

# The passport as means of identity management: making and unmaking ethnic boundaries through citizenship

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the non-resident citizenship made available for Hungarians living beyond Hungary's borders impacted the national identification of newly naturalised non-resident Hungarians. Through the analysis of 51 semi-structured in-depth interviews with recently naturalised Hungarians in Romania, Serbia, the U.S. and Israel, the paper compares how citizenship as a legal institution is perceived, practiced and consumed by Hungarians living in Hungary's neighbouring countries and overseas diasporas. Not denying the instrumental implications of the Hungarian passport, the paper argues that it is also an important means of constructing national identities. My empirical research shows that the passport strengthens the holder's sense of belonging to the national group. In addition, citizenship is also considered as a valuable symbolic asset which can be instrumentalised as means of social closure. Non-resident Hungarians use their Hungarian passports to prove their European ancestry and/or belonging to the Hungarian nation. At the same time, the passport also enables its holder to distance herself from the populations in their home-states in order to elevate the holder's social status.

## KEYWORDS

Non-resident citizenship;  
diaspora identity;  
transnationalism

## Introduction

In the summer of 2000 during a hiking tour in the Transylvanian mountains at the source of the Olt river I spent a night with some friends on the farm of an elderly Hungarian peasant couple. While cooking our canned food over the fire, we were chattering with the nice couple that allowed us to put up our tents and spend the night on their field. Although our group consisted of non-nationalist and mostly apolitical young Hungarians, it was hardly possible to avoid in the discussion the Hungarian government's proposal to introduce the so-called Status Law, a special quasi-citizenship status that was intended to offer benefits for ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring states in territories that once had been part of Greater Hungary. Our hosts were enthusiastic about the Hungarian government's hotly disputed and controversial plan. Despite the fact that they were in their late seventies, lived nearly 400 kilometres away from the Hungarian border and had no plans to visit Hungary or any other foreign country (which they could have

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anyways done with Romanian passports), they were thrilled by the prospect that their Hungarian nationality would be officially recognised by the Hungarian state.

'Look', the old man told me, 'we are Hungarians, we deserve this'. 'We are really Hungarian', he went on and in order to bolster his claim, he showed me a small piece of paper, a business card from a minor Hungarian politician. I found the situation bizarre. The couple spoke Hungarian with a nice Szekler accent, had Hungarian names, lived in a village populated nearly exclusively by Hungarians. No one questioned their Hungarian identity, but they nonetheless felt that they had to prove their Hungarian belonging to their guests from Hungary through presenting something that, at least in their eyes, resembled an official document. All this seemed completely counterintuitive or even weird to us. Why would anyone have so strong feelings about official documents? Why would ethnic Hungarians who do not want to move to Hungary be so obsessed with being officially recognised as a co-national by the kin-state?

Since then, the Hungarian government has offered not only external quasi-citizenship, but also full citizenship (including voting rights) for Hungarians living beyond the borders of Hungary. In this paper, I analyse the motivations and perceptions of newly naturalised non-resident citizens. Most importantly, I investigate if and to what extent non-resident Hungarians use Hungarian citizenship for identity management purposes. The paper is intended to fill a gap in citizenship studies. Despite the growing scholarly attention to issues of transnational engagement and agency, the identitarian implications of citizenship and voting rights have received only sporadic scholarly attention. While identity constructions implied in citizenship legislation have been the subject of comparative discourse and anthropology of policy analysis, the actual impact of those laws on identification, perceptions and dispositions have not yet been examined.

First, I overview the existing literature on citizenship and identity. Then, I give a brief summary of Hungarian non-resident citizenship legislation. Then I turn to my empirical research and summarise the main findings of qualitative interviews in order to assess the motivations of recently naturalised non-resident Hungarians. The main finding of the paper is that citizenship is still an important means of identity management. I argue that besides the inevitable instrumental considerations, non-resident citizenship and passports are perceived as boundary making and un-making tools that enable their holders to claim Hungarian identity, and, at the same time, distinguish themselves from titular nationalities in her country of residence.

## Citizenship and identity

Despite the fact that comparative citizenship studies have become a major cross-disciplinary research field, the implications of citizenship on identity construction has so far received very little scholarly attention. The study of citizenship has been dominated by normative and state-centered macrostructural approaches. The normative scholarly discussions examine whether, and to what extent, exclusionary and selective citizenship policies are in line with basic liberal norms (Bauböck et al. 2006; Howard 2009; Bauböck 2010; Pogonyi, Kovács, and Körtvélyesi 2010; Vink and Bauböck 2013; Dumbrava 2014). A good number of comparative analyses have discussed citizenship constellations from an international legal perspective. All these macro-institutionalist approaches have focused on the external and internal rational choice, historical and sociological determinants of

citizenship policies as well as citizenship legislation's impact on intra- and inter-state relations (Džankić 2015). The lack of interest in bottom-up perspectives is partly explained by the fact that political science research is preoccupied with macro-level developments and thus often ignores the potential of anthropological qualitative research (Knott 2015).

More recently, scholars have started to look into the micropolitical foundations of citizenship acquisition. In addition to the dominant legal and political science approaches in citizenship studies, an increasing number of scholars started to apply bottom-up sociological research methodologies to find out why new citizens seek naturalisation and how citizenship impacts individual life perspectives. Despite the growing spectrum of rights that are dependent on residence rather than full citizenship, these analyses suggest that naturalisation is still an effective tool for social integration of immigrants (Pogonyi 2017).

These analyses look at citizenship either as a formal status that assigns individuals to states in the international system, and through this, provide them with core rights. But in addition to status and rights, citizenship has an additional important component. Besides its instrumental implications, individuals may attach symbolic, sentimental and identitarian significance to citizenship. As Christian Joppke in his important analyses of the meaning of citizenship in the age of immigration points out, citizenship has three main dimensions: status, rights and identity (2007, 2010). Thus, citizenship is not only a formal legal status that secures rights and entitlements, but also a marker of identity and belonging (Isin 1999; Bellamy, Castiglione, and Santoro 2004; Isin and Turner 2007; Karolewski 2009; Stoker et al. 2011). Citizenship is a boundary creating category that distinguishes members from non-members and thus, in addition to securing status and rights, it has the potential to ground identification.

