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## EXPLAINING THE DECISION TO PARTICIPATE – CAN ATTENDANCE AT THE DELIBERATIVE WEEKEND BE EXPLAINED USING A RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY APPROACH?

In the spring and summer of 2008, the Empirical Social Science Research Center of the Corvinus University of Budapest utilized two participatory research methods in the Kaposvár region within the framework of the IntUne European research project. These methods were a deliberative public opinion poll and a citizens' jury. Firstly, 1514 people were asked during a representative survey in the Kaposvár Region whether they would come to an event, by using the following text:

*Now let me tell you about an interesting opportunity we're offering to many of the people who take part in this survey. On June 21-22 there will be a weekend assembly in Kaposvár, organized by Corvinus University of Budapest, where the participants will discuss the topics of unemployment and job creation in the area of Kaposvár with other people from the area and get to question policy experts and policy makers about them. It's a chance to meet people from all walks of life, to hear their ideas and share your own, to learn more about these issues, and to interact with policy experts and policy makers. Since the assembly and its results will be covered in the media, it's also a chance to make your voice heard. We will offer a gift coupon of 5000 forints for your time and there will be a lottery where 7 prizes of 50 000 HUF each will be drawn among about 250 participants. We hope we can put you on the list as a possible participant...*

From among the 1514 people questioned, 242 (16%) expressed the desire to participate in the weekend, and another 193 (13%) said it was possible but they were not yet able to tell if they could come. Following data collection, everyone was once again invited from these two groups to the deliberative weekend and briefing material in the form of an information brochure was sent out to them. Finally, 111 people came for the entire weekend<sup>2</sup>, which means that 7.3% of the people questioned, and 25.5% of those invited in the second wave actually showed up at the event.

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<sup>2</sup> Three of them participated in the citizens' jury (together with others) and 108 people participated in the deliberative poll.

The rate of participation (7.3%) lags behind the average of other deliberative weekends held previously. However, it is worth noting a significant difference: while a majority of the former deliberative polls were national, the Kaposvár one was limited to the locality of the region. Having studied several pieces of research, the following statement may be risked: that the rate of participation is usually higher for national deliberative weekends than for local ones.

The rate of participation at national deliberative weekends is usually around 25%<sup>3</sup> (Luskin–Fishkin, 2005; Herman, 2007; Sturgis–Roberts–Allum, 2005; Andersen–Hansen, 2007; Luskin–Fishkin–Jowell–Park, 2004; Luskin et al., 2005; Luskin–Fishkin–Jowell, 2002). Naturally, there is variation; for instance, at the very first deliberative public opinion poll weekend, 34% of those questioned turned up at the small-group session in Manchester in Britain in 1994 (Luskin–Fishkin–Jowell, 2002). Meanwhile, in Hungary, 16% of those questioned filled in a second questionnaire at a national deliberative weekend in Hungary in 2005 (Herman, 2007), thus the rate of participation of the deliberative poll (the so-called ‘Hungarian AGORA’ poll) was somewhat lower than that of other national deliberative polls.

As for the rate of participation at regional deliberative polls, the following can be noted: in New Haven at a local deliberative weekend 13% of the previously invited turned up in 2002 (Fishkin et al., 2008), while participation in local polls held on eight occasions in Texas between 1996 and 1998 varied between 16 and 23% (Luskin–Fishkin–Plane, 1999). Researchers stress that in the case of both pieces of research participation was lower than the rate they usually obtained in the case of national deliberative polls. In 2007, a deliberative poll was held on the topic of education in the town of Omagh in Northern Ireland. According to the official report of the event, 21% of those invited to the small-group discussions actually came<sup>4</sup>. In March 2008 at a deliberative poll weekend organized in one of the counties of California, 13% of those originally questioned participated (Fishkin–Peck, 2008). A far lower rate of participation (4.5 and 4% respectively) was found for deliberative polls held in two Norwegian towns in 1999 on urban development and environment and development (Hansen, 1999). Hence it can be stated that the rate of participation in the Kaposvár event is rather low, even when compared with other local deliberative polls.

According to the creators of the method, the deliberative poll is rather similar to a quasi experiment and in comparison to other experiments, samples of deliberative polls are closer to balanced representativity (Luskin–Fishkin, 2005).

In the present paper we describe which factors can explain somebody’s participation in the event, and whether rational choice theory can offer a proper framework for the explanations. We have formulated hypotheses about the differences between those who did participate and those who did not based on a rational choice theory approach. Our main assumption is that those for whom participation meant less ‘cost’ and greater ‘benefit’ were more likely to attend the event than the rest. Consequently, we assumed significant differences existed between the characteristic features of participants and those who did not come (or in other words, we suggest that the sample is a distorted to some extent).

At first we describe what differences were found in earlier deliberative polls between those who did not participate and those who did. We then describe the perspective of rational choice theory (RCT) and our approach, which is based on this theory. Finally, we examine the Kaposvár data using our hypotheses.

<sup>3</sup> There are several deliberative polls about which there is no information regarding participation - this figure can therefore be considered only an approximate average based on the research from which we could take relevant information.

<sup>4</sup> A Deliberative Poll on Education. Downloaded from: <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/nireland/2007/omagh-report.pdf>; Date of downloading: 12 September 2008.

