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## Parental caringscapes – the analyses of mothering practices in local community contexts

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### ABSTRACT

During the last two decades of Family Sociology there is a growing interest toward understanding the complex phenomenon of parental experience. According to the changing perspective of the field, parental experience is embracing three different but interrelated aspects: the parenthood as a social institution, practices and agency of parenting and the intimate relationship between a particular child and her/his parent. This approach reflects to the changing social interpretations of parenthood and the growing emphasize on the “good parenting” in lay and professional discourses, and diversification of institutional and informal contexts of parental care. As a part of this process the status that parents occupy in different social fields shows diversity as well, and sometimes parents experience distance between the value of their parental status in varying contexts. Becoming a new mother can lead to central position in the family, while on the societal level it may goes together with a kind of isolation and the feeling of periphery. This gap has an effect on evaluation of parental competencies, autonomy and parental interpretations of care. In our study implementing a human geographic approach we suggest that parental care and the relating experiences cannot be separated from the wider and narrower space, place and time where the actual caring work is occurring.

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**Kulcsszavak**

szülői gondoskodás, helyi közösségek, helyi társadalom

Cím: A szülői gondoskodás formái – az anyaság gyakorlatának elemzése a helyi társadalom kontextusában  
Absztrakt: A szülői tapasztalat és szülői identitás témáját növekvő figyelem övezi az elmúlt 20-25 évben a családszociológiai kutatások terén. A szülői gondoskodás gyakorlata mellett mind fontosabbá vált annak megismerése, hogy hogyan látják a szülők magukat szülőként, hogyan konstruálódik meg a szülőség tapasztalata. Számos egészségügyi, szociális, etikai, pszichológiai probléma, folyamat jelenhet meg ebben a keretben, s a különböző tudományterületekhez kapcsolódó kutatások mint egy nagytűtőveget használhatják a szülői tapasztalatot e jelenségek tanulmányozása során. A szülői szerepkör diverzitást mutat annak tükrében, hogy milyen értéket társítanak az eltérő szülői státuszokhoz. Az anyává válás például centrális pozíciót eredményezhet a családon belül, ám a társadalmi kontextusban inkább jár együtt izoláció megélésével és perifériára kerüléssel. Ez a szakadék hatással van a szülőség megélésének minőségére. Tanulmányunk célja az, hogy bemutassuk hogyan formálódik az anyaság tapasztalata és a szülői gondoskodás megélése különböző lokális terekben.

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**Introduction**

During the last two decades of Family Sociology, there is a growing interest in understanding the complex phenomenon of parental experience emerging in different social contexts. According to the changing perspective of the field, parental experience is embracing three different but interrelated aspects: parenthood as a social institution, parenting practices, and the intimate relationship between a particular child and her/his parent. (Hobson 2002, Morgan 2004, Dermott 2008, Daly 2016). In our study implementing a socio-spatial approach we suggest that parental care and the related experiences cannot be separated from the wider and narrower space, place and time where the actual caring work is occurring (Ivanova–Wallenburg–Bal 2016). We use McKie and Bowlby’s concept of caringscape to show how the maternal experience is formed and performed in different local contexts. Caringscape can be defined as a mental map of caring for and about somebody, with the significant places, spaces, actors, memories and plans of care and all those emotions and reflections that are connected with these elements (Bowlby 2012).

We examine spatial aspects of parental care analysing an individual and an institutional narrative that are organized around parenthood and care. The individual narrative is a part of an ongoing fieldwork research on understanding parental

autonomy in families raising children living with autism spectrum disorder in a rural community. The institutional narrative is based on a case study analysis of an NGO located in the 9th district of Budapest, named Mothership Centre. Using thematic analysis of interview texts and participant observation resources we found that supportive and self-organized communities and informal networks of caring relationships of parents occur as a resource of local change and social power, and at the same time these reshape the personal and local meanings of periphery and exclusion.

