Where are Those Better Angels of Our Society?

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Abstract

The paper presents findings of a research carried out among pro-refugee individuals in social media in Hungary. During the so-called refugee crisis that emerged during the summer of 2015, anti-immigrant sentiments in the Hungarian public were fueled by a strong governmental campaign. Nevertheless, a pro-refugee counterpublic opposing the hegemonic discourse also emerged. The paper discusses existing scholarly literature on the phenomenon and how it appears in and is shaped by the digital sphere. The empirical findings focus on two characteristics of the pro-refugee counterpublic. First, we look at whether this counterpublic can be described as a homogenous group with a clear ideological profile and political affiliation. Second, we ask if counterpublics behave differently from other groups online, as 'thick' communities with distinct activity hierarchies. The methodological ambition of the paper is to present a digital data-driven approach, based on data provided by Facebook, which allows the individual profiling of each user. The connections and schemata of these profiles provides the analytical background of the present research. We aim to illustrate that such a post-demographic digital approach has a number of advantages over traditional sociological methods, especially in terms of granuality, behaviours, sensuality and temporality.

Keywords: refugees, digital methodology, counterpublics, social media

Where are Those Better Angels of Our Society?

Introduction

The recent explosion of digital data from social media holds a dialectical fascination for social scientists. As more and more human activities migrate to the space of social media and therefore become hybridized, they provide exciting research subjects to scholars. On the other hand, these digital data also lead to new data-gathering, -mining and -processing techniques that need radically new methodologies. We call this fascination dialectic because these two

dimensions–the new research subjects and the new methodologies–are obviously interrelated: they mutually and permanently shape the questions we ask, consequently the answers we get and the statements we articulate. Although this dialectical fascination of data-driven social science is felt by many, we believe it is justified only if this data-driven approach is able to fulfil two further expectations.

First, a data-driven approach is justified if it is able–or at least intends to–answer relevant, fascinating questions (that is, it avoids to ask irrelevant, boring questions which have no–or very little–social relevance at all). Second, it is justified if the applied methodology sheds light on social problems that cannot be answered better with traditional methodologies. This implicit critique–elaborated by others in detail elsewhere–states that attempts in data-driven social science seem to be self-referential, redundant and non-reflexive (Boyd and Crawford 2012; Kitchin 2014). Just because digital data are available it does not automatically mean that they reveal a deeper understanding of social reality. This ambition to address relevant social questions with new methodologies must not be confused with what Lazer and his colleagues call 'big data hubris'–that is using these data without clarifiying their validity and reliability (Lazer, Kennedy, King and Vespignani 2014).

Driven by the above considerations, in what follows we present our findings on a social group that can be characterized as taking a pro-refugee stance during 2015 when the so-called refugee crisis played out in the Hungarian discourse. The present paper is part of an extended research where several characteristics of Hungarian pro-refugee movements are examined in the framework of social movement theories. Previous phases of the research however brought up a number of crucial dilemmas that could not be answered via traditional approaches. During our previous research we faced essential questions which can only be answered with applying new digital data and an innovative methodology. In what follows we first give a background of the Hungarian political and social context against which the research takes place. We describe how anti-migrant sentiments were fueled and utilized by the Hungarian government but also point to counterpublics opposing the hegemonic discourse. The focus of our research is on these counterpublics, therefore we give a short theoretical introduction on the academic literature of the phenomenon. Our methodological approach is grounded in a number of assumptions regarding the use of digital data in social sciences and the post-demographic paradigm in particular, therefore the paper elaborates on these considerations in its next section. Positing pro-refugee groups as counterpublics our paper has a dual research

focus. First, we look at whether this counterpublic can be described as a homogenous group with a clear ideological profile and political affiliation. Second, we ask if counterpublics behave differently from other groups online, as ‘thick’ communities with distinct activity hierarchies.

The Hungarian context

For anyone interested in international affairs, the so-called refugee crisis that escalated during the summer of 2015 needs no introduction. While the number of refugees heading towards Europe has been steadily on the rise in the previous years, a sharp increase in these figures took place in 2015. While the details and explanations of this increase reach beyond the scope of this paper, an important characteristic of this drastic change is the growing significance of the so-called Balkan route as an entry point towards Europe. This led to Hungary becoming an important transit-point for most refugees the majority of whom passed through the country towards Western Europe.

In order to understand the Hungarian context of the refugee crisis the role of the Hungarian government can not be overlooked. While the governing party’s (Fidesz) popularity is left unchallenged by opposition parties both in the polls and the voting booths, two important factors shaped the refugee-discourse in the Hungarian public. First, a number of interim scandals during the second half of 2014 has caused a sharp, nevertheless temporary decline in Fidesz’s popularity. This explains the government’s political agenda-setting strategy in which external threats and enemies became central elements. Second, this strategy in fact preceded the so-called refugee crisis. In fact, as early as during the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo-attacks in January 2015, prime minister Viktor Orbán started framing Europe’s problem as that of migration. Orbán’s words were followed and echoed by a number of governmental actions that all set the stage for the crisis during the summer, effectively labeling refugees as threats in the Hungarian discourse. Among these actions were the setting up of a working group to handle the immigrant question[1]; a so-called national consultation that included questions such as ’Do you agree that mistaken immigration policies contribute to the spread of terrorism?’[2]; a major billboard campaign with three central messages (’If you come to

[1] http://index.hu/belfold/2015/01/29/a_kormany_felkeszul_a_bevandorlokra/
[2] http://hungarianspectrum.org/2015/04/25/viktor-orban-will-take-care-of-hungarys-unwanted-immigrants/

Hungary, you have to respect our culture!'; 'If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our laws!'; and 'If you come to Hungary, you can't take away our jobs!'). The campaign was concluded with the government's declaration of the plan to set up a fence on the Hungarian–Serbian border[3], the setting up of which was finalized on 15 September, 2015.

