

## "The Summer of a Man's Life". Universal and Individual Patterns of Young Adulthood in the Life of Loránt Hegedüs<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

**The purpose of the study.** Social psychologist György Hunyady claims that historians often incorrectly interpret the intentions, attitudes, and character traits of an individual by trying to extrapolate it from his actions. By contrast, historical characters generally attribute their actions to external factors. The impact of the environment on the individual's life path is also emphasized by the most recent psychobiographical research (C.-H. Mayer et al). Starting from this, the study aims to reveal the impact of the challenges of the era and the socio-cultural environment on the decisions of Loránt Hegedüs, a member of the Hungarian multi-positional elite.

**Applied methods.** The study is based on Levinson's theory of psychobiography, and it examines Hegedüs's young adulthood (17-40 years), which corresponds to the season of summer in the human life cycle.

**Outcomes.** This stage in Hegedüs' life brought profound changes in the fields of occupation, marriage, and parental role. However, his "dream" did not come true. Disruptive events that shook society as a whole, including the First World War, the dissolution of the Monarchy, and the revolutions of 1918/1919, significantly hindered the progress of his personal goals. A change occurred in middle adulthood, when, as a result of the unfolding of the counter-revolution, his personal aspirations were able to merge with the prevailing values and expectations of his time. The study supports the effectiveness of the application of psychobiography in the field of history.

**Keywords:** History, Levinson's Theory, Loránt Hegedüs, Psychobiography, Young Adulthood

### Introduction

Historians share with other social scientists the important goal of explaining the behavior of the individual. This ambitious undertaking is connected to the difficulties of uncovering the past in the case of the historian. However, in the past, as in the present, man was embedded in his own environment in many ways (including those characteristic to the era); consequently, it is only worth examining them together. Moreover, not only does the environment affect the individual,

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but the individual also influences his environment.<sup>2</sup> This is especially the case when we talk about an exceptional individual of the era, a historical figure.

Loránt Hegedüs, the focus of this study, had an influence on the one hand on the Hungarian economy where he was a decision-maker (bank president, organizer, and manager of GYOSZ and TÉBE, as minister of finance), and on the other hand, on the intellectual life (science, literature) and society of his time with his 60 studies, 50 books and 2,000 journalistic writings.

Biographies of outstanding personalities are dealt with, among other things<sup>3</sup> by psychobiography,<sup>4</sup> which examines the individual's life in a sociocultural context using both psychological and historical research methods.<sup>5</sup>

### **Research question**

Social psychologist György Hunyady mentions among the pitfalls<sup>6</sup> of historical cognition that when examining the role and actions of historical figures, we usually overestimate their personality characteristics and their inner subjective motives. Moreover, in many cases, we try to explain a person's intentions, attitudes, and character traits based on their actions. However, what is often not taken into account is that the perspectives of the actor and the external observer are different in judging the causes of the actions. While the former traces his actions back to external causes, the observer, in our case the historian, primarily refers to the causes and abilities inherent in the actor. This is what social psychology calls the fundamental attribution error.<sup>7</sup>

Based on the above, this study focuses on an examination of the environment in and its constraints on the individual. More precisely, we are looking for the answer to the question: how did the challenges of the era and the socio-cultural environment influence Loránt Hegedüs's decisions? In addition, we attribute an important role to the circumstance of where the individual is in their life cycle. We examine the so-called young adulthood, which generally begins at the age of 17 and continues to the age of 40, right up to the onset of the midlife crisis.

### **Sources and methods**

The study is basically based on a family chronicle,<sup>8</sup> including a biography describing Hegedüs's life chronologically, which is based on rich and varied primary source material (memoirs, letters, notes, and photo documentation). In addition, we also use published documents (books, newspaper articles). The latter primarily refer to Hegedüs's work, but indirectly also give insight into the era.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Levinson, et al. (1978): 16.

<sup>3</sup> Vonyó, J. (2017)

<sup>4</sup> Bálint, Á. (2012); Kóváry, Z. (2011)

<sup>5</sup> Ponterotto et al. (2015): 3.

<sup>6</sup> Hunyady, Gy. (2002): 436–437.

<sup>7</sup> Hunyady, Gy. (2002): 436–437.

