

# Privacy issues in Hungary

– *background paper* –



**Ipsos Szonda Hungary**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Queen's University commissioned Ipsos Szonda to conduct a desk research about 'privacy' issues in Hungary.

The current study gives a brief summary about issues related to privacy in Hungary. We begin with the impact of the post-WWII experience on attitudes to privacy and trust in government as well as other socio-political institutions and the current socio-political system in general. Hungary's Communist past and the primarily material concerns of the present do seem to have a major impact on privacy issues. This is followed by an overview of some new technologies related to privacy: the proliferation of credit cards in Hungary as well as computer and Internet use – and opinions thereof – by Hungarians. The third part examines the current state of affairs related to privacy by analysing available data (polls and others) on public opinion about privacy.

## II. MAIN FINDINGS

### *1. The impact of the post-WWII experience on attitudes to privacy and trust in government*

The history of Hungary after WWII can roughly be divided into three eras, each having different implications to privacy. However, the first two eras (roughly 1947-1956 and 1956-1989) when Hungary was under Communist rule only differed in the level of political oppression, and a qualitative change (and the real introduction of privacy in Hungary) had to wait until the downfall of Communism in 1989.

#### **1.1. THE PRE-1989 ERA**

The first stage of this period began in about 1947/48 (after the few years it took the Communists to gradually seize complete control of the country's political, economical and social life), and lasted until about the 1956 revolution. This time is referred by Hungarians as 'the fifties' and can be characterised as the worst period of political oppression, when privacy was out of the question both in discussions and in practice. Virtually every aspect of the country's life was under the total control of an almost Orwellian police state. After the 1956 revolution the system changed a lot.

Although the revolution was put down by Soviet troops, and a brief period of retaliation came, the Communist leadership made some concessions to society after all. This not only meant the increase in the production of consumer goods (which was suppressed before '56 to give priority to heavy industry), but also some leniency regarding opinions and worldviews. Dissident views were still not tolerated at the public level, but issues could be discussed more freely in private.

Freedom was limited, tough: telephones of politically suspicious persons were tapped, mail from abroad was opened, known opposition figures were harassed, and some people were made (induced, appeased, coerced or forced by blackmail) to 'cooperate' with the authorities and to provide reports on their peers' politically dissident views or behavior. (After the changes a full list of such people never materialised, so the Hungarian public is still shocked every now and then by the exposure of some well-known public figures as informers in the past.

According to a recent poll the majority (61%) of citizens would approve the publication of a list containing the names of all people informing on their peers in the Communist era – [www.gallup.hu/Gallup/release/ppref020621.htm](http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/release/ppref020621.htm)) Although such practices carried a blow to privacy, this can also be viewed as a small step forward – the state at least switched from the open prosecution of the 'enemy of the people' to more clandestine means.

No public opinion data are available from the era before 1971, but Hungarian historians usually refer to the '60s as a period of 'consolidation', when Hungarians came to terms with the system and found consolation for the lack of freedom in the increasing opportunities for material growth. (Valuch, 2002) The deviation of private views from the official standpoint became measurable in the '70s. Public opinion polls that started in 1971 and the results of which were strictly for the Party elite's eyes only showed that people were less and less satisfied with the economic situation of the country and the living standard, two major topics studied in those times (Angelusz, 1996). By the '80s these views began to circulate even in informal discussions at the workplace (Angelusz, 1996). However, this kind of 'informational privacy regarding political views' remained informal until 1989, when democracy was introduced to Hungary.

## 1.2. THE POLITICAL CHANGES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS TO PRIVACY

The change from a Communist dictatorship (albeit a 'soft dictatorship', as the system that existed after the late '50s is usually referred to) to democracy was a process of some duration rather than a sudden and dramatic change. The political opposition began to form in 1987–88 when most of today's prominent Hungarian political parties (other than the Socialist Party which is a descendant of the former ruling party) were founded. Negotiations between the ruling party and the opposition began in 1989, resulting in a constitutional reform in the Fall of the same year.

The reformed Constitution included the rights to the protection of personal data and to freely obtain information of public concern. In 1991 the use of the personal identification number (a number unique to each citizen and appearing in all kinds of official documents related to the person) was ruled unconstitutional and abandoned. The current law on the protection of personal data (a 'privacy law' as it could be called in English) came into effect in 1993.

The law also ordered a Parliamentary Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information to be elected by the Parliament. This was delayed by some party politics, but an agreement on the person to choose was reached in 1995. (For more on privacy-related institutions and organisations see Section 3.2.)

While the political changes have set the stage for a society where privacy is respected, there are some indications that Hungarian culture is not as aware of the value of privacy as Western societies with established democracies. Two contradicting phenomena can be observed, both of which can be explained as a legacy of the former Communist system. On the one hand, many people and even some institutions seem not to value privacy as high as the public in established democracies. Privacy violations can be found in abundant quantities: by the police, by tax authorities, by commercial companies, by the yellow press, and even by universities (by teachers putting lists of test results on noticeboards) (source: PCDP website – for more on privacy violations see Section 3.2.). According to a poll (source: GfK Hungary website) only less than 50% of Hungarians would prohibit that organisations gather their personal data for commercial purposes – in Western European country this percentage is near to 100%.

On the other hand, some people seem to worry about privacy too much. There were instances when various public opinion research companies in Hungary having different political 'reputations' (e.g. believed to have left-wing or right-wing political orientations) consistently gave different estimations of the public support for different political parties in the same period – this was explained by the researchers that some respondents 'knew' where the company asking them 'belongs' and responded accordingly (that is, hiding their real preference if the company was believed to favor the opposite side! – Fischer, 2001). There were even instances of some (albeit extremist) politicians asking their supporters not to answer to researchers from companies they did not like (Fischer, 2001). The culmination of these phenomena came at the 2002 elections when all but one companies underestimated the support for the (then opposition, later the winner) Socialist Party. After a more thorough examination of the data (which included responses related to values and worldviews) it turned out that a considerable part of Socialist supporters must have been discouraged by the heated and sometimes aggressive campaign rhetorics and hid their real preferences from the researchers (source: Gallup Hungary website; [www.gallup.hu/Gallup/release/ppref020423.htm](http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/release/ppref020423.htm)).