Interestingly, the identity dimension of citizenship has for long been understudied. One of the reasons why the identity component of citizenship has not been systematically examined is due to the taken for granted assumptions related to the postnationalisation of citizenship (Bosniak 2000). As Joppke argues, due to the 'increasing universalism of citizenship', the identity component of formal membership becomes detached from former nationalist and religious values (2010, 111). Thus, in liberal democratic states, citizenship becomes more procedural rather than the indication of collective ethno-cultural or ethno-religious identity (Joppke 2010, 117). In Joppke's view, in-line with the general retreat of nationalism, the 'identity-lending dimension of citizenship' (2010, 142) has been reduced to Habermas' thin 'constitutional patriotism' as the state becomes less dominated by the dominant ethnic group. Accordingly, Joppke predicts that in the increasingly globalised world, 'the instrumental attitude to citizenship cannot but grow and grow', (2010, 159) and romantic attachment to the institution of citizenship is soon to become passé (see also Joppke this issue).

One could even speculate that the same processes that weakened the instrumental value of citizenship have also impacted the identitarian component of formal membership. It seems logical to assume that citizenship has become less relevant as a badge of identity thanks to less restrictive naturalisation requirements, growing transnational migration, the internationalisation of human rights, and the increasing importance of residence in entitlements. Membership in the body of citizens is generally becoming disentangled from membership in the national community as defined in terms of putative historical continuity, cultural sameness or ethnic homogeneity. As the boundaries of citizenship have become porous, citizenship is becoming less exclusive, and so it may less likely be considered an

important indication of membership in the nation. The liberalisation of citizenship acquisition requirements implies that formal membership becomes increasingly detached from cultural similarity and national identity in a globalised world (Spiro 2008). In liberal democratic states, citizenship cannot any longer be considered as a proxy of ethno-cultural and ethno-religious identification (see Harpaz & Mateos in this issue).

The thesis on the detachment of citizenship from identity sounds intuitively convincing and coherent, but an alternative hypothesis that predicts the increasing importance of the identity component of citizenship is not any less salient. Quite remarkably, the first scholars who speculated about the potential implications of the postnationalisation of citizenship argued that as its rights component hollows out, citizenship may nonetheless retain its function as a marker of identity. As Brubaker observed in his seminal comparative analysis, 'the politics of citizenship is today first and foremost a politics of nationhood. As such, it is a *politics of identity*, not a *politics of interest* (in the restricted, materialist sense)' (1994, 182). In the similar fashion, in her book on the postnationalisation investigating the postnationalisation of membership, Soysal also predicted that as basic rights and entitlements would become available on the basis of universal personhood and residence, but citizenship would still retain its identity dimension (1995, 159). Despite the inevitable weakening of the cultural element, a number of empirical studies suggest that formal citizenship may nonetheless remain an important badge of identity. An array of case studies do suggest that newly naturalised individuals still consider citizenship as the factual proof of the completion of integration (van Oers, Ersbøll, and Kostakopoulou 2010; Witte n.d.; van Oers 2014) and as the official, state-sanctioned recognition of belonging to the imagined community of a nation, as defined through formal membership. In one of the few analyses of everyday perceptions of citizenship, Miller-Idriss examines the views of young Germans on citizenship, and finds that while citizenship is viewed as a territorial and cultural category rather than an indication of belonging, it is still considered an important marker of social identity (2006). The emotive content of citizenship is, however, context dependent. As shown by Yanasmayan's insightful and empirically rich comparative analysis of Turkish immigrants' naturalisation narratives, the affective implications of citizenship are dependent on the host states' naturalisation policies (2015). In the case of the Netherlands, where dual citizenship is not allowed, Turkish applicants for citizenship are less likely to attach identitarian value to citizenship in the country of residence. In the UK, where dual citizenship is tolerated, applicants do not perceive naturalisation as an identitarian act that impacts national belonging and imagination. Similarly to Yanasmayan, Van Gorkum (2015) also contends that restrictive dual citizenship policies do not at all strengthen the feeling of belonging to the country of residence. Van Gorkum examined the decision of Turkish and Iraqi young adults born in Germany who had to choose between their German and their other citizenship at the age of 21. He found that, contrary to the intention of state actors, the ban on dual citizenship did not strengthen the loyalty of immigrants. The young second-generation migrants who had to choose between their German and their ancestral citizenship valued – and in some cases, even opted for – the citizenship of their parents in order to express their symbolic belonging to their ancestral homelands.

The above examples suggest that citizenship status and the entailed rights do impact the loyalty and identification of resident individuals. In the migration context citizenship has retained its identity component while it is still an important asset that secures the access to

certain entitlements. It is, however, less clear if and how naturalisation is perceived and used by individual who are not habitually present in the territory of the state. In the diaspora context, the instrumental value of citizenship is different from the migration context. While resident migrants may enjoy many of the rights and entitlements traditionally entailed by citizenship without being naturalised, non-resident citizens may not access most of their rights. Even if extraterritorial citizenship is not a distinct legal status and citizens have formal access to the same set of entitlements irrespective of residence, the actual activation of many of these entitlements is conditional on territorial presence. Non-resident citizenship thus is practically quasi-citizenship, as many of the benefits of membership can only be used within the territorial boundaries of states of which one is a citizen. The most obvious pragmatic benefit of non-resident citizenship not conditional on territorial presence is the passport that enables its holder to travel. Nonetheless, the instrumental value of non-resident citizenship is inevitable. As a result of international migration and the growing toleration of dual citizenship, the number of individuals possessing more than one passport has significantly increased in the past decades (Pogonyi 2011). As Amit points out, the availability of different passports has an important impact on the 'life course' of individuals (2014). In Amit's sample, passports are considered primarily as offering specific career and educational options rather than symbols of belonging (although multiple citizenship was in some cases more of a burden, as it limited access to government jobs, and in the case of U.S. citizens, money earned abroad was taxed in the U.S.). The instrumental value of citizenship is even more apparent in the case of transmigrants who are simultaneously active in more than one country. For them, citizenship has become a tool to circumvent national legislation and utilise different citizenships for economic or migration purposes. Thus, 'flexible citizenship' manifested by multiple passports is a 'matter of convenience' (Ong 1999), a document that increases cultural and social capital, and elevates its holder's class status (Altan-Olcay and Balta 2016). According to these interpretations, even if homeland governments intend it as an identity-building tool, eligible individuals regard and use citizenship for instrumental purposes (see Mateos, Kim and Knott in this volume).

