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## **National symbols in Hungarian sixth graders' history textbooks**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is mapping national symbols mentioned most frequently in history textbooks. The research questions were the following. What are the most commonly mentioned national symbols (e.g. historical characters and places)? What actions and events do the textbooks usually mention in relation to these symbols? Some of the relevant chapters of four Hungarian history textbooks (approximately 450 pages) were analysed. The textbooks covered Hungarian history from the tenth century till the early eighteenth century. The textbooks most frequently mention kings, tell about their reign, but their personal characteristics and actions also appear. Textbooks contain more than 100 places, one of them, Buda gets great emphasis in all periods. These results give descriptive information about national symbols, but can be used in two ways in further research. On the one hand, the outcomes can be used to design test items measuring students' knowledge about these symbols. On the other hand, they can be the basis of further analysis of textbooks designed for younger students.*

**Keywords:** *National identity, national symbols, elementary school, textbook*

### **Introduction**

The main aim of our research is measuring elementary school children's national identity. We would like to gather information about (1) how the components of children's national identity develop with age, (2) what agents affect development, (3) how school influences development, and (4) what phenomena (e.g. social problem solving and intergroup attitudes) are related to the components of national identity.

In this research we face several challenges. First of all, elementary schoolers' national identity receives little research attention in Hungary. The lack of studies can be attributed to measurement challenges. First it needs an interdisciplinary approach; researchers need to integrate the results and methods of history, psychology, sociology and educational science. Second most of the instruments created for measuring adolescents' or adults' national identity cannot be used in this age group, so special instruments have to be developed. Finally, the instruments have to take into consideration the culture-dependent nature of national identity.

In the international literature there are instruments which target certain aspects of national identity, but some components, mainly the school related ones are not measured at all. Thus it seems that some instruments can be adapted to investigate certain aspects of Hungarian students' national identity, however, new instruments also need to be developed to measure some school-related components.

At present, we are in the phase of adapting international instruments (e.g. the Strength of Identification Scale, see Barrett, 2007). In addition we are developing a new instrument, a test to measure children's knowledge about national symbols.

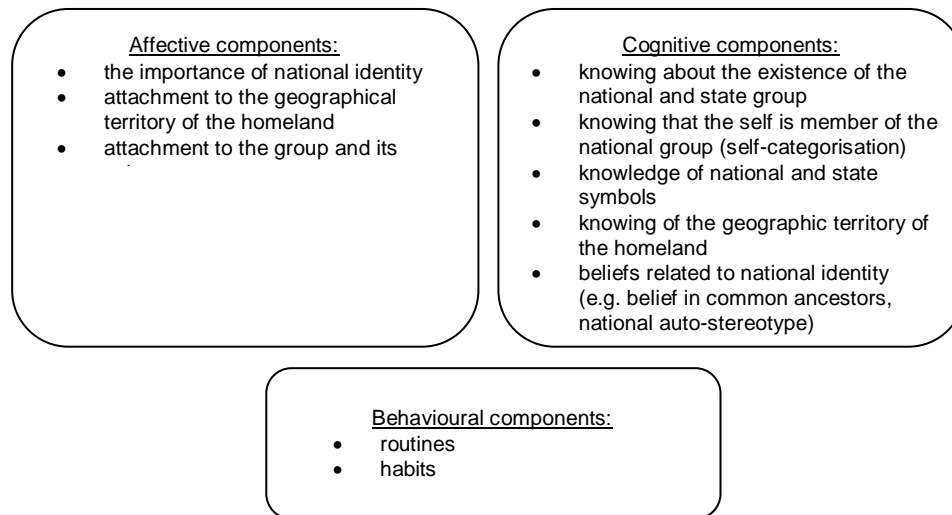
We have already started to develop the first version of this test. In March we conducted a pilot study with sixth graders ( $n=116$ ). The test measured children's knowledge about some of the components of national symbols proposed by Smith (1991). We tested children's knowledge about school related symbols which mainly belong to the domain of the history (e.g. memorial places of battles and important historical events) and the geography curriculum (e.g. rivers and lakes).

