

## **THESIS SYNOPSIS**

**Andrea Zsuzsanna Nyéki**

**The World of Work in the Hungarian Television  
The Portrayal of Occupations in Hungarian Fiction Series**  
Doctoral Dissertation

**Supervisor:**

**Dr. habil. Károly Bozsonyi**  
Professor

Budapest, 2024

**Department of Sociology**

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# 1 Aim and Background of the Dissertation

## 1.1 Introduction

Television plays an important role in socialization (Greenberg, 1982; Signorielli, 1993; Wright et al., 1995; Cohen and Weimann, 2000; Hoffner et al., 2008; Gehrau, Brüggemann, Handrup, 2016), and it has a great impact later on too. Viewers gain knowledge from television about new, unfamiliar or unusual things, and they learn from there about the greater social reality to which they do not have direct access. Many television programmes represent occupations through working characters, therefore media has an inevitable role in shaping the public opinion on work-related notions.

Work plays a central role in human life. In the Western culture active life is the standard, meaning that the people's lives are framed by doing paid work. Work affects life in many ways: transforms the environment and shapes people's identity (Watson, 2008). Occupations determine individuals in the social settings. On social events, for example, people who meet for the first time often ask the question from each-other "What do you do?". The answer to this question helps people to define who they are in the social context. Participation in certain occupations are culturally bound and socially valued (Phelan and Kinsella, 2009; Unruh, 2004) and occupational titles functions as social categories as well, therefore, they are also a part of social identity.

Television series is the most important media genre due to its social, cultural and psychological roles while it also functions as tales for adults. The audience can develop a close bond with the characters and identify with them. Once the engagement is strong enough, viewers might start to feel that these stories are not just for them, but also about them. (NMHH, 2016). According to Nielsen Audience Measurement data, fiction series is the most popular genre delivering high ratings for the broadcasting channels: the reception share<sup>1</sup> of series is the highest among all program types (20,4% RSH, Total 4+, Q1 2019, Total TV).

In 2015 altogether 8 new series were premiering in Hungary, including HBO's *Aranyélet*, which was the most successful Hungarian series of all time - even internationally. In the chosen 5 year-long period, between 2015 and 2019, in total 24 Hungarian prime-time fiction series premiered. In case of some series a certain profession or a work itself (meaning any activity with the purpose of which is to make money, or to earn a living), or a particular workplace has a central role in the

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<sup>1</sup> Reception share ('RSH' represents the rating of an event compared to the total rating of broadcaster television channel; it can also mean the rate of viewers that a certain program brings compared to the total number of viewers of the respective television channel, it indicates the attractiveness of the programmes) <http://www.agbnielsen.com/glossary/glossaryQ.asp> [Accessed 13 12 2018]

storyline. For example, a series about teachers and everyday life of a school (*A tanár/The Teacher*, *Bogaras szülők/Lice Mother*), or series set in a private hospital (*Jóban rosszban*). If television portrays a distorted image of work, it can mislead the audience members, generate false beliefs, and foster dissatisfaction with their own social standing. For example, what about a financial director of a private hospital in the agglomeration being the head of a national mafia network? Or a company owned by 5-6 families, always on the verge of bankruptcy, but still providing a prosperous livelihood for everyone?

Several international studies (e.g., DeFleur, 1964; Atkin, 1991; Vande Berg and Steckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Signorielli, 2009; Jacobs et al., 2015; Behm-Morawitz et al. 2018) confirmed the media's impact on occupational aspirations of children and adolescents. These research projects were focusing on the depictions of occupations in television programmes and examining the impact on people's notions about the world of work.

Consequently, the aim of this research is to explore how entertainment television shows – particularly locally produced, scripted series – portray the world of work: in a realistic, idealised, or a distorted way. The study analyses the labour market represented in television series along two axes: the horizontal angle covers employment, occupations, and sectors, while the vertical angle concerns the stratification by characteristic of work done, hierarchical position and the occupational prestige in relation to socio-demographic aspects.

The novelty of this research is the application of a unique approach which enables a complex understanding of the phenomenon and thus will contribute to the international body of knowledge on the issue. Via content analysis the media's messages on the occupation-related issues were reviewed in order to provide a comprehensive overview of what kind of messages are transferred through the contents of television. The research maps the potential biases of the portrayal of certain occupations, however, beyond the explorative goals, the study gives us an opportunity for cross-cultural comparisons as well. Furthermore, by applying the approaches suggested by prior research (i.e., including genre and platform-based analysis [Signorielli 1993, 2009]), and with its complex perspective, this study provides additional empirical support for cultivation theory.

Moreover, this study investigates the indirect and contextual meanings by analysing the work-, and occupation-related verbal elements and other additional relevant aspects (e.g., depiction of overtimes and atypical work). These have an inevitable importance in understanding and comprehending the whole picture of the portrayed phenomena. Since previous research projects disregarded these perspectives, the current analysis not only fills the gap in this field but also provides a guideline for the research directions omitted thus far.

