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Biography is blooming again. The individual, who in the past few decades seemed to lose relevance as subject of scientific research, in social history and historiography oriented towards social history is having its come back as a history-forming person. It cannot be denied that historical science seemed to pile up significant loss by focusing analysis almost exclusively on structures and processes and disregarding individuals' and personalities' impact on social phenomena. The biographies that were written concentrated primarily on life paths of "important people" – heads of state and generals.

The cancelling of this unproportionality has started in the past few decades both in national and international historiography. Primarily by facing methodological difficulties related to the basic question whether a person's life can – and if yes, how – be described, then by contrasting methodological approaches of different disciplines, getting rid of barriers, legitimising the personal attitude of biography writers and finally by incorporating theoretical and methodological results of other disciplines. In spite of emerging dilemmas, in the past few decades the approach to biography as something that makes it possible to come closer to the whole of reality by "commencing from a realistically given structure of a human life path and describing connections to discoverable structures and irregularities of a life like this intertwined in its historical context in a historical section" (Hagen Schulze).

At the cross point of different methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks several generally accepted tenets have been adopted. First of all, we need to accept that the analysed person does not live in one dimension, but is rather developed in a complex manner. The life path itself is not coherent, the need for coherency originates from today's need of the historiographer, in spite of the fact that the given person's life periods show great differences. Second of all, although it seems a trivial fact, it needs to be emphasised over and over again that the sources at our disposal for the analysis of a given individual are generally

heterogeneous, unsystematic and unchronological, and rather deficient and random. Thirdly, it is important to take into account that no person can be analysed in an isolated manner, but only with its family background, namely, its primary socialisation is influenced by traditions characteristic of a certain social group and change through time. In certain cases the general referential framework can be a group of similar social background, similarly socialised, while in other cases these can be superordinated structures in a society. The complexity of a personality always depends on social complexity, and on the interactions between individual and social contexts, the extent of integration.

An indispensable biographical problem is therefore the analysis of a person's individuality and its relation to group parameters. Or, as György Kövér formulates: "Who is the biography about? About the person embodying the type (types) or about the individual caught in the group's (class's) net and trying to get out of it? Does the biographer with a life path really connect dot-like life events? In sociopsychology, the basic turning points of a life narrative are called »nuclear episodes« and they are connected along a thematic thread. Would it not be visually more precise if instead of dots connected by a line, these turning points were imagined as »life whirls« or »life comets« depending on whether a person is drifted along in a whirl of life or if the person rushing through life as a comet? This way we would be able to follow the aspects of thematisation via which we used to interpret a life path from a reductionist point of view in a broader line, through a set of parameters. One after the other and one within the other."

In the past half decade the Research Institute of Ethnic and National Minorities, together with the Institute for Hungarian Culture in Vojvodina and the Society "Borsos Tamás" from Târgu Mureş organised two conferences about the relationship between individuals and community. (In August 2007 in Senta one under the title *Minority Life Paths* and in November 2010 in Târgu Mureş another under the title *Individual and Community*.) The present volume is thematically based on these two conferences

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and contains cultural anthropological, folklore, art historical and historical analyses. We chose chronology as our editorial principle. In this way, life paths of persons bearing significant role in the lives of Slovakian, Transylvanian and Vojvodina Hungarian communities, their relation to the community, their integration to the majority society and political structure. This parallelism enables the reader to get an idea about similarities and differences of the social situation, political self-organisation and orientation of Hungarian communities abroad.

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