

The Organizational Development of the Hungarian Community of Ontario

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The organizational development of the Hungarian community in Ontario has been and continues to be a complex and many-faceted process. The main reason for this is the fact that Hungarians have come to this province in three different periods: during the interwar years, in the years following World War II, and in the wake of the 1956 Revolution. The primary aim of this paper is to examine the differences and similarities among the organizations of these three waves of Hungarian immigrants to Ontario. To facilitate an understanding of the general trends in the organizational development of each of these waves, a table has been compiled, showing the numbers and types of organizations established by Hungarians in Ontario.¹ Data for this chart and information for this paper have been obtained from the written, photographic and oral history material that has been gathered by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario.²

The first Hungarian associations in Ontario were the so-called mutual benefit societies which were created to protect immigrants from uncertainties confronting them in a new and strange social and economic environment. The earliest of these came into existence before the First World War, at a time when no state-sponsored welfare programmes and insurance existed in Canada. As well as providing a modicum security in case of accident or illness, these associations catered to the social needs of their members by holding meetings and social events, where the immigrants, isolated from the host society by language and culture, could find companionship. The First Hungarian Workers Sick Benefit Society was organized in Hamilton in 1907, it later grew to fourteen chapters in Ontario. The Brantford Hungarian Mutual Benefit Society, established in 1913, formed seven chapters in Ontario and two in Nova Scotia. The former became leftist-oriented and later amalgamated with the Independent Mutual Benefit Federation (IMBF). The latter

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Type of Organization	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
1. Community-wide/umbrella			T*	H*	TT	TT		
2. Fraternal/mutual benefit	H B H	We Wi Os G* N	H T N We B* T* N		Ts T T			
3. Churches		We Wi H Wi T We T P	We Wi T H We H Wi H Kc T Wi* T		H We D Wi	C C	O	L
4. Cultural/community Centres		We Wi Os Kc* T*	H S	T*Ti* S* Os*	T* H* B	D	T T	K O T T
5. Homeland district					Ts T		T T H	
6. Youth organizations			T* We	T*	T	TT	H H T* O* H	T O s* T T L T
7. Schools			T T* Wi*				T* T H O*	L T St T T Kc* Os
8. Newspapers * ceased		H	We* T*		TT	T	TT* D*	N* T* T H* T* T* T K T T* T* T*
Population/Hungarian Community-Ontario		1,003	10,474	16,082	28,182	59,427	65,695	

- City Code**
 B - Brantford
 C - Courtland
 D - Delhi
 G - Galt-Guelph
 H - Hamilton
 K - Kingston
 Kc - Kitchener
 L - London
 N - Niagara Falls
 O - Ottawa
 Os - Oshawa
 P - Port Colborne
 S - Sudbury
 St - St. Catharines
 Ts - Tillsonburg
 T - Toronto
 Ti - Timmins
 We - Welland
 Wi - Windsor

retained its non-political posture.

After the First World War additional societies were formed, offering similar kind of practical and social service, among these were the Welland Hungarian Self-Culture Society, the Windsor and District Hungarian Society and the Oshawa Hungarian Cultural Club. The aforementioned societies and clubs were independent organizations while others, such as the Brantford Sick Benefit Society and the Hungarian Workers Sick Benefit Society were branches of the larger insurance federations. By the 1930s, Hungarian mutual benefit or self-help societies were active in most cities in Ontario with a sizeable Hungarian community. Interestingly, there were no mutual benefit societies founded in Toronto, despite the fact that this city consistently had one of the largest Hungarian populations in Ontario. At no time were the head offices of the two largest mutual benefit societies located in Toronto. There were, however, various chapters established in the city. The importance of Hungarian mutual benefit societies has diminished considerably, since state-sponsored forms of insurance came into effect. To a certain degree, the fraternal/mutual benefit societies also acted as supra-communal or umbrella organizations as they had affiliates or chapters in many areas and served the function of acting as liaison between the host society and the immigrant community. In particular, the Kossuth Federation (the Hungarian section of the IMBF) maintained such a dual role.³ The first supra-communal or umbrella organization established in Ontario was the short-lived Canadian Hungarian National Federation, formed in Toronto in 1936.