Thus, undervaluing privacy and being over-concerned with it both can be found in the Hungarian public. Both phenomena can be interpreted as a legacy of the more than 40 years of oppression in post-WWII Hungary (not to mention that the system before WWII was also oppressive in its own ways). On the one hand, entire generations were socialised in a society where the right to privacy as we know it in democracies did not exist. These people perhaps did not learn to value the right to privacy because it was not declared, and did not learn to act to defend it because in practice it was not violated in a harmful way unless one became suspicious e.g. because of dissident political views or foreign (Western) connections. Although all kinds of personal data were kept track of by state authorities in ways which today would be considered as unlawful, an average person (that is, a person with not overly against the system and not showing political, economical or social initiative discouraged by the system) could not feel any special harm which would have made him/her feel discriminated in comparison to the majority.

On the other hand, some people did feel the harms of lacking privacy and being under control, especially those generations that experienced 'the fifties'. These people had all

reasons to develop fears of and distrust about letting personal information get known by authorities or public institutions.

As an alternative explanation – but possibly accompanying and not excluding the one above – we can also consider the fact that for Hungarians who live in a country that was economically shattered by an ineffective system privacy is an issue at the bottom of the priority list of their concerns. Studies show that most Hungarians mainly worry about their material circumstances and crime, while 'post-material' worries (like concern for the environment and about the development of science and technology, but even worry about family issues) lag behind (Lengyel and Vicsek, 2004).

### **1.3. PUBLIC OPINION DATA ON TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND VARIOUS POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN HUNGARY**

All existing social research data show that the trust in government as well as in the political and social system in Hungary is general is quite low. The most worrying element of the general picture is probably the way Hungarians think about the preconditions of social and economic success.

According to a 1998 Gallup poll (source: Gallup Hungary website; [www.gallup.hu/Gallup/self/polls/nepszava/nepszava9.html](http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/self/polls/nepszava/nepszava9.html)) 78% of Hungarians thought that success depends on connections or 'knowing the right people'. This was followed by immorality and elbowing one's way ahead (73%), while abilities and hard work were considered less important (mentioned by 67% and 52% of the respondents, respectively). The data from the 1998 poll hardly differed from a similar one made five years earlier. Recent results (Hunyady, 2004) show that such pessimistic views are still prevalent today.

The general distrust is also shown by studies about how satisfied people are with the new democratic and capitalist system in Hungary. Respondents in representative polls both in 1993 and in 1998 thought that they were more satisfied with their personal situation as well as with that of the country's in general. Moreover, judgements about the situation in 1988 were more favorable than those about the 1993 situation in 1998 (source: Gallup Hungary website; [www.gallup.hu/Gallup/self/polls/nepszava/nepszava5.html](http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/self/polls/nepszava/nepszava5.html)). When they were asked about the specific possible improvements brought along with the changes they listed free speech and the

freedom to travel most frequently, while social justice, morality (of the country's leaders as well as of society in general) and material conditions were judged much more unfavorably.

Another public opinion poll by Tárki Social Research Inc. (1999) showed that only 54% of Hungarian respondents thought that changing the socio-political system 'was a worthwhile move' (excluding those that replied 'don't know'). In comparison, the same percentage was 64% in the Czech Republic and 75% in Poland. Moreover, 51% in Hungary thought that 'the changes have brought more harms than benefits to the people', while only 18% judged that the benefits had outweighed the harms. A comparison with the Czech Republic and Poland can be seen in Table 1.3.1.

	Hungary		Czech Rep.	Poland
	N =	%	%	%
More benefits than harms	234	17.5	24	26
About the same amount of benefits as harms	417	31.2	44	33
More harms than benefits	684	51.3	32	41
Total	1335	100	100	100
Does not know	179	11.7	4	9

**Table 1.3.1. What did the changes since 1989 and what did the previous Communist system brought to the people? (Source: Tárki, 1999.)**

It is also very interesting to look at what people in the three countries thought about the two political systems according to various dimensions (see Table 1.3.2.). Although privacy rights as an aspect were not listed by the researchers, if we look at free speech as probably the closest concept (as it is also a civil liberty), we can see that while it is valued by the Hungarian public, it stands in contrast with the general negative evaluation of the socio-political system after 1989.

This result also has some negative implications about privacy in Hungarian public thought: if civil liberties are valued but the general picture is more determined by mostly material factors (living standard, employment, material well-being), then the prospects of spreading privacy culture in Hungary are not too good.



	Hungary	Czech Rep.	Poland
People's standard of living	3.91	3.07	3.44
Employment opportunities	4.35	3.31	4.26
Amount of leisure time	3.69	2.95	3.04
Opportunity to travel abroad	2.43	2.01	2.06
Opportunity to have one's say in domestic policy	2.60	3.03	2.83
Opportunity to have one's say in local policy	2.60	2.89	2.93
Material well-being of respondent	3.75	2.96	3.26
Public security	4.28	3.87	4.18
Social security	4.10	3.97	3.86
Free speech	2.53	2.28	2.01
Regarding the respondent's life altogether	3.55	2.96	3.28

**Table 1.3.2. Comparisons of the socio-political system in 1999 and that in 1989 according to various aspects. (Source: Tárki, 1999.) Comparisons were made on a five-point scale where 1 = 'today it is definitely better', 5 = 'today it is definitely worse'.**

However, despite the 'political alienation', the fact that most people do not see a better (or lesser evil) alternative to parliamentary democracy gives some reason for optimism (source: study at Gallup Hungary website, [www.gallup.hu/Gallup/self/polls/nepszava8.html](http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/self/polls/nepszava8.html)).

If we look at the 'trust indices' related to various political and social institutions, we see that the government, the parliament, the political parties and labor unions are always at the back of the pack. In a 100-point scale the trust in government was rated as 39 in 1993 and 43 in 1997 in a Gallup poll (source: Gallup Hungary website; [www.gallup.hu/Gallup/self/polls/nepszava/nepszava1.html](http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/self/polls/nepszava/nepszava1.html)), the index of trust in the parliament was 40 in 1993 and 43 in 1997.

The most trusted institutions were the Constitutional Court (something like the Supreme Court in the United States) with 59 and 67 points, respectively, the president (63 and 65 points, respectively – note that in Hungary the president is not a significant political actor but rather an emblematic figure representing the nation and mainly having a formal role) and the parliamentary commissioners with 62 points (this institution did not exist in 1993 – these commissioners are overseeing whether civil liberties are being respected in the country; one of them responsible for privacy issues, already mentioned in Section 1.1.).