## ***1.2 Theoretical Framework and Background***

The media-effect-related theories have evolved in parallel with the media environment. The research presented in this thesis based its theoretical framework on two theories: Geroge Gerbner's Cultivation Theory and Albert Bandura's Social Learning/Cognitive Theory. Both of these are among the fundamental and most-cited communication theories (Morgan, Shanahan, 2010; Morgan et al., 2015) that served as theoretical basics for several television and mass-communication-related research projects which aimed to analyse the messages of the media content and/or to explore the media impact on the audience (e.g. Signorielli, 2004; Hoffner et al., 2008; Signorielli, 2009; Esch, 2011; Gehrau et al., 2016; Signorielli, 2017). Essentially, these theories share the notions about the role of mass communication: it has become a symbolic environment of which effects are unavoidable because even in the absence of direct connection, the impact can also emerge through a socially mediated pathway (e.g. via other media content consumers). The perspectives are, however, different: while the cultivation theory focuses on television from a sociological point of view, the social cognitive theory explores mass communication from psychological aspects.

The cultivation theory is subject to a significant amount of concerns raising doubts about its applicability within the late modern media environment. One of the main criticisms against cultivation theory is the fact that due to technical improvement and the extension of platforms the audience have become fragmented. Morgan and Shanahan (2010) explain that all these developments serve one purpose which is a more intense way of media consumption, which resulted in even more watching which provides the justification of cultivation theory.

Based on the fact that the number of produced series in the U.S. increased two and a half times between 2010 and 2019<sup>2</sup> and being aware of the recent series cult in the world, it can be concluded that we are living in a new era of storytelling. People who decided to give up their cable television subscriptions (they are the so-called 'cord-cutters') also get access in several ways (through OTT services<sup>3</sup> or by downloading them from torrent- or other illegal sites, etc.) to the newest, well-known, over-hyped media contents. Thus, it is absolutely true, that the type of the platform is just secondary while the stories are circulating among pupils, societies, countries and continents. This is the strongest fact that continues to underpin the relevance of cultivation theory to this day.

The 'Cultural Indicators' research project was developed by Gerbner with the purpose of

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/444870/scripted-primetime-tv-series-number-usa/> [Accessed 07 09 2021]

<sup>3</sup> Over The Top: streaming media as standalone product addressed directly to viewers. e.g. HBO Go, Netflix, etc.

(On 8th March 2022 HBO GO platform was replaced by HBO Max (the American version of the streaming service), but since the date of the switch is outside the analysed time period (2015-2019), the previous name (HBO GO) is used in the thesis)

examining television as the key source of shared images and messages. Due to the stable messages of television and since everyone is affected by it directly or indirectly, its influencing power is strong. The aim of cultivation theory was to develop a method to examine the “central cultural dynamics of the age of television” (Gerbner et al., 1986 p.22).

Since the main focus of the current research is on the portrayal of the world of work in television, the main approach is based on the guidelines of the ‘Cultural Indicators’ project which provides an empirical support for exploring the television’s world. The research methodology also aligns with Gerbner’s ‘Cultural Indicators’ project framework and associated protocols. The study spans a period of 5 years and employs a systematic quantitative content analysis for the message system assessment.

Several research projects attempted to explore the portrayal of the world of work in television programmes. One group of researches focused on content analysis exploring how television contents portray the world of work (e.g. DeFleur, 1964; Atkin, 1991; Vande Berg and Steckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Elasmir et al., 1999; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Lauzen and Dozier, 2004, 2005; Signorielli, 2009; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015; Signorielli, 2017; Behm-Morawitz et al. 2018). Another group of such analyses concentrated on the effects on mainly the younger generations (Greenberg, 1982; Signorielli, 1993; Wright et al., 1995; Cohen and Weimann, 2000; Hoffner et al., 2008; Gehrau, Brüggemann, Handrup, 2016).

Former studies examined television’s demographic characteristics in term of the gender distribution, age, marital status and ethnicity. Most of the findings highlighted gender disparity (DeFleur, 1964; Vande Berg, Streckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg, Collette, 1997; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Elasmir et al., 1999; Glascock, 2011; Lauzen and Dozier, 2004; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Jacobs et al, 2015), low representation of teenagers and elder generation on television screen (Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Signorielli, 2004; Lauzen and Dozier, 2005; Smith et al., 2012). With regard to ethnicity, the same disproportional representation, which differs significantly from the distribution of the real population, has been reported (Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli 2004, 2009).

Prior research also found that the representation of everyday work roles on television is infrequent. (DeFleur, 1964; Atkin, 1991; Vande Berg and Steckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Elasmir et al., 1999; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Lauzen and Dozier, 2004, 2005; Signorielli, 2009; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2015; Signorielli, 2017; Behm-Morawitz et al. 2018). But not only the proportion of economic activity, occupational roles were examined, the

researchers extended the analysis by examining the relationship between work and the gender, age, marital status and ethnicity of the characters. As for gender differences, male characters on television screen were more often portrayed with higher status and leading organisational positions, while their female counterparts were more likely to have stereotypical jobs or unknown occupational status, (Atkin, 1991; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Elasmarr et al., 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Lauzen and Dozier, 2004, 2005; Signorielli, 2009; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015) and older men were more probably to work outside the home than women (Signorielli and Bauce, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Lauzen and Dozier, 2005).

Although there were significantly more research conducted in the U.S. (e.g. 1964, Atkin, 1991, Vande Beg and Steckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993, 2004, 2009, 2017; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Signorielli and Bauce, 1999, Elasmarr et al., 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Lauzen and Dozier, 2004, 2005; Behm-Moravitz et al., 2008) than in Europe (e.g. Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015; Gehrau et al. 2016) in this field, the results showed that there are no remarkable differences: television portrays the world of work in an imbalanced, stereotyped way, in which men's situation is more favourable, compared to women in terms of occupational position, status, prestige and power.

