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# Hungarian Secondary School Students' Views on the Tasks of the Student Council (DÖK) and Their Participation in It<sup>1</sup>



## ABSTRACT

The Student Council is the body that represents and protects the interests of secondary school students and organises their social and cultural life at school. In Hungary, it is called a student self-government (diákönkormányzat, DÖK) in the Public Education Act. The Public Education Act gives the student council wide-ranging rights. The DÖK is one of the most important non-formal educational arenas for the development of civic competences, where the views of students are formed, their opinions are nuanced, and their knowledge can become skills and competences. The basic condition for this is individual and community activity and active participation, the development of which is a central tool for the social integration of young people. Participation in the framework of this study means participation in everyday life and decisions of the community, rather than mere organizational membership: ways of thinking and activities that are based on the world of social values and are reflected in public action and patterns of action. In this study, we also wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how do students' responses paint a picture regarding the role of the DÖK as a "democracy school". The self-governments of secondary school students are not only formed within the framework of the social climate and institutional microclimate, but they can also shape it reflectively when these frameworks

<sup>1</sup> Student Council is a group of students in a school who are elected to help plan and organize activities and events for other students. In Hungary, the Student Council is the body that represents and protects the interests of secondary school students and organises their social and cultural life at school. In Hungary, it is called a student self-government (DÖK) in the Public Education Act. The members of the school student council (DÖK) are usually elected by class. The DÖK determines its own operational framework. Provisions describing the functioning of the DÖK are incorporated into the school's internal rules (e.g. house rules) after approval by the school management. The Public Education Act gives the student council wide-ranging rights. In this study, Student Council is referred to as DÖK (Diákönkormányzat, Student Self-government).

are sometimes expanded. In this study we will examine the presence of conformity and the ability to innovate in relation to the DÖK, i.e. what patterns can be seen in the students' views on the functions and role and task assumption of the DÖK, and in the relationship of intention to participate in them.

## **KEYWORDS**

youth, active participation, student council, student self-government, Hungary

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## **INTRODUCTION**

At present, according to the current public education legislation, student councils (student government, Diákönkormányzat, DÖK) have the right to initiate, propose, opinion form and express of opinions on a number of issues that significantly impact the life and organizational character of institutions. One of these rights that is generally known is that the opinion of the DÖK must be sought: before the adoption of the school's organizational and operational regulations defined by the statutory provisions of the school SZMSZ, before determining the principles for the distribution of student social benefits, and when using funds allocated for youth policy purposes. It is also the DÖK's responsibility to form an opinion before adopting the school's house rules. The student council represents the interests of students towards the school administration, towards the maintainer, and on the school board consisting of representatives of parents, faculty members and members of the student council in equal numbers. It is a little-known and less frequently seen right to make proposals (concerning the student government) in everyday practice, according to which the DÖK may express an opinion and make proposals on all issues related to the operation of the educational institution and students. It can be deduced from the legislation that only a functioning student government can ensure that students can exercise their rights provided by law (directly or through representation), and that the legal operation of the given institution can only be ensured by a well-functioning student government. Hungarian

educational research at the turn of the millennium drew attention to the fact that these added values and value transfer processes are less prevalent in institutions' everyday operations (SZABÓ – ÖRKÉNY 1998; LIGETI 1999, 2000a, 2000b; CSAPÓ 2000, LIGETI – MÁRTON 2001, KINYÓ 2012).

At the same time, the DÖK is not only an actor on the stage of institutional education, which means not only a system of representation, but also a democracy school for children and young people, which is a space for civic education, a space for the formation and development of an active and active civic mentality culture, and in relation to enculturation, a non-formal educational space that goes beyond the provision of knowledge and value socialization within the framework of civic education subject processes.

Several works were published on the DÖK in the nineties, parallel to the process of democratization of educational institutions, with a focus on community and public socialization (TRENCSÉNYI 1993, PAPP – PÁL 1993, GAÁL 1994, DÁVID 1995, SZABÓ – ÖRKÉNY 1998, LIGETI 1999), and in the period after Hungary's accession to the European Union, the topic again came to the forefront of interest, primarily with a focus on the active participation of youth (LIGETI – MÁRTON 2001, KÁLMÁN 2003, BARACSI – HAGYMÁSY – MÁRTON 2009, KÁTAI 2006). However, partly because of the social, educational and educational changes that have taken place in the last decade, and partly because of the new challenges facing the world of school and youth, we have to say that further research is needed for a deeper understanding of this topic. At the same time, the topicality of the topic is indicated not only by the demonstrations/protests taking place with the participation of secondary school students due to changes affecting the education system, but also by the fact that in the regulatory system of education and education it seems that "great emphasis has been placed on youth and student council, yet young people are not reached by these institutions, and young people do not even feel that they have a say in public affairs" (KERPEL-FLORIUS – NAGY – FAZEKAS 2020. 363).

