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## COMPARISON OF TRUST AND SOCIAL RELATIONS AMONG STUDENTS IN RUSSIAN AND HUNGARIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT.** Trust is the basis of social relations and the building block of every society. However, various societies have different levels of social trust, which is a consequence of various cultural dimensions' as well as historic and economic variables' interplay. The paper intends to explore the relation of social embeddedness and the level of interpersonal trust in two significantly different cultures – Russian and Hungarian. The results presented in the article are, on the one hand, the outcomes of secondary analysis of the data obtained from the World Values Survey and the European Social Survey, on the other hand, they also offer an insight into the still ongoing primary research on 585 students in business higher education in Hungary and Russia. The results indicate that although there are gender and other demographic variables based differences, social embeddedness and national culture (values, attitudes, behaviour) is of relevant influence on the level of interpersonal trust. According to the data presented, the Hungarians – despite being a low-trust nation – in general trust their peers more than the Russians do. However, if we distinguish between two forms of trust – thick and thin – the Hungarians then achieve significantly higher scores in thin trust only.

**JEL Classification:** Z13

**Keywords:** trust, social embeddedness, Hungary, Russia, World Values Survey, European Social Survey.

### Introduction

Cultures are the integrated patterns of human knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours. They are also a certain way of life determined by beliefs, values, and symbols that people accept without thinking about them and that are passed along through socialisation from one generation to the next one (Schneider *et al.*, 2014). In this way, culture is a collective programming of minds that distinguishes the members of one group or a category of people from another (Sun, 2009). Various cultures are characterised by very different levels of social values, trust being one of them. According to (Fukuyama, 1995) trust is one of the most important factors in national cultures, without which economic prosperity cannot be obtained.

Trust as a social phenomenon is especially relevant, since it influences relations on various levels. On a personal level it fosters collaboration and creativity (Anderson *et al.*, 2014), as well as organisational commitment and teamwork (Sol *et al.*, 2013). On the societal level it generates a sense of belonging and cooperation (Balliet, Van Lange, 2013). On this level of a society, it is also regarded as a phenomenon that enables collective actions and improves social relations (Freel, 2000; Davis, 2016). In the present article, the focus is on general trust; which is a belief that people hold about other people's benevolence (Bond *et al.*, 2004).

Various indicators of general trust are explored in international literature, but most of them are very focused on a certain subset's behaviour, hence cannot be regarded as representative of the whole population. However, the European Social Survey, with its targeted sampling methodology, provides trustworthy data on general trust. According to the research findings, some Northern European cultures – Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland – can be regarded as trusting cultures, while others, such as Hungarian, Czech and Polish, are distrusting cultures. *Figure 1* presents graphically the abovementioned differences with the help of data from round 7 of this survey (ESS, 2017).