Usually, umbrella organizations were formed in response to specific needs which arose in the community. For instance, the United Canadian Relief Committee was founded in 1945 to unite Hungarian-Canadians in the sending of clothing, medicine and food to Hungary and to ease the post-war suffering. Similarly, it was not until 1956 that the Hungarian Canadian Federation (founded in Toronto in 1951) could improve its image and influence by heading the protest against Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising of that year and through initiating the fund-raising campaign for the victims of the revolution and for the refugees.⁴ It can be generally stated that if the short-term purpose for which the umbrella organization was formed was achieved, its impact and influence

thereafter diminished. No one wave or group was outstanding in establishing community wide organizations.

1

The situation is very different in the case of Hungarian religious organizations in Ontario. The number of congregations founded and churches built by the interwar immigrants, as the chart illustrates, exceeded the contribution of any other wave. The first Hungarian congregations organized in Ontario were Presbyterian and were founded in Welland and Hamilton in 1926. In 1928, Hungarian Roman Catholics founded parishes in Welland and Toronto. Hamilton, Toronto, Welland and Windsor, cities which had a Hungarian population of over 1000 by 1931, each had at least four congregations active by the mid-1930s.⁵ The size of the community was not always in direct relation with the number and size of the institutions established, however, as was demonstrated in the case of Port Colborne, where there were also over 1000 Hungarians. In this city, only one congregation was founded. Port Colborne's Hungarian community was a more transient one when compared with the communities in Welland and Windsor. Hungarians were attracted to cities largely on the basis of employment availability and security; where this was scarce, the community could not grow or diversify.

Only larger congregations had permanent ministers during the 1930s and 40s, sometimes because they could not, during the Depression, support them, more often because there were few ordained ministers available. The first Hungarian Roman Catholic priest to serve in Toronto, Rev. László Forgach, was a "*sorkosztos*," someone who went to a different home every night for his meals.⁶ This was the only way the congregation could support its priest.

Most of the Hungarian priests and ministers in Canada established missions in one community, but spent much of their time travelling to others. The Rev. Eugene Ruzsa, the first Hungarian Lutheran minister in Canada, used to travel to four and sometimes five different communities on each Sunday to hold services. Since the minister had no transportation, each time he completed a service in one location, he had to persuade a member of the congregation who owned an automobile to transport him to the location of the next service.⁷

In the tobacco district of southern Ontario, churches were only built by the interwar immigrants in the late 1940s and early 50s.⁸ Despite the fact that most of the Hungarians only came to the tobacco district during the Depression, it took that long until they established themselves financially and felt secure enough to support community institutions. The congregations of Ottawa and London were started as a direct result of the influx of refugees in 1956, following which the Hungarian population of these two cities were each augmented by approximately 800.⁹

The need for cultural expression superseded the need for religious institutions in some cities, such as Niagara Falls, Brantford and Oshawa, where, despite the fact that the earliest Hungarian institutions were founded in these cities, no church was acquired. Hungarians in the northern mining town of Sudbury and Timmins — where again no religious congregations were established — formed several cultural groups.

2

The interwar immigrants established numerous community centres. Two thirds of the existing community centres in southern Ontario were founded by the interwar immigrants, though some groups only acquired buildings after the Second World War. One of the reasons for this delay was that during the war there was a great scarcity of building materials, another was that after the war the Canadian Government openly encouraged and assisted conservative segments of ethnic communities to organize and obtain buildings in order to counteract leftist activities.¹⁰

