

Thematic Article

Staying aspirations among Hungarian minority students in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

Research on youth mobility in Central and Eastern Europe has primarily focused on migration intentions and the drivers of out-migration. Much less attention has been paid to the motivations behind staying, particularly among national minority youth living in peripheral regions. This study examines the staying aspirations of Hungarian minority university students in Central and Eastern Europe and explores the demographic, human, economic, and sociocultural factors that shape their intentions to remain in their home regions. Drawing on the aspiration–capability framework developed by Carling and Schewel, the study analyses survey data from 1,107 Hungarian minority students enrolled in higher education institutions across several Central and Eastern European countries. Using multivariate statistical models, the analysis investigates how different forms of capital and regional embeddedness influence students' aspirations to stay rather than migrate. The findings suggest that staying aspirations are not merely the result of limited mobility opportunities. Instead, they are strongly associated with sociocultural embeddedness, minority community ties, and forms of social capital that connect students to their local environments. These results challenge the dominant migration-centred perspective in mobility research and highlight the importance of immobility as an active and meaningful life strategy. The study contributes to the growing literature on youth immobility by demonstrating how minority status and regional attachment shape mobility aspirations in Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Hungarian minorities; youth immobility; staying aspirations; aspiration–capability framework

Introduction

It is widely accepted and supported by empirical research that human capital plays a decisive role in the social and economic development of regions (Nijkamp & Poot, 1998; Bradley & Taylor, 1996; Corcoran et al., 2010). The primary institutional framework for the accumulation of human capital is education, particularly higher education, which is not only a key factor in individual mobility and labour market success but also a fundamental resource for the economic competitiveness and social development of regions. In the case of minority communities, higher education plays an even broader role. In addition to ensuring the supply of educated young people, it represents one of the key pillars of the social reproduction, institutional functioning, and cultural survival of minority communities (Pusztai & Márkus, 2019; Tonk, 2012; Salat, 2012).

The regional effects of higher education are discussed in the literature through two interrelated mechanisms. On the one hand, locally accumulated knowledge and human capital externalities contribute to regional economic growth, as the presence of a skilled workforce generates cumulative benefits for the local economy and society. On the other hand, the mobility of highly educated young people also poses a significant challenge for regions, as the migration of human capital produced by higher education may weaken the economic potential and social development prospects of the sending regions (Faggian & McCann, 2009).

Migration research has long emphasized that migration is a highly selective process: the likelihood of mobility is generally much higher among individuals with higher educational attainment than among those with

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lower levels of education (Haapanen & Tervo, 2009; Venhorst et al., 2010; Rérat, 2014; Kazakis & Faggian, 2017). Empirical studies have also shown that migration aspirations tend to be particularly strong during the period of higher education and gradually decline over the life course (Haapanen & Tervo, 2009).

The emigration of highly educated young people not only reinforces unfavorable demographic trends but also limits the long-term economic growth potential and social reproduction of regions (Corcoran et al., 2010; Rérat, 2014). This issue is particularly sensitive for Hungarian minority communities in Central Europe, where the mobility of educated young people may have not only economic but also significant social and cultural consequences. The loss of human capital also poses a serious risk to the long-term sustainability of these communities, as groups with lower levels of education are generally more likely to assimilate (Geréb, 2008; Kiss & Csata, 2007). Consequently, retaining graduates within their local communities is crucial for minority populations not only from an economic perspective but also from a broader social and cultural standpoint.

The importance of this issue is further reinforced by demographic trends in Central Europe. The largest Hungarian minority communities in the region, particularly those in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine, have experienced continuous population decline in recent decades (Obádovics, 2019; Gyurgyík, 2005; Veres, 2023; Péti et al., 2020a). In addition to natural demographic processes, migration has also been a key driver of population decline in the regions under study (Péti et al., 2020b). Despite this, the question of educated young people remaining in their home region, referred to as geographical immobility, remains relatively under-researched in the region. Most migration studies primarily focus on the causes and consequences of emigration, while considerably less attention has been devoted to the factors that support local retention. Moreover, relatively few studies examine the age cohort of higher education students, even though mobility aspirations tend to be strongest during this stage of the life course.