The government's communication was by and large unchallenged by Hungarian opposition parties who reacted with mixed messages to the official propaganda. One factor to explain the one-sidedness of the debate is that the pro-refugee stance in the Hungarian public is a rather unpopular one. Existing research on the subject has shown repeatedly that an overwhelming majority of Hungarians consider migrants a threat, while those who would welcome migrants are a small minority (Sík 2016). Our claim that the political discourse regarding refugees has been one-sided from the start does not mean however that counterpublics didn't emerge to resist the official anti-refugee campaign. Borrowing a term from Steven Pinker's renowned book –the title of which is taken from Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address in turn–(2011), the 'better angels' of Hungarian society emphasized humanitarianism, altruism and solidarity towards refugees as the desirable answer to the escalating crisis. For example, the governmental billboard campaign was countered by a crowd-funded anti-billboard campaign by the Hungarian mock party, MKKP (Two-Tailed Dog Party), setting up 300 billboards countrywide[4], criticizing the government's stance. When refugees in large numbers started to arrive in order to cross Hungary towards Western Europe, witnessing the inaction and often hostility of state authorities against refugees, a handful of grassroots relief groups organized themselves providing assistance that proved to be essential in the handling of the crisis. Significantly, these counterpublics all organized themselves on Facebook. This further supports our preliminary claim, namely that this digitally-born counterpublic provides us with novel research subjects and the need for novel methodological approaches with which these subjects can be examined.

Digital counterpublics

The intensity with which the debate about refugees and European responsibility appeared in public discourse has been observable on social media as well. This aspect of the refugee crisis

[3] http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/06/17/uk-hungary-immigration-idUKKBN0OX17U20150617
[4] http://mkkp.hu/wordpress/?page_id=1551

has important implications for scholars studying digital phenomena. They relate to the question whether the Internet and social media in particular fosters the emergence of a public sphere that is in a sense advanced when compared to previously existing forms. This question in turn can be conceptualized as part of a larger academic debate around the democratic potential of new communication technologies where viewpoints range from technooptimist (Shirky 2008) to -pessimist stances (Morozov 2011). While one strand of these discussions often focuses on the organizational/mobilizational aspects of social media (Diani 2000), where the lowering of mobilisation costs are often found to have a positive effect on social movements and civil society in general; here we focus on another aspect: the public sphere, assuming that it is closely linked to the democratic potential of the Internet and social media.

The Habermasian concept of the public sphere describes a space where ideas are deliberated through communication; in such a public space the exhcange of thoughts takes place in a non-coercive manner. As Habermas himself clearly elaborated, twentieth century developments–especially the rise of mass media–have led to the deterioration of the public sphere described above. The question then becomes whether digital platforms bring us closer to Habermas' normative idea of a public sphere (Habermas 1989).

Optimistic viewpoints usually posit a direct positive relationship between digital communication affordances and deliberation (Benkler 2006; Holt 2004; Singh 2013). Technopessimists on the other hand claim that the affordances of digital media lead to not more but less deliberation. Writing about 'echo chambers' Gromping states that social networking sites polarize users and lead to the emergence of 'enclaves', where critical reflection is seriously hindered (Gromping 2014).

The stance of Habermas himself stands closer to the latter group, stating in a speech given in 2006 that 'the rise of millions of fragmented chatrooms across the world instead lead to the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated public issues' (Habermas 2006: 423).

Another strand of criticism against the 'public sphere' formulation of the digital sphere questions whether such platforms are public in nature at all. Dijck for example stresses this point in claiming that social media platforms should not be regarded as spheres but as

communicative instruments and that these instruments do not lead to a new public sphere but to a formalization of an informal discourse that always existed (Dijck 2011).

So far we haven't questioned the original basic assumptions behind Habermas' concept of the public sphere. One of the central tenets of the formulation receiving considerable ciriticism is the claim that there exists a singular public sphere. Instead, as Nancy Fraser and others have argued we should conceptualize discourse as consisting of a plurality of publics where counterpublics resisting hegemonic discourses also emerge. Not only is the assumption of a singular public sphere mistaken, claims Fraser, but it isn't desirable either (Fraser 1990).

It has to be noted nevertheless that Habermas himself revisited the question in light of the criticisms directed against the concept of a singular public sphere, and has expanded it to capture the possibility of a 'pluralistic, internally much differentiated mass public' (1992: 438).