### **The changing contexts of parenthood**

The topic of parental experience and parental identity has been the subject of increasing attention in the field of family sociology research over the past 20-25 years. A growing body of literature demonstrates that above the description of parental strategies it is increasingly important to know how parents see themselves as parents, and how the experience of parenthood is constructed (Daly 2017).

It is not only family sociology that is of interest in this issue. The subject of parental experience offers a well-grasped perspective for understanding various social phenomena since parenthood is already a situation in which a great deal of emphasis is necessarily placed on the personal and institutional aspects of care. Many health, social, ethical, psychological problems and processes can appear in this framework, and research related to different disciplines can use the parental experience as a looking glass in the study of these phenomena. The topics examined are often related to transitions between social positions, life stages, (eg.: Cohen 2015), and the changing social and cultural contexts of parenthood, furthermore the varying interpretations of parental roles (see: Dermott 2008, Hobson 2002, Staneva–Wittkowski 2013).

To understand these changing accents in parenthood research we see it important to make a short summary of those social and cultural phenomena that have a great impact on the meanings of parental roles.

The cultural paradigm of the technology age is globalization and the information society. Castells (2000) said the network society is more accurate to describe the society of the information age. We could read about different visions of the future from futurologists. They think that living with technology is producing the next level of human evolution: the coexistence of machines and humanity. (Roszak 1970, 1990) Today, in the 2020s we see that social media has more impact on social activity or inactivity and that is the technology that is challenging. „People interact and co-act supported by easy-to-use technologies. This lets them buy and sell, know and comment, as well as review and support things that relate to their daily lives and

surroundings. People create much content easily, and these inputs can be utilized both to filter content and tell the user about items that probably are of interest to him/her. This content is also used to link people to each other and these networks are used as one important source of metadata that helps in filtering the relevant information.” (Ahlqvist et al. 2008: 67)

Using social media in everyday life gives the appearance of being in a central position in society even if someone lives on the periphery. Using social media gives the appearance of having access to all the information that affects your everyday life. 25-30 years ago, social information connected to geographical spaces, the centre and periphery firstly had a proxemic meaning. (Horkai 2011, Hall 1995) For example, youth cultures were mostly located where universities and colleges were. In the small towns, youngsters appeared only during the school holidays. We supposed that they preferred those leisure-time activities that they used in the place of their study, where their college or university was situated. It leads to the phenomenon that the small towns and villages lose their youth because those cannot guarantee an energetic and youthful way of life. The connection between youth cultures and local society showed us the vulnerability of youth issuing from regional differences. This made youth move away from small towns to bigger cities where more social, economic, and cultural possibilities were available. The reasons for the migration were the low service index and the absence of job opportunities. (Horkai 2004)

The spread of network society, technologies, and social media results that the connection between youth cultures or any other subcultures and the local society has changed. The local society does not need a geographical space or any institution (for example schools, colleges) anymore, it can be organized and function in cyberspace at least as effectively as it was before the internet. The experience of central position or getting to the periphery rather connects to time than space.

The sociology of aging shows many examples of perceiving the central position in the society, for example the theory of youth centrism. „It can be defined in terms of the following: a rejection of parental influence and marked orientation on peers, criticism of adult institutions (family, school, state) and their representatives (parents, teachers, police, politicians), a strong belief in a generation gap, and the belief that young people can resist the adult world.” (ter Bogt et al 2001: 231) From the scope of consumer society, youth centrism has a different interpretation. If you are young, you are in a central position in society, because you are independent, free of social responsibility, you can shape and personate yourself. (Lasch 1996) This is the desired state full of experiences, and one of the very decisive experiences of this life stage is becoming a parent. When a child is born, he/she gets the very central

position within the family until his/her sister or brother has been born too. Then the children will be in the central position.

