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Same Place, Different Bicycles. The Etic and Emic Perspectives of Digital Life in Hungary[1]

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to provide a critical analysis of the discursive-mediatized image of the digital environmental subject. An ambivalent element of the neo-developmental language of digital life is the "digital divide", which often takes ideological form when it constitutes the (non-)digital Other on the other side of the digital world, in the rigid binaries of centre–periphery. Of course, nothing illustrates the inequalities in access to digital and non-digital goods better than global crises such as the coronavirus epidemic, where the disparities between the living conditions (e.g. learning opportunities) of privileged and disadvantaged areas are widening, and this is one of the proofs of the existence of the digital divide. The school, which is the ideological state apparatus responsible for the reproduction of the subject as a basic productive force, became dysfunctional in different ways in different countries of the world, including Hungary, during the epidemic. In the latter, the epidemic has, according to many trusted research studies, further increased the backlog of disadvantaged and/or Roma students, and thus their segregation. Although it seems certain that the most important condition for the sustainability of digital life, and with it of the state, is the re-creation of digital environmental subjects through the education of digital literacy and critical-reflexive media use, the state seems to be abandoning these social groups in this respect; in their case, the interpellation value of digital education, or more precisely the lack of digital education, is the deterrence from learning. In the analytical part of the paper, I compare two media materials to highlight the possibility of a different narrative, coexisting with the negative trend briefly described above. These two items construct two images of digital environmental subject, and by analysing the differences between them, I would like to demonstrate that the hierarchy

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of centre–periphery can be made relative through the (non-)digital Other's emic and critical self-repositioning, facilitated by participatory research.

Keywords: digital life, digital environmental subject, participatory film/video, digital divide, digital literacy, visual interventions

1. Introduction

Although the concept of sustainability has become the subject of global discourse in the last few decades, first in relation to the natural environment and then in social and economic terms, socio-political systems have historically always sought sustainability through the efficient use of their resources. These latter efforts differed from the discourse of resource management in the 21st century in that sustainability was conceptualized at a particular (local, imperial, national) level, given that the challenges were also particular and local, or at least particular compared to contemporary global challenges such as the climate crisis or global inequalities. Another fundamental difference to the sustainability problems of past eras is the sustainability of the digital environment, in the sense that the database-driven communication system of our time connects societies and economies on a global scale, preserves and stores cultural heritage like no other communication system before. Today natural, social, and economic sustainability and the sustainability of the media environment are linked in an unprecedented way, even though to some extent the maintenance of the mental and material infrastructures of communication was a condition of survival in all societies. The digital environment is becoming so much an integral part of societies that it can no longer be confined to the Aristotelian "second nature". The digital environment is a material endowment that takes over, complements, reflects, and expands the role of the social environment (the world of work, the world of social organization, the world of war, etc.). Thus, just as the critique of the binary opposition of nature and society raises the question of which is embedded in the other, so the social-actual versus digital-virtual binary opposition is also open to question. The inseparability of the social-actual and the digital-virtual environment means that we also cannot talk about their sustainability in isolation. We cannot talk about conventional or renewable natural resources separately from the digital systems that regulate their extraction, distribution, and use. Likewise, we cannot talk about human capital without embedding it in the discourse on digital platforms and analysing the inclusion, mediation, and exploitation of human resources in the digital medium. Following this logic, there are strong parallels between the dilemmas of the natural environment and the digital environment, especially in terms of analysing the sustainable relationship between humans and their environment. In other words, and more specifically on the basis of environmental justice,

the concept of digital environmental justice can be introduced, and the digital environmental subject can be modelled on the environmental subject.

2. The Concept and Adaptation of the Environmental Subject in the Digital Space

In 2006, Krista Harper conducted an anthropological research in a disadvantaged community in northern Hungary (Harper, 2012). She was primarily interested in proving the hypotheses that environmental injustice can always be defined as a social problem and that communities who at first sight can be visually and spatially associated with the damage caused to the environment are themselves victims of a less visible social injustice. Harper used the method of art-based participatory action research, which in this case meant the photovoice, in order to reveal the environmental problem, together with the people living there. She recruited local young ones, gave them a workshop on the method, and together they came up with the idea of taking pictures of environmental damage with their cameras. A mobile exhibition of the pictures was organized, and the results of the research were presented locally, in the capital and abroad, in the hope that participatory action research will lead to further, now larger-scale, expert interventions (better flood and inland water protection, elimination of illegal dumping, improvement of infrastructure, etc.). The emancipatory and empowering aim of the research was to help the participating young people emerge as environmental subjects in local and transnational spaces. At the beginning of her study, Harper briefly summarizes the three representational crises that have contributed to the emergence of the critical environmental subject, in the course of the 20th century.

