

PhD Programme in Sociology

PhD THESES

Zsuzsa Blaskó Social Origin Effects in the Labour Market? Transmission of social inequalities outside the educational system

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Budapest 2008

Institute of Sociology and Social Policy

PhD Theses

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I. Aims of the study and previous research in the field

Intergenerational transmission of social and economic advantages has for long been in the focus of different disciplines in the social sciences. Scholars in sociology have widely researched the persistence of social and economic inequalities and the ways advantages are inherited from generation to generation. Growing inequalities in the labour market as well as a non-increasing trend of social mobility in industrialised societies are making the issue particularly timely.

To investigate the underlying mechanisms behind the pure correlation of social origin and social destination, attempts were made to decompose the relationship into its components (e.g. Blau and Duncan 1967) and distinction between direct and indirect effects were made. Firstly, parents' social standing has a major impact on educational attainment and influences the offsprings' later opportunities in life via the educational channel. Children from families of a higher social standing receive more and better education and therefore they work in better jobs, earn more salary and more social prestige. This is called the *indirect effect* on the social background. At the same time, the impact of social origin may operate independently from schooling and result in significant differences in the social destination of individuals with similar educational attainment but different social backgrounds. In this case, individuals with similar educational attainment achieve different social position because of the differences in their social origin. This is called the *direct effect* of social origin and this is the focus of this study.

Functionalist theory and increasing meritocracy theory argue that in industrial and postindustrial societies, education – as a signal of achievements and merit – is becoming the determinant of social success to an increasing extent. (E.g. Treiman 1970, Bell 1972) These ideas are exceptionally influential in the field of social mobility research. At the same time, cultural reproduction theory is arguing that it is the inequalities *within* the educational system that is more important. It is not surprising then, that the idea of the direct transmission of social status received relatively little attention lately. Remarkable exceptions are studies by Goldthorpe and Breen, systematically challenging the propositions of functionalist theory as well as the basic ideas of meritocracy (e.g. Goldthorpe 1985, Breen-Goldthorpe 1999; 2001; Goldthorpe-Jackson 2006). They also present their own empirical results suggesting that the importance of direct parental effects is not at all declining – at least not in the contemporary Britain. Looking at the status attainment process of the 1958 cohort of the National Child Development Study (NCDS), Breen and Goldthorpe (1999) find that parents' social class remains to exert a significant effect on the social class of the respondents even when education, abilities and also effort – possible constitutes of merit – are controlled for. In another study (2001) they compare the 1958 cohort from NCDS and the 1970 cohort from the British Cohort Study. Here they find that by the 1990's, more room was left for the direct channels of social inheritance than a decade earlier. In an earlier study Breen (1998) is looking at second-level school leavers from the Republic of Ireland. Decomposing the total impact of social origin into its direct and indirect components, he shows that social origin's influence on the odds of avoiding unemployment is only partially mediated through education.

A recent paper by Evans and his colleagues (Evans et al 2005) suggests that direct effects of social origin also exist outside Anglo-Saxon societies. Comparing the process of status attainment in 31 countries all over the world they find that in 20 of these countries parental background plays a role in shaping occupational status even when respondents' education is controlled for. The direct effect of scholarly culture (as measured by the number of books) tends to be stronger in post-communist countries (including Hungary) than elsewhere. Further empirical results relating to Hungary include Iannelli's analysis on LFS 2000 data, showing that children of parents with a higher education degree get higher prestige jobs than their similarly educated counterparts in all the 12 countries studied (2005). Kogan and Unt use similar data in their study (2005), but focus on Hungary, Slovenia and Estonia only. They show that an offspring of poorly educated parents is more likely to end up in jobs to which she is overeducated, and less likely to be undereducated for her job, then others. This effect was found to be strongest in Hungary.

Aims of this study

Building on existing research findings, this study aims at refining and also deepening our understanding of the direct effect of social origin by looking at the case of Hungary today. It does so firstly by exploring and classifying possible underlying mechanisms that promote social origin's direct effect on the attained social status. Three sets of family assets are identified as generating direct social effect: cultural-, network- and financial. Efforts are made to pinpoint the role of these factors in the process of status-attainment outside the educational system.

