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The role of Internet in playing out a violent social conflict in Hungary: the assault on Gay Pride Parade in July 2007

Study based upon work supported by the National Research Foundation under Grant number 2067468

Motivation

On July 6, a Saturday afternoon, I was working at home but unable to concentrate because every 5 minutes I heard the disturbing sound of either a police or ambulance siren – I didn't know which. Around five o'clock, when I went down to the mailbox to retrieve the newspaper, I heard a horrible noise of people whistling and shouting. Looking through the small window of the building's front door, and I saw a mass of running people. Some were skinheads, but the mass included people of various ages and appearances, waving the national tricolor flag or the white and red stripes of the Árpád flag. Some of them were throwing eggs, tomatoes, and – even more dangerous – beer bottles, while chanting anti-gay, anti-semitic, and anti-government slogans. Their wrath was directed at the 12th annual Gay Pride Parade, in which some 2,000 people marched down the streets of Budapest carrying rainbow flags. The police were in full force, separating the two groups and occasionally apprehending some of the more aggressive counter-demonstrators.

The next morning, radio newscasters reported that during the night, after the police had left the parade area, skinheads attacked small groups of gays leaving the area. Nearly a dozen were assaulted in the dark parks and small streets in the area where parade participants held a post-demonstration party. Reporters noted that the organizers of the demonstration were more or less expecting something like this, which is why they had heavy police security. In previous years, right-wing extremists had threatened the marchers, but until now, the number that turned out was small, and a strong police presence limited their actions to heckling. This year, threats of assault were issued prior to the parade on certain far right internet sites. The crudest of these is the extremist www.kuruc.info, a site edited mainly in Hungary but hosted by a server in the United States in order to avoid interference or censorship by Hungarian authorities.

These events compelled us to modify the original subject of our presentation. Instead of analyzing the internet's role in promoting social peace during the election campaign period, we chose a topical case study: the role of the internet in the conflict between the gay minority and the extreme right forces in July of 2007 in Hungary. However, the part played by the internet in instigating and inflaming the conflict cannot be separated from the reality of the crisis or other mass media. While the conflicts, as played out on the internet, were only virtual, they were realized on the streets. Thus, like other media, the internet must be seen as a material force with real consequences. We should add that in the course of the analysis, we learned more about the problem than we expected.

Our main questions were as follows:

- What were/are the open and hidden characteristics of the relationship of the

¹ The flag with red-white stripes originally belonged to the first Hungarian kings' family, the House of Árpád, but the Hungarian Fascist party chose this flag as the basis for its flag during WWII. Since then this flag has had a negative connotation for many in Hungary, and particularly for Hungarians of Jewish origin. It is not by chance that the extreme right wing nationalists and skinheads chose this flag for their symbol

gay minority and the heterosexual majority in Hungarian society? Was an open and violent conflict to be expected?

- Who were the main players in the conflict and what was/is the relationship among the different social and political actors in gay issues? Who could be mobilized and in whose interest was the conflict? Who stood to gain from a violent conflict?
- What were the peculiarities, if any, of the Gay Parade of 2007?
- And finally, our culminating questions, what was the role of the internet in the conflict?

The basis: The real world

1. For many people, the violent assault on the participants of the Gay Pride Parade² was unexpected and shocking. Others, however, raised the question of whether such a response was not to be expected. In the context of Hungarian society, what is the perception of gay issues, and of the role of violence in resolving social conflicts? How did a demonstration of gay pride become a spark that ignited an explosive violence?

It must be stated unequivocally: *The gay issue as a political item was not on public agenda in Hungary in 2007. It was not a visible issue in either the mass media or in other forms of public discussion.* Occasionally, a late-night radio or television program broached gay issues, and once in a while, the press printed an article on the annual gay parades. In 2003, the Constitutional Court offended some citizens when it set the same age (14 years old) for consensual *homosexual* as well as heterosexual relations. In general, Hungarians think that sexual issues, regardless of whether they are hetero – or homosexual, belong to the private sphere. Homosexuality is a particularly taboo issue for the public at large in Hungary. Indeed, one of the main aims of queer organizations and those civil organizations supporting them is precisely that of forcing gay issues into the public sphere, to make them topics of public discourse, in order to change public attitudes.

During the past twenty years, the Hungarian people were rarely asked their opinion on homosexuality. However, some studies do exist. Data generated by the Median Public Opinion and Market Research Institute³ shows a slight lessening of negative attitudes between 1997 and 2003:

<i>Opinions on homosexuality</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>2003</i>
It is a <i>sin</i> against society	4,0%	3,5%
It is an <i>illness</i>	38,6%	34,3%
It is a <i>deviation</i> from the social norms	17,8%	14,1%
It is a <i>private issue</i> of the individuals	20,4%	29,8%
It is a <i>basic human right</i> to chose a partner of the same gender	10,3%	10,5%

During the last few years, public opinion research connected to gay issues turned to new questions. In part, the attention was spurred by the coming out of two politicians -- in 2005, Klára Ungár, a member of the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats, and in 2007, Gábor Szetey, a Socialist and State Secretary of the Prime Minister's office. The main questions

² According to some specialists the direct mirror translation of the *Pride* word itself contributes to the conflict of the heterosexual majority and homosexual minority. The majority of the people cannot understand, and are even irritated by the concept of a homosexual person being be proud (in Hungarian: "büszke") of his sexual orientation, particularly when this is not applicable to the heterosexual. Following the coming out of a Hungarian politician, many coming outs appeared in reader's letters to the newspapers and Internet forums by heterosexuals, declaring themselves proud to be straight.

³ <http://www.median.hu/object.893a4438-c74b-4a32-9f9a-eca01a7e5425.ivy>

have been whether sexual orientation is a private issue, whether the state should regulate gay life, and whether sexual orientation should be a political issue. Although there has been only slight change in the acceptance of the homosexuality, the coming out of politicians has *polarized* opinions: In 2005, 29 percent of respondents thought that the state should regulate and place limits on homosexual life. In 2007, 34 percent agreed with this statement. On the other hand, however, in 2005, 23 percent of respondents accepted the notion of gay marriage, while in 2007, this figure rose to 30 percent. The main indicators for opinion regarding gays is educational and age. The better educated and the young are more ready to accept gay equality.