A more recent poll on trust in political and social institutions was conducted by Gallup Hungary in 2004 when Hungary became a member of the EU. Table 1.3.3. shows the Hungarian data compared to the EU-average.

Institutions:	Hungary			EU-average		
	Rather trust	Rather do not trust	Does not know / No answer	Rather trust	Rather do not trust	Does not know / No answer
Army	52	33	14	63	26	7
Radio	42	47	11	62	29	9
Charity or voluntary organisations	50	34	16	59	28	6
Television	44	50	6	54	39	8
Religious institutions and organisations	39	45	16	42	45	6
Press	27	64	9	47	46	12
UN	55	28	18	49	34	14
Police	54	38	8	61	33	16
EU	54	32	14	41	41	9
Labor Unions	16	61	23	34	50	14
The country's legal system	47	42	10	45	47	9
Large companies	21	62	17	26	60	11
Parliament	29	61	10	35	54	18
Government	31	58	11	28	63	17
Political parties	13	75	12	14	77	13

**Table 1.3.3. Trust in various institutions in Hungary and in the EU. (Source: Gallup study at [europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/nat\\_hu.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/nat_hu.pdf))**

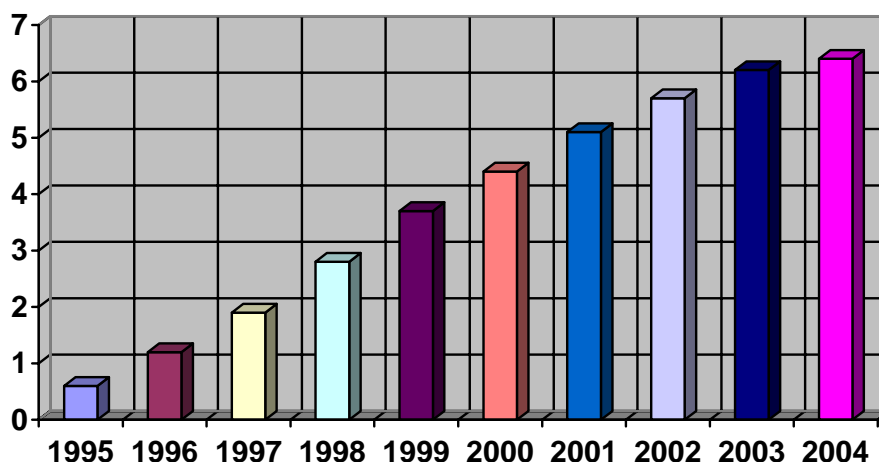
The studies discussed here are but a few and probably the most interesting examples of several polls made in Hungary since the political changes, and reflect the general picture quite well. Gallup Hungary e.g. did a series of studies on the perceptions of corruption in Hungary, with the results showing that Hungarian citizens in general see corruption as a wide-spread phenomenon and a serious obstacle in the way to a well-functioning democracy. (More information at [monitor.gallup.hu](http://monitor.gallup.hu), some also in English.) Further studies on perceptions of democracy in Hungary also can be found at [www.gallup.hu/europa.htm#CCEB](http://www.gallup.hu/europa.htm#CCEB), some of them in English as well.

## ***2. Material factors related to privacy: the use of credit cards, computers and the Internet in Hungary***

Privacy today is strongly related to novel info-communicational technologies such as credit card use, netbanking, computer and Internet use and e-commerce. The next part gives a brief overview of the proliferation of these technologies in Hungary, as well as about the ways Hungarians use and think about these technologies.

### **2.1. THE USE OF CREDIT CARDS IN HUNGARY**

Credit cards appeared in the early '90s, after the political changes in Hungary. The number and use of credit cards in Hungary has seen a rapid growth ever since (NBH Reports, 1999, 2003, 2004). There was a more than six-fold increase in the number of credit cards used by Hungarians between 1995 and 1999, and the number nearly doubled again by 2004, reaching 6.5 million in a country with a population about 10 million people (see Diagram 2.1.1.). At the end of 1999 among Eastern and Central European new democracies Hungarians had the second largest number of credit cards by capita (0.358 after the 0.509 in Slovenia, but ahead of Croatia (0.304), Slovakia (0.287), the Czech Republic (0.208), and Poland (0.181)) (NBH Report, 1999).



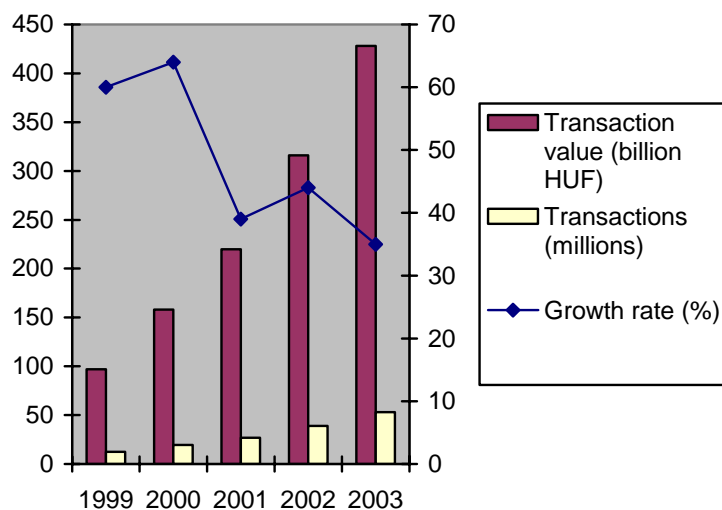
**Diagram 2.1.1. The number of credit cards in Hungary, 1995-2004 (in millions). (Source: NBH Reports, 1999, 2004)**

Most bank cards (about 5.7 million) are not credit cards in a strict sense, but still debit cards (that is, no overdraft is allowed). About 711 thousand are credit cards, and even smaller minorities of bank cards are business cards (about 220 thousand) and charge cards (about 14 thousand).

The number of transactions has seen a similar growth: there were 92 million transactions by Hungarians in 1999 (including drawing money from cash machines), while five years later 93 million transactions occurred only in the first half of 2004. The value of these transactions grew from 147 billion Hungarian Forints in 1995 to 1835 billion HUF in 1999 and to 2234 billion HUF in the first half of 2004. About 98% of these transactions occurred in Hungary, and in the rest of the cases Hungarian card owners used their cards when travelling abroad.