<sup>8</sup> Zsindely, S. (2007)

The study is a qualitative psychobiography, which is partly exploratory and partly descriptive. It discusses the questions of Levinson's theory in a dialogic form, that is, Levinson's description of the appropriate stage of the life path is followed by the analysis of Hegedüs's life events.<sup>9</sup> The study is therefore an interpretation of the individual's life supported by theory and data from sources.<sup>10</sup> The study focuses on the individual in a holistic context.<sup>11</sup>

### **Theoretical background**

In order to explore Hegedüs's biographical data, the study uses psychobiography as an interpretive framework, which allows us to see the person and the world around him from a different perspective than the traditional one. Its aim is to understand the individual and uncover the personal motives behind his public actions. Although psychobiography is located at the intersection of psychology and history, it is still rarely used by historians.<sup>12</sup> The reason for this is that the main criterion of psychobiography is that the analysis is based on a psychological theory.

In order to answer our research question, we use Levinson's theory of psychosocial development. This enables the interpretation of Hegedüs's young adulthood stage within the entire life cycle.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Levinson emphasizes the interconnectedness of the self (psyche, personality, inner world) and the external world (society, culture, institutions, history) and their influence on each other.<sup>14</sup>

One of the key concepts of the theory is the life cycle. This is not the same as "life span" or "life course". The former refers to the period from birth to death but only describes it without understanding it. The latter, on the other hand, focuses on the pattern of the individual's life (which can be revealed through life events and relationships). However, Levinson interpreted life as a process, for which developmental theory offered a suitable perspective. With the term life cycle, he wanted to point out the specific character of the life path, that its sections follow each other in a specific order.

Levinson proved that the life journey from birth to death follows a universal pattern that can have endless cultural and individual variations. The reason for this is that the course of life can be influenced by many things; consequently, there may be alternatives or detours within the life path that speed up or slow down the development process, and in extreme cases, development may stop completely. The process is therefore not a balanced, continuous, changeless flow. On the other hand, the order of the life stages does not vary from person to person. The life stages succeed each other within the life cycle, just like the seasons do in nature. Each has its own

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<sup>9</sup> Edwards, D. (1998)

<sup>10</sup> Runyan, W. (1988)

<sup>11</sup> Elms, A. (1994); Mayer, H-C. (2017)

<sup>12</sup> Bálint, Á. (2014)

<sup>13</sup> Fouché, P.– du Plessis, R.– van Niekerk, R, (2017)

<sup>14</sup> Levinson, D. (1986): 3.

distinctive character. Based on this, young adulthood, which is the focus of this study, can be equated to summer.

Another key concept of Levinson's theory is life structure: the underlying pattern or plan of an individual's life in a given period.<sup>15</sup> The individual must again and again build a structure around himself, within the framework of which he is able to make his "dream" come true. Periods of structure building and structure changing follow each other. During the latter, the individual re-evaluates the current life structure. Levinson does not interpret transitional periods as a crisis, but rather as a challenge.

According to Levinson, the two components of the life structure are the "Dream" and the relationship with the "Mentor". A "Dream" is a person's idea of himself. It gives meaning and purpose to their life. The Dream changes from time to time in the transitional periods, constantly adapting to environmental and personal constraints, and compulsions. A mentor is an older person who facilitates the realization of the "Dream".<sup>16</sup>

### **"Summer of Life"**

Early adulthood is ushered in by a transition between 17 and 22 years of age and ends with the onset of the midlife crisis at the age of 40. Early adulthood is associated with the most dramatic changes in a man's life. This is when he is at his peak in terms of energy, ability, and potential, but the external pressure on him is also at its greatest. His personal goals (the realization of his "Dream") and the social expectations typical of his time are sometimes strongly intertwined, and at other times they contradict each other.

At the beginning of the era – at the peak of his physical and mental strength – he must take his place as a man in the society of adults, and at the end of the development process, when he turns 40, a new era (season) begins in his life. He begins to realize that the "summer of his life" is ending and autumn is approaching. Physical and mental characteristics are relatively stable throughout the period,<sup>17</sup> just as it is true that "summer" is also the most stressful season in a man's life.

### **The transition to early adulthood (ages 17–22)**

For Hegedüs, at the beginning of young adulthood, it was a considerable challenge to take his place in society. His family members, belonging to the multi-positional elite,<sup>18</sup> unwittingly placed high expectations on him. The mother was a memoirist, Jókay Jolán, and the father, Sándor Hegedüs, was a true self-made man who, thanks to his talent and work ethic, had a dizzying career: he was simultaneously an economist, minister of trade, member of parliament,

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<sup>15</sup> Levinson, D. (1986): 5.