– The first of these is the crisis of the anthropological image of the Other, brought about by the realizations that the Other is constructed in the process of anthropological research and that a much more authentic image can be obtained by the researcher if they seek to know the Other in her/his own (emic) terms, no longer in a hierarchical-exploitative but in a horizontal-associational representational discursive system.
– The second crisis of representation is the crisis of the scientific image of the natural environment, which is the result of the realization that the natural environment itself is not a "natural" thing but the object or product of discursive processes (research, policies, interventions).
– The third representational crisis is the crisis of the environmental image constructed about the environmental subject. In this context, privileged middle-class researchers have been confronted with the fact that environ-

mental problems present themselves differently to disadvantaged and marginalized groups and therefore cannot be homogenized and appropriated. The main lesson of the third representational crisis is that environmental injustice is a corollary of social injustice, i.e. disadvantaged subjects are able to become reflexive and critical environmental citizens if they are aware of the intersectional (environmental and social) nature of their exploitation.

Based on the above line of thought, we can attempt to analyse the digital environmental subject, and the representational universe from which it emerges and takes shape, along the lines of the environmental subject. First, we need to answer the question of how the Other is constructed in relation to the digital medium, along the lines of the discursive construction of the Other in anthropology (and social sciences in general). The answer to this question will hopefully lead to a rethinking of the other two aspects. In other words, mapping how the Other is constructed in or in relation to the digital environment can reveal how the digital "nature" is constructed and represented by the majority (academia, social industry, development NGOs, politicians, educationalists, etc.) and how, by becoming aware of these two realizations, the digital environmental subject can emerge and gain voice, stepping out of the objectified role of the (non-)digital Other.

Media anthropologist Faye Ginsburg's critical discourse analysis of the digital divide can help us get started. Ginsburg's article was published in 2006, and while the discourse around the digital divide has changed a lot since then, the ideological and paternalistic discourse that Ginsburg attributed to the Western techno-optimistic intelligentsia, which she called "digerati", remains.[2] It is not that the author denies the differences between the global North and South, or even within countries, in terms of access to digital tools. Rather, she is trying to point out that while these differences in access to the Internet or digital tools exist, the notions of "digital divide" or "digital age" reflect the dominance of a particular technological regime. On the one hand, the regime and its ideological neo-developmentalist language suggests that if we close the digital divide, social problems will disappear (technological determinism), and, on the other hand, it ignores other types of (mostly non-digital) tools that make possible good practices for creative knowledge exchange and preservation, for example, for indigenous or disadvantaged groups. Ginsburg argues for the existence of non-homogeneous epochs, of diverse ways of using recording tools living side by

2 "This techno-imaginary universe of digital eras and divides reinscribes onto the world the illusion that these remote 'others' exist in a time not contemporary with our own, effectively restratifying the world along lines of late modernity despite the utopian promises made by 'digerati' of the possibilities of a twenty-first-century McLuhanesque global village. Ironically, this throws us back into an earlier era of documentary practice – up through the early 1980s – in which Western documentary makers felt an obligation to represent 'the rest' without imagining that these people might be interested in representing themselves (something that the accessibility and affordability of video has facilitated over the last two decades)" (Ginsburg, 2006: 130).

side, ultimately by relativizing the hierarchical relationship between centre and periphery (Ginsburg, 2006). Going back to the above, disadvantaged and marginalized communities are automatically constructed or represented as subordinate Others in the developmental language through their relationship to and in the digital space. This type of homogeneous representation, dominated by academic researchers, politicians, or media workers, can come into "crisis", or let us say that the general picture can go from monochrome to polychrome, when we learn about the relationship of a given community to the digital environment not only from external observers but also from within the communities, from an emic perspective. Thus, not only is the concept of the digital divide dominating the discourse, but through their existing good practices and critical interventions, the digital environmental subjects themselves are reporting on their own culture. This active voice will speak differently about itself, about its community, about the digital environment, and will thus act as a digital environmental subject. The media anthropologist who critiques the ideological discourse of the technological determinist regime (Ginsburg) and the anthropologist who conducts art-based participatory action research (Harper) come to the same conclusion, arguing for and acting on the need for an aesthetic and critical (self-)repositioning of the Other. The key to the sustainability of digital life is the active participation of digital environmental subjects in creating their own image and telling an alternative narrative of the digital divide.