### ***1.3 Research questions***

The main focus of the research is the world of work portrayed in Hungarian, scripted, prime-time series. International content analysis highlighted the over-representation of certain kind of occupations in television programmes and emphasized that the depiction of work on television is distorted in numerous ways: infrequent presentation of ordinary work roles, and more glamorous and prestigious occupations on screen than in real-life. The current study intends to provide a general overview on the Hungarian situation, what the main characteristics of television's labour market are concerning economic activity, entrepreneurship, hierarchical position, and occupations and occupational prestige.

The analysis is divided into two distinct parts. The first part focuses on television, more specifically the series universe in relation with the real world by examining the demographic distribution of the characters on television (a.k.a. TV citizens), their work-related characteristics, and comparing these aspects with the actual social conditions. The second part, focuses on patterns within the series by exploring how the world of work is represented on television screen through the prestige of occupations (the more prestigious occupations are presented on screen, more the world of work on



television seems to be glamorous), and via analysing the contextual elements of the work activities. The specific research questions are grouped into sets of questions according to the two main parts, and within each of these they are structured by the broader topics.

#### FIRST PART - TELEVISION WORLD VS. REAL WORLD

##### **RQS1. Representation of characters and its accuracy**

- RQ1.1. What are the demographic characteristics of Hungarian Fiction series?
- RQ1.2. How does television's demographics compare to the real Hungarian population?
- RQ1.3. How accurate is the representation (e.g., in terms of their age, socio economic status, etc.) of gender in television series?
- RQ1.4. How often do such life changing events occur to the characters in the storyline that alter their socio-demographic characteristics, and which are the most frequent ones?

##### **RQS2. Representation of the world of work and its accuracy**

- RQ2.1. What are the main attributes of the world of work in Hungarian fiction series?
- RQ2.2. What is the relation between occupational characteristics and gender in Hungarian television series?
- RQ2.3. How do the characters' employment status and the portrayed professions compare to the real-world labour market?

#### SECOND PART – THE WORLD OF WORK IN THE FICTION SERIES UNIVERSE

##### **RQS3. Occupational prestige**

- RQ3.1. What is the proportion of high-, middle- and low-prestige occupations in Hungarian television series?
- RQ3.2. What is the relation between occupational prestige and gender in Hungarian television series?

##### **RQS4: The relation between certain occupations and work-related contextual – verbal and non-verbal – elements:**

- RQ4.1. What occupations are presented more frequently on-screen doing work activities, overtime and atypical work?
- RQ4.2. What is the proportion of work-related mentions (in positive and negative ways, success, problems, and financial issues)?

##### **RQS5: Differences in portrayal and accuracy; gender balance**

RQ5.1. What are the differences between

- formats (daily/weekly),
- genres (drama, comedy, etc.), and
- broadcasting platforms (public, commercial, cable channels, and premium channels with OTT service) in terms of occupational portrayal in the Hungarian television series?

RQ5.2. Is there any difference in the portrayal of genders – meaning that the presentation of men and woman is more balanced – if female creators are involved?

## 2 Methodology: data and analytical strategy

In order to answer the above-introduced research questions quantitative content analysis was performed on premiering Hungarian fiction series in a five-year-long period.

The scope of this research is an extensive quantitative content analysis on all Hungarian scripted, fiction series of which the first run (premier) was broadcast between 2015 and 2019 (1<sup>st</sup> January 2015– 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019) in the prime-time broadcasting hours (19 p.m. – 23 p.m.).

Altogether 24 series were broadcast in the chosen period and timeband. These were differentiated by their main type: daily series that are mainly telenovelas or soap operas and weekly series. In case of daily series, 7 titles were coded, including the 2 longest-running soap operas, *Barátok közt* and *Jóban rosszban* that were aired for more than a decade<sup>4</sup>. A teen series called *Holnap tali!* was excluded given genre arguments, while *Éjjel-Nappal Budapest* is a scripted reality series the storyline of which is the translation of the original German version (*Berlin – Tag & Nacht*) with minor changes and was thus also excluded.

The broadcast time of the included daily series (*200 első randi*, *Barátok közt*, *Drága örökösök*, *Jóban rosszban*, *MintaApák*, *Oltári csajok*, *Terápia*) was more than one thousand six hundred hours, which required rationalisation by sampling. A disproportionate sample was applied in order to avoid the overrepresentation of the long running soap operas – the sample size is in total three hundred hours – one hundred hours are dedicated to the two soap operas each, while in case of the remaining telenovelas and series, also one-hundred-hour-long sample was selected, which is proportionate to their total airing time.

As for the weekly series, except the excluded 3 titles, all of them were coded. *Butiquehotel.hu* was disregarded since its broadcast time changed during the first run and the quarter of the series was

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<sup>4</sup> *Barátok közt* was launched in 1998, *Jóban Rosszban* since 2004 on the two biggest commercial channels (RTL Klub and TV2) in Hungary.

not aired in the chosen timeband. The second blacklisted title was *Kossuthkifli* which is a 6-episode-long miniseries, the story of which story is set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly to *Holnap tali!*, the other teen series, *Egynyári kaland* was cast out on account of genre issues. The total broadcast hours of the weekly series pool were two hundred and a half hours.