<sup>16</sup> Levinson et al. (1978): 91–93., 98–99.

<sup>17</sup> Levinson et al. (1978): 22.

<sup>18</sup> Those who held more than one elite position at the same time. Member of the traditional, economic, intellectual, political etc. elite.

public writer, academic, and the head guardian of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District. The evolution of his career coincided with Loránt's childhood: the career started at the age of 25 in 1872 (which was also when his son was born) and reached its peak with his appointment as minister when Loránt was 17.

Loránt's godfather was the charismatic writer Mór Jókai, who sensed the "Jókai blood" in his godson, so he encouraged him to write poetry and edit newspapers as a small child. In addition, Loránt was given his first name after the main character (Loránd Áronffy) of one of his godfather's novels (*By the Time We Grow Old*). Loránt saw the novel as a kind of destiny book, which could also be related to the family's Reformed religion and belief in predestination. In addition to the father and godfather, there was another academician in the family, the classical philologist István Hegedüs, Loránt's uncle. In addition, Hegedüs attended the same Budapest Reformed High School, as did other recognized and respected male members of the family. All this must have put a lot of pressure on Loránt, who was the oldest boy in the family. Loránt had a younger brother, Sándor (1875–1952), who was a writer, and a younger sister, Rózsika (1881–1949).

The period of transition represents a turning point in the individual's life from the point of view of individuation, that is, the development and maturation of the personality: he is separated from his family and redefines the boundaries between the self and the outside world. At the same time, his image of himself (his "Dream") also changes.

Hegedüs spent the entire summer away from his family for the first time at the age of 17. He began his university studies in Budapest while living in his parents' house (he studied law), then at the age of 20 he continued his studies in Berlin and a year later in London. He rented an apartment in both places with the support of his parents. In Berlin he lived with several people, in London he lived alone. It was then that taking care of oneself and others, such as cooking, first played a role in his life.<sup>19</sup> During these years, Hegedüs became stronger and more independent, but his family was still behind him. but he still had the support of his family.<sup>20</sup>

During his university years, he began to make the "Dream" he had cherished since the age of 7 come true, to become a confectioner and member of parliament by day, and an astronomer by night. As a result of the success he experienced during his studies, he became convinced that if he worked hard, he could become whoever he wanted. He conducted research (won a career prize) and also developed his public speaking, writing, and reasoning skills. He widened his social network. It was then that his scientific approach became problem-oriented and holistic. His professors also played a big role in this, among whom Herbert Spencer became Hegedüs' supporter and mentor. His interest in several different fields was already evident at that time. During his student years, he studied law (in Budapest), economics (in Berlin), and sociology (in London). Hegedüs acquired a broad view of the world by maintaining contact with members of many cultural, social, and/or religious groups different from his own.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hegedüs, L. (1929): 26.

<sup>20</sup> Levinson et al. (1976): 22.

<sup>21</sup> Coser, R. (1975)

By the end of the transition period, Hegedüs was able and willing to follow his father's example through his areas of endeavour. Like Sándor Hegedüs, he also tried to carry out activities useful in the eyes of society. Although he delved into many things, and sociology,<sup>22</sup> which aims to improve society, was closest to him, he nevertheless committed himself to economics. Loránt grew up in parallel with the development of modern Hungary, when his father, a minister in Kálmán Széll's government, gained merit in the development of infrastructure and industry thanks to his knowledge of economics.<sup>23</sup>

### **Entry into the life structure (ages 22–28)**

After the five-year transitional period, Hegedüs entered the young adulthood with definite ideas and made the first serious decisions of his independent life.<sup>24</sup> These extended to all areas that mark one's place in the adult world: marriage, occupation, place of residence, and lifestyle.

At the age of 23 (1895), he was inaugurated as a doctor of jurisprudence and political science with the royal ring at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, where he swore that for the rest of his life, he would "serve the king, science and the country with all his strength".<sup>25</sup> In other words, he publicly committed himself to assuming a social role of responsibility. In addition, science also became permanently decisive in his life.

During and after his studies, Hegedüs travelled throughout Europe and North Africa. In 1897 (at the age of 25), he also visited the United States to study the reasons for Hungarian emigration. These travels further broadened his horizons and supported him in understanding the wider world around him.

