


2011

# Brain Drain Out Of Hungary And Its Inhibitors

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# **BRAIN DRAIN OUT OF HUNGARY AND ITS INHIBITORS**

**Eliza Plous**

**PIM 69**

**A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in  
International Education at the SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.**

**July 24, 2011**

**Advisor: William Hoffa**

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## **Acknowledgments**

The author would like to extend her deepest gratitude to the following individuals for their contributions to this project: Istvan Matrai and Ilona Tálos Matrainé, Agnes Lepold, Csilla Jakosa, and the many students and faculty of Jurisich Miklos Gimnázium és Középiskolai in Kőszeg, Hungary who offered their assistance. Finally, the author wishes to give special thanks to Eleonóra Póczané, for her translations, input, and continuous support.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In many Central and Eastern European countries, a poor economic climate at home forces young people to make their careers in the West. Hungary is no exception. After spending time both studying and working in Hungary, the author chose to investigate the phenomenon known as “brain drain”: the large-scale emigration of young, educated individuals from Hungary as they seek higher salaries and more promising career prospects in neighboring Western European countries. This paper offers a comprehensive report on the economics of the brain drain problem, and on the opinions of young Hungarians who are currently seeking employment abroad; it also explores some of the potential factors that could convince this demographic to return to their home country.

To investigate this topic, the author distributed surveys to three groups of Hungarians. The first survey was sent to young Hungarians, aged 16 to 26. The second survey was sent to parents who recognize the effect the issue may have on their children. The third survey was sent to educators in a Hungarian secondary school. Respondents in all three groups were asked about their involvement in the “brain drain” trend. They were also asked to provide any knowledge of job placement organizations or other initiatives to reverse the drain. A total of 62 responses to the survey were received and analyzed. The resulting paper is an account of the current “brain drain” problem in Hungary, including a brief background on Hungary, a full analysis of survey results, and an investigation into potential solutions to the problem.

## **Introduction and Background**

My interest in Eastern and Central Europe dates back to my childhood. My family is of Polish and Belorussian heritage, a fact that my parents shared with me from an early age. As I grew older, it became obvious that I had developed a personal fascination with this part of the world. By the time I went off to college in 2001, I had a feeling that I wanted to study something related to Eastern European culture. It was not at all surprising to friends or family when, a year into my studies, I declared a major in History and a minor in Eastern and Central European Studies.

In my third year at college, I decided to take advantage of my school's many opportunities to study abroad. With encouragement from my favorite teacher, Professor András Árpád Boros-Kazai, I chose to study in Budapest, Hungary. I had taken Boros-Kazai's class on Eastern and Central Europe just a semester prior. His family had fled the country during the 1956 Revolution against the Soviet Army. The Revolution had broken out on October 23, when Hungarian people took to the streets, determined to break free of Soviet dominance and reestablish an autonomous Hungarian parliament. But on November 4, hundreds of Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest. Soviet troops used violence to suppress the Hungarian protestors, and thousands fled the country (BBC, 2010). My professor's family immigrated to the United States to escape the violence.

In class, Professor Boros-Kazai always stressed that the tragic events of 1956, like so many other events in Hungary's history, helped to shape modern Hungary's pessimistic—even fatalistic—national character. But until I arrived in Budapest for the first time in February 2004, I could not understand what he meant. After even a few weeks, however, I began to notice

common opinions and personality traits among the Hungarians that I met. People spoke with great cynicism, even anger, about the government. I learned that even after 1989, Hungary's democratic elections had still produced a Parliament full of corrupt socialist leaders. The job market had only worsened since 1989, and unemployment was common. For those who were employed, salaries were painfully low. Though Hungary was slated for EU accession in May of that year, many Hungarians looked towards EU membership with cautious optimism. Most could not even muster that much.

Being surrounded by this skeptical national sentiment, I struggled to understand what it must feel like to grow up not knowing if hard work would pay off. In the U.S., children are raised from an early age to believe that with enough motivation, they can achieve anything. It saddened me to learn that my new friends, only eighteen or nineteen years old, were already trained to feel so pessimistic about their futures. When my program in Budapest was over, I would return to school in the U.S., then graduate with my degree, and likely find a nice job for myself. Would my Hungarian counterparts be so lucky?

In 2008, I returned to Hungary to teach English at a secondary school. This time, I chose to live not in Budapest, but in the small, medieval town of Kőszeg, on Hungary's western border with Austria. Spending the year with young adults, I gained a much deeper understanding of the brain drain problem in Hungary. Of my graduating students, about one third of them planned to attend university abroad. Many of them expressed that they planned to seek work abroad after university. Because my school had a bilingual Hungarian/English curriculum, I was not surprised to learn that so many of my students wanted to use their strong English proficiency abroad. I was impressed by their motivation, and assured them that with their confidence and language

skills, they would succeed no matter where they went in the future. But while I lauded their ambitious study habits, I could not help but feel disheartened to know that many of them would be leaving Hungary.

I returned to the United States in the summer of 2009, ready to begin attending SIT Graduate Institute for my Master of Arts in International Education just two months later. I knew from the start of my year on campus that I wanted to investigate the “brain drain” problem in greater depth as a Capstone project. But I also wanted to learn how to achieve a professional position working with international students in the United States. As I progressed through my academic coursework and into my practicum sites, I realized that my personal interest in brain drain was entering into a moral conflict with my professional commitment to the idea that every individual student deserved to have a life-changing experience abroad.

Following my year on campus at SIT, I worked at two consecutive practicum sites. At the Center for Cultural Interchange (CCI) in Chicago, I reviewed applications and responded to participant inquiries regarding CCI’s Career Advancement Program, in which international students and professionals are placed into one-year internships in their field. I processed dozens of applications from eager recent graduates in Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Participants were drawn to CCI for its promise of professional experience in their field of study. Part of our admission process included careful review of the applicant’s essay, to see how well they could articulate what they planned to do with their experience upon return to their home country. Several applicants during my 6-month internship were denied a J-1 visa at the US Embassy, because they were unable to convince the consular officer in their country that they really intended to return home.

After six months, I began my current position as an international student advisor at Moraine Valley Community College in the Chicago suburbs. Here, too, it is important for students to articulate what they plan to do with their education upon return to their home country. Our international student body includes nearly three hundred students from around the world, who study a wide variety of subjects. Some of our students intend to complete their course of study as quickly as possible, and then return home to use their degree. Others, however, will undoubtedly attempt to maximize their time in the United States, by applying for further degree programs after Moraine Valley, perhaps to be followed by internships. I know of one woman from Turkey, who has managed to study and intern legally in the U.S. for eleven consecutive years.

In both of these positions, while I was delighted to be working with students again, I could not help but have bouts of guilt. I give my unconditional support to all of my hardworking students, but at the same time, I still question whether I am contributing to brain drain around the world by assisting students in studying here. Of course, if I did not assist them, I would also be compromising my commitment to promoting international education for all individuals. But still: What if my students love it here so much that they decide to abandon their home countries? In the short term, I made the decision that the only way to reconcile these opposing professional interests was to work on both of them at the same time.

During and after SIT, I maintained a strong relationship with many of my friends and professional contacts in Kőszeg, calling upon them to participate in my surveys for this project. Now, with the data collected from their responses, this paper aims to answer the following questions: what potential solutions to Hungary's brain drain problem can be envisioned, and

who will benefit most from them? Will the proposed solutions help to solve the brain drain problem at just the individual level or on the national level as well?

### Background on Hungary

Before discussing the issue of brain drain in modern Hungary, it is useful to review Hungary's political and economic background. The modern Hungarian attitude toward the government and the job market is deeply rooted in Hungary's long and tragic history. Though this paper is not a discussion of culture, it is important nonetheless to understand that Hungarians, as a result of their history, tend to maintain this fatalistic outlook on their nation's future. Responses to my survey, later in this paper, will indicate that the average Hungarian has a great love for their language and culture, but an even greater distrust of the government. This distrust produces a perceived attitude that it is useless to try to fix the nation's problems—the only solution is to act out of one's own best interests.

### A Brief History

Below is a brief history of the Hungarian people and nation, with attention to the most important events in its history. One who is interested in learning more about Hungary's cultural and geographic uniqueness may want to refer to Lonnie R. Johnson's *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends* (2002), or Miklós Molnár's *A Concise History of Hungary* (2001). Meanwhile, any travel book on Hungary will probably provide the reader with a better sense of the tragic "Hungarian character"—at least, as it is viewed by Western visitors.

One thing that most literature on Hungary has in common (whether written by Hungarians or foreigners) is that it all tends to mention the shared belief that Hungarians are the “outsiders” of Europe. This self-prescribed label dates back to Hungarians’ initial settlement on the European continent. The Hungarian people, known in their language as the Magyars, arrived to Europe relatively late compared to their neighbors. The Magyars were a nomadic tribe from the steppes of Central Asia. Scholars trace their origins to just east of the Ural Mountains in Russia. The tribe arrived in the Carpathian Basin (the area just west of the Carpathian Mountains, along the Danube River) in 896 A.D. Most of the surrounding area was already inhabited by that point, and the Magyars quickly learned that the Germanic tribes to the West, the Slavs to the North and South, and the Romanians to the Southeast all had one thing in common: Christianity. Under the influence of their Western neighbors, the Magyars forsook their pagan traditions for Catholicism in 1000 A.D. The conversion formalized their residency in Europe, and until around the mid-Sixteenth Century, the Kingdom of Hungary flourished. Hungarians often reference this early history as evidence of being “different” from their neighbors: they arrived late to Europe and managed to fit in—but their acceptance was conditional upon their willingness to conform.