The same process proceeds with the mother. Becoming a mother gives the very central position within a family but a bit peripheric from a social or community point of view. The mother who cares for and about one, two, or more children have different possibilities in the labour market than the woman with no child. UNICEF report (UNICEF 2020) shows a detailed problem map of the mothers' labour market positions. We can see that society expects mothers to work full-time or half-time jobs and also take care of children. Most of the parents (59%) feel that their workplace is not family-friendly or parent-friendly in a way, and 18% said that their workplace is not family-friendly at all. (UNICEF 2020: 26) Parents feel resigned both in their workplace and their family, and the mothers experience more determination and less freedom in their everyday life. (Lipták - Matiscsákné 2018)

### **Doing parenthood - application of family practice approach in the analysis of parental experience**

By the 2000s, some works exploring the meanings of parenthood used as an important conceptual bedrock that in parental experience the social expectations and culturally defined values of parenthood tied together with individual parental identification and with the parental practices elaborated by the individual actors. Several postmodern scholars of family sociology, eg. David Morgan and Barbara Hobson, suggest a complex approach to parenthood that separates these dimensions for analytical aims. A triangle of meanings can be used in understanding interpretations of parental experience, that separates the terms of the parent, parenthood, and parenting. The first refers to the process of identification, the relationship of a parent and his/her children (identification level), the second is about social expectations, obligations, responsibilities, roles, statuses, and discourses to be a parent (institutional level), and the third is expressing the actual practices of parenting, the ways how people do their parenting. The differentiation of these categories offers a useful tool for the examination of diverse roots of parental experience and the interplay between institutions and practices. (Hobson 2002, Morgan 2004)

Within this theoretical framework in this paper, we put greater emphasis on the idea of parental practices that are associated with the term of David Morgan's concept of family practices. The term came to be widely used after Morgan's 1996 work "*Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies*". He developed the idea to define the family through the actions carried out by family members. Morgan says "family is something that individuals do, rather than something that people are"

(McCarthy-Edwards 2011:88), so family practices imply all everyday activities “that people do, insofar as they are intended to have some effect on another family member” (Cheal 2002:12). According to Morgan’s argumentation, day-to-day practices are not rationally based and calculated by people, but routinised and are taken for granted, therefore “(...) in carrying out these everyday practicalities, social actors are reproducing the sets of relationships (structures, collectivities) within which these activities are carried out and from which they derive their meaning. (...) There is, therefore, an inevitable circularity between these practices and the sets of other individuals and relationships within which these practices have meaning.” (Morgan 2011a:2) That means that the everyday caring activities of life relating to family members are embedded in wider social discourses of family and parenthood, their subjective meanings are shaped by them, while these discourses are (re)constructed through the particles of family practices. Furthermore, as Morgan explains, these practices are fluid, they have no concrete borders: they connect for example to other social practices of age, body, gender, religion, or overlap each other. Applying these ideas, parental experiences (and identities) are reproduced in the crossroads of different social and individual practices and discourses, and their ideas about family boundaries, interpretations of care, and their own role as a parent are articulated through these intersections.

## **Parenthood and disability in a local context - a parental narrative**

### *The background*

Family practices are rooted back to the family we live with but people continuously know about the families they live by. Using the distinction of Gillis (1996), doing family and family discourses related to each other, but at the same time the ideals of family life represented through social discourses of parenting, marriage or care are just unreachable images from the point of view of a particular family. Unexpected events, turning points, changes and challenges in human life may lead to family troubles (Francis 2013), crises or need of coping that reshape the identity interpretations of all family members.

Childhood disability is widely referred to as a source of crisis in a family life course, especially in the part of the literature where parental view point is at the focus. Although in the last few decades there is a strengthening narrative that seeks to overcome the ‘tragedy narrative’ of disability (Bognár 2012; McLaughlin 2012), parents raising children with disabilities often face difficult consequences of exclusion, stigmatization and insufficient access to basic resources. They are insiders and outsiders at the same time: most of them are non-disabled, but share the experience of differentiation of their children in numerous areas of life. As a

consequence, parents raising a child with a disability — especially mothers — occupy a peripheral place and remain invisible in disability research. (Ryan - Runswick-Cole 2008) The widespread debate over the controversies of and critics against the parental role and position in disability movement and in disability studies is well documented in several research papers and documents, and it reaches over the frames of the current paper.<sup>16</sup> Here we concentrate on the liminality that defines the experiences of parents of children living with disabilities.