Our test needs improvement (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.65$ ), therefore we decided to explore what national symbols appear in the curriculum and in certain textbooks (e.g. history textbooks). This paper presents the results and conclusions of gathering information for item development. First, the theoretical background is presented including a possible model of children's national identity and a short summary of national symbols. These chapters are followed by the methodology section, the results and the summary including limitations and further directions.

### **1. The components of national identity**

In our research the model of national identity proposed by Barrett (2007) is applied (Figure 1). This model is suitable for the study of elementary school children and it distinguishes cognitive, affective and behavioural components. The affective domain includes the importance of national identity, the attitudes towards the homeland, the nation, and national attitudes. Cognitive components are knowledge of the national group, self-categorisation and various beliefs about the national group (e.g. belief in common ancestors, and national auto-stereotype). Behavioural components are also present; the habits and routines which attach to national identity belong here (e.g. participating in national commemorations).

**Figure 1. The components of national identity proposed by Barrett (2007)**



## 2. National symbols

National symbols are important cultural elements of a national group. According to historians, during the nation building processes the symbols of one or more ethnic group become national symbols (Smith, 1991).

Cultural anthropologists emphasise that these symbols have an important role in expressing group membership. Anderson (1983) regards a nation as an ‘imagined community’, because its members do not know each other personally, but they imagine it as a well-defined community which has its boundaries, and members feel some kind of togetherness. Cohen (1985/2001) also emphasises the significance of symbols in community processes. He considers socialisation as a vital community process when the cultural elements of the group are mediated. The knowledge of these cultural symbols helps the person to orient in the social environment. The knowledge about the symbols of the community leads to the person’s self-categorisation when someone defines himself or herself as a member of a group. The symbols also show the boundaries of the community. Cohen notes some interesting characteristics of symbols: (1) they do not have codified meaning; their interpretation is subjective, (2) despite the symbols being learnt and interpreted individually, a person’s own interpretation also infiltrates into the general interpretation of the symbol, and (3) symbols express group membership.

Several different national symbols are mentioned in the literature. Based on the work of Smith (1991), Kapitány and Kapitány (1998) and Edensor (2002) national symbols can be categorised by two dimensions (see Table 1). The first dimension refers to the origin of these symbols and it distinguishes formal symbols and informal symbols. Formal symbols are officially determined by the state and most of the people know them. In

contrast informal symbols are not officially defined, rather they are the places, events and cultural elements which are often related to everyday life.

The second dimension refers to the domains of symbols and it contains four sub-dimensions. The geographical-economic dimension contains the geographical places and economic objects which usually used to refer to the nation. The behavioural components symbolise the formal and informal events where the members often participate. Most of the cultural-material symbols relate to everyday life. Those styles and objects belong here which are typically used by the members. Last but not least, historical symbols express the common history of the members.

School has an important effect on mediating the official symbols. In the Hungarian core curriculum the symbolic events and characters are present in nearly all subjects in elementary school especially in literature, music and history. Therefore analysing the curricular contents and the textbooks of these subjects can help us reveal what symbols are mediated by the school.

Summarizing these thoughts national symbols can be defined as cultural elements which are shared by the group members. Therefore every personality and places which appear in the historical narrative can be regarded as a national symbol; however they get different emphasis in the narrative. This is why we aimed to explore all the selected national symbols mentioned in the textbooks and formulate conclusions about how these symbols appear in history textbooks.

