

**Doing by Showing:**

**Poverty Portrayals Performing Social Exclusion  
In Hungarian Factual Entertainment Television Programs**

*A media regulation policy proposal*

**DRAFT**

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## Contents

### 1 Introduction

### 2 Poverty in reality TV: A research on text and production

#### 2.1 Reality TV in Hungary

#### 2.2 Research results

### 3 Real-life effects of contemporary poverty portrayals in the media

#### 3.1 Effect One: Self-fulfilling images and representations: Non-monetary indicators of poverty and exclusion

#### 3.2 Effect Two: From framing to blaming: Responsibility attributions and media portrayals of poverty

#### 3.3 Effect Three: Tales for Two Cities – Media Use, Stratification and Trust

#### 3.4 Effect Four: Words and policies

#### 3.5 Summary: Why regulate?

### 4 Stakeholder standpoints

#### 4.1 Stakeholders (1): Media regulation instruments, institutions, and processes

##### 4.1.1 Stakeholder: EU media regulation instruments

##### 4.1.2 Stakeholder: UK media regulation

##### 4.1.3 Stakeholder: Hungarian media regulation

#### 4.2 Stakeholders (2) Media organizations and professionals

#### 4.3 Stakeholders (3): Civil society

#### 4.4 Stakeholders (4): The media theory and cultural critique community

#### 4.5 Stakeholder assessment

### 5 Policy options

#### 5.1 Policy Option Nr. 1: Contemporary media regulation needs only minor adjusting to tackle the issue of portrayal of the poor

#### 5.2 Policy Option Nr. 2: The disadvantaged as a minority group should enjoy protection from discriminating, unfair, or stereotyped portrayal

#### 5.3 Policy Option Nr. 3: Local fix – Only the new and problematic hybrid contents should be regulated

6 Option Four - A synthetic solution: Recommendations

7 A personal remark

Appendix 1 Research methods

Appendix 2 Research on poverty portrayals in *Fókusz*

Appendix 3 An outline of three months of *Fókusz* reports

Acknowledgements

# 1 Introduction

*“The starting point for any examination of public policy for the audiovisual media must be the recognition of the specific role they play in our societies and the need to ensure balance between the free play of market forces and the preservation of the general public interest.”*

*"The Digital Age: European Audiovisual Policy."* Report from the High Level Group on Audiovisual Policy, chaired by Commissioner Marcelino Oreja, 1998

*“...the audiovisual media play a fundamental role in the development and transmission of social values. This is not simply because they influence to a large degree which facts about and which images of the world we encounter, but also because they provide concepts and categories - political, social, ethnic, geographical, psychological and so on - which we use to render these facts and images intelligible. They therefore help to determine not only what we see of the world but also how we see it.”*

*Principles And Guidelines For the Community's Audiovisual Policy In the Digital Age*  
- Commission Of the European Communities, 1999

Poverty in the information society has no longer been regarded simply as a problem of sheer lack of income. Apart from material resources, marketable knowledge, and *performance in representing marketable meanings in society* are now also key variables of the social status any individual possesses. Key organizing principles of modern societies, such as solidarity, competition, exclusion and inclusion all perform various *allocations of meanings* through various representational processes. Interpersonal communication and the media are the main terrains of making, reproducing and changing socially constructed meanings regarding the individual and the society. The mass media is an important source, and field of negotiation of norms, examples, and rationales for inclusion and exclusion, let them be everyday interpersonal encounters or government social policies. *Words and pictures about poverty on the screen and facts of poverty in homes and in the street now all belong to the same continuum.*

Most broadcasters are aware of the fact that the electronic media is not (and probably has never been) an innocent and neutral tool of mirroring reality, and therefore professional mastery and professional responsibility constitute now an indivisible

single entity. Professional rules exercised in newsrooms and evaluated by regulatory institutions regard a certain circle of content standards, associated with violence, sex, and certain aspects of human dignity as issues that represent a serious counterbalance to freedom of expression. Concerns regarding television representations of poverty however do not belong to this circle of meanings of special treatment. Probably it was the right thing to do ten or fifteen years ago, which period witnessed the advent of a radically new set of television genres, now called reality TV (a term that most people a generation before would have taken as a dictionary example for the expression *oxymoron*.) This genre has blurred entertainment and “seriousness”, fact and fiction in such an extent that now time has arrived finally to reconsider its various roles in a pluralist democratic media system.

Opening a new chapter in the audiovisual policy dialogue over a content issue does not promise a result that, for instance, scientists might harvest when they discover a new star or molecule; especially, because these discoveries (allegedly) do not depend too much on who says what about galaxies or atoms. Contrary to this, media policy is a terrain where the “validity” of an argument depends in a considerable extent on who has been involved in the debate over the given issue. Therefore, this study pursues two, equally important aims: Firstly, it presents a media policy proposal regarding television representations of poverty, and secondly, it seeks to involve interested parties into the discussion.<sup>1</sup>

In this document we

- **analyze** representation strategies Hungarian commercial reality television programs employ in portraying the poor and the needy, and then
- **outline** a normative framework appropriate for evaluating the performance of these programs. In answering the simple question *why regulate*, we
- **assess** statements of various social disciplines regarding the likely effects of the representations in question on people’s life in real terms; in other words, we
- **juxtapose** the issue of representation of poverty and their effects with the concern of the public interest. In doing so, we
- **evaluate** Hungarian, foreign and supranational media regulatory instruments’ capacity to tackle concerns regarding television representation of the disadvantaged, and finally in the context of given regulatory environments, we

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<sup>1</sup> This study exhibits a certain limitation in terms of its empirical basis. In the course of constructing our argument we had to use a rather diverse set of empirical material both in terms of television programs and analysis. Since in our knowledge, there has not been any study covering our research question in a systematic manner, that is, analyzing text, reception, production, and regulation issues in a shared context, in our judgment, our choice of methodology can be evaluated as justifiable.

- *formulate* a range of conceivable policy alternatives, and then
- *identify* a set of recommendations addressing various aspects of a desirable policy change process both in a national and in a European context.

## 2 Poverty in reality TV: A research on text and production

### 2.1 Reality TV in Hungary

*“I am more concerned that infotainment media too often stretch the truth and give false perceptions of reality. To entice audiences and to fit the constraints of media time and space, they rely heavily on stereotypes, exaggeration, half-truths, and innuendo that impressionable audiences accept as reality. No news and information media are immune from this tactics, but infotainment media capitalize on them. Thus, in infotainment media relatively complex problems are simplified to ‘we versus them’, what rhetoricians call a ‘straw man’ technique.”*

Carol Reuss (in Gordon, Kittross, Reuss, 1996)

In this discussion we use a narrow definition of reality television or interchangeably, factual entertainment programming: *It is usually a prime time television entertainment magazine in which a significant amount of stories are about private individuals’ life who usually tell their story in a first person format.* This exposure can take the form of a traditional on-site report, a studio discussion between the individual and the reporter or a talk show format.<sup>2</sup> In August 2002, the following reality TV programs, or programs with considerable share of “reality TV-component” exist in Hungarian television broadcast:

- *THÉMA (Theme)*; on M1 (public service channel), 15 min., on weekdays. A fairly artistic, highbrow “confession” of mostly private individuals, less often of public figures, about their life, work, and views on general issues.

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<sup>2</sup> However conceptually it would be logical to include into this circle programs that use footage extensively from closed circuit TV recordings, or the genre of dramatized real-life events, or specialized reality programs on the work of highway patrols, fire brigades, emergency ambulances, we still exclude these programs from the discussion, because most of them do not have significant and regularly produced Hungarian mutants (yet). Though two major reality shows of the Big Brother kind have been launched recently in Hungary, we do not discuss these programs in this proposal, because they are much more entertainment than reality; on the regulatory aspects of these reality shows see: Hammer, 2002.

- *Fókusz (Focus)*; on RTL KLUB, 30 min., on weekdays. A current affair entertainment program (comprising of 3-5 reports) with a human-interest accent.
- *Fókusz Plusz (F. Plus)*; on RTL KLUB, 30 min., on Saturdays. Similar to *Fókusz*, but it covers only 1-2 issues more in-depth.
- *Fókusz Portré (F. Portrait)*; on RTL KLUB, 30 min., (occasionally) on Sunday. An interview with private individuals or with celebrities.
- *Akták (Files)* on RTL KLUB, 30 min., on Sunday. A general interest current affairs news magazine.
- *Mónika Show*; on RTL KLUB, 55 min., on weekdays. Typical confessional chat show on personal issues.
- *Aktív (Active)*; on TV2, 30 min., weekdays. A human-interest magazine, the competitor of *Fókusz*.
- *Napló (Diary)*; on TV2, 30 min., on Sundays. A current affair news magazine.

The first large wave of these kinds of programs emerged in the late 1990, after the establishing of commercial stations of national broadcast. One could witness a dynamic evolution of these programs; dozens of them have come and gone after a short period of time. Most of them can be characterized as infotainment programs, and the reactions of the audience and the media profession have been formulated according to it. As prime time programs, most of them produce fairly high ratings, and in terms of their content, a frontline has emerged between those praising these programs as fulfilling viewers' wants and needs, and those who regard most of these programs' content as an immoral, harmful, voyeuristic, and sensationalist tabloid material. Our role in this proposal is obviously not to take a quick stand on this debate; our view is though that most of these value statements are not grounded on a systematic treatment of the complex issue of the television's role in the society, culture, and public life and in politics.<sup>3</sup> In order to clarify some of these conflicting

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<sup>3</sup> For example, let us take the serious charge of voyeurism. Voyeurism does not have an essence, its meaning is determined between the balance of the rights of the interested parties who participate as peeper or peeped in the mediated voyeur act, this way producing a norm serving the public interest, (see in more detail: Calvert, 2000.) The meaning of voyeurism evolves through time as a result of changing boundaries between the notions of private and public. What we see today as something fairly mainstream (for example, family life of public figures), some decades ago it would have been seen as bad-taste peeping. At the same time, for example, when critics blame the media for sensationalism and platitude, they should not forget that pulp literature created printing as an economy of scale enterprise a good 500 years ago, and also contributed to the emergence of the phenomenon of passionate *mass* reading – together with its all consequences.

assumptions, we have conducted a research on the issue of the portrayal of poverty in *Fókusz*, the most popular among the enlisted factual entertainment programs<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.2 Research results

International media research in the recent past and contemporary media studies emphasize a few interrelated observations regarding our research subject<sup>5</sup>:

- ***The missing poor.*** Generally, western societies seem to be much richer on the screen than they are in reality; “media society” is predominantly middle and upper class. Somewhat paradoxically in return, class-related content is a relatively underscrutinized field in media studies (Croteau – Hoynes, 2000.)
- ***The evaporating poor.*** Cultivation theory suggests that textual underrepresentation of the poor in the media causes that heavy viewers underestimate the proportion of the poor contrasted to the rest of the society (Gerbner, 2000.) More recent studies warn from making such direct causations (Livingstone, 1990/1998.)
- ***The deviant poor.*** The most general statement about the media portrayal of the poor is that these texts make implicit connection between (i) crime –and another forms of deviance– and poverty (Gans, 1995), and (ii) negative personal traits –immoral behavior, laziness, substance abusing– and poverty (Swanson, 2001.)
- ***The deserving and the undeserving poor.*** As a direct consequence of the previous point, the poor are strictly divided into two distinct groups. The first one is the client of the “charity angels”, while the second one is that of the police (Devereux, 1998.)
- ***The mute poor.*** In news and public affairs programs poor people’s problems are often represented by “spokespersons” (experts, social workers, politicians), while the poor lend the *picture* of their body, or of their physical environment to the report or program (Devereux, 1998.)

These accounts have been partly reinforced, partly recontextualized by our research findings, which are the following<sup>6</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> An empirical research on media use of elementary school children’s media use revealed in 1999 that children’s most popular channel was RTL KLUB (*Fókusz*’s host channel) particularly because of that program (Barta – Szíjártó, 2000.)

<sup>5</sup> Though we have been unable to track down any book-length publication in English with the subject of ‘poverty in infortainment’ *per se*.

<sup>6</sup> See the research document in Appendix 2 and 3.

- ***Abundance of poverty.*** Unlike in news programs, poverty has been shown in *Fókusz* quite often. Poverty appears in the 12% of the reports (37 out of 304) either in a clear dramaturgical context (hunger, absolute poverty, homelessness), or in a coordinated manner (when for example, the story line is about a family conflict, but the report contains strong textual and/or visual references to poverty). In an average it means that a *Fókusz* viewer would see 2 or 3 poverty-related report every week.
- ***The troubled poor.*** 34 of the 37 the poverty-related reports are organized around the larger theme of suffering, misery, or sickness.
- ***The poor ‘out there’.*** Partly as a result of the report format employed almost exclusively in the current affair entertainment genre, poor people’s problems are almost never contextualized in a wider societal context. Poverty reports discuss structural causes of the portrayed problem quite seldom, nor inform the viewer about how many others (in what circumstances) share the portrayed problem in the society. We call this representational strategy as *essentialized portrayal*, when
  - people’s problems are discussed predominantly in the context of their life story;
  - wider causes and effects of the portrayed problem are mostly omitted from the report;
  - the discussed social problem is portrayed as a result of the personal failure, misfortune, or particular inability of the portrayed individual, and
  - people in the poverty-related reports express nothing about themselves or about their life than the details of their problem.
- ***Distress pictures as proof.*** The visual, textual and dramaturgical representation of the given problem relies largely on fine details of hardships, devastating living environments, or of the suffering body. Arguments and claims regarding the causes and the nature of the problem are largely substituted by close description, or visual presentation of the given problem. The striking *pictures* of social suffering as “descriptions” serve as suggestions regarding the causes of the distress: all unified in the visual image and words of the portrayed poor person. The consequence of this rhetoric is that it produces a distance between the portrayed problem and the viewer: The problem appears in a closed, self-referential context (“the meaning of the picture is the picture itself”), while in a somewhat parallel manner, problems that lack dramatic occurrences or explicit pictures tend to cease to exist as problems.
- ***Poverty as a network of allusions.*** A relatively great production attention is paid to visible details of, or evidences to the outlined problem. These implicit allusions (close pictures of trembling hands emphasizing inability to act, a cracked empty pot suggesting hunger, intimate description of bodily problems,

or close shots of undressed sick bodies suggesting lack of control, etc.) constitute a network of “cooperating” arguments regarding the nature of the portrayed issue.

- **Poverty TV: A mixed genre.** Almost each of the analyzed reports constitutes a mix of various styles, levels of empathy or of sensationalism; most of the reports would not fit to any category as “emphatic”, “empowering”, “voyeuristic”, or “poor-bashing”. Very often the anchor introduces the report through addressing the viewer to exercise sympathy and reflection, and the subsequent report employs a rather essentialist strategy. Also, certain *Fókusz* programs perform full public interest roles through their investigative reports.<sup>7</sup>
- **Poverty in a magazine mix.** Additional meaning of poverty portrayal in this current affair program can be drawn from the fact that a report on poverty is usually presented with 3 or 4 another reports covering significantly different topics. This editorial strategy can be justified in a sense (this is the only way “serious” topics are watched by viewers of commercial channels), but there is another, somewhat unfortunate result of this editorial practice: Reports on poverty-related issues gain a position (and presumable viewer reaction) similar to another reports in the program sequence covering extreme sports, exotic animals or celebrity look-alikes, this way placing an accent to the borderline between the “sober center” and eccentric/exotic/deviant margins.
- **Panoptical authority over the poor.** In terms of tele-narration, each report’s axis is the “testimony” of the person the story is about. The story is guided by a continuous narration (generally by the reporter of the story), and the narration and the words of the protagonist are in particular relationship, in which the narration tells the viewer (in a “God’s voice” manner) what the story is about, while the role of the protagonist is to testify the narration with his or her words (“God’s right”). While it would be somewhat unlikely in the case of a traditional documentary, neither the sequence of pictures in the report, and perhaps more importantly, nor the oral “testimony” of the protagonist would be

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<sup>7</sup> *Fókusz* reports have sometimes served as investigative attempts to reveal authorities’ unlawful practices. Katalin Gönczöl, the Ombudswoman for Human Rights initiated an investigation in 1999 (based on a story about a school principal abusing physically and psychologically school children) and another one in 2000 (based on a *Fókusz* story about social welfare authorities who failed to intervene when a mother mistreated her sick child.) The most famous of all *Fókusz* investigative attempts was when they shot a scene with hidden camera when a young Roma man was beaten up by policemen in a rural town, Hajdúhadháza; this report was also followed by investigation of the Ombudswoman (Állampolgári Jogok Országgyűlési Biztosa, 1999, 2000/a, b.) In each case, resolutions issued by the Ombudswoman have referred to the given *Fókusz* program the case was revealed by. Another *Fókusz* report (using hidden cameras) revealing police unresponsiveness to young Roma men attempting to file a report at the police station in Soltvadkert has led to an open letter written by the European Roma Rights Center to the National Chief of Police (Roma Sajtóközpont, 2001).

sufficient in themselves to suggest the viewer what the story is about exactly – the key to the “puzzle“ is in the narration. In a few cases the reporter’s voice (usually presenting a question) appears in the report, but there seems to be a definite intention at *Fókusz* that they try to exclude technical television presence from what actually is seen and heard on TV, in this way offering an illusion of a seamless “togetherness” and “unmediated-ness” between the viewer and the protagonist of the story. Each story is usually finished with a comment serving as a closure by the anchor. This method contributes to the essentialized representation of the needy appearing in the report through the creation of an ideal, unified audience viewpoint. This “peek into an outside world” type of representation widens symbolic distance between the viewer and viewed person, or problem. This type of “viewer-text” relationship is further emphasized through the anchor’s lead that usually provides the viewer with a strong opinion on the subsequent report, offering a preferred reading of the text.

- ***Appearance in Fókusz as last straw.*** A particular production-related concern can be identified after the examination of the nature of reports and the social background of the protagonists appearing in the reports. As it is sometimes explicated by the narration, very often people with problems are the ones who approach *Fókusz* with their story. Based on this fact, a very basic dynamic can be outlined: Among people with problems in the society, the more disadvantaged someone, the more likely she or he would approach *Fókusz* as a last hope to solve the given problem.

In terms of their discursive nature, these research findings normally would not extend the claim of a mainstream academic media research, therefore in the next section we outline a set of evidences concerning how this particular television portrayal of poverty affects people’s life in real terms; in other words, we will point out how the analyzed *textual, reception-related and production-related observations constitute a set of public interest concerns.*

### **3 Why regulate? Real-life effects of contemporary poverty portrayals in the media**

Media effects are one of the most arcane subjects in social sciences. This proposal is based on the solid conviction shared by the mainstream of contemporary empirical media research and theory that media content does not affect viewers’ opinion and worldview in a direct and long-lasting manner. (A natural consequence of this statement is that we reject ideas that blame the media for all vices and miseries of the world.) Media content nevertheless performs important roles in society but almost

always in an indirect and cumulative way.<sup>8</sup> In this section we outline particular facets of “media effect” research, each of them representing concrete, matter-of-fact, real-life impacts of contemporary poverty portrayals in television reality programming. As it was noted before however, these effects are not to be meant as single causes of any social problem. But we do claim that *media portrayal of the needy is an important variable in a multidimensional system in which a number of interconnected material and symbolic processes constitute a circuit of social change resulting an increase, reproduction, or decrease of poverty in a society.*<sup>9</sup>

The most important elements of this circuit –inspired largely by the model of *circuit of culture* (Hall, 1997)– are the following:

- a) Representation/Text
  - A flow of media texts of poverty in the media;
  - Mainstream genres in public service and commercial television;
  - Mainstream means of defining and measuring poverty.
- b) Production
  - Market (rating) realities in commercial broadcasting.
- c) Consumption/Reception
  - Framing effects: Relationship between media genres covering poverty and responsibility attributions in the viewer’s mind;
  - Different social patterns of media use in society;
- d) Identity/Agency
  - Different modes of habitus in groups of society and the role of the media in this process;
  - Social production of variables of social distance and difference;

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<sup>8</sup> Silverstone (1994) stresses the salient importance and capacity of television in the processes of constructing “rules, roles and rituals of the taken for granted yet entirely insistent everyday world” though he also notes that is hard to give a consistent account of the impact of the television on people’s life, because the --in Janice Radway’s terms-- nomadic audience live “in different overlapping but not always overdetermining spaces and times: domestic spaces, national spaces, broadcasting and narrowcasting spaces, biographical times, daily times, scheduled, spontaneous but also socio-geographical times: the times of the *longue durée*.. Television’s influence is displaced and diffused by its position of the audience in these multiple times and spaces” (Silverstone, 1994: 130). In terms of a general understanding of media contents’ impact on viewers’ knowledge and opinion, Sonia Livingstone’s (1998: 20) formula seems compelling stating that “through their narrative requirements for consistency, coherences and redundancy, programmes may organise people’s beliefs and frames of thinking in specific, robust, often simplified ways, creating dichotomies and oppositions, forming associations and connotations, not previously used by the viewers.”