For testing the reliability of the coding schemes and process, 10% of the whole sample was coded by two independent coders. Since the current research involved tree coders, and different level variables, KALPHA was applied for checking the Intercoder Reliability Indices (ICR). Regarding Krippendorff (2004) suggestions, KALPHA is always acceptable above 0.9, over 0.8 guarantees suitable reliability, and the results between 0.667 and 0.8 could support explanatory studies. Most of the cases (74 per cent of the variables) the result of the ICR test reached the acceptable level ( $\alpha \geq 0.667$ ) or higher. Unfortunately, in some cases the results failed to reach the tolerable level, due to the low number of episodes coded by the sub-coders that provided limited opportunities for fair judgements (most of the cases disagreement was caused by (user) missing codes (recording the ‘Unable to determine’ option)).

Three different coding schemes were applied for the purpose of collecting all essential data during the data gathering phase. The databases that contain the recorded data were merged with each other, in line with the analytical steps in order to answer the research questions:

**Series database:** gathers all substantial information about the series, such as its format, genre, type of broadcasting channel, and availability on OTT platforms. The sex of the main creators (showrunner and lead writer) was also coded, given that these variables may provide interesting additional insights for the gender part of the second research question aiming to investigate the relations between the sex of the creators and the portrayal of the characters’ work roles. To assess the creators, on screen credit was used and their sex was determined by their (first) name. Two variables record occupation- and work-related information about the whole series itself. The first one is to decide whether the work/workplace has a central role in the storyline: because some series are based on certain jobs (e.g., *Bogaras szülők* – elementary school, *Ízig vérig* – restaurant, *200 első randi* – radio station, etc.), these need to be distinguished from the other ones which depict ‘everyday life’. The other variable is about the representation of the portrayed occupations, meaning whether the depicted occupations, the way of doing a job on screen is close to the real world’s routine or rather it seems to be somehow distorted.

Since in case of the daily series sampling was applied for rationalizing the amount of coded contents. The projection weight was calculated from the episode numbers ( $W_P = N_{\text{total episode}} / n_{\text{coded episode}}$ ) the purpose of which is projecting the results to the whole population of the series that were

involved in the analysis.

**Character database:** covers all socio-demographic characteristics of the relevant characters who are the unit of the analysis: only with speaking roles (more than three lines) and judged to be 15-year-old or older. The following character traits were coded:

- Character's name and character ID – any changes the affected the characters were coded under a different (sub) ID in order to track changes
- Gender (male, female) – the socially constructed aspect was recorded, due the fact that the biological sex is undetectable in most of the cases
- Chronological and social age: chronological age, which is the categorization of the character's precise or estimated age; social age, that covers an estimation of the stage at which the character operates in his/her interactions with others
- Marital status
- Having children and number of children
- Socio-Economic Status: the evaluations was based on only the visible possessions (e.g., housing conditions, having car and the type of the car, clothing, jewelleries, etc.)
- Living in a City or Countryside (Type of settlement) only 3 options were well detectable: living in a city, countryside or abroad
- Economic activity
- Occupation
- Own Business (yes or no)
- Hierarchical position / Status of employment
- Work-related Illegal Activity (yes or no)
- Ethnic minority: Romani or not

In order avoid the distortion which would occur by the use of character subvariants, a universal ID was added to each character, and based on the number of the subvariants, a character weight was calculated ( $W_{ch}=1/N_{\text{character subvariant}}$ ). The number of the individual characters who matched the coding criteria is 1995, while with all subvariants the total number of recorded cases is 2584. Applying the character weight, a proper description of the characters can be provided without distortion.

**Episode database:** includes all work appearance variables: number of appearances during work activities, working overtime and doing atypical work; number of work-related mentions: mentioning work in a positive/negative/neutral way, problems and successes; number of mentioning financial

issues.

Furthermore, for this database, concerning the fourth research question, an additional standardising weigh was calculated. The application of this weight ( $W_{st}=1/n_{\text{coded episode}}/10$ ) reduces each series to the length of 10 episodes thus eliminating the distortions caused by the different episode numbers and allowing the series to be compared.

**Supplementary database:** gathers all the reference or so-called ‘real-world’ data. The official datasets of the Central Statistics Office (STADAT, Microcensus 2016) were used for the comparative analysis, in order to measure the socio-demographical and occupational distributions on television against those of the Hungarian labour force and overall societal characteristics. The most up to date and relevant available<sup>5</sup> data were applied (from STADAT, the average of the 2015-2019 period)<sup>6</sup>.

The statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 27. Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the demographic and work-related characteristics, with comparisons to population data when available. The goodness of fit for the observed data was evaluated using a  $\chi^2$  statistic, which was calculated via an online calculator. Crosstabs and  $\chi^2$  statistics were employed to evaluate the relationships between demographic variables. The analysis of occupational prestige and its correlation with gender was conducted using descriptive statistics, two-sample t-tests, and multivariate linear regression, with bootstrap resampling employed due to the non-normal distribution of the data. In instances where complex comparisons were required, ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis tests were employed, dependent on the normality of the data. Furthermore, the analysis entailed the categorisation and standardisation of variables, facilitating a comprehensive examination of occupational portrayals across diverse series formats and platforms.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 First part - *Television World vs. Real World*

#### 3.1.1. Character Overview

The first research question set focused on the representation of the characters and its accuracy.

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<sup>5</sup> Official data about ethnic minorities and number of children are provided by Microcensus 2016, all other socio-demographic data were available in the Summary Tables (STADAT)

<sup>6</sup> One methodological problem in relation to ‘real-world’ data should be noted: in the KSH data on Stratification by the character of work done, currently retired persons are included by their last occupation, thus increasing the size of the two-manual and agricultural groups. This classification cannot be reproduced in the present study due to different analytical purposes.