## DIFFERENCES EXPERIENCED IN EARLIER DELIBERATIVE POLLS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS AND THOSE WHO DID NOT PARTICIPATE

Representativeness is one of the most disputed issues in deliberative polling. The reason is that those who come to the deliberative weekend are self-selected from those who were included in the representative sample of the first round. A profound study of the basic socio-demographic and/or attitudinal differences between participants and non-participants is indispensable to interpreting changes of opinion.

Inventors of the method and their co-authors generally say that occasional significant differences do occur between participants and non-participants but they are usually small ones and appear in a limited number of aspects (Fishkin–Luskin–Jowell, 2002). In another paper, however, they acknowledge that in all probability participants of the deliberative weekend differ from those who do not come or do not respond in the following aspects: generally they come from a higher social class, have a higher level of education, are more interested in the topic and have a higher level of knowledge about the issue (Luskin–Fishkin, 2005).

During the course of analyses of earlier deliberative polls, the researchers usually studied the possible differences between participants and non-participants of the deliberative weekend along social and economic lines. Summing up the results, the following can be said: the participants of a deliberative weekend following a national poll are generally somewhat younger (but typically middle-aged), of a higher level of education, and generally more interested in politics and public affairs than those who stayed at home (Merkle, 1996; Luskin–Fishkin, 2005; Andersen–Hansen, 2007).

It is definitely worth dwelling upon the differences that can be experienced in the case of local deliberative weekends. In the case of the deliberative weekend of New Haven (mentioned above) the researchers found that, similarly to national deliberative polls, the formal educational level of the participants of small group discussions was somewhat higher than those who stayed at home. At the same time it is an interesting result that there was a greater proportion of residents from New Haven who came to the weekend than those who stayed at home<sup>5</sup> (Fishkin et al., 2008). This suggests that residents of the settlement where the event is held are more inclined to participate than residents of other settlements in the case of regional deliberative polls. In Texas, at the eight deliberative polls held between 1996 and 1998 (about the use of various fuels and of electricity) participants tended to be somewhat older on average than those who did not come<sup>6</sup>, and in keeping with other deliberative polls, those who came to the weekends were more interested and educated than those who did not come (Luskin–Fishkin–Plane, 1999).

In Hungary, a deliberative poll was organized for the first time in 2005 (Hungarian AGORA), in which the topic was the situation of the Roma. According to results, the rate of participation was higher for the age group 18 to 29, those dwelling in cities of county rank, students and the unemployed. These results suggest that potential participants had more time to participate - if it can be rightly assumed that students and the unemployed have more free time than employees. As an indicator of public activity in everyday life, researchers used a variable to measure participation in a possible election held on a Sunday during the week of the poll. The proportion of those who came to the weekend was highest among those who said they would definitely participate in the elections, so the researcher's original hypothesis was verified. The hypothesis concerning a higher rate of participation in the deliberative weekend by those who were involved directly with the issues deliberated was discarded by the researchers: there was no

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5 The sample was taken in New Haven and in 15 surrounding settlements.

6 However, the averages were not specified in the paper and remain unknown to the authors.

significant difference between the inclination of the Roma or the non-Roma to participate, and there was no greater rate of participation among those whose place of residence had a significant Roma population (Gregor, 2007).

Attitude-differences between those who stayed at home and those who participated were studied only in a few cases. Out of these we will mention two studies here. The first deliberative poll was held in Britain in 1994 on the topic of crime. Initially, the researchers assumed that a willingness to participate would be influenced by the individual's fear of crime. This assumption was not proved; there was no significant difference between participants and non-participants regarding this dimension (Fishkin, 1995).

In contrast, Hungarian AGORA research revealed significant differences. Attitudes towards the Roma significantly influenced willingness to participate: those who had no prejudices against the Roma were much more likely to come to the deliberative weekend. On this basis it can be stated that in some cases attitudes may have a significant influence on the inclination to participate (Gregor, 2007).

Finally, we call the attention of the reader to an important point in relation to participation and non-participation. In an article (published in 1998) Price and Neijens studied the new polling techniques that appeared in the late 90s<sup>7</sup>. They call attention to the fact that in the case of techniques where respondents were questioned in several waves, there were no or only slight significant differences between participants and non-participants according to the variables (either socio-demographic or attitudinal) under research. However, it can be imagined that there could be a difference in variables which went unmeasured by the research, though relevant to the topic. At the same time, the researchers do not discuss for which variables the difference can be assumed likely (Price–Neijens, 1998).

The above findings demonstrate that a number of pieces of research have found differences in the composition of the original sample and the group that participated in the deliberative weekend. It is a question whether these differences can be explained by assuming that those people for whom it meant less cost and more benefit were more likely to come. There are indications for this under the above-mentioned circumstances but there are also cases when no significant differences were found along variables that could have shown differences when considering cost and benefit. There has, as yet, been no systematic study of participation in terms of cost and benefit using a multivariate model, and no application of the rational choice theory approach.

## EXPLAINING THE DECISION TO PARTICIPATE

### Rational Choice Theory

Our aim is to study whether an approach based on the theory of rational choice offers an adequate framework for explaining the decision to participate. For this it is indispensable to present theories explaining rational decisions and to clarify our own standpoint and approach.

