

# BELVEDERE

MERIDIONALE

Történelem és társadalomtudományok  
History and Social Sciences  
www.belvedere.meridionale.hu  
belvedere@jgypk.u-szeged.hu  
szerk@belvedere.meridionale.hu  
ISSN 1419-0222 (Nyomtatott)  
ISSN 2064-5929 (Online)



(Creative Commons) Nevezd meg! – Így add tovább! 4.0 (CC BY-SA 4.0)  
(Creative Commons) Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Cím / Title:

Success Perception Embedded in the Experience of Adverse Social Selection of a Post-Communist Transition Society

Szerző / Author:

Szabó, Éva – Kékesi Márk

DOI 10.14232/belv.2014.4.7

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14232/belv.2014.4.7>

Cikkre való hivatkozás / How to cite this article:

Szabó, Éva – Kékesi Márk (2014): Success Perception Embedded in the Experience of Adverse Social Selection of a Post-Communist Transition Society. *Belvedere Meridionale* XXVI. 4. 95–109. pp

# *Success Perception Embedded in the Experience of Adverse Social Selection of a Post-Communist Transition Society*

**Abstract** Based on the four different types of success ethics described by DE VITIS-RICH (1996), a questionnaire was created and used in a representative sample (N = 1007) of the contemporary Hungarian society to gain understanding of the dominant social representation of success achievement two decades after the fall of the iron curtain. Results showed that none of the four distinct types of historical American ethics could gain sole dominance, but a specific blend of success ethics characterizes the national public thinking, with the vast majority of respondents belonging to a cluster best described by strong belief in immoral success achievement and low confidence in hard work-based goal attainment. At the same time, a relatively slow movement towards a more proactive approach to success perception was detected by comparing the results of two earlier researches in Hungary, but having powerful social capital and well-functioning connections still holds the first place on the list of success factors.

**KEYWORDS** success, success perception, success ethics, post-communist transition, adverse selection, social representation



Success and its achievement is a key issue for most people. This concept is essentially related to the concepts of subjective well-being and happiness. Experiencing success is an essential part of one's satisfaction with him/herself and with his/her life. In Hungary, this has become a central issue only after the fall of the Communist regime. This was partly due to political and ideological reasons, but the effects of the information revolution, the fall of the real and virtual iron curtain, along with globalization, have also contributed to the reproduction of the American cult of success in Hungarian public opinion. Local researches conducted in the field pointed out that the concept of success is strongly connected to, and to some extent, overlaps the concept of richness and welfare (VÁRINÉ-SOLYMOSSI 1999, SZABÓ-VÁRINÉ 2007, SZABÓ 2007). Moreover, achieving success requires a type of immoral, corrupt behaviour along with a few undesired personality traits in case of successful persons, especially in the business sphere (FÜLÖP 2004; SZABÓ-VÁRINÉ 2007; SZABÓ 2007). Elaboration of success ideologies is always a result of social discourse. Patterns and models mature into abstract representations and are distributed as widely shared views among different social strata and generations (BAR-TAL 2000).

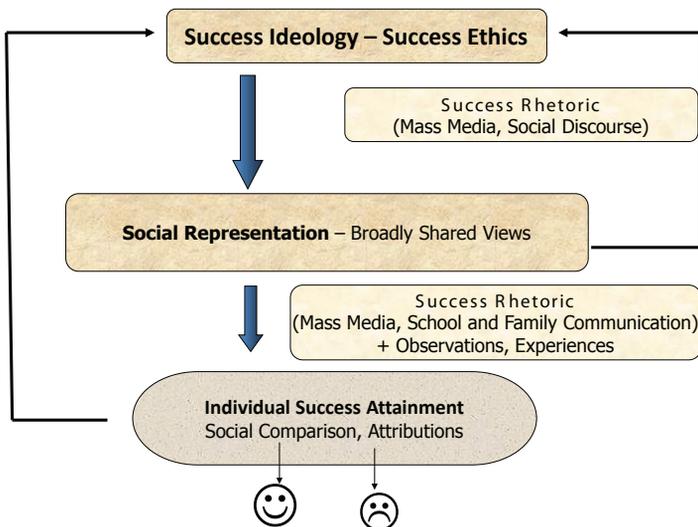
As promised by success stories in books and trainings, man can achieve any target through positive thinking and hard work. It is unclear, if this approach is compatible with that of the

individuals who were socialized in the Hungarian culture. Did we adopt this philosophy, import the ‘American dream’, or did we shape our own version, the ‘Hungarian dream’? Does the achievement of virtually anything by hard work sound plausible in the Hungarian context, or did historical and cultural impacts develop an ethic of success with different focal points? To answer these questions, probably large-scale interdisciplinary researches would be necessary which are out of our current scope. In this paper, we aim to present the most prevalent success perception using the results of a representative national survey carried out in 2008, to draw comparisons with the well-known American success ideologies (DE VITIS – RICH 1996) and to locate its role in the experience of Adverse Social Selection (HUNYADY 2002).