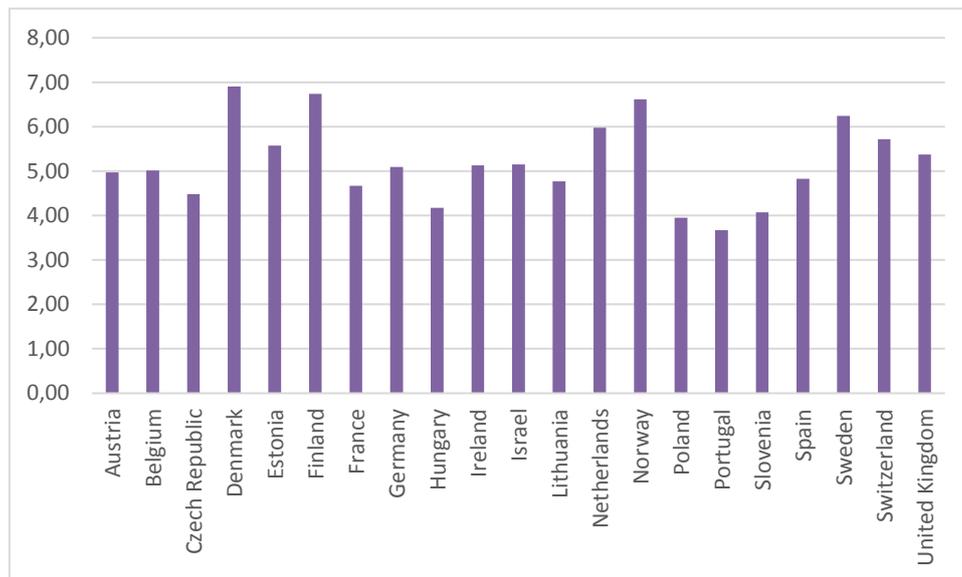


Figure 1. Indictors of general trust among European countries

Source: Own research based on the European Social Survey Round 7 data (ESS, 2017).

While the V4 countries share a common history and hence their value sets resemble each other, there are other cultures, outside Europe, that can also be characterised with low level of trust, such as Russia. This paper describes, on the one hand, the outcomes of our secondary analysis of the data from the World Values Survey, on the other hand, it presents an element of the still ongoing primary research on over five hundred students in business higher education in Hungary and Russia.

## 1. Social relations and trust

We are social beings. We need others for sustaining ourselves, since the most of us are not able to create all the goods and services on our own that we require. Social embeddedness however is not only important because of tangible support. there is also an emotive component,

that might even be more important. The sense of belonging to is a basic motivator (Maslow, Lewis, 1987). Having others around us, to connect with provides motivation and reward, can be a source of reassurance and punishment, offers resources and support in informational, tangible as well as emotional sense. Hence, social support is a multidimensional construct that includes tangible, informational, emotional support, esteem, and an access to a social network (Cutrona, Suhr, 1992). Thompson (1995) defined social embeddedness as frequency of contacts with others, which has a potential to integrate individuals into a supportive community. Over time people accumulate social support; social connections to others (Hansen *et al.*, 2001). However, the process of acquisition is strongly connected to the individuals' perceptions. Not the deed itself, but how it is seen by the other is the core notion of social support. In line with this Deelstra (Deelstra *et al.*, 2003) defined social support as the perceived helping behaviour of others. This definition emphasises the importance of the relation of the individuals concerned and the situation they are in.

The notion of social embeddedness is really hard to capture – mostly because of its dimensionality and perceived nature. Quantification is even more difficult, since frequency of contact is not the only feature to be taken into consideration when exploring social relations. On the basis of the social network approach of social support (Ellison *et al.*, 2014), support provided by various social contacts is dependent on the size, diversity, functionality and variability of the social network the individual possesses and the centrality of the very person within this network. Network connections can be strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 2005). However, social support, and especially centrality in a given network is not for free. The procurement of social support is based on reciprocity.

In line with this Lin (2001) defines social capital as an investment in social relations with expected returns. Hence social capital is strongly connected to one's ability to trust and accept dependency from others. Accordingly, in some literature, trust is perceived as a proxy indicator of social capital (Fukuyama, 1995; Kohn, 2009), while trust describes the quality of people's relations and, on a greater scale, their connectedness and their position within a given community or the whole society (Gambetta, 2000; Markowska-Przybyła and Ramsey, 2015; Szkudlarek and Biglieri, 2016).

Social relations can be separated into two basic categories on the basis of the belonging of the members involved (Putnam, 2000; Williams, 2006). Bridging ties connect people of various clusters (age, gender, social status, ...) and increase the variety of one's social supportive belt. They are mostly weak contacts, however are very effective when it comes to informational support. On the other hand, bonding ties are much stronger than bridging ties, and are infused with positive emotions and intimacy (Ellison *et al.*, 2014). They are more substantive, since they incorporate a higher level of interpersonal trust thick trust (Putnam, 2000).

According to Fukuyama (1999) if the social relations are rather bonding than bridging - the society has a narrow radius of trust – people only develop trust within their own private spheres, with those whom they think to share the same values and beliefs. This means, people in low trust societies fail to meet and interact with people with different points of view and do not develop trust in public institutions or stand up for the greater good either (Newton, 2001). People lack patterns for cooperation and civil participation. This way, trust is a way to approach social networks and on a greater scale societies as well.