Taking the Hungarian case as our empirical focus provides an analytical advantage in the research of counterpublics. Following Fraser's distinction between stratified and egalitarian multicultural societies the Hungarian case is an example of the former where the government's hegemony in the public discourse and in the media and a strong anti-migrant sentiment in the public in general leads to *subaltern counterpublics* as opposed to a peacefully coexisting plurality of publics in the latter. This is significant because based on this distinction we can revisit the question of separation coined 'echo chambers' previously in a more multifaceted manner. As Fraser claims, separation and publicness are not binary options for such counterpublics: '(…) in stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.' (Fraser 1990: 124)

Thus, our starting point is that pro-refugee civilians in Hungary formed a counterpublic against the hegemonic and government-fueled anti-refugee discourse as those welcoming and aiming to help refugees were a small and often stigmatized minority in the Hungarian population. Elsewhere we have argued that social media affordances were central to the organization of this counterpublic as Facebook has become a platform where grassroots movements offering humanitarian aid for refugees primarily organized (Dessewffy and Nagy

2016). Here we look at the position of this counterpublic within the wider Hungarian discourse, whether it was a dispersed network of individuals or a closed enclave with a distinct ideological profile. This focus drives our first two research questions:

RQ1: Is the Hungarian pro-refugee counterpublic a politically homogenous or heterogenous one?

RQ2: How do political affiliations appear within the pro-refugee counterpublic?

We also argue that counterpublics in such circumstances have a distinct 'hierarchy of activity' when compared to other communities. The underlying assumption is that counterpublics behave distinctly from other communities online. An analytically useful distinction is made between 'thin' and 'thick' communities by Bimber (1998) who argues that the former is created in pursuit of individual goals while the latter aim to achieve a higher common goal. While Bimber goes on to doubt that the Internet facilitates the emergence of thick communities, the distinction is useful when emphasis is put on the activity patterns of the two different groups. It is often argued that activities of lower intensity and commitment (such as 'likes' on Facebook) are practiced by more members in online communities than activities of higher intensity and commitment (such as attendance of events or membership in groups on Facebook); a potential research question is whether this is the case in the 'thick community' of the pro-refugee counterpublic. This research question has farther-reaching consequences that can not be discussed in detail here. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the oft-stated claim by techno-pessimists regarding online feel-good activitism and slacktivism is based on the assumption of an activity hierarchy ranging from low-intensity activities practiced by many to high-intensity activities practiced by few (hence the claim of low-risk participation actually reinforcing the status quo). If this assumption proves to be incorrect, a number of inferences drawn from it also need to be reconsidered. This research focus drives our second two research questions:

RQ3: What is the distribution of activities–measured in social buttons–in the pro-refugee counterpublic on social media?

RQ4: Are there in-group differences in the distribution of activities in the pro-refugee counterpublic?

Digital data and the post-demographic paradigm

There is a growing body of literature on the theoretical challenges presented by digital methodologies. Here the basic idea is that when 'data-gathering instrumentations [change...] so will the social theories associated with them' (Latour 2009: 157).

Although the radical novelty of digital methodologies is often elaborated by contrasting them with previously dominant survey methods, it is good to remind ourselves that surveys are also a historical product. The survey method gained popularity and legitimacy because of its perceived advantage over observation-based methodologies. What is significant here is that any methodology paradigmatically creates an episteme–borrowing Foucault's notable concept (Foucault 1989). The main function of an episteme is that it marks the boundaries between what can and cannot be said in a given discourse (Ruppert, Law and Savage 2013).

Therefore, we do not intend to herald the coming of the digital as a victory over old methods. Rather, we aim to present a couple of characteristics of knowledge-production by the means of digital methods. In the present paper our purpose is even more modest. We do not pretend to cover the whole vibrant debate on digital methodology (Rogers 2009, 2013; Venturini and Latour 2010; Marres 2012), instead we only present a number of specifities and affordances of digital data which are relevant to our research.

Granuality

Bruno Latour celebrates the collection, ordering and processing of digital data for epistemological reasons:

> What we are witnessing, thanks to the digital medium, is a fabulous extension of this principle of traceability. It has been put in motion not only for scientific statements, but also for opinions, rumors, political disputes, individual acts of buying and bidding, social affiliations, movements in space, telephone calls, and so on. What has previously been possible for only scientific activity—that we could have our cake (the aggregates) and eat it too (the individual contributors)—is now possible for most events leaving digital traces, archived in digital databanks, thanks, let's say, to Google and associates (Latour 2009: 159–160).

Latour argues that what the ‘digital deluge’ offers is the deconstruction of holistic and homogenous social concepts. These comprehensive and abstract concepts tend to determine our ways of thinking, even though holistic notions such as ‘society’, the ‘consumer’, ‘women’ or ‘voters’ are oversimplifications because they conceal the underlying diversity they represent. Nor is the situation much improved if we break these terms further down by using traditional concepts and terminilogies. When we speak of ‘urban elderly’, ‘undecided voters’, ‘middle-class women’ or ‘college youths’, then these more disaggregated categories can be just as incidental and empty as the categories we started with.