3. Digital Education as Function of the Ideological State Apparatus

As one of the most important areas of "digital life" is digital education, and as this is where the challenges of the coronavirus epidemic have been most visible, it is worth briefly analysing the role and function of schools. In this regard, we can take into account, among others, the French post-structuralist Marxist philosopher Luis Althusser's critique on dogmatic Marxism and his resulting concept of the subject both as a potential model for rethinking the rigid binary oppositions discussed in the introduction and as a way to understand the role of school in the sustainability of the state and the most important condition for sustainability, the reproduction of the subject. Althusser criticized the dogmatic opposition between the material base (or substructure) and the "non-material" superstructure by drawing attention to the materiality of the ideological state apparatuses, which he considered part of the superstructure (Althusser, 1970). The author's work was an integral part of the linguistic turn of the sixties and seventies since it focused on the materiality of ideology and on the materiality

of the institutions representing ideology, and it emphasized the resources of the ideological state apparatus (state, church, justice system, education) as resources that determine the base rather than being exclusively determined by the base. Ideology does not have an ideal, spiritual existence but a material existence, and an ideology always exists only within an apparatus, in its practice, in its material form. The rituals of ideology are material, i.e. they have a material effect on the individual. According to Althusser, the most important ideological apparatus of the state is the school since it is there that the basic element, the productive force of the system, the subject, is reproduced. It is in school that the individual is qualified, where they learn to submit to the order, where they are born through material and ritual (repetitive) practices. In school, ideology addresses individuals as subjects (Althusser calls this process "interpellation"), which implies a theatricality of subject formation. The author's main thesis is that there is no subject before ideology. In this way, the ideologically appropriately attuned subject is a prerequisite for the existence of any state, and the attunement, i.e. the reproduction of the subject, takes place in the school, where the subject is interpellated, mediatized, represented, and reproduced.[3]

The materiality of the new digital representational universe that emerged and rapidly unfolded in the 1990s was briefly obscured by the techno-optimistic discourse that surrounded the hypertextual structure and by the Internet and digital tools based on it at the time.[4] The hypertext discourse portrayed the digital world as an immaterial media reality, which is emancipating the user through interactivity, providing an infinite repository of data, being ideologically opposed with the material book. Then, with the spread of devices and the expansion of online space, the discourse of immateriality gave way to other ideological discourses. In the meantime, the media environment has been taken over, sometimes more slowly, sometimes more quickly, by the ideological state apparatuses to be used successfully for the interpellation and ritual reproduction of subjects. To a greater or lesser extent and to very different degrees globally, the ideological reproduction of digital subjectivity in education is now one of the most important conditions for the survival of the state. The exceptional education crisis brought on by the coronavirus epidemic only highlighted this phenomenon. For years now, education in privileged parts of the world has not been actual, even when students are physically present, but actual *and* virtual, hybrid so to speak, a kind of mirror showing the everyday intersection of the social-actual and the digital-virtual.

3 There is an interpenetration between repressive state apparatuses (government, courts, police and armed forces) and ideological state apparatuses, in other words, violence and indoctrination working in tandem on the subject. Examples of interlocking are the teacher's physical and psychological disciplinary techniques in the old days and today the presence of school guards in Hungarian schools, visits to schools by law enforcement agencies, or the offer of law enforcement careers to disadvantaged/Roma youth.

4 For a critique, see, among others: Hayles, 2001; Müllner, 2007.

4. The Education in Hungary during the Coronavirus Epidemic, with Special Reference to the Situation of Disadvantaged and/or Roma Students

Below are an article and a study on the education of disadvantaged and/or Roma/Gypsy pupils during the epidemic. Róbert Báthory, a journalist for *Szabad Európa*, writes:

> According to a survey made in May [2020], digital education has hit families of students with multiple disadvantages the hardest. Joint research by Rosa Parks, the Partners Hungary Foundation, and the Motivation Association has found that one third of children with multiple disadvantages have disappeared from digital education in Hungary. Ágnes Kende, a sociologist at the Rosa Parks Foundation, says the government cannot expect parents with low levels of education or who have lost their jobs to teach their children maths or literature and linguistics at home while they struggle to make ends meet. (Báthory 2020)