However, trust, the same as social relations, is hard to define. Various researchers concentrate on various features or dimensions of it. They even define various forms of it:

- affect and cognition based trust (McAllister, 1995),
- process-based, characteristic-based and institutional-based (Zucker, 1986),
- particular and general (Hardin, 2002),

- knowledge based strategic and particular (Uslaner, 2008),
- particular social trust, general social trust and political (Newton, Zmerli, 2010),
- particularised, generalised, and identity-based (Freitag, Bauer, 2013),
- social-integrative, value system based, information based (Dessewffy, 2014),
- interpersonal and social (Hadiwitanto, 2015).

In this paper – as an analogy of bridging and bonding ties the terminology of thick and thin trust will be used.

Thick trust is the basis of all trusting relations, since it is the first form of interpersonal relations (Erikson, 1993). When a baby is born the basic orientation towards others is basic trust. This is the strongest form, since babies are completely dependent on others in their first months. IN most cases, this basic trust transforms into thick trust towards family members with age, cognitive development and social experiences. Uslaner (2002) labels this form as particularised trust, since it is strongly connected to common background and shared cultural norms besides personal characteristics. Thick trust is based on familiarity, similarity and strong emotional relationship – the same as in bonding relations (Cook *et al.*, 2005). People who know each other well and for a long time tend to develop thick trust, which with time is not even considered trust, but induces automatic decisions and behaviour.

Thin trust is a relation between people from diverse social backgrounds, who might not know each other very well (Khodyakov, 2007). Hence, the relation of those involved is not unconditional, and is based rather on cognitive, than on emotive motifs (Luhmann, 1988). Thin trust is inevitable in obtaining bridging ties, which is necessary for obtaining resources, which are abundant within the network of bonding relations. In line with this, thin trust is not inferior to thick trust, only basically different. When developing thin trust, people usually either believe in the other party to be morally upright (Uslaner, 2002), or expect him to be fair, honest, and reasonable when dealing with us (Solomon, Flores, 2001). In this sense, thin trust is based on a presupposition of the other party complying with the basic ethical rules (Messick, Kramer, 2001; Nagaj and Zuromskaité, 2016).

## 2. Social relations and trust in Russia and Hungary

As already presented in the introduction part, Hungarian culture is a low trust culture. It is not only reflected in the data of the European Social Survey (ESS, 2017), but is also underlined by the World Values survey data (WVS, 2015) as well. According to the WVS data, Russians can be characterised by a similarly low level of trust. While 70% of Hungarians think that most people cannot be trusted, in Russia the ratio of this thinking the same is 71%. In both countries, the majority of respondents was afraid of being taken advantage of. In both countries respondent evaluated their fear on a ten-points scale where 1 was totally agree and 10 do not agree at all. The average for Russian respondents was 5.55 (Std. Dev.: 2.594), while for Hungarians 5.64 (Std. Dev.: 2.162). The distribution of the responses is displayed on *Figure 2*.