<sup>9</sup> There is an inherent contradiction between the *method* of the policy proposal and the *subject* of the proposal. As any policy proposal, it has to be grounded on objectively measurable claims highlighting straightforward, non-ambiguous causes and effects. But the claim of objective measurement is largely inapplicable in content and effect issues in media policy. One solution of this problem can be that one accepts a method (employed in this document) when a *network* of objectively measurable claims justify the policy initiative, which claims cannot be connected to each other with a full methodological rigor.

- Different levels of trust and distance in society towards the media;
- e) Regulation/Norms
  - Changing principles of measuring poverty;
  - Mainstream norms of media content regulation;
  - Traditions of self-regulation in the media;
  - Interaction between public discourse about poverty and social policy;
  - Changing societal norms of inclusion and exclusion;
  - Legitimizing of social inequalities in terms of their (i) nature, (ii) origin, (iii) justifiedness;
- f) Social stratification principles
  - The work of non-monetary variables in social processes resulting poverty;
  - Processes of production and reproduction of cultural capital;
  - Changing role of the cultural principle in social stratification;
  - Mutual relationships between social trust, norms, cultural capital and social stratification;

### **3.1 Effect One: Self-fulfilling images and representations: Non-monetary indicators of poverty and exclusion**

*“...social exclusion can be identified not only through objective aspects of people’s lives, but also by images related with their social positioning and their ability to make choices to act.”*

Eurostat, 1995

One might claim that it needs no special justification to discuss the policy relevance of culturally created social differences, or the media policy relevance of television portrayal of the poor, after Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Commission commissioned a research in 1995 focusing on the nature of determinants of exclusion and poverty that “cannot be translated into monetary terms.” The process of reflecting on basic questions regarding exclusion (its definition, causes, what people are excluded from, etc.) has resulted a genuine statistical measurement instrument which serves as a complementary method to income and wealth based survey methods. The document (Eurostat, 1995) defines exclusion as a process and identifies five social systems performing exclusionary dynamics. One of these fields is labeled as a *system of symbolic references*, associated with concepts such as “identity, social visibility, self-esteem, basic abilities, interests and motivations, and future prospects.” The “*breakdown of the images and representations* attached to the [social] activities [of the excluded] and which are important elements of social identification and integration” serve as central processes in the system of symbolic references. The document outlines an overview of 14 fields of new indicators<sup>10</sup>. Two of them require

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<sup>10</sup> They are the following: Attributes of each member of household. Relation of each member of household with the economy, the labor market and the social security system. Economic situation of the household. Family of origin. Consumption patterns and living conditions of the household. Housing and the neighborhood. Citizenship and participation in society. Social

particular attention: *Social representations* include a set of indicators referring to images and representations regarding the capacity of the people to act (or not) in order to improve their situation, and “the identification of negative expectations concerning some key vulnerability factors (racism, precarious housing, unemployment, isolation, health problems, family breakdown, social isolation and others)”. If one compares this list of “key vulnerability factors” with key themes in poverty-related reports in *Fókusz*, the similarity is truly striking. What follows from this is that poverty portrayal in this current affairs magazine reinforces certain stereotypes week by week, which –both as distancing mechanisms between the poor and the rest, and self-fulfilling image for the excluded– contribute to the reproduction of social exclusion –as the methodology of Eurostat suggests. Another important indicator domain of exclusion is called *symbolic references*. This domain contains references (among others) to question items regarding self-esteem<sup>11</sup>, social identity<sup>12</sup>, and cognitive and behavioral abilities<sup>13</sup>. Comparing this set of variables to current affairs reports

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representations. Health and welfare. Social Links. Economic Area. Institutional. Territorial. Symbolic references.

<sup>11</sup> Questionnaire items are the following:

1. I feel like I am no one.
2. I feel I am as capable as others.
3. People usually like me.
4. I feel I am competent in what I do.
5. When I have a good idea I try to realize it.
6. When I have a problem I can't solve it without help always.
7. I like myself often.
8. I make too many mistakes sometimes.
9. I don't deserve other people's affection occasionally.
10. I feel I am not different.
11. I feel something is wrong in my head.
12. I feel I am a failure.
13. I'm intelligent.
14. My family loves me.
15. I feel I don't like my body.
16. I'm not responsible for my situation.
17. I feel enough energy to solve my difficulties.
18. I need a lot of support.

<sup>12</sup> I feel that my place in society is:

1. inside society /outside society
2. winner/ loser (defeated)
3. inferior/superior
4. identical/different
5. strong/weak
6. desired /undesired
7. protected/vulnerable
8. valuable/not valuable

<sup>13</sup> Three groups of question items asking about a ability to control impulses, cope with stress, cope with personal failure and frustration.

portraying sad, crying, trembling-handed poor people who have nothing to wait for and nothing to miss, who struggle with problems which are sometimes unclear even for the reporter, one might have an impression is that vast majority of poverty portrayals in *Fókusz* would qualify as an audiovisual record of the ideal typical poor and excluded person. As it has been in the case of the previous set of indicators (symbolic references), poverty-related (otherwise correct and sometimes even emphatic) television programs describe exclusion in such a way that in the course of the portrayal a distant and closed world “outside” might induce feelings of sympathy but not so much responsibility.

Summarizing this last section, we have found that Eurostat (that is, the statistical apparatus of the European Commission) considers *images and symbolic representations* of the poor (or of poverty) as active and measurable factors in the process of exclusion producing poverty. With this, the notion of culturally constructed meanings (and concerns associated with it) has occupied now a mainstream position in the policy discussion. If the symbolic *per se* (image, mode of representation of the image, and modalities of media consumption of the image of the poor) do contribute to matter-of-fact, real-life, and substantial exclusion of groups and individuals, media policy has to consider poverty representation concerns (associated with content and production) appropriate to be regulated in a public interest context. What follow from this are the following:

- The justifiedness (and the performance) of media portrayal of the poor cannot be regarded as sufficiently regulated through a mere consent between the portrayed and the producer.
- The public interest is not damaged only if freedoms of the (1) producer to free expression; (2) interviewee to free speech; (3) viewer to access to information and entertainment, are all amended by an argument explaining how that particular act would compensate the harm caused by the symbolic representation (therefore matter-of-fact perpetuation) of personal suffering.
- Particular care is needed if the *image* of social exclusion (therefore real-life reinforcement of exclusion) is a commodity, which can be sold, “refined”, or consumed.
- The notion of exclusion (social, economic, geographical, age-related, ethnic, cultural, etc.) *per definition* implies lower social visibility of the excluded, therefore their television representations serve as a source of primary information for a large portion of the society; these representations possess a large capacity to establish the “standard social distance” between the excluded and the rest of people. This “standard gap” is a key element in terms of norms of social justice, because it contains
  - descriptions and qualifications for being “inside” or “outside”;
  - definitions, explanations and justifications for social differences;

- a choice of norms evaluated as relevant regarding the responsibility of the excluded for their situation, responsibility of the rest of the society towards the excluded.

In summary, *the performance of media portrayal of the poor has to be evaluated in the context of public interest justifications, because the images and representations in question constitute elements belonging to the cultural citizenship of the excluded*, whereas we define cultural citizenship as

- **text**, that is, a set of meanings associated with life of groups and individuals,
- **access (1)**, that is, people's ability to make others accept meanings they prefer representing;
- **access (2)** of people to others' image and representations whose cultural citizenship is being acknowledged and protected;
- **representation**, that is, the mechanisms through which meanings associated with life of groups or individuals are being produced, reproduced or changed;
- **protection**, that is, the nature and extent of attention of communication regulation to text- and access-related concerns of groups or individuals, and more generally, the extent policy and politics is ready to integrate the process when groups and individuals wants others to recognize particular meanings chosen by them to represent their life.<sup>14</sup>

### **3.2 Effect Two: From framing to blaming: Responsibility attributions and media portrayals of poverty**

Empirical research on various styles of television portrayal of poverty, and on the impact of different styles of portrayal on viewers' attributions regarding whose responsibility is the problem depicted, has entered at important observations from the viewpoint of this policy initiative. Shanto Iyengar (1991) devoted a segment of his path breaking research on framing effects to the observation of framing effects in relation with news about poverty. He has differentiated television news items into two larger groups. He calls a news frame *episodic* if it

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<sup>14</sup> If one finds this point somewhat odd, we'd call the attention to the fact that while people in need bombard editorial offices of TV current affairs magazines via phone and letters with their personal stories, the term *paparazzo* was coined to describe another strategy of these magazines towards the rich and famous. While in the first case no particular regulation has been regarded as important, in the second case media regulation pays detailed attention to such details as the use of high-focus camera lenses. This element of cultural citizenship refers to inequalities in the competition of recognition of differences, for example, gendered stereotyping has been addressed by communication, while the notion of stereotyping the poor has been largely overlooked by regulatory attention.

*“takes the form of a case study or event oriented report and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances (for example, the plight of a homeless person or a teenage drug user, the bombing of an airliner, or an attempted murder.”)*

#### A thematic news frame

*“places public issues in some general or abstract context and takes the form of a ‘takeout,’ or ‘backgrounder,’ report directed at general outcomes or conditions. Examples of thematic coverage include reports on changes in government welfare expenditures, congressional debates over the funding of employment training programs, the social or political grievances of groups undertaking terrorist activity, and the backlog in the criminal justice process.”*

The research (based on content analysis, field experiments, and correlation analysis) has found, that in the case of the theme of poverty, a framing effect could be observed. When viewers watched poverty related news items in a thematic news frame, they tended to regard societal (government policy) responsibility as a key solution for the problem, while poverty appearing in an episodic news frame has induced a different responsibility attribution in the respondents’ mind; in this case they tended to regard the portrayed individuals as largely responsible for the problem outlined in the news report. Iyengar’s concluding note is highly instructive in this proposal:

*“When placed in the context of actual network coverage, the experimental results suggest that the predominant news frame for poverty has the effect of shifting responsibility from society to the poor. Were the networks to increase the level of thematic framing in their coverage of poverty, Americans might be more apt to consider society or government rather than the poor responsible.”*

Kilpatrick and Leweke (1997) have reinforced Iyengar’s findings using a different media sample, when they found “limited, but significant results” of framing effect on viewers’ evaluation of poverty portrayal in news magazines.<sup>15</sup> John Hartley (1984/1988) has identified another layer of the “portrayal-responsibility attribution” dynamics. He argues that in news programs very often the aim of “realism” results a portrayal of a serious issue (taking his example, the crisis in Northern Ireland) through personal stories (the family of a murder victim), while in return, important aspect of the issue in question have become as of less importance.

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<sup>15</sup> Their further methodological contribution –including media use as an independent variable– will be discussed in more detail in section 3.2.

Taking into consideration that framing research usually sample evening news items from national channels (networks), findings of the framing research school would be probably more robust in the context current affairs entertainment magazines than in the case of news programs. While in news programs the viewer always encounter a certain mix of thematic and episodic research frames, in current affairs magazines episodic framing's dominance is overwhelming – which fact directly stems in the program's basic stylistic feature. In a way, as our empirical research on *Fókusz* suggests, the narrative frame employed by its magazine could be identified as *hyper-episodic*, because editors usually omit from the –obviously episodically framed– reports any reference regarding how many others are affected by a similar problem in the country, or what else the portrayed persons do in their life other than suffer.

Summarizing this section, we have found that viewers of current affairs magazines covering social problems encounter these issues almost exclusively through the personal story (or rather, a snapshot) of an individual, which *mode of coverage presumably induces victim-blaming sentiments in viewers*.<sup>16</sup> This effect lays the ground for the assessment of the performance of this particular type of content in a public interest context, because the individual rights of the portrayed are not suitable in themselves to counterbalance the negative cumulative effects of the television programs in question, therefore communication regulation has to protect the disadvantaged from stereotyped, hyper-episodic, and essentialized portrayal.

### **3.3 Effect Three: Tales for Two Cities – Media Use, Stratification and Trust**

The previous two sections have shown how television texts reinforce elements of social knowledge constituting measurable nonmaterial variables of social exclusion (in section 3.1), and how the main style frame of reality programming induces social distance between the excluded and the rest of the society (in section 3.2). In this section we will show *how these exclusionary dynamics reinforce each other in the context of media consumption patterns* outlined by a recent empirical sociological research (Pintér - Hammer, 2001.) The research has pointed out that:

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<sup>16</sup> This hypothesis is further supported by the facts that retrospectively, Hungarian television audience generally has not been exposed to shocking pictures of suffering of disadvantaged groups in society, therefore (as theories and research on media effects suggest) the impact of these portrayals is probably greater on the audience than it is the case with more familiar social facts and media texts. Moreover, the mode Hungarian commercial media covers social problem has been also still in flux, therefore it is crucial regarding future professional and ethical performance of non-fiction television in Hungary what kind of professional standards, viewer dispositions and ethical framework will set the mainstream rule for the profession.

- The poor use more TV than the middle class does.<sup>17</sup>
- The poor trust more in TV than the middle class does.
- The poor trust less in others than the middle class does.
- The media use of the poor represents less selectiveness and conscious choice than that of the middle class.<sup>18</sup>
- For each social strata, media use contribute to the “crystallization” of their status; elite groups’ media use contribute to the reinforcement of their elite position, while media use of the disadvantaged groups contribute to their exclusion.

As the research results show, media use, as a status reinforcing factor contribute to the opening of the gap between social strata, and presumably media content (through different amount of media use, different levels of trust in the media and in others) imposes a larger amount of influence on the more disadvantaged groups in society. Clues regarding the nature of this influence can be drawn from another set of empirical social research. Firstly, stratification research has pointed out that that (empirically measurable) borders blur between social strata, and the role of the cultural principle (cultural milieus) has been increasing (Angelusz, 2000; Fábíán et al., 1998.) Mitev (2001) claims that the principles of the post-communist social structure are still in the making, and they are not reproductions of previous structures and principles. Secondly, the interrelations between the changing social structure and changing notions of social justice have been observed in several European countries in the 1990s, and in post-communist countries respondents regarded personal traits as causes as poverty, while in Western Europe respondents have found the causes of poverty in social-structural circumstances (Örkény, 1997.) Perhaps even more importantly, the research has found that in a society, the lower social status individuals possess, the more likely is that they would blame people for their disadvantaged situation. Taking the large level of flux between the “poor” and the “almost poor”, these symbolic distinctions employed by the “nearly poor” can be understood as an important strategy in establishing their position – through attempts to distance the truly poor from them.

Summarizing this section, we have found that culturally constructed differences play a decisive role in social stratification in post-communist societies, especially with relation to the disadvantaged. Comparing justice-related attitudes with media use patterns, one might enter into a compelling conclusion that *post-communist societies*

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<sup>17</sup> The borderline that divides light and heavy TV viewers is the same as the one divides groups of higher level and lower level social integration (including work), and also the same as which divides social groups possessing larger and smaller amounts of cultural capital.

<sup>18</sup> Groups with higher social status live in a richer media environment (appliances) than the poor and still spend less time with media usage.

(especially the more vulnerable strata) characterized by generally higher level of exclusionary tendencies and lower level of social solidarity are more open to impacts of exclusionary, victim-blaming, essentialized messages from the media than it can be observed in Western Europe. What follows from it is that mainstream Western European concerns regarding media ethics and regulatory standards protecting the public interest must be taken more seriously in the post-communist context.

### 3.4 Effect Four: Words and policies

Urban studies scholars and housing policy experts were among the first ones who have provided a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between wording of social problems (choice of words, metaphors, lines of argument) and particular policies supported by the worldview (implied by that wording.)<sup>19</sup> Poverty policies have been also scrutinized in terms of their discursive context; most influential among these accounts is Herbert Gans' (1995) analysis of the relationship between a linguistic innovation (*underclass*) and the changing preferences in US antipoverty policies. Though it would seem as a "semiotic zeal" to point out direct influence of words on government policies, the spread of this expression (together its twin-concept, the *undeserving poor*) as a result of the work of journalists, researchers and funding agencies has nevertheless contributed to the legitimizing of the welfare cuts in the 1980s in the US.<sup>20</sup> Loïc Wacquant (2001) presents an evidence in his illuminating *Prisons of Misery* how the rapid emergence of the *zero tolerance* penal philosophy and practice in the US (and elsewhere) was accompanied by the portrayal of the poor in the context of deviance by the mass media. Finally, Zygmunt Bauman suggests in his seminal piece on the "new poor" that attempts to welfare-dismantling practices (as the turn from universal service provision to means testing) could have never been as successful as they were if they had not been supported by popular media depictions of the "deviant poor"; in Bauman's (1998: 71) words:

*"..the abnormality of the underclass phenomenon 'normalizes' the issue of poverty. It is the underclass, which is placed outside the accepted boundaries of society, but the underclass constitutes, as we remember, only a fraction of the 'officially poor'. It is precisely because the underclass is such a big and*

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<sup>19</sup> Jim Kemeny (2001) points out that the main metanarrative of housing policy and policy research is the dichotomous treatment of society/market (as „natural“) and the state (as „artificial“), which treatment of social reality favors certain issues, problems, policies, solutions, and particular groups of people, in the expense of another issues, policies and people. Robert Furbey (1999) discusses eloquently how such terms as *reconstruction*, *renewal*, *redevelopment*, *revitalization*, and finally *regeneration*, as catch words for urban policy in the UK since World War II have paved the ways for different policy strategies.

<sup>20</sup> Discussed in particular aspects by Reynolds Eblacas (1999), Sotirovic (1999).

*urgent problem that the bulk of people living in poverty are not a great issue that needs to be urgently tackled. Against the background of the uniformly ugly and repulsive landscape of the underclass, the ‘merely poor’ shine as temporarily unlucky but essentially decent people who – unlike the underclassers – will make all the right choices and eventually find their way back into the accepted boundaries of society. Just as falling into the underclass and staying there is a matter of choice, so the rehabilitation from the state of poverty is also a matter of choice – the right choice this time.”*

These examples of reflection on the relationship between media texts and public policy represent a “step ahead” position compared to the goal of our research and policy initiative. Since we are unaware of any systematic study on the relationship between Hungarian social policy and the all-media portrayal of the poor, we are not in the position to claim any relationship similar to ones outlined by Gans or Bauman. But we claim definitely, that the portrayal of the poor in Hungary’s most popular reality entertainment programs deserve policy attention, because they do contribute to the nature of prevailing notions of solidarity, let these notions formulated by television programs, social policy agendas, public opinion changes, or individual viewer reactions. Reformulating this statement to the language of media regulation, we claim that television portrayal of the poor, as an important factor in the formation of norms of solidarity and exclusion, represents a public interest concern sufficiently enough to consider its protection from sheer market forces.