The question of coming out was first asked in 2007. Public opinion slightly differed in reference to common people versus politicians: In regard to common people, 47 percent of respondents believed that they should be open about their sexual orientations, while 38 percent believed they should keep the matter confidential. In regard to politicians, 44 percent believed they should be open about their orientation, while 45 percent believed they should remain in the closet. For 38 percent of respondents, it would be acceptable to support a politician who shared the same political opinion but was also homosexual.⁴ Divorce and adultery were more acceptable than homosexuality for the majority, while drug use was less acceptable.

Erasing prejudice requires a long time and great effort. It involves education as well as experience interacting with gays. Public opinion data show that those who are personally acquainted with gay people have more positive opinions than those who do not know any homosexuals. Because of the taboo character of the issue, however, introducing it into the school curriculum offends the majority. *It is this silent majority, incidentally, which the more active – and aggressive – right wing actors claim are backing them.*

2. On the one hand, the judgment of homosexuality as a private issue can be considered a sign of tolerance. On the other hand, however, it can be seen as a refusal to acknowledge the real problems faced by gays as a minority group. What appears to be tolerance may mean that for the heterosexual majority, the existing situation is satisfactory: in the bedroom one can do whatever one wants and there is no need of any change. Homosexual individuals see the situation differently. Excluded from the public sphere, they want representation as a viable minority group, and therefore, they fight against their perceived disadvantageous situation as objects of discrimination.

There are serious limits, however, to the visibility of a group which the majority considers small, marginal, and for many, even deviant. According to many heterosexuals in Hungary, the gay population is not viable as a recognized minority group. Indeed, many homosexuals believe it is better to conceal their sexual orientation because of the prejudice of the majority. International data suggests that the population of queer Hungarians (including homosexual, bisexual, transvestite, and transsexual) is between 5 and 10 percent, which would mean between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people. Gay parades, however, draw no more than 2,000 to 3,000 participants, including heterosexual sympathizers and supportive family members. The leaders of various pressure groups complain that they cannot advocate on behalf of gays, because they are afraid of conflict with friends, family, employers and the administration if they were to reveal themselves as supporters. A public opinion poll by the Hungarian Social Research Institute, *Tarki*, showed that while in the Czech Republic 43 percent, in Slovakia 30 percent, in Poland 14 percent, in Hungary only 8 percent of respondents said that they have a gay acquaintance⁵. By concealing their sexual orientation, gays limit the possibility of recognition by potential supporters as an oppressed group. Thus,

⁴ <http://www.median.hu/object.893a4438-c74b-4a32-9f9a-eca01a7e5425.ivy>

⁵ Cited in: <http://www.hirszerzo.hu/cikk.39449.html>

they are unable to form a strong lobby or pressure group, and ultimately, to be accepted as a community. (There are more than 10 different Hungarian queer organizations represented on the internet, not including regional organizations.)

Many members of the heterosexual majority in Hungary dislike the Gay Pride Parades. They feel uncomfortable watching overtly gay individuals, particularly when they are engaged in public demonstrations of sexual behavior. Radical gay activists directly state that one of the main aims of the parades is to break this taboo. Certainly, there are those in the gay minority whose actions are designed expressly to shock the majority, to subvert the accepted norms at least once a year, and to enjoy their discomfort. There are, however, different opinions about the character and aims of the parades among both heterosexual and homosexual groups. Is such an in-your-face political demonstration necessary for gay rights? Is it necessary to demonstrate sexual differences? Should they march in a such manner as to show that they are just like the majority, only with a different sexual orientation? Is the parade a carnival, a festival, a freak show, or what? What should be the message of the parade? *In any case, the parade does increase the social visibility of gays in Hungary. It is a community-building ritual, and perhaps it can increase the political power of gay organizations. >From this perspective, the risk of negative reactions may be worth taking, i.e., any publicity is good publicity. The minor, non-violent protests against the previous Gay Pride Parades undoubtedly increased their news value for the mass media.*

3. During the last ten years, the main forms of negative discrimination towards homosexuals have been removed from Hungarian laws⁶ in harmony with the requirements of European Union. However, homosexuality is not recognized among the official special interest minorities (ethnic, religious, and national), and this is painful point for gays. This year, gay activists felt it was time to demand the right to marry, to have a family, to adopt and raise children as the constitutional “right to happiness.” The slogan of the Gay Pride Parade this year was the oath of the newly married heterosexual: “Till death do us part.” Arguing that marriage and children are fundamental human rights, they consider themselves discriminated against by the heterosexual majority, not only directly, but indirectly as well, given that married couples have many social, as well legal and financial, advantages. These demands were dramatically put on the agenda of the 2007 parade, and this undoubtedly antagonized many people, particularly those supporting traditional Christian values and the heterosexual family, as well as those who worry about the possible effects of homosexual parents on the sexual orientation of their own or adopted children.

According to ILGA-Europe’s Eurobarometer, Hungarians are among the most traditional peoples in Europe with regard to gay rights. They are similar to the peoples in countries such as Malta, Lithuania, Slovakia, Estonia, and Poland⁷. The peculiarities of the country do not seem to provide a favourable environment for a radical and immediate change of the situation. The leaders of Hungarian gay activism, however, aim to move the country to the frontline of gay rights. Their points of reference are Holland, Spain, and Belgium (and the United States). They argue that guaranteeing gay rights is the precondition of true democracy and social progress. However, it must be stated that liberal democracy is not universally accepted among Hungarians. the liberal form of democracy is questionable for many people

⁶ From the year 1961 the homosexual relationship between two adult people is not a criminal act in Hungary, in 1995 The Constitutional court declared, that partners of the same sex can form partnership in life. In 2004 the age distinction of the freedom of the sexual relationship of the hetero - and homosexual pairs was unified at 14 years. A new act is on the way of discussion - the new civil cod - would not make any differences between the different sexes connected the form of living together in civil partnership, or domestic partnership, however it would contain less rights than the heterosexual marriage.