Hungary’s autonomy was not to last, however. The Sixteenth Century saw the rise of the Habsburg Dynasty in Austria and of Suleiman the Magnificent in Ottoman Turkey. Over the next one hundred fifty years, Hungary was dominated in the West by the Habsburgs, and in the South by the Ottomans. “Free Hungary,” as it became known, existed only in the eastern region of Transylvania (or Erdély, in Hungarian). Hungary continued to be ruled in this tri-partite fashion until the late Seventeenth Century, when the Habsburgs forced the Ottomans back

south and off of the European continent. This gave the Austrian empire free reign over Hungary, and ushered in Hungary's Romantic period. It was under Habsburg dominance that some of Hungary's most revered poets, writers, and revolutionaries inspired passion among the population, urging the Hungarian nobility to fight for independence from their Austrian rulers.

What could have been an ill-conceived fight came down to a fairly civil agreement in 1867, known as the Compromise, in which Hungary's government was granted part-ownership of the Habsburg Empire—which then became the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The final decades of the Nineteenth Century were golden years for Hungary: the medieval cities of Buda, Pest, and Óbuda were united to create modern Budapest; various urban planning schemes were undertaken to give Budapest a Parisian feel; and in 1896, Hungary hosted the World's Fair, known as the Millennial Celebration—commemorating 1000 years since the Magyars first settled in Europe.

Hungary ended the Nineteenth Century with high hopes for the future. Unfortunately, the Twentieth Century was a return to the foreign domination and misery that Hungary had grown used to in previous centuries. The First World War was disastrous for Hungary: the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire resulted, among other things, in the Treaty of Trianon, signed in 1920. The Treaty lobbed off large chunks of Hungary's land to the South (now Croatia), Southeast (Serbia), North (Slovakia), and—most regrettably—East (Transylvania, now part of Romania). Practically overnight, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory, and with it, close to three million speakers of the Hungarian language—a staggering number, considering that modern Hungary is a country of only ten million. To this day, Hungarians reference “Big Hungary”—the map before 1920—as evidence of what has been lost. The stereotypical

Hungarian loves to wallow in the misery of the past, and to prophesize that the Hungary is destined to suffer long into the future.

The Second World War only resulted in further tragedy for Hungary. After first siding with Nazi Germany in 1940, Hungary began secretly holding peace talks with the United States and Great Britain. In 1944, Hitler learned of these talks and ordered his troops to occupy Hungary. Soviet forces responded to this threat with force, and Hungary ended up caught between the two powers as they fought to expel one another. The city of Budapest suffered tremendous damage during the fighting. Many Hungarians fled the country to escape the political unrest, resulting in Hungary's first major wave of brain drain. In late 1944, Soviet forces cast out the German army, maneuvered Hungary's unpopular communist party into power, and set up a provisional government. By 1949, Hungary was officially absorbed into the Eastern Bloc and became known as the People's Republic of Hungary.

The events of World War II did long-lasting damage to Hungary's national psyche. It became one of the first incidents in which a Hungarian government (albeit hand-picked by Soviet forces) abused and lied to its own people. For a small nation like Hungary, with a language not spoken by any other European nation, the idea of Hungarian leaders disregarding the needs of their own people was truly perceived as a betrayal. For the next fifty years, Hungarians experienced life under Communism. Politics continued much like they had started: the corrupt Hungarian Communist Party maintained control of the country, with Moscow intervening when it felt the small republic needed guidance. During the Stalinist period, from 1945 through 1956, Hungary's Communist regime was considered the harshest of all the Eastern Bloc nations, mainly because Hungarians exhibited the strongest opposition, and thus

required the harshest suppression. By 1956, the general population's aggression piqued, and so began the protests leading up to the violent October Revolution.

During and after the War, thousands of Hungarians fled to the West. The 1930s and 1940s were glorious years for Hungarian scientists, and Hungarians won several Nobel Prizes in the fields of physics and chemistry. But the effects of the brain drain are obvious here: most of these Hungarians won their Nobel Prizes for work they produced in countries other than Hungary. The scientific fields were not the only place where Hungarian expats found success: Hollywood was flooded in the 1930s by dozens of Hungarian screenwriters and producers. A second wave of brain drain occurred soon after the War, as a result of the 1956 Revolution. Scholars estimate that around 200,000 Hungarians emigrated from Hungary during the violent suppression in 1956 (*Hungarian Spectrum*, 2011).

In 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall initiated a domino effect across the Eastern Bloc, as cracks in the Communist system finally became deep enough for opposition groups in those nations to unseat their socialist governments. Hungary was no exception, and actually experienced a fairly smooth transition to democracy. New political parties developed, including the liberal Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz), the opposition group Association of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), and the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF). Open discussion of political change reached a high point not seen since before 1956; however, amidst these changes, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) remained strong.

In early 1990, Hungary held its first free elections. József Antall of MDF won the majority, and became the first prime minister of the newly democratic Hungary. His first task was to initiate the change to a free market economy. After his death in 1992, Péter Boross

continued his reforms. But in 1994, MSZP was elected, and the Socialist party once again took control of the country.

1990s in Hungary brought mobility: for the first time in fifty years, Hungarians could travel freely to Western Europe. After decades of working under a corrupt socialist government in Hungary, thousands of Hungarian professionals and scholars headed west, seeking better pay and wider recognition. The result was the largest wave of emigration out of Hungary since the 1956 Revolution. Hungary suffered from abnormally high national debt as it struggled to become a free market, and the job market sharply contracted. Funding for the sciences was greatly reduced, which only added to the “push.” The United States was the top destination for fleeing scientists in this period: 41 percent of émigrés headed to the U.S. in 1987, followed by 46 percent in 1989. Of those who found employment abroad, 15 percent never returned (Vizi, 1993, 106). Across the region, Central and Eastern European countries lost between 2 and 4 percent of pre-89 scientists in the 5 years after the fall of Communism (Woodard, 2005).

Following the same pattern of previous waves of brain drain, Hungarians once again began to emigrate in larger numbers when Hungary joined the European Union. As guaranteed in the Schengen Agreement of 1985, all EU member states are afforded the benefit of free mobility across borders (*Europa*, 2009). A European Commission report released in 2004 predicted that the new EU members (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary) could lose 10 to 13 percent of their students and 5 percent of their university graduates in the coming few years, as labor restrictions in the EU were lifted. According to a survey conducted in 2004-5, 60 percent of recent graduates from Budapest’s Semmelweis University were considering leaving.

## Hungary's Current Political and Economic Landscape

The past few years have produced changes for Hungary. June 2011 marked the 1-year anniversary of Hungary's right-wing Fidesz party winning the election and taking control of Parliament. This was a significant change, because Fidesz claims to be the first truly non-socialist party to hold office since 1989 ("Fidesz: the story so far," *The Economist*, 2010). June also marked the end of Hungary's six-month EU presidency, in which Hungary had the rare opportunity to take the European spotlight (Navracsics, 2011).

Despite political advancements, Hungary has continued to struggle economically. According to a recent essay by Hungary's Deputy Prime Minister, Tibor Navracsics, Hungary was among EU states that suffered the most from the worldwide 2008 recession. By 2009, Hungary had experienced a 7 percent drop in GDP. The government helped prevent further losses by cutting public spending by 3.8 percent of GDP in 2009, but most cuts were made to public sector pay and social spending. Between 2006 and 2008, Hungary successfully reduced the national deficit from 9.2 to 3.4 percent. Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai also wanted to cut 1.7 percent between 2009 and 2010 to keep Hungary's deficit within the International Monetary Fund's limit of just 3.8 percent of total GDP. His office set up a separate fiscal council to manage the deficit numbers.

As of September 2009, Bajnai's cuts had produced positive results: no Hungarian banks had collapsed; the central bank was able to start cutting interest rates based on the forints depreciation; and Hungary's IMF loan was extended through October. In anticipation of the upcoming election, Bajnai enacted other measures: he cut social security contributions in an

attempt to increase employment (which in 2009 was 55 percent, one of the lowest in Europe). He also began to gradually increase the retirement age to 65.

However, Bajnai's plans were cut short when he failed to be reelected in 2010. Viktor Orban became the new Prime Minister, and since then, his Fidesz party has made severe changes to Hungary's constitution, causing many Hungarians to accuse Fidesz of becoming an authoritarian regime. What was considered the pragmatic, sensible party a mere two years ago has now fallen into the same historical pattern of deceptive politics that Hungarians have grown used to. Needless to say, Fidesz has not caused any major changes in the typical Hungarian attitude toward politics.