### 1 Success as a Social Concept – Success as a Social Representation

The word ‘success’ has a broad range of meanings in any language. It refers to one’s actual performance as well as to a more abstract interpretation covering several areas of life. These two interpretations are not independent from each other; however, it is still important to distinguish between the so-called social success (a socially determined phenomenon with a larger scope covering a number of areas in life) and the actual experience or result of a person based on actual successful performance. The concept of social success is in the focus of our investigation whose key factor is the presence of appreciation of others or the society. This aspect and the importance of this distinction were first emphasized by Ichheiser and Mannheim, defining the chief criteria of success as social appreciation and upward social mobility (ICHHEISER 1970, Mannheim 1930). Merton’s theory highlights the distinctive success perception of individuals, which usually reflects the dominant success image of the society, but it may also be different or even contradicting because of personal experience (Merton 1980). In this sense, the interpretation of success can be regarded as a social representation, which reflects and shapes the dominant perception in the society (MOSCOVICI 1981). *Figure 1* shows the possible dynamics of the development and changing of social representations concerning success.

FIGURE 1 ❖ Empirical model of the development and changing of success ideologies



The figure summarizes the main concepts of the different levels of success perception and the directions of its development and impacts. Starting with the success ideology of the society, in this system, *success ideology* describes the target system projected by the given society as an idea of success (MERTON 1980). *Success ethic* is a systematic pattern of methods and opportunities used as ways of achieving success in a given society. It is an abstract construct containing the attitudes behind the behavioural patterns leading to success rather than the concrete actions (DE VITIS – RICH 1996). During social communication (*success rhetoric*) or social discourse, these patterns mature into broadly shared views. Different socializing agents are the mediators of this process, such as mass media (written, electronic) and family or interpersonal communication (BAR-TAL 2000; VÁRINÉ 1999). The created social representations are to some extent different in their contents depending on the social strata and the level of education (KATZ 1964; HYMAN 1953). These broadly shared views are returned to the individuals via the channels of communication, shaping their own concepts and ethics of success. At this level, real interpersonal communication plays a more significant role; moreover, observation and model following as new important elements of acquisition are introduced. Based on all these inputs, individuals shape their own valid success ethics and success ideologies. This structured representation controls behaviour with a direct and conscious goal orientation, or in the form of latent intentions, setting the demand level of a person (MERTON 1980) and serving as an initial point for social comparison in the area of successfulness. These are the benchmarks for evaluating one's own and others performance, lifestyle, achieved social status and success, and as a result, satisfaction, happiness or disappointment is felt.

Success perception at the level of the society changes because of the modification of the broadly shared views which comprises the imprints of success ideologies and success ethics and retroacts on the formation of success ideology and the dominant success ethics (see *figure 1*). At another point, individuals' perception of success and identification with goals and achievement methods offered by the society might influence the chief or dominant views. Hence, success ideologies continuously change in course of the development of the society, and so do the possible methods of success achievement. This change was documented by DE VITIS and RICH (1966) in their work that analyzes the different periods of American social history.

### **1.1 Success Ideologies and Success Ethics in the American Society**

Analyzing the documents of the development of the American society, De Vitis and Rich described four elementary forms of success ethic, which were predominantly characteristic to the given period. These showed the people in each era how to achieve the desired 'American dream'. In their summarizing work, they do not only present these, but also highlight their connection to the prevailing psychological schools of the era. Below we present the main characteristics of the four types of success ethic based on their 1996 book.

#### **1.1.1 Character Ethic**

The first identified success attainment method is called *character ethic*. This approach became prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century and obviously reflected the concepts of Protestant ethics: poverty and hardship contribute to the formation of personality traits and a character necessary for succeeding. Lacking these, human personality would not be mature enough, since it is not compelled to prove. Key characteristics of men living in conformity with character ethic (and patterns contributing to personal success) are: perseverance, sobriety, steady-

ness, hard work, sparing, righteousness, fairness, manhood, sense of duty, diligence, trustfulness, initiative and ambitiousness. This approach proclaims the omnipotence of the character. According to the original form of character ethic, talent and education play a minor role in prosperity. Nevertheless, this feature was 'tamed' by the end of the twentieth century. Today even the followers of character ethic consider education and school performance through hard work essential, primarily because of the decreasing importance of physical work in financial welfare. The key reasons for failure are inadequate or weak character traits, laziness and the lack of efforts.

The concept of character ethic is somewhat similar to David Riesman's concept of inner-directed character (RIESMAN 1983). This personality type is directed by the inner compass and dignity brought from his/her family, regardless of social mobility, the ever changing world or commercials and propaganda tools.

### 1.1.2 *Mind Power Ethic*

According to this approach, success depends on the power of ideas and the appropriate spiritual orientation. Its formation was mainly the consequence of economic expansion that enabled social mobility and the dissemination of psychological theories. As a result, the lay culture of psychology has developed, incorporating the theories of psychoanalysis, hypnosis, etc.

By rejecting character ethic, mind power ethic disregards the role of the character and the need for an ascetic lifestyle. An important thesis of this approach is the unrelated nature of success (welfare) and morality; it is not only the honest man who is entitled to richness and upward social mobility. One of the most prominent representative of this view is Orison S. Marden, who edited the magazine 'Success' at the beginning of the 1900s, and wrote a number of books on the question of success. In his view, everybody can achieve success in life which he/she believed to be achievable (MARDEN 1908). In mind power ethic, self-development and formal schooling play little role in success. The source of failure is not laziness, but negative approach, anxiety and pessimism.

This idea is reflected in later success perceptions and theories emphasizing positive thinking. Imagination, mental constructing and recalling successful outcomes as the practical recipe to success achievement appear in a number of subsequent theories (e.g. HILL 1972). Techniques linked to this theory are still used nowadays in several fields (such as in psychotherapy and sport psychology) to promote factual changes or to reach goals (LÉNÁRT 2007).