It is obvious that these labels hide the conglomeration and networks of very different individuals. Ideally, when properly employed, digital methodologies can help in capturing, interpreting and describing the diversity and complexity of such relations–and ultimately of life itself–since they enable us to identify a large number of actors and to shed light on the relations between them. This is what Evelyn Ruppert and her colleges called ‘granularity’:

> There is a suspicion of aggregated properties that are derived deductively. Instead, the focus is on particularistic identifiers (…). In such processes aggregates may also be derived (as clusters of granular cases), but these are inductively created and not ‘imposed’ onto data sources (…). This focus on granularity drives forward a concern with the microscopic, the way that amalgamations of databases can allow ever more granular, unique, specification. This is part of a desire for wholeness, an embrace of the total and comprehensive which is never ending but which generates a politics of mash ups, compilation, and data assemblage (…). (Ruppert et al. 2013: 13)

Behaviorism

Surveys tell us about opinions. For the most part, these opinions tend to be epistemologically ‘messy’, and the picture they provide bears a tenuous relationship to reality at best. It is obvious that the substance of survey answers can be distorted by political reservations, or–for example–by fear. But the problem is even deeper than the basic underlying issue, namely that survey answers to politically, economically and sexually sensitive questions, therefore they do not reflect real opinions. One of the basic tenets of Schütz's phenomenological sociology of knowledge (1967) is that everyday knowledge–which is the dissemination of the interpretations of the self-evident ‘primary reality’ of everyday life–is of pre-eminent significance. Yet this everyday knowledge follows particular rules, it is by its very essence

incoherent, disjointed and non-reflexive. This underlying hypothesis is unfolded later in social psychological works that show our near-unlimited ability for self-deception (Tavris and Aronson 2007). This means that in the case of survey data-collection we might harbour serious epistemological doubts as to the validity of the answers, even in the case of the most innocuous issues investigated. Not because respondents deliberately want to mislead researchers, but because most often their positions on the given issue are not fully crystallised or clear. Surveys performed in situations where the respondents are questioned tend to produce answers that reflect respondents' desire to comply with what they presume is expected of them. The results of surveys are also tenuous because they reflect obscure, often even non-existing, views. By contrast, our methodology fundamentally relies on digital footprints, it uses the imprints left by actual behaviour. If we are interested in someone's political preferences, then we do not need to answer the question ‘Do you visit the following pages when you surf the internet?’, as you would in a survey. Instead, we get a clear picture based on actual behaviour as it is manifested in the number of ‘likes’, ‘attends’ or group memberships, on these pages. Researchers thus may obtain a clearer picture of real preferences, decisions and actions than they would by using traditional methods.

Sensuality of Facebook-data

Traditional ‘social science apparatus’ also holds biases that narrow down the conceptual horizon of the articulated social problematic. Michael Savage demonstrates how survey methodology uproots individuals from their social contexts and relations (Savage 2010). It can also be argued that the enumeration and sampling of individual accounts creats an over-rationalized representation of reality. With other words it fails to take emotions, pleasure and sensuality into account (think about the clumsiness of the sexual questionnaires for instance). We bring this up because Facebook-data constitute another extreme. Emotions, things to be enthusiastic about, effects of sensual stimuli–be it food, music, sport or relations to ‘events of outrage and hope’–are over-represented on Facebook. Therefore, if we have a research interest regarding these topics, Facebook may provide a better source to answer these questions.

Temporality

Traditional methods of data-collection are tiresome, expensive and time-consuming. There has always been a significant gap between the conditions observed at the time of the data-collection and the conditions that prevail at the time when the processed data are published. For the most part, years may pass between data-collection and publication, and hence at the time of the latter the analyses in the research refers to data collected considerably earlier. To be sure there are longitudinal researches–but those are rather expensive and increasingly rare. Thanks to the application of digital technologies, the pace of data collection has also accelerated significantly. By virtue of the fact that previously analogue information will become available digitally, sociological insight could become more efficient and fast. We can capture (almost) real-time behaviour in measuring indicators where time-delays in measurement are methodologically problematic and we can also collect data for a longer time period.

Although we focused on the characteristics of these four factors–granuality, behaviours, sensuality and temporality–our Facebook-database defines a different landscape or epistheme in a further sense as well. In this field, as Ruppert and colleagues point out: 'the move to the digital is *a move to heterogeneity* (…). It is about factors, impulses, risk profiles, and circuits and the post-demographic as Rogers (2009) has suggested. To this extent, humanist conceptions of society are being eclipsed.' (2013:34)

Indeed, the concept of the post-demograhic paradigm is summing up what we said so far about the specificity of Facebook-data. This concept also underlines the bargain we have to accept. We have no chance to examine the traditional socio-demographic componenents, which were the starting points for every survey done before. But we may understand some other things by being able to answer some questions that we haven't been able to address before. Rogers describes the post-demographic paradigm as follows:

> Conceptually, with the 'post' prefixed to demographics, the idea is to stand in contrast to how the study of demographics organizes groups, markets and voters in a sociological sense.It also marks a theoretical shift from how demographics have been used 'bio-politically' (to govern bodies) to how post-demographics are employed 'info-politically,' to steer or recommend certain information to certain people (Foucault, 1998; Rogers, 2004). The term post-demographics also invites new methods for the study of social networks, where of interest are not the traditional demographics of race, ethnicity, age, income, and educational level—or derivations thereof such as class—but rather

> of tastes, interests, favorites, groups, accepted invitations, installed apps and other information that comprises an online profile and its accompanying baggage. (Rogers 2009: 30)

This post-demographic approach is boosted by the major sociological process of the theory of individualisatition from Beck (1992) to Bauman (2000), from Castells (1996) to Latour (1993) as much as the everyday experience of empirical and marketing researchers, namely that traditional socio-demographic categories begin to loose their explanatory power.

The conclusion is that in relation to digital devices then, we need to get our hands dirty and explore their affordances: how they collect, store, and transmit numerical, textual, or visual signals; how they work with respect to standard social science techniques such as sampling and comprehensiveness; and how they relate to social and political institutions. To tease out these specificities and qualities it is useful to consider, in an historical register, how digital devices compare with other, older socio-technical devices, and consider the different affordances that they offer in a nuanced manner (Ruppert et al 2013).