### **3.5 Summary: Why regulate?**

In this section we have identified *four ways contemporary poverty related television programs play active roles in the process of social exclusion of the disadvantaged*, therefore these representations cannot enjoy an unconstrained protection of freedom of expression; their regulation is justified by the claim of public interest. Again, we stress, the outlined real-life effects of television poverty portrayals work in a process-like network manner. This dynamic feature of social exclusion makes it particularly difficult to tackle. Social exclusion –especially its elements associated with symbols and meanings– operate mainly in a field that falls beyond the terrain of traditional citizenship (civil rights, political rights, and social rights.) Power related differences in modern democracies cannot be described along different levels of access to these three types of rights, because these are protected by law and constitution, therefore the natural tendency of human beings to compete and to gain the possible largest control over the social world has found an appropriate field in culture, and indeed, the cultural principle is the main dimension that explains social mobility, status, or stratification. Power in contemporary democratic societies is a function of wealth one accumulates

in various currencies of cultural citizenship (knowledge, habitus, network, attitude, meanings, ability to make others accept our meanings, representations, position in the equity discourse, etc.) A successful performance in the field of cultural citizenship is nevertheless, a predominantly middle class privilege, especially because of the strong connection between the notions of socially constructed meanings and consumption. While the dynamic of construction of cultural differences can be praised in the context of the middle class as an unprecedented opportunity to freedom to pursue choices and seek bonding, the same cultural principle has turned out as nearly catastrophic with relation to disadvantaged groups in the society; their exclusion is no longer based on lack of access to civil, political or basic social rights, but rather than on their performance along a web of culturally defined norms. Paraphrasing Charles Taylor, one could claim that the equality of civic, political and social rights is in fact, the politics of exclusion.

Solidarity in a society is a peculiar public good: If it increases, it is beneficial for all. If people abuse or destroy it, they take away trust and solidarity from everyone's life, especially from those people's life who really needs solidarity and trust. What follows from it is this: *If a society cannot regulate itself in a way that a loss of a public good (solidarity) would be distributed in an equal manner to everyone, the least the society should do (as a second-best option, or compensation) is to acknowledge the protection of that value in the name of the public interest.* In the next sections we will assess how issues associated with the media representation of the poor have been addressed by various stakeholders affected by problem; perhaps the most important among them is the contemporary EU media regulation system.

#### **4 Stakeholder standpoints**

This policy proposal addressing the issue of television representation of poverty requires the consideration of the standpoint of the following stakeholders: An analysis of *media regulation instruments'* stance on the issue in question can provide a necessary but not sufficient condition with the justification of the policy proposal, that is, whether or not the proposed regulation of poverty portrayal is in accordance with the letter and spirit of contemporary communication regulation. Secondly, since the policy issue involves questions regarding professional ethics in the media, the standpoints of *media organizations and professionals* constitute an indispensable element of this proposal. Thirdly, a particular segment of *civil society* (media watch organizations, social policy activists, advocacy groups) has contributed somewhat to the discourse about justice-related communication issues. Fourthly, a short assessment

of relevant schools of thought in the *media theory and cultural critique community*<sup>21</sup> might also inform the proposal in terms of their main concerns regarding power and representation.<sup>22</sup>

#### **4.1 Stakeholders (1): Media regulation instruments, institutions, and processes**

As we have pointed out in the previous section, the process of social production of meanings related to the life of the poor (with particular attention to television programs) in itself contributes to the social, economic, cultural and political exclusion of the poor, and therefore, representations of poverty is an inherent part element of the process of reproduction and perpetuation of poverty. In this context the claim would not sound too convincing that sheer market competition, or in other words, the fresh spirit of free communication would generate a discursive public good equitable to all. Consequently, *substantial public interest concern lays in the claim of regulation of communication content affecting social exclusion, possibly in the form of self-regulation*. There are only three obstacles in the way of this proposal: Firstly, contemporary communication regulation regimes tend to use the trump of public interest in restricting freedom of communication only in a few rather meticulously circumscribed cases; they tend to abstain from direct regulation of media content. Addressing this issue in a wider context, Mike Feintuck (1999: 25) notes:

*“the changed technological and commercial environment has already forced a shift in regulatory focus, towards those controlling delivery and reception of broadcast media rather than on the content of programming or the ownership of the corporation.”*

Violent and sexually explicit materials, and hate-speech are the main contents that have been found by regulators as appropriate to restrict in the name of public interest. Secondly, a quick glance at EU, US, and national media regulation instruments from

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<sup>21</sup> At first glance it might seem somewhat paradoxical (worse: morally dubious, paternalistic) that the poor themselves have not been included into the group of stakeholders. But if one takes into consideration that the main concern that this proposal addresses is that disadvantaged groups in society suffer exclusion, marginalization, voicelessness, demonization, and commodification (with the contribution of commercial media) it would somehow limit the strength of our argument if we could point out a set of robust opinions expressed by the poor themselves; this policy issue would not be a policy issue anymore.

<sup>22</sup> If one finds it unusual to include academic social science into a group of stakeholders of media regulation, we would call the attention that a good 30-40 years ago a similar initiative was started by a loose circle of academicians, journals, and research institutions, addressing media representation of a social group comprises more than 50% of any society: women.

Europe, one thing seems rather obvious: There is no country where issues and controversies associated directly with representations of poverty has been included into media regulation documents. Thirdly, self-regulation is a virtually non-existent concept in European commercial television.<sup>23</sup> In order to tackle these serious obstacles, we have formulated a set of principles underlying an envisioned regulatory instrument that aims to address poverty portrayal concerns (unfortunate, unfair, unjust, or false television representation of underprivileged individuals or groups), and we will contrast these principles with contemporary European media regulation practices. According to these principles, communication regulation acknowledges that:

1. Certain groups in society should to be protected from certain ways of portrayal.
2. A portrayal of one individual can cause harm to another one(s) who belong(s) to a group associated with the portrayed individual. (Right to reply - Who does it belong to?)
3. Media content can affect people's life in a direct way, as well as –through a web of causes and effects– in indirect ways as well.
4. There are media contents that impose their effects on society in a cumulative way.
5. A good regulatory system has to be firm but flexible: New phenomena require continuous reflection.
6. The regulation of new and unforeseen communication phenomena (technologies, markets, contents, receptions) might require the reconsideration of previous regulations.
7. Content concerns invite self-regulation instead of regulation coming from elected political bodies.
8. Self-regulation's natural corollary is media education and media literacy.

#### **4.1.1 Stakeholder: EU media regulation instruments**

Article 10 on freedom of expression of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms is the main source of protection of people from harmful, unjust, indecent messages and representations. The Convention asserts:

1. *“Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas*

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<sup>23</sup> “Apart from the self-regulation mechanisms in the public service broadcasting sector, the European countries surveyed show little familiarity with self-regulation bodies for both pillars of a dual-structure broadcasting system, nor yet with a self-regulatory body for commercial broadcasting alone (Bröhmer, J and Ukrow, J., 1999: 89).

*without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.*

- 2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.”*

The 1989 Directive on audiovisual media (*Television Without Frontiers*, Council Directive 89/552/EEC) and its 1997 amendment (Directive 97/36/EC) as key documents of the communication-related *acquis* deserve a particular attention, since these documents serve as normative yardsticks to the common European media market. The *Directive*'s main content-related concern is the protection of the youth from harmful messages “*which are likely to impair the physical, mental and moral development of minors*”, including advertising of tobacco and alcohol. Commercials are rendered by the regulator to abstain from inducing behavior prejudicial to health, safety and protection of the environment, and from being offensive on religious or political beliefs (Article 12.) Pornography and gratuitous violence are key contents the regulator seeks to protect the youth from (Article 22.) Another content-related set of restrictions of the *Directive* is when it states that programs (including advertising and teleshopping, Article 12) *should not harm human dignity, and should not enact or incite discrimination or hatred based on race, sex or nationality (Article 22a.)* The *Directive* encourages awareness and educational measures to reflect on problems associated with content-related issues (Article 22b/.) Chapter VI of the *Directive* on the right to reply presents a certain flexibility regarding the legitimate subject of the *reply right*. It states:

*“..any natural or legal person, regardless of nationality, whose legitimate interests, in particular reputation and good name, have been damaged by an assertion of incorrect facts in a television programme must have a right of reply or equivalent remedies.”*

This formulation suggests that this right is to be exercised mainly by those portrayed in programs personally, but provides a niche for action for others as well who can prove (based on a “legitimate interest”) that their interests were damaged as a result of a particular portrayal (based on incorrect facts) of others. The question here is that how the test for the “legitimate interest” condition could be formulated. In other words, the question therefore is whether the balancing of the right to free expression

with individuals' right to control messages about themselves serves more the public interest, or rather, public interest is guarded more if the principle of free expression is balanced with anyone's right who can prove that others' portrayal (based on incorrect facts) is harmful for his or her interests. This latter, roughly speaking, "group-interest based" content regulation philosophy is rather distant from the mainstream tone of the Directive, but the explicit regulation of contents affecting various *minorities' rights to enjoy protection from hate-speech and discrimination* are noteworthy and very important exceptions from the mainstream tone. Another important consideration might stem from the term "incorrect fact". The Directive struggles here with a simple question: *Where is the border line between a "fact" as a statement regarding a single occurrence, and a "fact" suggested by either a stereotyped representation (for example, of minorities), or by a cumulative impact of a larger number of messages (of violent character, received by children, for example)?* The Directive implicitly acknowledges these two latter as issues to consider in the course of regulation, though.

European media regulators attention was extended in 1995 to the issue of media treatment of another two social groups: men and women. The Council Resolution (95/C 296/06) "on the image of women and men portrayed in advertising and the media" discusses gender, mainly female representation issues. This document always connects representation questions with considerations regarding the proven or anticipated unfortunate *result, or impact of certain kinds of portraying* of women and men. The Resolution highlights the following four interconnected areas that form a circuit of *interdependent social phenomena*:

- *Life facts* of any gender group, such as "discrimination on grounds of sex", "position of women in the media", "equal opportunities for men and women" (the two latter as goals)
- *Societal attitudes* regarding the justification of those life facts, such as "change in attitudes to sharing occupational, family and social responsibilities";
- *Media texts* portraying gender groups (either existing or desirable ones) such as "depiction of women", "promotion of a positive image of women", "challenge traditional images (of gender groups)", "realistic picture of women in society", "an image of women and men that was positive and free of prejudices or stereotypes", or when the Resolution confirms that "whereas the roles of women in public life are represented less than those of men; whereas the roles of men in private life are represented much less often than those of women";
- *Media influences*, effects and impacts as results of certain ways of portrayal and the media representation of gender groups include, when the Resolution confirms "that sexual stereotyping in advertising and the media is one of the factors in inequality which influence attitudes towards equality between women and men", and that "the media could play a part in changing attitudes in society

by reflecting in particular the diversity of the roles played by both women and men in public and private life.”

Acknowledging both the difficulties arising at regulating content issues and the interconnectedness of such social phenomena as media texts, media influences, public attitudes, and life facts of the portrayed groups, the resolution nevertheless calls on meticulous *content recommendations*, such as promoting a “diversified and realistic picture of the skills and potential of women and men in society”. The document envisions this goal, that is, the “respect for human dignity and an absence of discrimination on grounds of sex” to be achieved through “disseminating this image by implementing *measures*”, such as:

- “campaigns for awareness”;
- promoting “the study, creation and formulation of new ideas to reflect the diversity of the roles of women and men”;
- “recognition of the negative effects which stereotypes based on sex may have on the physical and mental health of the public in general and of young people in particular”;
- “the development and implementation of voluntary self-regulatory codes.”

This resolution can be perceived as quite revolutionary in a sense, because policy documents rarely try to tackle such elusive cultural assumptions, as the *interdependence of social status, media image, and public perceptions*. Policy documents formulate also quite seldom content recommendations, such as a “diversified and realistic picture” of anything or anyone. If one might seek a justification for applying the approach, analysis and substance of the resolution above to the representation of poverty (assessing also mainly content, production and effect issues), the comparison of any gender group with the group of the poor –both as citizens of the EU– might provide a useful context for it. It is rather obvious, that since the basic principle of the European Union is that there are no essential, “as such” differences between men and women as legal subjects and citizens of Europe, the poor (who as a socially more homogenous group than the groups of men or women in Europe) and the dignity of the poor *do deserve at least the same level of regulatory protection* from media (representation) distortions and harms than any gender group or their members’ dignity. (A quick look at media regulation documents of the Council of Europe can confirm this experience: While its recommendation on the protection of women against violence –Rec (2002)– states that its member states should: “encourage the media to promote a non-stereotyped image of women and men based on respect for the human person and human dignity”, COE media regulation documents do not contain similar provisions in favor of socially excluded groups of society.) Contemporary EU media policies’ disrespect regarding concerns of the representation of the poor implicitly assumes that the poor do not represent any

positive or negative life experience which could qualify this group to seek an acknowledgement and treatment of their problems, other than the protection of individual, political, or social rights of poor people – while the portrayal of gender, and participation in the process of image making of groups of women and men have been tackled by the Resolution with great vigor.

*The Green Paper on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity In Audiovisual and Information Services* (1996) is devoted to tackle considerations more in depth regarding “two specific issues of overriding public interest”, that is, contents offending human dignity and the interests on the youth. In its *Introduction* the Green Paper sets out

*“to examine the challenges that society faces in ensuring that two specific issues of overriding public interest i.e. protection of minors and of human dignity, are adequately taken into account in the rapidly evolving world of audiovisual and information services. ...The full potential of such developments will depend on society as a whole striking the right balance between freedom of speech and public interest considerations, between policies designed to foster the emergence of new services and the need to ensure that the opportunities they create are not abused by the few at the expense of the many.”*

The Green Paper suggests on-line services as the key novelty that justifies the rethinking of the regulation issues concerning the youth and human dignity. Nevertheless, the Green Paper does analyze concerns regarding both broadcast and on-line contents. It identifies clear-cut “to be banned” content categories, such as “child pornography, gratuitous violence, and incitement to racial or other hatred, discrimination, and violence”, but it rightly expresses regulatory, theoretical, and practical uncertainty when it poses the question: “*What will be the long-term societal impact of hybrid material combining the real and the virtual worlds?*” Though this question has been formulated to reflect on on-line media development, but *it can be applied seamlessly to concerns regarding the (policy-wise rather unreflected) wave of infotainment and reality TV as well.* The Green Paper outlines a model for evaluating controversial contents in which the right to free expression is balanced with the public interest in general, and with the rights to privacy in particular, citing articles from the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and from the Television Without Frontiers Directive. In terms of a wider policy environment, the Green Paper highlights media self-regulation and media education as further essential elements of a democratic media system that might preserve sufficiently both fundamental values: Free expression and human dignity.

The 1997 *Green Paper on Convergence* COM(97)623, as a milestone regulatory document sets an agenda for reformulating European communication policies in the

light of technological, business, content, and consumption-related convergence in the ICT field. Representing a certain sense of urgency, the document reflects largely on two major issues, firstly, it discusses regulatory concerns closely associated with digital development, and secondly, it analyses various options for creating a unified regulatory mechanism for old and new actors in the analog and digital ICT fields. With regards the latter, the document contends, *“the role of the media industry as the bearer of social, cultural and ethical values within our society is independent of the technology relied upon to reach the consumer.”* This document asserts also, that since there is no such a thing as the “essential” meaning of any media text or message, that is, the meaning of any mediated assertion is determined by who receives it, in what circumstances, in what kind of context, and via what communication channel. Though this new policy philosophy has been developed in the light of the appearance of new (digital) technologies which brought new contents and consumption modalities, *it can be applied to new genres of commercial television as well.* New genres of factual entertainment entail new types of contents and texts, new programs, new viewer habits, new production mechanisms, new journalistic practices, new reception modalities, and new media effects (such as it is the case with the digital media or with Internet chat forums); it is quite obvious therefore that the new public sphere represented by factual entertainment programs assumes new roles to these programs (and to the media as such). These new media roles partly annul former agreements about the balance of conflicting democratic values (associated most often with free expression vs. human dignity) which new situation naturally cries for a regulation that reflects the issues associated with the wave of factual entertainment programming.

The Green Paper’s another landmark feature can be detected in its dedication to the issue reflected in a section title: “The need for public interest objectives to be clearly defined.” Identifying public service broadcasting (content and service) as the main terrain of assessing public interest objectives, the Green Paper asserts: *“any analysis of public interest objectives in the light of convergence must be the need to define public interest objectives so that market actors have a clear idea of the obligations with which they must comply”* – and it is rather obvious that this claim about “clear idea about obligations” can be extended to the regulatory sphere as well. In terms of regulation objectives related to content, the document perceives convergence as a single factor making a case in it for a reassessment of means, ends and objectives of content regulation. If one includes textual, genre-related, and reception related convergences embodied by reality programming broadcasting into the process of convergence, then there is no need for further justification that *the Green Paper’s assertion regarding the importance of rethinking content regulation is a valid and important concern related to reality entertainment programs too.* The Green Paper offers a useful principle for this:

*“At its most basic, the central issue is not the validity of particular rules but whether the impact of technology on particular services requires a reassessment of the means of achieving the objectives in question. Essentially this is an application of the principle of proportionality, which means that current approaches must be assessed in the light of the specific characteristics of the service concerned. This means that there does not have to be a single standard applicable to the same content whatever the channel used for distribution. Instead, different standards might apply.”*

The 1998 Commission communication (COM (1998) 446 final), setting an agenda for the communication-related policy strategy in the Community, basically reinforced the regulatory direction of the previous communication policy, when it states: “..the audiovisual sector does not require any major regulatory initiative in the short term.” An assessment of this document might suggest, that *content concerns had retreated* somewhat from the policy discussion while employment, competitiveness and economy concerns reinforced successfully their position in the policy agenda.

The 1998 Council Recommendation on the protection of minors and human dignity (98/560/EC) has applied previous broadcast communication principles to the digital media and on-line communication development framework with particular attention to the proportionality test; it has added *no new element* to the broadcast content regulation policy.

In 1997 the Commission set up a chief review group to assess the direction of the audiovisual policy of the Community. The “High Level Group’s” report (The Digital Age: European Audiovisual Policy, 1998) has approached issues connected to communication and justice in a numerous ways. In reassessing democratic functions of the media, apart from “usual” access, (content) plurality and information considerations, they have included a somewhat novel concern (similar to the “public forum” doctrine applied in US free speech cases): *“provide the means whereby the public debate which underpins free and democratic societies can take place, means that the market will not necessarily deliver on its own.”* Moreover, the report further specifies the “constructive”, or in other words *“performative” role of the media:*

*“[the media] are largely responsible for forming (not just informing) the concepts, belief systems and even the languages – visual and symbolic as well as verbal - which citizens use to make sense of and interpret the world in which they live. Consequently, the role of communication media extends to influencing who we think we are and where we believe we fit in (or not) in our world: in other words, the media also play a major role in forming our cultural identity.”*

The 1999 Council Resolution on public service broadcasting (1999/C 30/01) has reaffirmed its functions in “ensuring democracy, pluralism, social cohesion, cultural and linguistic diversity.” This document reflects two equally important considerations. Firstly, it has reinforced the democratic functions of the “comprehensive media”, secondly, the document has assured that apart from quality considerations, wide reach is an equally important role of the public media – both concerns induced by warnings regarding “trash TV”, consumed by an atomized audience through an abundance of satellite and cable channels. New content or dignity concerns however were not reflected by this document.

The Commission’s *Principles and Guidelines for the Community’s Audiovisual Policy In the Digital Age* (1999) stresses (digital) technological innovation as a key factor for the need of reconsidering audiovisual regulation principles and practices. Its protected public interest concerns involve cultural and linguistic diversity, the protection of minors and consumer protection. In terms of wider societal impact of the media –as quoted in the Introduction of this paper– the document asserts that the media

*“has a major influence on what citizens know, believe and feel and plays a crucial role in the transmission, development and even construction of cultural identities.”*

The document’s three key elements form the viewpoint of broadcast content and of human dignity are the following: Firstly, it foresees a unified EU regulatory instrument for “all communications infrastructure and the services associated with that infrastructure” (such as OFCOM in the UK). Secondly, it asserts, “*far from having to reinvent a new regulatory framework for audiovisual content*, the Community can best manage the changes taking place by building on its existing instruments and principles.” Thirdly, it reaffirms the role of self-regulation in the content regulation process.