### 1.1.3 *Personality Ethic*

The techniques of making good impression are the key to success in this theory; charming appearance is just as important as good communication style. The key to achieve success is clever establishment of relationships and smart influencing of others. The most prominent author (or 'preacher') of this approach is Dale Carnegie, probably best known for his book 'How to Win Friends and Influence People'. The basis of personality ethic is a type of Machiavellianism, in which there is no clear-cut line between sincere influencing and manipulation of people (CHRISTIE 1970; GEIS 1970). In this approach, neither fortune, nor prior financial circumstances are significant; the sole precondition of success is the good insight into the character and the smart way of handling and influencing others. The spread of personality ethic in public thinking contributed to some positive changes, such as the development of 'human relations' approach in psychology, marked with the name of Elton Mayo (Bakacsi 2004).

### 1.1.4 Service Ethic

This is the less prevalent in American culture, but it had some effect from the early 1900s until the 1950s. In this 'Gospel'-type ethic, good and selfless action is the key to success, with central concepts such as helpfulness, benevolence, self-sacrifice, responsibility, strenuousness and denial of the importance of welfare. To some extent, this approach contradicts the previous ones: the sole interest of someone is to feel that he/she is a good person, which is achievable through serving a good cause. This idea appears in psychology in researches on altruism and prosocial behaviour, which have become a central topic of modern evolutionary psychology (BERECZKEI 2009).

The success ethics described by DE VITIS and RICH (1996) were developed successively, on the basis of historical, economic and political changes, and sometimes they reflected earlier ethics. A certain developmental period had its dominant success ethic, however, nowadays in Europe as well as in America, all four ethics are present, and their specific blending provides the basis for success perception and success attainment in the given society. In our model (*Figure 1*) these views appear on the top level, becoming broadly shared views mediated by (tele)communication. Nevertheless, these representations are not perfect reflections of the original rhetoric; much more they appear as specifically reconstructed attitudes and views filtered through individual experience that influence the judgments of individuals concerning themselves and others.

## 1.2 Exploring the Broadly Shared Views – Success Researches

Classical attribution researches boast the greatest tradition in success perception research, in which the attitudes towards successfulness are concluded from the analysis of explanations given to success and failure. This tradition extends along the entire line of success researches; almost all investigations include the analysis of patterns associated with successful people and the situational effects influencing success. Researches point out that people are likely to attribute actual success and being successful to internal reasons (personal dispositions or efforts), while external reasons are blamed for failure. The reason for this is self-protecting distortion mechanism (KELLEY – MICHAELA 1984), however, these mechanisms are culture-dependent (Smith and Bond 1993). Attributions of economic success, beyond the well-known cultural effects, are influenced by a number of factors, such as the belief of the respondents about the locus of control (VECCHIO 1981), political affiliation (LEWIS 1981; FURNHAM 1988) and socioeconomic status (FORGAS 1982). Attributions following success or failure are not only important because of presuppositions, but they also largely influence the person's later motivation, as presented by WEINER (1979). When exploring success perception, it is not only and not primarily the orientation of attribution which plays a crucial role. Analyzing the contents of the conclusions shows the patterns and factors which are identified as conditions fostering success. General success perception and stereotypes concerning 'successful people' in the given society are reflected in these contents. This is affirmed by Moscovici's theory on the connection between social representations and attribution processes: attribution always follows and justifies the social representation of the given topic (MOSCOVICI 1981, 2002). A similar theory of justification system was formulated by JOST (2003).

Stereotypes of successful people were investigated during the period of the political transition in Hungary by Ms Ibolya Szilágyi Vári and her research team (VÁRINÉ 1999). This complex qualitative and quantitative research incorporated the traditions of success research based on the examination of attitudes and explored the success perceptions of three intellectual groups

(architects, economists and agronomists) in two age groups (last-year university students and senior experts) with the analysis of the effects of social context. Results showed that the concepts of success and financial well-being are strongly interconnected. The success-image of a given profession is further influenced by the characteristics of the chosen occupation (e.g. agronomists chose 'determinedness', economists chose 'being well informed' as the key factors to success). However, a number of similarities were explored between the three groups. Respondents described two characteristic patterns of success: firstly an image of success built on exceptional individual performance, hard work and its enjoyment, while the other can be summarized with the concept of economic success. The latter appeared more frequently in all three groups of respondents compared to the individual performance and enjoyment, a concept related to Maslow's self-actualization (VÁRINÉ 1999). This research 'snapshotted' the representations of success at the moment of the political transition, which also means that dissatisfaction and frustration caused by the economic decline in the 1990s was not tangible in the results yet.