Most of the early cultural/community centres housed a banquet hall, kitchen facilities, libraries and reading rooms. Groups active within the clubhouses usually included amateur dramatic troupes and soccer teams; dance classes and English language instruction were also offered intermittently. Despite the fact that most of the immigrants who founded these centres had little formal education, much importance was placed on the maintenance of the reading rooms and libraries housed within these club buildings. Initially, organizations held their functions in rented premises. The first group to acquire a building was the *Wellandi Önképzőkör*, or Welland Hungarian Self-Culture Society. Purchase of the building in 1924 was made

possible largely through the donations of English-Canadians. The petition they signed when they made their donation read as follows:

*The undersigned agree to pay the sums set opposite their respective names to form a fund where with to acquire by purchase or otherwise suitable premises to be used by the Hungarian Self-Culture Society of Welland, the object of which is educational so that its members may acquire a knowledge of the English language and thus become useful and successful citizens of Canada. The members of this society, seventy-eight in number, consider Welland as their home.*¹¹

The intentions of the English-Canadian donors were commendable, considering that the main objective of such cultural societies was the maintenance and preservation of Hungarian culture.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Ontario's Hungarian community was plagued by sharp divisions and antagonisms between its left-wing and conservative elements. The ideological split permeated even their social and religious organizations. For example, when the Delhi & Tobacco District Hungarian House was built in 1949, the leftist Hungarian language newspaper, *Kanadai Magyar Munkás* (Canadian Hungarian Worker), repeatedly attacked the house's leadership because they founded a community centre and not a *Munkás Otthon* (Worker's Home). The Hungarian contractor who built the house related that there were frequent threats against him and the house's executive. According to the contractor, shortly after the supporting beams of the structure were in place, the leftists hung a rope tied in a hangman's noose on one of the beams and wrote beneath it: "this is where the leaders of the Delhi Hungarian House will hang themselves."¹²

3

When the postwar immigrants began arriving in 1948, they established organizations and institutions with somewhat different aims: to maintain the culture and traditions of the homeland, particularly those undermined in Hungary after 1945, and to transmit the Hungarian cultural identity and heritage to the second generation. The Hungarians who settled in Ontario

following the Revolution of 1956 formed over half a dozen new theatre companies, dance groups and choirs. Sándor Kertész founded the Toronto Art Theatre, in response to a need on the part of newly-arrived actors and actresses to practice their craft. The theatre group celebrated its 20th anniversary year in 1981. The Kodály Ensemble, consisting of a choir and a dance group, has become a renowned Hungarian folk dance company. George Zadubán, the founder of the Kodály Ensemble, believed that through such groups the refugees sought to recreate the urban cultural milieu they left behind in Hungary.¹³

Between 1920 and 1980, there was no outstanding decade with regards to the number of cultural organizations established, no one wave or group was exceptional in this respect. The purposes of the three waves in founding cultural organizations were different, however: for the interwar immigrants, cultural groups provided social contacts and a sense of ethnic persistence; the postwar immigrants were provided with a sense that their cultural traditions were being preserved and passed on; the 1956 refugees promoted the fine arts and formed organizations which were an extension of the cultural scene in Budapest.

One of the most significant achievement of the post-war immigrants was the founding of the Hungarian-Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto in 1974. The Centre was reorganized out of the earlier established Toronto Hungarian House, the sale of whose building made the purchase of larger facilities possible. The Centre is considered to be one of the focal points of Hungarian community life in North America. It houses some twenty organizations, a library of 30,000 volumes and a Saturday language school, encompassing grades one through eight. The Centre also publishes a monthly journal and produces the only Hungarian-language radio broadcast aired in Southern Ontario.