In the case of young people, the devaluation of trust in decision-making systems and dissatisfaction with traditional forms of participation in public life and youth organizations is not a new phenomenon: they were already interested in research at the birth of European youth sociology (MANNHEIM 1952), and at the beginning of the two thousands, European states were already strongly interested in professional policy actions and social innovation developments in the political structure of their community (eg. White Paper 2001) and youth research (YOUNISS et al. 2002, DUDLEY – GITELSON 2003, LETKI 2004, ZELDIN 2004, CHECKOWAY 2006, GINWRIGHT – CAMMAROTA 2007).

In the second decade of the new millennium, new types of youth activities appeared, which were typically born from the professional use of info-communication technologies (internet, smartphone, web2, social networking sites) and the network of virtual youth communities (JANCSÁK 2013, THEOCHARIS 2015, IGNATOVA 2023). Nevertheless, alienation from European electoral politics does not mean that young people are apathetic about public life (SLOAN 2014.), but rather that they engage in different activities and intensities than the parents' generation (and even instead of traditional age-group representation frameworks such as youth councils – cf. TAFT – GORDON 2013) (see also SAUNDERS et.al. 2012, VAN DETH 2014, THEOCHARIS – VAN DETH 2018).

Our time is characterized by instability and uncertainty caused by the crisis of consensus norms and social values. Economic and political crises, new migration flows and technological

changes have created new vulnerabilities among young people. The phenomenon of the crisis of values extended to the social values of freedom, solidarity, empathy, autonomy and responsibility, that is the crisis of universal humanist values appeared, and in this context, exposure to the manipulations of the post-truth era intensified (JANCSÁK 2020a). At the same time, secondary school life can represent significant added value for the later civic life of generations currently growing up in school, when young people are prepared for conscious and active citizenship roles, embracing social values through education, and knowing and creatively interpreting elements of our past and culture. Can secondary schools and the student government system take advantage of this opportunity, and can they meet this challenge?

The world is the frame of reference for young people, therefore youth organizations not only filter and interpret social reality and impulses coming from social space, but also shape it themselves. Therefore, student movements have the potential to initiate significant social change if they are supported by other economic, demographic and social forces (GORDON 2000). Young people want to take an active part in society around them. If they are excluded, this also means that democracy is not functioning properly. (Council of Europe 1992). The basic condition for the existence of a living society is the active participation of citizens in the social, political, cultural and economic fields (REKKER et al. 2015, PONTES 2018). In the case of young people, it is particularly important to learn the necessary competencies related to volunteer activities (QUINTELIER 2015, RODRIGUES – MENEZES – FERREIRA 2024). The aim here is not only to develop knowledge, but also to motivate, acquire and experience an active civic role (SIURALA 2002, HOSKINS – SAISANA – VILLALBA 2015)

One of the tangible products of the development of European democracies over several centuries in terms of social organization is the widespread application of the principle of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity does not mean only and not primarily territorial division, but also a rational division of tasks. This is especially true in the world of education, where the student council (DÖK) has become increasingly involved. Various local governments are the basic tools for preserving the functioning of democratic institutions. These specific organizational frameworks of social self-management are equally suitable for representing values and interests. The delegation of raising and settling questions and problems is evident for the stakeholders in the educational scene. Raising problems, proposing solutions, participating in decision-making and implementation are tasks that can be trusted by students who treat the scene as their own.

In the course of our research, (1.) we examined how students think about the functions and tasks of the DÖK, see the possible roles of the student government in a narrower or broader framework, and (2.) to what extent do they consider the search for answers to the challenges and the solution of problems that appear in the world of the school's students in the new millennium as role expectations of the DÖK?

Currently, the student government is one of the most important non-formal educational arenas for the development of civic competences, where the views of representatives and representatives are formed, their opinions are nuanced, and their knowledge can become skills and competences. The basic condition for this is individual and community activity and active participation, the development of which is a central tool for the social integration of young people. Participation in the framework of this study means participation in everyday life and decisions of the community, rather than mere organizational membership: ways of thinking and activities

that are based on the world of social values and are reflected in public action and patterns of action. (3.) In our research, we also wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how do students' responses paint a picture regarding the role of the DÖK as a "democracy school".

The self-governments of secondary school students are not only formed within the framework of the social climate and institutional microclimate, but they can also shape it reflectively when these frameworks are sometimes expanded. From the perspective of types of adaptation, starting from Merton's (2000) theory, we will examine the presence of conformity and the ability to innovate in relation to the DÖK, i.e. what patterns can be seen in the students' views on the functions and role and task assumption of the DÖK, and in the relationship of intention to participate in them (4).

## METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

In the first phase of the research launched in 2023, we conducted three focus group interviews at three locations (Szeged, Pécs, and Debrecen) with the aim of specifying our questionnaire based on the knowledge gained from this. An eight-page paper questionnaire consisting of 36 sets of questions, containing both closed and open-ended questions, was used as a data collection tool for the research. László Hamvas and Rita Mária Kiss contributed to the development of the questionnaire, János Lőrinczi helped me in data analysis. The anonymous, self-completed questionnaires were completed by secondary school students in grades 11 and 12 (16-19 years) from April to May 2023 (N=374). The filling was done using the easy access method in secondary schools that responded positively to our request (10 grammar schools and 8 vocational schools<sup>2</sup>).

## RESULTS

Of the young people in the sample, 48% are boys and 52% are girls. Two-thirds of technical school students are boys, while 61% of the secondary school students are girls. Of the 374 respondents, 21 boys and 20 girls are members of their school's DÖK, representing one-tenth of the total number of respondents. According to the age distribution of respondents, 16-17 year olds (62%) are slightly overrepresented in the sample compared to 18-19 year olds.

Just over one-third of the respondents indicated that they were interested in politics (36%). Interest in politics was more prevalent among boys, while almost half of boys reported this, only 39% of girls, a significant difference ( $F=8.115$ ,  $\text{sig}.<0.05$ ;  $t=1.918$ ,  $\text{sig}.<0.05$ ). Interest in politics does not vary according to the age of the respondents, almost half of all age groups are interested in politics. Interest in politics is more prevalent among secondary school students (47% indicated it, compared to one-third of students in vocational secondary schools/technical schools). Members of DÖK expressed a higher proportion of their interest in politics than non-DÖK members. Two-thirds of those in the DÖK group indicated that they are interested in politics.

<sup>2</sup> Within the framework of this research, vocational secondary schools = technician training school, where preparatory training for secondary school leaving examinations is carried out (high-school graduation).

The majority of respondents live in cities (34% in county seats, 33% in other towns and 2% in the capital), one-third of the students live in small settlements (28% of respondents live in villages, and 3% live on farms).

Just over half of the respondents had fathers with secondary education (26% with vocational education, 34% with a high school diploma), 36% had a college diploma, and 4% had fathers with 8 primary education. Similarly, 4% of the students whose mothers had completed primary school. The mothers of two-thirds of the respondents has a secondary education (18% skilled workers, 34% with a high school diploma). 44% of respondents had a degree. Active citizenship mentality culture and interest in public issues are significantly linked to family socialization (JANCSÁK 2020a, 2020b), therefore, we assume that different patterns emerge in the perceptions of student self-government and participatory activities based on parents' educational qualifications.

One-fifth of respondents use the Internet for 1-2 hours on weekdays, half of the respondents use 3-4 hours and one-third more than 5 hours. On weekends, this time increased among students: two-thirds of respondents spend more than five hours online, while nearly one-third spent 3-4 hours online, and only 7% spent less than two hours. The deeper patterns of this time spent were not examined at the time of this data collection, i.e. how much of this amount of time is accounted for, e.g. online contact, entertainment or obtaining information. Research conducted among Hungarian youth age groups (SZÉKELY 2020, GULD 2022) indicated that internet use means less getting information on public and political topics and activities of public activity in virtual spaces than entertainment. This is in line with the results of our survey of secondary school students in 2019 (Our memory 2019, N=317, see JANCSÁK 2020a), according to which the time spent on the Internet is inversely proportional to the commitment to conscious civic roles (and interest in history). From this point of view, we assume that in the case of the tasks of the DÖK and the intention to participate in it, we will find the same phenomenon in the case of the 2023 data collection, i.e. those who use the Internet more are less receptive to public participation in schools.

While 8% of respondents are optimistic about the future of society (41% pessimistic and 51% "is-is"), we see the reverse picture when it comes to their own future, with two-thirds of respondents optimistic about their own future (5% pessimistic and 32% "is-is"). During our initial assumptions, we believed that optimism/pessimism towards the future of the personal and society shows a different pattern in relation to the task and role realization of the DÖK.

More than two-thirds of respondents indicated that they needed help because of a violation of their rights. In such cases, parents (28% of those affected), friends (14%), siblings (8%) or teachers (5%) were most likely to be contacted, and least likely to the DÖK or the school child protection officer (only 1-1% of those affected). We assumed that the experience of violation of rights meant different opinions and commitments regarding student advocacy, tasks and participatory activities.

## TASKS OF THE DÖK

During our research, we were primarily interested in the tasks students expect the school student government to perform.