I quote at length from the authors of the study presenting the research:

> Based on the results of our research, we can predict with a fair degree of certainty that the forced transition to digital education has further increased educational inequalities in Hungary. This is also an issue in other countries, but in Hungary the almost complete lack of government support for teachers in schools with disadvantaged children, and the abandonment of disadvantaged children and their families, means that the increase in educational inequalities is likely to be particularly marked. In our view, there will be a significant increase in the number of children repeating and dropping out in the future. This may be particularly true for disadvantaged students of secondary school age: they have been studying at a distance for almost a year now, with a significant proportion of them having little access to the conditions and infrastructure needed to study at home. Young people from disadvantaged and Roma backgrounds typically go to vocational schools, where they are expected to take part in practical training. It is easy to see that in distance education this is even more difficult than in other types of secondary schools (grammar school, technical college); in some areas, it seems impossible. The social divide in education is certainly widening also for primary school pupils, as our research shows that the higher the proportion of disadvantaged pupils, the more pupils were unable to engage in digital education and lost contact with teachers

> (i.e. dropped out of education in the first month). Among those who have not been disconnected, there are also a very significant proportion for whom paper-based learning materials and assignments meant "distance learning". In a family in which the parents themselves are uneducated, live in difficult existential circumstances, and where housing poverty is prevalent, it is obvious that such a formally maintained school has little to offer in terms of content and knowledge acquisition. According to the vast majority of teachers, education was impossible without significant help from parents, and one of the biggest difficulties was that pupils could not understand the tasks and material on their own. Based on this data, it is clear that disadvantaged students' backlog has increased during the digital education period, even when they were able to engage in education.[5] (Kende–Messing–Fejes, 2021: 93; see also Fejes–Szűcs, 2021; Horn–Bartal, 2022)

This leads us to conclude that the class and ethnic disadvantages in digital education are a heightened version of the disadvantages observed in traditional education. The digital education gap (or, more precisely, the gap between the lack of digital education and the presence of digital education) multiplies the effects of segregation. A direct consequence of this is that there is a double exploitation in the crisis of (digital) education, with the reproduction of labour being shifted to the disadvantaged, possibly unemployed worker and their family. We can assume that all this does not mean that the state ceases to reproduce the subjects it needs for its own maintenance. Although the material and repetitive rituals practised at school are not part of students' daily lives in the absence of education, they are also interpellated outside school. On the one hand, the school is replaced from time to time by other ideological state apparatuses, or substitute institutions, like the church as a spiritual or the municipality as a material helper. On the other hand, and beyond these, the most important performative is a silent interpellation: you do not need to learn. Prior to this denial has been another one, as the Hungarian state has not yet addressed its Roma citizens through the curricula in order to strengthen

5 Regarding the overlap between multiple disadvantage and Roma origin, the authors draw attention to the following: "In line with the Hungarian literature (e.g. Havas, 2008; Havas–Liskó, 2005; Papp Z., 2011; Szűcs–Kelemen, 2013; Zolnay, 2007), we distinguished four groups of schools (or classes) in terms of their composition: schools with an estimated proportion of multiple disadvantage or Roma children lower than the national average (0–20%), schools with a mixed composition (20–40%), schools on a segregation trajectory (40–60%), and socially and/or ethnically segregated schools (60–100%). As the two categories (multiple disadvantage, Roma) showed differences that were practically within the statistical error range, we do not report the results separately for the two groups. However, this does not mean that we are conflating the concepts of Roma and HHH children; we are aware that these are fundamentally different groups and require different public policy approaches, yet an important finding of our research is that in the perception of teachers, the HHH and Roma categories are strongly confused (Messing, 2014; Messing–Bereményi, 2017)" (Kende–Messing–Fejes, 2021: 82) [quotation translated by the author].

their cultural identity, or rather it has addressed them through denial: Roma culture is not part of school.[6] A national-ethnic community whose identity has been denied in school curricula (and whose Hungarian identity has simultaneously and permanently been denied by the political leadership until today) is being reproduced again under the epidemic as an uneducated Gypsy subject, whose fate is further segregation, whose chance is to live in a subordinated caste. This is apartheid, not yet raised to the level of law, but already functioning in practice.[7]