Though usually reference is made to rational choice theory (RCT) as a single theory or theoretical approach, several authors have pointed out that this is practically a family of theories (Hechter–Kanazowa, 1997; Csontos, 1999; Hack–Handa, 2008). If one is required to summarize the essence of the theory of rational decisions one may refer to Jon Elster who stated that when an individual can act in different ways, he or she usually does what promises the best result in

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to the deliberative poll, also the following: "American Talk Issues", "The Choice Questionnaire" and "The Planning Cell".

total (Elster 1995: 30). Putting it differently, the theory of rational choice regards and interprets the acts of individuals and collectives and their interactions as being interest-oriented benefit-maximizing individual decisions (Szántó, 1998).

Based on the level of the phenomenon to be explained, one may distinguish between RCT as a theory of action and RCT-sociology as a social theory (Szántó, 2006a). Though both operate on a micro-level, the former aims to explain individual phenomena, and the latter collective phenomena. In the present paper, the phenomenon to be explained (the decision to participate) as well as explanatory phenomena (the societal–demographic characteristics, attitudes and attributes of the individual) operate at an individual level; we therefore take RCT as a theory of action as our theoretical framework.

According to a classical economics-based model, the individual (*homo oeconomicus*) always behaves rationally, maximizing benefit when making economic decisions. *Homo oeconomicus* studies the opportunities available to achieve the given aim and chooses the one that promises the biggest profit for the given expenditure. The opportunity that brings the possible biggest benefit with the smallest investment of energy will be chosen by the actor (Andorka, 2006, p. 38). According to this classical approach, the individual practices a self-interested approach because he or she wants to enhance his or her well-being—in the form of material wealth (Hack-Handa, 2008). The traditional approach to benefits and costs requires that they be monetized, but more recent economic approaches interpret cost and benefit in a broader sense (Hechter–Kanazawa, 1997), and there are views that do not only consider rationality in the case of economic actions (Becker, 1997). During the course of our empirical analysis we utilize this broader approach.

The definition of rationality is of key importance in the theory of rational choice. On what basis can the border be drawn between rational and irrational action? Clarification of this issue is important because, as we will see later on, behavior corresponding to norms can also be included under the term ‘rationality’, depending on the definition, and can be explained within the framework of RCT.

First of all, we invoke the well-known typology of action of Max Weber, one of the most important representatives of classical sociology as an important theoretical antecedent of the modern typologies of action (Szántó, 1998). As pointed out by József Hack-Handa, Weber was not so much among the historical forerunners of RCT because of his analyses, but rather for the ideal types of rational action he formulated, and by cultivating methodological individualism (Hack-Handa, 2008). In fact, one of the cornerstones of the theory of rational choice, as mentioned above, is how we define what is rational. Weber’s concepts of rationality can be followed through describing ideal types of social action. Weber isolated four ideal types of social action: 1. instrumentally rational; 2. value-rational; 3. affectual; and, 4. traditional (Weber, 1978: 24). During the course of instrumentally rational action the actor’s behavior is oriented towards the accomplishment of an aim. The actor considers by what means he/she can reach that goal and what the value content of that goal is; he/she is capable of thinking over and considering the side effects of his/her actions and considering and deciding what actions he/she may ultimately attempt to reach that aim with. In the case of a value-rational action, the actor is motivated by faith in the value of action itself (here one cannot find consideration of the side-effects of action). In the case of affectual action, emotions are the guide, whereas it is customs that guide traditional action (Weber, 1978, p. 25). When discussing types of social action, Weber also discusses the issue of irrationality. He raises the point that looking at value-rational action from the angle of the instrumental-rational, it seems to be irrational because the actor hardly cares or does not at all care about the consequence of action (Weber, 1978, p. 25-26). According to László Bertalan’s interpretation, Weber’s concept of rationality in the strict sense - supposing that the actor pays attention to the consequences - actually corresponds

to the concept of instrumental-rational action. This is the concept of rationality understood in the narrowest sense. On the other hand, a broad interpretation of rationality includes value-rational action alongside instrumental-rational action (Bertalan, 2001). Jon Elster, regarded as a modern representative of the Weberian rationality concept (Huoranszki, 1999), summarizes the essence of rational action as being result-focused (Elster, 1995, p. 117). One of the most disputed points of rational choice is the assessment of norms and norm-governed actions. The dispute is about whether individual respect of norms can be explained by RCT or not (because it lies outside the domain of the theory). Actually it is the concept of rational choice that is the focus of the discussion: how to interpret rational behavior and whether, in keeping with this, a norm-governed decision should be considered rational choice? Some representatives of RCT are inclined to regard norms as simply arbitrary preferences and as such part of the RCT model. During the course of socialization the individual internalizes norms and values governing community life, and later on behaves accordingly but this can be seen as rational action. If the individual wished to help others, and would derive some satisfaction from doing so, then this altruistic behavior may be interpreted as rational action as well (Scott, 2000). József Hack-Handa calls attention to the fact that some variants of RCT supplement the condition of self-interest as guidance with the possibility of considering the individual's well-being as a function of another's well-being; hence altruistic behavior can also be interpreted with the help of RCT (Hack-Handa, 2008). Ferenc Huoranszki categorizes action motivated by norms as being among actions that can be explained with the help of RCT. Huoranszki rejects those arguments which classify norm-governed action as being irrational because they are partly or fully explained by emotions. One of the key sentences of his theory is that "the actor attributes value to actions corresponding to moral norms"<sup>8</sup> (Huoranszki, 1999). Huoranszki points out that in the case moral action is defined in a way that the individual attributes value to the action itself, then the value attributed to action in morally non-neutral situations partly depends on the value of the outcome, partly on the probability of the realization of the result and also on the value of the chosen action itself. The choice to follow self-interest or obedience to norms is a decision-making situation, and in using this approach following self-interest only represents the maximization of the value of the result. However, in obeying norms the action itself has a value, and, according to Huoranszki, RCT should be able to handle the fact that different individuals may attribute different costs to norm-governed actions. He writes, "there is such a variant of choice theory which is capable of considering the fact that the rational actor does not only value the outcome of his/her actions but the very action itself"<sup>9</sup> (Huoranszki, 1999). Here he clearly refers to the narrow or broad interpretation of the Weberian concept of rationality mentioned also by László Bertalan. This is how norm-governed actions may be included into the field of study of the theory of rational decisions.