**Table 1. A possible categorization of national symbols**

	Geographical-economic	Behavioural	Cultural-material	Historical
Official/ formal	capital city borders coins passport	national commemorati ons national holidays	flag anthem national museums places	national colours emblems of national events memorial places of battles kings coronation regalia
Unofficial/ informal	typical plants typical animals rivers lakes landscapes important cities	pop culture events	dresses vehicles foods drinks music dances architecture styles occupations sports national costumes	heroes and heroines folk stories and myths

### 3. Sample and methods

We analysed four Hungarian sixth graders' history textbooks published between 2007 and 2011. A total of seven history books were used in Hungary for sixth graders between 2007 and 2013. Of these the four under analysis were used constantly throughout this period. Henceforth we will refer to the textbooks as Book 1, Book 2 and so on.

The textbooks cover Hungarian and global historical events from the middle ages to the eighteenth century. Only the chapters dealing with Hungarian historical periods were analysed (approximately 450 pages). The analysed chapters contain three major time periods: the age of Arpadian kings (tenth-thirteenth century), when the Hungarian state was established and the first Hungarian royal family ruled; from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth century when several foreign royal dynasties replaced each other, and from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century when the Hungarian kingdom was torn apart because of the expansion of the Ottoman Empire.

We observed the frequency of national symbols (e.g. kings, important personalities and places) from the historical dimension using word count. We also aimed to explore what thoughts textbook writers emphasize in relation with these symbols. This paper focuses on descriptive analysis and the comparison of textbooks.

### 4. Results

The names of kings and historical characters were mentioned a total of 3498 times including all books and time periods. The chi-square test showed significant differences ( $\chi^2=30.57$ ,  $df=6$ ) between the books regarding different time periods (see Table 2). However, the relation between these variables is not remarkable; Cramer's V value is 0.07 (its value range from 0 to 1 depending on the strength of the connection) which can be interpreted as a weak significant ( $p<0.001$ ) relationship. Book 2 and Book 3 mention the most characters, while Book 1 and Book 4 contain fewer references to them. The standardised residuals (z-scores) show that Book 1 mentioned significantly more names in the second time period ( $z=3.6$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and significantly fewer names in the third period ( $z=-2.8$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). All other standardised values are non-significant. These results imply that historical characters are most frequently mentioned in the first and second time periods. It is partly due to the historical circumstances. In the first and second periods the textbooks focus on internal affairs, while the emphasis of the third period is mainly on foreign policy actions.

**Table 2. The connection between publications and time period regarding the historical characters mentioned**

	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Total
1 <sup>st</sup> time period	228	403	436	267	1334
2 <sup>nd</sup> time period	306	352	438	237	1333
3 <sup>rd</sup> time period	120	256	284	171	831
Total	654	1011	1158	675	3498

#### 4.1 Kings and famous historical personalities

Kings and famous personalities (e.g. heroes and heroines) are formal and informal history related national symbols. The summary of our analysis shows that kings were the most frequently mentioned historical personalities (32%). They were followed by rebels (20%), soldiers and politicians (19%), persons representing culture (e.g. priests, historians) (18%) and queens and princesses (16%).

Because one of the assumptions of chi-square test is that expected frequencies should be greater than five in all cells, this test could be used only in the case of kings. The analysis found no significant difference ( $\chi^2=1.35$ ,  $df=6$ ) between the analysed books and the number of how many times they mentioned kings in the different time periods. So in this aspect there are no differences between the textbooks, and the low values of standardised residuals also confirm this result (z-score range from -0.7 to 0.6). At the same time the frequencies (see Table 3) are different in the era: most frequently the Arpadian kings are mentioned.

**Table 3. The frequency of kings mentioned by books and period**

	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Total
1 <sup>st</sup> period	19	21	23	20	83
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	10	9	11	10	40
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	5	7	11	8	31
Total	34	37	45	38	154

#### 4.2 Characters and actions

From all the three time periods we selected the most frequently occurring persons, and using content analysis we categorized the actions mentioned in relation to them (inductive coding was applied). Results indicate that the textbooks mention internal affairs (political and economic actions, ecclesiastic affairs) most frequently (47%). Foreign policy (26%) has as much emphasis as personal and cultural affairs (27%) (personal traits of the kings and their cultural actions). There was no significant connection ( $\chi^2=11.47$ ) between the books and the action categories. 47% of the actions refer to internal affairs, while foreign policy (26%) and personal actions and traits (28%) have the same emphasis.