In our questionnaire, we first asked students to describe what they thought is the most important function of the DÖK. The answers were divided into eight groups and we were able to

conclude that the most important functions are the exercise of advocacy functions (120 mentions) and the organization of programs and events (95 mentions), which are considered the most important functions of the DÖK. 34 mentioned community organizing and community building, 18 mentioned improving the relationship between students and teachers, the same number mentioned assessing student needs and gathering ideas, and 13 mentioned tasks related to providing information to students. In addition, five students believe that managing conflicts between students and two respondents believe that finding sources is the most important function of the DÖK.

From the data obtained by the following closed set of questions, we were able to conclude that students – not surprisingly – see the task of the DÖK and the representation of student interests in this area as important in the case of the policy that represents the everyday framework of the school's microworld (indicated by 90%). For students, representation also means that the DÖK should ask for students' opinions before taking a position (89%). The same representative role is represented by taking a stand on issues affecting students, which should also be implemented towards the head of the institution (84%) and through the institution's internal communication channels (e.g. school radio, FB group) (according to 81% of respondents). For the vast majority of students, making decisions related to the DÖK's own operation (83%) is an emphasized task, similarly to supporting initiatives taken by non-DÖK students (72%). The majority of students consider initiatives aimed at community life activity (73%) to be part of the DÖK's responsibilities rather than making decisions related to community life (58%).

According to two-thirds of respondents, student council members are responsible for youth and civic activities outside school gates: organizing joint actions with other schools' DÖKs (65%), involving students in local civil society actions (e.g. helping the elderly, environmental protection or volunteering) (61%).

A smaller proportion of respondents (45%) consider it the task of the DÖK to represent student interests in cooperation with other DÖKs in the case of the settlement, and the same proportion also indicated that they believe that it is the task of the DÖK to express its opinion on student disciplinary matters.

From the answers received to the closed set of questions, it emerged that students consider it important to implement roles that activate/stimulate and support initiatives in the inner world of the school in connection with the DÖK, and less to represent and represent the special student interests of the age group that is decision-making and least of all goes beyond the walls of the school. The decision-making role appears for students only in defining the operational framework in the context of DÖK organization (83%), but it shows less legitimacy in the case of decisions related to community life (58%). The same is indicated by the fact that only 45% of respondents consider expressing opinions on student disciplinary matters to be a dodgy task. A picture emerges before us as if students do not feel that the DÖK is so much their own, their own representation system, that in addition to assessing and representing opinions, they no longer give DÖK members a mandate to participate in decisions representing other decisions that cause serious waves (settlement level) and have personal consequences (disciplinary cases).

With the intention of getting to know deeper patterns, we ran our analyses in relation to independent variables, during which we found the following (Table 1).

Girls consider it more important that the DÖK should take a stand with the head of the institution on issues affecting students ( $Z = -2.090$ , sig. < 0.05), and that the DÖK should be the

initiator of active school community life (Asymp. Sig 0.01) and involves the school's pupils in local public actions of civil society ( $Z = -2.524$ , sig.<0.05). The boys consider it a more important task for the DÖK to participate and express its opinion in student disciplinary matters ( $Z = -2.932$ , sig.<0.05).

The initiation of active community life appears as a more important expectation among older students aged 18-19 ( $Z = -1.952$ , sig.<0.05). From the distributions by type of school, we could conclude that secondary school students consider it more important than the school principal to take a position on issues related to school life ( $Z = -2.813$ , sig.<0.05), that before making a resolution, the DÖK should collect the opinion of students ( $Z = -2.169$ , sig.<0.05), and that it should decide on its own operation ( $Z = -3.655$ , sig.<0.05), and support the initiatives of non-students ( $Z = -2.604$ , sig.<0.05) and to organise various activities in cooperation with other municipal student council ( $Z = -2.353$ , sig.<0.05).

With regard to the type of settlement of permanent residence, we found that young people living in cities, mostly in cities with county rights, consider it more important for the DÖK to seek the opinion of the school's students before making any position (Chi-Square = 18.418, sig.< 0.05), while the situation is the opposite for the DÖK to express an opinion on student disciplinary matters, young people living in cities with county rights consider it least important. (Chi-Square = 11.454, sig.< 0.05)

Opinions on individual tasks also showed significant differences in terms of interest in politics. Respondents who are interested in politics consider it more important than their apolitical peers that the DÖK should take a position with the principal on issues affecting students arising in the life of the school ( $Z = -3.538$ , sig.<0.05), that it should seek the opinion of the school's students before making resolutions ( $Z = -2.670$ , sig.<0.05), and that it should make decisions regarding its own operation ( $Z = -2.091$ , sig.<0.05) and to support initiatives of non-DÖK members ( $Z = -3.215$ , sig.<0.05).