Young Hungarians preparing to graduate from university over the next few years must consider whether it will be sensible for them to remain in the country despite all of this political treachery. As we will see in my survey results, young Hungarians are no less opinionated on the government's dishonesty than older generations. The political disappointments that Hungarians have already experienced only strengthen the idea that it will be useless to wait for the government to step in and take control of unemployment. Instead of waiting around, the sensible thing to do is to take opportunities—wherever they might present themselves.

## **Literature Review**

In late 2009, I had the opportunity to research the brain drain problem in Hungary for an assignment in my Theory and Practice of International Education course at SIT. In my preliminary research on the topic, I discovered two important things: 1) the term "brain drain" typically applies only to of the emigration from a given country of professionals in the scientific

and medical fields. I located no scholarship on the loss of personnel in any other professional field, in Hungary or elsewhere—but I saw no reason that Hungarians in fields outside the sciences would have much better job prospects in the country; and 2) the existing research on the brain drain problem in Hungary is very sparse. Very few articles have been written on the topic since 2008, and once again, articles from 2008 or earlier refer only to the scientific community.

A 2005 article by Colin Woodard in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* was one of the few I found that applied directly to my research. Woodard explains the difficulties that Hungarian scientists face, as government funding continues to be scarce. Profiling young Hungarian chemist Tamás Kovács, he allows the reader to understand the position of scholars who reluctantly make the decision to take jobs abroad. Woodard weaves Kovács' personal story with statistics, citing that the entire Central European region suffered a dramatic brain drain of scientists in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet regime. He explains that as the governments of these nations adapted, funding for the sciences was cut drastically. Now, says Woodard, those nations fear a new wave of brain drain, as EU membership makes finding jobs in the West even easier. This article, though already a bit out-of-date, introduces the brain drain issue and sets the stage for the problem as it stands now, in 2011.

Another study that helped to frame my research was Richard H. Adams, Jr.'s paper, "International Migration, Remittances, and the Brain Drain: A study of 24 labor-exporting countries" (2003). Adams' paper was published by the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Group. It is a comprehensive account of the brain drain trend in several countries worldwide. It is useful not only for its geographic scope of coverage, but also because Adams brings a fresh

perspective to the issue. He surmises that perhaps the common perception of brain drain as a negative force is incorrect—it may, for example, encourage higher education in many countries that sorely need a better-educated population. According to his figures, in countries that experience brain drain, only about ten percent of the educated population tends to emigrate. Therefore, he suggests, if much more of the population seeks higher education but only ten percent leaves, then the result will be a better-educated general population. He also is able to examine the issue in a way that demonstrates its importance to the World Bank.

### **The “Push and Pull” Theory of Migration**

To properly discuss the reality of the brain drain problem in Hungary (or anywhere else), it is necessary to apply a theory that can simplify the idea of human migration and identify its causes. There are many migration theories that are used to explain emigration, but the one most suitable to Hungary’s current situation is the “Push and Pull” Theory of Migration. This theory supposes that human migration can generally be reduced to the individual forces (usually economic) that cause an individual to leave the home country for a new host country. Factors from within the home country that influence an individual to emigrate are considered “Push” factors. “Pull” factors are the features of the host country that make it an attractive destination for the individual.

Numerous economists have published their own versions of the Push and Pull Theory, but for my purposes, I found a version written by a Hungarian physicist Szilveszter Vizi to be the most appropriate. Vizi’s 1993 article, “Reversing the brain drain from Eastern European countries: the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors,” stressed the importance of reversing the brain drain to

Hungary's scientific community. As I mentioned, the term "brain drain" is typically used in reference to emigration from within the scientific community. I will later provide evidence that Hungary's brain drain is occurring in a variety of professional fields, not just the sciences; however, it is true that Hungarian contributions in the sciences are significant. Therefore, Vizi's concern for preserving Hungary's scientific community is legitimate, and it is understandable why his "push" and "pull" factors are designed to describe that demographic. Here, I list Vizi's factors, but I will later supplement them with additional factors of my own creation:

Vizi's "Push" Factors:

- Poor climate for scientific research
- Old, decrepit, out-of-date facilities
- Lack of government funding for research and development (R & D)
- Few jobs
- Fewer opportunities for promotion and advancement in given professional field

Vizi's "Pull" Factors:

- More vibrant scientific community; better climate for scientific research
- Modern and clean facilities
- Higher salaries and much better government funding compared to Hungary
- More jobs available
- Greater opportunity for promotion

(Vizi, 1993)

While Vizi's factors are certainly useful, I have added a few "push" and "pull" factors of my own, to make the Push and Pull Theory more applicable to a wider variety of professional fields, and to the needs and desires of young people in 2011.

Additional "Push" Factors:

- Lack of job opportunities in fields outside of the sciences
- Job prospects in all fields limited to large cities: mainly Budapest, but also Pécs, Veszprém, Győr, and Debrecen
- Few job offers for recent graduates

- Lack of cultural/ethnic diversity in Hungary

Additional “Pull” Factors:

- Vibrant cosmopolitan atmosphere (shopping, music, nightlife, etc.)
- Ethnic and linguistic diversity
- Networking opportunities with students and professionals of various nationalities
- Better access to internship opportunities
- Greater likelihood of being hired as a recent graduate

I hypothesized that these factors would play a role in current migration trends among young Hungarians before conducting my survey. Responses to my survey indicated that my additional “push” and “pull” theories were, for the most part, correct (see “Survey 1” below for a full analysis of survey questions and results). This serves as partial justification for my research, indicating that there was indeed a gap in existing research on brain drain in Hungary, due to the focus on the scientific fields.

After reviewing existing literature on the brain drain problem in Hungary and on the Push and Pull Theory, I came to the realization that the largest missing piece in all of this scholarship was research aimed at *reversing* the brain drain trend. To remedy this, I hypothesized several “pull-back” factors that I anticipated would be necessary if Hungarians planned to reverse this current wave of emigration. My factors were influenced by the articles mentioned in my Literature Review: I focused on the remarks of scholars and scientists that hinted at what would need to change in Hungary to convince educated young people to return. Below are my hypothesized “pull-back” factors that could lead to a reversal of the brain drain trend:

- Increased government funding for Research and Development (R&D)
- In-country networking opportunities in a variety of professional fields
- Job recruitment organizations or websites

- More scholarship and media coverage of the brain drain issue
- Increased investment within Hungary (both foreign and domestic)
- Increased number of tourists/foreign students in Hungary

Once again, my survey respondents indicated many of these same factors when they were asked what needed to change in Hungary to reduce brain drain. It is uplifting to note that I have found evidence that at least two of these things are currently being at least partially addressed: later in this paper, I will discuss EU funding for programs at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and of several job placement organizations and online listings aimed at recent Hungarian graduates.

### **Research Design: The Current Hungarian Perspective**

In April of 2011, three surveys were distributed via email and Facebook to three groups of Hungarians. The surveys were carefully designed to collect opinions on the brain drain problem in the country. Each survey was aimed at a different demographic: the first went to young Hungarians, aged 16 to 26; the second went to parents of young Hungarians; and the third went to Hungarian educators. These three groups were singled out because they are all intimately involved in the employment issues facing young Hungarians.

Any reader may notice that the majority of the Hungarian population probably falls into one of the above three groups. This is no accident. The current unemployment crisis in Hungary affects not only recent graduates, but the older generations as well—after all, economic progress comes in large part from the introduction of fresh skills and knowledge into the job market. If the results of these surveys are representative of the entire Hungarian population, then it is clear that the Hungarian government cannot afford to avoid this issue any longer.

Before I sent this survey, I hypothesized the following: that the majority of my respondents would agree that brain drain exists in Hungary, and is a problem; but that very few of them would express any personal ability to reverse the brain drain, or take any responsibility for it. As my survey results will indicate, this hypothesis was more or less correct.

### **Limitations of the Survey Results**

I am confident that my survey responses provide vital data that can be used to make some generalizations about the brain drain issue in Hungary. However, I have also considered the potential limitations to my research:

- Most of the survey respondents live in a relatively small geographical area. Respondents tended to live in the Western Hungarian counties of Vas, Győr-Moson-Sopron, and Veszprém. All three of these counties are fairly close to the Austrian border and thus, students are more aware of schools and jobs just over the border.
- My survey to young Hungarians was limited to those who study English. Many Hungarians speak a different second language, and thus seek job opportunities that require proficiency in that language. Language proficiency was not a focus in this study.
- The pool of respondents was small: 56 students; 4 parents; and 2 education professionals.
- Participants' answers may have been influenced by knowing me personally.

### **Findings**

#### Survey I: "Young Hungarians: What's Your Future?" (Appendix C)

The first survey was distributed via email to young Hungarians, mainly my former students. The survey asked about their plans for study, work, and life, with the goal of

determining how they fit into the “brain drain” trend. 56 young Hungarians (ranging in age from 16 to 26 years old) responded to the survey of ten questions. Of that group, 44 respondents were from Vas Country in Western Hungary. Three respondents were from Veszprém County, three were from Pest County, two were from Győr-Moson-Sopron County, and two were from Bács-Kiskun County (see Appendix B for a map of Hungary’s counties). Vas, Veszprém, and Győr-Moson-Sopron counties are in Western Hungary. Pest County is in the center of the country, and Bács-Kiskun is in the Southern region. Therefore, the reader should be aware that these results mainly encompass the views of young Hungarians in Western Hungary. The other regions represented were in very small numbers, and there was no representation from Eastern Hungary.