The connection between textbooks and periods were also investigated. There are significant connections in all cases (Table 4). All books emphasise internal affairs; these are the most frequently mentioned categories.

**Table 4. Significant connections and the strength of connections between historical periods and action categories by textbook**

	$\chi^2$	df	Sig	Cramer's V	Sig
Book 1	17.88	4	0.001	0.20	0.001
Book 2	32.62	4	0.001	0.24	<0.001
Book 3	28.78	4	<0.001	0.24	<0.001
Book 4	87.07	4	<0.001	0.42	<0.001

Looking at the frequencies it seems to be a general tendency that the second historical period gets more attention from the authors. The emphasis on the second period can be attributed to different factors. In this period foreign kings ruled the country. It is also possible that historians have more information about this era. There are differences regarding the action categories. Book 1 and 2 give greater emphasis to personal affairs, while Book 3 mentions foreign policy more. Book 4 refers to these categories more evenly.

**Table 5. The frequency of action categories by book and historic period**

	Book1			Book2			Book3			Book4		
	IA	FP	P	IA	FP	P	IA	FP	P	IA	FP	P
1 <sup>st</sup> period	40	3	16	58	5	27	39	7	11	55	3	5
2 <sup>nd</sup> period	55	35	27	44	40	28	38	55	32	43	48	19
3 <sup>rd</sup> period	27	11	21	34	28	36	26	17	21	21	17	42
Total	122	49	64	136	73	91	103	79	64	119	68	66

Note: IA – internal affairs, FP – foreign policy, P – personal traits, cultural affairs

### 4.3 Historical cities

Historical places were mentioned a total of 896 times. This value is significantly lower than the occurrence of historical persons. 15% of these symbols are mentioned in relation with the first period, while 31% were mentioned in relation with the second and 54% with the third period. This result is not surprising, because historians have more information about later eras. The textbooks contain more than 100 places, but only one city, Buda gets a great emphasis in all time periods.

There is a significant ( $\chi^2=32.58$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) weak (Cramer's  $V=0.135$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) connection between the books and the periods regarding the frequency of the places. The number of places emerges parallel with the periods, as it can be hypothesized. Book 3 contains the most references, a total of 328 and Book 1 the least, a total of 174. Finally no significant connection was found between the place categories (places related to political action, culture or battles).



## 5. Summary, limitations and further directions

In conclusion it can be established that historical personalities are more important and more frequently used symbols of the Hungarian historical narrative in the analysed textbooks, and this seems to be a general tendency in all books. Another common trait of the textbooks is that except for the third period (when foreign policy received more attention) historical personalities get similar attention from the authors. Another general tendency is that internal affairs are attributed most frequently to historical personalities. It can be explained national history focus of the textbooks. At the same time it is an interesting result that there are small differences between textbooks, with foreign policy affairs and personal-cultural actions getting the same emphasis. As it has already been mentioned, historical places get a smaller attention, but their number increases in parallel with the periods.

In this research we aimed to gather information about the national symbols mediated by the textbooks. We have arrived at some answers, but a number of issues remain open. Do the perceived differences between the symbols and time periods influence children's national identity? Do they indeed know more information about the personalities from the second period? One of the limits of textbook analysis is that it gives information only about the textbook, and it cannot say anything about students' actual learning.

At the same time, the results have some implications regarding test development. Based on the results it can be established that such items should be created which focus on the knowledge about kings. From the mentioned historical places only one city, the cultural and political centre of the country, Buda emerges. The items should mainly focus on the internal politics of kings. Further analysis is needed to identify the most common and important actions emphasized by textbook authors.

In order to refine the results and gather more information for item development the next step we plan is conducting semi-structured interviews with elementary school teachers including history teachers. Based on the findings of the interviews a questionnaire will be developed for teachers.

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