With regard to parents' educational attainment, we found that the expectation of collecting preliminary opinions in case of a resolution increases in parallel with the increase in the educational attainment of fathers and mothers, in both cases the most important thing for the children of parents with a degree is that the DÖK should seek the opinion of the students of the school before making a resolution. (fathers Chi-Square = 12.958, sig.< 0.05, mothers Chi-Square = 11.565, sig.< 0.05).

We found no significant differences between DÖK officials and non-office holders in terms of internet frequency.

However, positive perceptions of personal future have caused rifts in three factors. Those who prefer not to be confident in their own future consider it more important to collect opinions before the resolution (Chi-Square = 8.382, sig.< 0.05), do not consider it a döö task to represent the school's students at municipal ceremonies (Chi-Square = 7.127, sig.< 0.05), and consider that it is not the task of the DÖK to involve the school's students in local civic initiatives (Chi-Square = 7.576, sig.< 0.05).

Students who are optimistic about the future of society consider it more important to publish statements on public affairs through the school's internal communication channels (Chi-Square = 8.743, sig.< 0.05), they also consider it more important for the DÖK to make decisions related to community life (Chi-Square = 8.531, sig.< 0.05), to take the initiative in the active



community life of the school (Chi-Square = 8.785.454, sig.< 0.05) and, to involve the school's pupils in municipal civil life (Chi-Square = 12.285, sig.< 0.05).

Students who report that they have had a negative experience with a violation of law consider it a significantly more important DÖK task to take a position on matters concerning students with the principal ( $Z = -2.191$ , sig.<0.05), to have the DÖK express its opinion in student disciplinary matters ( $Z = -1.901$ , sig.<0.05), and also to allow the school's students to participate in civil actions of municipal public interest through the DÖK ( $Z = -3.120$ , sig.<0.05).

*Table 1*  
*Tasks of the DÖK*

|  | YES (%) |
|--|---------|
| represent the interests of pupils in drawing up the school's rules of procedure  | 90      |
| consult the pupils of the school before taking a position  | 89      |
| take a position with the headmaster on matters concerning students in the life of the school   | 84      |
| take decisions about its own activities  | 83      |
| take a stand on school issues affecting students through the school's internal communication channels (school radio, Facebook group, etc.)                     | 81      |
| take the initiative to promote an active community life for school students  | 73      |
| take up non-DÖK-member student initiatives in school life  | 72      |
| organise joint actions with other school DÖKs in the municipality on issues of concern to young people   | 65      |
| involve school pupils in the activities of local NGOs in the public interest (e.g. environmental protection, help for the elderly, other voluntary work, etc.) | 61      |
| take decisions concerning the students' community life   | 58      |
| represent the school at municipal celebrations   | 49      |
| together with other school DÖKs in the municipality, approach the mayor to represent the interests of local young people                                       | 45      |
| give an opinion on disciplinary matters concerning students  | 45      |

## REFLECTIONS ON CLASSICAL ADVOCACY TASKS AND NEW ROLES

In the next part of our research, we wanted to know what students think about the tasks of the DÖK. In a closed question, we examined the opinions of six statements, asking respondents to indicate on a five-point scale how much they think the DÖK is responsible for (Table 2). In addition to traditional advocacy roles ('hands-free' learners' voices, representation and handling of disputes), this set of questions also included some of the new phenomena emerging in the school world (Preventing violence in schools, Preventing bullying at school, combating discrimination, Countering disinformation and fake news). In our opinion, these are among the biggest challenges facing the school world, and we wanted to know how students feel about whether the DÖK, which represents the learning community, has a role in them. We found that, in addition to traditional student government roles, students think significantly less about the need for DÖK involvement in the case of new vulnerabilities that have appeared in the world of young people.

In the case of expressing students' opinions and representing and handling disputed issues, we can assume that for students representation means expressing opinions (this is the more passive) and less about "arguing" – including student-teacher or student-student conflict – and handling disputes as a decision-making role, and implementation. The latter is a more active role and goes beyond the former in that it assumes strong legitimacy as a basis for action in addition to representation (e.g. signaling opinion/problem) as a basis for action in relation to decision-making (case management and resolution). From the responses, it seems that this legitimacy is lacking.

Looking at the distributions of voters at the two extremes of the scale (totally vs. not at all), we can conclude that while two-thirds of the respondents believe that the representation and representation of student opinions is the main task of the DÖK, and another third believe that the DÖK should represent and handle the emerging disputes, in their opinion the new challenges affecting the world of schools are less of the task of the DÖK. The same number of respondents (18%-18%) consider combating disinformation and preventing violence in schools to be entirely the task of the DÖK, while 12% and 20% respectively believe that these are not at all wall data of the DÖK. Our data show that according to students, action against discrimination and action against violence in schools is even less of a task for the DÖK (in the case of both, 17% indicated that they do not consider it the task of the DÖK, respectively completely and 19%, respectively).