**Question 1** asked basic biographical information: name (if desired), hometown/county, age, year in school, and university major (or desired major). Of the 56 total respondents, 25 were still in secondary school. 28 were in various universities. One respondent did not answer, and two were university graduates. Respondents then listed their majors, or intended majors.

The results were as follows:

Business:	9 (includes Accounting & Finance)
Engineering:	8 (all types)
English:	6
Tourism:	5
Law:	4
Medical:	3
Undecided/no answer:	3
Computers/IT:	2
Education:	2
Other:	14 (one each of the following: acting; agricultural development; biology; cultural management; economics; geography; interior design; international relations; literature;

marketing; national defense; physiotherapy; recreation and health; sport training)

Total: 56

What is immediately striking about these responses is that they represent a wide range of academic interests. As mentioned previously, Hungary is frequently recognized internationally for its strong contributions to the fields of basic scientific research and development; these are the same fields upon which most brain drain studies are focused. But these young Hungarians exhibit interests that are representative of trends in many countries worldwide. The field of Business, including Accounting and Finance, scored the highest number of responses. Among other high-scoring fields were Hospitality and Tourism (which, I hypothesize in my own “pull-back” factors, could potentially be a means of reversing the brain drain), and not surprisingly, English language studies. Engineering—including civil (2), mechanical (1), vehicle (1), food (1), general (2)—was the chosen field of eight respondents; however, the other sciences did not receive any attention, save for one biology major.

Additional responses showed representation of the liberal arts: literature, acting, international relations, law, and geography were among 14 single responses. This diversity could be evidence of several things: 1) that young Hungarians are emulating the choices of post-secondary students in Western countries, particular the UK and the United States; 2) that perhaps that this particular sampling of students (drawn mainly from Western Hungary, which tends to be more economically prosperous than Eastern or Southern Hungary) includes mainly students whose families are financially stable enough that they do not feel pressured to choose a more conventional field; or perhaps most likely, 3) that in the face of Hungary’s extremely

unfavorable employment climate for recent graduates, young Hungarians know it is not important what they choose—no matter the choice, they will be better off working abroad.

**Question 2** asked for the name and location (city and country) of the university each participant attended (or planned to attend). Results were as follows:

<b>More than one vote:</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>One vote each:</b>	<b>14</b>
ELTE, Budapest:	11	Moholy-Nagy U. of Art/Design	1
Wiener-Neustadt, Austria:	7	Acting university, BP	1
U. of Pannonia, Veszprem:	5	Zrínyi M. Nt'l Defense U., BP	1
Undecided:	3	U. of Pécs	1
Semmelweis U., Budapest:	3	Abroad, probably in the US.	1
BP U. of Tech & Econ:	3	Universität Heidelberg, Ger.	1
Széchenyi U., Győr:	3	U. of Oulu, Finland	1
U. of West Hungary:	3	University of Miskolc	1
BP Business School:	2	Kodolányi János U., BP	1
Corvinus U., BP:	2	Dania, Randers, Denmark	1
Ireland or Northern Ireland	1	Universitas Budensis BP	1
Pázmány Péter Egyetem BP	1	West-Hungarian U., Győr.	1

Respondent Choices by General Region		
Schools in Budapest, Hungary	Schools Elsewhere in Hungary	Schools Abroad
ELTE: 11 Semmelweis: 3 U. of Tech. & Economics: 3 BP Business School: 2 Corvinus U.: 2 Acting U.: 1 Nt'l Defense U.: 1 Pázmány Péter: 1 Universitas Budensis: 1 Kodolányi János U.: 1	U. of West Hungary: 3 U. of Pannonia, Veszprem: 5 Széchenyi U., Győr: 3 West-Hungarian U., Győr: 1 Moholy-Nagy U. of Art: 1 U. of Pécs: 1 U. of Miskolc: 1	Fachhochschule, WN, Austria: 7 Dania, Randers, Denmark: 1 Dublin or Belfast: 1 U. of Oulu, Finland: 1 U. of Heidelberg, Germany: 1 Abroad, probably in the US: 1
Total Budapest: 26	Total HU outside BP: 15 (Undecided: 3)	Total Abroad: 12

**Question 3** asked respondents why they chose this particular university by ranking factors in order of importance to them. Choices were: Academic Programs Offered; Primary Language of Instruction; School's Location; Campus Culture/Diversity of Students; and Reputation of School. According to responses, Academic Programs Offered was the most important or second most important factor, with 37 responses between the number 1 and number 2 spots. Reputation of the School followed, with 25 respondents in the first and second spots. The other three categories (Language, Diversity of Students, and Location) all received votes on the "less important" end of the spectrum. Thus, results clearly indicate that young Hungarians consider the quality of academics and the reputation of a school before they consider the country, language, or culture surrounding the campus. This could be evidence of the fact that quality of education is perceived to be the best way to ensure good job prospects following graduation—regardless of where those job prospects may be.

Question 3 also included a "Comments" section, where respondents could expand on their reasons for ranking their choices as they did. One of the respondents, who was studying in Wiener-Neustadt, Austria, had this to say:

*"Well, these reasons cannot be differentiated [sic] in the sense that they altogether influenced my choice :) I didn't choose it because it was located in Austria or in this specific city (I don't like the city... :D) but if it had been 3000 kms away, I would not have applied for it... The costs associated with this school/country/etc. were acceptable for my family, still many people in Hungary cannot afford to attend a school in another country. I wanted to be taught in English, and I liked that many students were from abroad..."*

(Respondent to Survey 1, 2011)

Other similar comments indicated that respondents were torn between choosing various categories as most important. Several students made comments similar to the student above,

indicating that while academics were undoubtedly the most important, the additional factors, such as campus culture and school location, were only slightly less important.

In **Question 4**, respondents shared their professional goals. Much like their choices of major, the answers here varied greatly. Most respondents indicated a personal attachment to their field of interest, or a natural talent that drew them to it. But regardless of the field, ten responses had one thing in common: they all referenced the good chances of finding work in their field. While overall, this group of young Hungarians exhibited diversity of interests, at least ten of them may have developed their professional ambition as a result of learning that the field offered good job prospects.

**Question 5** asked respondents where they would like to live as adults. The answers, once again, were diverse:

Where to live as adults:

Hungary:	14
Specific country abroad (Europe):	7
Abroad first, then Hungary:	6
United States:	6
Undecided, but abroad:	23 (includes European destinations, UK, USA, Japan, and Hungary. Respondents who mentioned Hungary suggested they'd like to live in Hungary, but recognize that they may not be able to find jobs, and thus are already considering other options.)
Total:	56

Next, in **Question 6**, respondents were asked to rate which factors were most important in choosing where to live as adults. Choices were: "Language Spoken," "Being close to Family/Friends," "Opinion of your Parents," "Love for the Culture," "Career Opportunities," "Average Salary," and "Quality of Life." The scale went from 1 to 7, where 1 = most important,

and 7 = least important. Fifteen respondents chose 1 for “Language Spoken,” indicating that it was the most important factor in choosing a country of residence. Twelve chose 2 for Language. “Career Opportunities” received twelve votes at 1, and thirteen at 2. “Quality of Life” and “Love for the Culture” received 9 votes each at 1. “Opinion of your Parents” received the most counts on the “least important” end of the scale: eighteen votes each for 6 and for 7. No other category received such a strong number of responses on the low end.

As a second part to Question 6, respondents who had answered that they wanted to live in Hungary as adults were asked to explain why they chose their home country. While only fourteen respondents clearly stated Hungary as their future home, twenty-one respondents gave an explanation here. This can be explained by the fact that six participants described a desire to live abroad first, and then relocate back home. One or two others mentioned Hungary, but were not optimistic that they would actually be financially able to remain there. The responses here were telling: numerous participants stressed that while they may be forced to leave for work, they will never feel as comfortable as they do in their home culture. Said one respondent:

*“...this is my home country. I HAVE TO live there. It's ok going abroad for a while or work there for years. But I think everything, what is the most important in a person's life is in her/his home country. (family, friends etc...) and these "things" are more important than e.g. career in another country [sic].”*

(Respondent to Survey 1, 2011)

**Question 7** asked whether respondents had friends or relatives currently living abroad. This question was asked in an effort to gather data on Hungarians other than those who answered the surveys. It is possible that young Hungarians choose schools based on where their friends or family members have gone.

Friends or Family Abroad:

No:	13
1-3:	16
4 or more:	27

Following the trend seen in previous responses, the answers varied greatly. The majority of respondents (27) had numerous friends or family members living abroad. The most commonly mentioned destinations were Austria, Germany, Finland, the UK, and the United States. Other destinations included Italy, Slovenia, Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, Scotland, Spain, and other European countries. Sixteen respondents had only one to three contacts living abroad. Thirteen respondents had no contacts who were studying or had studied abroad. Presumably, these respondents were at the younger end of the age spectrum, and thus had fewer friends in university—but this is not certain.