⁷ *Figyelő*, 2-8. August 2007. p. 23.

in the Hungarian majority. In addition, the political changes that swept Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, coupled with globalization, have resulted in a general crisis in values, often manifested in confusion, unease, and disquiet. For this reason, questioning sexual roles and gender identity, claiming that there are not (or need not be) differences between men and women, seems too much for many people. Finally, a Hungarian socio-historical-cultural peculiarity (fuelled by conservative politicians and followed by almost half of the population) is anxiety about the demise of the Hungarian population and fear of losing “Hungarianness” or even the tragic disappearance of the Hungarian nation altogether. Arguments about gay issues must be viewed within the context of these social complexities, which intensify the challenges enormously.

4. The tacit, passive discriminatory attitude and negligence of the Hungarian as opposed to the radicalism of gay leaders offer politicians on different sides of the political palette an opportunity, a *playground*, to exploit for their political aims. For many people, especially Christians, gay rights are framed as moral issues with a strong emotional component. And when the issue of gay rights is picked up by political forces, its moral character promises the intensive involvement of the larger public.

The political division of the nation into two factions, a social liberal and a national conservative, puts all questions, including the homosexual one, in a politically factionalised framework. One cannot say that everyone on the left and/or liberal side supports the equality of homosexuals, nor that on the right side everyone is homophobic. However, liberals are labelled by the extreme right as socialists in alliance with queers. On the other side of the coin, the right wing is labelled by liberals as homophobic, neo-fascist, and dictatorial. The threats shouted at the queers at the Gay Pride Parade were explicitly mixed with threats to the left/liberal side of the political palette, the governing coalition.

These sharply contrasting views have been exploited and mobilized by two radical extremes: liberals of the Youth Organization of the Alliance of Free Democrats (the so-called “New Generation”), and the extreme right, nationalist, and moralistic Jobbik (*Betters* – “For a Better Hungary”). The gay issue offered both groups an opportunity to position themselves as active, strong, and viable political actors, and gave scope to their ability to dominate the political scene. As young actors, they have nothing to lose, they are unwilling to compromise, they have little previous political experience, and neither group recognizes the importance of tolerance.

*The liberal youth organization backs the radical demands of gay leaders without compromise, and tries to pressure its “adult” organization, the Alliance of Free Democrats, to enact legislation guaranteeing the rights of gay people*⁸.

Jobbik is a new political formation, discontent with the politics of the major rightwing party, *Fidesz*, which has been in the opposition during the last two election cycles. *Jobbik*’s members consider themselves the “clean, innocent generation,” i.e., the post-1989 generation. However, *Jobbik* failed to reach 0.5 percent of the vote in the 2006 elections. Nevertheless, they consider themselves representatives of the “Hungarian majority” and seek to defend it against Jews, Roma, and other “destructive” minorities. Based on their vision of a “healthy Hungarian society,” “for the self-defence of the majority”⁹. They called for acting out against gays, and especially the liberals backing them, in order to protect the traditional values of

⁸ The “New Generation” - according to their homepage <http://www.ujgeneracio.hu/index.php?v=1> add to the issues of the Alliance of Free Democrats: gay rights, decriminalization of drug use, women rights– first of all rights to abortion, and the freedom of eGeneration – first and foremost against the regulation of the Internet

⁹ In July 2007 the declared the establishment of the “Hungarian Guards”, a half military body of “national self-defense” which aroused concern of different political forces and minority organizations in Hungary and outside the country. The political protest cannot, however, hamper the establishment of the body, because the Hungarian constitution and the laws don’t prohibit this

nation, Christianity, families, and children. As “conservative revolutionists,” they have no qualms about acting in concert with other “street fighters” – neo-fascists, skinheads, and football hooligans. Jobbik claims the liberals mobilize and exploit the gay minority to further their political aims, and they see the New Generation as their primary opponent.

The two main parties with mass support, the *Socialists* on the left and *Fidesz* on the right, are much more measured in their declarations concerning gay issues, given the diversity of their supporters. The governing Socialists, together with their liberal coalition partners, the Alliance of Free Democrats, make occasional promises and positive gestures toward the gay minority, but ultimately, they claim there are political limits to achieving equality. The conservative *Fidesz* has chosen the tactic of silence, especially when its ally, the Christian Democrats, protest against gay activities and attempt to force the issue back into the private sphere. *Fidesz*’s other tactic, as the major opposition party, is to blame everything on the government. The Socialists made a dramatic gesture when they supported Szetey’s coming out at the opening ceremony of the Gay Festival in July 2007. *Fidesz* qualified the governing coalition’s acceptance of Szetey’s orientation as an attempt to divert attention from other, more important political problems.

5. One final factor must be taken into account in assessing the background to the turbulence surrounding this summer’s Gay Pride Parade. The country has experienced a great deal of political tension as a consequence of the political crisis following the 2006 elections. The opposition has attempted to resolve political problems on the street, outside of Parliament, where they are in a minority, albeit by a slim margin. The tension has been heightened by the government’s efforts to reform the system of public services and welfare, as demanded by the EU to reduce the state deficit. Such changes mean a decrease in the living standard and social security for the majority of Hungarians¹⁰. This social tension exploded several times in riots on the Budapest streets during the last year, and the potential for further violence could easily be exploited by Jobbik and its allies. The tense atmosphere seems to have given a certain moral backing to other extreme groups¹¹, chiefly football hooligans looking for a confrontation with police. Their favorite scapegoats for all social ills are the *foreigner, the Jew, the Gypsy, and the fag*, terms which they use indiscriminately as obscenities during football matches¹². The Gay Pride Parade finally allowed them to locate one of the objects of their abuse, although the term “fag” has been so overused that they resorted to other terms of derision.