Relevant scholarly literature is replete with research utilizing traditional survey methods in the analysis of political and public engagement even when their focus is on digital affordances' effects on such engagement. Some of these focus on political campaigns and engagement (Bode 2012; Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck and Nord 2014; Garcia-Castañon, Rank and Barreto 2011; Hargittai and Shaw 2013); others are specifically aimed to understand protest activities (Enjolras, Steen-Johsen and Wollebæk 2012; Macafee and De Simone 2012; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). What links these studies is their approach towards new research problems with traditional methods. While we do not question the merits of such approaches we argue that this methodological choice already limits the possible research questions and outcomes as they are unable to account for the specifities–granuality, behaviour sensuality, temporality–described above. Therefore the underlying starting assumption of this paper is that digital activities reflect people's attitudes towards social phenomena, and social buttons–such as likes, group-memberships and event attendances–are suitable metrics of this public engagement.

Methodology

The empirical research described here is based on data provided by Facebook. Facebook allows its users to get data out of the platform officially through so-called APIs (Application Programming Interface). Our database is built on access to data through APIs. We store anonymous user activity consisting of post likes on pages, event attandances, and group memberships. Data were collected between June 1 2015 and May 30 2016. This database allows the individual profiling of each user, the connections and schemata of these profiles provides the analytical background of the present research. We extracted data using Datalyze, a software custom-made to excerpt, store and analyze information from Facebook.

The database focuses on two groups independent of each other. First, we looked at individuals with pro-refugee attitudes on Facebook within the researched period (the 'pro-refugee group'). Second, we looked at people who show signs of political sympathies and therefore can be considered politically active on Facebook ('people with political affiliations'). We posit that both the pro-refugee attitude and political sympathies can be measured based on activities carried out on the platform.

When creating the 'pro-refugee group' data were collected from Facebook pages, groups and events that were sympathetic with refugees. 6 Facebook pages, 5 Facebook groups and 69 Facebook events were analyzed altogether.[5] An individual belongs to the 'pro-refugee group' if (s)he carried out at least one activity in the researched period in the given pages, groups or events. In the case of Facebook pages a post like, in the case of Facebook groups a membership, and in the case of Facebook events hitting the button 'attend' is considered an activity. The distinction between 'post likes' and 'page likes' is significant in our case. While liking a page sometimes translates to intentions of following a certain case and does not necessarily automatically mean sympathising with a given issue or personality, liking a post translates to agreeing with its contents.

In order to create the group of people with political affiliations we gathered data from Facebook pages that belong to existing Hungarian political parties. 77 such Facebook pages were screened, consisting of pages that belong to either individuals (party politicians) or organizations (the official party page). Based on these 77 pages 11 political party proxies were created.[6] An individual belongs to a party proxy if (s)he carried out at least one activity–

[5] The list of pages, groups and events is available on request from the authors.
[6] The list of pages is abailable on request from the authors.

a post like on the given page–within the researched period. While it is close to impossible to give a detailed description of the Hungarian political spectrum here, the background of these party proxies is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Party proxies in the database

Name of the party: political profile (political position)
Jobbik: a radical extra right-wing party (opposition)
Fidesz: the governing right-wing party (government)
KDNP: the coalition party of Fidesz (government)
LMP:an anti-establishment Green party (opposition)
Moma: a left-wing party (extra-parliamentary, opposition)
Együtt: a left-wing party (opposition)
PM: a Green party split from LMP (opposition)
Liberálisok: a liberal party (opposition)
DK: a left-wing party split from MSZP (opposition)
MSZP: the traditional left-wing party (opposition)
MKKP: a mock party (extra-parliamentary, opposition)

Thus, our database consists of two different, nevertheless overlapping populations, pro-refugee individuals and people with political affiliations. The composition of the database is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Composition of the database

Groups within the database	N
Pro-refugee individuals	76,002
Individuals with political affiliations	785,921
Total number of individuals in the database	883,800

Applying Python computer language to our research, the structure of the database allows for the examination and analysis of the connections between the different groups and subgroups by the creation of cross-sections. Descriptive statistics are supplemented by network analysis in the paper, utilizing Gephi, a network analysis and visualization platform.