Addressing this research gap, the present study examines the aspirations of Hungarian minority higher education students in Central Europe to remain in their place of residence. Specifically, the study aims to identify the demographic, social, and sociocultural factors that shape students' aspirations for geographical immobility.

Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to Geographical Immobility

The Aspiration–Capability Framework of Migration and Immobility

In our analysis, we investigate the staying aspirations of Hungarian minority higher education students in Central Europe, drawing on the migration models developed by Jørgen Carling (2002) and Kerilyn Schewel (2020), as well as findings from international empirical research. In this study, we use several closely related terms to describe the behaviour of remaining in place, including immobility decisions, plans to stay, aspirations, and intentions. These terms are used interchangeably throughout the analysis.

Carling and Schewel start from the empirical observation that individuals living in the same social and economic environment and possessing similar resources may nevertheless exhibit significantly different mobility behaviours. Consequently, geographical immobility is interpreted not as a lack of agency, but as a strategy chosen by individuals.

Carling's (2002) aspiration–ability model conceptualises migration decisions through the joint consideration of aspirations and capabilities. The model distinguishes three basic categories. Migrants are those who possess both the aspiration and the ability to migrate. Involuntary non-migrants are individuals who would like to migrate but lack the capability to do so, while voluntary non-migrants are those who choose to remain in place. Schewel (2020) extended this typology by introducing a fourth category: resigned non-migrants, who possess neither the aspiration nor the ability to migrate.

The significance of these models lies in their recognition that mobility and immobility decisions cannot be explained solely by structural constraints. Instead, they also emphasize the role of individual interpretations, aspirations, and forms of community embeddedness. In addition to macro-level social, economic, and political conditions, these approaches therefore pay particular attention to individual and micro-level characteristics, such as sociodemographic background, family context, community ties, and social resources (Carling, 2002; Schewel, 2020). Consequently, when analysing the staying aspirations of minority students in their local communities, it is important to examine these various resources and forms of attachment together.

Determinants of Staying Aspirations in the International Literature

The international literature interprets individuals' mobility and immobility decisions as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by demographic characteristics, economic resources, and various forms of social and cultural embeddedness. Research on immobility particularly emphasizes that spatial mobility is not solely the result of economic rationality; rather, it is shaped by the complex interaction of individuals' resources, social networks, and identity-based attachments (Lundholm et al., 2004; Halfacree, 2004; Van Ham et al., 2001; Rérat, 2014).

In the following section, we review the main groups of factors that, according to the literature, may play a decisive role in shaping higher education students' aspirations to remain in their place of residence.

Demographic Factors

International research regularly highlights age and gender as important factors influencing immobility decisions. With increasing age, the willingness to move generally declines. This trend is usually explained by the fact that older individuals tend to be more deeply embedded in their local social environment, possess more place-specific knowledge and social ties, and are more likely to develop stable life-course patterns (Fischer & Malmberg, 1997; Haapanen & Tervo, 2009). However, in the case of higher education students, this stage of life represents a specific situation, as the period surrounding the completion of studies often coincides with the emergence of the strongest mobility aspirations.

The literature offers different explanations for gender differences. Some studies suggest that women may display higher mobility aspirations because spatial mobility can serve as a strategy to compensate for disadvantages in the labour market (Rérat, 2014). Other studies, however, emphasize that men tend to be more career-oriented and are therefore more likely to accept the risks associated with migration in order to advance their professional careers (Faggian et al., 2007). At the same time, traditional gender role expectations and community norms may, in certain contexts, reinforce women's aspirations to remain in place (Schewel, 2020).