### *1.2.1 Success Perception and Experiencing Adverse Selection*

Following the political transition in Hungary, success perception and success ethic have dramatically changed. Aiming at equality, a concept emphasized by the socialist authorities, was gradually replaced by an image of success that manifested in the differences in financial welfare. The political and economic turn made success achievements easier for certain social groups and strata, while the new success ideal became more and more unreachable for others. In this sense, winners and losers of the political transition can be distinguished (KOLOSI – TÓTH 2008). However, economic welfare and income only constitute one determinative component of successfulness and satisfaction. Social and individual well-being is strongly determined by subjective impressions of success achievement, its foreseeable preconditions and methods, thus, the dominant success ethic of the society. According to the survey carried out in 1993 and repeated in 1998 by the Gallup Institute, the Hungarian population mainly believed in the first period following the transition that the safest way to achieve success leads through patronage and unscrupulous careerist behaviour. Five years later a small move towards the appreciation of hard work and individual abilities was revealed. Nevertheless, the strengthening of this success ethic appeared only among younger and more educated strata, those under forty and with secondary or lower education found honest work and actual abilities less important in success attainment (GALLUP INSTITUTE 1998). This approach also manifested in stereotypes regarding successful businessmen (SZABÓ 2007); the image of a successful businessman is significantly more negative compared to that of a generally successful man. According to the respondents, a successful businessperson is the least honest and helpful, but significantly more violent than his/her 'non-business' counterpart. A rather similar outcome was concluded by Márta FÜLÖP (2004). In international comparison, the belief in the connection between success and competition with immoral means is a highly salient feature in the Hungarian results. Compared to the Japanese sample, Hungarians more frequently point out this connection. According to the interviews, Hungarians believe that immoral solutions during competition play a far more important role in success attainment than one's exceptional qualities (FÜLÖP 2008).

These findings confirm the presence of the social and public phenomenon called 'experience of adverse selection' by György Hunyady in the Hungarian society (HUNYADY 2010). In his theoretical introduction, he explains that the experience of adverse selection determines whether members of the society feel that those who get the good or better social (financial) positions deserve them or not. The concept of 'merit' here does not only reflect the connection between

hard work and success, but also implies the existence of moral and human virtues. The perception of the successful man radically differs from this image, the supposition of experiencing adverse selection becomes reality, resulting in ‘malaise’ or ‘discomfort’ in the society. In his researches, symptoms of this negative attitude were detected at several points. According to the results of the adverse selection and system justification factors of his questionnaires, the understanding of success as a result of social connections rather than that of hard work or talent is still prevalent in Hungarian society (HUNYADY 2010). This result is especially remarkable in the light of the above mentioned GALLUP research (1998). We suppose that public opinion did not really change during the period of ten years.

The goal of the present research is to explore the dominant success ideologies developed in the Hungarian society during the twenty years of democratic transition, to examine their relations to the American models of success, and to reveal the relationship between success perception and the subjective feeling of success. No hypotheses were set up, since the research was not the repetition of an earlier experiment or testing an existing model, but to explore the phenomenon. However, a few presuppositions were made based on the results of preliminary investigations and observations of social processes. We presupposed that no clear dominance of any single success ethic would be detected because of the unique development and history of the Hungarian society, rather a combination of success ethics would be found in public thinking. Beyond these, we supposed based on Hyman (1953) and Merton (1980) that in the success perception of different social groups, these patterns would appear with different levels of acceptance. We also assumed a difference between the attitudes of those claiming themselves successful and unsuccessful and we believed that signs of experiencing adverse selection would be more noticeable in the latter group.

## 2 Combinations of Success Models and Success Ethics in the Success Perception of the Hungarian Society – Results of a Representative Survey

The survey was conducted by TÁRKI Public Opinion and Social Research Institute, in collaboration with the Department of Sociology of the University of Szeged. A representative national sample of 1,010 persons (women: 56.5%) was drawn, the questionnaires were administered by interviewers. Mean age of the sample was 47.2 years (SD: 16.85 years), the youngest respondent was 18, the oldest 87 years old at the time of the survey (2008). Educational distribution is in correspondence with the national trends; hence the proportion of the particular vocational group is unequal. Key descriptive statistics are shown in *Table 1*.

Sex		Level of Education			
		Vocational or Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
Male	Number	248	137	53	438
	Percentage in the Sample	24.7%	13.6%	5.3%	43.6%
Female	Number	290	208	68	566
	Percentage in the Sample	28.9%	20.7%	6.8%	56.4%
Total	Number	538	345	121	1004
	Percentage in the Sample	53.6%	34.4%	12.1%	100.0%

## 2.1 Attitudes to the Factors Defining Success

Respondents were asked ( $N=1003$ ) to rate the importance of personality characteristics in being successful. Four-grade scales were used, 1 meant the lowest and 4 the highest importance. The listed options almost completely matched the ones used in our earlier surveys (teacher and student survey, SZABÓ-VÁRINÉ 2007, SZABÓ 2007), extended with the item ‘compliance with the law’, which appeared earlier among personality traits, as an ‘honest/dishonest’ trait. At the same time, we considered important to include this item, because preliminary researches had suggested that this moral aspect is of cardinal importance both in market competition (FÜLÖP 2004, 2008) and in the thinking about social processes (HUNYADY 2010). The average importance and standard deviation of the elements of becoming successful is shown in *Table 2*.

Aspect	Mean	SD
To have good connections with important people	3.68	.633
Intellectual abilities	3.62	.613
Personal characteristics	3.56	.631
The family environment in which he/she grew up	3.56	.723
Fortune	3.43	.791
His/her financial situation	3.39	.745
External appearance	3.28	.781
Place of residence (in a geographical sense; city, town, village)	3.16	.919
Hard work	3.15	.861
Compliance with the law	3.12	.933
His/her former school performance	2.79	.927

TABLE 2 ♣ Evaluation of certain aspects in becoming successful ( $N = 1001$ )

As it is shown in *Table 2*, in accordance with preliminary findings, having good connections is the foremost item on the list. The importance of intellectual abilities in achieving success was second on the list which is a promising result; it was followed by the importance of personality and family. School performance was not regarded as a relatively unimportant element by respondents, which coincides with the results drawn from the sample of school teachers (SZABÓ 2007). In the scope of exploring success ethics and the experience of adverse selection, a remarkable result is that hard work and compliance with the law ended up in the end of the list.