Not surprisingly, nearly all mentions of contacts abroad were in Western countries (either in Western Europe, or North America). As evidenced by the results from Question 6, the countries where these respondents have friends or family studying are characteristically countries that are also known to offer higher salaries and better quality of life than Hungary. While most of the countries above have completely different native languages, English (or, to a lesser extent, German) is widely spoken in all of them. Many Western European universities offer programs conducted entirely in English, in order to better prepare graduates for an increasingly competitive job market.

**Question 8** finally identified the central theme of the study:

“Nowadays, the young people in many countries are moving to more prosperous countries to study and work, because they can't find good jobs at home. This is called ‘Brain

Drain,' because the home country loses a lot of its educated young people. Do you think Hungary is losing too many young people? Why or why not?"

Despite fairly even distribution of responses in previous questions, the results here were overwhelming:

Is Hungary losing too many young people?

Yes: 54

No: 1

Don't know: 1

Respondents had a lot to say on the topic. Many expressed frustration that Hungarian businesses do not seem to favor hiring recent graduates. Others referenced particular fields that present even greater employment challenges than others. Some examples:

- *"Yes, Hungary is losing many young people. The reason is the salary and the numbers of available jobs. So here in Hungary we are studying for many years, a diploma is a basic criterion, but the employers don't want to pay "the price of the diploma." That's why many young people leave the country, because other countries are [sic] really appreciate Hungarian labour force. So why should we stay here if we have more oppurtunites [sic] for a better life abroad?"*
- *"It's really difficult to find a job after graduation, and even if you can find one, the salary is still really low. For example, doctors often go abroad because they earn so little money here."*
- *"Yes, Hungary is losing too many young people. The political situation in our country is under the ground level. There's no democracy. Politicians say that Hungary is a democratic republic. No. It isn't. There's no opportunity. You can't find jobs. If you are entrant, you can't get a job, because you have to have working experience. BUT HOW?? So...maybe the political background is the main reason."*

In **Question 9**, participants were asked if they knew of any organizations that helped young Hungarians find jobs in Hungary. The results are listed below:

Do you know of any job placement organizations?

No: 34

Yes, but didn't provide names: 10

While the majority of respondents (34) said they were not aware of any such organizations, the remaining 22 respondents offered names or other suggestions for finding job placement assistance in Hungary. The data is encouraging: perhaps the organizations are still getting off the ground, and will continue to gain popularity and influence. The next section of this paper will explore these organizations in further depth, along with additional methods of reversing the brain drain.

Organizations that students mentioned included: FIT (“where students can read about jobs, and make a test, that tell them, what they can do well”), Meló-Diák, Rébusz, Fürge Diák, Karrier Iroda, PannonWork, Aktiva, and Trenkwalder. I was pleased to discover that all of these organizations were new to me. In addition, several respondents mentioned university career offices—said one respondent, “. . . there are organizations at the different universities which help students find a job before or after graduation.” However, this student did not indicate whether the university organizations typically help students find jobs in Hungary, or abroad. A handful of students also pointed out that many of these campus offices only help students find student jobs, which are short-term and do not pay well. Another respondent suggested Állásbörze: “. . .this is an expo, where you can ask about the work from the employers.”

**Question 10**, the final question of the survey, asked respondents to think creatively of ways to bring young Hungarians back to Hungary. They were asked to consider advice they might give to the Hungarian government; young individuals; companies; anyone who might need to hear it. The question provoked a strong response across the board: some respondents were even moved to profanity as they cursed the Hungarian government’s mistakes.

#### How to bring young Hungarians back to Hungary?

Target the Government:	15
Target companies:	23
Other/Don't know:	18

Many respondents identified two of the biggest issues in the Hungarian job market: first, that most jobs are severely underpaid compared to Western countries—particularly teachers and scientists. Second, Hungarian companies do not seem to hire recent graduates. This is a frustrating problem: how to gain that experience if no one will hire you? This perception is echoed in recent essay on the Hungarian labor market by Attila Kun: “The most important characteristic of the Hungarian labour market is low participation rate, which is coupled with relatively low unemployment and high inactivity. This is especially the case among young people” (Kun, 2010). Kun goes on to explain that Hungary’s job market has consistently been tough on recent graduates for many years. Meanwhile, several respondents pointed fingers at the Hungarian government for not taking responsibility for the brain drain issue. Suggestions here included lowering taxes for recent graduates, creating more jobs, and building more factories.

Based on Survey 1, the biggest problems contributing to brain drain are:

- Few job opportunities in all fields
- Poor salaries
- High taxes
- Unwillingness of companies to hire recent graduates

These factors, for the most part, corresponded to Szilveszter Vizi’s (and my own) “Push” factors, identified in the previous section on the Push and Pull Theory. This indicates that the theory itself seems to hold ground in defining the current wave of brain drain in Hungary. The responses to many of my questions in Survey 1 were negative, and certainly reflected the

pessimistic attitude frequently exhibited in Hungarian culture; however, my confidence was boosted quite a bit by the responses to Question 9, in which respondents offered names of job placement organizations. In the next section, I will examine their suggestions further.

#### Survey II: “Hungarian Parents: What Is Your Child’s Future?” (Appendix D)

*(Hungarian title: “Magyar Szülők: Mi A Gyermekek Jövője?”(Appendix E)*

The second survey targeted parents of young Hungarians, in hopes of learning how they feel about the idea of their children leaving the country for work. This survey consisted of nine questions, and received four responses (one in English, and three in Hungarian).

**Question 1** asked basic biographical information: name (if desired), hometown/county, age, profession, and university attended (if any). The four respondents were 43, 34, 39, and 50 years of age, respectively. Three of them worked in the field of education, and one worked at a bank. The 43- and 50-year-old respondents had both studied Russian in university, which can be explained by the fact that Hungary was still part of the Eastern Bloc when they were of university age.

**Question 2** asked parents if they had ever studied abroad in their lives. The same two respondents who studied Russian language also studied abroad in Russia. The first studied in Odessa for six weeks in 1986, and in Vladimir for three months in 1987. The other studied in Saint Petersburg for two months in 1980, and in Moscow for 5 months in 1981. The other two participants did not study abroad.

**Question 3** asked if parents had ever worked abroad, and if so, to provide details, as well as explain why they returned to Hungary. None of the four respondents had ever worked abroad.

**Question 4** asked if the respondent had any family or friends working abroad, and if so, to provide details. All four had acquaintances abroad. The following destinations were mentioned: Austria, Germany, Great Britain, and Spain. One acquaintance lived in New York. An interesting detail was that these acquaintances worked in a wide variety of professions. The first respondent said she knew that numerous residents from her town of Kőszeg commuted to Austria for work every day (the town is only ten minutes from the Austrian border). There, “they mainly work in catering industry as waiters, chefs, receptionists or at private houses as cleaners or gardeners.” The same respondent also had one cousin working as a surgeon in Germany, and another cousin working as a shop assistant in New York. Another respondent had about four or five acquaintances who had worked abroad. Two worked in Great Britain, one as an assistant, another as an au pair; another worked as a teacher in Germany; and one worked in the tourism field in Barcelona. A third respondent had a friend waitressing in Hamburg, Germany. This respondent’s own husband also worked as a painter in Austria. The last respondent had about twenty acquaintances abroad, in various fields: hospitality, tourism, education, and and retail.

In **Question 5**, respondents were asked about the ages and interests of their children. The first respondent had an 18-year-old son. He was interested in communications. The second had a 4-year-old daughter. The respondent hoped she would become an architect or carpenter, but stressed that the daughter could pursue whatever made her happy. The third respondent

had three children, and did not mention their ages, but did say that all three plan to attend college. They had not yet decided on professions. The last respondent had a 21-year-old child who was interested in marketing and finance.

**Question 6** asked if any of the respondents' children lived abroad, or planned to in the future. The first respondent said she thought her son might plan to work abroad temporarily, but did not want to settle there permanently. One respondent did not have any children living abroad. The other two had children in Austria. One said this was because of increased job opportunities; the other said their child attended the Fachhochschule in Wiener-Neustadt (this university was attended by several of the respondents to Survey 1).

Like the survey sent to students, **Question 7** introduced the brain drain problem, and asked parents if they believed Hungary was losing too many young people. Again, like Survey 1, all respondents answered "yes." The first respondent said "more and more young professionals leave the country to get better-paid jobs. They think they have better opportunities to get a career and better chances for their families (education, health care, free time etc.)". The second respondent said that many young people leave, and meanwhile, the government does nothing. The third echoed what many young respondents had said in Survey 1: companies need to start hiring recent graduates, and to pay decent wages for skilled labor. The fourth added that Hungary's labor market is better for families with children, but not good for young entrants to the job market.

**Question 8** asked if parents had any suggestions for the Hungarian government, businesses, or anyone else, on how to reverse the brain drain. The first respondent said that "many things would have to be changed in Hungary to keep people (not only young!) in the

country. I would not let freshly graduated leave the country immediately without paying back their tuition.” The next said that nothing would change until Hungary’s leadership completely changed and until companies started hiring new graduates. The third echoed the need to improve wages. The fourth recommended increasing scholarship opportunities, and taking advantage of EU funding.