Family circumstances also play an important role in immobility decisions. Relationship status, family size, and the presence of children can all influence individuals' spatial plans. Mobility decisions are often not solely the result of individual considerations, but also reflect the interests and resources of the family as a whole. Research suggests that the presence of children generally strengthens the likelihood of remaining in place, whereas the effect of relationship status is more complex and should be interpreted in conjunction with other factors, such as a partner's occupation or income (Nivalainen, 2004; Haapanen & Ritsilä, 2007).

Human and Economic Capital

Individuals' human capital and economic resources play a central role in explaining mobility decisions. The literature consistently shows that individuals with higher levels of education are generally more likely to move than those with lower levels of educational attainment. One explanation is that individuals with higher human capital often associate more favourable labour market opportunities, higher incomes, and better career prospects with more developed regions or countries (Venhorst et al., 2010; Corcoran et al., 2010; Rérat, 2014; Kazakis & Faggian, 2017). Human capital can therefore function both as a resource facilitating mobility and as a factor that increases its likelihood.

Regional mobility studies have also shown that intentions to migrate tend to be stronger in economically less prosperous regions than in more developed ones (Andrews et al., 2008; Corbett, 2007; Corcoran et al., 2010). However, this does not necessarily imply that the most highly educated individuals will automatically migrate. In certain professions, such as teaching or healthcare, the probability of remaining in the region may be higher, suggesting that the mobility effects of human capital may be profession-specific and context-dependent (Venhorst et al., 2010).

Family background also plays a significant role in shaping mobility aspirations. Graduates from families with higher levels of cultural and human capital, such as those with more highly educated parents or a higher social status, typically demonstrate greater mobility aspirations (Belfield & Morris, 1999). Economic resources, including financial circumstances and income level, also influence immobility intentions. Lower income or less favourable financial conditions often increase the likelihood of mobility, as they reinforce the desire for better living conditions (Haapanen & Tervo, 2009).

One specific form of economic embeddedness is homeownership, which the literature identifies as one of the strongest predictors of staying in place (Helderman et al., 2006). Housing stability not only represents an

economic resource but may also strengthen individuals' local attachments, thereby reducing their propensity to move.

Sociocultural Factors

Cultural and community attachments also play a decisive role in shaping immobility decisions, particularly in minority contexts. Ethnic affiliation may influence mobility patterns, as members of ethnic minority groups often make mobility decisions under different social and structural conditions than members of majority populations. According to Faggian and colleagues, members of ethnic minorities frequently display lower levels of mobility in the early stages of their careers, which can partly be explained by social conditions and structural opportunities (Faggian et al., 2007). At the same time, our previous regional studies suggest that Hungarian minority higher education students in some cases show weaker aspirations to remain in place than their majority Hungarian counterparts (Sütő, 2025), indicating that the effect of ethnicity is highly context-dependent.

Religiosity and belonging to religious communities may also be associated with aspirations to remain in place. According to Myers (2000), religiosity can be interpreted as a form of place-specific capital that strengthens individuals' local attachments, as belonging to religious communities often involves close connections to local social networks. In minority communities, this relationship may be particularly strong, as religious and national identities are often closely intertwined (Tózsér, 2024).

Language competencies may also play an important role in immobility decisions. The literature generally interprets language skills as a factor facilitating mobility, as they reduce the risks associated with migration and facilitate integration into new social environments. In minority contexts, however, knowledge of the state language and the use of the mother tongue can also be interpreted as forms of place-specific human capital that may support social and labour market integration within a given country, thereby increasing the likelihood of remaining in place (Schewel, 2012). By contrast, foreign language competencies are more closely associated with expanding opportunities for international mobility.

Based on the theoretical approaches presented above, the staying aspirations of higher education students can be interpreted as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped jointly by demographic characteristics, human and economic capital, and sociocultural attachments. The aim of our analysis is to explore how these factors influence the geographical immobility decisions of Hungarian minority higher education students in Central Europe.