A second part of this research is concerned about differentiating between various groups and areas of the society that are influenced by the direct effect to a varying extent. In other words, segments of the society that are particularly sensitive to the direct social influence are identified. People with different levels of education are analysed separately and special attention is paid to higher education graduates who are generally believed to be only moderately influenced by the effect of social origin. Also different segments of the labour market are handled separately and economic sectors with an excessive demand for communicative competencies and other soft skills are identified. It is suggested that social origin is of particular importance in securing success in these "personality reliant" sectors. Finally, distinction is made between employees in the private and the public sector to find out how the different nature of these labour market segments impacts upon the significance of the direct social effect.

II. Methodology applied

In the analyses presented I mostly apply multivariate analyses to various Hungarian social surveys. Depending on the nature of the problem studied, data from the KSH Time Use Survey 2000, the Youth 2000 survey and the Graduate Survey (Fidév) 1999 are used. In most cases, the mechanism of status-attainment is modelled with OLS regressions. Social attainment in the models was proxied by the Standard Occupational Prestige Score (SIOPS) and the wage of the respondent. Social background was measured by the principal component of parental occupation and parental education indexes, making interaction effects convenient to include. Interaction effects were applied to study the characteristics of the groups in our focus: graduates, employees in the personality reliant sectors as well as employees in the private sector. To find out how the status attainment process of these groups differs from that of the rest of the population, an interaction term between the social origin measure and a dummy variable indicating membership in one of these groups was included in a set of models. To allow flexibility of gender differences, models were estimated for men and women separately.

Statistical analyses in this study are supplemented by a set of interviews conducted with young graduates. These provide a more in-depth understanding of the school to work transition process and are especially helpful to highlight the mechanisms promoting the direct effect of the social origin. Two of these interviews are included in the dissertation as case studies.

Research shown here is focusing on the first job after completing highest level of educational as well as the job a few years after. Only young people entering these jobs in the time period between 1990 and 2004 (2006 in the case of the interviews) are included in the analyses, which holds age effects fairly constane. The main remaining source of generation effect which we have to deal with is the political transition in 1989-1990.

III. Findings of the study

1. Main finding of this study is that young people's labour market success is not independent of their social origin in Hungary today – even if their education, main demographic characteristics and labour market experiences are held constant. Children of more educated parents or parents with a higher social prestige can expect higher wages and an occupation with higher social prestige than their similarly educated counterparts with a less advantageous parental background. Direct effect of social origin was found to be responsible for about 30-50 percent of the total effect of family background on the attained social position by. This is true for the wages earned 4-6 years after finishing school as well as for the social prestige of the first job, and (in the case of women) also for the social prestige a few years later. We have also shown that the magnitude of these effects remained largely the same after the political transformation in the end of the 1980's in Hungary.

It is important that the magnitude of the direct social effect is not identical in the various segments of the labour market. The average premium for coming from a better family ("better" by one unit as measured by a principal component) was 800 to 1600 Hungarian Forint per month in the entire young generation studied – a sum that reached 6000-7000 Forints in some specific subgroups of this population. Subgroups that proved to be particularly vulnerable to the direct social background effect include higher education graduates (at least when their wages are concerned), employees working in the personality-reliant sectors and also employees of the private sector. Cultural, network and also financial assets of the family are shown to play an important role in generating direct social effects.

2. Groups most strongly affected by their social origin were identified along three major dimensions: (a) educational level, (b) economic sectors with different skill-demands and (c) public vs. private sector.

2.1. Concerning **level of education**, a hypothesis was formed suggesting that the significance of the direct parental effect is not necessarily declining as level of education is increasing. According to a widely accepted idea, supported by earlier studies (e.g. Hout 1988; Vallett 2004; Breen and Jonsson 2005), social background plays no role whatsoever among **higher education graduates**. In other words, higher education would erase any impact of the social origin and would provide equal employment opportunities to everyone irrespective of their social background. Contradicting this idea our research suggests that at a time of a rapid and excessive expansion in the higher education system, employers are increasingly likely to rely on factors other than the applicants' highest level of education. Because of this, characteristics linked to the social origin will also play a role in the selection process. Following Breen (1998), I also hypothesised that graduates from general fields of study (such as Humanities, Social Sciences, Arts) are more likely to be affected by their social background than those with a more specific field, providing closer links to the labour market (e.g. Business studies, Law, Medical Studies).