### 2.2.1 ‘Popularity’ of Certain Ethics of Success in Hungarian Public Opinion

The roads that lead to success highly differ. According to the model presented in the theoretical introduction of this paper (DE VITIS – RICH 1996), beliefs regarding behaviour and attitudes which assist someone in becoming successful are divided among four main success ethics. In our questionnaire, all four approaches were represented by several items. We asked independent, but theoretically qualified experts to categorize the items representing the four factors; only those items remained in the questionnaire which were put by both experts in the same category. Eventually, ten items remained on the form, representing the four types of success ethic.

Items of character ethic:

- » Works hard.
- » Lives rather for work than for pleasure.
- » Always abides by the laws.

Items representing belief in mind power ethic:

- » Strongly believes that he/she might be able to do anything.
- » Always thinks positively.

Items representing belief in the power of personality:

- » Gains advantages through his/her connections.
- » Treats people well.
- » Is able to influence others.

Items representing the approach of service ethic:

- » His/her main goal is to work for the benefit of others.
- » Is able to and willing to make sacrifice for others.

These were extended with a line of items representing the ability of fast adaptation to changes and the related willingness to take risks. Introduction of these items were vindicated by preliminary research outcomes which claimed that one of the most important traits of successful persons is such a dynamic approach (Váriné 1999; Szabó-Váriné 2007). This group of items was named 'dynamism ethic' and represented by the following items in the questionnaire:

Dares to risk. ❖ Always ready to renew. ❖ Always ready to make changes.

Finally, we sought to ask about the acceptance of 'wangling', a particularly Central Eastern European way of attaining success. This behaviour is not obviously immoral, but certainly not completely legal; wangling means pushing the legal boundaries and searching for weaknesses in regulations. The core attitude behind such behaviour is that everything is certainly allowed which is not explicitly forbidden; this attitude was measured with a single item in the questionnaire: 'He/she knows and takes advantage of loopholes'.

Similar four-grade scales were applied (1 = absolutely not characteristic of a successful person; 4 = a very important trait). Means and standard deviations are shown in *Table 3*.

	Mean	SD
He/she knows and takes advantage of loopholes	3.43	.921
Gains advantages through his/her connections	3.42	.910
Dares to risk	3.40	.826
Always ready to renew	3.39	.768
Strongly believes that he/she might be able to do anything	3.37	.768
Is able to influence others	3.32	.857
Always ready to make changes	3.27	.773
Always thinks positively	3.23	.822
Lives rather for work than for pleasure	2.96	.882
Works hard	2.92	.926
Treats people well	2.91	.953
Is able to and willing to make sacrifice for others	2.45	.950
Always abides by the laws	2.39	1.022
His/her main goal is to work for the benefit of others	2.16	.910

TABLE 3 ❖ Evaluation of the characteristics of successful people (N = 909)

Data in the table show that it was worth extending the original system of De Vitis and Rich with the observed characteristics of the Central Eastern European societies, since the item measuring wangling scored the highest average in the entire list.

Chief mental and behavioural characteristics of the successful man reflect primarily the ethics of mind power, personality and what we called dynamism here, while less important features include character and service ethics. At the same time it is obvious that the separate categories described by De Vitis and Rich are largely blended. Hence it was important to explore the patterns of interconnectivity of these items in the minds of the respondents by principal component analysis. As a result, two distinct types of success ideology could be separated among the Hungarian population, as shown in *Table 4*. The two factors explain 55.76 percent of the original variance; items of dynamism and personality ethic appear in the first factor along with elements of mind power, while components of character and service ethic appear in the second factor.

	Factors	
	1	2
Dares to risk	.818	
Gains advantages through his/her connections	.779	
Always ready to renew	.775	
He/she knows and takes advantage of loopholes	.765	
Is able to influence others	.752	
Always ready to make changes	.704	
Strongly believes that he/she might be able to do anything	.593	
Is able to and willing to make sacrifice for others		.778
Works hard		.751
His/her main goal is to work for the benefit of others		.747
Always abides by the laws		.724
Treats people well		.666
Lives rather for work than for pleasure		.440

TABLE 4 ✧ *Factor structure\* of success ideologies*

*Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.*

One item ('Always thinks positively') had to be left out from the principal component analysis, because it appeared in both factors with a nearly equal weight (.552 and .424). Evaluation of the results shed light on a difference in the interpretation of the creators of the questionnaire and the respondents. In our intentions, 'Treats people well' belonged to category of personality ethic, since it was meant to be a type of smart influencing or utilization for goal attainment according to De Vitis's model. The factor structure showed us that respondents unanimously interpreted this item as a friendly, kind and helpful attitude, linking it to service ethic. Due to these results, we also regard this interpretation as authoritative.

