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"Struggle for the Souls": The Manifold Applications of a Research Project

In 2020, a research community initiated by the Committee of National Remembrance (NEB) began a complex socio-historical and ecclesiastical-historical investigation of the first half of the Kádár era (the "long sixties"). The basis for this extensive research was provided by two agreements: in 2018 with the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, and in 2019 with the Institute of History of the HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, which designated the perspectives of the investigation. We paid particular attention to exploring the possibilities and means of resistance inherent in Catholic and Protestant religious practice under the communist dictatorship. Our research extended to what means, opportunities, and room for manoeuvre Christian communities had for the active experience of individual and communal forms of religious practice, and for the transmission of their value and norm systems during the Party-state period. While the communist authorities defined religion as a rival ideology representing a source of danger to the party's ideological monopoly and something to be defeated, and the churches as the only legally operating, system-alien and hostile institutions, the real-political recognition of the churches' social embeddedness at the same time compelled the holders of power to rethink the tactical toolkit of church policy from time to time. The scientific investigation thus aimed at a deeper understanding of the social history of the Kádár era, with the participation of historians, archivists, cultural anthropologists, and sociologists. We established the framework for joint work and provided online and offline opportunities for regular dialogue and for clarifying the methodological and content-related questions that arose in the meantime. Online café

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sessions (workshops) and offline workshop conferences helped us to thoroughly examine the characteristics of church policy in the sixties and the possibilities for religious practice. The extensive basic research yielded its results, because in 2023, the collection of studies entitled *Küzdelem a lelkekért. Pártállam és egyházak a hosszú hatvanas években* (*Struggle for the Souls: The Party-State and the Churches in the Long Sixties*) was published, containing twenty-nine studies. The volume was presented by renowned researchers of the era in the capital and beyond our borders; and the editors and authors presented their results at several conferences and scientific sessions (Budapest, Miskolc, Pécs, Cluj-Napoca, Oradea).

In addition to basic research, we paid particular attention to ensuring that our results reach the widest possible audience; we found the most effective means for this in the creation of an exhibition and the special themes related to it. The exhibition, consisting of sixteen portable panels (roll-ups), presents the sixties from the perspective of church communities and youth, under the title *Küzdelem a lelkekért – Egyházi ifjúsági közösségek Magyarországon a hosszú hatvanas években* (*1958–1973*) (*Struggle for the Souls – Ecclesiastical Youth Communities in Hungary in the Long Sixties, 1958–1973*). Our most important goal with the exhibition was for today's secondary school age group to become acquainted with their grandparents' youth, thereby contributing to the dialogue between generations and to the bringing to the surface of forgotten or silenced traumas. The exhibition was primarily intended for secondary school students, so we developed various ways to aid reception for students and teachers, into which we also involved the schools – within the framework of a pilot project covering eleven schools. Based on the filtered experiences, we compiled a package that we can offer to interested institutions, from which they can choose various elements according to their needs. The exhibition can be presented within the framework of state holidays and compulsory school memorial days (25 February, the memorial day for the victims of communism; 23 October, the national holiday of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956; 25 November, the memorial day for the Hungarian political prisoners and forced labourers deported to the Soviet Union), and an unconventional history lesson can be requested. We strove to make the exhibition receivable and experienceable „in itself," so we prepared online and offline question sheets separately for the primary and secondary school age groups. The questions were compiled for the students in such a way that they could be solved while viewing

the exhibition or afterwards, without the help of a subject teacher. The exhibition is not only suitable for being dealt with within the framework of a history lesson, but due to its many aspects, it is also suitable for being processed in religious and moral education, literature, music, and art and visual culture classes.

To assist the work of teachers, we prepared lesson plans of varying depth (a one-lesson version, a two-to-three-lesson version suitable for deepening the topic), where, through the life story of an outstanding personality pointing to general moral values, with a source-centred approach to the era, we gave teachers a choice for a new-perspective processing of the Kádár era, pointing to individuals and their individual decision-making life situations. The source-centredness included, on the one hand, ego-documents and interviews; on the other, archival materials; and thirdly, feature film/short film representations, thus making the topic adaptable for students studying in different types of schools.