In families raising children with disabilities parental identity and practices are interwoven with the meanings of disability, that is disability thematizes discourses of parenthood. According to the definition adopted in the social model of disability, disability is not a static condition, but a situative phenomenon formed in a combination of social and individual constructions, and diverse and fluid in its forms and possibilities (Barnartt 2010). This reading of disability also appears in the interpretation of parenthood. It is a good example that the different micro- and macro-contexts of parenting require continuous self-definition from the parents concerned: in playground conversations with parents of typical children their parental success and practices are defined differently than in a self-support group of parents of disabled children. Looking for appropriate health care services or education produces experiences and questions that are different from the mainstream.

The research project which is used as one of the empirical resources in this study places the phenomena of disability and parenthood into a local context. The general aim of the work is to investigate disability-perceptions in a rural community in Eastern region of Hungary within the frames of ethnographic fieldwork. The research has a focus on parental autonomy experiences and its correspondence with local disability discourses. In the recent phase of the project, my main question was that how families raising autistic children<sup>17</sup> experience patterns of difference-making around disability during everyday life in the local community, and how they gain autonomy in their everyday parental and caring practices.

Rural life or a rural community is one of the classic fields of research in social sciences. However, in Hungarian social research the topic has been pushed into the background in recent decades. It only becomes attractive when a special pursuit, work (rural tourism, rural investment) or nostalgia leads the investigator (Kovács

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed explanation see: Kröger 2009; McLaughlin 2012, Rummery, K., & Fine, M. 2012, Green 2007; Fine & Glendinning 2005.

<sup>17</sup> According to Dunn and Andrews (2015) I use an identity-first language (disabled person, autistic child etc.) in the recent context of my research, taking into account the way of expressions of those parents who take a part in field investigating consultations.

2012). Within the field of parental care and disability, the dimension of rurality also rarely comes to the fore. It appears mostly through the category of residence, as a socio-demographic factor. (Some examples of this are: Tobak 2013; Bánfalvy 2003:66 ) The local world of a rural area, its representation, i.e. the functioning of the imagined (local) communities of the people living there and the network that makes it up, rarely comes into focus as a unique topic in the wider social research. At the same time, in the last two decades, the involvement of spatial approach and the consideration of the human geographical aspects of care have become increasingly important in care research.

It is a good example for the growing curiosity about spatial explanations (and an effect of a spatial turn in social sciences) that David Morgan revisiting his early thoughts of family/parental practices, he identifies as a weak point of his theory that it may fail to place family practices within wider structural frameworks and furthermore at the time of writing the original concept he has not taken into consideration that family practices are not located exclusively in typical family places like the home, but there are several segments of social space that are significant in “doing” families.(Morgan 2011b:4-5) In his later works he completed his argumentation and cited the idea of caringscapes and “this approach provides a ready way in which issues of structured inequalities and power may be incorporated. These considerations remind us of the steepness or distance of key features within a given care landscape. Finally, this approach provides links between individuals and their life trajectories, their social configurations and relevant social institutions, all these being located within a temporal framework.” (Morgan 2011b:5).<sup>18</sup>

The caringscape approach was introduced by L. McKie and S. Bowlby (2010, 2019). According to them, informal care can be interpreted as a kind of landscape that the actors involved in care build themselves throughout their lives upon their past memories of caring, present experiences and future visions. These landscapes are multidimensional, including different patterns, scenarios, memories, norms and expectations of care. Those who give and those who receive care possess this imagined land and they do not travel alone there, although formal and informal fellow travellers may change, just as the landscape itself is constantly evolving with changes in the social, economic, and political environment (Bowlby 2010, Bowlby 2012, Bowlby and McKie 2010). This aspect of care is strongly relational: the position of the narrator always depends on the relations to other actors within this

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<sup>18</sup> Other scholars in the field of family research recognised the importance of spatial dimension of family life and there is a growing body of books and papers concerning this object. See for example: Halatcheva-Trapp et. al. 2019.



space. Furthermore it is a discursive space that is continuously constructed by the actors of care through thinking of and doing care, and the existing spatial and social structures of care shape the possibilities and representations of care too.