The instrumental perception of extraterritorial citizenship is particularly relevant in the European context. In the supranational European Union, citizens of the member states are also entitled to most benefits and rights within the territory of the Union through European citizenship (Bauböck and Guiraudon 2009). Most importantly, free movement and civil rights are available to second country nationals in the EU. Social rights are also decoupled from citizenship, and are increasingly linked to residence and contribution. The main additional value of citizenship in a member state is the right to vote, as second country nationals are entitled to participate only in the EU and local, but not in the national legislative and presidential elections. Thus, the added value of state-level citizenship is relatively low for EU citizens moving and settling down within the European Union. Research confirms that extraterritorial citizenship status in wealthy developed countries is pursued because of its instrumental value rather than for symbolic and identity related reasons. While EU citizenship has devaluated member state citizenship for second country nationals, it has at the same time increased the value of member state citizenship for third-country nationals. Through obtaining citizenship in any of the EU member states, third-country nationals become full EU citizens and thus gain access to all supranational rights in all EU member states. As the supranationalisation of citizenship

rights has not been paralleled by the supranationalisation of acquisition policies, it seems logical to assume that relatively easily obtainable EU member state citizenship becomes highly attractive for third-country nationals. Obtaining EU citizenship is the gateway to all supranational and residence-based rights and entitlements available in the EU member states. Thus, the EU-passport serves as the entrance pass to 'Fortress Europe'. In light of all this, it is not at all surprising that interest in non-resident EU citizenship surges at times of economic and political crisis. As Cook-Martín shows, descendants of European immigrants in Argentina turned to their ancestral European citizenships as a reaction to the Argentinian economic crisis (2016). Similarly, citizenship in EU member states is also attractive within Europe. On the basis of an insightful qualitative analysis, Neofotistos points out that young ethnic Macedonians who acquire non-resident Bulgarian citizenship are motivated by pragmatic considerations. While the Bulgarian government hopes to strengthen the transborder Bulgarian nation and delegitimise Macedonia through non-resident citizenship, applicants from Macedonia do not identify with the Bulgarian state or the Bulgarian nation, ignoring Bulgaria's geopolitical intentions when applying for citizenship. Their main aim is to gain the opportunity to work in the European Union through Bulgarian citizenship. Likewise, Harpaz demonstrates in a survey that non-resident citizenship is far more attractive for people from less developed Latin American and Eastern European countries than for citizens of Western countries. Harpaz explains this pattern by claiming that 'long-distance' citizenship is primarily an instrumental asset (2015). Individuals from less developed countries are more likely to obtain non-resident citizenship for economic purposes, while citizens of Western countries take up non-resident citizenship for personal and sentimental reasons. This also explains why individuals from less developed countries are much more willing to obtain multiple passports than citizens of rich states (see Harpaz this issue). In a separate paper, Harpaz also shows that EU citizenship is indeed a valuable status symbol and economic asset for young Israelis who want to work or study in the European Union – or have the option of exit in case of an attack against Israel (2013). In these cases, no extra-pragmatic value is attached to non-resident citizenship in the EU member states. Tintori examining the use of Italian passports by descendants of Italian migrants in Latin America also contends that the EU passport is valued as a document that creates opportunity for mobility (2011). Holders of Italian passports can study and work in the EU – or even the U.S. through the visa waiver program. Tintori also notes that an Italian passport is regarded as 'life-insurance' that can be used to seek refuge in case of political turmoil in the country of residence.

All this, however, does not mean that citizenship is valued only as a gateway to a more prosperous and secure life. Extraterritorial citizenship in many cases is pursued not in order to gain access to pragmatic economic opportunities, but because of its symbolic implications. The legal inclusion in the citizenry entails equal status – not only equal access to entitlements, but symbolic equality as well. The passport is not only a valuable economic asset, but an object, tangible and authoritative documentation of the social status of an individual (Groebner 2007; Ferraris and Davies 2013). As Torpey argues, states invented passports in order to monopolise control over the people, which implies the institutionalisation and codification of identity (2000, 13). Without such institutionalisation, modern nationhood would have been unlikely to emerge and replace fuzzy and interwoven mediaeval loyalties (Torpey 2000, 14–15). Bureaucratic classification as a full member may strengthen the individual's sense of belonging to the national group.

Research has found that official documents are indeed important facilitators of identification with the homeland. As Naujoks has shown, even external quasi-citizenship strengthens the sense of belonging, solidarity and commitment of overseas diasporas to their countries of origin and co-ethnics (2013). Another research reached a similar conclusion concerning the identity formation impact of external quasi-citizenship and the Hungarian Card on Hungarians in Transylvania (Bakó 2005).

### The institutionalisation of non-resident citizenship in Hungary

In this section, I will briefly overview the introduction of non-resident citizenship in Hungary, in order to introduce my research on Hungarians who naturalised since 2010 without living in the country.

Since the democratic changes in 1989/1990, transborder Hungarian ethnonational communities living outside Hungary as a result of the 1920 border arrangements have been an important concern for each successive Hungarian government. The Iron Curtain separated not only Western Europe from the Soviet bloc, but also cut transborder kin-minorities off from their kin-states within Central and Eastern Europe. The cooperation of the Warsaw Pact states and the official rhetoric of Socialist internationalism prevented the Hungarian government from stepping up in defence of Hungarian minorities discriminated against in the near abroad. As part of the democratic transition and the Europeanisation of the postcommunist region, minority protection became an important human rights issue for the international community as well as kin-states. In the early 1990s, all Central and Eastern European countries introduced transborder policy frameworks in order to offer help to their kin-minorities living outside the borders. These efforts were designed in line with European minority rights protection norms, but at the same time they served the aims of right-wing governments that launched new nation-building projects.