- Findings support strongly the basic assumption: the direct impact of the social origin is <u>not</u> eliminated by higher education in Hungary today. Moreover, a significant direct background effect concerning wages was only found among the most highly educated labour market entrants.
- Making use of the young graduate survey (Fidév) 1999, a series of alternative explanations for this finding could be rejected. Analyses of this data have shown that the correlation between family background and employment success can not be eliminated by controlling for field of study, type of higher education institution or application ratio of the higher education program. (The latter was interpreted as an index of the quality of the higher education programme.) A significant relationship remained also when all these factors (and also certain labour market conditions) were controlled for.
- Among men three and a half years after graduation, those with a father at the highest quartile of the social prestige scale earn 12% more than their counterparts, while men whose father also completed higher education enjoy 4% more social prestige than others. In the case of women, advantages associated with a good social background appear sooner after graduation but they seem to diminish later. Women's advantages included a 9% wage premium (associated with a graduate father) and 4% higher social prestige score (associated with a graduate mother) a year after graduation. The gender-difference

in the "timing" of the social background effect was attributed to expected family engagements. Such expectations might significantly divert women's career in their twenties making their early labour market choices more conscious, than those of men's.

- Experiments with various model-specifications have shown that the story told here is not about the most disadvantaged suffering further disadvantages even if they manage to access higher education. We have found the reproduction of the elite instead: the cream of the crop among graduates, that is children of university graduate or highly prestigious parents who manage to secure their social advantages even at a time when number of graduates is expanding dramatically.
- The hypothesis that graduates with a "general" kind of degree are more strongly affected by their family background could not be reconciled on this data.

2.2. Studying the issue of direct social impact from the perspective of labour demand, I coined the concept of **personality-reliant jobs**. Such jobs are defined as jobs that require a high level of communication, social and interpersonal skills, and / or creativity and autonomy. At the same time possession of technical skills, professional knowledge plays a relatively smaller role in successfully filling in the personality-reliant positions. Since the skills listed above are suggested to be linked to family background (e.g. Bernstein 1971; Brown and Scase 1994; Breen and Goldthorpe 2001; Evans et.al. 2005), we assumed that in jobs where there is high demand for such skills and competencies, success is more strongly related to family background.

Because information on skill-requirements were missing on the job-level, industrylevel data from the British Skills Survey was used. Based on interviews with employees, jobs in this study were classified according to their skill- and knowledgerequirements and results are published by industry¹. For the purposes of our analyses, industries with a high demand for communication and literacy skills and relatively small need for technical competencies and mathematical knowledge were selected. Five industries were classified as personality-reliant on this basis: education; finances;

1

http://www.kent.ac.uk/economics/staff/gfg/WorkSkills1986-2001.pdf

public administration; health and social work; and real estate and business services.

- Along with a dummy for holding a job in any of these industries along, an interaction term for family background was included. These have shown that direct impact of the social background appears indeed decisively in these industries. Including the employees of both the private and the public sector in our models, social background effect in the personality-reliant sectors appeared only in terms of social prestige. On the other hand, when analysis was narrowed down to those working in the private sector, it became clear that it is the personality-reliant areas of the private sector where the link between family background and employment success is the most significant, affecting wages as well as occupational prestige.
- We also found that those with a more prestigious family background are more likely to work in the personality-reliant sectors than others, even when others factors are equal. This suggests that young employees make their employment-choices conscious of their skills and competencies that are rewarded in the personality-reliant sectors. Because of this, they are more likely to apply for jobs in these sectors than in others, where there is a smaller demand for such competencies. An alternative explanation is that it is the employers in the personality-reliant sectors who are more likely to find the necessary skills in applicants with a "better" family-background.

2.3. Another attribute of the workplace that might influence social background's impact on employment success is the **type of sector**. In line with Goldthorpe's argument (1985) we also suggest that employers in the private sector are less affected by bureaucratic regulation and enjoy more freedom in selecting and also promoting their employees according to their personal attributes rather on the basis of their level of education. Consequently, we expect the direct background effect to be more significant among those who work in the private, rather than in the public sector.