6. While taking minority sensibilities into account¹³, it must be acknowledged that some gays contribute to the gulf, in that the more radical and visible leaders, backed by the

¹⁰ An excuse for the non conventional form of politicizing was the publicizing of a sound record made on a closed meeting of the Socialist Party in government. On this sound record it was to be heard the prime minister, who, arguing for radical reforms, for rhetorical reasons directly accused his own party and himself not to do anything during the previous election period, and lying about the results during the election campaign. Once leaked, the opposition picked up, and capitalized for its aim to mobilize the people against the government

¹¹ This could be felt in October 2007, when the mass of street demonstrators went to the building of Hungarian Television, some extreme groups fired cars, attacked and break into the building, destroyed and robbed, and the huge mass of people was standing and watching all this on the square.

¹² Foldesiné, Szabo Gy.: Faji előítélet és idegengyűlölet a magyar labdarúgó-stadionokban (Racism and hatred of aliens in the Hungarian football stadiums.) Kalokagathia, 1997. No. 1-2.
http://www.hupe.hu/info/kg/cikkek/1997_1-2.pdf

¹³ To characterize this sensibility I would cite a short part from a blog of a very nice and clever, and Christian gay man. He felt discriminated, because he went with his partner to a restaurant to have dinner. The dinner and service was ok, but at the end the waiter asked: “May I make up one bill, or will you pay separately?” He painfully mention in his blog: “If I would be there with a women, nobody would ask, whether we want to pay separately. And why does the girl selling roses never come to our table? I like to buy flowers for my partner too.”

Youth Organization and certain civil associations, reject such values and strategies as patience, tolerance, and incremental change. They demand immediate equality and a value-neutral approach to the relevant legal framework, without giving due consideration to deeply-rooted sentiments among the majority¹⁴. Although legislation in advance of its time can play an active role in reforming public attitude and modifying behavior, such political action can never be totally detached from public opinion. Legislators need the support of the masses to be reelected. *Public opinion and prejudice can be changed only through long periods of enlightenment and information, finding a common basis of social values on both sides and the elimination of mutual fears.* All this raises questions regarding how members of the minority communicate the issues they face and the remedies they seek to the larger public. In other words, is the Gay Pride Parade an appropriate and adequate form of communication with the majority, a medium that is likely to result in the resolution of the gays' problems?

If it is true that mutual awareness results in mutual understanding, much more information, of a diverse nature, is needed in order for straight and gay people to accept and trust one another. However, information is not enough. Common values that unify the two groups must be identified and used as an umbrella under which people of different sexual orientations can be brought together¹⁵.

7. Finally, the events were influenced, or even instigated, by one other factor, and that is the internet. In the age of the internet, information flows without limits of time or space. Legal restrictions on freedom of speech vary in different countries, based on their socio-cultural, historical, and political experiences. The internet allows national regulations to be circumvented. An example of this was the closing down of the <http://kurucinfo.hu> website in Hungary due to its extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, anti-Roma, and fascist content. As mentioned above, the site continues to exist as <http://kuruc.info>, located on a U.S. server and supported by Hungarian extremists living both here and abroad. because it moved to a server in the United States server and is supported by the Hungarian extreme right wing groups living here and there. It is considered, that this site inflamed, mobilized, and organized various groups opposing the visibility and acceptance of gays¹⁶.

Mass media and the gay issue

Several studies have dealt with the visibility of gays and gay issues in the Hungarian media. Judit Takács systematically analysed the content of the liberal weekly news magazine, *HVG*¹⁷, from 1993 to 2000. The subject of homosexuality appeared in the following columns, listed on the basis of the frequency of appearance: foreign affairs, society, and culture; science and culture; Hungarian domestic and foreign political issues; news, opinions, and readers' letters. When homosexuality was not the main subject of the article, the main themes were, in rank order: churches, religion; culture, advertising, fashion; legal regulation; foreign and domestic politics; criminality; science, minorities, AIDS, the Holocaust, sexuality, national security, etc. {Ildiko: check the punctuation in both of the lists above. They can't be

¹⁴ For example they insist on the wording "marriage" demanding change in the legal regulation instead of "civil partnership" or whatever, with the same rights because this could symbolize in a spectacular way the total equality of the hetero- and homosexuals pairs.

¹⁵ This is difficult to achieve. For example a group of gay people with conservative views wanted to form a "Gay civic circle". The "civic circles" were initiated and organized by the conservative Fidesz, as a network of supporters of the Party. Their intention to join the circles of supporters remained without feedback

¹⁶ The authors do not share unambiguously this opinion. Undoubtedly the site is very irritating, its style is extremely vulgar, boorish, and full of hate against different minorities – but its effect on Hungarian society would be neglectable without a receptive, transmitting audience.

¹⁷ Judit Takács: Homoszexualitás és társadalom. (Homosexuality and society)
<http://www.policy.hu/takacs/books/isbn9639494577/ht-4.html#hvg>

right, particularly the second one. Here's the relevant rule: Use a semicolon between items in a list if any of the items contain commas.}

Takács found that the main frames surrounding gay issues in Hungary were politics, religion, the family and children. The issue of discrimination arose in connection to politics when certain right-wing groups refused to allow gays to participate, to religion when the Catholic Church rejected the policy of ministering to gays, and to the family when questions arose regarding the artificial insemination of lesbians. In nearly half the articles, homosexuality was mentioned in a positive context, while in the other half in a negative context. 45 percent of the articles presented gay issues connected to Hungary, and 20 percent of these articles raised the possibility that gays be allowed to represent themselves as an official minority group. Some articles provided a forum for the leaders of gay organizations, while others informed readers about entertainment of special interest to gays. As revealed by Takács's study, the press's approach to gay issues seems to be one of holding gays at arm's length: Write about them, but as something distant, abstract, and foreign – not as actual individuals living with and among the rest of the population.

Gay issues are not in the forefront of public attention in Hungary. They rarely appear in newspapers, radio, or television, apart from the annual parade. The public service channels do feel obliged to cover events that have political import, such as coming out of the State Secretary Szetey, and then to frame the story as political news. For strategic reasons, the organizers of the gay parade register their demonstration with the police as a *political* action. This category not only provides more security than would a cultural or other type of demonstration; it also increases the chances of news coverage. MTV1, the main public television station, led its coverage of the parade with these words: "There was no need to disperse the anti-demonstrators, the Gay Parade arrived at its destination.¹⁸" The story emphasized the role of the police in maintaining order, and included an interview with the main organizer of the event¹⁹.