4

Homeland district associations bring together immigrants originating from one country, city or district in Hungary.¹⁴ In the case of Hungarian communities in the United States, homeland district organizations were characteristic of the turn of the century immigration, which was comparable, as far as the background of the immigrants was concerned, with the interwar immigration in Canada. For example, in Cleveland, Ohio, organizations such as the *Szabolcs megyei klub* (Szabolcs

County Club), *Gömör megyei klub* (Gömör County Club) and *Szatmár megyei klub* (Szatmár County Club) played an integral role within the community for decades.¹⁵ It has been postulated that these organizations were a product of a generation of immigrants who distrusted the host society and were drawn into close association with fellow villagers and others from their homeland district because of their rural background and relative difficulty in adjustment.¹⁶

According to the findings of this paper, there were no associations of this kind established during the 1930s and 1940s in Ontario. The energies of the interwar immigrants were entirely spent on establishing community-wide organizations and institutions. Although large segments of the membership of some of the first organizations were from one area or district in Hungary, they came together to form organizations which would serve a specific need and attract a large number of Hungarians in the community. For instance, originally the Brantford Hungarian Mutual Benefit Society was intended to be named to "County of Zala Sick Benefit Society," as a reflection of the origin of the founding members.¹⁷

There were several homeland district associations formed after the Second World War by immigrants from urban as well as rural backgrounds. This may be attributed to several factors. The initial and most important needs of the community, namely mutual aid, churches and cultural groups were met by the time of the Second World War. Moreover, after World War II, a significant number of Hungarians immigrated to Canada from Transylvania in Rumania and Bácska-Bánát in Yugoslavia. The groups that had lived as minorities in Europe formed homeland district associations in Ontario following their arrival.

The existence of homeland district associations, therefore, may not simply be attributed to fear, on the part of immigrants with rural backgrounds, of new surroundings and a foreign language. It may be viewed rather as a form of nostalgia or sentimental attachment to one's native region which was characteristic of all immigrants, regardless of period of emigration. Moreover, these organizations were generally formed after the foundations of the community had been established, again demonstrating that they were not first and foremost a defense mechanism on the part of disoriented immigrants.

The contribution of the interwar immigrants with regards to youth organizations and schools was significant, in light of the fact that they encountered considerable limitations with regards to individuals willing and able to teach such classes and textbooks available. Community organizations attracted the second generation through youth clubs, sports divisions and even dance classes. The task of providing Hungarian language instruction, however, remained largely with the Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy. At some congregations, such as St. Elizabeth of Hungary Roman Catholic Church in Toronto, the Hungarian school was organized nearly simultaneously with the founding of the church by the Sisters of Social Service.

In other cities and towns, it was difficult to ascertain, in many cases, whether language instruction was held at a particular church, community centre or under the auspices of an organization. There were several churches which held religious instruction in the Hungarian language, but these Sunday schools could not always be classified as Hungarian language instruction. Hungarian Workers' Clubs in Ontario organized numerous language schools during the interwar years. The exact number or history of these may never be documented as the bulk of the records of the Hungarian sections of the Independent Mutual Benefit Federation and of the Workers' and Farmers' Club seems to have been lost.¹⁸

The postwar immigrants placed special emphasis on transmitting the culture, language and heritage to their offspring and made considerable progress towards achieving this goal. They did this through numerous Hungarian language schools and the Hungarian scouting movement. The Hungarian Scouts Association was reorganized in displaced persons camps in Europe. Canada comprises a separate region within the Hungarian Scouts Association. There are fourteen troops across Canada, half of which are in the Province of Ontario. The first troop in Canada, number twenty, "*Árpád Vezér*," was founded in 1952 in Toronto. In the youth organizations category, ten of the fourteen entries made after 1950 represent different scout troops, only three of which have ceased altogether. The other youth organizations listed are for the most part social groups affiliated with a community centre, church or larger organization.

During the post-World War II years, several communities

founded Hungarian language schools on the elementary level. The two elementary schools in Toronto, St. Elizabeth Hungarian School and the János Arany School reported a combined enrollment of 500 students in 1979. Outside this city the Hungarian language at the elementary school level is being taught in Hamilton, Delhi, St. Catharines, Kitchener, London and Oshawa. The Toronto Hungarian School Board, founded in 1971, organizes summer camps where children receive intensive instruction in the Hungarian language. It also publishes textbooks used by the Saturday schools and written by the teachers themselves. Since 1971, the "*Kis Magyarok*" series of workbooks for grade levels one, two, three and four has been completed.