After the landslide victory of the Right-wing Fidesz party in the 2010 parliamentary elections, nationalism became the main organising principle of the Hungarian government's symbolic, economic and geopolitical policies. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán announced what he called a 'freedom fight' against 'colonising' foreign powers, including multinational companies, foreign investors, the IMF and the European Union, in order to strengthen Hungary's national sovereignty and boost its economy by reducing what the government considered 'unfair extra profit' made by multinational companies in the country. Streets were renamed, new monuments erected and history books rewritten, with the aim of restoring Hungary's national pride. The government intended to re-structure social reality in line with a reinvigorated nation-centric imagination.

As part of the nationalist reframing of social and political life, the second Fidesz government completed the transborder nation-building project of the Right. In 2010, less than a week after the inaugural session of the new House, the Fidesz government introduced non-resident citizenship for Hungarians living outside the country in the name of 'national reunification beyond the borders'. Subsequently, the new Hungarian Constitution enacted in 2011 defined non-resident Hungarians as full and equal members of the Hungarian nation. The new Act on the Election of Members of the Parliament of Hungary, adopted by Parliament in late 2011, offered passive and active voting rights for Hungarians living outside the borders of the country. In the government's rhetoric,

the primary aim of this scheme was to redress past injustices suffered by Hungarians who lost their citizenship due to the redrawing of the borders in 1920. The formal inclusion of ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries and overseas territories was also intended to establish a legal bond and institutionalise solidarity among members of the Hungarian 'transnation'. The Fidesz government claimed that it is a moral duty for Hungary to help Hungarians living outside the country even at the price of exerting pressure on the governments of the neighbouring states. As of July 2016, more than 780,000 Hungarians living outside the country have acquired non-resident citizenship.

Although the Hungarian government introduced non-resident citizenship as part of its symbolic transborder nation-building project, non-resident Hungarian citizenship has important instrumental benefits for at least part of the Hungarian transborder and diaspora population. For Hungarians living in Ukraine and Serbia, Hungarian citizenship entails some important tangible benefits exist. Most importantly, extraterritorial citizenship grants Hungarians in these countries unrestricted access to the EU labour market. However, Hungarian citizenship without residence in the country is of little pragmatic use for most transborder Hungarians. Both Romania and Slovakia are members of the EU, which means that Hungarians living in these countries can move and work in Hungary even without citizenship. As Béla Markó, former leader of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania party noted, non-resident citizenship for Hungarians in Romania has 'more symbolic than pragmatic value'. In Slovakia, the moderate Most-Híd party was also less than enthusiastic about non-resident citizenship. Béla Bugár, the leader of the Hungarian-Slovak party, claimed that he would not even bother to apply for Hungarian citizenship. It must also be noted that after the introduction of non-resident citizenship by the Orbán government in 2010, the Slovak government immediately banned dual citizenship, so Hungarians in Slovakia who naturalise in Hungary risk losing their Slovak citizenship. Hungarians in Serbia, Romania and Ukraine (by violating the Ukrainian ban on dual citizenship) may also benefit from the privileges granted by the U.S. Visa Waiver Program for Hungarian citizens.

The Hungarian government made citizenship available not only for transborder Hungarian living in the neighbouring countries, but in the overseas diasporas as well. But as expatriates and their descendants had even before 2010 had the opportunity to retain their Hungarian citizenship (or reclaim it if they had lost it before dual citizenship was recognised in Hungary), the new legislation targets the members of the 'transborder diaspora' (Pogonyi 2017), that is Hungarians and their descendants who migrated from Hungary's neighbouring countries. For those of them who do not yet have it through their home country citizenship (Romania, Slovakia, etc.), Hungarian citizenship has instrumental value as it enables them to settle down, work or study as EU citizens in the European Union.

The official statistics on non-resident naturalisations submitted since 2011 clearly indicate the divergence of interest in Hungarian citizenship outside the country (Table 1). In Ukraine, more than 96 percent of the Hungarian population has applied for citizenship, while in Slovakia, at the other end of the scale, only 0.6 percent. The pattern here is straightforward. Among Hungary's neighbours, Ukraine is the least developed and least secure. Average income and job opportunities in Ukraine are significantly worse than in Central European EU member states. Since the outbreak of military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Hungarians have been drafted into the army. Hungarian passports for

**Table 1.** Total number of facilitated non-resident citizenship applications in Hungary since 2011 (as of July 11, 2016).<sup>1</sup>

Other citizenship	Facilitated re-naturalisation applications	Facilitated naturalisation applications	% of facilitated re-naturalisation and naturalisation applications	Total facilitated naturalisation applications	% of the applicants to the local Hungarian population
Romanian	25,600	466,456	5.5	492,065	40
Serbian	6366	147,545	4.3	153,911	60.6
Ukrainian	3454	147,166	2.3	150,620	96.2
Slovak	242	2664	9.1	2906	0.6
Other	2164	17,536	12.3	19,700	N/A
Total	37,826	781,367	4.8	819,193	N/A

Source: Office of Immigration and Nationality.

Hungarians in Ukraine offer a chance of exit and access to jobs in Hungary as well as the EU. The 96.2 percent application rate also shows that the Ukrainian ban on dual citizenship is not at all effective, as it does not discourage eligible applicants from naturalisation. In Serbia, 60.6 percent of local Hungarians applied for citizenship. The relatively high interest in Hungarian citizenship can be explained by the fact that Serbia is not an EU member state, thus Hungarians in Vojvodina need Hungarian passports if they want to work and settle in Hungary and other EU member states. In Romania and Slovakia, the interest in non-resident citizenship is lower than in Ukraine or Serbia. As both Romania and Slovakia are members of the European Union, Hungarian passports have little additional instrumental value for Hungarians living in Romania and Slovakia. The intriguing difference in the ratio of Romanian (40 percent) and Slovakian applications (0.6 percent) could be explained by the toleration of multiple citizenship in Romania and the ban on dual citizenship introduced by the Fico government in 2010.