The commercial television channels report on gay issues based either on their commercial "news value" or on their entertainment capacity. (In the case of the parade, the event's colorfulness was emphasized by TV2, owned by the Munich-based Pro Sieben Sat.1, and its scandalousness by Bertelsmann's RTL Klub.) This means that the gay community has to create dramatic, spectacular events in order to gain visibility. This is not, however, always in harmony with their rational, political aims of achieving fundamental human rights. The demands of the media result in the trivializing and tabloidization of gay politics. While antics designed to attract screaming headlines may promote their visibility, it also creates a negative image of gays as exhibitionists and clowns, not political actors to be taken seriously.

Given the scant, often shrill media coverage, the public receives only a sketchy, deformed picture of the queer community. The mass media prefer the extravagant, the spectacular, the colorful, the extraordinary, and the sensational, but it is questionable as to whether this kind of information promotes mutual understanding and respect. Gays express frustration about the contradiction²⁰: On the one hand, they must try to make the Gay Pride Parade attractive to the media by breaking sexual taboos and presenting a carnivalesque scene meant to offend the sensibilities of many of their fellow citizens. On the other hand, they complain that the mass media ignore the masses of people marching in ordinary dress, perhaps holding hands with their partners, in favor of transvestites in provocative dress and those who are "shaking their asses" in explicit displays of their sexual orientation.

¹⁸ To the venue, where the after-party took place.

¹⁹ The organizer emphasized that the event's aim is to open the eyes of the comfort-loving majority to the fact that the gay people are treated as second rate citizens.

²⁰ The issue was widely discussed on the gay Internet forums, for example on the site www.pride.hu.

Framing the gay parade and gay issues in the Hungarian mass media:

In relation to the subject of our study, the gay events in July 2007, the Political Capital Institute analysed articles covering the gay parade and gay issues in various Hungarian leading newspapers and popular internet news sites²¹. These forums interpreted the gay parade as a political act, and consequently, they differed according to their political orientation. The analysis provided only a rough outline of the arguments for or against gay rights, and did not consider the dramatic or moralizing overtone of the discourse.

According to the analysis, the structure of the main arguments in the mass media and the framing the gay parade and gay issues were as follows:

	Arguments most frequently used	
<i>Subject</i>	<i>Supporting</i>	<i>Against</i>
Issues of homosexuality	public issue	private issue
Situation of homosexuals	discriminated	deviants, provocations
Aim of the Gay Parade	visibility, fight for legal emancipation	distraction of attention from the factual political issues
Responsible for the atrocities	radicals, politicians supporting radicals, police	radicals, provocateurs, parties in government, exploiting the gay issue for their aims, police

Based on the above, one can deduce that traditional communication channels present limited opportunities for straight and gay people to reach mutual understanding. The main reasons are the relative invisibility of this small minority, the taboo character of homosexuality, and the exigencies of the mass media. For those whose sole source of information is the mass media, the gay parade remains a colorful but minor event that politicians attempt to exploit, while gays themselves remain strange, exotic, and a little dangerous.

The issue of the Budapest Gay Pride Parade 2007 in the virtual world

The reason we turned our attention to the internet in our research was that several radical internet sites took an active part in the organization of the anti-queer protest. This information became clear from the conventional mass media, as the press and broadcast stations relayed information gleaned from the internet. This common practice means that for better or worse, the effects of information that originally appears on websites is often multiplied. We ourselves became acquainted with the extreme right-wing site, www.kuruc.info, via a traditional medium, the Népszabadság newspaper.

Although we carefully examined all of the internet sites connected to the Gay Pride Parade counter-demonstrations, we do not intend to provide a comprehensive analysis of their content. We have limited our efforts to the examination of certain communication peculiarities on the internet, mainly related to discussion forums where the conflict was directly addressed. We also examined YouTube. Our purpose was to explore the question of whether and how these communication forms reconfigure the communication process, whether they increase or decrease the tension between the conflicting sides, and whether or not they contribute to mutual understanding. The results, however, can be considered as a

²¹ http://www.hirszerzo.hu/cikk.meleg-kerdes_maganugybol_politikai_ugy.39915.html The Political Capital Institute (Political Capital Policy Research & Consulting Institute (Political Capital)) offers services to political and economic decision-makers and analysts. <http://www.politicalcapital.hu/aboutus.html>

hypothesis. Limitations of time and space did not allow for a detailed verification.

The first part of the study may seem too long from the point of view of the main subject of the study. It is clear, however, that the Internet is an organic part of the real world: at least part of the content of the virtual world is constructed directly from the real world, it can not be understood without being familiar with the contexts, and in our case we were interested in its reactivity to the real world. Of course the question remains as to whether the internet site of a given organization can be considered mainly as an additional mean to realize the aims of that existing organization in the “real world”, or should we have to consider its role independently, on its own rights, on the basis of the communication peculiarities it adds to the capacity of the factual organization.²²

The website, we are most interested in has no existence apart from the internet, no equivalent in the traditional public space. This site is www.kuruc.info. It is worth noting once more that its previous variant was banned in Hungary. Those Hungarian citizens maintaining the site and providing its content are forced to conceal their identity because the unlawfulness of their activity²³. We are also concerned with minority forums on the internet. Without this means of communication, the queer community would be much less viable. It is not only quantitative factors that limit the visibility of gays in traditional forums, but also the need felt by many people to conceal their orientation. The internet plays a vital role in the community life of this minority. It offers a safe playing ground and communication forum for those who prefer to remain anonymous, in many cases even from those of the same orientation. An additional advantage of the internet is that it also provides a forum for displaying the existence and functions of foreign gay organizations²⁴. Situated in more positive environments, such organizations can stand as models, inspire, and even lend prestige to Hungarian associations. A limitation of such forums, however, is that they have dual objectives, which sometimes conflict. On the one hand, communication is internal, oriented toward the community itself. Its primary aim is to strengthen the community’s identity and cohesion. On the other hand, communication must be oriented toward the external majority. The emancipation of a minority is not possible without its acceptance by the society at large. These two kinds of communication require different skills, media personalities, tactics, and strategies²⁵.