### *The field and the method*<sup>19</sup>

The settlement where the mentioned research is carried out is a large village in Eastern Hungary. The population of the settlement is 4800 people, it has been increasing in recent years. The most important institutions are the primary school with eight grades, the kindergarten and the nursery, furthermore a community library and a care centre operates there. Two general practitioners, a school visitor, and a dentist work in the village, and also a pharmacy is available. The central institution of the fieldwork is a local private school for school-aged children living with autism spectrum disorder. It was founded on the initiative of a parent, currently nine children study in two buildings, providing them with all-day care in cooperation with the primary school. The school is led by a local foundation financed by the state subsidies and they receive private donations as well. Families can use all services free of charge in the school.

The fieldwork started in August of 2020, when three semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers working in the local private school and three parental conversations were recorded as well. Till August of 2021 five more interviews were conducted, partly online and partly in person, due to the restrictions associated with COVID-19. The interviews were transcribed and analysed by MAXQDA 2020. The names and all personal data were anonymized.

In the analysis below I outline the personal caringscape of one parent through the activities, emotions and subjective reflections she mentioned, while I use the analytical sub-topics of caring activity offered by S. Bowlby (Bowlby et. al.2010). Above the clearly defined caring activities, I identified the examples of planning, management and accession of care, furthermore the personal reflections, emotions relating to care and the most important turning points in the personal life story, intersecting with the episodes of care. Additionally, I examined how spatiality becomes important in different layers of the narrative and how involvement in the local network of relationships influences the agency of the narrator.

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<sup>19</sup> A detailed Hungarian version of the analyses will be published in *Socio.hu Social Science Review* (expected date of publication is 2021. December (11/4.) as a part of the thematic issue of „The Sociology of (the lack of) Care” <https://socio.hu/index.php/so/index>.

*A mother's narrative – the chronological threads of the narrative and parental self-determination*

I chose A. because she has the strongest relations to the field. She's a local, she was born and spent her early childhood, school years and adult life there. The family occupies a lower middle-class position in the local society, both parents have jobs, A. works at a local service. She had serious health issues in recent years, so she's often been on sick leave.

A. is a mother of three, two children live with her and her husband now, and the third is an adult, living not far from Them. The second child was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder at age 4. The mother soon realized the atypical development of the child, after which she began to look for specialists to map the child's difficulties. The child did not speak for a long time, occasionally he still finds it difficult to express himself. The child also has mobility difficulties, which occurs in fine motor and large movements, e.g. clumsiness, he gets tired quickly if he has to walk a lot. He is quite independent. He spends plenty of time with his computer, reads on the Internet, he looks at all the topics of interest to him. He's currently studying at the local school.

A. describes herself as 'not too heavy-handed' mother who is not so consistent, more of a permissive, empathetic parent, and there is a very close relationship between her and her younger children.

She links this parental self-determination with the events and difficult experiences of the parental life path. She sees that the autism of the third child, the long journey of finding diagnosis have fundamentally made life difficult for the smallest. Bonding with this child and close relationship is also a kind of free space for experiencing motherhood after the many losses she has experienced.

