania. The president of the Young Lawyers Club informed Zoltan Gal, Deputy Minister of the Interior and Chairman of the Interministerial Committee, as well as Laszlo Nagy, Deputy Chairman of the Transylvania Alliance about the event who, in turn transmitted the information to Matyas Szucs and Geza Kotai of the department of foreign affairs of the HSWP. In the meantime it was announced by the radio reporters that the car was proceeding towards the border station without hindrance. By the time the police car with the two men had arrived to Nagylak, the police at the border control had received the order not to hand over the refugees to the Romanian authorities (*Magyar Nemzet.* 12 December 1988).

Certainly the most significant factor in the whole constellation was the intra-refugee personal networks through which the critical situation was detected. Had this been missing the information either would not have reached the next agent or would have arrived too late. What this extreme example, however, clearly shows is that speed is of the utmost importance in coping with such a crisis. The mass media had a major role in furthering and accelerating the action. Again, paradoxically one may add, the media exercised their effect not through their own official channel, i.e. publicity but through their smoothly operating intra-organizational personal networks. The next step was the appearance of the 'Big Shots' who could arrange a happy ending.

(…)

References

Franka, ~F (1988), I have just fled from Transylvania, Lang, Budapest.
Report on the Hungarian Minority in Romania (1988), .
Sik, E. (1988). Refugees and the Waves of Immigration' Manuscript, Budapest.
Sik. E. and Tarjanyi~.-Zavecz. T. (1989). Report on the Transylvanian Refugees' Manuscript. Budapest.
Sik, E. (1990), 'On the Importance of Networks in the Migration Process: The Case of Refugees in Hungary', Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Network for Social Network Analysis, San Diego, California, February 15-20
X.Y. (1989), 'Case study of the Young Lawyers' Club', Manuscript, Budapest