In an attempt to discover the leading motives for the organization of the Gay Pride Parade, as well as the reaction of gay groups to the events as they played out, we began by

²² Of course, this is an oversimplifying of the situation: The “real” here is opposed to the “virtual” - the Internet exists in the real world too. And there are organizations, which exist mainly in the virtual space - certain news sites, which are not Internet variants of publications in the “real world”.

²³ It was revealed in the news on August 22, 2007, that the Hungarian prime minister turned to the Minister of Justice and asked him to examine the constitutional possibilities of what kind of measures, if necessary on an international level, could be taken against the [kuruc.info](http://www.kuruc.info), site as it has no regard for the basic values of the Hungarian Republic or privacy, and express and arouse hatred against minorities, communities, groups of people, as well as distributing defamatory and insulting contents. <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20070823-gyurcsany-utasitotta-a-takacs-albertet-a-kurucinfo-elleni-fellepesre.html>.

It has to be mentioned, that that the Hungarian civil society fight back as well, although using the same unlawful means (connected to the privacy), hosted on an other American server, but opposing to the www.kuruc.info on the address <http://igazkurucoldal.blogspot.com/>. The editors of this site investigated and published the names and activity of the www.kuruc.info on the <http://kurucwanted.blogspot.com/>. They identify themselves as anti-fascists.

²⁴ On the main Hungarian gay site, the pride.hu visitors can see pictures from Gay Pride Parades in Vienna and Sydney.

²⁵ Hungarian sociologists and communication experts (both homosexual and heterosexual) discussed the problem of the relationship of the visibility and the Gay Parade in its present form in Hungary. They agreed that although it is contradictory, they could not advise any other more appropriate form. <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20070626rozsaszin.html>

examining the main gay internet site in Hungary – www.pride.hu²⁶ This site contains a wealth of information concerning gay individuals, issues, and communities. Thus, such sites are useful forums in a society where gays experience a profound sense of invisibility. Even those straight people who have gay acquaintances avoid discussing problems and experiences related to their sexual orientation. This misguided apprehension limits interaction and the achievement of deeper mutual understanding, and well-designed websites can play a vital role in informing the public and shaping public opinion in a positive direction²⁷.

Again, it is plain that the internet is a very useful mean for minorities which do not reach the threshold of the traditional public sphere. The analysis of the gay internet sites helps the outsiders to understand better this minority, but helps to go beyond this commonplace. In a strange way, direct contacts with this minority can result in further misunderstanding as well. The long period of hidden or open aversion and the lack of communication between the gay minority and the straight majority resulted in fundamental lack of trust.²⁸ It seems that the Hungarian queer or gay community is in the phase of forming, identity searching, the communication is directed inside the community, (and to the hidden yet potential members) and their aim is emphasize their “otherness”.

It does seem significant, and this applies to all minorities, marginal and extreme groups, that they would be far more insignificant without the internet. These groups would be almost invisible on the traditional forums but due to their activism and to their presence on the internet the mass media occasionally covers them (especially in quiet news seasons), and the publicity increases their respect and popularity among their members or would be members.²⁹

The internet also offers an easy way for people to network and for otherwise separate, independent groups to coordinate their efforts. Of course, this facility in linking like-minded people can result in the formation of both progressive and destructive virtual communities. Starting from a single site, one can follow hyperlinks to a whole network of radical anti-gay activists and their blogs, and trace the development of the counter-demonstrations designed to

²⁶ Very different opinions can be found on the discussion forums of the main gay site, www.pride.hu, although the loudest voices are the most radical liberal ones and this is certainly not independent from the fact, that the “New Generation” liberal youth organization placed high on their agenda gay rights, and they have some gay members as well. They prefer radical solutions in the minority-majority relationship and communication. There are also other voices, which incline to other political sides, and would prefer different communication style. According to the site’s statistics the number of users is 32 673 (2007, August).

²⁷ It must be said here to be fair and because the authors do not believe that there are totally objective social researches, only more or less balanced and fair methods of research, that the authors constitute a heterosexual pair, who were not particularly interested earlier in gay issues, believed that the sexual behavior is a very private issue, and were averse not only to exhibitionism of Gay Pride Parades, but to all forms of sexual exhibition,. Making this position clear is to help the reader to rectify the inescapable bias.

²⁸ This became obvious upon examining two cases: in one case one queer activist created a topic for the “outsiders” with the good intention to offer a possibility for them to get acquainted with gay people, and to ask questions and receive answers from an authentic source. The topic went into a deadend: first, there were only 1-2 interested outsiders, and the majority of queer participants played pranks, and ridiculed a naïve 18 years old heterosexual girl, who went to the topic and wanted to know more about them, and may be to have a friend. When she understood she was the brunt of a joke she left the forum. In an other case, after the gay parade an other heterosexual outsider under the negative effects of the violence following the Gay Pride Parade with the tag name of “*Peacemaker*” wanted to discuss the problems or marriage and adopting children with the local community. Although *Peacemaker* would be considered among the heterosexuals as liberal and tolerant, some radical gay participants rejected him extremely vulgarly, telling him to leave the topic, and writing that he was worse than those, who attacked them because he supposed that he was tolerant.

²⁹ Many of the radical sites were pleased at the mass publicity because the number of their visitors increased significantly. In addition, the authors do not rule out that the mass publicity contributed to threats becoming a reality. Especially in the case of the football hooligans who took part in the attack of the Gay Parade.

disrupt the Gay Pride Parade.³⁰ Such an exercise demonstrates the difficulty of managing the internet, and its tendency to elude the control of the originators of information. Jobbik, which initiated the anti-gay protests, is a legally organized youth party. As such, its mobilization of supporters advocated only symbolic violence as opposed to brute force³¹. However, Jobbik's call to action was circulated on the websites of more aggressive, ideologically extreme factions. Whether Jobbik accepts it or not, it at least shares moral responsibility for the violence.