The 1999 Council Conclusions the role of self-regulation (OJ C 283/2 of 6.10.99) has identified self-regulation as an “in nature” national issue reflecting values and concerns of the given society and therefore should be taken care of member states individually. The Conclusion calls for the national regulation authorities’ contribution to the development of self-regulatory processes, and stresses the importance of sharing experiences of regulators, media organizations and the audience in a European level. Preceding this Conclusion, an expert seminar in Saarbrücken has formulated key values, concerns and rationales for self-regulation in a EU context; some of them are instructive from the viewpoint of this policy proposal. As it will be elaborated in more detail at the end of this section, it is obvious, that the *claim of regulating poverty related television contents and productions naturally invites the application of a particular form of self regulation*. On the other hand however, an ironical note from an

expert assessment on European media self-regulation should guide any initiative aiming media self-regulation:

*“..the best and the most effective self-regulation systems exist in those countries in which they are least needed”* (Bröhmer – Ukrow, 1999.)

#### **4.1.2 Stakeholder: UK media regulation**

This policy proposal has to give an account the nature and extent of application of EU communication regulation standards in national regulatory regimes. The example of the UK communication regulation systems serves as an example for this reality check. As it can be expected after the review of key EU communication regulation documents, there is no direct evidence for concern in UK media regulation regarding television portrayal of socially disadvantaged groups of society. The Broadcasting Standards Commission's<sup>24</sup> (BSC) codes on fairness and standards however contain important references to “neighboring” concerns of poverty portrayal. BSC's standards code (under taste and decency) discusses concerns regarding respect and dignity, and notes that

*“individuals should not be exploited needlessly or caused unnecessary distress, nor should the audience be made to feel mere voyeurs of others' distress”*  
(Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1998: 24.)

Regulatory attention to the respect for human dignity has been expressed by the Independent Television Commission's Programme Code<sup>25</sup> (ITC) (2002), a set of standards for commercial television channels, as well:

*“Viewers have a right to expect that licensed services will reflect their responsibility to preserve human dignity, as far as possible, in respect of both individuals and individuals as members of groups. Individuals should not be exploited needlessly or caused unnecessary distress, nor should the audience be made to feel mere voyeurs of others' distress. In particular, consideration should be given to the treatment of vulnerable minorities, bearing in mind the likely effects of both misrepresentation and under-representation”*<sup>26</sup> (Code 1.8.)

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<sup>24</sup> BSC's main tasks have been laid down by the 1996 Broadcasting Act. BSC covers all forms of television and radio services in terms of setting, monitoring and reporting on standards and fairness issues.

<sup>25</sup> ITC has licensed and regulated all the forms of commercial television in the UK since 1990.

<sup>26</sup> These minorities are specified as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and „other, less obvious and vulnerable, minorities including older people, homosexuals, and minority religious faiths or language groups. “ Code 1.8(iii)

What follows from this statement is that the presentation of human distress in television programs has to contain an explicit or implicit *argument about the “reason” of showing that distress* which can be drawn from a public interest consideration (for example, pointing out responsibilities, or connections to other social problems, highlighting structural causes of the portrayed problem, etc.) This concern is addressed by ITC’s program code in a similar way:

*“a producer needs to balance the wish to serve the needs of truth, the desire for compassion and the public interest against the risk of sensationalism and the possibility of an unwarranted invasion of privacy.”* (Code 2.2(iv))

The BSC standards code (also under taste and decency) discusses *stereotypes*:

*“Much humour depends on stereotypes and there are many occasions when their use can be justified for the purposes of a particular programme. Care, however, is needed to avoid the unthinking or lazy adoption of stereotypes: for example, in the portrayal of male and female behaviour; the creation of an impression of older people as a single, vulnerable group; or the representation of people with mental health problems as violent. The same is true of a number of groups which may be singled out on grounds of race, religion, or sexuality”* (Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1998: 28.)<sup>27</sup>

The fact that the code specifies men, women, the elderly, mental patients, and groups of race, religion or sexual preference<sup>28</sup>, does not mean that the spirit of this standards consideration would not be valid in the case of another groups<sup>29</sup> (such as nations, ethnic groups, or professions, such as police officers, brokers, sex workers, or truckers), therefore no doubt, *socially disadvantaged individuals or groups are also protected from stereotypical portrayal.*

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<sup>27</sup> Taking an example from a post communist setting, producer guidelines of RTV Slovenia protects women, people with disabilities, sexual minorities, older people, and religious groups from stereotyped portrayal or another form of exclusionary media representation (RTV Slovenia, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> One could find it as an unpleasantly curious coincidence that each of the groups specified by the code can have middle class members, while on the other hand, the homeless, prostitutes, crime offenders, the unemployed, drug addicts, or another groups –not typically middle class groups– though often portrayed in a stereotyped way, still have not deserved particular regulatory attention.

<sup>29</sup> This argument is explicated by the BBC Producers’ Guidelines (under *Portrayal*, 9.2.2.) in the following way: “People should appear in the full range of roles that reflect reality. BBC programmes should not categorise black people as criminals, women as housewives, disabled people as victims, gay people as ineffectual, old people as incapable, or people of any particular profession, vocation or walk of life as inevitable source of fun.”

The Independent Television Commission's *Programme Code*, explicitly acknowledges the fact that program codes by definition cannot be all-encompassing and comprehensive:

*"..licensees should aim to operate within the spirit of the Code, as well as the strict letter of it. The Code is open subject to interpretation in the light of changing circumstances and on some matters it may be necessary to introduce fresh requirements or advice from time to time."* (Code Foreword)

Rather exceptionally among media regulation documents, the ITC program code has taken the risk of explicating its *effect* concerns (including concerns referring to *cumulative* effects) regarding gratuitous violence in television programs saying that gratuitous violence:

*"can upset, disturb and offend and can be accused of desensitising viewers, or making them unduly fearful or of encouraging imitation. These are legitimate public concerns.."* (Code 1.7.) ...*The regular and recurrent spectacle of violence may lead viewers to become less sensitive to violence or to overestimate the level of violence in the real world. Licensees must take into account the potential cumulative effect of violent material."* (Code 1.7. (d))

As the review of these regulatory documents suggests, numerous "neighboring" concerns related to television portrayal of poverty are expressed in British regulatory documents and processes; their application to the subject of this policy proposal can be found at the end of Section 4.

### **4.1.3 Stakeholder: Hungarian media regulation**

Main television content regulation considerations, relevant from the viewpoint of this proposal, in the Hungarian Broadcasting Act include (Section 3):

(2) *"The broadcaster must observe and honor the constitutional order of the Republic of Hungary, his activity may not offend human rights and must not be instrumental to the rise of hatred against individuals, sexes, populations, nations, or ethnic, linguistic or other minorities or against churches or groups of a religious persuasion."*

(3) *"Broadcasting must not be intended to offend or prejudice, explicitly or indirectly, any minority or majority or to present or prejudice minorities or majorities based on racial criteria."*

The National Radio and Television Commission (ORTT) published a regulatory guideline in 2002 (Országos Rádió és Televízió Testület, 2002) covering content issues in the digital communication services.<sup>30</sup> The guidelines seek to coordinate a balance between free expression and fundamental human rights (to dignity and to access to information) and the aim of protection of minors. According to Hungarian law, any content-related restriction of free expression (in the digital and non-digital media) has to meet the following requirements:

- The content and means of protection of any fundamental human right that performs a restriction of free expression has to be laid down in a separate piece of legislation (act)<sup>31</sup>.
- Restriction of free expression has to observe the condition of proportionality.<sup>32</sup>
- The right of human dignity is strictly connected to the person in question portrayed or quoted.

## 4.2 Stakeholder (2) Media organizations and professionals

In terms of the roles and performance of current affairs entertainment magazines, commercial television professionals generally argue that the popularity of these programs and the lack of serious regulatory intervention with regards these contents justify their claim, that is, these programs play an integral role in the dual media system. Péter Kolosi, the founder editor-in-chief of *Fókusz*, now Program Director at RTL KLUB, said in an interview in this research that commercial televisions' two main roles has been successfully fulfilled by *Fókusz*: *informing and entertaining the public*. Dorca, an anchor at Z+ music television channel, one-time *Fókusz* editor, argues that regardless controversies, *Fókusz* is a landmark in Hungarian commercial television, because a group of young people has got a chance and created a new genre in television:

*“The program has produced continuous high ratings in the past three years. Three years is an extremely long period in the commercial television world,*

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<sup>30</sup> The Commission has issued several decisions concerning the public service character of *Fókusz*, the current affair entertainment magazine of RTL KLUB, the program that serves as an empirical material for the purpose of this proposal. Since the topic of the controversy around *Fókusz* (whether or not it can be evaluated as a public service program) is out of the focus of this proposal, we do not discuss it in this document.

<sup>31</sup> As quoted by the Commission's guidelines: 64/1991 (XII. 17.) Constitutional Court resolution.

<sup>32</sup> As quoted by the Commission's guidelines: 20/1990. (X. 4.) Constitutional Court resolution.

*and even senior television personalities have been unable to attract such a large audience's attention for such a long time" (Urbán, 2001.)*

Media professionals outside of commercial television industry however often express a more skeptical view regarding the ethics and professional character of non-fiction entertainment television. György Kerényi, editor-in-chief of *Rádió C*, a Budapest-based Roma minority radio condemns commercial television programs that they *cover social issues as "horror"*, instead of describing processes such as how one would become a crime offender or a prostitute. He also blames commercial television with *desensitizing viewers*, when watching programs (he mentions *Fókusz*) portraying extreme suffering would become a daily routine (Mihancsik, 2000.) András Salamon, a film maker blames commercial media for *marketing human misery*:

*"I can hear their anchor before the commercial: 'Father spilled carbide on his son, we will right back, stay with us.' They abuse others' suffering in an utmost cynical way" (Mihancsik, 2000.)*

It is a noteworthy fact, that media critics with different cultural and political leaning, who would normally severely disagree on most public issues, represent a remarkable similarity in their opinion about *Fókusz*. Márton Murányi's devastating criticism (2001) in *Magyar Fórum* (an extreme right weekly) about *Fókusz*, is almost identical with Dániel Urbán (2001) a cultural critic's words who identified a *Fókusz* report as a the nadir of the programs professional niveau when a report covered a story of a man who was attacked and severely injured by his pigs. Rather remarkably, journalists and critics in *Élet és Irodalom* (a liberal cultural and political weekly) basically share the direction of opinion of their political opponents about infotainment. "db" (2001, an author marked by initials) has commented with acid remarks a *Fókusz* report (discussing bacterial infection dangers of pig killing in rural household) highlighting exposures of obvious lack of elementary professional (biological) knowledge of the editor and the reporter. In another issue of this liberal magazine, Erzsébet Molnár (1999) has caricatured in a short piece a *Fókusz* report describing the life of homeless people living in the sewage system in Miskolc. László B. Bóka (2001) has emphasized the seamless combination of public service functions with tabloid television genres in *Fókusz* reports. Bóka suggests that *Fókusz* employs a method that editors most likely borrowed from German current affairs magazines that use the fig leaf of public service tone in order to show any tabloid content in the name of public interest.

As the quoted professional opinions might suggest, there is a sharp dividing line between commercial television journalists and the rest of the profession in terms of the ethics of reality programming. The Visegrad Papers project, the *Voluntary Code of Ethics for Hungarian Broadcast Journalists*, as one of the few attempts in Hungarian television self regulation, however contains an important recommendation (based on

consensual decision of the profession represented in the process) about television portrayal of the disadvantaged, when it suggests: “Disadvantaged people should not be made to look unusual or extreme.”

### 4.3 Stakeholder (3): Civil society

Media portrayal of poverty raises somewhat different questions in Europe than in North America. Numerous US-based and Canadian media watch organizations, advocacy groups and social welfare protection organizations criticize the ways North-American print and electronic media portrays poverty. They claim that “poor-bashing”, or blaming the poor in the media hold two major features. Firstly, they observe a racial bias, which causes that white poor people are more likely to be portrayed with journalistic sympathy, while non-whites –especially African-Americans– are more likely to be presented in the stories with negative traits. Secondly, researchers and activists claim that there is an emerging tendency in the media in North America; poverty stories appear more and more frequently in the context of crime, drug abuse, welfare fraud and violence. Critical academic media research –for example on the *Vancouver Sun* (Gutstein and Hackett, 1999), or on the *Windsor Star* (Canadian national paper) (McArthur, 1998)– and independent media watch work in close relationship, especially in Canada. Jean Swanson, author of *Poor-Bashing: The Politics of Exclusion*, and activist calls poverty-portrayal practices “poornography”:

*“The media takes a lot of approaches to covering stories on poverty. Lies. Double standards—for example, playing up welfare fraud and playing down corporate fraud. “Poornography”—portraying people who are poor as sufferers—is part of the journalistic technique of ‘putting a face on the problem.’ The problem with this is that it doesn’t politicize the problem, it doesn’t point to the causes of poverty, and it doesn’t point to a solution (often charity is offered as the answer)” (Fine, 2002.)*

*Community Action Poverty*, a Winnipeg-based activist group has formulated the effects of “poor-bashing” the following way:

- It hurts people in their daily lives.
- Adults and children are shunned, despised, pitied, patronized, humiliated, and ignored.
- It blames individuals for being poor, and takes attention away from the overall state of the economy.
- It justifies policies like workfare, which undermines wages and working conditions.

- It undermines support for social programs that benefit all Canadians and our communities.
- It encourages people to think in stereotypes and to discriminate against people who are poor.
- "Snitch" lines criminalize people on welfare and turns people against each other.

Media-related activism in Hungary with regards the portrayal of the disadvantaged has focused largely on the media representation of the Roma. The Budapest-based European Roma Rights Center's press watch service and the Roma Press Center (Budapest) have worked closely with a group of researchers (sometimes activists themselves) who published important studies about Roma representations. These studies claim that the Roma suffer a certain discrimination in the media, because they appear in the programs almost exclusively in the contexts of violence, conflicts and suffering (Bernáth – Messing, 1998; Messing, 1998, 2000; Vicsek, 1996.) Bernáth and Messing (2001) evaluates the appearance of a Roma character in RTL KLUB's daily soap (Among Friends) as a first sign of the change of the ghettoized representation of the Roma.<sup>33</sup> Reality entertainment programs have not been assessed by critical media research or media watch organizations in Hungary<sup>34</sup>. Krisztina Morvai's (penal lawyer and theorist of family abuse issues) reflection is one of the few professional assessments of the ethical and professional performance of reality entertainment programs:

*“As a lawyer I think that media legislation should regulate how far the media could go in exploiting people's tragedies and making profit from it, especially when we talk about children. .. Actually, I don't believe that these cases [tragedies shown in infotainment programs] are simply personal tragedies – this is why I find it outrageous when the media covers these cases as sensations, taking them out of their social context. The cases happen very often and their causes lay in power relationships between men and women, between adults and children, or between authorities and clients. These issues should be discussed continuously in films, books, in the press and in politics. When a family falls apart, the father is an alcoholic and batters his children; it is not necessarily only the personal tragedy of the Kovács's or Kolompárs. These are social problems, and as such, political problems as well. These*

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<sup>33</sup> Our study and policy initiative was born partly as a criticism of the ethnicity-based understanding of mediated exclusion represented by these studies.

<sup>34</sup> Of course, it does not mean that NGOs do not express occasionally opinion about factual entertainment program. Unfortunately their contribution most often can be characterized as an emotional outcry, at best (“cultural trash”, “pomography for the mind”, “filth that should be banned”), therefore very difficult to be channeled into a policy dialogue.

*problems are as much political as economic questions or conflicts in party politics” (Mihancsik, 2000.)*

In terms of production ethics, *Fókusz* was addressed by a serious charge of unethical revealing of report interviewee’s identity in 1997. The report was about three men with HIV+ who accepted the invitation of the production for a report about their life and problems under the condition that they would appear with pseudonyms and with their faces faded out. Fading was not completely successful and shortly after the airing of the report, the three men have suffered serious insults in streets and stores. They filed a lawsuit against RTL KLUB and won the case. The case has been documented by Habeas Corpus Association, a human rights NGO (Habeas Corpus, 2001.)

#### **4.4 Stakeholder (4): The media theory and cultural critique community**

Media-related social sciences have formulated the following main observations regarding the nature of representation of the disadvantaged and the likely impacts of these representations.

- In the US, African-Americans are overrepresented in news magazines’ poverty-stories, at the same time underrepresented in news stories that suggest sympathy to the depicted person (Gilens, 1999).
- The media in the US portrays poor people in the context of crime, drunkenness, and drug using (Gans, 1995.)
- In the US, magazine photographs in poverty stories overrepresent female, black, urban, and children’s poverty, and white characters in “poor on job training“ story lines (Clawson – Trice, 2000)
- Stereotyped portrayals of the poor fuel public misperceptions on poverty, which might influence social policies towards directions that punish the poor (Bauman, 2001/1998.)
- In general media content the upper and middle classes are overrepresented in fiction, non-fiction and news programs (Croteau – Hoynes, 2000.)
- Cultivation theory says that media reality influences the way people estimate the size of different groups in the society (Gerbner, 2000.)
- In news and current affairs stories the poor can be differentiated clearly into two groups: the deserving and the not deserving poor (Devereux, 1998.)
- Narratives styles employed by news programs induce victim-blaming sentiments in the viewer (Iyengar, 1991.)

- Dominant genres of the news media –that present personal stories as not examples of more general problems but as the problems themselves– are integral parts of a hegemonistic exercise of power that is “*achieved not by direct coercion (a last resort), but routinely by seeing to win the consent of subordinate and powerless groups*” (Hartley, 1982.)
- The disadvantaged suffer from a cultural domination of the upper classes of society, because as both invisible in public life and stigmatized by dominant stereotypes, their marginal position has been created through two mechanisms: Firstly, dominant meanings about the poor and dominant discussions and perceptions of the *poor body* reinforce each other. Secondly, the experience of marginalization –both in the eyes of the disadvantaged and the rest– has become petrified as taken-for-granted objective reality (Young, 2001.)
- Genres employed by tabloid television programs contribute to a “regime of truth” (Foucault) regarding the position of the disadvantaged in the society, suggesting “normalized”, “the way as it is” vision of social differences and of the society (Glynn, 2000.)
- Reality entertainment programs’ main frame, the first person format suggest a particular notion of neoliberal citizenship, according to which the rich and the poor can thank predominantly to themselves that they possess their particular position, while the role of the state is restricted to manage hard crisis, such as violent crime, forest fires or mad cow disease. “*Narratives of personal change are the only narratives of change that the television of neo-liberalism can offer*” – argues Jon Dovey (2000) in his *Freakshow*.
- The choice of words one describes a problem with is in fact, a decision itself about the desirable direction of the solution of the problem. Robert Castel (1993), a historian of social policy warns about consequences of using certain words in social policy: “*Instead of using such terms as poverty, marginalization, deviance, exclusion, I propose terms like uncertainty of lives, vulnerability and disintegration. The purpose behind such terms is to suggest that we are witnesses to a changing process, rather than static conditions. This affords us the optimism of placing such social phenomena- in a dynamic context which we are able to improve: to help those in need before their vulnerability becomes entrenched in a fated, frightening reality.*”

#### **4.4 Stakeholder assessment**

In Section Three (Why Regulate?) we have outlined various ways contemporary media representations of poverty contribute to the multidimensional process of their exclusion. Though social exclusion is the main concern of social justice in Europe now, its complex and cumulative character makes it extremely difficult to address.

After a review of stakeholder standpoints expressing content, production and regulatory concerns (or non-concerns) regarding the portrayal of the disadvantaged, two obvious conclusions seem obvious. Firstly, media or television representations of poverty/social exclusion have not raised serious regulatory interest in Europe. Secondly, there seems to be a deep cleavage between critical media studies and media regulatory instruments regarding the accuracy and importance of poverty portrayals in television.<sup>35</sup> While social exclusion can be described and analyzed best with methods using sociological methods (statistical frequency) and cultural analysis (using qualitative methods), actual processes of media content and production regulation are organized mainly around individual cases of portrayed people. Fortunately, this proposal does not need to resolve this conceptual contradiction entirely, because certain content-related initiatives –media regulation of violent content and of stereotyped representation of certain groups (both imposing their impact on the audience in a cumulative way)– have paved the road to this proposal. In this subsection we will point out how the logic of media regulation of the portrayal of the disadvantaged can be connected to institutional possibilities provided by regulatory framework in the European Union and in Hungary.