The naturalisation rates suggest a clear correlation between the practical benefits of non-resident citizenship and the number of applications. The above pattern seems to be in line with the hypothesis that non-resident citizenship serves instrumental and pragmatic interests. The application statistics clearly suggest that interest in Hungarian citizenship is higher in countries that suffer from armed conflict and economic deprivation. The variations also indicate that non-resident citizenship is far less attractive for Hungarians who live in other EU member states (Romania, Slovakia). Thus, there is a clear statistical correlation between naturalisation applications submitted by Hungarians living in countries with different economic and security environments. The comparison of Ukrainian and Slovakian applications suggests that the ban on dual citizenship by the country of residence is effective only if the comparative instrumental advantage of Hungarian citizenship is relatively low (Iglesias, Sata, and Vass 2015). While in Ukraine, the ban on dual citizenship does not seem to discourage applicants, in Slovakia, where Hungarian citizenship has little practical value, only very few applications were submitted.

The ratio of facilitated re-naturalisations and facilitated naturalisations suggest a similar pattern. Although the two types applications are distinguished in the Act on Citizenship, facilitated re-naturalisation and facilitated naturalisation procedures are identical – in fact, the same application form is in use for the two, formally distinct procedures. Individuals who themselves had Hungarian citizenship earlier in their lives may apply for re-naturalisation (and the parallel facilitated naturalisation of their descendants, provided they all speak Hungarian), while those who have never had Hungarian citizenship

can apply for facilitated citizenship through their ancestors who once had Hungarian citizenship. The higher ratio of re-naturalisation suggests that more of the applicants to facilitated citizenship are former citizens themselves. In the case of applicants from the neighbouring countries, these are mostly individuals who were born during the reannexation of transborder territories to Hungary under World War Two. Individuals in the 'other' category is a mixed container that consists of two different cohorts. First, here are migrants from Hungary who renounced (or were deprived of) their Hungarian citizenship at naturalisation abroad. Second, it also contains those 'transborder diaspora' Hungarians (ethnic Hungarians from the neighbouring countries who settled down in the West) who indicated their Western citizenship on the application form rather than their previous or other citizenship from Romania, Serbia, Slovakia or Ukraine. The divergence in the ratio of facilitated re-naturalisation and facilitated naturalisations shows that the proportion of actual re-naturalisations is the lowest in Ukraine, followed by Serbia, Romania and 'others'. This pattern can be explained again by the divergence of instrumental value of Hungarian citizenship in the different diaspora contexts. The higher ratio of re-naturalisations suggests a higher interest among elderly applicants who are less likely to seek citizenship for its instrumental implications. Among Hungary's neighbours, the ratio of new naturalisations is the highest in Ukraine, where citizenship provides the most practical benefits and so it is more attractive for younger applicants. In Slovakia, where the proportion of re-naturalisations is relatively high, citizenship has little pragmatic value, and thus the ratio of younger applicants who never had Hungarian citizenship is lower. The more instrumental benefit Hungarian citizenship entails for a specific cohort, the higher the ratio of younger applicants who are less likely to be motivated by symbolic considerations. At the same time, it must also be acknowledged that more than 500,781 applications were submitted by individuals who already had citizenship in an EU member state. Thus, 61 percent of the total applications are unlikely to be motivated by instrumental considerations, as in these cases, Hungarian citizenship does not entail any additional important entitlements on top of the ones the applicant already had access to through EU citizenship.

### *Passports and ethnic boundaries: empirical findings*

In order to find out how recently naturalised non-resident Hungarians regard citizenship, in 2014 and 2015 I completed four rounds of semi-structured interviews with the total of 51 newly naturalised Hungarians in the U.S., Romania, Serbia and Israel (see [Appendix 1](#)). Most of the respondents were recruited through local 'fixers' and through online forums. The four contextually different external locations enabled me to offer a comparative perspective on the modalities of self-perception in different Hungarian external populations. Not surprisingly, the perceptions of citizenship varied along the pragmatic benefit of Hungarian passports for the specific cohorts. In Serbia, most interviewees thought that Hungarian passports are useful for Hungarian in Serbia who could otherwise not move and work in Western European countries. In Romania, on the other hand, only a few respondents thought that Hungarian citizenship has any tangible pragmatic benefits. In the U.S., only parents seemed to be concerned with the economic possibilities entailed in Hungarian citizenship. First and foremost, they thought that their children would have the opportunity to study at European universities for free or at least for much lower tuition fees than

in the U.S. Such considerations were also common among newly naturalised Hungarians in Israel. In my sample, Israeli Hungarians regarded Hungarian passports as a gateway to the European Union job market.

As passports are not issued automatically to newly naturalised non-resident Hungarians, but they have to apply for them separately. Thus, we do not have any statistics on how many of the newly naturalised non-resident citizens obtained Hungarian passports and it is not easy to speculate about the nexus of different nationhood modalities and official documents. In a small online survey ( $N = 881$ ) I inquired about passport applications in order to find out more about the instrumental use of Hungarian citizenship (Pogonyi 2017). In my sample, the variation of the application rates in the three transborder locations can partially be explained by the different pragmatic value a Hungarian passport has. While in Romania, less than half of newly naturalised Hungarians acquired a passport, in Serbia nearly 70, and Ukraine slightly over 84 percent. This divergence, on the one hand, suggests that Hungarian passports are more attractive for non-resident populations whose original passports provide only limited travel and work opportunities. But, on the other hand, the relatively high Romanian application rate cannot be accounted for by instrumental explanations. Bearing in mind the fact that a Hungarian passport provides very few additional opportunities to what Romanian citizens already have, the 47.2 percent application rate suggests that applicants have motivations other than purely instrumental ones. This corresponds to the observations made in the analysis of the interviews. As I have pointed out in the previous sections, a Hungarian passport has inevitable benefits for non-EU citizens, but, as suggested by the interviews I briefly discussed above, is also perceived as proof of national belonging (Table 2).