*'Well, I say, my bigger boy is problematic too, he has learning disabilities, too, and now he is a drug addict. And then my second boy, and before him I had that little girl, and she died. I say, I have one girl only, with whom ... and she always comes with me, and she ... And I often feel pity. Well, I said that I felt sorry for (the smallest child). Because he couldn't really be a small child.'*

In A.'s parenting narrative, two main chronological threads can be identified, which gives the memory structure of the whole conversation. The most dominant is the history of the development of the child with ASD, which includes the story of the diagnosis and episodes exemplifying the difficulties of caring for and about the child. The chapters of this story-line are actually signed by the alternating professionals and institutions with whom the family has met till the present. The other thread is

less explicit, but the events that make up it are the outstanding milestones of the parental life path, several smaller stories are connected to them.

### *Spaces of care*

Care permeates the whole narrative, A. connects most of her mentioned responsibilities to some aspect of care, and the emerging network of relationships is typically organized along the lines of care. Below I present in a more detailed sense the family and wider social network of relationships that determines her caring work.

### *Family caring network – caring roles*

In the family relationship, basically, A. and her family appear as informal carers, and the caring relationship between them is characterized by mutual support and interdependence. However, the mother's caring activities are not limited to this micromilieu, her caring focus extends beyond this inner circle of mutual support. Care is present in A.'s wider family relationships without the requirement of reciprocity, both in terms of care for and care about. For example she cares for the old father of her husband, too. In A.'s interpretation, care is an obligation related to family roles, which she takes over from her husband and his sister.

Caring duties of A. are really diverse. In addition to 'caring for' tasks (housework, hygiene, following a diet, medical care, transport, developmental teaching, shopping, administration, supervision of children, caring for an elderly relative), 'caring about' is also strongly present in the various roles of the mother, especially in the form of solving issues related to autism (other mentioned areas: attentiveness, protection, empathy, favour, community work, information). Her parents and sister primarily help with the supervision and transport of children, and occasionally provide emotional support. The father's position is peripheral in the home caring network outlined by the mother, he sometimes has difficulty performing the care tasks according to his family roles. The home is mainly connected to activities that he performs alone (sleeps, works around the house, seldom looks at the children). The mother is attached to the home and nearby locations, moving in this space, while the father is attached to the distant, for example, he travels because of his work, even not at home for several days.

*'Yes, and not too long ago they were in D., and they slept there. Lately it is rare, but earlier they were in Germany. Well, I say, you always travel the world. And I just always move here in this place. I say, I'd like to go SO much!'*

The mother's caring-assistance attitude also appears beyond the family relationship and retains its informal character in all of these examples. She has taken on extra duties at both of her children's schools and follows online forums related to ASD,

where she shares her experiences with others. In these virtual and real groups, helping others is also the scene of experiencing a sense of parental competence.

However, the similar parental situation does not necessarily bring with it proximity and strong ties. Stories of A. do not reveal the image of an active supportive parenting community, the parents are more related to the school than to each other, she doesn't talk about other meeting points than school occasions, at most the community is formed in the temporary projects. The parents appearing in her stories, mostly isolated actors, who are occasionally explicitly dismissive and A. has developed close relationships with professionals dealing with her child instead.

#### *External support and care*

In the narrative, care is displayed on several levels of spatiality, from the nearby space of the home to the local spaces of the village to the more distant urban spaces. Her network of contacts extends to all three space dimensions, her relationships are diverse, dominantly due to her embeddedness in the local society. Her active relations have preludes in her autobiography. In case of problems requiring external support and assistance, the search for solutions starts through the informal channels of the local contact system. In this field A. is at home, knows the personal history and family background of the actors embodying the institutions, even elements related to her own story. This knowledge not only makes institutions and the services more accessible, but also facilitates more effective problem-solving, availability of better care and longer-term cooperation.

