

Un gen al marginalității – sociografia. Revista *Szociográfia*, 2025, nr. 1, Budapesta, [https://magyarorszagfelfedezese.hu/wp-content/ uploads/1.-szam-Szociografia.pdf](https://magyarorszagfelfedezese.hu/wp-content/uploads/1.-szam-Szociografia.pdf)

As a frontier phenomenon between social sciences and art, sociography has been present in Hungarian culture for over a hundred years. Despite its consolidated status in Hungary, it was only in December 2025 that it received a dedicated forum: the online magazine *Szociográfia*. Over the decades – with the exception of the 1950s –, volumes and columns in magazines have appeared, but not a periodical publication.

The magazine *Szociográfia*, with its first issue published online in December last year, appears as a new organ of the Discovery of Hungary Foundation. Since the definition of this genre has, from the beginning, aroused controversy, in her introductory article, Kamilla Friesz-Kovács, editor-in-chief, considers it important to announce: “in a separate column we seek the answer to the question of what sociography is and why it is important to tell the stories of reality again and again.” (p. 6) Because sociography is, indeed, a multifaceted concept. The Dutch founder Sebald Rudolf Steinmetz (1862-1940) defined it as a method of describing “by any means” the characteristics of a people in a certain era. Hungarian sociologists from the beginning of the 20th century interpreted it differently, focusing on collecting the most objective data possible, primarily about villages. During the interwar period, an important change occurred: sociography also became social criticism, especially through the works of the “popular writers’ movement” of the 1930s. Since sociology was not accepted during the Horthist regime, the sociography of writers assumed – even enduring lawsuits, marginalization – the task of exposing the consequences of feudal remnants on the Hungarian village. After the Second World War, in the Stalinist era, sociography was banned, just like sociology. Later, during the period of détente in the 1960s, it reappeared through works at the limits of political tolerance, somewhat continuing the interwar traditions. Renewal was brought by the “new sociographers” of the 1970s and 1980s, when a completely different approach emerged.

As such, we can say that the method widely used in ethnography and sociology to describe a social unit does not overlap with this concept, nor with the title of this journal.

Before presenting this first issue of the journal, we must mention that the young Hungarian sociographers of the interwar period, having discovered the work of the Sociological School in Bucharest, admired both the monographic methodology and the involvement of university youth in investigating the village. Thanks to this sociographic trend, Dimitrie Gusti became particularly well cited in the cultural press in Hungary – according to the original

research of Viktor Karady. I wrote about the visit of a group of Hungarian sociographers to Dimitrie Gusti and a monographic campaign carried out in the Transylvanian village of Șanț on the pages of the journal *Transilvania*.

It is worth remembering that in the 1960s, when sociology was reborn, this genre benefited from a distinct collection of volumes of great resonance: *Magyarország Felfedezése* (Discovery of Hungary). The collection was (and still is) constantly successful, occupying a stable position between institutionalized sociology and literature. Sociology also diversified during these decades. The cultural magazine *Mozgó Világ* (Moving World) gave impetus to this development. Therefore, it is understandable why Péter Pál Tóth, the president of the Foundation, felt the need for sociographic authors to (re)define their genre in the "What is Sociology" column of the newly published magazine.

As László Szále explained in his spiritual essay, "sociography is a kind of jack of all trades or polymath: it knows everything, but less about the details. That is why it is not accepted by science. It is a complicated genre. Just like life." Therefore, the author is an adherent of a sociology that composes a mosaic of the most diverse sources of knowledge, in order to offer an original picture of a slice of reality. A fervent follower of multidisciplinary, Szále confesses: "When I write sociology, I steal from everywhere. From history, sociology, local history, ethnography, and literature, in order to supplement my own poor visual and expressive abilities and to approach my subject in a way worthy of it." (p. 13)

László Pastyik from the Serbian Vojvodina does not seek to define sociology, but rather evokes its emergence in his homeland after World War I: "Sociographers who grouped around the magazine *Híd* (Bridge) described the difficulties of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina. In the 1920s, a land reform was introduced in Royal Yugoslavia that did not offer the Hungarian rural population long-term living conditions. One way out of this situation for Hungarian peasants was to emigrate and settle in South America." (pp. 23-24) For Pastyik, his condition as a minority in the Serbian province of Vojvodina continues to be a source of inspiration today.

According to Ilona Czibak, "sociography is more than a study, statistics or 'science', because it reveals us and takes us deeper; a good sociology penetrates us. For such an effect to develop, it requires the reader's sensitivity, receptivity and, last but not least, the God-given ability of the writer to make us see." (p. 27) Therefore, motivated by its very marginal social origin, not only the definition of the genre is important, but also the purpose of sociology, emphasizing primarily the arousal of emotion.

The head of the Psychosociology column, Gusztáv Lányi (a psychologist and a sociographer), writes about this quasi-scientific genre from a completely different perspective. In an academic study, he identifies the place of sociology in the system of social sciences and concludes that "sociography is a creative activity intended to describe, diagnose and treat the world of personal and collective social life. Sociology – unlike the disciplines of sociology and psychology – requires a creative and provocative presence. This is, of course, also its risk." (p. 41) According to Lányi, the sociographer does not seek satisfaction through scientific studies, but rather through publications that directly shape social relations. In the history of Hungarian social sciences, we can observe that the sociographer often became a political actor through his critical work. These articles also demonstrate how various approaches, perceptions and political motivations define contemporary Hungarian sociology.

The Young Sociologists' Forum is a surprising column initiated by Éva Sztáray Kézdy. She is the only professor at the sociology faculties in Budapest who has been teaching sociology as an independent subject for years. Her merit lies not only in reading and critically debating the works of the classics of sociology, but also in supporting them in discovering and

describing the hidden themes of contemporary Hungarian social life. Undoubtedly, sociographic education stimulates social sensitivity and independent research.

Obviously, a column entitled “Sociographies”, which contains original writings, could not be missing. In her writing, Ilona Czibak recalls her own childhood marked by multiple disadvantages, offering a truly moving and convincing account of marginality. On the other hand, Csenge Kondorosy’s article is less sociological and more like a case study for a PhD in cultural anthropology.

The last column, entitled “Book Fragments”, can be considered an innovation, because a literary magazine does not publish fragments of works already published on the market. However, we believe that the republication of a significant part of Márton Falusi’s book, *A kikényszerített álom. Tamási Áron szülőföldjén* [The Forced Dream. On Tamási Áron’s Homeland], not only serves a function of popularization and advertising, but also promotes a new model for the genre.

The appearance of the magazine *Szociográfia* is a gesture of respect for a noble cultural tradition, which critically reflected social marginality, but especially this genre’s capacity for renewal.

This genre will be able to simultaneously educate social sensitivity and develop literary taste, while encouraging the use of unconventional methods for mapping hidden reality and disadvantaged situations. The magazine *Szociográfia* is not an internal communication tool of a professional association, but rather an experimental forum which transcends cultural and scientific boundaries.

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