Overall, the character portrayal in Hungarian fiction series is imbalanced and distorted compared to the real Hungarian population. The findings of the present research also support the outcomes of the previous research (DeFleur, 1964; Atkin, 1991; Vande Berg and Steckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Elasmars et al., 1999; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Lauzen and Dozier, 2004, 2005; Signorielli, 2009; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015; Signorielli, 2017; Behm-Morawitz et al. 2018), indicating that there are similar trends in the representation of Hungarian television series as in the case of foreign-produced content, thereby conveying a similarly distorted image to their audiences. In terms of gender, as the results highlight, the portrayal of males is more favourable, not only because of the differences in proportions, but also because of their characteristics.

Male characters outnumber females while their proportion in the society is quite the opposite. The depiction of age groups is also inadequate as the majority of the characters are in their midlife, while adolescents and elderly (aged 60 or older) people are underrepresented. Females on television screen are more likely to be younger by 10 years compared to males, women are more likely to be portrayed as younger (in their 20s and 30s), while men are mainly depicted as 30–50-year-olds.

Married couples are highly underrepresented on television, just as well as divorced or widowed people, who are apparently sacrificed for a better storyline which is dominated by singles and characters in relationship. Indeterminate marital status is more typical among male characters. Parenthood is also inequitably presented in fiction series: not only are fewer characters with children presented on the screen, but parents with one child are significantly overrepresented compared to families with more children and also in comparison with the population average.

The representation of socio-economic status is also imbalanced, favouring the upper- and upper middle class. Males with higher economic status dominate the females, while married characters are more likely to be depicted in fiction series. Lastly, similarly to the case of marital status, indeterminate socio-economic status is proportionately higher among men.

As for the residence of the characters, most of them live in cities, but due to the new trend of Hungarian series production residents of villages are also overrepresented. Last but not least, the ratio of ethnic minorities in fiction series is remarkably lower than in the society, and even if they appear, mainly male Romani characters were visible in the analysed media contents. These findings are in line with the earlier foreign research outcomes which also highlighted a biased representation of genders (DeFleur, 1964; Vande Berg, Streckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg, Collette, 1997; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Elasmars et al., 1999; Glascock, 2011; Lauzen and Dozier, 2004; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2015), elderly characters (Signorielli and Bacue, 1999;

Signorielli, 2004; Lauzen and Dozier, 2005; Smith et al., 2012), and ethnic minorities (Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli 2004, 2009).

Regarding the subvariants of the characters, it can be summarised that one fifth of the characters were affected by life changing events. Examining these changes is a new aspect of research, although there are some studies that analysed trends in portrayal covering longer periods (e.g., Atkin, 1991; Signorielli, 1993, 2009; Greenberg, Collette, 1997; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Emons et al., 2010), their focus was on the evolution of depiction rather than on the changes in the characters' traits. In this analysis, this aspect was involved as the last part of the first research question in order to get a more nuanced picture. The review of the changes in the characters' traits revealed that the most common events were those related to their marital status and/or career. Both themes provide the writers with plenty of opportunities to make the storyline interesting and exciting. As for love life related narratives, the audience loves dramas and fairy tales, therefore relationships are always in the centre of the plot. This analytical approach also highlighted the fact that series tend to present unrealistic occupational mobility, meaning that on screen starting a new career from scratch or starting an own business which is immediately profitable is made to look simple and easy to achieve. On one hand, this might encourage the audience members to be brave and to change their lives, however, on the other hand, it can cause damage for those who tried and failed by making them feel that they were not good, diligent, or talented enough to make it happen.

### **3.1.2 Occupational Characteristics**

Overall, the work force in Hungarian television series is more masculine and glamorous, just like prior foreign studies (e.g. (Atkin, 1991; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Elasmr et al., 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Lauzen and Dozier, 2004, 2005; Signroielli, 2009; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015) described.

Firstly, employment rate is overrepresented in such shows, while economically inactive persons (students, pensioners) are dramatically underrepresented. Moreover, the majority of men were active, while their female counterparts are overrepresented among those who are economically inactive. In television series the proportion of entrepreneurs is significantly higher than in the real world. Just as the socio-economic characteristic of the characters, the world of work on television also shows discrepancies between males and females. The overall workforce status of females is less clear than their male counterparts' concerning their economic activity, hierarchical position, and

occupations. Furthermore, women are depicted in fewer different professions than men. Females are also more likely to be portrayed as unemployed, pensioners and homemakers, while the employment rate of males are higher, and they are more inclined to wield power and freedom, since their proportion among managers and self-employed is quite high. Work-related illegal activities do not involve many characters (5.9%), but most of the implicated ones are male, and very few of them are deprived or hold low positions.

Professionals and managers are dominant in fictions series, commercial and services occupations are also overrepresented, while agricultural, industrial and elementary occupations are highly neglected. The most frequent occupations on screen are police officers, health workers (doctors and nurses), pink collar occupations (waiters, salesclerks), lawyers, managing directors and actors. Men, besides the white-collar professional jobs are also involved in service occupations, as courier, waiter, bartender. Women are often seen in pink-collar professions, administrative jobs (e.g.: receptionist, secretary), but being teachers and actresses are also among their most common professions.