In 1896, Hegedüs became administrative aide for the Ministry of Finance for two and a half years, and two years later, at the age of 26, he made progress both in his work and in starting a family. Like his father, he became a member of parliament, as he had dreamed of since childhood. This happened at such a young age that, according to a cartoon, when he entered parliament with his father, the doorman said: "*No children allowed. Leave the little boy outside.*"<sup>26</sup>

Loránt married Margit Navratil in 1898.<sup>27</sup> The deeply religious Hegedüs belonged to the Reformed Church, while his wife belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. However, following one of the expectations of the time - he emphasized the elements that hold the nation together, thus - he was open to religious differences. Moreover, in his writings, he considered service to the nation to be the primary task of the Hungarian churches (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Jewish).

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<sup>22</sup> It was not yet possible to get a doctoral degree in Sociology.

<sup>23</sup> Halkovics, L. (2002): 769–783.

<sup>24</sup> Levinson et al. (1976): 22.

<sup>25</sup> Pesti Napló 1895. October 12., 2-3.

<sup>26</sup> Borsszem Jankó (1898): 3.

<sup>27</sup> At that time, Hegedüs already lived separately from his parents at Andrásy út 77. Cf. Levinson (1976): 22.

In early adulthood, the individual is expected to contribute to the survival of humanity. This includes having and raising children and maintaining marriage and family.<sup>28</sup> Hegedüs' first daughter, Jolán, was born during this period, in 1899 (when Hegedüs was 27 years old). She was followed by two more daughters in 1902 and 1907. Hegedüs fulfilled the duties of a devoted father; partly due to his wife's illness, he assumed an important role in the education of his daughters. In conclusion, Hegedüs invested a lot of energy in his family and work in his 20s.

### **Transition in the 30s (ages 28–33)**

According to Levinson, during the transition of the thirties, the individual gets a "second chance" to create a more satisfying life structure, and most people go through crises.<sup>29</sup> Hegedüs probably asked himself the question, "how to proceed?", yet he did not make any decisions that brought about any serious changes during this period. Both his family life and his work were satisfactory for him. At that time, his second daughter, Margit, was born. All areas of his work (politics, economy, literature, and public life) were equally emphasized in the era.

### **Settling down (33–40 years)**

At this stage, a broader life structure needs to be built and settled for the long term.<sup>30</sup> This presupposes commitment, especially in the areas of family and work. Hegedüs's third daughter, Mária, was born in this period (at the age of 35).

In his work, he concentrated more on the economy. In 1904 he became a university professor of finance. From 1905, he managed the Association of Hungarian Manufacturers in various positions. Because the Liberal Party failed, he was out of parliament for a few years, but he did not give up his political ambitions. His election failure meant a temporary crisis for him, which he tried to solve by writing his first play. Creative writing was a cure for his problems even later. In 1910, he was already a member of parliament again, meaning that after a minor fluctuation, Hegedüs' life continued as he had expected.

His activities made Hegedüs a respected member of Hungarian society at the age of almost 40, but due to his vivid imagination and unceasing desire to do things, he also dreamed of rising even higher on the professional ladder. However, his career did not reach its peak, when Levinson's theory would have expected, but 8 years later. The main reason for this is that the First World War broke out in 1914, after which he was tolerated in the bourgeois democratic system, and then he was an undesirable person under the Soviet Republic.

During the establishment of the counter-revolutionary system, he was appointed minister of finance in one of the most difficult periods, six months after the signing of the Trianon Peace Treaty. This was the zenith of his self-realization.

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<sup>28</sup> Levinson et al. (1978): 22–23.

<sup>29</sup> Levinson et al. (1976): 22.

<sup>30</sup> Levinson et al. (1976): 22.

## Conclusions

In the life of Hegedüs, the "summer" (ages 17-40) brought dramatic changes in terms of general challenges (occupation, marriage, having children), but his "Dream" did not come true in this "season". The events that severely disrupted the fabric of the entire society (the First World War, the dissolution of the Monarchy, and then the revolutions of 1918/1919) significantly hindered him, and during the Soviet Republic made it impossible for him to achieve his personal goals.

He stood out from his peers with his abilities and activity, but the career of his father and godfather put a lot of pressure on Loránt, who always wanted to conform. However, the downside of this was not yet visible. A change occurred (middle adulthood) when his personal goals were brought back into line with the typical values and expectations of his time after the development of the counter-revolution.

Based on the examination of Hegedüs's young adulthood, we can say that psychobiography offers the user a new perspective, more explicit questioning, and inspiration, and also amplifies knowledge about the historical person and his context. However, its most special feature is that it illuminates the human side of the historical figure.

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