My data on passport applications suggests that non-resident citizenship is far from being perceived as an instrumental asset only. The interviews with recently naturalised non-resident Hungarians also confirm the non-instrumental implications of formal membership and official documents. During the interviews, quite a few of my respondents presented their Hungarian identity documents spontaneously. The Hungarian passport had a particularly strong symbolic importance for older respondents who were born as Hungarian citizens in the territories that were temporarily reannexed to Hungary under World War Two. These individuals perceived the opportunity to get back Hungarian citizenship as the restoration of their original identities. In some of the interviews that took place in the homes of the respondents, I noticed that the Hungarian passport was displayed along family photos in the living room. Some of the respondents displayed their identity documents on their desks next to family photos and other personal memorabilia. Three of my interviewees from Serbia told me that they had long disputes with the authorities who made mistakes when transcribing their names using the Cyrillic birth certificates. Despite the extremely burdensome procedure to correct the names in the Hungarian

**Table 2.** Passport applications.

Have you applied for a Hungarian passport?	Answers	Applied	% Applied
Other citizenship: Romania	265	125	47.2
Other citizenship: Serbia	537	368	68.5
Other citizenship: Ukraine	59	50	84.7
Total	861	543	63

Source: Pogonyi (2017, 172).

registry and their identity documents, all the three respondents applied for new passports to make sure that they will have their proper family names in their Hungarian official documents. As they explained me, without having their names spelled correctly in their Hungarian passports, they would not have felt that they received back their Hungarian selves. An old lady living in the U.S. said that she would not even use the Hungarian passport or register to vote until she received the new documents with her correctly spelled name. Although the misspelling of their names would not have any practical consequences concerning the use of the Hungarian passport, these individuals nonetheless wanted to make sure that their official identity documents indicate their proper Hungarian names. In their cases, the Hungarian state documents served as a means to (re)construct and prove their Hungarian identity.

In the interviews, most of the newly naturalised Hungarians living outside the country mentioned symbolic reasons for applying for Hungarian citizenship. When asked about their reasons for applying, some of my respondents explicitly claimed that they did not consider Hungarian citizenship an instrumental asset. 'Hungarian citizenship is important for moral reasons ... We have not applied for it in order to travel with it. We just want to have it' (S9); 'It has no pragmatic value' (S11); 'I did not ask for it in order to benefit from it in any way' (R7). 'I can travel to the West with a Romanian ID card. Hungarian citizenship would have been useful when Romanians needed a visa. But now it does not matter' (R7). 'We would have needed Hungarian citizenship at the time of the Yugoslav war, but then they did not offer it, and now it does not have much practical use' (S11).

The vast majority of my respondents mentioned emotive considerations as their primary reasons for naturalisation. 'I always wanted to become a Hungarian citizen. After all, I was born a Hungarian', (U3) said. 'It was a relief to know that I am Hungarian, now I do not have to prove or worry about all this. It felt good to be done with all this and feel that someone cares for us', (U5) explained. According to (R3), 'it [Hungarian citizenship] means that we now know that we are Hungarians'. For the majority of the respondents, citizenship is considered a badge of identity. 'It is good to have it, so we know that we are Hungarians' (R1); 'In Székelyland, people get citizenship for emotive reasons. Minorities have a strong need to belong to somewhere' (R2); 'I have Hungarian ancestry. ... Your parents came from there, so you feel that you belong there' (I8); 'I feel Hungarian and I am Hungarian' (S12). The perception of citizenship as a marker of identity is reflected in the narratives of applicants from mixed families. R8, a young Hungarian-Romanian told me that she wanted to naturalise so that she will have not only her mother's, but also her father's citizenship (the father became entitled to Hungarian citizenship in 2010, too), and thus 'become part of the Hungarian nation officially'.

In most cases, Hungarian citizenship was regarded as the final and irrevocable completion of earning recognition as a proper and full Hungarian. It is important to underscore that this process of becoming a 'real' or 'official' Hungarian through naturalisation rarely involved a shift in personal identification. Formal inclusion in the Hungarian citizenry impacted the perceptions of non-resident Hungarians only indirectly. Naturalisation did not create a new subjective feeling of belonging, only reinforced and reified existing ones. According to the Kárpát Panel surveys and a similar questionnaire completed in 2013, Hungarians in the transborder defined ethnicity in terms of culture and language, and only a tiny minority said that formal citizenship is an important element of national membership. (Kiss and Barna, n.d.) Although both diaspora and transborder Hungarians

were aware of being geographically cut off from Hungary and claimed to have different identities than Hungarians in Hungary, they took their somewhat different, diasporic 'Hungarian identity' for granted. But, as I have shown above, Hungarians in and from the transborder region felt that their Hungarian identity was not being recognised by Hungarians in Hungary. While they did not think that formal citizenship directly strengthened their subjective feeling of being Hungarian, they considered the introduction of non-resident citizenship as an indication of Hungary's willingness finally to recognise them as full Hungarians.

Although most interviewees underlined that national feeling is independent of formal citizenship, they nonetheless thought that formal citizenship served as official proof of national belonging. As (U2) put it,

we always felt Hungarian, and it is an important formality to become Hungarian on paper too. We have always been Hungarian, but it is important that now you and everyone recognizes that we really are Hungarians, and there is a paper that proves we are.

In the same vein, (R8) remarked 'it makes me feel good. I can, to put it this way, be one of the Hungarians, I mean become officially Hungarian' Likewise, (R11) thought 'that it is obvious that those who feel Hungarian and speak Hungarian obtain citizenship'. He added that for him 'it felt like a moral duty to acquire Hungarian citizenship' which 'makes Hungarian identity stronger and at the same time it makes Hungarian identity official'. Others also believed that 'official' recognition through citizenship strengthens their feeling of belonging to the Hungarian nation.