Our study is based on the following hypotheses:

- H1. We hypothesize that there is no significant gender difference in staying aspirations among higher education students.
- H2. We hypothesize that students from more advantaged socioeconomic and cultural family backgrounds display stronger mobility aspirations.
- H3. We hypothesize that higher levels of religiosity and stronger attachment to religious communities increase the likelihood of remaining in place.
- H4. We hypothesize that foreign language proficiency decreases the likelihood of geographical immobility.
- H5. We hypothesize that a higher level of proficiency in the state language increases the likelihood of remaining in place.
- H6. We hypothesize that previous international work experience decreases the likelihood of remaining in place.

Materials & Methods

For the analysis, we used the empirical database of the Hungarian Youth Research 2020 survey. The study was conducted between October 2020 and January 2021 among young people in Hungary and among the youth of the four largest Hungarian minority communities living outside Hungary in the Carpathian Basin. The aim of the research was to explore the comprehensive social, demographic, and economic characteristics of young people aged 15–29, with particular attention to attitudes related to family formation and childbearing, educational and labour market trajectories, as well as social well-being and political interest.

The quantitative survey involved a total of 12,000 respondents, of whom 4,000 belonged to Hungarian minority communities outside Hungary. The sampling frame and the baseline distributions used to ensure representativeness were based on national census data and other regional statistical sources. The sample is representative of the target population in terms of settlement type, age group, and gender.

Randomness in the data collection for the minority samples was ensured through the combined use of the random walk and quota sampling methods (Székely, 2023). The size of the sample in each minority region was

as follows: 1,000 respondents in Slovakia (Felvidék), 500 in Ukraine (Transcarpathia), 2,000 in Romania (Partium, Inner Transylvania, and Szeklerland), and 400 in Serbia (Vojvodina) (Székely, 2023).

Our analysis focuses on minority and Hungarian respondents who were enrolled in higher education at the time of the survey. The number of such respondents was 561 in the Romanian subsample, 146 in the Ukrainian subsample, 225 in the Slovak subsample, and 175 in the Serbian subsample.

The statistical analyses were conducted using the SPSS 22 statistical software package. The datasets derived from the Hungarian and minority samples were integrated using the MERGE FILES command in SPSS. During the merging process, particular attention was paid to ensuring that individual cases were correctly matched and that variables were harmonised in a consistent format within the combined dataset. The application of this procedure made it possible to integrate the information from the different samples into a single database suitable for statistical analysis, thereby enabling the testing of our hypotheses.

In the analysis, descriptive statistical methods and chi-square tests were applied to examine whether significant differences existed between the student groups. In addition, logistic regression analysis was used to estimate which of the examined factors increase or decrease the likelihood of belonging to the group of students planning geographical immobility. The regression model also allowed us to consider the conditional effects of the variables when interpreting the results.

Measures

Dependent Variable

Staying Aspirations (Geographical Immobility)

In our study, students' immobility behaviour is examined on the basis of their plans regarding geographical mobility. The methodological justification for this approach is twofold. First, social psychological theories emphasize that individual intentions and aspirations are key predictors of actual behaviour (De Jong et al., 1985; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2008; Creighton, 2013). Second, empirical studies have also demonstrated that migration intentions are reliable indicators of actual mobility behaviour. This is supported by a 2019 study covering more than 160 countries, which found that a 1 percent increase in the proportion of individuals planning to migrate was associated with an average increase of 0.75 percent in actual migration flows between countries (Carling, 2019; Tjaden, 2021).

Based on these considerations, (im)mobility intentions were operationalised using the following survey question: "Do you plan to live abroad?" In our analysis, students who gave a clear negative response to this question were classified as aspiring to geographical immobility, that is, intending to remain in their current country of residence. Respondents who answered "yes" or indicated uncertainty were classified as not aspiring to immobility. This categorisation is based on the assumption that the focus of the present study is on firm intentions to remain in place; therefore, responses expressing uncertainty cannot be interpreted as a commitment to staying. Instead, such responses reflect a potential openness to mobility, which methodologically justifies their inclusion in the category of non-immobile respondents. Cases with missing responses were excluded from the analysis due to the lack of substantive information.