There is another important aspect of the use of a technology besides the numbers: it is the type of use. Thus, in this case it is an interesting question to what extent Hungarian card owners use their bank cards for paying for goods and services rather than just drawing cash from bankomats. As the NBH Report on the year 1999 pointed out, Hungary was still a cash-oriented society at that time: in about 85% of all the transactions in 1999 Hungarians used their cards to draw cash from machines.

In comparison, foreigners visiting Hungary in the same year used their cards to pay for goods and services in about 70% of the transactions made by them. By the first half of 2004, 41% of the transactions by Hungarians were made in order to pay for goods and services (including 3% when they charged up their mobile phone balances, which also can be made by using bankomats). However, if we consider the value rather than the number of transactions, we see that in the same half year only 13% of the total amount was spent as a payment, the rest was cash drawn out from bank machines. The amount of money spent by Hungarians by using credit cards is growing rapidly, but is still not much compared to the value of the transactions. A breakthrough in this respect is yet to happen – whether this is due to distrust in credit cards is an open question. Diagram 2.1.2. summarizes data on purchases made by Hungarians in Hungary with credit cards.



**Diagram 2.1.2. Purchases made in Hungary with credit cards by Hungarian card owners, 1999-2003. (Source: NBH Report, 2004)**

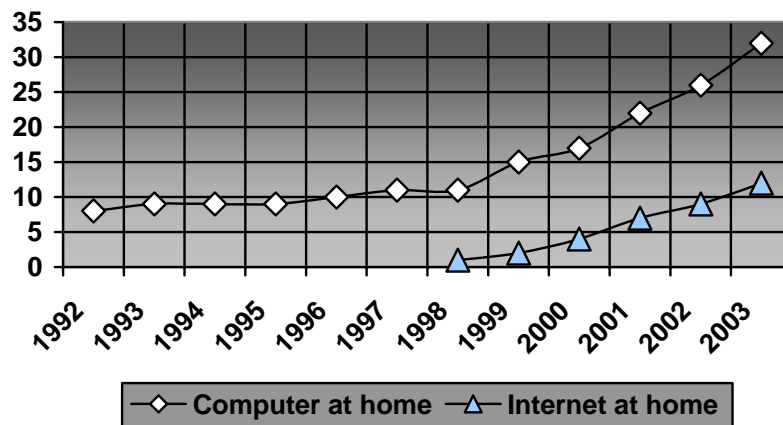
Cases when and known methods how credit cards are abused usually are a recurring topic in the media and in Internet discussion forums. However, NBH data on credit card abuse show that it is a relatively rare phenomenon. The damage caused by credit card abuse is less than 0.02% of the total transaction value (NBH Reports, 1999, 2004). The two most prevalent occurrences of abuse are the use of stolen/lost or falsified cards. About one third of the total damage is charged on the clients' accounts, the rest is written off by the banks (who takes the damage in each case depends on the specific circumstances). Only about 7% of all the damage is caused by telephone and Internet abusers (NBH Report, 2004 – the Report does not make a distinction between damage done by cheating by the telephone and on the Internet).

## 2.2. OWNERSHIP OF COMPUTERS BY HUNGARIANS

The ownership of computers and the use of the Internet in Hungary is best viewed through the lens of diffusion theory (Rogers, 1995 cited by Dessewffy and Rét, 2004). The theory says that the spreading rate of new technologies can be described as an S-shaped curve rather than as a linear trend. At first only a small group of 'innovators' use the new technology, then they are followed by increasingly larger groups of 'early adopters' and an 'early majority', making the curve of diffusion rate go steep high. After a while, when the

new technology has already spread to a majority of users the growth rate gradually flattens again.

Looking at computer ownership data we can conclude that the spreading of home computer use has still room for growth. The growth rate has increased since 1999 but the curve still has not reached the point of inflexion (see Diagram 2.2.1.). In 2003, 32% of the adult population (over 18 years) of Hungary had access to computers in their homes.



**Diagram 2.2.1. Percentage of households owning at least one computer 1992-2003 and households having home Internet access 1998-2003. (Source: Angelusz et al., 2004).**

Of Hungarians having a computer at home, the overwhelming majority (92%) owned PCs, 6% owned portable computers, and 2% owned both. About one third of computer owners had access to the Internet at home. The reasons for so many Hungarians not having a computer at home can be twofold. While material reasons can be fully valid (the price of a new computer is about the same as the average monthly salary in Hungary, and about three times the amount of the monthly minimum wage), used older computers can be purchased at considerably lower prices (although their usability is limited, considering the rapid development of operation systems, word processors, games and other software), and as we will see in the next section, there are some cultural or cognitive barriers in the way of proliferation as well.

There are some considerable and systematic inequalities in computer ownership in contemporary Hungarian society. Respondents of a representative study had a significantly higher chance to own computers if they (a) lived around Budapest or in Western Hungary

(where the economic situation is better), (b) had a higher income, (c) had higher levels of education, or (d) were younger (WIP Report, 2003).

### **2.3. THE USE OF AND ATTITUDES ABOUT THE INTERNET IN HUNGARY**

In 2003 25% of Hungarians (14 years and older) used the Internet (Dessewffy and Rét, 2004; WIP Report, 2003). The percentage of respondents using the Internet at least once in a month was only 22%. (WIP Report, 2003). Considering this fact and that this trend has been linear for a few years, it can be concluded that – similar to the case of computers – the diffusion curve has not yet reached the inflexion point, the main breakthrough in the proliferation of Internet use in Hungary is yet to happen. 12% of Hungarian households have an Internet connection, meaning that 13% of the population above 14 years of age have access to the Internet from their homes.

In the past few years accessing the Internet from home became the primary way of using this technology, but the percentage of users accessing the Internet from the school or the workplace is also high. Internet cafés and community centers as places of accessing the Internet were only mentioned by 1 or 2% of all respondents (relative to the total sample, not just the subsample of Internet users). Home use was referred to by 10%, while school and workplace use by 9% each.

It is a recurrent topic in the part of the Hungarian media which deals with technology-related issues (e.g. technology columns of general newspapers, e-journals, technical journals) why the Internet penetration is so low in Hungary. (In several other Eastern European countries comparable to Hungary in terms of economic development a higher proportion of the population is using the Internet: Slovenia: 50%, Estonia: 46%, Czech Rep.: 35%, Slovakia: 33%, Croatia: 33%, Lithuania: 31%, Poland: 25%.)