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<sup>35</sup> One of the main reasons of this cleavage lays in the conceptual discrepancy between the notion of culture and the paradigm of communication regulation in which single occurrences and concrete individuals occupy a central position. Simply, there seems to be a nearly irresolvable conflict between the concepts of exclusion and individual rights. The closing of this gap is a difficult, but not hopeless enterprise, because good cultural analysis of the location of power in contemporary societies is always based on concrete life facts, and on the other hand, fact- and individual-based media regulation is always a function of social, cultural and political processes contributing to the policy dialogue. James Carey (1989: 19-20) offers an interesting argument for the reason of this cleavage: “This intellectual aversion to the idea of culture derives in part from our obsessive individualism, which makes psychological life the paramount reality; from our Puritanism, which leads to disdain for the significance of human activity that is not practical and work oriented; and from our isolation of science from culture: science provides culture-free truth whereas culture provides ethnocentric error.” Toby Miller’s (1998) devastating description of the fields of cultural critique and policy (in the US) does not offer too much hope: “Grossberg was at a conference to discuss the future of the Canadian National Museum of Civilization. Most of the papers trotted out the expected litany of bastardries, committed by the usual suspects: sexism, racism, Eurocentrism, and ethnocentrism were the crimes, with capitalism, imperialism, and architecture the criminals. Presenters called for the museum to be delivered to the people. Now, Grossberg concurred with their excavations, in the sense that traces of the systems of oppression were clearly present, but there also seemed to be an automaticity of condemnation at work. The machinery of critique was hauled into play without anyone’s engaging the sense-making practices, pleasures, or otherwise of actual museum users. And museum educators were left with nothing to do—no ideas, no proposals. In this sense, Grossberg argues ‘the politics of the museum seem to be given well before any real analysis’... “The policy sciences, originally conceived as a connection between democratic and executive action, have degenerated into ‘unrepresentative expertise’ that lacks articulation with public life. ... [in the United States] policy connotes a pro-corporate position that turns highly contestable positions into absolute, with consultant professors simultaneously performing objectivity and applicability.”

- (1) Since Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union has found that perception- and representation-related indicators of poverty and exclusion should be taken into consideration in research and policy in order to understand, measure and tackle exclusion in Europe, and Eurostat has found relevant variables of self-perception –that otherwise emerge and change in a shared cultural context influenced significantly by the mass media<sup>36</sup>– contributing to exclusion;
- (2) Since the Commission’s Principles and Guidelines for the Community’s Audiovisual Policy In the Digital Age (1999) –in the context of ICT development– asserts that the media “*has a major influence on what citizens know, believe and feel and plays a crucial role in the transmission, development and even construction of cultural identities;*”
- (3) Since the “High Level Group’s” report (The Digital Age: European Audiovisual Policy, 1998) asserts “[the media] *are largely responsible for forming (not just informing) the concepts, belief systems and even the languages – visual and symbolic as well as verbal - which citizens use to make sense of and interpret the world in which they live. Consequently, the role of communication media extends to influencing who we think we are and where we believe we fit in (or not) in our world: in other words, the media also play a major role in forming our cultural identity;*”
- (4) Since Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights asserts the right to freedom of expression can be restricted for “*the protection of the reputation or rights of others;*”
- (5) Since the Green Paper on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity recognizes: “*The freedom to provide services is one of the four basic freedoms guaranteed by the Treaty. Restrictions are possible for overriding reasons of public interest, such as the protection of minors and of human dignity, but are subject notably to the proportionality test;*”
- (6) Since the Television Without Frontiers Directive asserts that television content should not harm human dignity, and should not enact or incite discrimination or hatred based on race, sex or nationality (Article 22a);
- (7) Since the Television Without Frontiers Directive contains no references neither to stereotypical portrayals, nor to issues associated with the portrayal of the disadvantaged;

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<sup>36</sup> See the next two points in this section.

(8) Since Chapter VI of the Directive on the right to reply asserts that it can be exercised by persons “*whose legitimate interests, in particular reputation and good name, have been damaged by an assertion of incorrect facts in a television programme must have a right of reply or equivalent remedies;*”

(9) Since the Television Without Frontiers Directive does not specify where the borderline is between “incorrect fact” as a single occurrence, and a “fact” suggested by either a stereotyped representation or by a cumulative impact of a larger number of messages;

(10) Since Council Resolution (95/C 296/06) “on the image of women and men portrayed in advertising and the media” asserts in reference to gender groups that their life facts, societal attitudes towards them, media texts portraying them, and media impacts of these portrayals can be assessed as a circuit of interdependent social phenomena;

(11) Since Council Resolution (95/C 296/06) “on the image of women and men portrayed in advertising and the media” formulates content recommendations concerning gender portrayal;

(12) Since Council Resolution (95/C 296/06) “on the image of women and men portrayed in advertising and the media” recognizes negative effects of gendered stereotypes “*on the physical and mental health of the public in general and of young people in particular*”;

(13) Since Council Resolution (95/C 296/06) “on the image of women and men portrayed in advertising and the media” recognized the importance of “*the development and implementation of voluntary self-regulatory codes*” in content regulation;

(14) Since the Green Paper on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity expresses concern regarding “*long-term societal impact of hybrid material combining the real and the virtual worlds;*”

(15) Since the 1997 Green Paper on Convergence COM(97)623, assert that the meaning of any mediated text is determined by who receives it, in what circumstances, in what kind of context, and via what communication channel;

(16) Since the Green Paper on Convergence asserts that –in the context of ICT development – it is important to rethink principles of regulation “*in the light of the specific characteristics of the service concerned. This means that there does not have*

*to be a single standard applicable to the same content whatever the channel used for distribution. Instead, different standards might apply;”*

(17) Since the 1998 Commission communication (COM (1998) 446 final), setting an agenda for the communication-related policy strategy in the Community, asserts that *“..the audiovisual sector does not require any major regulatory initiative in the short term;”*

(18) Since the 1999 Council Resolution on public service broadcasting (1999/C 30/01) has reaffirmed its functions in *“ensuring democracy, pluralism, social cohesion, cultural and linguistic diversity;”*

(19) Since the 1999 Council Conclusions the role of self-regulation (OJ C 283/2 of 6.10.99) suggests that the claim of regulating poverty related television contents and productions naturally invites the application of a particular form of self regulation, and that self-regulation as an “in nature” national issue reflecting values and concerns of the given society and therefore should be taken care of member states individually;

(20) Since the UK Broadcasting Standards Commission’s (BSC) codes on fairness and standards asserts: *“individuals should not be exploited needlessly or caused unnecessary distress, nor should the audience be made to feel mere voyeurs of others’ distress;”*

(21) Since the Independent Television Commission’s Programme Code (ITC) asserts: *“Viewers have a right to expect that licensed services will reflect their responsibility to preserve human dignity, as far as possible, in respect of both individuals and individuals as members of groups. Individuals should not be exploited needlessly or caused unnecessary distress, nor should the audience be made to feel mere voyeurs of others’ distress. In particular, consideration should be given to the treatment of vulnerable minorities, bearing in mind the likely effects of both misrepresentation and under-representation”*; they are: ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other, less obvious and vulnerable minorities including older people, homosexuals, and minority religious faiths or language groups;

(22) Since the ITC’s program code asserts: *“a producer needs to balance the wish to serve the needs of truth, the desire for compassion and the public interest against the risk of sensationalism and the possibility of an unwarranted invasion of privacy;”*

(23) Since the BSC standards code protects male and female behavior, the elderly, mental patients, and *“groups which may be singled out on grounds of race, religion, or sexuality”* from stereotyped representation;

(24) Since the BBC Producers' Guidelines (under Portrayal, 9.2.2.) warns from stereotyped portrayal *"People should appear in the full range of roles that reflect reality. BBC programmes should not categorise black people as criminals, women as house wives, disabled people as victims, gay people as ineffectual, old people as incapable, or people of any particular profession, vocation or walk of life as inevitable source of fun;"*

(25) Since the Independent Television Commission's Programme Code regards regulation as a dynamic process when it asserts: *"..licensees should aim to operate within the spirit of the Code, as well as the strict letter of it. The Code is open subject to interpretation in the light of changing circumstances and on some matters it may be necessary to introduce fresh requirements or advice from time to time;"*

(26) Since ITC program formulates content effect concerns (including concerns referring to cumulative effects) when portrayal of gratuitous violence *"can upset, disturb and offend and can be accused of desensitising viewers, or making them unduly fearful or of encouraging imitation. These are legitimate public concerns.."* (Code 1.7.) *...The regular and recurrent spectacle of violence may lead viewers to become less sensitive to violence or to overestimate the level of violence in the real world. Licensees must take into account the potential cumulative effect of violent material;"*

(27) Since Hungarian Broadcasting Act asserts: *"The broadcaster must observe and honor the constitutional order of the Republic of Hungary, his activity may not offend human rights and must not be instrumental to the rise of hatred against individuals, sexes, populations, nations, or ethnic, linguistic or other minorities or against churches or groups of a religious persuasion;"*

(28) Since Hungarian Broadcasting Act asserts: *"Broadcasting must not be intended to offend or prejudice, explicitly or indirectly, any minority or majority or to present or prejudice minorities or majorities based on racial criteria;"*

(29) Since The National Radio and Television Commission in Hungary (ORTT) seeks to coordinate a balance between free expression and fundamental human rights (to dignity and to access to information) and the aim of protection of minors in regulating digital services;

(30) Since in Hungarian law the content and means of protection of any fundamental human right that performs a restriction of free expression has to be laid down in a separate piece of legislation (act);

(31) Since in Hungarian law the right of human dignity is strictly connected to the

person in question portrayed or quoted;

(32) Since reality entertainment programs gain large audience share in prime time everywhere in Europe;

(33) Since commercial television professionals regard factual entertainment programs as important source of information and entertainment for the audience, and the majority of the commercial television profession regards these programs as of high esteem;

(34) Since media professionals outside of commercial television industry often blame reality entertainment programs with sensationalism (covering social issues as “horror”); inducing apathy and helplessness among the audience, and with unethical conduct (marketing human misery;)

(35) Since the Visegrad Papers project, the Voluntary Code of Ethics for Hungarian Broadcast Journalists, asserts: “*Disadvantaged people should not be made to look unusual or extreme.*”

(36) Since according to lawyers, media regulation should address the phenomenon of portraying social problems in reality entertainment programs without references to their structural causes;

(37) Since the Television Without Frontiers Directive encourages awareness and educational measures to reflect on problems associated with content-related issues;

(38) Since stereotypical representation of any group (or individual representing that group) harms the human dignity of the individual belonging to that group, because human dignity is a function of the ability of people to determine meanings about themselves, therefore stereotypical representation, as a human dignity concern could be regulated in the name of the public interest;

(39) Since critical media studies and empirical research have formulated numerous ways that media representations of the disadvantaged perform active roles in the exclusion of the disadvantaged;

***this proposal formulates the following framework of conclusions and recommendations regarding the television representation of disadvantaged:***

1. The delicate balance of freedom and solidarity is a genuine European value. As freedom is mainly exercised by individuals to pursue their goals and passions, solidarity –as policy, discourse and way of life– is the antidote against social exclusion.<sup>37</sup>
2. European community policy should reinforce that apart from important material variables, social exclusion is a function of meanings, perceptions, discourses people employ when perceive themselves and others, and the media plays an important role in this process.
3. Communication policy in the EU should recognize that the aim to eliminate social exclusion is in accordance with the public interest, therefore it can be understood as a legitimate balance of free expression.
4. Communication regulation should render voyeurism of human distress as protected by freedom to information until the presentation of the distress can be justified as addressing public interest concerns.
5. Fact in social sciences is not the same as fact in journalism or media policy. While the latter (as to be determined as true or false) guides contemporary media policy, the notion of exclusion invites another understanding of the notion of “fact“ too: Facts as collectively created beliefs emerge in a cumulative manner which process cannot be reconstructed as a mechanical sum of a number of “journalistic“ facts. As this cumulative process has been acknowledged by communication policy in regulating violent content (in the name of its cumulative effect), or by regulatory concerns regarding stereotyped portrayal, the conceptual conflict between these two notions of fact has been partly reconciled by communication policy already.
6. Taking into consideration the structure and philosophy of EU communication regulation, there are four technical ways to balance the freedom of expression with the aim of decreasing exclusion, as a trump. Firstly, regulation can render stereotyped portrayal as an act affecting human dignity (protected by the European Convention of Human Rights), because the meaning viewers decode from stereotyped portrayals is out of reach of the portrayed group or individual, and above all, the Convention asserts that the right to freedom of expression can be restricted for “the protection of the reputation or rights of others.“ Secondly, regulation can protect the disadvantaged as a minority (similarly to racial, ethnic or religious groups) from discrimination (ruled by the Television Without Frontiers Directive.) Thirdly, stereotyped portrayal can affect viewers’

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<sup>37</sup> An alternative and slightly more radical formulation of this recommendation could be formulated this way: One can trace social exclusion unmistakably, if the discussion of a social problem concentrates only to individual motivations and choices of individuals affected by the problem. (The application of this thesis to contemporary European media policy is truly disturbing: If the media representation of the disadvantaged can be approached only through the individual rights (to dignity and privacy) of portrayed individuals, this regulatory philosophy can be evaluated as an exclusionary practice.)

access (as a communication right) to undistorted information; this fundamental right is an essential element of the set of instruments protecting public debate as a means of democracy and self-government<sup>38</sup>. Fourthly, instead of a fundamental reassessment of content regulatory principles and practices, new hybrid infotainment programs could be regulated by a separate set of instruments.

7. Guidelines for non-stereotyped production and portrayal should be formulated by various policy actors, and these guidelines should be integrated into self-regulatory processes addressing production and content issues.
8. As it has been recognized by high level regulatory documents as a reaction to digital development, new broadcast television genres, especially reality TV and factual entertainment –as unprecedented hybrid texts– should be addressed by research and regulatory reflection would be important to assess these new contents, new audience reactions, new production-content relationships, and new media effects, and to juxtapose these assessments with current broadcast regulation (as it has been recently done by COE with regards reality shows raising dignity issues.)
9. Both national and European media regulatory bodies should initiate a research about the media representations of poverty in a longitudinal manner to be able to assess content accumulations and their effects.
10. Contents concerns, as sometimes elusive notions invite television professionals’ self-regulation.
11. Since there is a deep mistrust between television professionals, the cultural critic community, and sometimes the regulatory field, if cooperation cannot be expected, the reconciliatory process should be initiated by the regulator.

As we have stressed in the beginning of this section, today regulatory instruments do not pay particular interest to considerations regarding the media (especially television) representation of the poor. The analyzed stakeholder standpoints from the overall media policy field might suggest that *this proposed regulation of the television representation of the disadvantaged is a somewhat unusual regulatory enterprise, but nevertheless as a media policy reflection on the issue of exclusion, it is not alien to the spirit of the documents regulating social life in the European Union.*

## 5. Policy options

As evidences in previous sections suggest, essentialized portrayals of poverty in current affairs entertainment magazines play active roles in the symbolic (therefore

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<sup>38</sup> In the US this formula have been discussed as the “public forum doctrine” by Meiklejohn, Fiss, or Sunstein.

matter-of-fact) exclusion of the disadvantaged, therefore harms associated with social exclusion justify a regulation of the television contents in question. As we have pointed out in the analysis of stakes various relevant policy actors represent, the aim of the regulation is in accordance with the spirit of communication regulation. There are several different ways to design the regulation technicalities, and each choice holds different types of advantages and disadvantages. We have formulated the main regulatory recommendations in 11 points at the end of the previous section, and some of those recommendations are in conflict with each other. In this section we regroup these recommendations into three distinct policy choices; each of them seeks to address the concerns associated with television representation in poverty in a different way.

Before outlining an envisioned set of alternatives, it has to be made clear that *any content-related media policy has to contain the following elements regardless to the nature and direction of the policy initiative:*

**1. Proportionality.** Any restriction of free expression has to be in balance with the envisioned harm the content in question would have caused without its restriction.

**2. Universalism and realism.** Fundamental individual rights and public interest values are not negotiable, regardless to the nature of source of the content affecting those rights and values, while on the other hand, different contents, different means of content appropriation, different audiences, different reception modalities in each case require genuine regulatory reflections. Though these guidelines have been formulated in the Green paper on Convergence, therefore suggesting their application to online services, there is no reason to assume that the double objectives of universalism and realism are connected inherently to digital communication; these double objectives work properly in assessing regulatory concerns regarding new hybrid broadcast programs, such as television programs based on CCTV recordings, reality shows, or docu soaps.

**3. Content regulation in by nature national.** Though one can observe an increase in media contents' flow between cultures, languages and countries, national media regulation will be remaining the key actor in content regulation.

**4. Content regulation naturally implies self-regulation.** As the Saarbrücken expert seminar on self-regulation (1999) has summarized it in its recommendations, compared to overarching and comprehensive regulatory schemes, it is self-regulation that can adjust conflicting professional and ethical norms to regulatory principles in the contexts of technical possibilities, values, and traditions represented by different forms of media, culture, or country. In doing so, self-regulation (either as voluntary, or as co-regulation) has the salient capacity to streamline professional considerations

with public interest standards highlighted in content-related issues, especially associated with human dignity:

*“self-regulatory or co-regulatory measures must be suited to the purpose of defending the public interest. In particular, effective protection must be provided for natural and legal persons whose interests are harmed by what is said in the media. .. Self-regulation and co-regulation are more appropriate to some fields than others. In fields such as the protection of minors and human dignity, for example, both can help to ensure that operators assume their responsibilities towards the public.”*

Self-regulation possesses various advantages (compared to sheer legal procedures), such as flexibility, empowering capacity for the media and for consumers, and can preserve public reputation of the media industry.<sup>39</sup>

**5. Research on mediated exclusion.** Non-stereotyped portrayal –as a key concept in the pursuit of inclusion in and by the media– should be addressed by a Green Paper in national and EU levels. The justification of national regulatory concerns regarding to stereotyped portrayal of gender groups, age groups, groups based on sexual preference, language, etc. should be addressed in a systematic manner, as well as the assessment of these regulatory attempts would be desirable.<sup>40</sup> The Green Paper should assess interdependences between exclusionary (stereotyped) portrayal, social status of the portrayed, perceptions on the portrayed by others, and the self-perceptions of the portrayed groups or individuals.

**6. Two sides of the same coin: Content regulation and media literacy.** Even the most sophisticated balance of free expression and protected public interest values would be nearly meaningless without a critical, cultivated and curious audience. Media literacy is largely a school matter; media-related knowledge and skills should be a subject in secondary school curricula. Media classes in secondary (and perhaps in

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<sup>39</sup> Seminar recommendations have concluded with certain demands regarding any self-regulatory mechanism: Firstly, when it does not work, it is the state that has to intervene. Secondly, it has to be clear, transparent, socially acceptable, legal/constitutional, widely well known. Thirdly, self-regulation structures (media operators, user associations, self-regulation and co-regulation bodies) share responsibilities of „awareness raising, creating channels of input, and updating the system“. Fourthly, Member states hold the responsibility of support the self-regulatory process. Fifthly, European institutions should „promote exchange of experience (industry, user associations, self-regulation and co-regulation bodies and individual countries).“

<sup>40</sup> Stereotype plays a large role in the equity discourse (over distributing values and resources) this way influencing public opinion, a agenda, and decision making. Stereotype is never just style. It is always a further argument to maintain a situation that favors the powerless less than the powerful.

middle) schools should be given more emphasis in public education. Awareness raising regarding content issues as an indispensable element of a well functioning media system, as it is suggested by the Television Without Frontiers Directive naturally involves media literacy.