At the secondary school level there is one grade thirteen non-credit course in Hungarian studies taught outside the Toronto area, in St. Catharines. In Toronto, two credit courses are offered, grades 10 and 11, in addition to one grade 13 course. These classes were organized under the auspices of the Hungarian Helicon Society and taught in the evening at various locations. The Chair of Hungarian Studies, established at the University of Toronto in 1978, offers courses on Hungarian language, literature, culture, cinema and drama.

6

In the last category, that of ethnic newspapers, the interwar period was dominated by a few newspapers, each with a sizeable circulation whereas the postwar era is characterized by the establishment of dozens of newspapers, many of which served a special interest group or political party. Prior to the Second World War, the Hungarian-Canadian readership was served mainly by the *Kanadai Magyar Újság* (Canadian Hungarian News) published in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the *Kanadai Magyar Munkás* (Canadian Hungarian Worker), a leftist weekly published in Ontario. Thousands of Hungarians in Ontario also subscribed to the *Szabadság* (Liberty), a Hungarian-American daily which had a local office in Toronto.

Following the Second World War, Ontario and in particular, Toronto became the focal point of the Hungarian language press in Canada. Two of the largest newspapers in the Hungarian diaspora, *Magyar Élet* (Hungarian Life) and *Kanadai Magyarország* (Canadian Hungarians) are at present published in Toronto.

There were some 25 newspapers and periodicals founded in the Hungarian community after the Second World War. Of these, it has been estimated that fifty percent are still being published on a regular basis.¹⁹ In addition to the two already-mentioned weeklies, a Hungarian Jewish weekly, *Menora* was founded in 1961. Several monthly magazines were established, such as the *Világhíradó* (World Review) and *Krónika* (Chronicles), the official organ of the Canadian Hungarian Cultural Centre. Numerous organizational newsbulletins were published which served the interest of cultural, political, professional, artistic and sports groups. Outside Toronto, only a few Hungarian-language newspapers were founded after the Second World War: *Egységes Magyarok* (United Hungarians) (1958-62) was published in Niagara Falls and *Élet: Dohányvidéki Kisújság* (Life: Tobacco Country's Little News) (1957-59), which served the Hungarian farming communities of southern Ontario.

7

A number of overall observations may be drawn from the statistical information presented in the chart. According to one model of organizational development proposed by Maurice Freedman about the Chinese, "the greater the size and complexity of the overseas Chinese community, the larger the number and the greater the diversity in its associations." An additional corollary to the Freedman model states: "stability in size and composition of a community should be accompanied by stability in the number and kind of its associations."²⁰

This model may be applicable in the case of the Hungarian community. During the interwar period, many of the same kinds of organizations/institutions were established in several municipalities in Ontario. The communities in each of these municipalities were small, and organizational life was relatively stable. Following the Second World War, the majority of the 10,000 Hungarian immigrants of middle class urban background who came to Canada settled in the larger urban centres and founded new organizations to suit their own needs. They brought change and instability as well. The 19,000 Hungarians who came to Ontario after the Revolution of 1956 again settled in large cities and created even more new groups.

A pattern of significant change may be observed in cities such as Hamilton and Toronto, where many of the organizations

founded during the interwar years have ceased and been replaced by others. Smaller cities, such as Brantford, Oshawa and Welland received considerably fewer postwar and post-1956 immigrants. The Hungarian communities in these smaller municipalities exhibited more stability; in many cases the organizations/institutions founded in the 1920s and '30s in these cities continue to flourish.

It may be concluded that the Freedman model applies to the Hungarian community as well, i.e. that the greater the size and complexity of the Hungarian community, the larger the number and greater the diversity in its associations. The following modification should be made, however, if the model is to be applied to the Hungarian community in Ontario: the stability of the community and its organizations is related to the number and background of additional incoming immigrants and to the frequency of the arrival of new waves of fellow countrymen.