In the dispute about the assessment of norms, the two extreme stands are represented by Gary Becker and Elster (Hack-Handa, 2008). According to Becker, the economic approach offers a valuable and uniform analytical framework for the understanding of all human behavior (Becker, 1997, p. 26). At the same time he also stresses that many actions cannot be explained exclusively by this approach and therefore the co-operation of other disciplines is necessary (Becker, 1997). According to Becker, all human action can be regarded as profit-maximizing action by individuals with stable preferences who collect an optimal quantity of information and other inputs at different markets (Becker, 1997, p. 27). In comparison, Elster interprets rationality narrowly when he says that action governed by social norms cannot be classified as

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<sup>8</sup> Authors' translation

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being rational, because while rational action is achievement-oriented, an action governed by norms is not (Elster, 1995, p. 117).

In the current paper we study a decision-making situation when those questioned had to decide whether to accept the invitation and to actually come to the event or stay away. Anthony Downs lists the following among conditions for rational decision-making through a cost–benefit, rational decision-making lens: 1. the decision-maker has to know what he/she wants to achieve and what the aims are; 2. know through what alternatives those aims can be achieved; 3. know what the probable consequences of choice from the alternatives are (Downs, 1957). Which of the alternatives the individuals in question (the invited participants) would choose depends on their consequences. The alternatives can be arranged in a sequence on the basis of their expected utility, and in the spirit of the theory of optimizing decisions, the respondent would select the alternative with the expected largest benefit.

It is also important to mention the concept of bounded rationality in connection with disputes about the concept of rationality and the differences in approaches. According to the followers of this theory<sup>10</sup>, the conditions for perfect rationality are not always on hand for the individual. Often there is limited information available, the gathering of information is rather costly, and so is the consideration and mapping of consequences related to the various alternatives of decision. The advocates of bounded rationality therefore hold that the actor will not choose the best alternative but may be satisfied with a fairly good one. It is, however, difficult to determine what can be regarded as ‘fairly good’ (Szántó, 2006, p. 25).

One of the exciting questions for RCT to investigate is: ‘to what extent is decision-making between alternatives done consciously, or unconsciously?’ According to the traditional variant of RCT, the individual consciously conducts a cost–benefit analysis and at the end of that calculation he or she chooses the alternative by which benefit can be maximized (Hack-Handa, 2008). On the other hand, the deductive theory of exchange, fed by behaviorist psychology and shaped by Homans assumes that the behavior of individuals is basically shaped by rewards and punishments: the aim of the individual is to avoid punishment and to acquire rewards (Szántó, 2006b). It is confirmation and sanctioning through reward and punishment that conditions the individual to behave properly. In this case, however, one cannot say that the individual reaches a decision by complex internal mental/cognitive processes. It is not accidental that behaviorist psychology is called the psychology of stimulus and response: a stimulus received from the external world induces its own response. This approach is important from the perspective of including norms into RCT, since it is known that the main specificity of social norms is that various sanctions are related to them (Giddens, 2000). Once the individual learns these norms and also the relevant behavior it seems natural that he or she acts accordingly; he/she learns that the right response to external stimuli is behavior determined by the norm.

### Criticisms of the RCT approach

Ever since the appearance of the theory of rational choice it has provoked heated debates in the field of sociology.

Raymond Boudon, in his paper on the limitations of RCT (Boudon, 1998), asks the questions whether RCT is truly a general theory and whether this family of theories is really capable of explaining all sorts of social phenomena. According to Boudon, if RCT is limited only to the study of instrumental action, considering the means necessary to the achievement of the aim, and also its side effects, then it cannot be a general theory. Those opposing this view usually say that

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<sup>10</sup> Such as Simon; for further information see Simon, 1982.



non-instrumental actions (such as those governed by norms) are also instrumental ones, only at a deeper level: beliefs are the products of following self-interest.

Another objection is that empirical cases sometimes contradict RCT; for instance the voting paradox (Boudon, 1998, Green–Shapiro, 1994). From the perspective of the individual it is a rational decision not to vote, because the cost of voting is much more than the benefit deriving from it. How is it, then, that referendums are generally valid, because despite the theory, a sufficient number of people often cast ballots? Representatives of RCT naturally try to explain this paradox; according to some, the voter overestimates the value of his or her vote due to cognitive dissonance. According to Elster, the individual is encouraged by the voting norm to vote - though we know that Elster does not consider norm-governed action as being among those actions that can be explained by RCT (Elster, 1995).