Finally, **Question 9** asked parents which was more important to them: seeing young people stay in Hungary, or allowing their children to freely move to whichever country would afford them the most success and happiness. The first respondent said she would be happiest if her son could work abroad for a few years, but then return to Hungary and apply the knowledge he gained abroad. The second respondent said that although it made her sad to think of her children leaving, she understood the reality. She said that it would be nice if more young people stayed in Hungary, because if they stayed, it would give the impression that Hungary was “livable.” She said that today’s generation of young Hungarians have totally different options, so it is difficult to say what they should do. The third respondent said it was completely understandable why young people wanted to leave, so they should be able to do so. The fourth said that the most important thing was for Hungarian people to be healthy and happy, and that unfortunately, that would be difficult if young people stayed in Hungary.

#### Survey III: “Hungarian Educators: Where Are Your Students Going?” (Appendix F)

The third and final survey was distributed to professionals in the field of education. Only two professionals responded, both faculty members at Jurisich Miklos Gimnázium in Kőszeg, Hungary.

**Question 1** asked respondents, once again, to provide their basic biographical information, including name (if desired), hometown/county, current city/county, professional title, and university attended (if any). One respondent was 52 years old, from Kőszeg (in Vas County—see Appendix B for a map of Hungary’s counties), and had degrees in English and Russian from Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, still regarded as one of the best universities in the country for young Hungarians today. The other respondent was 40, also from Kőszeg, and had degrees in English and Math from Debrecen University in Eastern Hungary. Both were teachers.

**Question 2** asked which professional fields appeared to be most popular with young Hungarians these days, and why. One respondent named information technology, because it is well-paid and offers chances of working abroad; as well as law, once again because it is well-paid, but also because it offers chances of getting a quick promotion. The other respondent mentioned business, trade, and finance, all because they are well-paid; as well as various types of engineering, due to good prospects, well-paid jobs, and the fact that these jobs are very much needed.

In **Question 3**, respondents were asked if they had acquaintances working abroad, and if so, to provide details. The first respondent had two relatives who commuted to Austria every day for work. One was a professional soccer player, and the other was an unskilled laborer. The other respondent had a friend teaching in Great Britain and many acquaintances in Austria, all in the service sector, working in hotels, restaurants, or as assistants to the elderly.

**Question 4** asked educators whether they had ever lived abroad, and if so, why they returned to Hungary. Neither respondent had ever lived abroad. Question 5 asked where, to

the best of the respondent's knowledge, young Hungarians could find the best jobs these days. They were asked to think of employment both within and outside of Hungary. The first respondent mentioned that doctors have good job prospects in the Scandinavian countries and in Great Britain and that IT experts and economists can currently find work in "joint ventures in Hungary." The second respondent said that jobs in all fields are most plentiful in Budapest, followed by the mid-sized Northern town of Győr, where industrial jobs in particular were available. Austria offered jobs in hotel management and nursing, and Germany was a good destination for both doctors and nurses.

**Question 6** asked which fields these educators believed offered the poorest job prospects to recent graduates, and which offered the best. The first respondent had this to say: "Teachers are offered the fewest opportunities, because there are too many graduates and the number of children is decreasing. Doctors are offered the most job opportunities because there are few graduates, and many of them go abroad." This response brought up a residual problem caused in part by the brain drain trend: Hungary's birth rate is very low. The country has an aging population, and due to a recent government measure that increased retirement age from 55 to 62, people stay in the workforce for longer. If this respondent is correct that there are too many teachers in the Hungarian workforce and too few youngsters in the classroom, then teaching may not be the best choice for university-aged Hungarians.

The second respondent mentioned that fields offering the fewest jobs were "the humanities, theoretical fields, and scientific research," due to a lack of government funding. This respondent also mentioned the overabundance of teachers. Meanwhile, fields offering the most jobs were engineering, architecture, and IT.

**Question 7** once again raised the issue of brain drain, and asked if respondents felt Hungary was losing too many young people. Both agreed. The first respondent said, “I think we are losing too many doctors and scientists because they are not offered a good salary, good working conditions and chances of progress.” The second said, “Yes. We're already running short of doctors. Salaries are low.”

In **Question 8**, educators were asked how the brain drain trend could be reversed. The first respondent said that recent graduates should be encouraged to work or study abroad for the first few years, and then should be offered job assistance when they return to Hungary. The other suggested that “doctors, teachers, scientists, nurses should be paid much higher salaries. Fewer teachers of some subjects should be trained.”

Finally, **Question 9** asked which was more important: allowing young people to pursue their dreams abroad, or keeping young people in Hungary. The first respondent said “keeping them in Hungary is more important.” The other said, “We can't keep everybody home of course, but it would be important not to lose our best brains.”

### Employment Organizations in Hungary

Following my analysis of responses to these surveys, I went back and conducted research on the employment organizations mentioned by the young respondents to Survey 1. It was very encouraging to see names of organizations mentioned, considering that I had never heard of them—and only a few of the respondents seemed to be aware of them. Below is a summary of the organizations named:

**Jobline.hu:** The most encouraging aspect of the website is that it allows job seekers to search for jobs by county (within Hungary)—but NOT by country. Available jobs span a wide variety of professions, with the most jobs available in the sectors of Engineering/Technical (962 jobs total), IT (500), Finance and Accounting (406), and Sales and Marketing (263). Many other fields were also represented. Most jobs were available in Budapest, but there were listings in a wide variety of counties.

**PannonWork:** this site ([www.pannonwork.hu](http://www.pannonwork.hu)) is very similar to jobline.hu. However, it appears to have a wider scope: information pages in English and German cater very clearly to large, foreign-owned businesses looking for new recruits. But this is not a negative thing: job seekers once again search by Hungarian county, not by country.

**Rébusz Iskolaszövetkezet:** this is a job site ([www.rebusz.hu](http://www.rebusz.hu)) where young Hungarian students can find summer jobs. This can be valuable to students who seek to get a leg up on the experience that they are so widely expected to have before getting hired for a full-time position. Some offerings are in Austria, but most are within Hungary. However, being summer jobs, most are in the service sector.

**Meló-Diák:** another student job site, [www.melodiak.hu](http://www.melodiak.hu) offers more job listings aimed at students. This site provides both short- and long-term listings, in all corners of Hungary. The jobs tend to be in the service or even labor sector. Of course, for many students, any work is better than no work. I did not ask respondents if they felt that having experience working in unskilled student jobs afforded them any more of a competitive edge later, when they enter the job market. It would be an interesting additional study to investigate this.

## Discussion of Findings

Based on results from Surveys 2 and 3, Hungarian adults seem to hold the general viewpoint that young people deserve the best opportunities they can find. If the Hungarian government continues to avoid taking action against the brain drain, namely by failing to address the hiring discrimination against recent graduates, then Hungarians will be forced to continue acting out of their own best interests.

However, that may not necessarily be a bad thing. As the responses to Survey 1 indicated, young Hungarians are interested in a huge variety of subjects. Hungary's service sector has been growing rapidly since the early 1990s, and hospitality and tourism are increasingly popular fields for young Hungarians. Based on my survey results, about half of the young respondents indicated that they would like to live abroad for a few years to gain experience, and will then relocate back to Hungary. If this continues to be a trend, then it could turn out to be that Hungary experiences a shortage of professionals for the next few years—but that they will begin to return within the next five years, after they have gained marketable experience abroad. Of course, getting hired is only half of the problem. The other issue consistently mentioned by survey respondents is that wages are consistently low in almost all professional fields.

Another way of looking at the brain drain issue positively is by questioning why brain drain is widely considered to be an inherently negative thing in the first place. The popular answer comes down to education. According to Richard H. Adams, Jr. of the World Bank:

*“Since education has so often been cited as a major determinant of long-term economic growth, conventional wisdom has typically argued that the international migration of people endowed with a high level of human capital—the so-called “brain drain”—is detrimental for the country of emigration.”*

(Adams, 1)

However, Adams challenges this conventional wisdom: he supposes that if the world values education, and if there is a fear in economically disadvantaged countries that becoming educated and finding work abroad is the best way to succeed, then this will lead to more people gaining higher education. And since the average rate of emigration from any given country is just 10 percent of total population, the result could be a better-educated general population (Adams, 1).

## **Progress**

The organizations mentioned by survey respondents are not the only ones that can offer hope for reversing the brain drain. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), which continues to produce world-class research and development in all scientific fields, runs a project called the Momentum Program. Initiated by HAS president József Pálinkás in 2009, the Momentum Program has two goals: to reverse the brain drain among the Hungarian sciences, and to support scientific teams that are working on tangible, groundbreaking research. The Momentum Program's main goal has been to convince Hungarian scientists who now work abroad to relocate back to Hungary, offering EU funding for those who make the return trip.

According to a recent article on the HAS website, "The flexibility and success of Momentum stems from creative scientific excellence, the wisely conceived model providing predictable support, and from trackable and measurable productivity" (HAS, 2011).