Most of the time high prices are blamed. A typical argument is that since prices are high, only a small proportion of the population can afford to buy the technical equipment and pay the rates for use – therefore, Internet service providers are forced to keep the prices high to make their business profitable, which in turn results in a limited number of subscribers (source: [www.index.hu/tech/net/adeessel0114](http://www.index.hu/tech/net/adeessel0114)). Others blame the Hungarian telecommunication company's monopoly and high rates for telephone cable use ([www.index.hu/tech/net/ads041221](http://www.index.hu/tech/net/ads041221)).

However, recent survey data show that besides material reasons there are cultural ones as well. When asked about why they do not use the Internet (if they do not), respondents in a representative survey in 2003 listed the following reasons (they could list as many as they wanted to): does not need it (36%), has no PC (30%), not interested (26%), too expensive (18%), no knowledge (17%), fear of computers (2%), slow PC (1%), other reason (15%). Altogether, 50% of non-users listed 'cognitive' reasons not to use the Internet (no need, no interest, no knowledge, fear), 31% listed 'material' reasons (no PC, too expensive, slow PC), and 19% listed both (this time not counting those listing only 'other' reasons). Thus, more than two thirds of non-users see cognitive or cultural barriers which keep them back from joining the online world.

The prospects for the growth of the Hungarian Internet community are moderate according to survey results. When asked about their intentions to become users, about 90% replied that it was 'unlikely' that they would become Internet users during the next year. There was a significant relationship with age: the older the respondent was, the more unlikely he/she thought that he/she would become a user next year (WIP Report, 2003).

Regarding access to the Internet about the same inequalities apply as regarding the ownership of computers. Angelusz et al. (2004) computed a 'digital gap' index for different subgroups of the population by comparing the proportions of home Internet users in these subgroups to those in the general population.

As Table 2.3.1. shows, the use of the Internet is strongly determined by education, place of residence, age, gender and ethnicity.



	Not a home Internet user	Home Internet user	Digital gap index
Overall population	92	8	100
Gender:			
Male	89	11	132
Female	94	6	75
Education:			
Primary	94	6	6
Vocational	97	3	35
Secondary	88	12	148
College or univ. degree	73	27	330
Age			
18-29 years	86	14	169
30-44 years	87	13	163
45-59 years	92	8	104
60 years and older	99	1	11
Place of residence			
Budapest	83	17	209
County capital	89	11	136
Other town	94	6	75
Village	97	3	40
Ethnicity (as judged by the interviewer)			
Roma (Gypsy)	100	0	0
Not sure	96	4	47
Non-Roma (White)	91	9	106

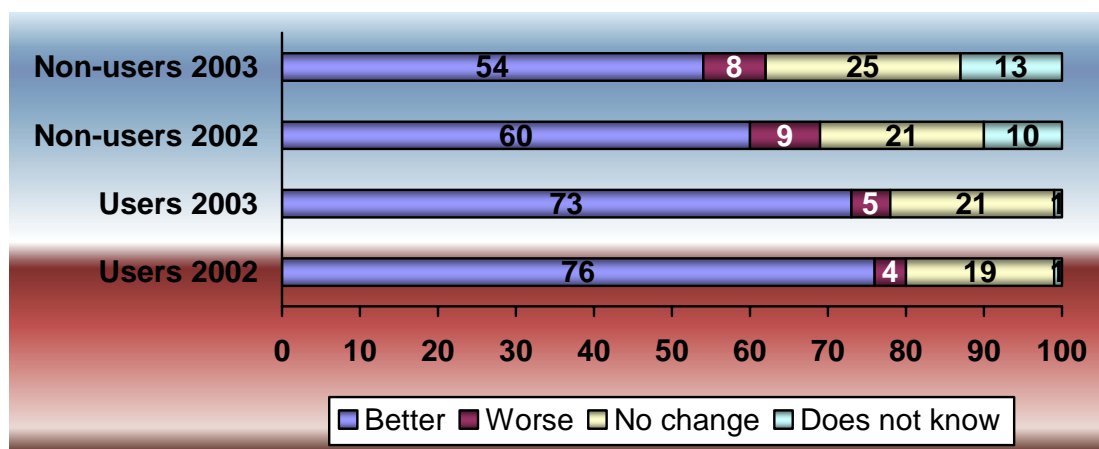
**Table 2.3.1. Proportions of regular home Internet users in various subgroups of society and digital gap indices for each of these groups. (Source: Angelusz et al., 2004.) (Digital gap index = percentage of home users in the subgroup / percentage of home users in general society.)**

The uses and gratifications of the Internet were also assessed by recent studies (the two most recent are: WIP Report, 2003 and Angelusz et al., 2004). However, since the categories that respondents could choose from varied, only a general pattern is given here rather than the data themselves. The most frequent use mentioned was e-mail, followed by information seeking (related to either work or study, by using search engines), recreation and games, reading of online press, chatting and visiting discussion forums, and downloading. Rather than analysing the several various types of uses and gratifications separately, Angelusz et al. (2004) conducted a factor analysis on their data to get a categorisation of these. The first factor was labeled 'experience and fun', including uses as downloads, games, chatting and the like.

The second factor was 'knowledge' (reading of technical papers, using search engines, downloading study materials etc.), the third 'public affairs' (visiting websites of the government, political parties or local authorities etc.), and the fourth 'high-tech' (netbanking, official affairs like dealing tax authorities, ticket reservations, stock exchange rates, etc.).

The factor analysis proved to be extremely useful in the assessment of 'second-level inequalities' regarding the Internet, i.e. inequalities reflected in the types of use rather than and beyond having an access itself. Social variables like education, income and cultural background were all significantly related to what one generally uses the Internet for. However, a more detailed analysis including further variables in the optimal scaling analysis revealed that the effect of these former variables are transmitted by nature of use (occasionally, regularly but not from home, regularly from home) and expertise (whether the person is an Internet-'novice' or an 'expert').

Optimism about and trust in the Internet has been on the decrease for the last few years in Hungary. In 2003 54% thought that the new technologies would make the world a better place, while 25% thought that they would not make any significant changes (compared to 70% and 22%, respectively in 2002). Internet users have a more favorable opinion about this new medium than non-users (WIP Report, 2003 – see Diagram 2.3.1.).