For A., the forms of care that can be used are not the services provided by a remote, impersonal care system, but manifestations of the help and supportive goodwill of personal acquaintances. Even if it is often burdensome to use these services, she never interprets obstacles as systemic errors, but as a consequence of individual omissions, human weakness, or personal attitude. The village is embodied in the network of proximate social relations and becomes the basis of the caring landscape in the parental narrative. The sense of home arises from familiarity and embeddedness in the local world of the village, and the mother's local knowledge of geographical and social routes are intertwined with each other. G. S. Rowles (1983) describes this phenomenon with the concept of insideness, which can best be translated as an experience of insidership and involvement. One of its aspects is physical insideness that refers to an accurate and deep knowledge of the physical environment, due to it in a familiar space (for example, in our home or hometown) we know exactly where objects or buildings are located, we use known routes unconsciously, the details of the space become internal. In the caringscape that emerges from A.'s narrative, we can find several such examples. The settlement itself is a home-like, well known space, and she is intimately tied even to its imperfections.

*'And once happened that I was here, in the middle of the village, and I said: 'It is good that I know where I am', because there was heavy snow, I've seen nothing. But after that I had to go, because if I don't finish with my work, I have to continue after lunch. But in this case, I have to leave my son alone, without surveillance, and then I went home, I looked after him, and I went again.'*

At the same time, as an example of autobiographical attachment, the narrator is familiar with the history of each place, she remembers the changes in the village space, few places transformed into memory spaces.

A.'s network of contacts is also an essential support resource for caring for her child with ASD. The support may appear in the form of information to increase knowledge about ASD, or discussion of current daily difficulties and challenges, or finding the institution or professional that is most suitable for the child. In addition, there is a strong close relationship between A. and the teachers of her son, and in general sense, these relations are based on partnership, we hear about several examples of personality and proximity. The support towards A. stems from this network of contacts, in practical and social terms.

Integration to the local network of relationships conveys a kind of protection and solidarity to A., for example, in a case where a stranger makes a disapproving remark about the behaviour of her autistic child in the store, a familiar cashier orders him. She also talks about herself as a person who rarely fights, reluctant to argue with strangers, and little by little she learned how to react in these situations. The bad experience with the stranger is one of the situations where disability also appears thematically, through the responses of others to it. This is also a good example of the dual attachment of the role of parent, since on the one hand she is a victim of stigmatization, exclusion, on the other hand she mediates between the child and the outside world, interpreting the behaviour of the child to others.

The perception of places, events, relationships that embrace the experience of involvement, and the way in which the narrator recalls and tells all of these things, are the forms of expression of parental identity. We can see in them the image of the narrator looking at herself as a parent.

The spatial characteristics of the village (everything is close, she can jump home during work, they live in the centre) strengthen autonomy, which gradually decreases with the increase in distance. The greatest difficulties in the history of parenthood arise from bridging physical distances, such as daily bus rides to the remote school, getting to the hospital by public transport, and developing the logistics associated with it. That's why getting a car and a driving license and phone usage of the kids are tools to strengthen the mother's agency. The inflexibility of the care services often makes it even more demanding to overcome the difficulties arising from the distance

(e.g. texting too late about the time of the medical examination, no time to organize the trip). Therefore, proximity strengthens agency, but this is true only if there is a way to occasionally break out, to move away from the local world of the village, to temporarily switch off these ties.

### **Mothership in Budapest - An institutional narrative**

#### *Self-organising local community within a local society*

How can the geographical space organize local communities of mothers? It seems easy within a Housing Estate's playgrounds, but many other agencies help to be a functional organization. In the 9th district of Budapest where the Attila József Housing Estate is situated everything looks like a small village within a huge town. You can walk in a very green park full of huge trees, there are a lot of birds and squirrels and it is far from the noisy main streets. There are two nurseries, four kindergartens, three elementary schools, and two secondary schools, medical stations and supermarkets, post offices, banks and lots of playgrounds. Approximately 15300 people live there and the place is very popular within families with small children.