### **5.1 Policy Option Nr. 1: Contemporary media regulation needs only minor adjusting to tackle the issue of portrayal of the poor**

This option is based on the conviction that media regulation policy has been formulated in the European Community, later Union, through such a long and meticulous deliberation among respected stakeholders, that it is somewhat unlikely that any major content regulation issue would have been missed by the European policy process in the past 15 years or so. Current Hungarian media regulation system is ready to tackle issues associated with unfair portrayal of the disadvantaged; if anyone's dignity has been offended by media content, the independent Hungarian judiciary system would make a decision about it, based on international legal standards. Any other complaint regarding media representation issues belongs to the terrain of taste and opinion, and cannot be justified in itself as a basis to initiate a government policy. Hungarian media regulation authority's (ORTT) Complaints Committee was established to answer and take action based on individual citizens' complaints. Nevertheless, larger societal implication of the portrayal of the disadvantaged –outlined in previous sections in this proposal– justify certain policy actions, and contemporary media policy instruments, both in national and European levels, are appropriate to initiate the following steps:

- The European Commission has continuously monitored content issues in protecting minors and human dignity. Subsequent reports can tackle concerns that are outlined in this proposal.
- National content and production standards (based on different traditions and on the nature of the given national media policy structure) can address concerns regarding the portrayal of the disadvantaged. The most appropriate way to create these standards is the self-regulatory process of the television profession.
- Since diversity is an outcome of the work of the all-television industry, more analytical television portrayal of social problems is probably more of the task of public service broadcasting than that of the commercial audiovisual media.

#### **Option Nr. 1: Pro arguments**

- The strength of this option lays in its realism. Policy initiatives of smaller scale that can be built on existing policy instruments and philosophies (enjoying the benefits of the status quo situation) can reach further than more radical proposals that have to change too many things in the policy architecture at once.
- The advantage of this option lays in the rationale of the dual media system that provides diversity through a multitude of channels, each of them with a distinct choice of style and envisioned role in a democratic media system.

### **Option Nr. 2: Con arguments**

- The core of the problem description regarding the television portrayal of the poor in a previous section (Why regulate) lays in the nature of social exclusion in contemporary European societies; exclusion is connected to language, meanings and perception in a large extent; contemporary media regulation is simply colorblind to these concerns.
- Social exclusion is a cumulative complex process; fact- and event-based media regulation lacks conceptual tools to address significantly content concerns which are based on contents' cumulative impact – even the Television Without Frontiers Directive contains no reference to the term *stereotype*.

## **5.2 Policy Option Nr. 2: The disadvantaged as a minority group should enjoy protection from discriminating, unfair, or stereotyped portrayal**

Contemporary media regulation protects groups from harmful or unfair portrayal in three ways: Firstly, the Television Without Frontiers Directive protects groups of race, sex and nationality from contents inducing discrimination and hatred. Secondly, Council Recommendation on portraying gender groups confirms the protection of men and women from stereotyped portrayal. Thirdly, various national television regulation documents protect all sorts of groups from stereotyped portrayal, such as groups of race, nationality, language and sexual preference, women, men, mental patients, the elderly, people with disabilities, and “*people of any particular profession, vocation or walk of life.*” Poor people should deserve the same level of protection. This option seeks to pursue this aim through the following steps:

- The poor should be included into the groups that are protected from stereotyped portrayal in the various national and EU-level regulatory documents.
- A shared general EU-level document should be prepared that contains guidelines regarding elements of a non-stereotyped portrayal.

- National media regulation authorities should perform continuous media watch of stereotyped portrayal in television programs.
- If self-regulation in television industry is unable to address the question of stereotypes in a self-regulatory process, the initiative should be taken by the national media regulation authority

### **Option Nr. 2: Pro arguments**

- Groups who are protected from mediated exclusion (stereotyped portrayal) have deserved this regulatory attention not because of any given trait or characteristics; these groups have suffered prejudice that makes their life difficult. The extension of this protection to the poor could be justified easily, because the life of the poor is perhaps more difficult, than the life of women, or the life of the elderly.
- The simple extension of the protection of certain groups from stereotyped portrayal to those living in poverty is a mere technicality; it requires no significant streamlining and adjustment in the overall national or EU regulatory framework.

### **Option Nr. 2: Con argument**

- Individuals belonging to groups of nationality, race, gender, sexual preference, or age usually assert their “membership” in the definition of their identity – they do not receive this trait as a mere label from others, at the same time these traits are given to these people. On the contrary, poverty is much less given to poor people (compared to age or race, for example), and sometimes people might find it difficult to identify themselves as “poor.”

## **5.3 Policy Option Nr. 3: Local fix – Only the new and problematic hybrid contents should be regulated**

The emergence of a set of new factual entertainment genres does not represent a sufficient reason to reformulate the meaning of fundamental principles, such as human dignity, laid down in basic legal documents, such as the European Convention of Human Rights or the Television Without Frontiers Directive. Pre-infotainment television content has been regulated sufficiently by supra-national and national audiovisual regulatory instruments. New infotainment programs and contents require a

separate instrument that can tackle content and production concerns raised specifically by these genres. This option contains the following steps to reach its objective:

- Contemporary audiovisual media regulatory instruments should be tested in terms of their applicability to the specific features of newly emerging infotainment programs (human interest stories, current affair entertainment magazines, docu soaps, docu dramas, reality TV programs using footage from CCTV cameras, crime buster magazines, confessional chat shows, reality shows, and so on.
- If current regulatory means are not appropriate to handle concerns associated with these new genres representing stylistic and categorical elusiveness, new rules should be created that reflect the nature of these new genres in a genuine way; similarly to the spirit of media regulation of the Internet and another digital services.

### **Option Nr. 3: Pro argument**

- Compared to another options that aim to rethink regulatory fundamentals, such as the public interest, this is a quick and easy solution. A good example for this is the swift reaction of the Standing Committee On Transfrontier Television of the Council Of Europe (2002) to the sweep of controversies induced by “Big Brother“-style reality shows across Europe. Though the document (published in 2002 April) represents no legal binding to European countries, its authoritative comments have been instructive in the discussion between the Hungarian regulatory authority (ORTT) and three commercial channels with currently running reality shows in 2002 September.

### **Option Nr. 3: Con argument**

- Media history has not come to an end in 2002. New technologies, new contents, new hybrid combinations of previous genres will be challenging regulatory standards, and the response to these challenges should not take the shape of a mere sequence of *ac hoc* reactions.

## **6. Option Four - A synthetic solution: Recommendations**

The novelty and strength of this final option lays in its genuine ability to harmonize

desirable elements from the previous three options. The main feature of this strategy is that in the course of addressing concerns regarding the television representation of the socially disadvantaged, it seeks to balance creative capacities of actors performing essential roles in audiovisual policy, as EU media policy regulators, national media authorities, expert groups and think tanks, commercial and public service television stations, media professionals' associations, media watch groups, media researchers, advocacy groups, media literacy experts and practitioners, and last but not least, the audience of television programs. The following course of action is in fact, a circuit of actions, feedbacks, cooperation, choices, conflicts and reconciliation. The following basic assumptions serve as value-related guidelines to this policy strategy:

- I. The delicate balance of freedom and solidarity is a genuine European value. As freedom is mainly exercised by individuals to pursue their goals and passions, solidarity –as policy, discourse and way of life– is the antidote against social exclusion.
- II. The objective of decreasing social exclusion is a justifiable public interest concern to regulate the media.
- III. Social exclusion in modern democracies is strongly connected to socially constructed meanings people hold with or without their will and intention; these meanings serve as guidelines for others (and for the individuals themselves) in the process of their recognition as members of their communities (possessing particular notions of cultural citizenship.)
- IV. The conceptual added value of the notion of exclusion, compared to poverty, is that –apart from material hardships– it reflects a deprivation from participation in the community. In contemporary modern societies “participation“ is more often media portrayal than individual participation, while “community“ in concrete terms resembles rather to media audiences. Therefore, exclusion of a group is a function of the nature of their portrayal in the media.
- V. The rationale for free expression as a public interest value lays in its capacity to create dialogue and forum for managing public issues; therefore, particular care is needed, when in the name of the public interest free expression is protected in the expense of depriving groups or individuals from entering into the public dialogue, because as subjects of stereotypes they are deprived from controlling meanings about their life and therefore excluded from rational deliberation.
- VI. Human dignity possessed by individuals is the function of their ability to control meanings associated with their life. Stereotyping people is therefore an act of deprivation of their human dignity.<sup>41</sup>
- VII. New hybrid forms of factual and entertainment programs sweep throughout

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<sup>41</sup> It is a noteworthy parallel that an extreme deprivation of human dignity is when people are deprived of their name and given a number instead; the intention of that practice is the total deprivation of dignity, that is, to make that person a non-person – an object

television industry in Europe; substantial concern has been expressed regarding the nature and impact of these programs, especially concerning their treatment of issues associated with the social and cultural margins of the society.

- VIII. Considering that in media regulation (i) the Television Without Frontiers Directive contains no reference to stereotyped portrayal; (ii) the justifiedness of someone's portrayal can be evaluated unambiguously today only through whether facts appearing in that portrayal are true or not, and; (iii) stereotyped portrayal of the poor presents concern nowhere in the EU; one can argue that these facts can be evaluated as active elements of the process of exclusion the disadvantaged suffer today in Europe.

The following steps constitute the elements of a policy process that aims to address concerns regarding the television portrayal of the poor and needy.<sup>42</sup>

- 1) Initiate university courses in social sciences (communication, sociology, social work), journalism, and law programs at the university level on the issues of representation, power, exclusion, regulation, infotainment, etc. Developing curricula, publishing readers and books.
- 2) Publish op-eds, arrange interviews in dailies, weeklies, and in radio and television programs on the policy issue and process.
- 3) Build a network of interested individuals, professionals, and institutions. Build a thematic website on media and poverty, focusing on academic, journalist-professional and regulatory aspects; get feedback, open a forum.
- 4) Do an empirical media studies research on poverty portrayals in factual entertainment programs. Publish it.
- 5) Prepare an assessment of regulatory instruments –media outlets' codes of conduct, national media policies with special attention to the Complaints Committee of ORTT, EU-policies– relevant from the viewpoints of dignity, factual entertainment, stereotyping, and portrayal of the disadvantaged.
- 6) Prepare a curriculum framework –on media, exclusion and inclusion– for secondary school media literacy classes or courses, consult it with curriculum developers, education policy makers, teacher associations; develop curriculum, prepare classroom materials, do teacher in-service training, organize pilot classes.

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<sup>42</sup> As noted before, in an ideal case, these steps –addressing rather concrete, easily accessible goals as well as complex, long term cultural changes, or a range of activities from individual initiatives to EU-level policies– form a circuit of heterogeneous steps, therefore any kind of sequence-like outline represents a certain level of abstraction. Still, the various steps in this plan proceed from the concrete, local, and individual action towards more institutionalized structures, up to EU-policies.

- 7) Approach the national media regulation authority with the conclusion of the work done so far. Initiate a discussion with the cooperation of the authority. Discuss the possibility of a pilot research project done by the authority: a longitudinal monitoring and content analysis of poverty-related programs in public service and commercial television programs.
- 8) Get journalists, media companies, advocacy groups, and organizations of the disadvantaged involved into the discussion. Since there is a deep mistrust between television professionals, the cultural critic community, and sometimes the regulatory field, if cooperation cannot be expected, the reconciliatory process should be initiated by the regulator.
- 9) Prepare a few concrete content, editorial and production recommendations and consult it with journalists, editors, producers, their associations and companies. These recommendations might include: (i) Avoid “totally-episodic framing“ in portraying social problems; (ii) When presenting a story about a disadvantaged person, include clues about the size of the group in the society sharing the same problem; (iii) On the longer run, editorial attention should be paid to not to portray poor people exclusively in the contexts of deviance, suffering, everyday extremities, freakish practices, but also in the contexts of pleasures, dignity, sacrifice, and beauty; (iv) When portraying extreme human distress (physical suffering, illness, mutilated bodies, personal tragedies, include a rhetoric argument about what sort of public interest concerns are addressed by those portrayals;
- 10) Consult human rights experts about possibilities of a precedent-like lawsuit regarding stereotyped portrayal in terms of (i) human dignity; (ii) the question of the subject of the right to reply to a program portraying a person belonging to a disadvantaged group<sup>43</sup>. Consult the possibility of a follow-up research by human rights activists interviewing people who were portrayed in factual entertainment programs about their experience about fairness and accuracy in terms of the production process and the broadcast content.
- 11) With the cooperation of the national media regulation authority initiate a formal process of self-regulation in the public service and commercial television industry. Discuss content recommendations with them. Facilitate innovative productions highlighting solidarity and inclusion. Facilitate the production of a shared code of conduct. Facilitate a distribution of responsibilities between public service and commercial production.
- 12) Do an assessment of the process from (1) to (11). Report the results to international professional organizations, and policy actors. Seek for further input from abroad.

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<sup>43</sup> Hungarian Broadcasting Act: “Broadcasting must not be intended to offend or prejudice, explicitly or indirectly, any minority or majority or to present or prejudice minorities or majorities based on racial criteria”

- 13) An EU-level expert group should assess, coordinate and dovetail experiences of various policy fields regarding the nature of exclusion in European societies. For example, while it is a commonplace for sociologists or social policy professionals, that the way the public discusses exclusion or poverty, is an independent variable in the process of reproduction of exclusion, the exclusionary rhetoric in the media is less obvious in media regulation policy.
- 14) Research on mediated exclusion and on non-stereotyped portrayal –as a key concept in the pursuit of inclusion in and by the media in national and EU levels. The justification of national regulatory concerns regarding to stereotyped portrayal of gender groups, age groups, groups based on sexual preference, language, etc. should be addressed in a systematic manner, as well as the assessment of these regulatory attempts would be desirable. The study should assess interdependences between exclusionary (stereotyped) portrayal, social status of the portrayed, perceptions on the portrayed by others, and the self-perceptions of the portrayed groups or individuals.
- 15) A general reassessment of EU media policy instruments regarding portrayal of the disadvantaged. This enterprise should tackle issues such as
  - (i) whether stereotyped portrayal constitute a harm of human dignity (protected by the European Convention of Human Rights), because the meaning viewers decode from stereotyped portrayals is out of reach of the portrayed group or individual, and above all, the Convention asserts that the right to freedom of expression can be restricted for “the protection of the reputation or rights of others“;
  - (ii) whether regulation can protect the disadvantaged as a minority (similarly to racial, ethnic or religious groups) from discrimination (ruled by the Television Without Frontiers Directive;
  - (iii) how to address cumulative effects with the current (fact- and event-based) regulatory paradigm;
  - (iv) under what conditions the right to reply (in case of a stereotyped portrayal) can be exercised by other people belonging to the same group;
  - (v) whether stereotyped portrayal can affect viewers’ access (as a communication right) to undistorted information – this fundamental right is an essential element of the set of instruments protecting public debate as a means of democracy and self-government;
  - (vi) whether reality TV genres (human interest stories, current affair entertainment magazines, docu soaps, docu dramas, reality TV programs using footage from CCTV cameras, crime buster magazines, confessional chat shows, reality shows, etc.) mixing fiction and reality in numerous unprecedented ways, require or not the reassessment of

regulation addressing concepts, such as dignity, privacy, informed consent, etc;

- (vii) a reassessment of Commission Recommendations on the protection of minors and human dignity in the light of research findings. Expected result: A Green Paper with recommendations. Supply findings of the whole process to the discussion about the late 2002 report on the *Television Without Frontiers Directive*.

As it is suggested by these recommendations, the success of this proposed initiative lays largely in the willingness and ability of the various policy actors to cooperate. This proposal therefore is not even the first step in this policy process; the overall aim of this proposal is to set the direction for the process and to facilitate the cooperation between producers, regulators, the interested public, and the viewers in order to achieve its farthest goal: A free and good quality media governed by sensible and virtuous rules.

## **7 A final personal remark**

In the course of the research over the issue of the relationship between exclusion and discourse and its policy implications, a recurring question has caused me a steadily growing amazement. Namely, how it is possible that the shared understanding of poverty, exclusion, and social difference, developed in European social sciences in the past decades –stressing the process-like, “cultural” character of these phenomena– has made infinitesimal impact on communication policy. In a similar vein, it is not less obscure for me that how authors of cultural analyses of “ideological representation”, or “mediated poor bashing” could stop at the threshold of their diagnosis and refrain from plugging their findings into the policy process. Nevertheless, if nothing else, I have learnt one very important thing during the research and design of this policy proposal. Innovative methods, the role of intuitions, and the qualitative paradigm have always borrowed an certain aura of “poetic sensibility” to cultural analyses of contemporary societies. After reviewing policy philosophies and practices, shifts between change and continuity in the policy process, one thing is rather obvious: The inventiveness and sharp sensibility of cultural analysis is a pale reminiscence of skills and knowledge one needs in the mastery of policy tools in order to change social realities.

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## **Appendix 1: Research methods**

This initiative is based on the following research segments:

- A social science desk research on issues such as exclusion, the nature of poverty in contemporary European societies, status and mobility, media impacts and effects, poverty portrayals in the press and television.
- An empirical research (text analysis and interviews) on Fókusz, the oldest current affair entertainment magazine.
- An extensive study (desk research and interviews) of EU and Hungarian communication regulation instruments with particular attention to content issues.

## **Appendix 2: Research on *Fókusz***

*Appendix 2* contains a short description of the development of reality entertainment programming in Hungary, with special attention to *Fókusz*, the flagship of prime time current affair entertainment programs.

### **1. Factual entertainment television in Hungary**

Reality programming has a short five-year history in Hungary; it has been introduced by the three national commercial television channels, all established in 1997. These days Hungarian audience (of about 10 million people) has an access to four national channels of ground transmission (two public service stations: M1 and M2, and two commercial ones: TV2 and RTL Klub), to a third public service channel of satellite transmission (Duna TV) with the mission of serving 3,5 Hungarians in the neighboring countries, and to numerous local channels. These days M1, TV2 and RTL Klub have daily and weekly programs that can be characterized as reality programming, including human-interest magazines, police magazines, real life ambulance drama, and confessional chat shows. Though reality programming had had certain early forms before 1989, such as the high quality documentary film tradition, “serious” talk shows of highly respected senior TV personalities and the ill-famous Blue Light (*Kék fény*), a police magazine exposing good citizens of the People’s Republic of Hungary to horrendous examples (and consequences) of anti-social behavior, reality TV, as a full-blown entertainment genre can be associated now mainly with the two foreign-owned commercial stations, RTL Klub and TV2.

The appearance of this new genre has made a remarkable stir-up among the audience. Firstly, these programs have been very popular, as prime-time programs they contribute significantly to the overall ratings of their host station. Secondly, they have produced sharp dividing lines in the audience. As probably everywhere in the world, Hungarian audience can be divided roughly into a few camps, that is, the fans of these programs, the ones who watch them and complain about their cheap character, the ones who don’t watch them and complain even more, media professionals who (depending on their employer) love them or hate them, media critics who usually regard these programs as lucrative voyeuristic enterprises, and media studies scholars who say that “well, it’s a little more complicated.” Reality programming has had an interesting neighbor-scene outside of television as well; independent Hungarian fiction cinema and literature has often employed recently topics and characters resembling remarkably to human interest reports of reality TV programs, all navigating on the troubled waters between fiction and reality. The relatively short

history of Hungarian factual entertainment programming can be regarded as a fast-moving and bloody evolution scene, about the 90% of the overall number of reality productions now belong to the extinct species category, there are only four of the currently running programs that has more than two years of history. The flagship of these programs is *Fókusz*, a daily prime-time human-interest magazine of RTL Klub.

## **2 *Fókusz***

*Fókusz* (Focus) was launched four years ago as a daily tabloid magazine with a strong human interest feature, designed straightforwardly after western reality TV programs, such as the German *Explosive*, and the US *Insider's View*. From its very beginning, it has been a prime-time program starting around 7:00 PM, right after the evening news, and now preceding RTL KLUB's own produced daily soap called *Barátok közt* (Among Friends). Its length is about 30 minutes, including commercials, and it is usually comprised of four or five reports (divided by commercials). *Fókusz* has two weekend mutants; *Fókusz Plusz* (Focus Plus) is of a same character as *Fókusz*, but it presents usually one or two reports in more depth and detail, and *Fókusz Interjú* (Focus Interview) which is a quite seriously tuned studio interview with celebrities ("talking now in a different way") or people who had done something remarkable of serious appeal (for example a father who started individually an education program for teenagers about drugs after his son died as a heroin addict.) In terms of its topics, style, genre, narrative, visual rhetoric, and most importantly, its anchors, *Fókusz* was designed to present a dynamic youth appeal. Its anchors (all in their twenties) are now celebrities themselves, appearing on magazine covers, rating high on the "Celeb Stock Exchange" of a chief internet news portal, and key targets of the "who we want" section of various Hungarian celeb porn sites. About 80% of its reports have been produced by *Fókusz* staff itself, and the remaining 20% are foreign (mostly US, and with a decreasing share, British, Romanian, French, and German) productions.