Regarding the four outstanding branches of economic activity in which the characters are mostly occupied, based on the proportion of the involved males and females only the gender specific rankings are different. Due to the high number of police officers and lawyers, public administration and defence is the most common among males. A great number of men and women hold positions in health and social work activities, although there are more women employed in this area. The arts and entertainment industry is also dominant, in which women are slightly more involved.

As for the social stratification by the character of work done, it can be noted that none of the occupation-based social classes are equitably portrayed on television, only the ratio of self-employed manufacturers and traders is close to the societal average, although still slightly overrepresented. Leaders, intellectuals, skilled workers and unemployed are overrepresented in fictions series, while semi-skilled and unskilled workers are underrepresented, just like students and children. Between men and women there are four classes in which the differences are outstanding: while male characters are more likely to be portrayed as leaders, unskilled workers and agricultural labourers (woman did not appear in this field at all in the analysed series) than their counterparts, while females tend to be middle-level professionals and office employees or unemployed/unclassified.

The outcomes align with the findings of foreign research (DeFleur, 1964; Atkin, 1991; Vande Berg and Steckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Elasmars et al., 1999; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Lauzen and Dozier, 2004, 2005; Signorielli, 2009; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2015; Signorielli, 2017; Behm-Morawitz et al. 2018) which have highlighted the infrequent representation



of everyday work roles, including the most common professions, as well as the portrayal of female characters' employment, as they tend to have stereotypical jobs or unknown occupational status (Atkin, 1991; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Elasmara et al., 1999; Glascock, 2001; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Lauzen and Dozier, 2004, 2005; Signorielli, 2009; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015).

### ***3.2 Second Part – World of Work in the Fiction Series Universe***

The second part of the analysis concentrated on the fiction series universe. In this part the data could not be compared with the actual social distributions as no such data are available. Here, some innovative approaches were applied which complemented well the methods used in previous research, thus further nuancing the picture of the world of work portrayed on television.

#### **3.2.1 Occupational Prestige**

The first topic (RQS3.) of the second part concerned occupational prestige, as prior studies came to the conclusion that the portrayed occupations in television series are more likely to be more prestigious and glamorous (Signorielli, 1993, 2004, 2009; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001, Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015).

This is the first instance where the research has departed from previous research by using objective measures of occupational prestige in fiction television content rather than arbitrary classification. In order to examine this aspect of the world of work the results of the occupational prestige research conducted by KSH were involved in the analysis as an objective measurement which is certainly not biased by the judgement of the researcher. Since the KHS survey covered not just the occupational prestige but also its five explanatory dimensions (income, social benefit, power, knowledge, and fashionability), these were involved in the analysis as well. All these angles of the occupational characteristics were examined with a special focus on gender differences.

Generally speaking, it cannot be stated that Hungarian television series portray more prestigious occupations, rather it is more of a complex phenomenon. The findings indicate that power is the only prestige dimension, as high-status occupations appear more frequently in such media contents, while other dimensions are dominated by average occupations. The knowledge dimension shows a more balanced picture for high- and medium-status occupations, with occupations requiring lower levels of knowledge or experience being less prominent in television series.

When gender differences were analysed, the dimensions of prestige, income and power showed significant differences, while there were no differences in the explanatory dimensions of

social benefits, knowledge and trendiness. The effect of gender on occupational prestige is diminished when other demographic variables are taken into account, but age has a significant effect in all models. The gender difference in the explanatory dimensions of income and power remained significant in all models, indicating that in these two dimensions male dominance is definitely present.

Type of role was significant for the second model in which the series variables were added: minor characters are more likely to have occupations with lower prestige (e.g. courier). The difference between males and females for income and power remained significant following the inclusion of other variables. Age also has a significant effect on prestige for both explanatory dimensions - in both cases, higher age is associated with higher status occupations. The effect of the other demographic variables is not statistically detectable, except for parental status in the case of income, which is associated with higher-wage status in all three models.

Examining the three prestige variables (occupational prestige, income, and power explanatory dimensions), it can be seen that the characteristics of the series have a significant effect on prestige. The variable concerning the relationship between the work or workplace and the plot was significant in all cases, indicating that series set in workplaces tend to depict occupations that have a higher perceived social prestige. The realistic portrayal of occupations was significant only for occupational prestige, and only in the second model (where the effect of minor character roles was also relevant), and for income in both models in which it was included, suggesting that in series where the portrayal of occupations is not distorted, the associated income status is higher, while for power this variable had no significant effect in either model. In order to ensure the completeness of the analysis, interaction variables were included in the third model for all variables, which were not significant in any case.

In accordance with the findings of previous research (DeFleur, 1964; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Glascock, 2011; Signorielli and Kahlenberg, 2001; Signorielli, 2004, Hoffner et al., 2008; Signorielli, 2009; Smith et al., 2012; Jacobs et al., 2015), based on applied objective prestige measures, it can be seen that the world of work depicted in Hungarian television series is typically not dominated by higher prestige occupations, they are not overglamorised in that sense, however, similar gender differences were found, especially in the explanatory dimensions of occupational prestige, income and power.