We made participating observations and cultural anthropological fieldwork in the territory of the House Estate from 2015 to 2018. During this research we found a special NGO of young mothers with small children: the Mothership Centre. It was formed in August 2014, the Mothership Centre (Anyahajó Központ) is a team of enthusiastic mothers who work tirelessly towards organizing the young families of the Attila József Housing Estate and beyond into a supportive community. We can read on their webpage that “the Mothership is fuelled by the diverse talents and abilities of our members, all of whom freely volunteer their time. This is how we have our very own graphic designer, marketer, crochet instructor, web designer, blog writer, and the list goes on. Indeed, our motto is “Everyone is good at something”, and we encourage our fellow mothers to use their existing knowledge, or try their hands at something completely new. Our biggest priority for the coming period is finding a permanent home for ourselves. By securing our own space, we will not only reach a new level of independence and flexibility, but we’ll also be able to open our doors to mothers seeking company almost any time of day.” (<https://anyahajokozpont.hu/english/>)

During our research, we made semi-structured interviews with mothers of small children who were on maternity leave at that time. It was a recurrent narrative that next to the many advantages of that House Estate the main disadvantage for these mothers, that they feel very peripheric, closed from society, and they feel unaccompanied since their workplaces connections have been paused. From the playground conversations, they formed a centre from their peripheric feelings and

tried to give solutions for their special problems of a special life-experiences that is becoming a mother. They started to come across regularly and organize their community as a supportive company with special programs. They used to help each other to learn to knit and to crochet. They revive the habit of helping the new mothers during maternity period with warm dishes and the older children's supervision in a reciprocal way. In traditional rural families, all these activities are firstly connected to relatives rather than the local community. In this example, the local society takes over the role of kinship while the peripheric situation turns into some central position within the similar properties and demands of mothers.

In the name of the centre, there are many symbolic shades of etymological phrases of the locality. Mothership Centre uses the sea as the symbol of life, where the Mothership Centre is the port: the meeting point of the mothers who are the ships and boats. The children are the little sailors and the mothers are the captains (central position again), every ship is a special family with its own problems and needs but they are similar because of the similar livelihood of parenting and the same locality. It helps them to live their autonomy in a familiar community and this local society turns into a supportive and caring surrounding where mutual aid and the experiences of coping techniques take place. Families usually leave the port when the mother gets back to the labour market and starts to work again after the maternity leave. And as they experienced mothers sail back to the port and connect to the Mothership Centre again when the next child is about to be born. Social media helps the members keep in touch and if a mother goes back to the labour market she turns on the Mothership Centre's program online.

As a local community, the boards of Mothership Centre take commitment to local affairs and charity events too. One of these problems is connecting to environmental protection against cut out the small forest surrounding the House Estate. It means they are deeply embedded in the local society to take part and represent local cases and businesses. These activities really give a central position to the Mothership Centre within the local society.

## **Summary**

We show two different cases to demonstrate how complex the relationship between parents (especially mothers) and local society. This approach reflects the changing social interpretations of parenthood and the growing emphasis on the "good parenting" in lay and professional discourses, and diversification of institutional and informal contexts of parental care. As a part of this process the status that parents occupy in different social fields shows diversity as well, and sometimes parents experience distance between the value of their parental status in varying contexts.

For example, becoming a new mother can lead to central position in the family, while on the societal level it may go together with a kind of isolation and the feeling of periphery. This gap has an effect on evaluation of parental competencies, autonomy and parental interpretations of care. We examine these maps of participants relating to a local community of mothers in Budapest and mothers living in a local society of a village. With the content analyses of half-structured interviews conducted with urban mothers, we found that supportive and self-organized communities of mothers occur as a resource of local change and social power, and at the same time these reshape the personal experience of periphery and inclusion. The overlapping caringscapes of these mothers draw the map of a supportive community that reaches over the field of caring work, including local social inequalities or environmental issues.

In the case of parents raising children living with ASD we cannot find a clearly organized supportive community in the background, but the individual involvement in the local network of relationships plays a crucial role in experiencing parental agency. In the parental narrative the personalized support offered by the teachers in the local private school and semi-informal relationships to school professionals provide a basis for parental care.

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