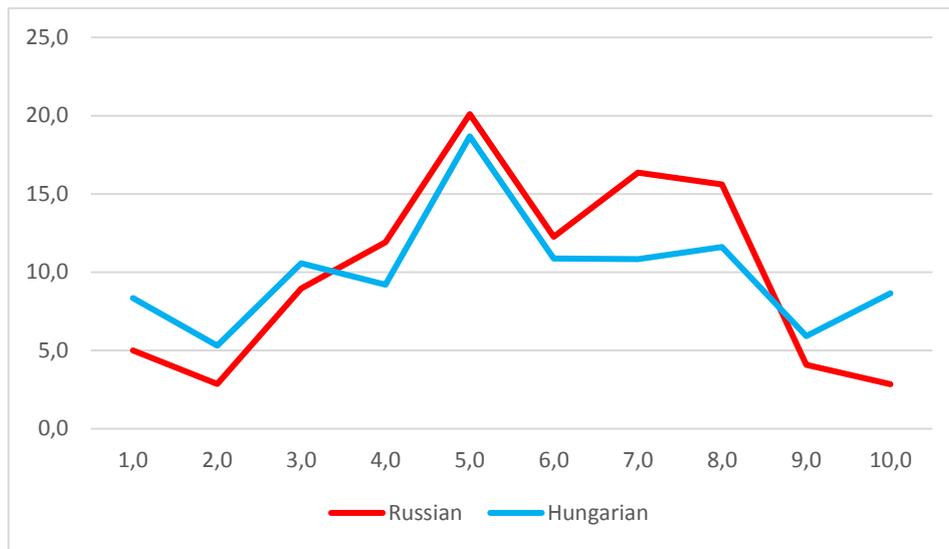


Figure 2. Respondents opinion regarding the question, whether most people would take advantage of them

Source: Own research based on World Values Survey data (WVS, 2015).

Russians and Hungarians are also similar, when it comes to various spheres of trust. The similarities are displayed on *Figure 3*. Data indicate scores on a four-point scale, where 1 represents totally agree and 4 totally disagree, hence the lower numbers indicate higher levels of trust, while lower numbers represent the lack of trust. The Russian sample consisted of 4481, while the Hungarian of 1004 respondents. As it is indicated by *Figure 3*, Russian respondents were slightly more trusting when it came to family members (thick trust), while they were more distrustful in every other aspect of social life (thin trust). However, when interpreting the data, it has to be noted, that family might mean different for Russians, then for Hungarians, since Russians are collectivistic and Hungarians are individualistic by their encompassing culture (Lazányi *et al.*, 2017).

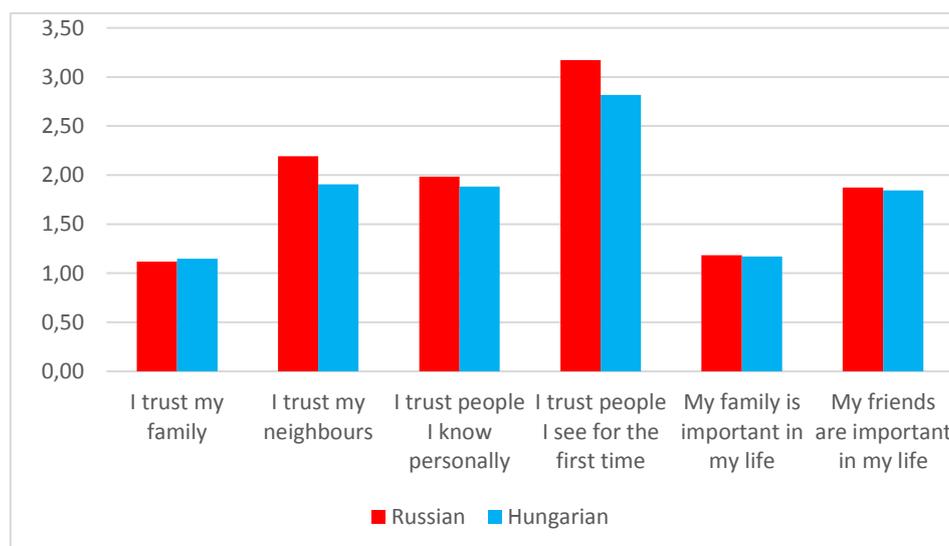


Figure 3. Differences in various levels of distrust in Russia and Hungary

Source: Own research based on World Values Survey data (WVS, 2015).

As also displayed on *Figure 3*, family and friends are both slightly more important for Hungarians, than for Russians, even though, on the basis of WVS data 76.1% of the Russians stated to understand others' preferences, while only 68.4% of Hungarians.