We examined the difference in the standardized factor score variable between certain groups by using a few independent variables. Sex proved to be insignificant, but the level of education as grouping variable produced significant differences in the first factor ( $F = 5.148$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). The ANOVA Post Hoc test showed that respondents with tertiary qualification regarded this attitude much more prevalent than those with primary or vocational education. Another significant difference in both factor score means was produced by the active/inactive labour force status of the respondent: active citizens scored higher on both scales (*Factor 1*:  $t = 2.057$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ; *Factor 2*:  $t = 1.993$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). This suggests that interest in successfulness and developing attitudes that

lead to successfulness is strongly connected with one's own experience of success or the possibility of experiencing success, since inactive people actually regard this question less important.

### 2.2.2 Patterns of Success Achievement Methods

Principal component analysis revealed that the two types of success ethic are simultaneously present in the respondents' thinking. However, it is worth investigating which combinations of these are to be called 'broadly shared views'. A cluster analysis was carried out with the standardized factor score output variables of the principal component analysis, targeting the separation of two distinct groups of respondents (clusters). Nearly 80 percent of the respondents were classified in the first cluster (N = 740) that revealed which combination of attitudes is the most broadly shared view in Hungarian society. The vast majority of the sample belonged to the group which believes to a higher-than-average level that success ethic based on wangling and dynamics leads to success; and to a lower-than-average level that honest ethic and serving others results in being successful. A smaller proportion of respondents (N = 181) provided an inverse answer; they believe in service and character ethic and to a lesser extent in other methods of succeeding (Figure 2).

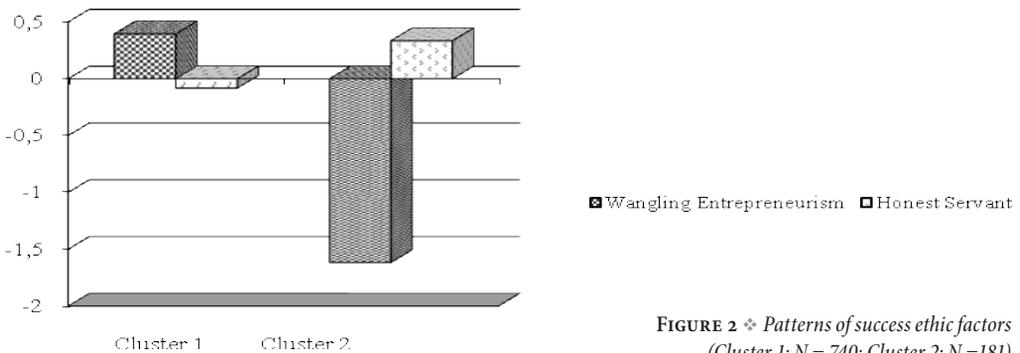


FIGURE 2 ♦ Patterns of success ethic factors  
(Cluster 1: N = 740; Cluster 2: N = 181)

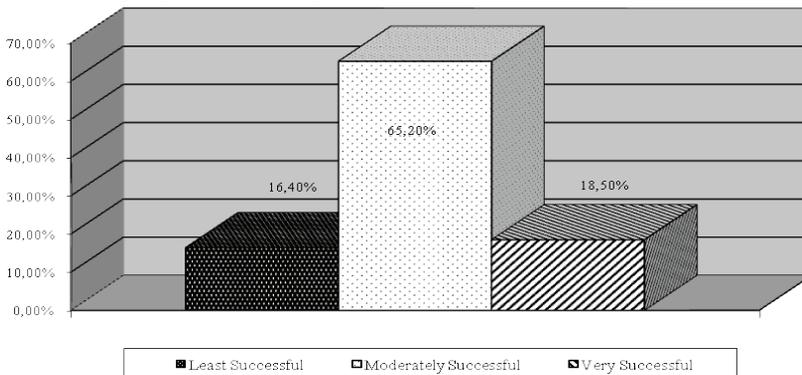
By using cluster analysis, the predominant view (the majority of the people were classified in the first cluster) could be identified. It seemed fruitful to investigate the patterns by which the respondents of the two clusters differ from each other. Using the Chi-square test, sex proved insignificant, and so did the profession types of the respondents. Two independent variables showed significant effects: the first is the level of education. People with higher qualifications were overrepresented in the first and underrepresented in the second cluster, in other words, respondents with lower levels of education are more likely to believe in the functioning of 'protestant' and service ethic in success attainment (Pearson's  $\chi^2 = 12.730$ ;  $p = .002$ ). The other factor determining cluster membership was the subjective experience of successfulness and satisfaction that we measured on an 8-item Likert-type scale based on Diener's (2000) Satisfaction with Life Scale and modified the items in accordance with the goals of the study. The new instrument proved to be a valid and coherent indicator of subjective experience of successfulness and satisfaction (explained original variance of the one-factor model: 50 %; Cronbach- $\alpha = .889$ ). Data are presented in Table 5.

Item	Factor Weight
I am satisfied with my personal relationships	.771
I am happy and balanced	.750
I consider myself successful	.744
I am satisfied with my professional skills and abilities	.711
I am satisfied with my financial situation	.689
I am satisfied with my social appreciation	.689
I live in a safe and balanced family	.630
People are curious about my opinion, which matters to them	.627

TABLE 5 ❖ Factor weights of the subjective experience of successfulness and satisfaction scale

An indicator of subjective satisfaction/successfulness was calculated from the eight items. Using cluster membership as independent variable, the means of the two groups significantly differ: respondents in the first (and larger) cluster feel far more successful and satisfied compared to those in the second cluster ( $t = 3.823, p < .001$ ). This might imply that people who trust the honest and accommodating success ethic are less satisfied and successful. To gain a better understanding of the question, we used the above mentioned index and divided the respondents into three unequal groups by using the standard deviation of the variable as cut points (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3 ❖ Distribution of subjective evaluation of successfulness (N = 959)



This new indicator of subjective perception of successfulness affirmed the result of the comparison of means. According to the Chi-square test, the least successful group is under-represented in Cluster 1, while the group of the most successful respondents (mean + 1 SD) is overrepresented, while obviously the opposite is true in Cluster 2 (Pearson’s  $\chi^2 = 10.022, p = .007$ ), see Table 6.