It has bolstered our national identity. ... Well, it is only a piece of paper, we had the feeling of belonging to the motherland before, but the fact that Hungary now has recognized us made us feel that we are now closer to the motherland, (R9) thought.

(R2), who always felt Hungarian, added that 'having a written proof of something makes everything so different. Really, for us this piece of paper is important'. He was even aware of the paradox of considering a document as proof of national belonging.

I have somewhat ambivalent feelings. It may sound a bit bureaucratic to say that this is a piece of paper only, but at the same time, through this piece of paper we feel that we are part of the great Hungarian nation and Hungarian culture, he said.

Similarly ambiguous opinions were mentioned by members of the overseas diaspora as well as transborder kin-communities: 'Okay, I have Hungarian origins, but this is a real piece of paper' (U1).

We have always felt Hungarian inside, but it is an important formality to become [Hungarian] on paper as well. We have always been Hungarians, but now it is also recognized by others, and there is a piece of paper which proves that we are (U2);

'Well, I am really proud of having a Hungarian passport, a Hungarian document. It means that I belong somewhere' (R4). 'I did not need an official document to feel Hungarian. ... But I still applied, because I thought it would strengthen my Hungarian identity and, at the same time, it gives it an official expression' (R11).

To some extent, non-resident citizenship undid or at least weakened the symbolic boundaries between Hungary and transborder kin-minorities. 'Now there is only one universal Hungarian nation. You know, there are no external and internal, but there is only a

single nation', (S1) claimed. According to (R9), 'non-resident citizenship confirmed for us that they [Hungarians in Hungary] have accepted us'.

Citizenship is ... about feeling Hungarian, it is about belonging together ... It shows that they have accepted and care about us. Until now we have not been admitted, Hungarians living outside the borders have until now been outsiders. Up to now. Now we feel that we all belong together (U2);

'I belong here, ... and I had to become a citizen, I had to feel that I have been officially accepted by the state. ... Now I will not have to prove that I belong here' (U11).

Some of my interviewees hoped that their Hungarian passport would prove their belonging to the Hungarian nation and pre-empt the othering of Hungarians living in Hungary. Many of them expressed hopes that the unmaking of intra-ethnic boundaries between resident and non-resident Hungarians (often mocked as 'Romanians' or 'Serbs') would elevate their status in the eyes of 'Hungarian Hungarians'.

It feels great to have the Hungarian passport because you can feel that you are accepted in Hungary as a Hungarian. Although I often think that we are greater Hungarians here than those at home, it is still a good feeling, (U9) told me.

Similar reasons were mentioned by (U6), a U.S.-born woman who, after living in Hungary where she learned the language, repatriated to the U.S. with her Hungarian husband. 'I was speaking in Hungarian, but they heard I am not Hungarian. Next time I will just pull out my passport and ask: "what"?' (U10), another Hungarian-American also thought that through citizenship, he would be considered a 'real' Hungarian, despite the fact that he did not speak Hungarian at all and had visited Hungary only a few times.

I can drive down to Eger, or Lake Balaton, and I feel like I'm part of the country. And if a police officer pulls me over for speeding, or pulls me over for the tail light that's burned out, I don't have to be treated like a foreigner, he argued.

(I8), who has already used her passport to travel to Hungary reported that her expectations that the Hungarian passport would help her to be recognised as a Hungarian had been fulfilled.

I had a Hungarian passport and they did not stamp it at borders. I asked the officer why he did not stamp it. He said 'You came home'. Yes, he said 'home'. And really, I felt too that we came home.

The Hungarian passport can be employed as means of proving membership in the Hungarian nation, but at the same time, also as a means of distinction. In addition to making national belonging official and final, Hungarian citizenship is also used as an asset that helps to distinguish its holder from the citizens of their countries of residence, and through this, elevate their status in the eyes of local majorities and others. Hungarians in Serbia and Romania regarded Hungarian citizenship as a certificate of membership in a more civilised nation. 'It is so good to have it. ... We could not even dream of it in the Communist times that we can say to a Romanian that "I am a Hungarian too"', said (R1). Similarly, (R4) said that Hungarian citizenship helps to accentuate and express that 'I am different from them, Romanians'. As (R10) explained, Romanians often used the highly insulting 'bozgor' [countryless, someone without a homeland] nickname for Hungarians. After the 2004 referendum, (R10) also felt that he was rejected by

Hungary, but since obtaining Hungarian citizenship he finally had a proper homeland that accepted him, and so he cannot any longer be called a 'bozgor'. (U7), the 80-year-old Hungarian-American lady who migrated from Serbia as a child told me that she could not wait for her first trip to Serbia so that she could use her Hungarian passport and get into the country as a Hungarian.

These boundary struggles have both an identitarian as well as a pragmatic dimension. Nearly all my interviewees in Romania said that although Romanians have the same rights as Hungarians in the European Union, a Hungarian passport is still valuable if one wants to get a job in Western Europe. They univocally believed that Romanians have a far worse reputation than Hungarians. They thought Romanians were considered lazy and unreliable in Western Europe and were often associated with petty crime. As a result of these prejudices towards Romanians, my respondents thought the chances of getting a job in Western Europe were much higher if they applied as a Hungarian (with a Hungarian passport). 'European countries have strong feelings against Romanian citizens, you know, stealing and other stuff. ... If we travel with a Hungarian passport, they look at us differently, we are not considered as suspicious' (R2) said. 'If you have Hungarian citizenship, you will be considered as a Hungarian. And Hungary has a better image than Romania because of Romanian guest workers' (R12). 'Romanians steal. They are perceived as Roma because they steal and do not work when they go abroad. These are facts' (R15). Through claiming Hungarian ethnicity, transborder Hungarians try to hide their Romanian ties in order to avoid the consequences of anti-Romanian prejudice, without challenging the stereotypical attitudes themselves.