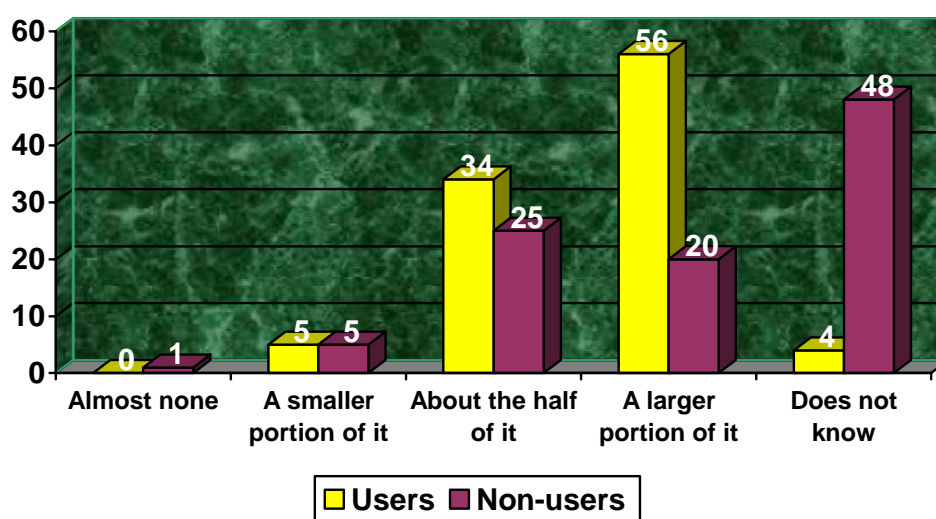


**Diagram 2.3.1. Attitudes about the Internet among users and non-users, 2002-2003.**  
(Source: WIP Report, 2003.) The Internet makes the world...

More specific opinions about the Internet also varied between users and non-users. It is interesting to note that even non users did not see the Internet as a potential threat to privacy. The judgement of the reliability of content available on the Internet also reflects a general sense of trust, even among non-users (WIP Report, 2003 – see Table 2.3.2. and Diagram 2.3.2.).

Item	Users	Non-users
People not having an Internet connection suffer a disadvantage.	2.7	2.3
Too much time is spent on the Internet.	3.0	3.4
He/she does not know the Internet.	1.5	2.5
The Internet can not offer anything important.	1.7	3.5
The Internet is not meant for children.	4.0	4.3
The Internet is a threat to one's personal data (= privacy).	2.8	3.3
You can save time by using the Internet.	4.3	3.9

**Table 2.3.2. Some specific opinions about the Internet among users and non-users.**  
(Source: WIP Report, 2003.) Ratings of agreement with various statements by users and non-users. 1 = strongly disagree ... 5 = strongly agree



**Diagram 2.3.2. The perceived reliability of Internet contents by users and non-users.**  
(Source: WIP Report, 2003.) How much of the information available on the Internet is reliable?

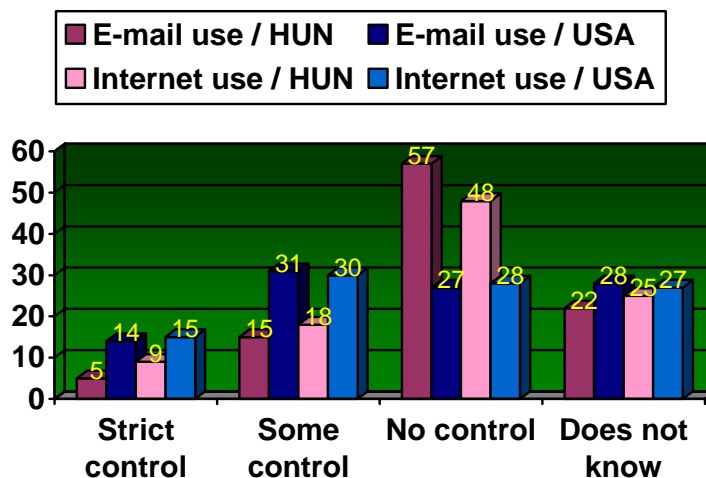
As we saw on Diagram 2.3.2., users and non-users agreed that the Internet is not especially meant for children. However, when asked more specifically, parents with home access do not perceive a negative effect of the Internet on family life and childrearing in general. Only 13% of these parents did notice any difference in their children's grade point averages since the family had had an Internet connection – of them, 7% perceived a positive, and only 6% a negative change.

The main perceived threat to children by parents is still television. Parents who are home Internet users worry more about their kids watching too much TV than spending too much time with the Internet (50% and 17%, respectively). 53% of them reported that they exert some kind of control over their children's Internet use. Filter programs are increasing in

popularity (11% in 2003 vs 7% in 2002), but the main ways of control are having children ask for permission or limiting the time they can spend with the Internet (mentioned by 36% each) (WIP Report, 2003).

Uses and gratifications of the Internet also include making new social contacts, even friendships and romantic relationships as well as maintaining old ones. 32% of Hungarian Internet users reported having made at least one acquaintance via the Internet, and 33% of them reported having older friendship now maintained primarily this way. Despite the possibility of anonymity provided by the Internet, only 9% said they would disclose personal information on the Internet that they would not share during a personal encounter (WIP Report, 2003).

Privacy on Internet also includes the topic of employers controlling their employees' Internet-related activities. Although 57% of the respondents used the Internet at work for private purposes (either e-mailing or web-surfing), only 27% of workplace Internet users in Hungary reported that their use of the Internet was controlled by their employers (compared to 45% in the United States). For e-mails, the same percentages in the two countries are 20% and 45%, respectively (WIP Report, 2003 – see Diagram 2.3.3.).



**Diagram 2.3.3. Employers' control over workplace Internet and e-mail use as perceived by employees. (Source: WIP Report, 2003.)**

## 2.4. E-COMMERCE IN HUNGARY

E-commerce is still in its infancy in Hungary. Not more than 14% of Internet users (3% of the overall population) have ever used the Internet for shopping (Angelusz et al., 2004). The WIP Report (2003) gives a bit more refined picture by also having asked research participants about the frequency of each type of use. According to their results, while e-mail (the most popular activity by Hungarians on the Internet) is used 'frequently' by 56%, and 'rarely' by 19% of the respondents, e-shopping was only mentioned by 11% as an activity they engage in 'rarely' (and by none as one done 'frequently').

Netbanking also involves only 11-15% of Hungarian Internet users (depending on which survey we consider). According to the WIP Report (2003) 5% of Internet users make bank transactions via the Internet 'frequently', and 6% of them 'rarely'. If the Internet is ever used for purchase-related activities by Hungarians, it is much more likely that they use it for gathering information about products and prices (24% of Internet users do this 'frequently' and 36% 'rarely' – WIP Report, 2003).