Findings

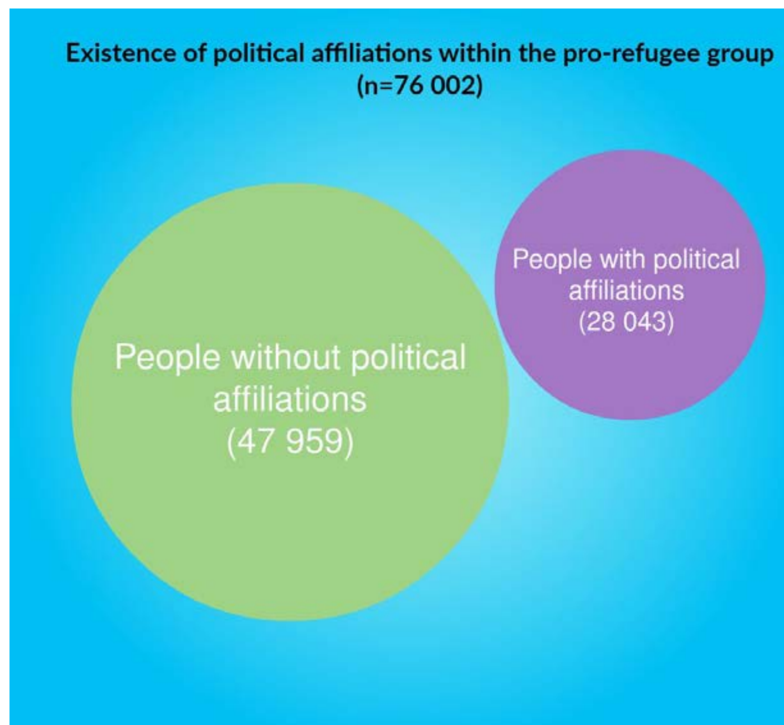
Positing the pro-refugee group as a counterpublic the research focused on two main characteristics of this public. Our first aim was to examine if in the context of a highly polarized political discourse this counterpublic emerged as a homogenous enclave with a clear ideological profile or consists of further sub-groups with distinct characteristics.

The second aim of the research was to look at the activity hierarchy of this counterpublic, whether it can be seen as a group of conventional activity traits, where participants in low-cost activities outnumber those with high-cost activities or one that goes against traditional activity patterns.

RQ1: Is the Hungarian pro-refugee counterpublic a politically homogenous or heterogenous one?

A look at the ties existing between pro-refugee individuals and political parties helps us understand the ideological profile of the group. One would expect that the nature of the refugee-debate in itself–it's complex, international scope and the symbolic values it calls into question, and a strong political involvement from the government's side–would be of interest for those with political affiliations. Looking at the numbers (Figure 1) however we found that the vast majority of pro-refugee individuals have no political ties in social media at all.

Figure 1. Existence of political affiliations within the pro-refugee group



The significance of this finding–that two-thirds of those taking a pro-refugee stance were politically inactive during the researched period–calls into question already existing assumptions about just how political the issue itself was for those supporting refugees. In the highly politicized context of the Hungarian refugee crisis this finding can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, we can argue that within the pro-refugee counterpublic a significant group existed that approached the question as a humanitarian, non-political one. This posits the existence of two–nevertheless overlapping–separate subgroups within the pro-refugee community driven by different motivations: a political activist subgroup and a humanitarian volunteer subgroup. Volunteers are distinct from activists in the sense that overall systematic social change is not among their goals as opposed to political activists who are driven by such considerations. However, a second possible interpretation is that people without political affiliations are not disinterested in politics but unable to identify with existing political alternatives.

RQ2: How do political affiliations appear within the pro-refugee counterpublic?

Given the highly polarized nature of the discourse and the massive campaign from the government's side against migration one would expect the pro-refugee individuals to be supporters of oppositional–mostly left-wing–parties in Hungary. We have seen that this is

already debunked by the numbers–as the majority of the group had no political ties whatsoever. When one looks at pro-refugee individuals with political ties it is clear that they predominantly support left-wing parties indeed (Table 3).

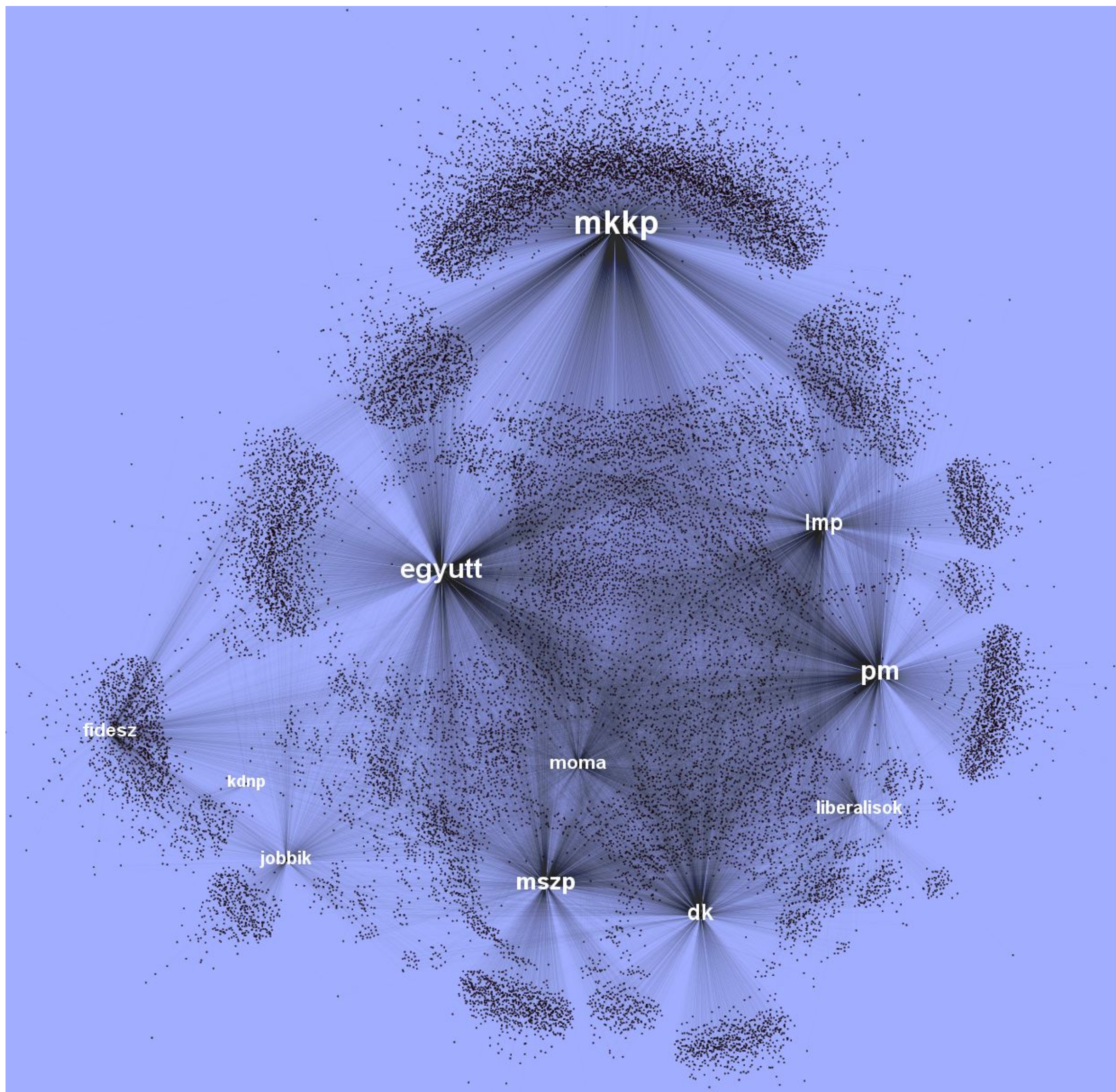
Table 3. Political affiliations by party within the pro-refugee group