		Cluster membership and its meaning		N
		1 Ethic of the ‘wangling entrepreneurship’ prevails	2 Ethic of the ‘honest servant’ prevails	
Least successful	Count	99	39	138
	Expected count	111.0	27.0	
Moderately successful	Count	474	112	586
	Expected count	471.3	114.7	
Most successful	Count	142	23	165
	Expected count	132.7	32.3	

TABLE 6 ❖ Crosstab of cluster membership and subjective perception of successfulness

Moderately successful people were represented proportionally in both clusters. The experience of successfulness and the acceptance of success ethics cannot be explained with the larger cluster membership; based on the analysis above, a real connection is measurable between the two variables in the case of the least and most successful people.

### 3 Discussion – Still Far From the ‘American Dream’

The goal of our research was to explore the Hungarian model of success perception and its collation with the available American patterns of success. In our analysis carried out on a representative sample of the Hungarian population, we tried to demonstrate the presence and acceptance of success ethics presented by DE VITIS and RICH (1996) and their connections to the level of experienced success.

As far as the whole issue of success perception is concerned, our results overlap the outcomes of earlier researches. The evaluation of the factors contributing to success has changed little since the previous surveys. In accordance with the findings of the Gallup Institute (1998) and VÁRINÉ (1999), the belief in good nexuses with important people still holds the prime position on the list, shortly followed by intellectual abilities which is a promising tendency already forecasted by Gallup Institute’s 1998 survey. Family stands in the third place, a fact that can be interpreted as a manifestation of a positive value. However, the simultaneous evaluation of the first and the last three items suggest a different interpretation as well. The last three factors are hard work, abiding by the law and school performance. If we take a look at the first and last three items, we may conclude that the respondents believe that smart people who are able to utilize good relationships and values originating in the family are more likely to succeed than those who lack these virtues, but work hard, were good students in school and follow the rules. It should be noted that devaluating school performance to such an extent may also reflect the judgment of school curriculum as well as the weaknesses of school evaluating/grading system, as it was suggested by our earlier teacher survey (SZABÓ 2007). Even if this argumentation seems a bit oversimplified, it is no exaggeration to claim that choosing these items in the first and last place reflects the experience of adverse selection introduced by György Hunyady in his work presenting the splashing waves of social well-being (HUNYADY 2010).

A further goal of the current research was to identify the extent to which the well-known success ethics are characteristic of the success perception of Hungarians. In their 1996 publication about success ethics, De Vitis and Rich introduced four types of success models, all of which are connected to certain developmental periods of the American society. Our results show that we have collectively ‘imported’ these in the past 25 years, nevertheless none of them gained sole dominance in the success perception of Hungarian people, most probably due to the different developmental patterns of the Hungarian and American societies. In the patterns explored in Hungarian public thinking, the four success ethics blend with each other and with other patterns characteristics to Central Eastern Europe known from preliminary researches (GALLUP 1998; FÜLÖP 2008; HUNYADY 2010). As a result, two markedly distinct patterns of success ethic could be identified. One of them delineates a success attainment path in which personality and mind power ethics appear alongside dynamism and what is colloquially called wangling (or finding loopholes). The other Hungarian model of success is honest and accommodating behaviour, thus showing the key elements of character and service ethics. A vast majority of respondents strongly believe in the first blend of success ethics (‘wangling entrepreneurship’) and to a smaller extent in

character and service ethics. The picture was further refined by the respondents' level of education and the experienced success. Respondents with lower qualification were characterised by honest and accommodating ethics more significantly than people with higher levels of education.

If we accept the assumption outlined in the first part of this paper that we acquire the dominant success ethic to some extent as a social representation, and use it as a guideline and as a reference frame for comparisons when we evaluate our own successfulness, than it is not surprising that experiencing success is also connected to our own perception of success and to the dominant general image of success in the given society. According to our results, those who feel less successful are more likely to believe in character and service ethic, while people who consider themselves extremely successful are overrepresented in the cluster with ethics based on dynamism and wangling. On this basis, we can conclude that both success patterns exist in Hungarian public thinking, but a more broadly shared view is currently the 'wangling entrepreneurship', which also includes the experience of adverse social selection. However, the modifying effects of experiencing success and the level of education, along with further differences explored during the analysis, but not detailed in this paper show that even if public thinking basically carries the above mentioned characteristics, success perception has a distinctive pattern among different social groups and strata. Detailed exploration and the in-depth analysis of these require further tough research work. \*