*Table 2*

*Classic advocacy tasks and new roles*

*(How much is the task of the DÖK...?, average values on a five-point scale)*

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Making students' voices heard           | 4.5 |
| Representation and handling of disputes | 3.9 |
| Fighting misinformation and fake news   | 3.2 |
| Action against discrimination           | 3.1 |
| Prevention of violence in schools       | 2.9 |
| Preventing bullying at school           | 2.9 |

In our further analysis, we found that girls consider it more important to display students' opinions when taking on their DÖK tasks (4.7 for girls and 4.3 for boys on a five-point scale;  $Z = -4.998$ , sig.<0.05), dispute representation (girls 4, boys 3.8  $Z = -2.153$ , sig.<0.05) and participation in bullying prevention (girls 3, boys 2.8  $Z = -1.946$ , sig.<0.05) than boys.

Looking for deeper patterns, we found no significant difference between age groups (16-17 years old and over 18 years old).

However, we were able to identify a significant difference in the opinions of students of vocational secondary schools, vocational secondary schools and general secondary schools in terms of expressing opinions and representing controversial issues in the same way. The average value of the answers given by vocational secondary school students is 4.2 in the case of the former, while it is 4.7 in the case of general secondary school students (the difference is significant ( $Z = -5.537$ , sig.<0.05)). In the case of representation and handling of disputes, we could conclude the same (vocational secondary school, vocational secondary school 3.8, general secondary school 4, the difference ( $Z = -2.027$ , sig.<0.05)). Compared to students of vocational secondary schools and vocational secondary schools, secondary school students consider it more important DÖK tasks both to present opinions and to represent and handle disputed issues.

No significant difference was found between the mean scores according to whether the respondent was a member of the school's student council or not. Thus, both students who are members of the student council and those who are not members of the student council believe that the most important functions of the student council are traditional representational functions and voice within the student council, but less so in combating disinformation and pseudo-news and discrimination, and least so in preventing violence and bullying in schools. This seems to be the students left to the adult world. This result raises the need for specific training for elected representatives and DÖK members. Based on the data, the same picture emerges for non-school (municipal, county, national) DÖK members (8 in the sample).

However, parents' educational attainment seems to have some influence on student perceptions. When it comes to displaying opinions, the opinions of children of fathers with higher education differ significantly (Chi-Square = 9.553, sig.< 0.05) from the other two groups (their children have an average score of 4.6, children with secondary education have an average score of 4.4, and children of fathers with primary education have an average score of 4), but the children of fathers with secondary education and fathers with a bachelor's degree do not differ. Children of fathers with degrees rated the display of opinions the highest (4.6) as a DÖK task. The situation regarding the "hands-free" of students' opinions regarding the educational attainment of mothers is the same as for fathers: children of mothers with tertiary education (4.6) differ significantly (Chi-Square = 8.704, sig.< 0.05) from both other groups, while children of mothers with secondary education (4.4) and bachelor's education (4.3) do not differ. In terms of tackling discrimination, children of mothers with primary education (average score: 4) differ significantly (Chi-Square = 8.615, sig.< 0.05) from the other two groups, but children of mothers with intermediate (average value: 3) and tertiary education (average value: 3) do not differ. Children of mothers with a degree rated the role of expression higher, while children of mothers with a bachelor's degree (15) rated action against discrimination. This result raises questions of personal involvement/experience and its consequences, as well as the development, training and preparation of learners' communities and representation to deal with and resolve such cases.

In terms of internet usage habits, we did not find significantly different patterns regarding DÖK's tasks. Students who use the Internet for 5 hours or more both during the week and on weekends undervalue the fight against fake news and the prevention of bullying at school just as much as those who use the Internet for less than 3-4 hours or less than 2 hours.

During our initial assumptions, we believed that trust in the future of the person and society shows different patterns in relation to the task of the DÖK. However, our data only partially confirmed this. Based on optimism/pessimism about the personal future, we did not find significant differences in the average values of each task. Opinions about the future of society, on the other hand, have shown an interesting correlation. In the case of active doc engagement (representation and management of disputes), we found a significant difference (Chi-Square = 8.932, sig.< 0.05) between respondents with an optimistic and less optimistic future outlook. Those who trust in the future of society consider representing and handling disputed issues to be a more important DÖK task (average value 4.3) than those who do not trust the future of society (3.7).