Our research revealed that the notion of the internet as a site of rational discussion where the aim is to create consensus is a myth. In the trackless forest of the internet, there are not only large, public sites with masses of visitors, but small, dark networks connected by paths that are well-known to their participants. Beyond the editors of internet site, users of the discussion forums mutually inform their and other communities. They often attach links or copy large chunks of information from other sites or forums. The more active participants crop up repeatedly on related discussion groups, and indeed, they keep track not only of the discourse on sites that support their ideologies, but on oppositional sites as well. This ability to access friendly and hostile sites with equal ease results in contradictory effects. On the one hand, advocates of a given position can become acquainted with opposing arguments and perhaps form a more enlightened opinion. On the other hand, they can use the information they glean in a more technically rational way, to adjust or hone their tactics³². Thus in principle, the internet can create more favorable circumstances for dialogue and the accommodation of other points of view. But it can also distort discourse and raise mutual fear.

In the course of the research it became clear again for the authors, that the approach to the internet as a public sphere of anonym participants, and the place of rational discussion is a myth – not to mention the aim to create consent. In the trackless forest of the internet there are not only big, central public internet sites with mass of visitors, but networks of small domesticated places, sites, connected by paths well-known to the participants, where the actual information is run if needed. Beyond the editors of the Internet sites, the participants of the discussion forums – and the different forums – inform mutually their and the other communities. Often they attach links, or copy large parts from other internet sites or forums. There are participants, who move not only between the discussion topics of one forum, but between the sites – and there is possibility to keep track on not only the friendly but the hostile sites as well. This can result in contradictory effects: on one hand the different sides can get acquainted with the other side's views, to receive a more detailed picture, and perhaps to form a more appropriate tactic or strategy. On the other hand if a view picked up by the other side or outsiders, it can gain significance larger than it would have without this publicity, and this can deform the given part's strategy or tactic. In principle, this can create more favorable circumstances for dialogue, to accommodate to the other's behavior, but it can

³⁰ This happened in the case of the right wing extreme groups, when preparing to attack the Gay Pride Parade in Budapest. One can follow the trace of the circulation of hate information, the relationships of the organizational and "spontaneous" communication on the internet forums. Avoiding any formal responsibility many people could be mobilized and their behaviours instructed. The mass media only supplemented this organizational activity when publishing the purpose of these groups...

³¹ They instructed their members to make photographs of the participants of the Gay Pride Parade with the intention to use them as proof of public indecent exposure at a legal process. Their second intention was to put these photos on the Internet – this would be a form of forced coming out (to bring shame to them). When they learned that a group taken it was illegal for a party, they told to their members to do it as "private persons", like tourists. Indeed, a lot of photos and video can be found on the *YouTube*. Otherwise the court dismissed the action.

³² It seems, however, that the position that mutual acquaintance promotes mutual understanding often remains only a myth, because of the differences in the frames of interpretation, the basic values.

also distort the discourse, and raise mutual fear.

The discussion forums are a strange mixture of public and closed group communication. The participants however often forget that the forums are open, and they are surprised when they encounter an external reference to something they said online – particularly if they believe their post has been misunderstood or misused³³.

The majority of participants in the Hungarian discussion groups somehow know each other and what is more, they often meet face-to-face³⁴. Although they use nicknames online, the majority of these monikers are expressive of their public identity in a compressed form. All of the discussion forums we examined use software that collects and offers for reading all the contributions of individual participants. This function makes it possible to sketch their informative-communicative profile, to interpret adequately their contributions and paths between the different topics.

Every online discussion group includes a core of habitual visitors who dominate, if not monopolize, the conversation. Even when one of these dominant voices changes his or her nickname, group members are apt to recognize his or her presentational style or mode of argument, and guess who it is. In political forums, a particular participant may take it upon himself to lead the discussion. Such “stars” or “professional discussants” spend a surprising amount of time on the forum³⁵, and because of their communicative skills, aggression, or restlessness, they play a far more dominant role than the others in directing the course of the discussion. In other words, despite rhetoric about the democratic nature of the internet, the voices of participants are not equal. Often, the dominant voices overpower new players or those with contrasting opinions, and only a few “old forum dwellers” are ready to fight with them. The style of communication is often vulgar, but this seems to be a special mannerism, similar to the obscenities that pepper the speech of the youth, and the regular participants take it as such. It often seems apparent that discussions are driven by a simple urge to communicate rather than the desire to clarify a point, to achieve consensus, or to persuade others³⁶.

In special cases however, persuasion is an explicit aim although there are no signs on the forum, that anybody persuaded somebody else. It happens that the result appears not in the virtual but in the real world, so it would be hard to prove a successful persuasion exclusively on the basis of analysing the discussion threads.³⁷

In the age of the domination of visual communication the analysis of the effects of the Internet would be incomplete without mentioning a relatively new forum, the YouTube video

³³ There were only 1-2 sporadic notices on the football extremes discussion topic about the possible “fag-beating”, to which the overwhelming majority did not react, moreover, they became concerned about it when it became public. They were surprised, that somebody “else” read it as well, felt, that “this can bring us negative consequences” and attacked the participant, who presented the “off topic” message. Gay forum users are also often surprised, when learning that “outsiders” read their messages as well. To be frank, it happens that some of these messages are not in line with the aims to reduce the majority’s prejudices

³⁴ In her PhD dissertation Ildiko Kaposi arrived to similar outcomes analyzing the discussion forum of one of the largest news site, index. Kaposi I.: Virtual Deliberation: An Ethnography of Online Political Discussion in Hungary. http://www.ceu.hu/polsci/dissertations/Ildiko_Kaposi.doc

³⁵ The reader can find such comments : ”Sorry, I was gone for an hour, but I have arrived home, and we can continue. I have no Internet connection in my car.”

³⁶ When felt that the verbal clash could threaten the maintenance of the communication, the participants often use off topic comments, puns, and intentionally misunderstand the other, or joke. In the case of a covert community such as the gays this would be natural, but this is also present on the forums of major news portals.