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BAKACSI, GYULA (2004): *Szervezeti Magatartás és Vezetés*. Budapest, Aula Kiadó.
- BAR-TAL, D. (2000): *Shared Beliefs in Society – Social Psychological Analysis*. Sage Publication Inc.
- BERECZKEI, T. (2009): *Az erény természete (Önzetlenség, együttműködés, nagylelkűség)*. Budapest, Typotex Kiadó.
- CARNEGIE, D. (1991): *Sikerkalauz 1. Hogyan szerezzünk barátokat, hogy bánjunk az emberekkel?* 5. átdolg. kiadás. Minerva, Budapest.
- CARNEGIE, D. (1999a): *Sikerkalauz 2. Ne aggódj, tanulj meg élni!* 8. kiadás. Budapest, Gladiátor.
- CARNEGIE, D. (1999b) *Sikerkalauz 3. A hatásos beszéd módszerei :a meggyőzés iskolája*. 6. kiadás. Budapest, Gladiátor.
- CHRISTIE, R. – GEIS, F. (1970): *Studies in Machiavellianism*. New York, Academic.
- DE VITIS, J, R. – RICH, J.M. (1996): *The success Ethic, Education and the American Dream*. State University, N.Y. Press.
- DIENER, E. (2000): Subjective-wellbeing: the Science of Happiness and a Proposal for a National Index. *American psychologist* vol. 55. no. 1. 34–43
- FORGAS, J. – MORRIS, S. – FURNHAM, A. (1982): Lay Explanations of wealth: Attributions for Economic Success. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* vol. 12. no. 5. 381–397.
- FURNHAM, A. (1988): *Lay Theories. Everyday Understanding of Problems in the Social Sciences*. Pergamon Press. 125–150., 189–207.
- FÜLÖP, M. (2004): Economic competition perceived by French and Hungarian Adolescents. In Ross, A. (ed.): *The Experience of Citizenship*. London, CiCe Publications. 325–333.
- FÜLÖP, M. (2008): Verseny a társadalomban – verseny az iskolában. In Benedek A. – Hungler D. (szerk.): *VII. Nevelésügyi Kongresszus. Az oktatás közügy*. 51–74
- GALLUP (1998): Mitől függ a boldogulás Magyarországon? 1993–1998. *Népszava* április 11. [www.gallup.hu/orszagkep.htm](http://www.gallup.hu/orszagkep.htm)
- HILL, N. (2007): *Gondolkodj és gazdagodj!* Bagolyvár Kiadó, Budapest. (*Think and Grow Rich*. Wilshire Book Company, California, 1972. )

- HUNYADY, Gy. (2010): *A társadalmi közérzet hullámverése. 20 Év után*. Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest.
- HYMAN, H.H. (1953): The value system of different social classes. In Bendix, R., Lipset, S. (eds.) *Class, Status and Power: A reader in Social Stratification*. Glencoe, Ill. Free Press.
- ICHHEISER, G. (1970): *Appearance and Reality*. Jossey-Bass. Inc. Publ. San Francisco
- JOST, J.T. (2003): *Önalávetés a társadalomban: a rendszerigazolás pszichológiája*. Osiris, Budapest.
- KATZ, F. M. (1964): The meaning of success: some differences in value systems of social classes. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 62. 141–148.
- KELLEY, H.H. – MICHAELA, J.L. (1984): Az attribúció elmélete és kutatása. In Hunyady Gy. (szerk.): *Szociálpszichológia*. Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó. 55–116.
- KOLOSI, T. – TÓTH I.GY. (2008): A rendszerváltás nyertes és vesztes generációk oldalnézetből. Tíz állítás a gazdasági átalakulás társadalmi hatásairól. In Kolosi T. – Tóth I. Gy. (szerk.) *Társadalmi riport*. Budapest, TÁRKI. 15–46
- LÉNÁRT, Á. (2007): *Mentális fejlesztőprogram. Módszertani füzet*. Budapest, ÖTM, Sport Szakállamtitkárság.
- LEWIS, A. (1981): Attribution and politics. *Personality and Individual differences* vol. 2. no. no. 1. 1–4.
- MARDEN, O.S. (1908): *“He Can Who Thinks He Can”*. NewYork, Crowell & Co.
- MERTON, R.K. (1980): *Társadalomelmélet és társadalomstruktúra*. Budapest, Gondolat.
- MOSCOVICI, S. (1981): Social representation. In Forgas, J. (ed.) *Social cognition: Perspectives on Everyday Understanding*. London, Academic Press.
- MOSCIVICI, S. (2002): *Társadalom-lélektan. Válogatott tanulmányok*. Budapest, Osiris.
- RIESMAN, D. (1983): *A magányos tömeg*. Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó.
- SZABÓ, É. (2007): „Sikeres embert faragni” – Pedagógusok véleménye a sikerességről és az iskola szerepéről. *Pedagógusképzés* 5. évf. 1-2. sz. 27–37.
- SZABÓ, É. – VÁRINÉ SZILÁGYI I. (2007): Tanárok sikerképe a rendszerváltás után. *Alkalmazott Pszichológia* 9. évf. 3–4.sz. 123–146.
- VÁRINÉ, SZILÁGYI I. – SOLYMOSSI, Zs. (1999): A siker szociális reprezentációja - értelmiségi rétegeknél. In Váriné Sz. I. – Solymosi Zs. (szerk.) *A siker lélektana*. Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, Budapest. 42–72
- VECCHIO, R. (1981): Workers' beliefs in internal versus external determinants of success. *Journal of Social Psychology* vol. 114. no. 2. 199–207.
- WEINER, B. (1979): A theory of motivation for some classroom experiences. *Journal of Educational Psychology* vol. 71. no. 1. 3–25.