This paper intended to give an overall view of the organizational development of the Hungarian community. It suggested that some waves made significant contributions in specific areas, such as the interwar immigrants in the establishment of mutual aid societies and churches, the postwar immigrants in schools and youth organizations and the post-1956 Hungarians in cultural groups and newspapers. It may be argued that each wave simply contributed that which was most acutely needed by the community at that particular time, i.e. the interwar immigrants with regards to mutual aid. The complementary nature of the work of the three waves should be emphasized, however, each wave filled a specific role within the community and made contributions which were unique.

This paper was intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. New areas of research will hopefully be stimulated by it in addition to creating interest on the part of the community towards the history of Hungarian organizational life in Canada.

NOTES

1. Each symbol on the chart represents one organization and the letters indicate the city in Ontario where the specific organization was founded. The types of organizations are found on the left-hand side.

2. Statistical information presented in this paper with regards to the numbers and types of organizations/institutions in various cities and towns in Ontario were compiled from over 30 taped interviews, Hungarian-Canadian newspapers, organi-

zational minute books and personal papers, which are all in the Hungarian collection of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario. Also used as a reference was Eugene Ruzsa, *A Kanadai Magyarok Története /The History of Canada's Hungarians/* (Toronto, 1940).

3. For more information see N. F. Dreisziger, "In Search of a Hungarian-Canadian Lobby, 1927-1951," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 12 (1980): 81-96.

4. N. F. Dreisziger, "National Hungarian Canadian Organizations," in Susan M. Papp, (ed.) *Hungarians in Ontario*, a double issue of *Polyphony, The Bulletin of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario* 2, Nos. 2-3 (1979-80): 54.

5. Ruzsa, *op. cit.*

6. Interview with Rev. László Forgách, August 25, 1978.

7. Interview with Mrs. Pearl Sojnocki (nee Ruzsa), August 23, 1979.

8. In 1923, Virginia tobacco was first grown at a farm between Delhi and Lyndoch in southern Ontario. Since then Norfolk County has become the tobacco belt of Ontario. During the late 1920s, groups of Belgians, Hungarians, Poles, Lithuanians, Germans and Ukrainians moved into the area.

9. According to Canadian census statistics, the Hungarian immigrant population of Ottawa increased from 137 in 1950 to 1,149 in 1960; London increased from 297 in 1950 to 1,270 in 1960.

10. Interview with Mr. Paul Rapai, August 21, 1979.

11. Original document dated July 8, 1924, in the Géza Kertész collection, Multicultural History Society of Ontario.

12. Interview with Mr. George Gilvesy, August 22, 1979.

13. Interview with Mr. George Zadubán, March 24, 1979.

14. The term "district association" is used in Edgar Wickberg, "Some Problems in Chinese Organizational Development in Canada, 1923-1937," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 11 (1979): 88-98.

15. Cleveland was at one time the city with the second largest population of Hungarians after Budapest. The community was unique because during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, it comprised a distinct neighborhood, a Hungarian "ghetto." For more information about its history, see Susan M. Papp, *Hungarian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland* (Cleveland State University, 1981).

16. Alexander Weinstock, *Acculturation and Occupation: A Study of the 1956 Hungarian Refugees in the United States* (The Hague: Publications of the Research Group for European Migration Problems, 1969), demonstrates that the interwar immigrants (in Canada) and the pre-World War I immigrants (in the United States) lived in close community with one another and clung to their ethnic traditions to maintain some continuity with the past. Homeland district associations were but one expression of this phenomenon.

17. S. Papp-Zubrits, "The Brantford Hungarian Mutual Benefit Society," *Polyphony* 2, No. 1, p. 57.

18. Carmela Patrias, "Hungarian Immigration to Canada Before the Second World War," in *Hungarians in Ontario*, p. 38.

19. G. Bisztray, "The Hungarian Canadian Press," in *Hungarians in Ontario*, p. 54.

20. Wickberg, "Some Problems in Chinese Organizational Development," p. 88.

