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**Preliminary observations**  
on information privacy in Hungary  
(1989–2006)

1. In Hungary – as in other new European democracies – there was an initial euphoria and demand for human rights, including informational rights and freedoms, around the collapse of communism. It was followed by a period of relapse in which a new generation has grown up for whom career, profit, business, and political power all take precedence over respect for individual rights. This high tide–low tide dynamism had a significant effect on demand for privacy.

2. While the Western political ideal is based on the autonomous, self-determining citizen and the transparent, accountable state, the communist ideal was based on the self-determining party-state leadership and the transparent, accountable citizen. The new Hungarian regime introduced a whole legal and institutional system according to the Western ideal. However, over-politization of the new rights undermined the values represented in the new ideal.

3. Today's Hungarian society is rather divided and imbalanced in terms of values and attitudes. There is a forced political polarization connected to competing ideologies, in which, however, traditional values and ideas seem to be interchangeable, according to interests of political powers. This seems to reduce the importance of individuality, personal autonomy – including informational autonomy – in society.

4. According to the first comprehensive survey on information privacy in Hungary, in 1989/90 the majority of the people were “blustering” and suspicious but obedient data subjects. Today, according to the GPD survey they seem rather uninterested and obedient.

5. Despite a well-working legal and institutional system and high media coverage protecting information privacy and propagating informational self-determination, the GPD survey shows that in Hungary, among the seven countries included in the final report, level of knowledge about privacy laws is lowest, extent of worry about personal information on the internet is lowest, judgment of national security laws as intrusive is lowest, the feeling to have a say in what happens with personal information is lowest, while privacy invasion experienced at the workplace is highest, however, trust in both government and business data controllers is highest, acceptance of data sharing between the employer and the government is highest, acceptance of CCTV is highest, acceptance of national ID cards is by far the highest, acceptance of customer profiling is by far the highest, the level of activity to protect personal information is lowest, although the ratio of resistance to privacy invasion is highest.

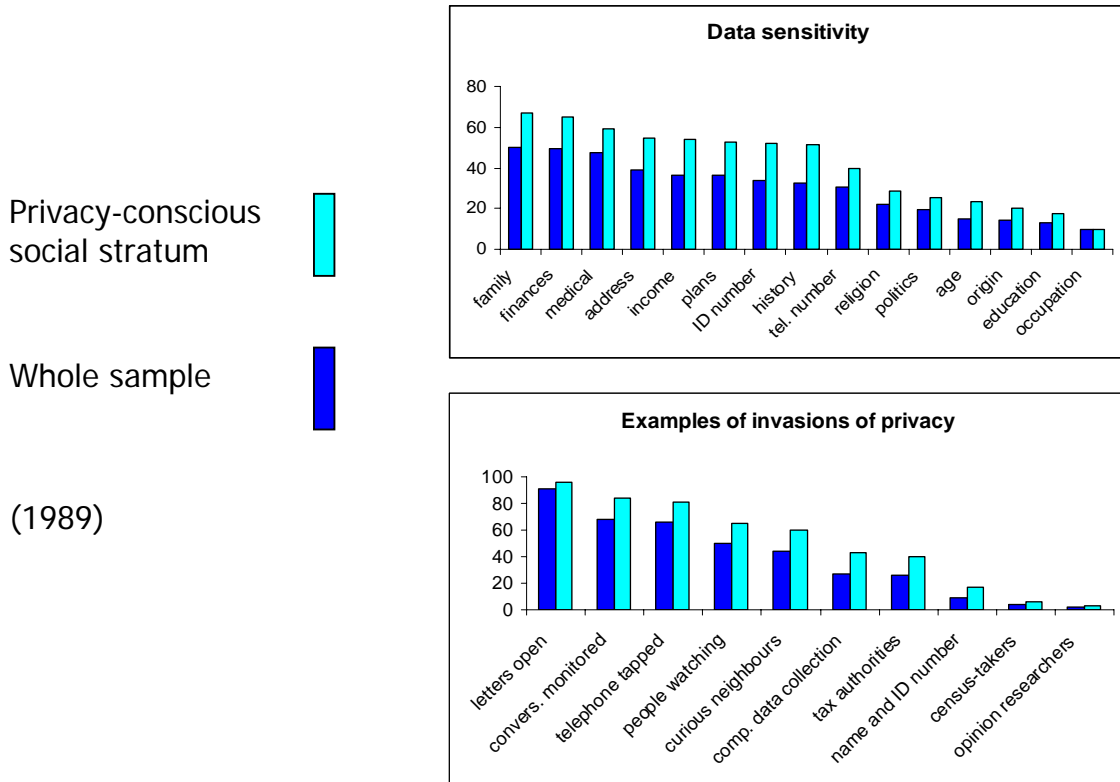
6. This profile can be partly explained with the low tide of rights and liberties, the “border-country” role of Hungary that may enhance the willingness to serve the new master, and the milieu of new capitalism where both commercial and work relationships introduced new, privacy-invading techniques to an unprepared population.

7. Since the change of the political system, a new information controlling monopoly, the business sector, has evolved. Therefore the knowledge and attitudes regarding the handling of personal information in the private sector cannot be compared in the two surveys.

8. There is a “threshold of abstraction” in people's attitudes regarding information privacy: no matter how intrusive a technique is – the more abstract it is, the less interest it excites.

This is partly reflected in the higher sensitivity to privacy in some real-life scenarios of the GPD survey.

9. There is a special group of powerful actors in the privacy and surveillance scene, namely, information technologists, whose attitudes and their image in public opinion deserve further investigation. In Hungary and in other new democracies of the CEE region IT professionals seem to be the natural allies of the data processing monopolies, therefore the systems they develop and operate reflect the interests and values of these monopolies.



Privacy-conscious social stratum

Whole sample

(1989)

### Data sharing