Very roughly, main topics and genres of *Fókusz* reports can be classified into a few general categories. "Light" human interest stories present a wide variety of soft freakish practices (often as official qualifications to get into the Guinness Book of Records), such as underexposed amateur artists and inventors producing something unusual, all sorts of different stories with a slight touch of soft sex, animal stories, new sports, strange vehicles, lottery and casino miracles, paraphenomena, look-alikes, etc. "Hard" human interest stories' main types are family conflicts (usually about children), neighborhood conflicts, medical stories (mistreatment cases, mysterious diseases, miraculous healings), crime cases, the "fight with the faceless bureaucracy" genre, the "on the margin" genre about life and problems of people in severe life conditions, etc. A certain segment of the "hard" human-interest reports (especially about missing people, medical problems, and certain conflicts) can be characterized as

“last straw” attempts of those appearing in those reports. In an average day, the 4 or 5 reports of one day’s *Fókusz* program represent a wide variety of the types above, producing a rather heterogeneous set of people, topics, problems, genres, and narrative standpoints represented in one day’s program. *Fókusz* has self-promo ads a day before and on the day of the program, calling viewers’ attention to the most important report of the given day’s *Fókusz*. Péter Kolosi, the first editor-in-chief and anchor of the program has given an explanation for the variety of topics and genre in an interview (Kolosi P., 2002), stressing that apart from being a basic rule in the genre, program heterogeneity gives an opportunity to *Fókusz* editors to include reports on “hard” topics discussing “serious” social questions that, according to Kolosi, viewers would never watch if they were presented in separate programs. Kolosi explained this the following way: “*There is that arrow thing. There must be one hit report each day, which as a shot arrow, pulls the other reports with itself. And the self-promos are to open a space for the arrow.*” Another element of the self-promotion is the (average) 30-second lead presented by the anchor preceding the given report in which he or she describes the coming story. These leads play important pedagogical roles offering preferred readings for the audience about the story in a cognitive, and perhaps more importantly in an emotional-attitudinal context as well.

As we have pointed out previously, a remarkable share of the program’s reports cover stories in which poverty appears either in a dramaturgical role, or in co-ordinated, illustrative manner. In 37 reports (12% of the total sample) poverty was one of the main dramaturgical lines in the report, or the report was about another issue (health, irresponsible authorities, etc.) but the report contained strong visual references to poverty. The main findings of the research can be found in Section 2.2 of this document.

### **Appendix 3: Sampled reports from *Fókusz***

Appendix 3 contains the complete list and summary of the *Fókusz* reports in the sampled period. The sample contains 89 days of program, comprising 304 reports. Sample periods are the following: Spring (April 8-18<sup>th</sup>, May 8-29<sup>th</sup>); Summer (August 10 – September 10<sup>th</sup>); Winter (December 17<sup>th</sup> – January 6<sup>th</sup>.) Sampling *Fókusz* has required certain considerations. Our viewpoints were the following: Firstly, we wanted to cover fairly recent production. Secondly, we wanted to sample periods belonging to different seasons (though supposedly in Hungarian television business there is no seasonal Nielsen-effect.) Thirdly, we wanted to avoid sampling the post-9/11 period, because the events had taken a considerable share from the program for several weeks. Fourthly, as poverty was our research topic, we wanted to cover the charity season around Christmas. In a few cases certain tapes were not accessible at RTL KLUB's video archive, in those cases we chose a few days from outside the sampled period.

The following section contains the description of the report analyzed in the sample period:

#### **April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Tuesday**

1. Dispute contest of teenagers.
2. Professional dog walkers in Buenos Aires (Argentine production)
3. Conflict about a family's debt. A family with 12 members had to run away from private creditors who were threatening them from their home without any belongings. The size of debt is in question: It has grown from HUF 30.000 (USD 310) to HUF 1 M (USD 3.700) in a few months.

Narrator: *"Now it's hard to figure out who is in debt, with how much and for whom."*  
Parents have placed their children to a temporary shelter (state orphanage).

Expert: The director of the orphanage.

Child: *"I have always dreamt about that we have a detached house with a garden, and everything will turn all right."*

The reporter (as the quote proves) has not been able to clarify exactly basic facts that the whole story was based on.

Mixed genre: Suggesting sympathy for the family, but this sympathy has not been operationalized into any kind of external responsibility. The main message of the story is that sometimes unfortunate things happen "out there", and perhaps it is not the mistake or incapacity of the reporter and the viewer if they do not understand exactly what and why things happen in such a way "out there".

4. A beauty parlor teaches visually impaired women how to do their makeup. Narrator: "Students at the course have never seen lipstick, makeup, or mascara." Close shots

on the eyes of the clients. Narrator: "Gaining self-respect is the most important. ... After the course, students can walk proudly on the street."

Mixed genre: Voyeurism and emancipation.

5. A village car mechanic constructs Lotus cars as a hobby

### **April 5<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. Two deceased women's bodies were mixed up in a hospital, relatives wanted to bury the woman who passed away but they got only her ashes.
2. A marriage of two women (foreign production).
3. A 12-year old girl is pregnant, she claims that she was raped by her brother-in-law, but later she took it back. According to local people, it was because the relatives of that man have threatened her.
4. Monks in a Polish village are the voluntary fire brigade.
5. Kormos, the cat is addicted to cigarette butts.

### **April 6<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. A young woman claims that her boyfriend sold her for HUF 30.000 (USD 110) and for a used Lada for a neighbor who has already had a wife. The two women had become in good terms up until the girl fell in love with another man.
2. A safe pistol that works only with a separate security device.
3. Sick child in a hospital, her mother spends the whole day there.
4. Dog walkers in the Netherlands are fined if they don't pick up the litter.
5. A Hungarian woman claims that she is an incarnation of Marilyn Monroe.

### **April 7<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. A young woman (with inborn physical deficiencies) has become pregnant, killed her baby and committed suicide.
2. A British artist paints miniature pictures.
3. Lots of men live in Alsószentmárton with the same name.
4. Children with glasses are in a separate group in a kindergarten in Pécel.
5. A Romanian man has become paralyzed 25 years ago and since then he has been in a hospital.

### **April 8<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

1. Young women sold as sex slaves. A Hungarian girl from a state orphanage (about 18) has applied for a job at an agency to work in Mexico as a bar dancer. It has turned out there that she was expected to have sex with bar guests. (She tells her story in a dark room, her face is faded out, close shots on her nervous hands.) After hard conflicts she could manage to resist her "employer's" will to serve guests in such a way, and finally ran away back to Hungary.

Expert: "Almost every girl from state orphanages is in such a danger who wish to get a job or just accommodation."

Narrator: Corrupt police officers cooperate with pimps.

Expert: An NGO's (against sex slavery) activist.

The report goes on with an "application" of an undercover female journalist for such a job in a suburban house. (Amateur-looking (hidden) camera moves –proof of authenticity–, unclear, unfocused pictures, gray tones.) Discussion with the agent who insists on that the applicant would make lots of money, no sex guaranteed, etc.

Expert: INTERPOL officer.

Narrator: *"Sex job agencies, go-betweens, pimps, costumers, corrupt police officers, lawyers, who regain female meat product from the police, and transport it for the owner, the pimp, who makes his living out of it - they constitute the commercial network marketing a human being, a woman."*

Last still: The girl from the story in a shopping mall, NGO hotline number for women in danger appears.

Mixed genre: Clear public service aspects (NGO hotline, etc.) presented in an almost melodramatic context. Accurate and appropriate expert presentation mixed with pictures of a woman with no face and trembling hands.

2. The proud fraud who sold Budapest's Western Terminal (railway station). A young man in jail, apparently very proud of his talent of cheating all sorts of people from the society. (Hands shown.)

### April 10<sup>th</sup>, Monday

1. Disco sex. Imitated female orgasm competition in a disco.
2. Breast-enlargement with telepathy and "hand-radiation" (soft-porno allusions).

Expert: Plastic surgery expert and his misgivings.

3. Soccer fans with their tape recorder at the game.

They recorded their fan-slogans at home and played it during the game. Older lower middle class male audience raises eyebrows.

4. Illegal amateur speed-start car race in a country city, Kecskemét, every night.

License plates, faces faded out. Narrator: *"It's a miracle that so far there hasn't been any accident."*

### April 11<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday

1. Collapsing house after flood. A lower middle class family from a small village (Tiszabábolna) flooded recently by Tisza river. They have no money. There is no electricity, they use oil lamps and candles. Deep cracks in the wall, slowly crumbling house. The local government has offered a shelter but they do not want to leave their house. Camera move towards (into) the pot on the gas oven.

Father: *"Yes, I'm scared, very scared but for the time being, I can do nothing, that's the truth."*

Expert: Local government representative.

Genre: Transparent pictures of helplessness.

2. Orangutan baby in the London Zoo. Abandoned by its mother, a woman breastfeeds the little monkey (pictures of the monkey sucking.)
3. Families don't want to leave their flooded house. Old poor people. Husband: Weak and sick, cannot leave his bed, can barely speak. 15 centimeter water in the room, furniture stand on bricks in the room.

Another family. Little girl asked by the reporter: "Aren't you scared of water here?"

Genre: Pictures of misery and helplessness, no cue of solution.

4. New medication against impotence in the US (US production)
5. Son disowned by his stepfather. This story is a continuation of another story of *Fókusz* of some months before. A 17-year boy was expelled from home by his father, saying he could return if he starts working. The boy left the town and lived with homeless people. He's got a job but his stepfather still hasn't let him in. Now he lives in a shed in their garden sharing it with goats, living in smell and excrement. He's got hooked on sniffing glue. Somewhat intoxicated when talking to the reporter. His mother and grandmother feel sorry for him but cannot help.

Narrator: "József Sándor Disznósi can blame only one person for his fate, it's he himself. He has got no goals, he cares nothing about future. The only thing he considers as important in how to find his stolen ID."

Genre: As usual, we learn nothing about the "non-photographable" causes of this situation: In this presentation, this miserable life is a result of a sequence of decisions of a few people.

### **April 12<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. US military officer raped a little girl in Kosova.
2. Visually impaired parents with 7 children live in a small village, Táborfalva, just moved from Havana housing project (Budapest). Impaired sight is the main dramaturgical plotline in the report, i.e. "technologies of living in dark."

Narrator: Distasteful play with words on the expense of the people appearing in the program in the narration: "Literally, they bought their house sight unseen." "If it is possible to say, they fell of love at first sight", etc.

Mixed genre: Voyeurism, essentialization with sympathy.

3. Children with Down syndrome. A new technology enables physicians to spot Down syndrome in an early phase of pregnancy.
4. A millionaire in South Africa collects military airplanes.
5. A Russian woman does fakir exercises to heal herself.

### **April 13<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. A 103-year old woman undergoing a (successful) eye operation (glaucoma). Close pictures on her eyes, on her hands too. Again, a mixed genre: Voyeuristic portrayal with the intention to induce sympathy.
2. A man from Slovakia has made a bicycle of wood.

3. An 11-year old girl as a parachutist. (Homemade VHS shooting inserts). His middle class father was reported to the police, for endangering the life of the girl.
4. An elephant seal breaking cars in New Zealand (New Zealand production).
5. A man from a village (Etyek) has built a wall of stones that he got as presents from 17 countries in the past decades.

#### **April 14<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. Three young men raped and strangled a teenager girl in a country town. All of them were drunk.
2. A recent innovation: Computer aid for stammering children (foreign production).
3. A horse riding record: Jumping over several cars.
4. Russian animal smuggler gang caught by the police (foreign production).
5. An old man made a cannon of steel debris and plays military scenes with it in Létavértes. [Style: Human interest.](#)

#### **April 15<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plussz

1. On cloning (Partly foreign production)
2. A Slovak man's supernatural characteristics (a human magnet).

#### **April 17<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. The couple's wedding car is a thrash dump truck.
2. French scientists identified a chemical that makes aging slowing.
3. A Hungarian karate champion's Guinness record in breaking 2.000 roof tiles.
4. A Hungarian new age healer hypnotizes his clients through phone.

#### **April 18<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday**

1. Contraceptive pills for men, a recent Italian invention (foreign production).
2. A painter who paints his pictures in seconds.
3. Hungarian look-alikes of US movie stars.
4. A US scientist anticipates major volcanic activities in the US in near future (Partly US production)

#### **May 8<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. Dangerous street corner in Aszód. Several children have been hit by cars. PUBSERV
2. A report about two journalists (Rózsa Eduardo Kôbányai János), and their conflict that they decided to resolve with a duel, which they have cancelled finally.
3. A widow with four children commissioned a company to build them a house but they disappeared with the money. It was 11 years ago, and they live in a half-ready crumbling house with lots of debts, in the last 7 years without gas and electricity. Close shot on an empty pot. [Style: Public service with melodrama.](#)

4. Harley Davidson gathering in Hungary, corporate CEOs and celebrities (Jimmy, Delhusa Gjon).

### **May 9<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday**

1. A continuation of an earlier report (April 10<sup>th</sup>) on illegal car races. A young man died after speeding on a bad road. Experts: Police officer, physician.
2. Children in poverty in Colombia. Violence, misery, poverty.
3. An American boy without legs, but he learned how to do various sports (foreign production).
4. A Roma family (mother and three children) in an (unidentified) small village. All the children are intersexual, having both sexes' genitals. The mother treats them as girls, their male genitals have been removed. The father is in prison. Very poor environment (close shot on an empty pot.) Pictures about naked children playing in the yard, then pictures about when they are examined in a clinic (genitals faded). The children can expect further operations. Another report accompanies this story about a Turkish village, where there are lots of intersexual men, interviews with them (foreign production). A subsequent result of the report was that –due to insufficient production efforts to conceal the identity of the interviewed woman, though she gave the interview under this condition– a regional daily published a tabloid piece on the family. No legal procedure has been initiated.

### **May 10<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. A psychiatrist was murdered by her client.
2. Artificial muscle fibers made of rubber, the invention of a Budapest Technical University professor.
3. A middle class woman disappeared with her daughter. Mentally unstable woman, the Court has decided on the favor of the husband when she filed a suit against him with the charge of molesting their daughter. She gave vegetarian food only for the child when she was an inborn baby.
4. Sex slaves in the US. Hidden camera pictures, undercover policemen in action.
5. A computer programmer invented the melting coffee spoon made of sugar.

### **May 11<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. Invention: Construction material from garbage.
2. An invasion of all sort of large insects in Romania (foreign production).
3. Animals tortured by children (explicit pictures), an animals right organization started a campaign
4. A 12-year old girl has become pregnant, the 15-year old father has been arrested with the charge of seduction. They have lived together already for a year in the girl's parents' house.

### **May 12<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. A middle class family in a suburban area complains that the neighbor's house is crumbling.
2. Miss Universe Hungary competition, backstage report.
3. A boy with leukemia dies unexpectedly (middle class family). Crying people. Narration: "It could happen with anyone any time."
4. A homeless woman in Abony. She was moved out by a family from her local government-owned tenancy by a family that showed a document, signed by the woman, indicating that she would give up her apartment in favor of that family – though the woman is illiterate. Narration: "By now it would be hard to reconstruct how she was removed from her apartment." (Editorial disbelief about the possibility of finding out how things happen "out there".)
5. A mechanic in Rákoshegy (Budapest) constructs seam-engines.

### **May 13<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

#### Fókusz Plussz

1. A little girl was raised by her grandparents and since they feel that they would be unable to continue it on a long run, they decided to let someone to adopt her (as it was shown in an earlier Fókusz). They received hundreds of letters, and found a family.
2. A Russian woman do does FAKIR exercises to heal herself. (Repeated.)

### **May 15<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. Bull terriers' victim, a child in a hospital.
2. Coal burns under a city (Centralia) in the US (foreign production).
3. Hungarian pensioner women do charity for leprosy camps in Ethiopia, Burma, and India etc. Insert: Pictures from a Romanian leprosy ward. As a charity, they make clothing, and send them to these camps on their own expense.
4. A woman has got pregnant after a sterilization surgery, because they didn't want more children. They've got twins, living in a temporary, bad quality apartment. They described their contraceptive methods. The father is unemployed.

### **May 16<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday**

1. Parents (lower middle class) of a deceased boy claim that medical mistreatment has taken place. They have given up their work and collect evidence.
2. A report on how dogs communicate.
3. A man has survived a very serious illness and decided to build a boat and sail around the world.
4. A girl who wrote a diary during her serious illness.

### **May 17<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. Neighbors' quarrel. The neighbor placed an ad in the name of his neighbor into the newspaper.

2. Moldova orphanage. Mentally disabled children. Voyeur classic.
3. Balloon flyer, he's had two almost fatal accidents. Amateur VHS inserts about the catastrophe.
4. Artist from the Ukraine makes miniature sculptures.

### **May 18<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. A woman in Pécs collects garbage in her garden. (T-shirt: Sepultura). Narrator: "Néhányan attól tartanak, hogy a felgyülemlett szemét fertőzéssel fenyegeti a környéket." Expert: Officer from the Surgeon General's Office. Water and electricity turned off in her house.
2. Internet crime, data theft (foreign production).
3. The collected money (a few thousands of USD value of HUF) of a young woman who grew up in a state orphanage has disappeared as a result of an administrative mistake. The woman's face was faded with dark. A public service treatment.
4. A recent invention: With a digital technology, children can play in their own cartoon.
5. A young man in Budapest has set up a private "Office of Appreciation and Congratulation" and gives awards for people who pay for it.

### **May 19<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. A middle class man was taken to the police because he failed to vaccinate his dog (though his dog died some time before) – he regards it as an exaggerated police reaction.
2. A Japanese joy-killer. He was curious how it is (foreign production).
3. A policeman as an amateur poet and painter.
4. Motorbike acrobats.
5. Vámosújfalú families who were moved out of their homes because of the flood. Mental-emotional stress. Expert: Physician. A psychologist applied the NASA's stress elimination exercises for the family.
6. Special announcement: Criminal frauds collect money from people in the country promising an opportunity to tell their problems in the program. Fókusz staff warns viewers not to believe these frauds.

### **May 20<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plusz

1. Sick children raised by foster parents.
2. Burning coal mine in the US (repeated).

### **May 22<sup>nd</sup>, Monday**

1. Parachutist's accident.
2. Barbara Cortland, a bestseller writer has passed away.
3. The bodyguard of Jasser Arafat trains bodyguards in Budapest.

4. A man in Colombia has climbed to a hill by riding bicycle.
5. Blade rollers in the forest.

### **May 23<sup>rd</sup>, Tuesday**

1. [Boy in Romania drank acid by mistake, lower middle class, without shirt.](#)
2. Ultra-Marathon runners run for five months on the top of the Great Wall in China.
3. As a promotion of a radio station (Sláger Rádió), four people spent a week in a Suzuki in downtown Budapest. It was a competition: Assuming that eventually some of them would give it up, the last remaining would get the car.
4. A visually impaired woman regained her sight (foreign production).

### **May 24<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. A 78-year old man in Romania runs about 40 km every day.
2. Volcanic eruption in the Philippines.
3. Butterfly zoo in Budapest.
4. An 11-year old girl was murdered by her schoolmates. Expert: NGO for rights of medical patients. Close shots on the crying father's hands and eyes.

### **May 25<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. [Parents of Hungarian children in Romania bring take their children to Hungarian hospitals for better medical service than available in Romania, and they cannot pay for it.](#)
2. A calf with 6 legs in a village.
3. Shark show in Budapest.
4. Wheel-chaired people appear in commercials in the US, in Hungary, there was a fashion show with woman in wheel chair.