Another critique against RCT is that its strict version postulates a general principle of decision which is valid for everyone, irrespective of ethnicity, time, and social group. It does not consider that the decision is embedded in a situation (Vicsek, 2000). In addition, some of its representatives regard it as the only relevant sociological approach which is capable of explaining practically every sociological phenomena, and believe that it can be applied not only to narrower fields. Such beliefs require for macro phenomena to be able to be traced back to individual actions. On the other hand, there are some authors<sup>11</sup> who dispute the truth of the statement that every macro social phenomenon can be traced back to the action of individuals. Or, even if in theory a phenomenon can be traced back to the level of the individual, it is not always worth considering as an explanation because it may not add anything really meaningful to the analysis and may complicate and blur the issue. A more recent group of criticisms objects to the study of decision-making situations in RCT-sociology. When action has several limitations due to power, structure and other social factors it might not be sociologically relevant to concentrate on individual decisions (Münc, 1992). Some sociological schools totally discard the possibility of choice, saying that social norms almost fully determine human behavior, and RCT may be attacked with this argument. At the same time, as we have seen, some representatives of RCT consider norm-based action also rational. Some micro-oriented psychological theories bring criticism to the model of rational choice as it does not describe well the behavior of people at an individual level. Micro-sociological criticisms say that emotions influence action far more than usually assumed by sociologists (Scheff, 1992).

## Our theoretical approach and hypotheses

We assume that the rational choice theory can be meaningfully applied to the study of the explanation of participatory decisions. Even if we agree with the above criticisms in that it is not the best approach in the case of many phenomena because of societal, power and structural limitations, we are of the view, that in case of our present topic it is sociologically relevant if we analyze it as a decision-making situation and do not stress the analysis of power restrictions among others. Here a situation was involved in which many people could ‘freely’ decide about their participation (even if a very small minority might not have had this choice, for reasons such as being so ill that they were unable to leave their home, etc.).

We have set out with a broad approach within RCT as we do not only classify things as costs or benefits that can be expressed in monetary terms. According to the RCT approach, decision-making situations can be of two kinds: parametric or strategic. In parametric decision-making situations the individual is confronted with the given conditions over which he or she has no

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<sup>11</sup> For example Tardos, as illustrated by Tardos 1998a and 1998b



influence, whereas in the case of strategic decisions he or she has to consider also the actions of other persons (Szántó, 1998). We study the decision to participate as a parametric situation (though it is a fact that it may have a strategic aspect too - when someone also thinks that others would definitely go and this influences their decision, etc.).

We accept Huoranszki's argument (Huoranszki, 1999) that norm-governed actions can also be classified as being rational actions: in this case we simply assume that the individuals attribute value (benefit) to norms. During the course of our analysis, however, we do not study the decision-making situation as norm-observing behavior. Although it is a fact that there can be norms linked to participation: someone may feel that it is his/her social duty to participate in such research, and norms also exist in relation to somebody promising something (for instance to go somewhere) and the keeping of such promises.

Schereff's suggestion (Schereff, 1992) that emotions may greatly influence action is something to be considered in relation to our topic too. We do not think that participation can be traced back exclusively to considerations of cost and benefit; clearly emotions could also have played some role in the action realized. Yet we regard factors of cost and benefit as being of primary importance in the given case (obviously in the case of some other phenomena it is possible that emotional factors are dominant).

In our view, cost and benefit may influence the individual's decision to participate even if the individual does not make a conscious cost-benefit analysis, and this can be assessed as also being rational action<sup>12</sup>.

*It is our basic tenet, built on rational choice theory, that those people for whom participation meant less cost and more benefit were more likely to attend the deliberative weekend.* For the benefits one might consider financial gain (a 5000 HUF voucher in this case) and also the possibility of discussing these topics with other people. In addition to the financial cost of getting there (price of bus ticket, etc.) we consider as "cost" the time that participants spend at the event.

Based on the approach outlined above, we constructed eight sub-hypotheses. Each hypothesis regards the decision to participate as self-interest governed action and traces back the decision to cost-benefit considerations (where we apply the concepts of cost and benefit in a broad sense as explained in the theoretical chapter).

*H1: Those interested in the topic were more likely to decide to come to the event.*

The 'benefit' offered by the event is larger for those participants who are interested in the topic. We think that those who are interested in social-political and public issues would rather participate in the event.

*H2: Those who were directly or indirectly affected by the topic were more likely to decide to come to the event.*

Those people are considered affected who are currently without work or were unemployed in the past, or in whose family there is/was an unemployed person. They attribute greater 'benefit' to the event.

*H3: Those who had more time were more likely to decide to come to the event.*

For those who have more free time, the 'cost' is less, namely the cost of time to be spent at the event.

*H4: Individuals who like to be in company of other people were more likely to decide to come to the event.*

There are some for whom it is torture to talk in front of other people, whereas others enjoy being among people. Clearly, the cost of participation is higher for those who do not like to talk to people they do not know, those who are shy and introverted.

<sup>12</sup> This is in keeping with some other authors such as Homans or Szántó (2006b)

*H5: Those who thought that they would have difficulty understanding what was to take place in the weekend meeting, and for whom it would be a great effort to follow what was being said were less likely to decide to come to the event.*

Less-educated individuals or those having little information about the topic may have thought that the weekend would be too difficult for them; perhaps they could not meaningfully contribute to the emerging questions which would make them uneasy and the advantages offered by the event may not have counterbalanced all these 'costs'. Whether the respondents found questions on the topic of the deliberative weekend difficult in the initial questionnaire might have influenced whether they thought it would take great effort to understand what was said by other participants and experts during the weekend.