Overall, 64.9 percent of minority higher education students (N = 1107) expressed a clear intention to remain in their home country. Our empirical analysis focuses on this group of students.

Independent Variables

Demographic Characteristics

In the analysis, the examined variables were grouped into three categories. The first category, demographic and family characteristics, includes variables related to the students' personal background. These variables comprise age, gender, relationship status, the number of children living in the household, the presence of the respondent's own children, and the country of residence.

Indicators of Human and Economic Capital

The second category, human capital and economic factors, includes variables related to the economic and cultural background of the student and their family, as well as their perceived social position. These variables

comprise parents' educational attainment, parents' occupation, the ownership of durable consumer goods, subjective financial situation, and the respondent's perceived social status.

Sociocultural Characteristics

The third category, sociocultural and mobility-related factors, reflects the student's cultural resources and prior mobility experiences. This category includes religiosity, knowledge of foreign languages, and previous international work experience. In the minority subsample, additional variables were included in the analysis, such as the use of the majority language and the Hungarian language, the language of education, and indicators measuring proficiency in the state language.

Results

The central question of our analysis is which demographic characteristics, forms of human and economic capital, and sociocultural factors increase or decrease the likelihood that minority students belong to the group planning geographical immobility. To address this question, we applied multivariate logistic regression analysis, where the dependent variable was students' immobility aspirations (0 = not aspiring to immobility; 1 = aspiring to immobility), while the independent variables included demographic, economic, and sociocultural characteristics. The use of this method allowed us to examine the relationships between students' staying aspirations and various sociodemographic, economic, and sociocultural factors within a multivariate framework, while also taking into account the conditional effects between the variables when interpreting the results.

The logistic regression models indicate that several factors increase the likelihood of remaining in place among minority students. These include relationship status, the perception of belonging to a lower social group, and indicators of material well-being, such as car ownership and the perception of financial security, including the absence of financial difficulties. Additional significant supporting factors include religiosity and characteristics related to linguistic and cultural background, such as attending a Hungarian-language kindergarten.

By contrast, the likelihood of remaining in place decreases if the student's father has a higher education degree, if the student has proficiency in the state language, speaks foreign languages, or has previous international work experience. The logistic regression model also made it possible to account for the conditional effects between these variables. When only demographic variables were included in the model, living in Ukraine appeared to reduce the likelihood of remaining in place. However, when indicators of human and economic capital were also included in the analysis, the effect of the country variable disappeared, while the other effects remained statistically significant.

Table 1. Logistic regression results predicting staying aspirations among Hungarian minority students (1 = aspiring to remain in place, n = 718; 0 = not aspiring to remain in place, n = 389).

	Coefficient (B)	Standard error (SE)	Wald	Significance	Oddsratios Exp(B)
Constant	-,780	1,167	,447	,504	,459
Demographic characteristics					
Ukraine (ref. category: Romania)	-,385	,322	1,424	,233	,681
Slovakia (ref. category: Romania)	-,384	,259	2,198	,138	,681
Serbia (ref. = Romania)	,006	,267	,000	,982	1,006
Gender (0 = male; 1 = female)	-,014	,195	,005	,944	,986
Age	,071	,042	2,924	,087	1,074
In a relationship	,447	,197	5,156	,023	1,563
Number of children in the household	,060	,194	,097	,755	1,062
Number of own children	-,119	,766	,024	,877	,888
Human and economic capital					
Mother's education: tertiary (ref. category: primary)	-,235	,367	,410	,522	,791
Mother's education: secondary (ref. category: primary)	-,149	,277	,289	,591	,862