The interactive processing of the topic was made possible by the creation of a historical investigative game with a specific frame story. The basic premise of the *Struggle for the Souls* programme's board game was simply formulated: what can we learn about the conditions of an era with the help of five „lost" bags? The game, which can be played in groups and individually, as well as cooperatively and competitively, takes players into the world of the sixties. According to the frame story, the players are young Hungarian émigrés, employees of Radio Free Europe, who are summoned to an extraordinary meeting on 30 September 1969. Their task is to analyse and interpret confidential materials from the Hungarian People's Republic that have reached the RFE's centre. In addition, they must uncover what connection there might be between the owners of the five bags smuggled across the Iron Curtain. We filled the bags of the five fictitious characters with easily accessible objects (make-up mirrors, wallets, face cream in the women's bags; lunch boxes, magnifying glasses, beer openers in the men's), and we also strove to make the flavours of the era accessible to the students, so characteristic sweets from that time, which are also available today, were placed in the bags. Alongside the objects evoking the era, we placed documents related to the characters: filmstrips, maps, archival documents, interior ministry teaching materials, postcards written by the developers, and edited versions of contemporary newspapers, which also contained data relevant to the given puzzle – the mission. For a similar

purpose, photos were also placed in the bags (fashion photos, ecclesiastical genre scenes, filmstrip frames, Ministry of the Interior teaching materials, surveillance photos), which present the stories of the game – based on real events and cases – from different perspectives. The most important parts of the bags were the above documents, which help the students in source analysis and interpretation. Our experiences have shown that beyond the sense of wonder and nostalgia, the game is suitable for acquainting students with the social history of the sixties and for presenting the birth and operating mechanisms of the Kádár system.

The *Struggle for the Souls* exhibition and educational package carries within it the possibility of further development, one spectacular element of which, strengthening local memory, is the two supplementary panels prepared by the staff of the Hungarian National Archives' Baranya County Archives, which present the religious life of the youth of Pécs and its surroundings in the long sixties. The exhibition, showcasing local memories, has reached numerous secondary schools in Baranya county. The rural training centres of the Mathias Corvinus Collegium, which undertakes the nurturing of talent in secondary schools (Debrecen, Budapest, Győr, Miskolc, Szeged, Székesfehérvár, Szekszárd, Szolnok), have also hosted the exhibition and our researchers.

The theme of the exhibition and the method of processing made it possible for our results to reach other groups beyond the world of secondary education. The pedagogical package, systematically rethought based on the research and supplemented with changes proposed by practising teachers, has also appeared in university education and in teacher training courses. The students of the Institute of History of the Faculty of Humanities of the Eötvös Loránd University and the Institute of Sociology of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University became acquainted with the *Struggle for the Souls* programme in its complexity. The university environment provided an opportunity to speak emphatically about the importance and methods of basic research, and about the possibility of applying the results in secondary education. We have presented the project on numerous occasions in the methodology classes of institutions training future teachers. The opinion of prospective and practising teachers was in agreement that the complexity and free variability of the package provide adequate flexibility for users, who can adapt it to local educational circumstances. In connection with teacher

training, the assertion of source- and experience-based pedagogical principles appeared emphatically, especially in the case of the bag game. A venture that provided real help to teachers, placing the persecution of churches in the sixties in a broader perspective, was the production of a 6-7 minute short film, which presents the system of relations between the various churches and the atheist state from 1945 onwards. The inclusion of contemporary newsreels and other audiovisual sources opens a new perspective in education, which is organically supplemented by elements of feature films, various diagrams, and graphs. The short film, which is also available on the website of the Committee of National Remembrance (https://neb.hu/hu/ismeretterjeszto-filmjeink#az), is also made suitable for classroom use by its length and differentiated forms of presentation.

We introduced the material of the exhibition and the related educational package to teachers working in education within the framework of accredited teacher training courses, in cooperation with the Office of the National Assembly and the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security Services. And at the All-Hungarian Teacher Camp organised by the Rákóczi Association, we reached not only domestic teachers but also teachers from beyond the borders.

The main target audience of the exhibition is the secondary school age group, but it was also our undisguised aim to open up to the older generations, since it is the grandparents of today's teenagers who are the real „protagonists" of our exhibition. Viewing the exhibition can also provide a way to initiate a dialogue between generations, especially in those parishes where people live who were young in the sixties. Recently, our exhibition has also reached more and more local congregations, where the opening of the exhibition is regularly held by our staff in the form of a lecture. Our six-part series published on the Catholic news portal *Magyar Kurír* and the related podcast interviews served to bring the exhibition and the topic into public discourse.