Political affiliations by party within the pro-refugee group	- number of people	% of the pro-refugee group
Jobbik	1 593	2.10%
Fidesz	2 655	3.49%
KDNP	140	0,18%
LMP	6 417	8.44%
Moma	2 964	3,90%
Együtt	11 516	15.15%
PM	9 864	12.98%
Liberálisok	1 700	2.24%
DK	6 200	8.16%
MSZP	6 800	8.95%
MKKP	15 198	20.00%

Nevertheless, a number of interesting aspects of Table 3 need to be pointed out. First, about 6 per cent of the pro-refugee individuals liked anti-immigration political parties during the researched period, which shows that the anti-refugee public also had a small dissident minority. Among supporters of anti-governmental parties within the pro-refugee group, sympathizers of the mock-party MKKP stand out. This could further be interpreted as a disillusionment with traditional politics amond pro-refugee individuals. All in all, supporters of newly established parties, such as Együtt, PM and MKKP stand out within the pro-refugee counterpublic.

A closer look at the distribution of political affiliations and their proximity to each other gives us further insights about the density of the group (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Network density of individuals with political affiliations within the pro-refugee group

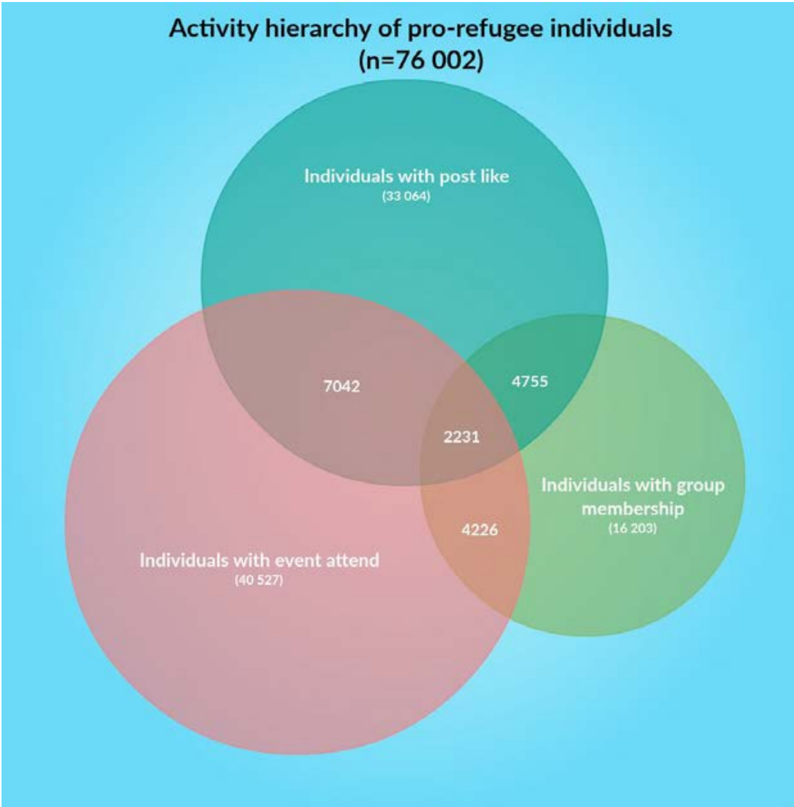


Visualizing the network density of the politically active pro-refugee subgroup as shown in Figure 2 helps us understand whether the group is a homogenous, closely-knit one or can be better described as heterogenous. The nodes in Figure 2 represent individuals with political affiliations within the pro-refugee group, while the clusters they are connected to are the political parties analyzed. The clusters–parties–with more individual likes are represented with larger letters. We see that the largest cluster is not the most central in the network–MKKP has a significiant amount of fans who don't like other parties, and are only connected to MKKP (given the party's anti-political, mock-nature this is not a surprise). We also see that densely interconnected clusters form around parties (Együtt, MOMA, PM) whose messages, approaches and political profile are largely similar, therefore could be substituted with each other.