Father's education: tertiary (ref. category: primary)	-,819	,362	5,105	,024	,441
Father's education: secondary (ref. category: primary)	,010	,252	,002	,967	1,011
Mother's occupation: white-collar (ref. category: blue-collar)	,132	,258	,261	,609	1,141
Mother's occupation: managerial (ref. category: blue-collar)	,410	,426	,924	,337	1,507
Father's occupation: white-collar (ref. category: blue-collar)	,180	,294	,373	,542	1,197
Father's occupation: managerial (ref. category: blue-collar)	-,400	,326	1,512	,219	,670
Perceived lower social class (ref. category: middle class)	,641	,316	4,123	,042	1,898
Perceived upper social class (ref. category: middle class)	,509	,274	3,441	,064	1,663
Has a bank account	-,469	,460	1,042	,307	,625
Has a bank card	,611	,461	1,752	,186	1,842
Has a credit card	-,323	,288	1,257	,262	,724
Has a loan	,554	,677	,670	,413	1,740
Has a student loan	-,544	,525	1,072	,300	,581
Has life insurance	-,172	,206	,693	,405	,842
Savings	,014	,239	,004	,952	1,014
Has financial investments	,399	,357	1,251	,263	1,490
Owens a home	,093	,205	,203	,652	1,097
Owens a car	,629	,271	5,406	,020	1,877
Ownership of durable household goods	,005	,230	,000	,983	1,005
Major electrical appliances	-,382	,218	3,077	,079	,683
Subjective financial situation (0 = financial insecurity; 1 = financial security)	,664	,297	4,986	,026	1,943
Sociocultural characteristics					
Religiosity	,576	,232	6,154	,013	1,780
State language proficiency	-,612	,311	3,882	,049	,542
Use of the mother tongue	,065	,044	2,196	,138	1,067
Mother-tongue preschool education	,592	,268	4,880	,027	1,807
Mother-tongue primary education	-,600	,443	1,836	,175	,549
Mother-tongue secondary education	,225	,369	,373	,541	1,253
Mother-tongue higher education	-,195	,201	,943	,332	,823
Foreign language proficiency	-,282	,128	4,834	,028	,754
International work experience	-1,141	,236	23,44	,000	,320

Source: Hungarian Youth Research 2020 – Integrated Higher Education Student Database (N = 2,200).

Note: The model is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The $-2 \log$ likelihood decreased from 729.591 to 618.767. Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2 = 0.214$; Cox–Snell $R^2 = 0.154$. The regression analysis was conducted using the Enter variable selection method (METHOD = ENTER). Exp(B) values above 1 indicate higher odds of belonging to the group aspiring to immobility relative to the reference category, while values below 1 indicate lower odds.

*Significant at $p < 0.1$. **Significant at $p < 0.05$. ***Significant at $p < 0.001$.

Discussion

Following the conceptual framework of Carling and Schewel, our results partly support the findings of previous studies suggesting that migration intentions tend to be stronger in economically less developed regions, whereas the preference for remaining in place is more typical in more developed areas. At the same time, the results concerning students from Ukraine indicate that, in addition to regional economic development, minority status may also play a decisive role in shaping immobility. This finding complements and refines previous regional research results.

Our analysis did not reveal significant gender differences in mobility decisions, which may suggest that with the strengthening of modern gender roles the differences previously observed between men and women

are gradually diminishing (Fényes & Pusztai, 2020; Sütő, 2025). In this respect, our first hypothesis is confirmed.

The literature frequently emphasizes the role of age in shaping mobility aspirations. Previous studies indicate that older individuals generally exhibit lower spatial mobility, which can partly be explained by the fact that over the life course they develop stronger social and economic embeddedness in their local environments (Fischer & Malmberg, 1997). In the present study, however, age did not prove to be a significant explanatory factor. A likely explanation is that the sample is relatively homogeneous in terms of age, therefore the smaller age differences among students do not result in substantial variation in immobility aspirations.

Our findings partly support previous research highlighting the importance of family and partnership-related factors in mobility decisions (Nivalainen, 2004; Haapanen & Ritsilä, 2007; Sütő, 2025). Among minority students, being in a relationship significantly increased the likelihood of remaining in place. By contrast, family size and the number of children did not prove to be significant determinants. This may be explained by the fact that childbearing is still relatively rare among higher education students; therefore its influence is more likely to become significant at later stages of the life course.