 To test this hypothesis, regression models including an interaction term between social background and the nature of the economic sector were estimated. These have shown that wages are indeed affected by the social background in the private sector only. Concerning social prestige however, no clear difference between the magnitudes of direct social background effect between the two sectors was found.

3. Regression models on the Time Use Survey 2000 were estimated to find out how the social-economic transition in 1989-1990 affected the level of direct social background effect in Hungary. Only the occupational prestige score for the first job after education was available in this dataset. According to our findings, the effect of social background on this measure didn't change to any significant extent after 1990. Neither a decline (as suggested by the functionalist theory) nor an increase (as it could be expected as a result of the higher education expansion, growth of the personality-reliant sectors and also the private sector) could be detected.

4. Possible **factors intervening** between social background and labour market success were classified as cultural, network and financial resources in this study. This distinction was based on Pierre Bourdieu's notions of the various forms of capital applied to the labour market (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1973). The data at hand did not make it possible to systematically measure and compare these factors. It did however allow us to illustrate their role in the process and – in some cases – to refine our preliminary assumptions about them.

4.1. The role of **cultural assets** in the labour market today has strengthened along with the importance of personality factors and general skills, such as communication, social, appearance, management and other skills in the labour market. (e.g. Brown and Scase 2004; Jackson et.al.2005) Even if they do not substitute for technical skills or professional knowledge, they certainly become a must in a range of working places. Many of these skills however can best be acquired in the early socialisation process, more effectively in the middle class families than elsewhere. It follows from this that those acquiring the "right" skills and personality factors in the parental home can put them to work in the labour market.

Out of the three kinds of assets it is the cultural one that is the most difficult to identify and especially to measure. To construct a reliable measure, one would first need to systematically explore skills and competencies that were shown to be linked to the family background. Secondly, the labour market selection process would need to be analysed so that the appearance and also the importance of these skills could be established. Not even our graduate interviews could provide an insight into the process thorough to such an extent.

However, several of our research findings provide at least an indirect indication of the presence of cultural capital in the labour market selection process. Direct effect of the parents' educational level – as opposed to their occupation – on graduates' employment success is clearly such a sign. Besides, the increased parental effect found in the personality-reliant sectors is also an indication of the importance of cultural assets, since personality-reliant sectors were identified exactly on the basis of their demand for a range of socially transmitted skills.

4.2. The importance of **social networks** in the job finding process has been established for a long time by now. (E.g. Granovetter 1974; Flap and DeGraaf 1998). Since members of a social networks are typically of similar social positions, it follows that higher prestige parents can mobilize acquaintances linked to "better" labour market positions to help their children. Higher status mediators between employers and employees have been proved to secure better jobs (e.g. Flap-De Graaf 1986, Rosenbaum et.al. 1990). We also know that network capital is of high importance in the (graduate) labour market (e.g. Brennan et. al. 2001) and also in the post-socialist Hungary in general (e.g. Czakó and Sik 1994), and in the Hungarian graduate labour market in particular (e.g. HVG 2006). Therefore we hypothesized that labour market entrants with a higher status family background have access to more valuable help at the job-finding process by building on their parents' social network and this way they can secure themselves better positions in the labour market.

The impact of fathers' occupational prestige on graduates' wages denotes the importance of network capital. This effect appears because occupational prestige seems to relate to influence and power linked to the occupation. Furthermore, we have shown that children of more educated parents are more likely then others to rely on parental help when looking for a job. We could

not however justify the assumption that this method of job search would be more successful for those from a better social origin than it is for others.

Graduate interviews included in this study also provided examples on the ways network capital operates in the labour market. One graduate started to work in his father's business at a rather young age, and there he made valuable contacts with people offering him further exciting career opportunities. In another case a longish, unsuccessful job-searching process was finally ended by the intervention of the influential father, who helped his son to a promising trainee position at a big public company.

4.3. Finally, we expected **financial resources** of the family to promote employment success by providing a secure background for a relaxed and therefore successful job-searching period; improving financial circumstances of the youngster by direct financial transfer or by leading to better paid jobs by increasing income-expectations. Findings in this respect have somewhat refined our original assumptions.