As indicated earlier, personal experience gained in some kind of infringement may shade the views on the accomplishment of tasks and roles of the DÖK. This dimension has revealed different patterns in three respects. Students who indicated that they had previous experience in some kind of violation<sup>3</sup> rated three DÖK tasks more important than the others. In their case, the "hands-free" of students' opinions received an average score of 4.6 (compared to 4.4 for those who were not affected ( $Z = -1.913$ , sig.<0.06), prevention of violence in schools 3.1 (compared to 2.8 for those not affected; ( $Z = -1.996$ , sig.<0.05), and bullying prevention 3.2 (not affected: 2.8; ( $Z = -2.294$ , sig.<0.05). From all this, we can conclude that students who have suffered negative effects in connection with violations of rights expect the DÖK to play an active role in preventing violations when new youth vulnerabilities appear in the world of education. Therefore, this is not an extended role expectation, but a phenomenon present in the world of latency, which poses a new challenge for student communities and elected representatives (!) as well. Training with such knowledge (and how to deal with infringements) can be an important part of the training of DÖK members.

The legitimacy of the DÖK and its student background base are the foundations for the effective implementation of interpretive community (Pusztai 2011), representation and community development roles. Based on the above, a "vacuum" emerges in the DÖK's "room for manoeuvre" between the possible (and necessary to undertake, e.g. prevention of school conflicts, bullying, discrimination) and the roles realized, in other words: between the possibilities offered by the legal framework and everyday practice.

This may be related to the democratic deficit in schools, the devaluation of democratic values related to the microworld of the school (the organizational personality of the school), the disturbances of the culture of active and active citizenship, the lack of civic competences (the unrealized tasks of the socialization function of the family in public life and civic education in schools), but also to the shallowness of civic education (education), students' knowledge of rights and legal awareness shortcomings. This is indicated by the results of our research (Table 3), according to which 4% of students believe that students have the right to express their opinion at the express request of teachers or principals, and another 20% believe that students can express their opinion through the DÖK, in a suitable forum during the school year.

<sup>3</sup> We did not examine the type of infringement, only the perception of involvement: in the distribution of yes/no variables.

*Table 3*  
*In what cases and when do you think students have the right to express their opinion at school?*  
*(percentage distributions)*

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| At the express request of the teachers or the headmaster.  | 4   |
| Through the student council, in the appropriate forum during the school year.                        | 20  |
| About anything and at any time, as long as the opinion does not violate the human dignity of others. | 76  |
|  | 100 |

## INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE

72% of students would participate in anonymous opinions (e.g. problem boxes), but only 54% would participate in expressing their opinion by assuming their name. Girls (78%) would participate more than boys (65%) ( $Z = -2.281$ ,  $\text{sig.} < 0.003$ ), but we found no difference between the sexes in terms of whether they also express their opinions with their names.

A quarter of students would participate in the leadership of the DÖK. Girls are also more motivated to participate in this issue (28% indicated that they would participate in the DÖK, compared to 24% among boys).

Overall, students' willingness to participate in taking on DÖK tasks can be assessed as low. (Table 4) The highest proportion indicated participation in the compilation of the policy, but this was also indicated only by 44% of respondents. This undermotivation means that the DÖK does not have a real supportive hinterland for exercising its initiative and proposal powers (only a half of students would participate in initiating active school community life and embracing non-dodgy student initiatives), but the same can be said about the power to form opinions and give opinions (42% of students would participate in collecting opinions, 38% would take a position on matters concerning students with the headmaster). One-fifth of students indicated that they would participate in expressing their opinion on disciplinary matters concerning students. The data show that only a minority of students would like to participate in making decisions that determine their own high school life and their school's microclimate. One third of respondents would participate in decisions related to the operation of the DÖK, and less than a quarter of respondents would participate in decisions related to the community life of students. Based on the data, we can see that as activity, personal energy investment increases, and from opinion-forming to representation (and possible conflicts) with face, word and deed, the motivation to participate decreases. We refer back to the results of the research, according to which students consider traditional advocacy and program and event organization to be the most important functions of the DÖK, and only a quarter of them would participate in the leadership of the DÖK, however, another 25% of students think that it is not possible to express their opinion at any time, but only in a limited way (at the express request of the headmaster, or during the school year in a suitable forum) – all this raises the question, Is the visible undermotivation in

terms of participatory activity due to the aforementioned democratic deficit, lack of information or lack of legal awareness? Either does it stem from the fact that students see the DÖK as a kind of “game of elites”, a cooperation between docs and institutional management, which arises in such a way that the election of DÖK representatives is not an election of representatives, but only a vote, when (see Arnstein 1969, Hart 1992) “smart representatives” are selected (e.g. as a result of nomination by the class teacher), or does it arise from missing patterns of exercising functions? e.g. in the institution DÖK is used only as decoration. With the further analysis of our research database, this will be the focus of our interest (for which our questionnaire provides a great opportunity), during which we will examine the patterns of satisfaction related to the role of the DÖK, as well as the opinions about making the work of the DÖK more effective, about the role set of the mentor teacher of the DÖK, and what content students expect from a training on student government.