Our results are also consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of parental resources. Higher parental human capital decreases the likelihood of staying and rather encourages mobility decisions (Belfield & Morris, 1999). At the same time, different dimensions of financial status influence students' plans in different ways. Among minority students, the perception of financial security and car ownership increased the probability of remaining in place, while perceiving oneself as belonging to a lower social group also strengthened staying aspirations. These findings highlight that interpreting mobility aspirations requires not only examining the availability of resources but also considering their symbolic meaning within communities. On this basis, our second hypothesis is partially confirmed.

The importance of religiosity also emerged in the analysis. Our results confirm Myers' (2000) argument that religiosity can function as a form of place-specific capital that strengthens the intention to stay while also shaping national identity. Therefore, our third hypothesis is confirmed.

When examining language skills, we distinguished between proficiency in the state language and knowledge of foreign languages. Foreign language proficiency significantly reduced the likelihood of remaining in place; thus, our fourth hypothesis is supported. However, among minority students, proficiency in the state language did not prove to be a significant factor when other variables were taken into account. This suggests that within the set of variables shaping staying intentions, other factors, such as social and cultural embeddedness or family background, play a more dominant role. In this context, knowledge of the state language alone does not appear to be a sufficiently strong motivating factor for remaining in place. Consequently, our fifth hypothesis must be rejected.

We also examined the effects of Hungarian language use and Hungarian-language education among minority students. We assumed that regular use of the mother tongue represents stronger cultural and local attachment, which may reinforce the intention to stay. However, our results did not reveal a significant effect, suggesting that mother tongue use alone does not necessarily indicate actual social embeddedness. Among the different educational levels, only mother-tongue preschool education strengthened staying intentions. One possible explanation is that early-life linguistic and community experiences, as well as the local commitment reflected in parental educational choices, may have long-term effects on young people's local attachments.

International work experience, however, reduced the likelihood of remaining in place. Even short-term employment abroad may therefore contribute to students acquiring intercultural skills and experiences. These experiences increase the chances of successful future mobility and reduce the perceived risks of migration. Accordingly, our sixth hypothesis is confirmed.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the demographic, human and economic capital-related, and sociocultural factors shaping the staying aspirations of Hungarian higher education students in Central Europe, and to analyse the interactions between these factors. The research was based on the premise that higher education constitutes one of the most important institutional frameworks for the reproduction of human capital, playing a particularly significant role in the social and economic sustainability of minority communities. At the same time, the life situation of higher education students is unique in terms of mobility decisions, as international research shows that mobility aspirations are strongest around the time of graduation (Haapanen & Tervo, 2009). This stage of life is therefore crucial for the regional retention of human capital.

The novelty of our study lies in analysing mobility and immobility aspirations among minority higher education students, a target group that has been relatively rarely examined even in international research.

Our findings contribute to the scientific discourse on mobility decisions among Hungarian youth in Central Europe and provide an empirical basis for a more nuanced application of aspiration–capability models interpreting geographical immobility. The analysis demonstrates that students' staying aspirations cannot be reduced solely to economic considerations. Rather, immobility decisions are shaped by the combined influence of demographic characteristics, human and economic capital, and sociocultural attachments.

We are aware that our research does not provide a complete picture of the factors determining immobility among the studied population. Our analysis focused on the interactions between variables included in the statistical models; therefore, several additional factors—such as the institutional environment, regional labour market opportunities, or the specific cultural context—require further investigation. Future research could therefore focus on longitudinal analyses of immobility decisions and comparative studies across different minority regions.

Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding of the role of minority education systems in Central and Eastern Europe. The results suggest that higher education institutions may play an important role in the regional retention of highly educated young people and thereby contribute to the social and economic reproduction of minority communities, as well as to the long-term development of their regions.

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