- From our statistical analyses one can conclude on the presence of financial resources from the finding that father's occupation is significantly related to young graduates' wages. It is so, because men's occupation is often interpreted as a measure of financial resources available for the family.
- The role of financial resources is shown in our graduate interviews more clearly and in more details. In the first example the well-to-do father is running a successful family business and provides a well-paid job for his son. This way he clearly promotes a high-flying career. From another story however we can also see how the lack of financial pressure and especially the own flat purchased by the parents can make it possible for the youngsters to reduce their income-expectations. As a consequence, wages at this stage of the career might not reflect the positive impact of the good financial circumstances of the family. On the basis of this analysis it is not possible to tell, whether the various investments work-experience, studies made at this early stage of the career, which are made possible with the financial support of the parents will also financially pay off later.

5. Our analyses made it possible to compare the influences social background have on wages on the one hand and on social prestige on the other. These two indicators were applied in parallel throughout the analyses wherever it was possible. On the basis of differences found between the direct parental effects imposed upon these two measures, the following comments can be made.

- Among higher education graduates wage reflects the impact of social origin much more clearly than social prestige does. In our analyses on the young graduates survey (FIDÉV) more moderate background effects on occupational prestige than on wages were found. (Around 4% in the first case and 9-12% in the other.) In our second analysis on graduates (on the Youth 2000 data) we found no direct parental impact whatsoever on the prestige scores, while effects on wages were significant. This is so, because with highest level of education being equal, deviation of occupational prestige scores is moderate while deviation of wages is not.
- Wages were found to be affected by social background in the private sector only. There was however no similar tendency found with occupational prestige scores. This shows that only in the private sector can employers pay differentiated wages on the basis of social background – or rather on the basis of skills and competencies, "personality factors" related to that.

Overview of main findings

	Men		Women	
	First job	Job 4-8	First job	Job 4-8
		years later		years later
Labour market entrants	SIOPS +		SIOPS+	SIOPS+
in general		Wage+		Wage+
Specific subgroups			·	
Graduates	XX	SIOPS+ ^{1,2}	SIOPS+ ^{1,2}	XX
		Wage+	Wage+	ΛΛ
Graduates in general	XX	XX	XX	XX
fields of studies	ΛΛ	ΛΛ	ΛΛ	ΛΛ
Employees in personal-	$SIOPS + ^{2}$	SIOPS +	XX	SIOPS +
ity-reliant sectors	5101.5 +	5101.5	ΛΛ	5101.5
Employees in personal-		SIOPS +		
ity-reliant sectors – pri-	$SIOPS + ^{2}$	Wage +	Wage +	Wage +
vate sectors only		wage 1		
Private sector	SIOPS + 2	Wage +	Wage +	Wage +
	5101.5	wage +	wage +	SIOPS -

Table 1. Direct parental effect in various circumstances

+: statistically significant at least at 10% level – positive effect

-: statistically significant at least at 10% level – negative effect

XX no statistically significant effect

¹: only according to the graduate survey ²: effect not stronger than in the reference group

Table 2 Findings concerning the various social assets

- Impact of parents' education on graduates' employment opportunities
- Increased parental impact in personality-reliant sectors
- Impact of father's occupation on male graduates' employ- ment opportunities
- Children of educated parents are more likely to rely on parents' help when looking for a job
- Positive impact of parental network clearly shown in the graduate case studies
- Impact of father's occupation on male graduates' employ- ment opportunities
- Positive impact of having well-off parents shown in the graduate case studies – but also the delaying effect of finan- cial security can be seen

IV. Further research questions and policy implications

- This study has raised numerous questions requiring further research. These are discussed in the paper in much detail – only the most important ones can be mentioned here.
 - The question, how direct parental impact changes over time (concerning changes by age as well as historical trends) remains open to a large extent in this study. This paper is looking at the Hungarian labour market in the 1990's and early 2000's and focuses on the labour market entrants. By gradually expanding the time-scale of the analysis it will be possible to tell whether our findings are only temporary products of the after-transition period in Hungary, or they remain significant for a longer time. It is also not clear yet, whether direct parental effects are to decline after the school to work transition period, or conversely, the gradual process of status-correction increases the correlation between the status of the parents and the offspring.
 - Fruitful efforts have been made in this study to elaborate and also to opera-tionalise the notion of personality-reliant jobs. There is however still a lot to be done in this area. We have identified a range of skills that – according to the literature – are linked to the family background (communication, literacy, creativity and autonomy). It is however very likely that further skills and competencies could be added to this list and also a more precise definition of them could possibly be worked out. In a next step, individual jobs should be classified according to the level of demand they pose on these skills and how the importance of these skills relates to the importance of technical and professional knowledge. Such an analysis should be based on experts' views combined with surveys among employees and also employers. Applying this information, a list of personality-reliant jobs could be generated and finally an analysis similar to the one described here performed. It can be expected that with jobs rather than economic sectors being the smallest unit of the study, areas highly sensitive to the direct parental impact could be identified, and in them unusually strong correlation between social origin and employment success would be shown.