### **May 26<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. A woman has taken care of her mentally and physically disabled son for 36 years. Anchor in the lead: "A mother has written a letter to us. She made no laments or pleads; she has just asked us to show her life. Her life and the life of her smallest son, who is 36. And why? Well, it is hard to answer to this question, but she asked us to show them because perhaps miracle would happen." Close shots on the undressed body of the man, and his face.
2. A kung fu guru (from Hong Kong) is in Budapest.
3. Cock fight in the Philippines.
4. NASA experiments on space levitation (foreign production).
5. A woman makes pastry from flowers.

### **May 27<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plussz

1. Three reports about young people who were very ill and they were writing a diary during that period.

2. The 78-year old runner (repetition).

### **May 29<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. Hungarian man visits all cities in towns in the country in 264 days in a super-Marathon.
2. Motorbike acrobats.
3. A man has poisoned his wife but later they have fallen in love again. Now the woman visits her husband in the prison regularly. (Close shots on hands). Hyper melodrama.
4. A Hungarian physician has invented a boat-car vehicle.

### **August 10<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. A solarium gives discount for clients if they let others peep them.
2. A woman lives with her children in the hallway of a crumbling apartment building in Budapest. People in the building help her with smaller things. No hope, no solution vision. The woman says that she'd rather commit suicide than placing the children in an institution. Narrator: "Don't forget, it can happen with any of us."
3. A look-alike of Katalin Karády, a one-time diva.
4. A monk in Csíksomlyó (Romania) lives by himself. Narration: "He has found spiritual peace."

### **August 11<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plussz: The secret of Nomi: a healing juice mixture or fraudulent marketing.

### **August 12<sup>th</sup>, Sunday**

Fókusz Portré (Portrait): Mr. Szilveszter Szántó lives in a farm with his family; he is 30 years older than his wife, and his son has a skin disease called állatbôr "animal skin": the boy's leg is covered with thick black hair; also there is a danger of skin cancer. They live in rather severe circumstances. After the intro picture, the man and his son are in the Fókusz studio, talking with anchor Anikó Marsi.

Close description of their poverty. Parents lost 20 kg weight because they have had nothing to eat. The man collects fish bait (as a source of income). The discussion is about the possible consequences of the boy's disease (Marsi: May we call it a disease at all?), and their hopeless financial circumstances. The family has collected money for the boy's previous operation, but they need much more. LAÉT, a poverty relief NGO and a Kecskemét physician helped them a lot.

### **August 13<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. An infamous armed robber-murderer has committed suicide in the prison.
2. The marriage of a Catholic archbishop and a Mooney woman.
3. A report about the adoption of a girl who was raised by her grandparent but decided to let someone to adopt her. Happy end.

### **August 14<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday**

1. US scientists' new medication against leukemia.
2. Diver's expedition (middle class professionals) into a shipwreck "Szt István battleship" on the Adriatic. Dangers and adventures.
3. A happy couple: A 202 cm tall, former basketball player woman and his much smaller husband. They work in a circus company and perform funny scenes on the stage (based on their height difference).

### **August 15<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. Barefoot water-skiing. Middle class fun.
2. Fire in a Budapest apartment building (private VHS recordings about the catastrophe).
3. Natalia Oreiro, an Argentine soap opera star in Budapest.
4. A seriously ill child needs heart and lung transplant, lower middle class family. (Feliratos trikó) Dilemma expressed: Should social security support (apparently) hopeless, very expensive treatments?

### **August 16<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. A woman in a small village (Szôkedencs) has stopped a runaway cart dragged by a bewildered horse, which was approaching the village playground. She's got smaller injuries. Interviewed in bed. Very poor family, their only income comes from elder flowers that they collect around the village. She will get prize of appreciation of courage from the local government.
2. Almost each inhabitant in a village called Ivád bears a family name "Ivádi". The village is a large family.
3. There might be medication for the human mad cow disease.
4. Illegal migrants and their traffickers: 70 migrants were found in a farm.

### **August 17<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. Wild boars destroy upper class villa gardens in Budapest.
2. Animals mistreated and died in a private Brazilian zoo (foreign production).
3. Pills for women who have no orgasm. Soft porno illustrations.
4. Interview with Geri Halliwell

### **August 18<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plussz: Reports with people who won lots of money in lottery in the past.

### **August 20<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. Motorbike ballet.
2. Settlements on Hungary's borders (Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western corners, highest, and lowest places).

3. Hungarian émigrés have returned from Brazil after decades.

### August 21<sup>st</sup>, Monday

1. Little girl with successful heart and lung transplants (from a middle class family).
2. The World's smallest sculpture in Japan (foreign production).
3. An extreme sport champion, living in Patvarc, a small village (middle class).
4. Amateur stripper.

### August 22<sup>nd</sup>, Wednesday

1. Amateur weather forecaster in a small village. "Maga szerint is már-már mániákus férfi." Narration: "Jobb, mintha a kocsmába járna." (As an obvious dichotomy..)
2. A report with a man with HIV+. Lead: "Confessing about his sins and mistakes he tells his life story." Narration: A socially excluded person. "*The way down the slope.*" "*He has felt security the first time in the prison.*" Looking for friends, sitting in front of Rác bath, a central spot in the gay scene. Expert: A physician from Szent László Hospital. Genre: Sympathy with distance. Melodramatic visual portrayal.
3. A couple grows kiwi in their garden in Szarvas.
4. A Hungarian émigré returns from the US and starts a massage therapy practice (penis enlargement). Kéz: kliens a szexológusnál.

### August 23<sup>rd</sup>, Thursday

1. A Hungarian expedition visits native Indians in Peru.
2. Tomato throwing fiesta in Italy.
3. A portrait of a 92-year old local doctor.
4. Lara Croft look-alikes.

### August 24<sup>th</sup>, Friday

1. A boy organized an aid concert for people in the flooded towns.
2. Bicycle taxi in Budapest.
3. A pop singer's plastic surgeries on her face.
4. Rodeo in the US

### August 25<sup>th</sup>, Saturday

Fókusz Plussz. Hungarian porno movie stars

### August 26<sup>th</sup>, Sunday

Fókusz Portré: Mr. Károly Gárpár started an anti-drug awareness campaign, after his son died as a heroin addict. Middle class man of endurance: Member of the local government, visits schools to talk with young people, studies theology. His filmed his son's death bed with his VHS camera.

### **August 27<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. A young couple married on a truck at the Budapest Parade.
2. People who survived a shot by lightning.
3. A man in Helvécia has built a theatre by himself.
4. Guinness Book attempt: Young men want to spend a week on the Budapest Ferris Wheel.

### **August 28<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday**

1. Researchers have identified the gene of ageing.
2. A watch repair man has reconstructed a Wurlitzer in Szentes.
3. Summer camp for autistic children
4. A wave of suicide among young German teens in a city. Satanist practices are in suspect, Hungarian and Ukrainian examples or animal killing rituals. (Music: Iggy Pop: Now I Wanna Be Your Dog.)

### **August 29<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. Hungarian Depardieu look-alike.
2. Model school in Cambodia.
3. Miniature car's race.
4. A woman's husband and two children died in a car accident that she has survived with severe injuries. She has started another life, adopted a child, and had another from his new husband. "Help should be returned." She bought a farm where she organizes weekend and summer camps for mentally and physically disabled children.

### **August 30<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. The story of the young men's Guinness-attempt on the Ferris Wheel.
2. Selection of participants of the RTL KLUB's reality show.
3. Breast feeding contest in a Peruvian prison (foreign production).
4. Homeless families live in unused train cars. They live, cook, sleep there. Family violence mentioned. Children caress the charity ladies who live with the families. "The adults work, or look for a job."

### **August 31<sup>st</sup>, Friday**

1. A former model is in coma after a car accident.
2. A new life saving vest (foreign production).
3. On cloning.
4. Terry Black, the Hungarian transsexual artist has adopted a child.

### **September 1<sup>st</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plusz: A report about the life of the Crow nation (native Americans)

### **September 3<sup>rd</sup>, Monday**

1. The Guinness attempt on the Ferris Wheel has been successful.
2. Former KGB and CIA employees organize bus tours together in Washington, D.C.
3. Women mud-wrestling in yogurt in Békéscsaba.
4. Training camp for beauty contest participants.

### **September 4<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday**

1. Sharks attack people in the US.
2. A new confessional chat show's (Mónika) background.
3. A weightlifter woman lives in Nagykörü with her four children, one of them seriously ill, she raises them from social assistance.

### **September 5<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. A Chinese woman has won USD 130.000 in the Casino in Budapest with a USD 1 bet.
2. A man cycles from Bucharest to Canada to collect funds for children in need, he rides a special, 2 m high bicycle.
3. Cliffhangers, extreme sport.
4. Strange car's race in Austria.

### **September 6<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. Russian physicians developed a new surgery method against drug addiction (foreign production).
2. Pig Brother show on the internet.
3. A young girl (11) is a talented driver. Middle class parents.
4. The Esztergom "iron man". Very active sport man and local public figure with one of his legs lost.

### **September 7<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. 1 million children was jumping in England to check whether they can induce a small "earthquake".
2. Hungarian scientists' theory about life on Mars.
3. A Hungarian hunter shot a exceptionally large leopard.
4. An inventor from Marosvásárhely (Tirgu Mures, Romania) with his inventions (glasses that automatically wake drivers up if they fall asleep, etc.)

### **September 8<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plussz: Autism. Middle class parents. Questions: What will happen with them when they will grow up? Who is responsible? Which institutions are responsible? Why autism is missing form the Act on Social Services?

### **September 10<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. Ferryboat catastrophe on the Danube river in Socialism. Authorities denied the losses.
2. A man learnt to fly with a light plane by himself.
3. Scientists plan to clone children (foreign production).
4. Hundreds of women do a wet T-shirt display as an attempt do a Guinness record.

#### **December 7<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. Dwellers of a housing project (formerly a Soviet military barrack) in Esztergom complain about the poor quality reconstruction. Public service tone.
2. A Lebanese man spent 12 years in an Israeli prison without legal procedure (hands shown).
3. A security guard of a water supply complex grows banana. Amateur poet too, talks to his palm trees.
4. In “tribal” territories in Pakistan people make their living from weapon fabrication and drug traffic. “Laws don’t apply behind that signpost.”

#### **December 8<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. Top lottery record is expected: How could it be spent (luxury items etc.)?
2. An old man in Tiszaszentmárton claims that he is a descent of Count Rákóczi Ferenc II, a famous historical figure. (Hands shown.) Csirkék az udvaron. Closure: “*It has been said that everyone is what he/she thinks about himself/herself.*”
3. Jogging with dog, a new (middle class) sport.
4. Medical mistreatment of a woman, lower middle class.

#### **December 9<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plussz: Christian Barnard’s visit in Budapest.

#### **December 11<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. An old lady started a hunger strike against her neighbor, a small company. Rather confusing story, it is unclear who did what.
2. The Hungarian arm-wrestling champion is a chef, he practices in his decent middle class home.
3. Guinness Book attempt: Who can drink more beer under water in a certain time. Diver’s middle class subculture.
4. An artist put himself on mail in a box.

#### **December 12<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday**

1. A Hungarian woman has been paralyzed after a car accident in the US when she visited her man friend. Her children and the man’s children in the US helped them to reconcile.

2. A physically disabled (middle class) man is helped by his dog. An animal behavior expert observes the dog.
3. A man in Vecsés heals his patients with head massage.

### **December 13<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. **A Nagykanizsa pension owner is accused by supporting criminals take foreigner in and out of Hungary illegally.**
2. A group of (middle class) friends watch a popular TV Quiz (Millionaire) together in a local bar regularly, the host of the show (István Vágó) visits them at one evening.
3. A decent middle class family, the wife is an ultra-Marathon runner.

### **December 14<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. College student (with his face faded out) explains how to “recycle” mobile phone chip cards.
2. A Chinese businessman, terminally ill spends his last months with people through the Internet, telling them his life (foreign production).
3. Model school for children. The dark side of the profession. Expert: Psychologist.
4. A little girl’s father died and she inherited nothing but a large debt. Legal procedure. Expert: Lawyer.

### **December 15<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. A psychological interpretation of the Winnie-the-Pooh story.
2. A Romanian artist in Torda does and displays his art (painting and sculptures) in the local garbage dump. He says: “I fight against mediocrity.” His art is “a demonstration against misery and oppression.” Each day the garbage is different, therefore the art is different. Narrator: “There is as much art in the world as much garbage there is, but there is only one time of art of this kind and it belongs to him.”
3. Balloon-implant to obese people’s belly helps them to lose weight. A lower middle class patient explains his case, how he destroyed all the furniture at home. The viewer can look into the patient’s belly with a fiber optics camera. Narrator explains that fat people suffer from lack of self-confidence.
4. A crocodile- and snake-tamer from Florida.

### **December 16<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plussz: SWAT-team (commando) world championship in the US.

### **December 18<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

1. Bat invasion on the balcony of a middle class family in Diósgyôr. The 150 bats were taken to a cave.
2. A man spends hours in a cage with snakes in South Africa.
3. A fortune teller woman tells clients what kind our hairdo to choose.

4. All the women in a small village, Kehidakustány do aerobic. Their trainer is a 76 year old woman. All the villagers attend their gala when they do a show. “Imádjuk ezt csinálni. Hát enélkül.. Üljek le a tévé elé és majszoljam a mézespuszikat?”

### **December 19<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday**

1. A gene is missing from 56% of Hungarians. Expert: Dr. Czeizel.
2. Japanese artist carves miniature Buddhas.
3. A mason in post-war Bosnia invented a new type of brick that needs no mortar.
4. Mysterious stones and walls in the Pilis mountains, “thorned cross”. Experts: Kovács András és Papp Gábor. “Twilight Zone”-kind reporting. After shooting the stone cross by the camere (by Fókusz staff), a ghost-like figure appears on the screen.

### **December 20<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

1. The Balkan Heartbreaker. 161 wives in 55 years. Guinness Book.
2. A man from the Luxemburg military changed his gender.
3. Medical mistreatment. Narrator: “*A horrifying story.*” A boy fell into coma during the medical treatment in a Pécs hospital. Parents (middle class Roma) claim the doctor’s responsibility who didn’t come in time. Hospital administrators reject the parents’ claim, and suggest that parents should place their child in a special institution. Expert: Parents’ lawyer. Public interest tone.

### **December 21<sup>st</sup>, Thursday**

1. Computer program for visually impaired people.
2. Strippers, as a present for employers of a Norwegian company at a corporate party (foreign production).
3. A group of families re-stage the Betlehem story in Püspökladány.
4. Fortune telling from buttock shape in England (close nude pictures) (foreign production).

### **December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Friday**

1. A private individual (Aunt Viki) repaired thrown away dolls and took them to a family shelter (in Kiskunmajsa) for poor families “People who had become socially exiled by their fate” as Christmas present, supported also by local entrepreneurs.” Commentator: presents are “*to forget their past..*”. Charity classic.
2. Madonna’s wedding party (foreign production).
3. Mr. Rácz from Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca, Romania), the human magnet.
4. Christmas strip show. “Love, sexuality, Christmas”. “Sex under the Christmas tree.”

### **December 23<sup>rd</sup>, Saturday**

- Fókusz Plussz: Hungarians living abroad.
1. A young man living in Cuba (nude pictures).

2. A woman living on the Seychelles Islands.

### **December 25<sup>th</sup>, Monday**

Longer, Christmas-tuned lead on homeless people.

-Christmas day for homeless people in Budapest. Scenes:

- Shopping mall (Mammut) shoppers and homeless people's pictures mixed.
- Soup kitchen (by Hare Krishna activists) at a main square (Blaha Lujza tér).
- A homeless man talks about where he plans to spend the night.
- Salvation Army, Xmas celebration with homeless men, singing together.
- Metro station closed in the afternoon.
- Tûzoltó Street children's clinic. A man cries with sick children.
- Keleti railway station: Security guard: "*Today we don't send off the homeless.*"  
Station buffet: Today we sell 50% more alcohol. A private individual brought bean soup for the homeless.
- Ambulance clinic: "*There are more suicidal attempts on a day like this.*"
- St. Stephen's cathedral: Midnight mass.
- The reporter wraps up the report on the street.

Christmas in an orphanage in Déva (Romania), Fókusz production. A Franciscan priest established the shelter. The children's parents are poor and/or sick, or they work and therefore they are unable to take care of their children. Children spend the nights at foster parents. Christmas evening together, they sing and get presents. Ideal typical portrayal: Poor children get presents at Xmas evening.

### **December 26<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday**

- Family conflict. Father searches for his daughter who was taken away by the mother first and then she placed her in an orphanage. Trial.
- A horse watches TV in the family's living room (US production).
- An encounter of three young women, grew up together in an orphanage, and as troubled teens (a member of a car thief gang, a prostitute, and a drug addict) now they have found a decent life. Happy end, Xmas.
- Man in coma is taken care of by his wife for years. "The power of love."

### **December 27<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday**

- Postman from Pécs as an exorcist, he heals people.
  - Penguins in the Tokyo Zoo (foreign production).
  - An Olympic gold medallist (Melbourne) returns to Hungary after decades of exile.
- A snake swallowed a coat (foreign production).

### **December 28<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. Two Hungarian men (truckers) imprisoned in Romania, controversial legal procedure. PUBLIC INTEREST STORY
2. Feng Shui – in stores. Lawyer's office.

3. Female singer has to gain weight. Pictures of a nagy zabálás.
4. A report about a man who grew up in an orphanage and now supports orphans and homeless children. Decent middle class with university degree, wearing a suit. Credo (hitvallás): “..nem törődtem bele.” Black and white illustration pictures about children in orphanages. Wife: Praising words about the efforts of his husband. He organizes a summer camp for orphans. Does sports (ping pong) with homeless children. He plans to get a third degree and to set up a foundation for children. Personal endurance stressed.

### **December 29<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. Pig killing family feast in Gara (small village). Scared of trichinellosis, a dangerous bacterial infection associated with raw meat. .
2. Underwear exhibition (Russian production).
3. Boy hit by 220000 Volts in Kerecsend. Miraculous survival. “Love has brought him back.” His girlfriend. Tortured body.
4. Beauty contest for mothers. The winner is an upper middle class woman (physician), she has four children.

### **December 30<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plusz

- Hungarian Nobel Prize Laureates
- Amateur inventors: Tandem ski. Visually impaired man builds a car. Bicycle with umbrella. Etc.

### **December 31<sup>st</sup>, Sunday**

Fókusz “Slussz”. Funny reports from 2001. Hungarian Full Monty.

**2002**

### **January 1<sup>st</sup>, Monday**

1. Married at New Year’s Eve.
2. Foreign Fókusz report sites from 2001: Milan (the kiss collector man). London Eye. Mexico. Berlin.

### **January 2<sup>nd</sup>, Tuesday**

Special edition: Jimmy Zábó, (a Hungarian pop star) killed himself by accident.

### **January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Wednesday**

1. Mixed up tapes in the video store. (Porn tape in the child-cartoon box.) Lower middle class family.
2. Training for mine-related disabled people in Cambodia (self-esteem story).

3. Barber retires after 66 years of work.
4. Medieval village in the US (tourist attraction)

#### **January 4<sup>th</sup>, Thursday**

1. Sick child (with nyitott gerinc)
2. Lima (Peru) woman with bees (covering her body) (foreign production)
3. English woman has turned her Lada into a virágtartó (foreign production).
4. Fashion show, women dressed in food (pizza etc.), child models.
5. US sisters invented a pump that help women to reach orgasm.

#### **January 5<sup>th</sup>, Friday**

1. Hearing impaired woman now hears: a chip in her head.
2. A French cukrász makes cookies of cigar taste.
3. Old American cars in Cuba.
4. Hymen operation (to fix it for young women before marriage), foreign production.
- 5.

#### **January 6<sup>th</sup>, Saturday**

Fókusz Plusz: Transsexual people.

### **Appendix 3: Acknowledgements**

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- to be done later.