*H6: Those who could come to the event easily were more likely to decide to attend.*

The difficulty of access may also influence those who would set out for the event. People who would have to make a greater effort to reach the event are regarded to as having more 'costs' to reach the place. Although it cannot be said with exact certainty how easy it was for each individual to travel to the venue, an assumption can be formulated that those who live in Kaposvár were more presumably likely to decide to come than those who live elsewhere<sup>13</sup>.

*H7: Those people for whom the financial benefit was important were more likely to decide to come to the event.*

The same sum may motivate people in different financial positions differently. We assume that the payment was regarded by the poor as a bigger benefit.

*H8: Those whose health status was better were more likely to decide to come to the event.*

Poor health status may affect participation in the weekend. During the two days of the event it was very hot and therefore the participation of people with poor health could have been influenced. For them, participation meant greater discomfort or 'cost'.

The above explanations may be related in the case of certain individuals. The various explanatory factors may even have opposing effects on decisions. For instance, the fee could mean quite a lot for a poor, undereducated person but he/she might feel that it would take a major effort to understand what was to be said during the weekend. Therefore it was deemed important to conduct not only bivariate analyses but multivariate analysis as well.

## Bivariate analyses

In this section we present the average and the distribution of the independent variables within the categories of the decision to participate. We define those people who came to the deliberative weekend (and were present on both days) as participants, whereas absentees are defined as being those who did not come from among all those who were questioned in the first wave representative survey.

In *Table 1* the averages of a scale created out of six variables by inclination to participate are given. The scale of public-life activity measures how many of the following questions the respondent answered with a yes: Did he/she ever sign a petition? Did he/she ever participate in a strike? Did he/she ever participate in a legal demonstration? Did he/she ever go to the open calling hours of the mayor? Did he/she ever attend the calling hours of a local politician? Did he/she participate in a local referendum?

Here it becomes clear that those who participated in the event are politically more active on average than those who did not come.

<sup>13</sup> The total first wave sample is stratified; the proportion of people from Kaposvár is 66.9%.

*Table 1. Index of public-life activity and participation*

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Did not attend the weekend	1403	1.89	1.57
Attended the weekend	111	2.75	1.76
Total	1514	1.96	1.60

(F statistics=75.970, p=0.000)

In *Table 2* the distribution of public-life activity is presented through another approach. It can be seen in the Table that those who often discuss public events with their friends and often view television broadcasts on public topics came in greater proportion to the event than others.

*Table 2. Public-life activity and participation*

	Did the interviewee come to the event?					
	No		Yes		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Does not speak often about public events and view television programs on public topics	1269	93.7%	86	6.3%	1355	100.0%
Often speaks about these issues and watches these in television	80	80.0%	20	20.0%	100	100.0%
Total	1349	92.7%	106	7.3%	1455	100.0%

(Pearson  $\chi^2=25.701$ , p=0.000)

*Table 3* shows that those who were already unemployed or had at least one family member who had experienced unemployment were present in greater proportion than the others.

*Table 3. Being affected and participation*

	Did the interviewee come to the event?					
	No		Yes		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Neither the interviewee nor any family member was unemployed	1024	94.4%	61	5.6%	1085	100.0%
He/she or a family member was unemployed	377	88.3%	50	11.7%	427	100.0%
Total	1401	92.7%	111	7.3%	1512	100.0%

(Pearson  $\chi^2=16.693$ , p=0.000)

*Table 4* demonstrates that those interviewees who were less busy and who were pensioners or unemployed came to the event at almost twice the proportion of those who were working or studying, or were on maternity or paternity leave.

*Table 4. Extent of engagement and participation*

	Did the interviewee come to the event?					
	No		Yes		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Not busy (pensioner, unemployed, other)	702	90.5%	74	9.5%	776	100.0%
Busy (works, studies, on childcare: flat-rate or income related)	700	95.0%	37	5.0%	737	100.0%
Total	1402	92.7%	111	7.3%	1513	100.0%

(Pearson  $\chi^2=11.338$ ,  $p=0.001$ )

Personality traits were measured using a 0 to 10 scale where the respondent had to indicate how far he/she thought the statement was true about him- or herself regarding whether he/she was a rather introverted and inhibited person. According to our results, absentees and participants did not significantly differ in respect to how true they considered this statement in their case in general.

*Table 5. Introversion, inhibition and participation*

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Did not attend the weekend	1379	1.99	2.56
Attended the weekend	109	1.78	2.43
Total	1488	1.98	2.55

(F statistics = 0.715,  $p = 0.398$ )

We also attempted to measure competency in the topic through level of education. Table 6 shows the distribution of inclination to participate by level of education. According to our results there is no significant relationship between education and participation in the weekend.