## **Challenges**

While even the simple fact that employment organizations exist in Hungary is encouraging, their existence alone does not guarantee that the brain drain problem is being effectively addressed. One challenge surrounding these organizations is that they are in competition with several organizations that encourage young people to leave the country, acting as “push” factors. For example, EducationUSA, an American organization with centers worldwide, has a strong presence in Hungary. The organization’s premise is innocent enough, providing young Hungarians with information on how to plan for university-level study in the United States. This can, of course, be a good thing—just see Richard H. Adams, Jr.’s argument that foreign education can result in a better-educated general population. But it could also be sending the message that foreign education, followed by foreign employment, is the key to a happy future—and of course, this brings me back to my own personal feelings of guilt in my work at an American college.

Foreign companies can have a similar influence, this time “pulling” young Hungarians to apply for jobs with them abroad. Young graduates already face hiring discrimination and low salaries at home, so if a foreign company offers a recent graduate a good position with a Euro salary, it is difficult to say no. As several of the respondents to Survey 1 pointed out, Hungarian higher education is very high in quality—therefore, foreign headhunters know they can find in Hungary many well-educated youths, desperate for promising work in their field.

Another discouraging moment in my research was in learning that one of Hungary’s only internationally known employment assistance organizations, “Project Retour,” is currently defunct due to the poor economy. The organization’s founder, Hungarian activist and blogger Regina Saphier, could not be reached for comment.

Likewise, another promising-looking Hungarian organization, PannonWork, did not return my email inquiry about their job placement services. Despite the fact that their website includes pages in English and German detailing their recruitment services, their failure to respond to my inquiry, even after a week, suggests that they are not as dedicated to Hungarian employment as their website suggests. However, this lack of response could also be due to poor staffing in their English department. It could also be due to the fact that while they do offer recruitment services to Western companies, their primary concern is working with the Hungarians who need jobs. Therefore, if my email went to an account that only responds to foreign requests for recruitment, it may be that those requests are deemed less important than providing assistance to Hungarians first. Had I emailed the company in Hungarian, at a different email address, perhaps I would have received a response.

The main explanation for the issues I discovered with Project Retour and PannonWork could be summed up by the fact that these organizations, and others like them, do not appear to be very well known. It is unclear how long some of them have been in operation, but my research indicates that the average university-aged Hungarian does not know they exist.

I have not yet given much attention to the greatest challenge I experienced on this project. To explain it, I will return to my original research hypothesis: before I sent out my surveys, I had hypothesized that my respondents would be able to identify that brain drain is a problem. On this point, I was correct: 60 out of 62 respondents did. I also hypothesized that, while they would agree that it was a problem, very few respondents (if any) would have any personal plans to get involved in social endeavors aimed at its reversal. Once again, I saw no evidence that any of my respondents planned to involve themselves in any organizations,

movements, or other groups aimed at reducing or reversing brain drain in Hungary. I did not see this as a major setback, however. As I mentioned in the introduction, I have gained an awareness of the cultural differences between young Americans and young Hungarians, particularly regarding the desire to “fix” social problems through grassroots efforts. Due to what I believe to be a longstanding distrust of governmental assistance programs, Hungary does not share America’s widespread respect for the nonprofit sector. Rather, the biggest challenge to my research is this: in writing this paper, I have been forced to confront the simple, dismaying fact that I, as an American, cannot decide on Hungary’s behalf that the brain drain issue is critical. If all Hungarians decide that their individual health, wealth, and happiness are more important than the preservation of Hungary’s overall economic stability, then I have no right to argue otherwise. All I can do is raise awareness of the issue and attempt to justify why I believe that it will have lasting negative consequences.

## **Conclusions**

Now that we have thoroughly examined my hypothesis, the existing scholarship on Hungary’s brain drain, and the responses to all three surveys, let us return to my original research questions: I asked “what potential solutions to Hungary’s brain drain problem can be envisioned, and who will benefit most from them? Will the proposed solutions help to solve the brain drain problem at just the individual level or on the national level as well?” As my research shows, most Hungarians identify some very clear solutions to the brain drain problem, which Hungary’s government must address:

- Increase salaries for skilled labor (education, the sciences, technology, medicine)

- Require private companies to hire recent graduates
- Reduce taxes on individual salaries

As the “Hungarian attitude” will suggest, it is unrealistic to expect the government to make any of the above changes anytime soon. Therefore, I believe it should be the responsibility of young Hungarians to use the information in this paper to make small steps. The survey respondents who stated that they prefer to live and work in Hungary can take advantage of the job placement organizations discussed earlier. Others can raise awareness of this problem: they can discuss it with their families, teachers, and peers; write articles; blog about it—if the problem exists, and everyone can admit it, then it is time to publicize this information.

### **Practical Applicability**

It is my hope that this paper can be of use to young Hungarians. As far as I can tell, it is the most up-to-date, comprehensive collection of data on this current emigration wave in Hungary, and on organizations and initiatives that can help reverse it. As we saw in my survey results, the sciences are no longer the only field in which brain drain is a critical concern. If these results are any representation of a larger pattern, we may have reason to believe that previous attempts at targeting brain drain have been far too limited. Therefore, I hope that this paper will inspire other scholars to continue to study Hungarian brain drain, not just in the sciences, but in a wide variety of fields.

The key to changing the current employment landscape in Hungary is through raising awareness of the organizations discussed in this paper. It is my desire that Hungarians who read this paper may share this information with their friends, families, and communities, thereby

giving these newly formed job placement organizations a wider audience and greater influence. While the “Hungarian attitude” of fatalism will not disappear overnight (or ever), Hungary’s young people are increasingly aware of opportunities for advancement. If these organizations can help recent graduates focus their ambitions inward rather than outward, then Hungary really may be at a turning point regarding its labor market.

### **Recommendations for further research**

Given both temporal and spatial limitations on my own research, I would recommend that the next researcher interested in this topic do the following:

- Contact the organizations mentioned above with plenty of time allotted to receive a response.
- Conduct research from within Hungary, hiring a translator, if possible. Visit the organizations named here, to collect direct information on their services and scope.
- Survey a wider geographic range, and larger number, of Hungarians.
- Consult a scholar of economics to gain a more functional understanding of the Hungarian labor market.

Despite my limitations, I am confident that the information contained in this paper is not documented so completely anywhere else. However, I know that there is much more research to be done. I hope that there are other individuals out there, Hungarian or not, who plan to continue where my research left off. Perhaps, if other scholars gain interest in studying brain drain in more depth, we can grow into a consortium of individuals with the common goal of reversing the brain drain in Hungary.

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## APPENDIX A

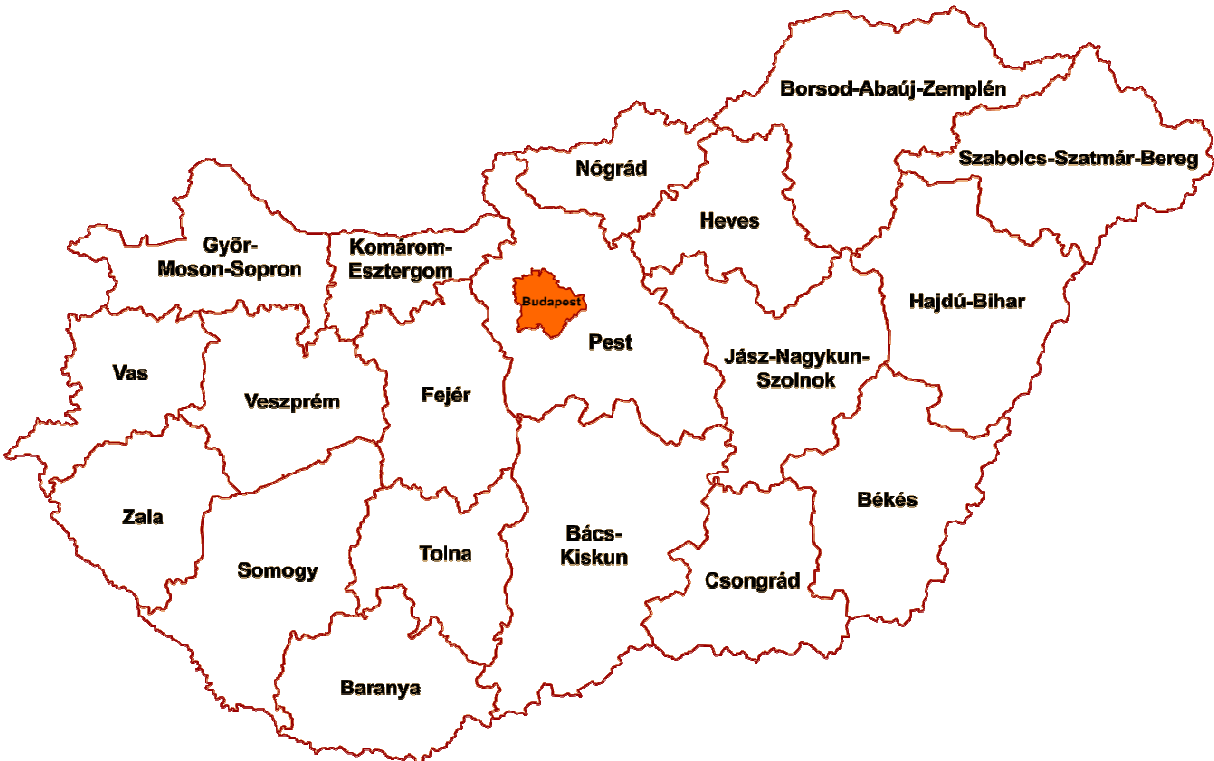
### Map of Hungary in Europe



Retrieved June 2011 from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/cia-maps-publications/maps/755241.jpg>