³⁷ For example this is the case when on the forum of the main gay site www.pride.hu the question have been raised years ago - and the discussion continues nowadays too - whether to go or not to go to the Gay Pride parade. Various arguments were posed although it was not evident that these were effective in persuading anyone. Several weeks later, however, the nicknames who had rejected earlier the idea to go, breathlessly reported in a different topic, that they went, and how good was, and they would go again the next time.

sharing site³⁸. As told earlier, *Jobbik* held a legal anti-gay demonstration at a crossroad on the route of the Gay Pride Parade. Participants were instructed to make photos and videos of the marchers as evidence in support of a court complaint regarding public decency. Secondly, the photos were to be published on the internet in order to reveal the identity of the marchers, thus causing them to be publicly humiliated. Many people, including demonstrators and bystanders as well as counter-demonstrators, did photograph the parade, using either a camera or a cell phone. Most of the photos wound up as personal souvenirs, but many of them were posted on internet sites. Nearly 30 videos were placed on YouTube. Most attracted relatively few visitors, except for one that was displayed first on the extreme right www.kuruc.info site. This video, which put accent to those parts of the parade, which offend the so called public decency, and irritate the heterosexual majority, had attracted 31,385 visitors as of August 25, 2007. One can wonder, which side the visitors came from. Five videos – posted by the same nick name - were deleted. One can wonder, which part of the YouTube terms of service justified cancelling of these videos.

The YouTube is a global video sharing website – among the hundred of thousands uploaded materials, however, one only find those materials one is searching for. So the posted pictures and videos certainly reach the same Hungarian public on both sides, as on the other, mentioned earlier sites. The significance of this is much more symbolic: the abstract possibility of worldwide publicity, worldwide humiliation. It is evident, that both parts involved into the conflict are very sensitive to such symbolical acts.

The original question posed by this study was, what was the role of the internet in the violent conflict between the Hungarian gay minority and members of the extreme right. And how, if at all, was the straight majority involved? In the actual moment, the violence was shocking and painful for anyone who witnessed it. Members of the gay community were threatened, and a lot of the members of the straight majority were embarrassed, especially because the extreme right minority claimed to represent the nation as a whole, arguing that their goal was to “defend the healthy Hungarian majority.” In analyzing the situation, however, it became clear that especially the whole political sphere was involved, and it is very hard to untangle the objectives, arguments, and consequences of competing interests. Thus, it is difficult to say who and what was won and lost in these events. Moderates of the political right blame the extremes, arguing that they gave the status of “guiltless victim” to the gay people, and that this won the sympathy of many people – and in long term, this helps to realize the aims of the liberals.

The role of the internet was important in playing out this conflict – not only as a device for organizing the Gay Pride Parade and the counter-demonstration, but also as an active participant, a symbolic playground of the different, often conflicting views, which, however, remained neither purely symbolic nor controllable. The examination of the content of the different discussion forums offers remarkable possibilities for discovering deep undercurrents of the public mood and the formation of opinions, which can lead to acts in the real world as well. The internet offers different, new configurations for communication and human relationships, but the rules and possibilities remain to be examined. It cannot be said that the internet unambiguously intensifies the conflicts (as the vulgarity of the content often suggests), but it does offer better positions for conciliation, if enough time and attention is

³⁸ **YouTube** is a popular video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips. Unregistered users can watch most videos on the site, while registered users are permitted to upload an unlimited number of videos. According YouTube's terms of service users may upload videos only with permission of the copyright holder and of the depicted persons. Pornography, defamation, harassment, commercial advertisements and material that encourages criminal conduct may not be uploaded. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube> We searched for the keyword ‘Budapest Pride’.

paid to searching for information, and there is enough tolerance to become acquainted with different approaches. Both these, however, are presently lacking in Hungarian society.

Epilogue: What happened during the two months after the events?

1. The socialist and the liberal parties in government called for a five-party declaration against the violence. The parties in opposition did not sign it, but instead stressed the responsibility of the government and the police to impede the violent acts and defend every form of expression.

2. The parties in government announced that in the fall, Parliament will discuss the right of gays to marry or to form civil unions. The liberal party supports the former, while the Socialists support the latter.

3.. The “Mr. Gay Europe” rivalry was organized in Budapest on August 8, 2007, in the main park of the city and in the Circus arena. The German candidate, a young man from India, became Mr. Gay Europe. No one disturbed the event, but the Circus was almost empty – only the jury and about a hundred people could be seen briefly on the television news, following the event

4. The prime minister called on the Minister of Justice to examine the possibility of countering intolerance by constitutional means. Certainly there will be changes in the penal code. He called on investigation of the possibilities of international cooperation against the extremely anti-Semitic anti-Roma, homophobic, offending the right to privacy and hate filled www.kuruc.info site, hosted by a US server.

5. “Jobbik” published a “declaration closing the issue” (“a clear, straight speech”). They declared that they are not opposed to homosexuals, but instead are against the homosexual policy of the liberal party. They protested against being confused with those “disturbing the order.” After this declaration, the party removed the issue from its agenda, and organized a “Day of (Hungarian) Self-Defense” against the liberal party and established the paramilitary “Hungarian Guard” for Hungarian Self-Defense.” This action alarmed the government, the liberals, leftists, and Roma and Jewish organizations both inside and outside the country. The inauguration of the first 56 officers received huge publicity, despite warnings that accentuating the event would have a positive effect on Jobbik’s popularity.

6. An extremely distasteful photomontage was circulated on the extreme right websites, and unexpectedly appeared on the website of a moderate right Hungarian radio station. It pictured Gábor Szetey, the Socialist and State Secretary of the Prime Minister’s office - whose coming out irritated the political extreme right - in front of a concentration lager, with a pink triangle on his coat (the sign what the homosexuals had to wear during the fascist era.) This event fan the flames, all the government overtly backed the State Secretary, and a fascist- - anti-fascist discurs inundated the Hungarian public space. The government accuses the opposition, that implicitly they contribute to the reborn of fascism, the opposition accuse the government that exaggerating the threat they want to turn the public attention from the real social economic problems. And here we are now...