### **3.2.2 Doing Work in Context**

After overviewing the main attributes of the portrayed characters and their work-related characteristics including occupational prestige, the next research question set (RQS4.) was dedicated

to the contextual elements that also characterise the world of work on television. Potter (2014), who had critical insights regarding cultivation theory, highlighted that simply counting the frequencies could be not enough, the context should also be analysed. Some researchers (e.g., DeFleur, 1964; Vande Berg and Streckfuss, 1992; Glascock, 2001; Lauzen and Dozier, 2005; Behm-Morawith et al., 2018, etc.) did apply certain contextual variables, such as background settings, interaction patterns, dramatic tone, goals of the characters and their effectiveness, etc. In this research, Potter's theoretical insights have been combined with the methodological approach of the cultural indicator project, and aspects closely related to the representation of the world of work were measured rather than variables that were only indirectly related to the main subject of the project. Therefore, the applied contextual elements covered two main angles: the first one is the visible part that includes the number of actual regular work activities, overtimes and atypical work that appeared on screen (RQS4.1). The second one concerned verballity, namely the number or work-related mentions (outside work situations) whether they were positive, negative or neutral, referring to success, problem or financial issues (RQS4.2).

This part was dedicated to the contextual elements of the world of work in Hungarian fictions series in order to investigate whether the visible and/or the verbal elements of occupations and work life of characters alter the picture that was depicted for RQ2.1. It was found that there are remarkable differences in which occupations are popular within the series, meaning which jobs are the most frequently held ones, and in how often these occupations are portrayed on screen during actual work activities.

Certain occupations were quite often held by the characters, such as, for example, lawyer, teacher, actor, but the number of their work actions were not markedly high. At the same time, some professions were very 'popular' in both ways: many characters held them, and they appeared on screen many times, such as police officer, doctor, managing director, nurse, etc. Gender-related differences were reinforced as well: men not only have more kinds of jobs, but we see them working more. Apart from the occupations in which both males and females appeared many times at work (e.g., doctor, barkeeper, police officer), for males managing director, financial director, and radio host (and editor) were the most frequently depicted occupations on the screen, while the females did their duties the most frequently as a nurse, receptionist, and shift manager.

In order to provide a complete picture, a theoretical approach was included in the analysis, according to which the analysis was replicated on a standardised database. The results highlighted that some occupations (e.g., teacher, chef, secretary) that are presented in series with less episode number are overwhelmed by those which are depicted in longer series. Also, the theme of the series also influence which professions are portrayed more often. This theoretical extra analysis was

intended to show what the picture painted by the results would look like if all series were of the same length.

The amount of overtime and atypical work activities is considerably low compared to the number of regular work actions, while atypical work occurred almost two times more frequently than overtime. Occupations that were more often portrayed at work on television screen also more frequently appeared during overtime or working in unusual situations (e.g., police officer, managing director, radio host [and editor]). For some of the most frequently seen professions, atypical working was not especially common, but overtime was more frequent (e.g., doctor and nurse), while for other jobs overtime was less prevalent compared to atypical work (e.g., lawyer, journalist).

Regarding verbal elements, more precisely the work-related mentions, the findings are rather in line with the frequency and amount of work activities, meaning that occupations that were more frequently depicted at work were also more frequently mentioned. In terms of volume, the number of work-related mentions is a quarter of the number of regular work actions, but five times and ten times more than the number of atypical work situations and overtime. The majority of mentions were neutral, the proportion of negative remarks of work-related problems were the second highest, while only a little share was positive comment or a note about success; the smallest percentage was concerning financial issues.

It can be concluded that the audience of Hungarian fiction series is more exposed to some occupations than others. Some professions are portrayed considerably more often while doing regular duties, or even atypical work and overtime. Moreover, these professions are more frequently mentioned outside the work events.

### **3.2.3 Portrayal in the Light of Genres, Subgenres, Platforms, and Creators**

The last part (RQS5.) of the analysis incorporated the suggested possible research directions of earlier studies (e.g., Signorielli, 1993, 2009; Morgan et al., 2015) and had a special focus on the differences in representation between the different types of series. The nineteen series were differentiated along five dimensions: format (daily/weekly), genre (comedy, drama, etc.), type of broadcasting channel (commercial, cable, public or premium) and gender of the creators (showrunners and lead writers). Since along these dimensions a very extensive analysis could be done (actually, the whole analysis could be completely redone five times), five simple, key aspects were chosen to provide a clear, straightforward and easy-to-follow overview: the ratio of male to female characters, the proportion of economically active to economically inactive characters, the combinations of the first two (distribution of economically active men and women), the occupational

prestige, and the number of work-related activities and mentions.

One of the most interesting results is that there is absolutely no significant difference in the gender ratio between the series types. Not even the involvement of women in the creative process had any impact on this matter. Lauzen and Dozier (2004) came to the conclusion that “women working behind the scenes are more likely to influence on-screen characterisation” (p495), which seems to be not true for Hungarian series production. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that the vast majority (14 out of 19) of the Hungarian television series aired between 2015 and 2019 were adaptations in which the creators work with a specific set of characters. This could be further analysed on a more recent database that include newer Hungarian-developed television series.

The portrayal of economically active and inactive characters is also distorted for all series types compared to real-world data, meaning that on television, in general, the majority of the characters who have a job are males, while there are more females among the unemployed. Males are more likely to be economically active in comedies, and less likely in dramedies, while the ratio of working female characters is higher in series which premiered on cable channels. Regarding the gender of the creators, in some cases the results were the contrary to expectations, for example, in case of female showrunners 75% of the economically inactive characters were female, while for male colleagues the proportion between the two genders is more balanced. Furthermore, in case of female creators the ratio of male characters with a job is higher, while active female characters reached the same level only if a mixed gender team wrote the series.