The Hungarian passport serves as a status symbol not only for transborder Hungarians, but for U.S. Hungarians as well, although in a different manner. When asked about the use of a Hungarian passport, nearly all of those interviewees who acquired it said that they liked to use it at European airports. All of them remarked that as a citizen of the European Union they could use the shorter EU lines and enter the EU as a 'European'. In these cases, the Hungarian passport is not used to claim Hungarian identity, but rather European ancestry.

In some cases, the passport was regarded as a status symbol that distanced its holder from the titular group even by Israeli Hungarians. As in the case of U.S. Hungarians, some of the respondents in Israel seemed to associate European ancestry with higher status. As (I8), who came to Israel from Transylvania at the age of one after World War Two said,

there are some manners in Israel that I do not like. For example, they are very loud. My parents taught me that you have to cut the meat with the knife. We do not touch the food with our hands, we use cutlery, but they [Israelis] do not.

But most of my respondents in Israel had different, more pragmatic considerations. Many of my respondents in Israel contended that they could hide their Jewish and Israeli belonging with the help of the Hungarian passport, and by doing so, could escape anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli prejudice. As (I4) told me, she liked the idea of possessing European citizenship so that she would not be identified as an Israeli and stigmatised for the politics of right-wing Israeli governments that she herself loathed. Although she had never personally experienced anti-Semitism while in Europe, she thought 'everybody hates us all around the world ... it's good when you go around with [a] European passport in Europe. The feeling

is safer'. She added that the Hungarian passport was perfect in this sense, as there is no indication in it about the holder's residence, as opposed to the Polish passport, in which, according to (I4) the country where it was issued is indicated. This, (I4) believed, is a huge burden, as it makes it impossible for those with Polish passports to hide their links to Israel.

## Conclusion

In the paper, I analysed the perceptions of non-resident citizenship of recently naturalised Hungarians beyond the borders of the country. The interviews suggest that non-resident citizenship and the Hungarian passport are considered not only as instrumental assets but also as a tool of national identity management. I showed that non-resident citizenship redefines the ethnic identity of Hungarians living outside the country. Although it did not create or shift existing ethnic boundaries, the institutionalisation of national belonging through citizenship changed nationhood modalities. Despite the fact that interviewees in the transborder Hungarian communities as well as members of the 'transborder diaspora' (Hungarians in the U.S. and Israel who migrated from the transborder territories) did not consider naturalisation essential to feel themselves fully Hungarian, they still considered citizenship important for identitarian purposes. Hungarians living in the neighbouring states interpreted the introduction of non-resident citizenship as an indication of Hungary's willingness to recognise ethnic kin living outside the borders as full members of the Hungarian nation. Many of my respondents expressed the hope that after naturalisation, Hungarians in Hungary would not identify them as ethnic others. Thus, they saw citizenship as a valuable symbolic asset which can be instrumentalised as blurring intra-ethnic boundaries and erase symbolic stigmas of otherness that transborder Hungarians experience in their encounters with Hungarians from Hungary.

Non-resident citizenship enables ethnic Hungarians not only to hope that they can blur perceived intra-ethnic boundaries (becoming a 'real Hungarian'), but also entrench inter-ethnic boundaries and symbolically distance themselves from titular majorities in the neighbouring countries and through this, elevate their social status. Transborder respondents thought that they could use Hungarian passports within Europe to dissociate themselves from the prejudice and stereotypes associated with the Romanian and Serbian majorities. In these cases, citizenship was used as means of social closure. In the U.S. and Israel, Hungarian citizenship was also used as a status symbol to indicate European ancestry and origins. Most respondents in the U.S. and Israel assumed that they could express European belonging through Hungarian citizenship and thereby elevate their social status.

The findings of the research show that citizenship is far from being a purely instrumental asset. While the instrumentalisation of citizenship and passports are widely assumed in the literature, the research presented indicate that formal membership and official documents are important means of identity management and ethnic boundary making.

## Note

1. The calculation of the ratio of Hungarian populations is based on the 2011 Serbian, 2011 Romanian, 2011 Slovak and 2001 Ukrainian censuses.

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## Appendix 1

### List of respondents

R – Romania

S – Serbia

U – U.S.

I – Israel

Code	Interview type	Gender	Language of the interview	Age (≈)
R1	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	60–65
R2	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	30
R3	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	–40
R4	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	–40
R5	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	–40
R6	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	–40
R7	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	45
R8	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	16
R9	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	35
R10	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	60
R11	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	23
R12	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	60
R13	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	23
R14	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	70
R15	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	20
R16	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	63
S1	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	72
S2	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	25
S3	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	42
S4	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	31
S5	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	30
S6	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	43
S7	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	38
S8	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	70
S9	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	73
S10	Skype	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	25
S11	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	43
S12	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	45
U1	Skype	F	grammatically fluent Hungarian (with noticeable accent)	42
U2	Skype	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	55
U3	Skype	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	40
U4	in person	F	good Hungarian with accent and mistakes	60
U5	in person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	73
U6	in person	F	good Hungarian with accent and mistakes (but she switches to English in the interview when discussing more complex issues)	47
U7	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	84
U8	in person	F	English (sometimes switches to Hungarian but has a strong accent and quite many mistakes)	46
U9	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	60
U10	Skype	M	English (no Hungarian at all)	66
U11	in person	F	Hungarian (native speaker)	54
I1	Skype	F	English (no Hungarian at all)	63
I2	in person	M	Hungarian (with some accent)	71
I3	Skype	F	English (but claims she also speaks Hungarian)	62
I4	In person	F	English (but claims she also speaks Hungarian)	65
I5	In person	F	English (no Hungarian at all)	25
I6	Skype	M	English (no Hungarian at all)	44
I7	In person	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	59
I8	In person	F	Hungarian (with a strong accent and many mistakes)	65
I9	Skype	F	English (no Hungarian at all)	29
I10	Skype	M	Hungarian (with some accent)	68
I11	Skype	M	English (but speaks Hungarian with a strong accent and many mistakes)	82
I12	Skype	M	Hungarian (native speaker)	71