### 3. Social relations and trust in Russia and Hungary – data of HEI students

Within the frame of a research supported through the New National Excellence Program of the Ministry of Human Capacities a research has been delivered on social embeddedness and trust of business students of a Hungarian and a Russian university. 269 students from Óbuda University, Budapest, Hungary (OU), and 316 students of Saint Petersburg University of Aerospace Instrumentation, Saint Petersburg, Russia (SUAI) have voluntarily filled out the online questionnaire (Lazányi *et al.*, 2017) of which the Hungarian version has already been tested on various samples beforehand (Lazányi, 2017a, 2017b) while the Russian version has been translated by a native speaker and has been tested on a small population of Russian speaking Hungarian students, to validate its phrasing.

The data have been collected in November and December 2016 with targeted sampling, inviting only students of business studies of the two universities. This way, a sample of 585 students has been gathered. Along these lines, the data presented below are not representative of the whole Hungarian or Russian population, are only describing a special subset – those in business tertiary education. However, the differences might indicate, that the attitude towards others, social embeddedness and levels of various forms of trust is in transition in the Z generation, and the researched cultures are becoming slightly more trusting.

The average age in the Hungarian sample was 22.33 (Std.Dev.: 3.516), while that of the Russian students was almost 2 years younger, 20.45 (Std. Dev.: 2.089). The difference might lie in the fact, that while 12% of the Hungarian respondents were part-time students, there were no part-timers in the Russian sample.

Another important discrepancy might be a difference in the proportion of male students in the sample. While the Hungarian sample consisted of male students up to its 72%, the Russian sample only contained 30% male respondents. However, on the basis of the results of an independent samples' t-test, the gender of the respondents did not account for significant variance in the data.

Respondents from both country had to state, how many social contacts they have on a weekly basis with various (binding or bridging) ties. The results are displayed on *Figure 4*.

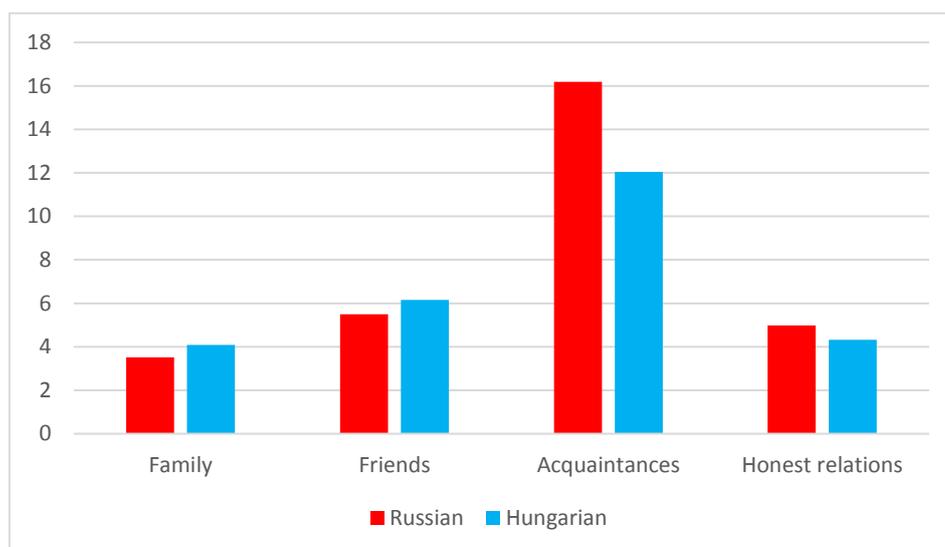


Figure 4. Number of various ties contacted on a weekly basis

Source: Own research.

As indicated on *Figure 4*, Hungarian respondents contacted more family members and friends on a weekly basis, while Russian students had more acquaintances, whom they had a weekly contact with. What is more, the difference in case of family members and acquaintances was significant, as indicated in *Table 1*. Interestingly, despite regularly contacting more of their family and friends, Hungarian respondents indicated to have fewer honest contacts, than their Russian peers.