Regarding the occupational prestige topic, the results were more nuanced with some interesting outcomes. As an example, occupations with low prestige are more likely to be portrayed in telenovelas and comedy series, while characters in soap operas frequently have more prestigious jobs. It is also noteworthy that occupations with low prestige are the least likely to be depicted on premium channels with OTT platform. Since accessing this channel-type requires a considerable amount of monthly subscription fee, the case may be that slightly more glamorized content is broadcast there for the sake of pleasing the viewers/subscribers.

Lastly, the number of work activities and work-related mentions were overviewed along the series-types, and only a low number of significant results were found. In general, none of each series characteristics have any impact on how many work-related actions or mentions appear on television screen. In relation to the genders, male characters are depicted more often at work in weekly series, and men talk about their work more than their female counterparts in series that premiered on commercial channels. Based on the results, it can be concluded that the difference in the frequency of male or females characters being depicted at work does not depend on the gender of the creators behind the scenes.

The presented outcomes suggests that different types of series depict certain phenomena in different ways, with different emphasis and style, but none of them portrays the real world in an accurate way. This part of the analysis was purposefully strictly restricted and structured, but a whole research direction could be dedicated to this topic in order to explore the key similarities and differences within and between the genres and series-types.

## **4 Summary and Conclusions**

The current study analysed the world of work in Hungarian television series which premiered in the prime-time slot between 2015 and 2019 with a special focus on occupations by taking into consideration the main socio-demographic traits of the characters, the occupational characteristics – including prestige – and work-related contextual elements such as the actual and atypical working activities and overtime (visual element) depicted, and all types of mentions in relation to work (verbal element).

In many regards, there are similarities with the findings of prior studies concerning the inadequate portrayal of, including, but not limited to, genders (DeFleur, 1964; Vande Berg, Streckfuss, 1992; Signorielli, 1993; Greenberg, Collette, 1997; Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Elasmars et al., 1999; Glascock, 2011; Lauzen and Dozier, 2004; Emons et al., 2010; Esch, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2015), older generations (Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Signorielli, 2004; Lauzen and Dozier, 2005; Smith et al., 2012), certain occupations (Signorielli, 1993, 2004; Greenberg and Collette, 1997; Elasmars et al., 1999; Glascock, 2001; Lauzen and Dozier, 2004; Esch, 2011), etc. These similarities can be interpreted as a confirmation of the mainstreaming pattern of television. Via the systematic repetition of messages and patterns, despite the wide range of possible options (e.g., different formats, genres, broadcasting platforms, etc.), the audience is still subjected to relatively restricted choices. One layer of explanation could derive from the perspective that the trend is an unrecognised and unconscious heritage or habit, namely, building on the success of previous series the next ones adopt the established patterns. Thereby the findings of this analysis contribute to the international scientific knowledge: the results demonstrate that biased media representation is a universal phenomenon, with similar distortions occurring in different parts of the world. The characteristics of depiction appear to adhere to the ‘original’ recipe of successful television series which entails an overglamorised world with male dominance. It can be stated that these phenomena not only extend across spatial and geographical boundaries but also over decades of series production, thereby preserving the imbalanced and biased portrayal of different societal members and groups.

This explorative research, therefore, is an powerful gap filler in this area as no such analysis

has been done in Hungary so far, and by highlighting the main characteristics of occupational portrayal in Hungarian television series it also sheds light on the discrepancies, distortions and inequities, thus offering guidance to the series creators for possible changes.

This exploratory research is significant for several further reasons. In addition to its niche nature, the current study makes a significant contribution to the scientific understanding of the subject matter through the innovative methodological approaches employed. Prior to this study, there had been no previous attempts to apply objective measurement in the analysis of occupational prestige in the context of fiction series. Furthermore, the objective prestige scores were based on the results of an actual occupational prestige survey conducted on the population for whom the analysed series were produced and the results demonstrated that the utilisation of such objective measures provides a considerably more nuanced picture when the occupational prestige is examined.

A further significant innovation in research methodology is the type of utilised contextual variables. Compared to previous research, this study has brought new aspects into focus by analysing actual work activities and work-related mentions. This approach provided a significantly more detailed picture of the representation of the world of work. If the aim of research is to assess how fictional television content can influence viewers' or recipients' beliefs and attitudes towards work, it is not sufficient to examine the frequency of characters' occupations, but it is also essential to know how often these occupations are depicted 'in action'. In addition, the number of mentions of work also refines the picture further, as it is a strong indicator of which occupations tend to have a stronger occupational identity, that is, the extent to which a profession affects more the private life, and which jobs are more likely to provide an ideal work-life balance. The results clearly demonstrated the discrepancies between the occupations commonly held by characters and the occupations that are frequently depicted as being performed on screen, which underscores the importance of such a complex approach to the subject.

The final part of the research covers possible directions outlined in previous foreign research that have not yet been explored in depth. The application of these approaches and the results highlight that, for example, the inclusion of the broadcasting channel/platform in the analysis could provide valuable additional insights into the analysis of the world of work within the fiction series, thus significantly complementing the findings from previous research.

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## **6 List of Publications Related to the Dissertation**

Submitted manuscript which is accepted for publication by *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*:

Nyéki, A., 2024. The World of Work in the Hungarian Television. The Portrayal of Occupations in Hungarian Fiction Series

(The article is about the main findings of this the first part of the analysis: characters and occupational characteristics in an edited form – with some sections having been removed or expanded.)