Social inheritance in the labour market can not be decreased without a throughout understanding of the actual mechanisms mediating between social origin and the attained status. In this study first steps towards this goal have been made. Possible family assets playing a role here have been identified and illustratative analyses have shown that cultural-, network- and also financial assets are all likely to promote success after education. Better targeted surveys however would ideally include a carefully selected range of questions to assess cultural, social and financial resources available in the parental house. This way the relative importance of each of these resources could be established. Methods of job search and direct parental assistance at the stage of labour market entry should also be explored to provide better insight into the actual process of social inheritance.

2. For social policy, the most important message of this paper is the following: around 30-50% of the total amount of social inequalities, experienced by young labour market entrants could be eliminated if inequalities outside the educational system could be abolished. This is of course not an easy task. The following guidelines to this work can be derived from our study.

- We found that social inequalities are mediated to the labour market entrants via cultural, network and financial inequalities of the family. Out of these three, network- and financial inequalities are difficult to influence. Possibilities to mitigate the use of social connections in the employee selection process are limited and financial security provided by the family at the time of labour market entry can not be centrally secured either.
- More fruitful efforts can however be made to compensate for cultural inequalities. From our preliminary findings it can already be seen that improvement of general skills within the educational system could also add to the reduction of labour market inequalities. Although it was emphasized that inequality-generating skills and competencies are mostly transmitted within the family, it is clearly not impossible to improve them in school. Skills that are highly valued in the labour market and contribute to the social inequalities and are therefore to be improved in the educational system include communication and literacy skills, creativity and the ability for autonomous work.

The more coherently the improvement of these skills could be built into the pedagogic programmes of the schools, the more similarly efficient the process would be to the early socialization.

- Such programmes must not be concentrated on the primary and secondary education only (although early skill-improvement would also contribute to the reduction of social inequalities among higher education graduates). It has to be made clear, that completing higher education can not in itself compensate for social handicaps in Hungary today. As long as the crucial basic skills are not efficiently improved at the lower levels of the educational system, it is necessary to continue this job inside the higher education institutions if we aim at eliminating social inequalities at the labour market.
- Professional career-services provided for the young labour market entrants could to some extent compensate for the deficiencies in any of the three resource-areas. Young entrants should be well informed about the job-searching methods, should learn how to behave proactively with employers and then they would be more likely to find a good job even when financial pressures are severe and no informal help is available. Moreover, by understanding the selection process, being trained for job-interviews and also for an efficient CV-writing, applicants also with a less favourable cultural background could more easily demonstrate the necessary cultural skills to the employer.
- There is an increased need for both the improvement of socially inheritable skills and career-support in those educational institutions that are typically training employees for personality-reliant jobs. Based on our findings so far, to these institutions belong high-schools and higher education institutions with a financial, medical, educational and public administrative profile.

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VI. Publications and conference paper presented in the field

Publications

Graduates in the Labour Market: Does Socioeconomic Background have an Impact? The case of Hungary – Czech Sociological Review, forthcoming – with Péter Róbert

Social Background Effects in the Hungarian Graduate Labour Market – to be published in the Working Paper series of the Demographic Research Institute, Budapest. Forthcoming – with Péter Róbert

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Conference presentations

Selection in the Graduate Labour Market. The Case of Hungary. CERGE-EI conference Prague, 2006 and International Sociological Association RC28 conference, 2007, Brno (together with Péter Róbert)

Társadalmi egyenlőtlenségek a diplomások munkaerőpiacán. (Social Inequalities in the Graduate Labour Market) Andorka Rudolf Emlékkonferencia, 2006 Budapest, Corvinus Egyetem

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