*Table 6. School education and participation*

	Did the interviewee come to the event?					
	No		Yes		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Did not go to school, uncompleted lower secondary school, completed lower secondary school (at least ISCED 2A)	384	93.7%	26	6.3%	410	100.0%
Vocational school (ISCED 2C or 3C)	397	92.1%	34	7.9%	431	100.0%
Upper secondary school-leaving exam	450	93.0%	34	7.0%	484	100.0%
College, university	172	91.0%	17	9.0%	189	100.0%
Total	1403	92.7%	111	7.3%	1514	100.0%

(Pearson  $\chi^2=1.625$ ,  $p=0.654$ )

According to our hypothesis, there was less probability that those people for whom it was more difficult to have to be at the venue by 8 a.m. would come, for instance because he/she lived farther away. In the next Table the distribution of readiness to participate is given by settlement. It can

be clearly seen that a higher proportion of those who participated were residents of Kaposvár than those who did not live there.

*Table 7. Settlement and participation*

	Did the interviewee come to the event?					
	No		Yes		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Not Kaposvár	475	94.8%	26	5.2%	501	100.0%
Kaposvár	928	91.6%	85	8.4%	1013	100.0%
Total	1403	92.7%	111	7.3%	1514	100.0%

(Pearson  $\chi^2=5.056$ ,  $p=0.025$ )

As no variable measuring income and possession of consumer durables was available we measured the economic situation of the respondent through living standard as assessed by the interviewee. *Table 8* shows the average on a scale of 0 to 10 where the respondent indicated his/her living standards, against inclination to participate. It is seen in the Table that those who came to the weekend generally assessed their living standards to be lower than those who did not come.

*Table 8. Assessment of one's own living standards and participation*

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Did not attend the weekend	1403	5.36	3.86
Attended the weekend	111	4.89	1.63
Total	1514	5.33	3.75

(F statistics=11.946,  $p=0.028$ )

In the last Table we studied whether there was any significant difference between participants and absentees through an assessment of their own health status as measured on a scale of 0 to 10. According to our results, there was no significant difference between participants and those who stayed at home according to degree of satisfaction with health status.

*Table 9. Health status and participation*

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Did not attend the weekend	1403	6.07	2.80
Attended the weekend	111	6.21	2.74
Total	1514	6.08	2.79

(F statistics = 0.249,  $p=0.618$ )

### Multivariate explanatory model

After presenting the bivariate models, we now present the results of a complex multivariate model. Inclination to participate can be interpreted as a decision-making situation which can have two possible outcomes; one is participation, and the other one is staying away. We therefore have chosen binary logistic regression to analyze this. The dependent variable of the model represents inclination to participate, whereas we treated the other variables of the bivariate analyses as explanatory ones. The age and gender of the interviewee were included in the model as control variables. The former was included as a variable with four categories because we assumed that the relationship was not necessarily linear. Binary logistic regression proved a useful analytical method because we could obtain an answer to the question of what features and characteristics enhance (or reduce) the odds of having a respondent participate in the Deliberative Poll. In addition, we get an answer to this question while our variables involved in the model are kept under control; in other words, if the odds of men and women attending the event show a difference, then that difference will not contain the possible hidden effects of the other variables involved in the model, so we are observing pure, partial effects<sup>14</sup>. This way we can partially filter out those distortions that are impossible to see using bivariate analyses (Székelyi–Barna, 2003)<sup>15</sup>.

The following table contains the results of the model in which we studied participation using those variables with the help of which we also wanted to give an explanation in two dimensions, supplemented with variables measuring the four categories of age and the variable of gender. In the case of categorical variables the reference category is given in the footnote, and that category for which the odds ratio is relevant when compared to the reference category is described in parentheses within the table

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14 Naturally, even in this case we cannot say that the difference is only and exclusively due to a difference in respondents' gender, because we are unable to say anything about variables that were not included in the model.

15 Before running our model we checked whether there was multicollinearity among our explanatory variables involved, through studying whether there was a function-like or stochastic linear correlation between them (Székelyi–Barna, 2003, p. 252). Although our calculated indices do point to multicollinearity to some extent in the case of the age variable, this is only to a minor degree, and thus we do not consider it to be a problem.

EXPLAINING THE DECISION TO PARTICIPATE

Table 10. Explanatory model

NAME OF VARIABLE	Beta	Standard error	Wald	Significance level	Odds ratio
constant	-4.91	0.74	43.97	0.000	0.01
PUBLIC LIFE ACTIVITY	0.28	0.06	19.49	0.000	1.33
INTEREST IN SOCIAL-PUBLIC ISSUES <sup>1</sup> (interested)	1.02	0.30	11.28	0.001	2.78
Subj. HEALTH STATUS	0.10	0.05	4.93	0.026	1.11
AFFECTED BY UNEMPLOYMENT <sup>2</sup> (affected: he/she or a family member was or is unemployed)	0.59	0.26	5.24	0.022	1.80
age group <sup>3</sup>			12.88	0.005	
31–45 years	0.98	0.48	4.08	0.043	2.66
46–59 years	1.46	0.48	9.50	0.002	4.33
60 years or above	0.82	0.53	2.40	0.121	2.27
ENGAGEMENT <sup>4</sup> (works, studies, being on maternity leave or receives maternity benefit)	-1.02	0.28	13.37	0.000	0.36
PLACE OF RESIDENCE <sup>5</sup> (Kaposvár)	0.65	0.26	6.14	0.013	1.91
SCHOOL EDUCATION <sup>6</sup>			1.85	0.604	
Industrial school.	0.37	0.30	1.44	0.230	1.44
Secondary final certificate	0.06	0.32	0.04	0.846	1.06
Diploma	0.19	0.39	0.23	0.633	1.21
INTROVERSION	-0.01	0.04	0.03	0.863	0.99
SUBJ. LIVING STANDARDS	-0.08	0.07	1.06	0.303	0.93
GENDER <sup>7</sup> (female)	-0.05	0.22	0.04	0.837	0.96
Initial log likelihood	745.422				
Final log likelihood	655.131				
Chi-square	90.291				
Degree of freedom	15				
Significance level	0.000				
R <sub>L</sub> <sup>2</sup>	12%				
Pseudo R-square	6.1%				
Correctly classified cases(%)	92.7%				
A priori	92.7%				