Table 1. Significant differences between Hungarian and Russian respondents' scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Family members	0.805	0.37*	3.561	511.158	0.000	0.588	0.165	0.263	0.912
Acquaintances	4.568	0.033**	-3.308	578	0.001	-4.142	1.252	-6.601	-1.683

\* Equal variances cannot be assumed, \*\* Equal variances shall be assumed

In order to explore the respondents' trust levels towards various ties, they had to evaluate various groups of social contacts separately on a five-points Likert scale (where 1 is totally disagree and 5 is totally agree), on how much they trust them. The results are displayed in *Figure 5*.

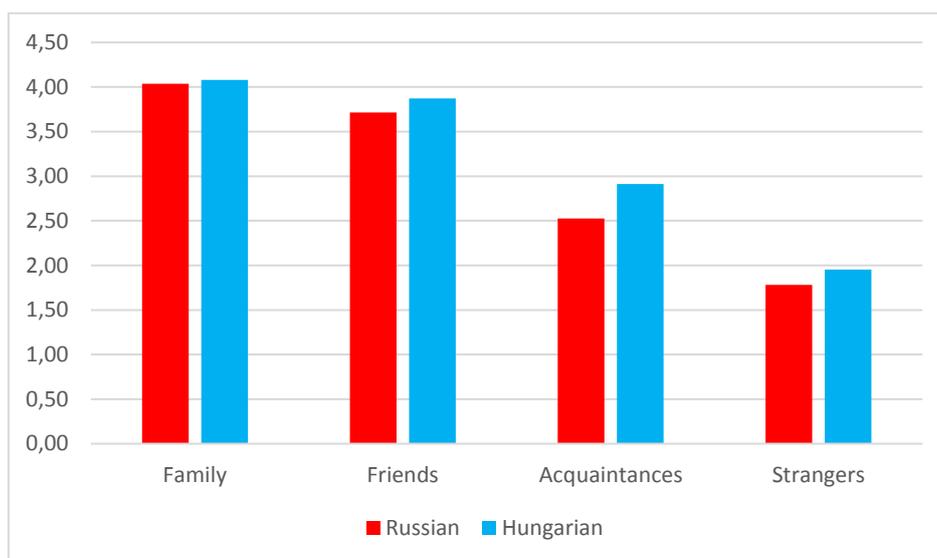


Figure 5. Respondents trust in various social ties

Source: Own research.

Not surprisingly, Hungarians trusted their family members and friends more, than Russians did, however, contrarily to the higher number of frequently contacted acquaintances, Russian respondents indicated lower level of trust regarding their acquaintances. What is more, the differences between Hungarian and Russian respondents' evaluations were significant in case of their friends, acquaintances and strangers (For further details see *Table 2*). Nonetheless, this is in line with the WVS data displayed on *Figure 3*.

Table 2. Significant differences between Hungarian and Russian respondents' scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Friends	2.221	0.137*	2.245	574.893	0.025	0.157	0.070	0.020	0.295
Acquaintances	21.031	0.000**	4.580	578	0.000	0.386	0.084	0.221	0.552
Strangers	5.165	0.023**	2.051	578	0.041	0.174	0.085	0.007	0.340

\* Equal variances cannot be assumed, \*\* Equal variances shall be assumed

The difference between the Russian and Hungarian students' responses is even more relevant, if we take into account that there were significant differences between the trust levels of males and females in the whole sample, and also within the Hungarian subset (see *Table 3*). These differences indicate that female students trust their family members more, than male students do. On the other hand, male students indicated higher level of trust towards strangers, than female students did. Unfortunately, these differences cannot be verified or falsified on the basis of WVS data, hence, to prove the existence of such difference further investigation are necessary.

Table 3. Significant differences between male and female respondents' scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Family	0.033	0.856	-2.040	570.227	0.042	-0.135	0.066	-0.266	-0.005
Strangers	1.812	0.179	2.090	577.109	0.037	0.176	0.084	0.011	0.342
Family (Hungarian subset)	0.006	0.939	-2.288	162.590	0.023	-0.228	0.099	-0.424	-0.031

\* Equal variances cannot be assumed, \*\* Equal variances shall be assumed.