## APPENDIX B

### Map of Hungary's Counties



(Retrieved June 2011 from [http://www.worldgeographics.com/cfg/public/lib/img/maps/europe/map\\_of\\_counties\\_in\\_hungary.png](http://www.worldgeographics.com/cfg/public/lib/img/maps/europe/map_of_counties_in_hungary.png))

## APPENDIX C

### **Survey 1: “Young Hungarians: What’s Your Future?”**

#### **Question 1:**

Welcome! The purpose of this survey is to learn more about the academic and professional goals of young Hungarians. Thanks for your participation! :) First, it is helpful to know about your background. In the box below, please provide your:

1. Name (not required)
2. Hometown
3. County
4. Age
5. Level of school: Secondary, University, or Finished
6. Field of study (if you didn't attend university yet, just say what you want to study)

#### **Question 2:**

What is the name of the university you attend(ed), or want to attend? Where is it (city, country)?

#### **Question 3:**

I want to know why you chose this university. Please rate these reasons for choosing your school, in order of importance to you. 1 = MOST important, 5 = LEAST important.

Academic programs offered; Primary language of instruction; School’s location (country/region); Campus culture/diversity of students; Reputation of school

#### **Question 4:**

What is your professional goal (your perfect job)? Why?

#### **Question 5:**

Which country do you want to live in as an adult?

#### **Question 6a:**

Again, rate how important each of these factors is in choosing which country to live in. 1 = MOST important, 7 = LEAST important.

Language spoken; Being close to family/friends; Opinions of your parents; Love for the culture; Career Opportunities; Average Salary; Quality of Life (nice flats, good shopping, etc.)

**Question 6b:**

**If you answered "Hungary" as the country you want to live in, tell me more. Why did you choose your home country? Be specific!**

**Question 7:**

**Do you have any friends or relatives who study/studied in another country?  
If yes, how many, and when? Which countries?**

**Question 8:**

**Nowadays, the young people in many countries are moving to more prosperous countries to study and work, because they can't find good jobs at home. This is called "Brain Drain," because the home country loses a lot of its educated young people. Do you think Hungary is losing too many young people? Why or why not?**

**Question 9:**

**Do you know of any organizations that can help young Hungarians find jobs in Hungary? If yes, please share!**

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Survey 2: “Hungarian Parents: What is Your Child’s Future?”**

#### **Question 1:**

**Welcome! The purpose of this survey is to learn how Hungarian parents feel about the academic and professional goals of their children. Thanks for your participation! :) First, it is helpful to know about your background. In the box below, please provide your:**

- 1. Name (not required)**
- 2. Hometown, County**
- 3. Current City, County**
- 4. Age**
- 5. Profession**
- 6. University attended, field studied (if any)**

#### **Question 2:**

**Did you study in another country at any point in your life? If so, where (city, country)? When, and for how long?**

#### **Question 3:**

**Have you ever worked abroad? If so, where (city/country)? When, and for how long? What was the job, and how did you get it? Why did you make the decision return to Hungary after the job?**

#### **Question 4:**

**Do you have Hungarian friends or relatives living and working abroad? If so, how many? Where do they live, and what professions are they in?**

#### **Question 5:**

**How many children do you have? How old? What do they study (or plan to study)?**

#### **Question 6:**

**Do any of your children live abroad right now? Or, do they want to live and work abroad when they are adults? If so, where (city, country), and why?**

#### **Question 7:**

**Nowadays, the young people in many countries are moving to more prosperous countries to study and work, because they can’t find good jobs at home. This is called “Brain Drain,” because the home country loses a lot of its educated young people. Do you think Hungary is losing too many young people? Why or why not?**

#### **Question 8:**

**Do you have any ideas of how to bring young Hungarians back to Hungary? Think of advice that you could give to the Hungarian Government, to other young people, to schools and businesses in Hungary...anyone!**

**Question 9:**

**What is more important to you: seeing young people (including your child) stay in Hungary, or letting your child go wherever he/she can find the best job? This is the last question, so thank you again for helping!/ Köszönöm szépen a segítséget! :D**

## APPENDIX E

### Survey 2, Hungarian Translation: "Magyar Szülők: Mi a Gyermeek Jövője?"

**1 Kérdés:**

Üdvözlöm! Az alábbi felmérés azt próbálja kideríteni, hogy a magyar szülők hogyan vélekednek gyermekük iskolai és szakmai céljairól. Köszönöm a részvételt! Először is, néhány kérdés a szülői háttérrel. Az alábbi mezőbe kérem, adja meg az alábbi adatokat: 1. Név (nem kötelező) 2. Születési hely, megye 3. Lakóhely, megye 4. Kor 5. Foglalkozás 6. Felsőoktatási intézmény és az ott tanult szakok (ha van ilyen)

**2 Kérdés:**

Tanult-e valaha külföldön? Ha igen, hol (város, ország)? Mikor és mennyi ideig?

**3 Kérdés:**

Dolgozott-e már valaha külföldön? Ha igen, hol (város / ország)? Mikor és mennyi ideig? Mi volt a feladata, és miért kezdett külföldön dolgozni? Miért tért vissza és kezdett dolgozni újra Magyarországon?

**4 Kérdés:**

Vannak-e magyar barátai vagy rokonai, akik külföldön élnek és ott dolgoznak?  
Ha igen, hány? Hol laknak, és mit dolgoznak?

**5 Kérdés:**

Hány gyermeke van? Hány éves(ek)? Mit tanul(nak) vagy terveznek később tanulni?

**6 Kérdés:**

Van-e olyan gyermeke, akik jelenleg külföldön él, vagy később szeretne külföldön élni és dolgozni? Ha igen, hol (város, ország), és miért?

**7 Kérdés:**

Manapság, sok országban megfigyelhető, hogy a fiatalok gazdagabb országokba költöznek tanulni és dolgozni, mert otthon nem találnak megfelelő munkahelyet. Ez az úgynevezett "agyelszívás" (angolul "Brain Drain"), mert az anyaország rengeteg képzett fiataalt elveszít. Mi a véleménye, Magyarország is túl sok fiataalt veszít? Miért vagy miért nem?

**8 Kérdés:**

Mit gondol, hogyan lehetne a magyar fiatalokat visszacsábítani Magyarországra?  
Milyen javaslatai lennének ezzel kapcsolatban a magyar kormánynak, fiataloknak, iskoláknak és vállalkozásoknak, vagy bárkinek . . .

**9 Kérdés:**

Mi a fontosabb az Ön számára: a fiatalokat (köztük a saját gyerekeit is) Magyarországon tartani vagy engedni őket, hogy megtalálják számításukat külföldön.  
Ez volt az utolsó kérdés. Köszönöm, hogy válaszaival segítette munkámat!

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Survey 3: "Hungarian Educators: Where Are Your Students Going?"**

#### **Question 1:**

Welcome! The purpose of this survey is to learn how Hungarian educators feel about the academic and professional goals of their students. Thanks for your participation! First, it is helpful to know about your background. In the box below, please provide your:

- 1. Name (not required)**
- 2. Hometown, County**
- 3. Current City, County**
- 4. Age**
- 5. Profession**
- 6. University attended, field studied (if any)**

#### **Question 2:**

Based on your students, which professional fields are most popular with young Hungarians these days? Why do you think these fields are popular?

#### **Question 3:**

Do you have Hungarian friends or relatives living and working abroad? If so, how many? Where do they live, and what professions are they in?

#### **Question 4:**

Have you ever studied or worked abroad? If so, where (city/country)? When, and for how long? If for work: What was the job, and how did you get it? Why did you make the decision return to Hungary after the job?

#### **Question 5:**

To the best of your knowledge, where can young Hungarian graduates find the best jobs? (any particular companies/organizations? In Hungary? In foreign countries?)

#### **Question 6:**

In your opinion, which professional fields in Hungary offer the fewest job opportunities to recent graduates? Which fields offer the most job opportunities? Why do you think this is? (Think of economic factors like government funding, tourism, or foreign investments)

#### **Question 7:**

Nowadays, the young people in many countries are moving to more prosperous countries to study and work, because they can't find good jobs at home. This is called "Brain Drain" ("Agyelszívás") because the home country loses a lot of its educated young people. Do you think Hungary is losing too many young people? Why or why not?

**Question 8:**

**Do you have any ideas of how to bring young Hungarians back to Hungary? Think of advice that you could give to the Hungarian Government, to young people, to schools and businesses in Hungary...anyone!**

**Question 9:**

**Which is more important to you: keeping young people in Hungary, or allowing them go wherever they can find the best jobs? This is the last question, so thank you again for helping!/ Köszönöm, hogy válaszaival segítette munkámat!**