The main items purchased on the Internet are CDs (mentioned by 61% of e-customers), software (29%), food deliveries (29%), tickets to concerts and events (26%) (source: GfK Hungary website). Business-to-consumer e-commerce (that is, not counting commerce between companies) reached a volume of over 7 billion HUF in 2003 (note that this is about 1/60 of the volume of purchases paid for with credit cards in Hungary – see Diagram 2.1.2.). Only one out of fifty visitors to Internet shops actually buy something in Hungary (Szabó, 2004).

A reason for the low presence of e-commerce in Hungary can be that there were only about 600 companies in Hungary that provided an opportunity for e-shopping (out of more than 21000 that were present on the Internet in some form). The overwhelming majority of companies in Hungary used the Internet to introduce or advertise themselves and provide information on their products according to a study by the (Hungarian) Institute for Economy Research (cited by [www.index.hu/tech/net/gki040922](http://www.index.hu/tech/net/gki040922)). A general disinterest on the part of Internet users can also be responsible for the phenomenon: for example, when asked to evaluate banks from different aspects, Hungarian consumers put the possibility of net-banking very low on their priority list (source: GfK Hungary website – see also the WIP Report (2003) results above). Consumers do have some reasons to be disinterested, though: according to the

Chief Office for the Protection of Consumers the majority of Hungarian companies selling their products via e-commerce are doing it without the necessary permissions and are consistently underinforming (sometimes even misinforming) their customers.

### ***3. Privacy in Hungary today***

The next part overviews issues directly related to privacy in Hungary today. First the linguistic fact that the Hungarian language does not (yet) have a single word for 'privacy' is examined. Then we turn to available public opinion and survey data related to privacy. Since there are has not been many surveys related to this issue in Hungary, some other sources on the views of the general public and privacy culture in Hungary are also considered.

#### **3.1. SOME LINGUISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Important question: are there any relevant implications of the fact that Hungary does not have a word that is equivalent to 'privacy' in the English language?

It is a fact that the Hungarian language does not have a single word which could be an equivalent for 'privacy'. Does this fact have relevant implications for the Hungarian privacy culture and the way Hungarians think about privacy? In our view, it has some, but no major ones.

Linguistic differences can imply cultural differences, and are indeed a major concern for cross-cultural psychologists when they are translating their questionnaires (Van de Vijver and Leung, 1997). However, while they are a major concern for social researchers constructing measurement instruments to be used in different cultures, they do not necessarily reflect that the same concepts can not be shared by people living in different countries. The relationship between language and thought is a classical topic in cognitive psychology. Since the '50s a number of studies discussed what is called the 'language relativity hypothesis' by the linguist Benjamin Whorf. While some differences in thought between cultures speaking different were actually revealed, the majority of evidence shows that similarities in human thought are more apparent. Probably the most frequently cited study in the field was the one (cited, among others, by Eysenck and Keane, 1990), in which the researcher demonstrated that the recognition of colours followed the same patterns in English-speaking as well as

Dani subjects, despite the fact that the Dani (an agricultural tribe in New Guinea) have only two words for colours, one for the darker and one for the lighter ones. More recently (and with more relevance to the topic of this study), the cross-cultural psychologist Shalom H. Schwartz revealed some basic similarities in the contents and structure of human values in a study done across 44 countries worldwide (Schwartz, 1994), and developed a questionnaire which is the most widely used instrument to measure values ever since. Thus, even if we speak about values, the underlying structure and the contents of thought can be similar across cultures, be the languages they speak entirely different. (For a more detailed and recent overview see Berry et al, 2002, 147–171.).

The fact that there is no single word for 'privacy' in Hungarian is by no means a reason for the idea of privacy not to take root in Hungarian public thought. Actually, there is an equivalent phrase in Hungarian for 'privacy', albeit a bit complicated one: 'a személyes adatok védelme' (= the protection of personal data). If a single word is to be used, 'adattvédelem' (= data protection – this time the English version is longer) offers itself as an alternative, although in this expression it is not specified what kind of data we are talking about (e.g. it can imply the protection of company as well as personal data). By some small civil associations pioneering in raising privacy-awareness in Hungary even the English word 'privacy' is used (in expressions like 'a magyar privacy-kultúra' = the Hungarian privacy culture – e.g. at [www.bigbrotherawards.hu](http://www.bigbrotherawards.hu) ).

Indeed, the concept is gradually penetrating the public life in Hungary, as the facts discussed elsewhere show (institutions and laws protecting privacy, petitions addressed by citizens to these institutions, civil associations promoting privacy, privacy-related news in the media etc.). Thus, if a Hungarian person wants to think about or discuss privacy, or taking measures to defend his/her privacy, he/she has every means to do so.

However, in our case the linguistic difference can actually imply some difference, if not between the English and Hungarian concepts of privacy, then between the emphasis and importance these concepts have in public thought in English-speaking countries and in Hungary, respectively. As Berry et al. (2002) point out:

'There is no aspect of overt behavior in which human groups differ more than in the languages they speak. However, by itself this does not have any more far-reaching implications (...). Frequently occurring notions may be coded in shorter words, but this is about the only regularity.' (Berry et al., 2002, 170.)

While English-speaking countries have rich traditions of civil rights, Hungary is a new democracy, the majority of whose citizens were socialised in the Communist era, when privacy as a right had only a very limited existence. Therefore, many of them may not be as aware of their rights to privacy as citizens of older democracies probably are. In an interview the previous Parliamentary Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information, László Majtényi complained about the inactivity of Hungarians to exercise their rights to privacy and to obtain public information. The long and very officially-sounding phrase 'a személyes adatok védelme' suggests that this concept is a relatively new one to Hungarian society, and is not yet frequently used by Hungarians. When the concept takes root in Hungary – for which all the objective (legal and institutional) and some of the subjective (new generations being socialised in a democratic way, and an increased sensitivity to privacy in some of the adult population) conditions are present – a shorter word will probably appear. A very likely candidate is 'adattvédelem' ('data protection'), in case of which the context would make it clear what kind of data the speaker is meaning.

### **3.2. PRIVACY CULTURE AND OPINIONS ABOUT PRIVACY IN HUNGARY**

Public opinion research directly related to privacy issues in Hungary can be summarized very briefly: it is virtually nonexistent. Unlike in some Western countries where public opinion polls directly targeting privacy issues or topics related to the freedom of information are conducted (e.g. [www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/handouts/privacy/public\\_responses.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/handouts/privacy/public_responses.cfm); [/www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=13566](http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=13566)), in Hungary all the existing research is related to some different topic and has some implications to privacy as a by-product.