However, it is worth saying here in advance that in response to the closed question “How do you think the work of the DÖK could be made more efficient?” three-quarters of students indicated (values of 4 and 5 in five-grade scale), and furthermore, 70% of respondents indicated that “If not only one designated person worked on this, the whole faculty would support his work” and 64% of students say “If students were given more freedom to manage their affairs”.

*Table 4*  
*Would you participate?*  
*(percentages)*

|  | YES |
|--|-----|
| representing the interests of students in drawing up the school's rules of procedure?  | 44  |
| gathering the views of students before taking a position?  | 42  |
| taking a stand with the headmaster on issues affecting students in school life?  | 38  |
| in initiating an active community life of students in the school?  | 34  |
| supporting non-DGB student initiatives in the public life of the school?   | 33  |
| publicising the school's position on public matters affecting students through the school's internal communication channels (school radio, FB group, etc.) ? | 32  |
| in making decisions about the functioning of the Student Council (DÖK)?  | 30  |
| involvement of school pupils in local civic activities of public interest (e.g. environmental, helping the elderly, other voluntary work, etc.)?             | 30  |
| organising joint actions with other DÖK in the municipality?   | 24  |
| in making decisions about the students' community life?  | 23  |
| to express an opinion on disciplinary matters concerning pupils?   | 20  |
| represent the school at municipal celebrations?  | 18  |
| visit the mayor together with the DÖK of another school in the settlement to represent the interests of the local youth?                                     | 15  |

## CONCLUSION

As we wrote in the introduction, only a truly functioning student government can ensure that students can exercise their rights (directly or through representation). The legal operation of an educational institution can only be ensured by a well-functioning student government and the active participation of the school's citizens in community and student public life.

In the course of our research, we examined (1.) how students feel about the functions and tasks of the DÖK (they see the possible roles of student government in a narrower or broader framework), (2.) to what extent they consider the search for answers to the challenges and the solution of problems that appeared in the world of the school's students in the new millennium as role expectations of the DÖK, and (3.) what picture the students' responses draw in relation to the role of the student government as a "democracy school", and (4) the representation background and opportunities that motivations for participation create.

Girls, high school students, young people living in cities, those interested in politics and those affected by violations of rights are those who formulate broader role expectations in the case of student government. Children of fathers with degrees emphasize the formulation and representation of opinions, and the role of combating discrimination is emphasized by students whose mothers have a bachelor's degree. Those who have suffered negative effects in connection with a violation of rights expect the student government to play an active role in preventing violations when new youth vulnerabilities appear in the world of education. In terms of internet usage habits, we did not find significantly different patterns regarding DÖK's tasks, however, those who use the Internet more are less receptive to public participation in schools. Those who trust in the future of society consider representing and handling disputes, i.e. taking on conflicts, to be a more important task than those who do not trust.

We believe that preventing violence in schools, preventing bullying in schools, combating discrimination and combating disinformation and fake news are some of the biggest challenges facing the school world today. At the same time, we found that, in addition to traditional student government roles (gathering opinions, advocacy), students think significantly less about the need for DÖK involvement in the case of new vulnerabilities that have appeared in the world of young people.

The legitimacy of the student government and its student background base are the foundation for participation, the effective implementation of representation and community development roles. A "vacuum" emerges in the DÖK space between the roles that are possible (and necessary to be assumed by rights, e.g. prevention of school conflicts, bullying, discrimination) and the roles realized. According to the students' opinions, in everyday practice the tasks of DÖK are to collect/display opinions and organize events and programs. Motivation to participate in DÖK and active community participation characterizes only a small proportion of students. Representing opinions with face and deed, and accepting potential conflicts, shows even less inclination.

This may be related to the democratic deficit in schools, the devaluation of democratic values related to the microworld of the school (the organizational personality of the school), the disturbances of the culture of active and active citizenship, the lack of civic competences (the unrealized tasks of the socialization function of the family in public life and civic education in schools), and the shallowness of civic education (education), students' knowledge of rights and legal awareness also with its shortcomings. However, alienation among students from public roles

in schools may also indicate a lack of opportunities for involvement (e.g. student council used as decoration).

Nowadays, student government is one of the most important non-formal educational areas for the development of civic competences, where students' views are formed, their opinions are nuanced, and their knowledge can become skills and competences.

The basic conditions for individual and community activity and the active participation of young people are a positive supportive environment on the part of the adult world, a democratic organizational microclimate and a cooperative organizational personality. The development of active participation is a central tool for the social integration of young people.

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