RQ3: What is the distribution of activities–measured in social buttons–in the pro-refugee counterpublic on social media?

Turning to the question of activity hierarchies one would expect the conventional pattern based on previous research where activities organize in a pyramid with most individuals participating in low-cost activities (in our case, post likes on Facebook), a smaller group take part in somewhat more demanding ones (event attendances on Facebook), and the highest cost activity (membership in a group) is practiced by only a few. Our findings show that this was not the case in the pro-refugee counterpublic (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Activity hierarchy of pro-refugee individuals



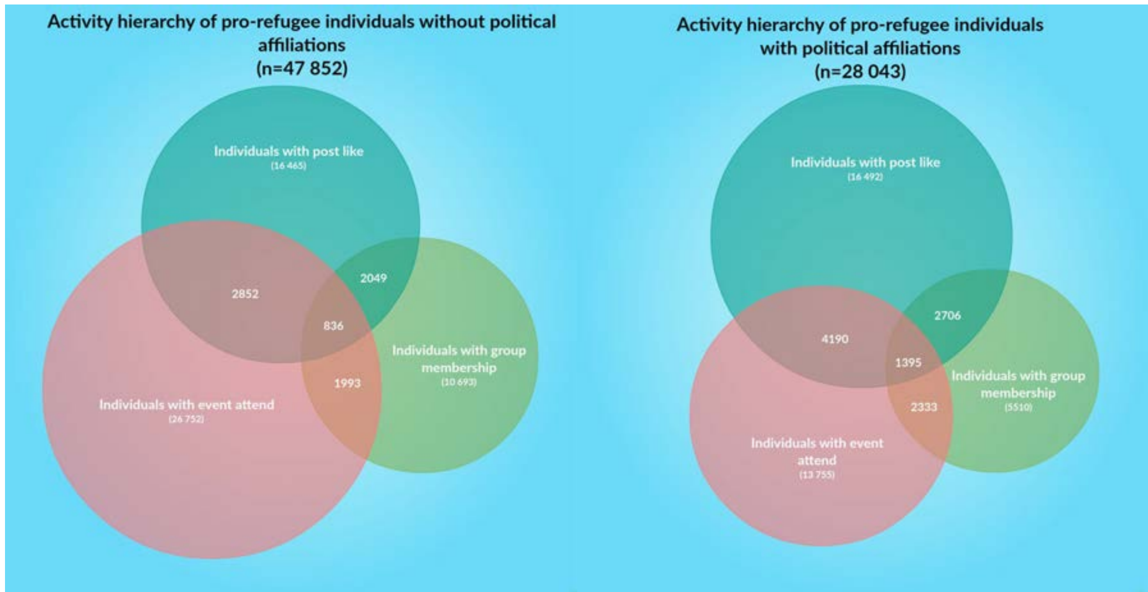
The scholarly assumption that states that digital activism is inferior to other types of offline activities seems at least questionable in the light of these findings. First, it is obvious, that the artificial separation of online and offline activities holds little truth-value: the predominant activity (event attendance) points to a hybrid sphere where online activities are closely tied to offline consequences. Second, it is not the lowest-cost activities – coined feel-good activities – such as post likes, but higher-cost activities that are typical of the group. This points to a

possible difference between the engagement patterns of thick and thin communities, where thick communities are more likely to involve their members in more demanding tasks than thin ones.

RQ4: Are there in-group differences in the distribution of activities in the pro-refugee counterpublic?

Within the pro-refugee counterpublic there is a difference between the activity patterns of those with political affiliations and between those who are not politically involved. The first subgroup's activity hierarchy resembles conventional patterns gravitating towards a higher proportion of low-cost activities while non-political individuals are more involved in higher-cost activities (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Distribution of activities within the pro-refugee group by political affiliation



This finding further reenforces our previous claim regarding the heterogeneity of the pro-refugee counterpublic. Not only is this counterpublic divided in terms of political affiliations but we can track different activity patterns within the group. But our findings also show that those with political affiliations, and presumably construct the refugee-crisis as a political issue, are more likely to engage in low-cost activities, while those without political affiliations, and in most likelihood, different motivations, predominantly engage in higher-cost and higher-risk activities, such as attendance of events. Differences in approaches

therefore mean different motivations, where non-political individuals engage in more intensive activities.

Conclusion

Marres (2012) recently suggested a research agenda rather similar to the present paper, focusing on the practical behaviour of people instead of their oftentimes distorted and misshaped voices. She refers to the Greek myth of Philomela, who was raped and her tongue was mutilated to silence her, but still was able to identify her rapist and tell her story by waiving it in to a tapestry. In our view, this is an apt–even if too violent–metaphor concerning to digital methods. As Zizi Papacharissi (2015) pointed out: digital data are fascinating if they contribute to telling a better story, construct a more appropriate narrative. In our research we try to ask relevant questions about a crucial European problem that cannot be answered without our data. We identified the composition, political affiliations–or lack of them–and activity hierarchy of the Hungarian pro-refugee counterpublic. This problematic obviously requires further research, but we prove that collecting, storing and analyzing social media data can be a relevant part of the ongoing discussion.

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