1 Reference category: not interested

2 Reference category: not affected

3 Reference category: 18–30 years

4 Reference category: unemployed, retired or other inactive

5 Reference category: not from Kaposvár

6 Reference category: completed max. 8 forms of primary education

7 Reference category: male



We could improve the worst fit by 12% with the involvement of independent variables.

As can be seen, a significant impact on participation is exercised by public–political activity, interest in social and public issues, the subjective health state of the respondent<sup>16</sup>, being affected by unemployment, the age–group of the interviewee, his/her engagement (has much free time or not) and place of residence. Whether somebody considers him- or herself more introverted and inhibited (when the effects of the other variables are filtered out) had no significant effect on whether that person came for the weekend. Educational level and subjective living standards also did not have a significant effect on participation in our multivariate model.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our starting point was that rational choice theory can be meaningfully applied to the study of the explanation of the decision to participate. We utilized a broad interpretation of RCT in so far as not only things that could be monetized were classified into cost and benefit categories.

Many of our hypotheses were realized in the multivariate model. We were able to identify significant correlation, corresponding to our expectations, between participation in the deliberative weekend and the following explanatory variables: public life–political activity, interest in social and public life topics, subjective health status, affectedness, the extent of a person’s engagements and place of residence. At the same time we did not find significant connection with our dependent variable in the case of some explanatory variables (subjective living standards, school education and introversion). The fact that not every single hypothesis could be verified in itself does not mean that our basic assumption was refuted (namely, that the individuals were mostly influenced in their decision by factors of cost and benefit). After all, we did not try to create an algorithm on the basis of how people could compare all the possible costs and benefits. It is possible that in the case of many people there were some particular considerations of cost and benefit that overbore other elements of cost and benefit. For instance, for an individual with only low school education level and with several jobless members of the family, the benefit of participation could be so high that it could broadly counterbalance other high costs that he/she may have incurred during the weekend. Then the question arises how our basic tenet can be refuted if there is no need for the verification of our sub-hypothesis concerning every point of consideration. It can be stated that had we found many connections running counter to our assumption then it would have been worth thinking over to what extent cost–benefit considerations could figure into decision-making. However, this did not occur: we did not find any significant connection running counter to our assumptions.

We mention as a limitation to our approach that we have studied decisions on participation as situations where self-interest is followed, though the decision may have also been influenced by the observance of norms to some extent (“it is right to participate in such a weekend and help out”, etc.). Even if norms did influence participation to some extent, we argued that it can also be handled through rational choice theory, in the case that we assume that the individual attributes value to the action itself and not to the result. We, however, did not include this dimension into our analysis because it would have required different kinds of hypotheses. In addition

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<sup>16</sup> The subjective health status of the respondent was significant in the multivariate model, whilst it was not significant in the bivariate models. But in a two-dimensional study we had no way of filtering out the effect of those variables (mainly, the age variable) that could influence assessment of participants’ subjective health status. In the case of logistic regression, however, the effect of subjective health status appeared ‘purely’, as the effects of the other variables included in the model were filtered out. This suggested a significant effect on participation.

we emphasized that we considered in the present decision-making situation the dimension of 'following self-interest' to be of greater importance.

Further on we stress that, in our view, costs and benefits can influence the individual's decision to participate even if a consciously analytical process in which the individual assesses costs and benefits is not involved.

It is important to take into consideration when assessing our results that the level of participation in this particular deliberative weekend can be regarded as low in comparison to many deliberative polls. With a higher ratio of participation it is possible that the sample would be distorted to a lesser extent than in the case of the present research, but at the same time we assume that the cost and benefit perspective can be basically applied to them as well.

Deliberative polling and the citizens' jury are two methods where those invited have to come to a given venue. We believe that the basic tenet of our RCT approach can be applied to other methods as well. Other methods also exist which draw on the time of the subjects of research more than a short survey by questionnaire does, and even require people to go to a certain location. During the course of focus groups the interviewees again have to 'sacrifice' some time and go to the location of the discussion, even if it is just a few hours. There are also such representative surveys (questionnairing) which require greater effort from the subject of research. If considerations of cost and benefit influence inclination to participate in these pieces of research, then the sample may be distorted. This can affect the results of research. Therefore this issue has to be definitely checked in the case of research which requires greater effort from research subjects. As a deliberative poll is also this kind of method we are of the view that great emphasis has to be laid on analyzing those who go to the deliberative weekend. During earlier research, as it was expounded at the beginning of the present paper, attention was usually devoted by researchers only to differences between the so-called 'hard' socio-demographic variables. They thought that representativity should not be lost in using those variables. During the course of our present research we found that while the sample was not distorted along certain socio-demographic variables (living standards, school education, gender), there were significant differences between the participants and those who did not come to the weekend using other kinds of variables.

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