Analysing the correlations of the introduced variables have called attention to the close relation of the number of friends and acquaintances regularly contacted (Pearson correl.: 0.469; Sig.: 0.000). This might indicate a personality trait of extroversion being more prevalent in this population, but can also point out a competency for handling bridging relations and building thin trust more easily. The same tendency was demonstrated with the correlation of inclination towards trusting friends, acquaintances and strangers. Since the correlations have ranged from 0.389 to 0.443, a factor analysis has been done to decrease the number of components. With the help of a Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation 2 components with Eigenvalues greater than 1 could be created that could represent the selected four variables adequately (*Table 4*).

Table 4. Communalities with Principal component analysis

	Initial	Extraction
Trust family	1.000	0.692
Trust friends	1.000	0.702
Trust acquaintances	1.000	0.742
Trust strangers	1.000	0.809

Although reducing the number of variables from four to two is not a real change in numbers, the components created with the help of the Principal component analysis, using a Varimax rotation method with Kaiser normalization (*Table 5*) represent the two aspects of trust defined by international literature, namely that of thick (component 1) and thin trust (component 2).

Table 5. Component Score Coefficient Matrix

	Component	
	1	2
Trust family	0.587	-0.157
Trust friends	0.538	0.012
Trust acquaintances	0.137	0.507
Trust strangers	-0.217	0.671

With the help of the component values created in the above described manner, differences between male and female students, along with nationality based differences could be explored.

As displayed in *Table 6*, thin trust was more prevalent among male respondents and Hungarian respondents. However, since the Hungarian sample mainly consisted of male students, the difference between the two cultures regarding thin trust should be the subject of further research.

Table 6. Significant differences regarding thin trust

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Component 2 – Thin trust (Male-Female)	1.642	0.201*	2.597	575.052	0.010	0.214	0.082	0.052	0.376
Component 2 – Thin trust (Hungarian- Russian)	5.147	0.024**	3.616	578	0.000	0.298	0.083	0.136	0.460

\* Equal variances cannot be assumed, \*\* Equal variances shall be assumed.

## Conclusions

Trust is the basis of social relations and hence it is the building block of societies. International literature distinguishes various forms of trust. In present paper – as an analogy of bridging and bonding social ties – thin and thick trust has been investigated with the help of data from representative international researches of the World Values Survey and the European Social Survey and 585 student responses from business faculties of Óbuda University in Hungary, and Saint Petersburg University of Aerospace instrumentation in Russia.

According to secondary data presented in this paper, both Hungary and Russia are low-trust countries. Although there are slight variations in trust levels towards various social spheres – like Russians trusting their family members more than Hungarians – trust, especially thin trust is very low in both countries. Since trust is a proxy variable for social support and influences the generation and maintenance of social ties heavily, this has far fetching consequences on individual, organisational as well as on societal level. In line with Fukuyama's (1995) theory without trust economic prosperity is curbed.

In order to explore, whether generation Z students are significantly different from their brethren in regard to their social embeddedness and various forms of trust, the primary research focused on students in higher education. What is more, to exclude the potential disturbing effect of various professional cultures, and make the two national datasets comparable, only business students have been researched.

The findings of the primary research were mostly in line with the secondary data presented in this paper. Russian respondents contacted fewer family members and friends on a daily basis, however, they had more acquaintances compared to Hungarian respondents.

Russians trusted all of their social contacts less, than Hungarians, however, interestingly they had more honest relations, than the Hungarian students stated to possess. What is more, Hungarians trusted their friends, acquaintances and even strangers more than Russians did. Another interesting difference was that no matter the nationality, male respondents trusted their family less and their acquaintances more than their female peers.

With the help of a Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation 2 components have been created, and these components were clearly equivalent to the two forms of trust - thick and thin trust. With the help of the so created factors it could also be demonstrated that thin trust was more prevalent among male respondents and Hungarian respondents. However, since the Hungarian sample mainly consisted of male students, these results are rather indicative than probative, and induce further investigation.

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