While usual data on party preferences, popularity ratings of politicians, opinions on topical political issues and even survey data on more general social issues like democracy, corruption, Internet use, education, social inequalities, national and European identity, attitudes towards and trust various institutions and perceptions of the economic situation and economic prospects etc. are abundant, privacy as of now does not seem to have been a topic evoking an interest large enough to become the main topic of any study.



Thus, the main sources for public opinion about privacy in Hungary are studies investigating some other topic involving privacy as well. Some of such research have already been discussed above. A general trust is indicated by the fact that more than half of Hungarians would be willing to let companies gather and process their personal data for commercial purposes (source: GfK Hungary website).

A survey about the perceived threats to security (Lengyel and Vicsek, 2004), although did not ask on privacy specifically, showed that the types of worries privacy should belong to are perceived as only minor threats to everyday security. Data are abundant on Internet use and attitudes about the Internet. These again show that the majority of Hungarians – even non-users of the Internet – have positive views towards and trust in this new medium.

A public opinion poll about the police (Gallup, 2002; source: [web.b-m.hu/belugy/hir2002.nsf/262067e6e5c6411dc1256b380073fc29/4c6fa4c363389281c1256cb4003e5659?OpenDocument](http://web.b-m.hu/belugy/hir2002.nsf/262067e6e5c6411dc1256b380073fc29/4c6fa4c363389281c1256cb4003e5659?OpenDocument)) showed that Hungarian citizens in general had more positive than negative attitudes about the police. Based on their experiences the majority of them was pleased with how policemen and -women did their jobs – despite the fact that the majority got into contact with the police as a controlling higher authority (e.g. identification, smaller traffic violations, etc.), and only a few percent contacted policepersons as people able to provide help. Even those who had negative attitudes complained mainly about indecision and lack of effectiveness on the part of the police, and to a lesser – but still considerable – extent about corruption.

Other polls by Tárki Social Research Inc. ([www.tarki.hu/adatbank-h/kutjel/pdf/a537.pdf](http://www.tarki.hu/adatbank-h/kutjel/pdf/a537.pdf)) revealed a different 'interpretation' of privacy. Attitudes about tax evasion were compared between Eastern European countries. Hungarians were the most frequent to agree that hiding tax-related information from authorities is a 'forgivable' (though not 'commendable') act, because taxes are too high (Hungary: 42%, Poland: 30%, Czech Rep.: 18%).

At the same time, the occasional hiding of party preferences in public opinion polls and the general distrust in and cynicism about the socio-political system reflect a different pattern of thought – an ambivalence that was ruminated upon in Section 1.2.

Thus, public opinion polls do not give us a comprehensive picture about Hungarian public thought related to privacy. Reasons for this can be that (a) Hungary is a new

democracy, and more sophisticated values of democracies like privacy need more time to take root than other, more practical values (like freedom of travel, freedom of enterprise etc); (b) the political socialisation of many Hungarians was shaped by the late Communist era when privacy was not even a topic in public speech – this could have resulted in a lower level of privacy-awareness in Hungarians (both as violators of privacy and victims of privacy violations); (c) although Hungarians value privacy, they have other concerns preceding this issue on their priority list (like financial problems, prospects of unemployment, the crime rate etc); (d) institutions or organisations related to privacy in Hungary have so far lacked the interest (e.g. the government) or the money (e.g. civil organisations) to order surveys on the topic.

There are actually some civil organisations pioneering privacy in Hungary (e.g. [www.bigbrotherawards.hu](http://www.bigbrotherawards.hu), [www.tasz.hu](http://www.tasz.hu) – the latter also available in English), but – as one would expect anyway – information provided at their webpages are petitions and articles rather than research data.

The hypotheses above can receive some support if we consider other sources regarding privacy as well. According to the news collection at the PCDP-website a number of privacy-related news items regularly appear in the Hungarian media (averaging roughly one a day, and the collection is not claimed to be complete or representative by the compilers). The number of complaints and reports to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Data Protection and the Freedom of Information has been increasing at about a rate of 40-60% for a few years.

The cases include mishandling of personal information by authorities (the police, tax authorities, social welfare institutions), banks and employers; asking for too many personal data in various offices or even at mobile phone companies, etc. According to the PCDP-webpage most privacy violators are cooperative and a lot of violations occur due to ignorance of the law rather than ulterior motives. However, citizens are also 'inactive' (or even 'lazy' as the word used by the previous Commissioner can also imply) in reporting data abuse and privacy violation.

Privacy also is a frequently discussed topic in the media. However, media items are either essays representing the views of the publicist or reports on specific instances of supposed privacy violations which might get attention from the audience. In this case, even more than in that of privacy violation reports (about which we don't know how much and what types of actual violations they cover, etc.) we can not talk about reliable data on public

opinion in Hungary. A detailed content analysis of privacy complaints and media items is beyond the scope of this paper, so let us turn to the conclusions now.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Due to the lack of relevant and directly privacy-related data (although having some that are related to privacy in more indirect ways) this paper ends with some directions for further possible research rather than definite conclusions.

- (a) What is the current level of privacy-awareness in Hungary? Some data indicate that people value and need privacy, while other indicators show that there is a considerable ignorance and indifference about privacy in Hungary.
- (b) What kind of behavioral strategies exist in contemporary Hungary related to privacy? Can distinct patterns of privacy-related behavior (e.g. activism, ignorance, hiding) be identified, and if yes, what kind of social and psychological (attitude) variables are they linked with?
- (c) If there are ambivalent processes regarding privacy in Hungary (ignorance vs need and sensitivity), then what are the variables that can explain them? Possible candidates are education and income, but age (time of socialisation) and political orientation as well.
- (d) How are opinions about privacy related to the more general social attitudes about the country's socio-political system?

While Hungarian attitudes about privacy seem to bear the mark of the socio-political system that existed before 1989, new patterns also appear to be emerging. Unravelling the interplay between the legacy of the past and the flux of the present, as well as finding prospects for the future shall be an intriguing task for empirical studies yet to come.

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[www.index.hu](http://www.index.hu) = Index is one of the leading Hungarian Internet news portals, containing articles on various topics ranging from politics to sports, and including information technology as well.