5. Two Narratives about Tomor – Two Digital Environmental Subjectivities

In the following, I will present two media materials, which have in common that they both were produced in a small village called Tomor in northeast Hungary, completely independently of each other. One is Róbert Báthory's *Szabad Európa* video (also summarized in a written article), and the other is a participatory media project or, more precisely, a video made in the framework of that participatory media project. The participatory video/media project was a weeklong film workshop organized in August 2021 by the researchers of the Minor Media/Culture Research Centre (ELTE Department of Media and Communication). Róbert Báthory's video explores the impact of the epidemic on education through the testimonies of three affected families, quoting a statement from the Secretary of State for Education and briefly presenting the aforementioned scientific research.[8] The lead summarizes the content of the video for the reader: "Three mothers, three very different life situations, but all of them have struggled with digital education. Two mothers with eight grades who had to relearn the multiplication tables with their children. But even for the mother in Buda[pest], quarantine school was stressful. The Secretary of State predicts only 2-3 weeks of digital education" (Báthory 2020).

The video does not essentialize the difficulties of digital education and the disadvantages of the lack of digital education as a Roma problem, but the differences between the possibilities of the (non-Roma) mother in Budapest and the Roma mothers in Tomor are clearly visible. Although there are some overlaps between the actors appearing in the two contents, there are so many differences between the video reportage and the video produced in the media project that at first glance

6 There have been several studies on this topic in the last twenty years: Terestyéni, 2005; Monitor Critical Workshop, 2014; Binder–Pálos, 2016.

7 The term *apartheid* was conceived and used cynically in South Africa as the equivalent of "good neighbourhood".

8 "Róbert Báthory is a senior investigative journalist for *Szabad Európa* [Free Europe] in Hungary. He has been working in the media for 17 years, 10 of which as a reporter, editor, and editor-in-chief for the biggest television stations: RTL Klub, Tv2, Hír TV, MTV. Before that, he worked for Kossuth [National Public] Radio and Rádió C [the first Roma radio in Hungary between 2001 and 2011]" (Szabad Európa).

a comparison does not seem justifiable. There are differences between genres (reportage – self-introductory video), subjects (the state of digital education – the village's landmarks), platforms and access (free news portal – YouTube channel with limited access), the production backgrounds (media agency – a film workshop organized by the staff of a Budapest university research centre for local children, supported by the Hungarian state and with the participation of independent filmmakers), presumed audiences, educational environments (official school – off-school alternative education). Certainly, other differences can be detected, but perhaps the most important is the difference between the narratives and their framing, and on this level it is worth comparing the two items of content, primarily with the aim of looking at them as two examples of the construction of digital environmental subjects. In the video, the journalist reveals the negative experiences through the voices of the people involved, providing the reader with an (at least partly) emic perspective. The bounded nature of the reportage genre means that the narratives of those involved are introduced with a rhetorical device in order to assert an external point of view. This visual-rhetorical description of the space evokes the reader's hidden knowledge of the disadvantaged Roma settlement and sets the stage for the stories of the mothers of Tomor about digital education:

> Dilapidated houses in the one-street village. Children with torn shoes on adult bicycles. The silence of Tomor in Borsod County is disturbed only by the roar of a combine harvester rolling through the village. Only 230 people live here, and those who can are fleeing. Miskolc [the nearest big city] is very close on the map, only 35 kilometres away: 40 minutes by car, an hour and a half by bus. For the local Roma, the distance is almost insurmountable. (Báthory 2020)

In the report, one mother expresses everyday deprivation in terms of the mutually exclusive opposites of food and digital education, which the journalist then emphasizes in the title of the report: "they will either eat or use the Internet". The ranking of basic needs highlights the secondary nature of digital education, and ultimately that if the intellectual workload on families is coupled with the lack (unaffordability) of communication infrastructure, then digital education goals at home are unattainable and digital life is unsustainable. Seeing the two locations presented in the report, and hearing/reading the narratives, the viewer/reader of the report is strongly drawn to the image of the digital divide, which is difficult to argue with. The narratives of the mothers in Tomor help us to understand that, through no fault of their own, their children are disappearing from the very ideological state apparatus that is supposed to address them and whose function is to reproduce them as a workforce. The workforce is reproduced for anything

other than the workfare system,[9] by erasing students from the digital space, denying them the chance to be mobile on the labour market, to improve their skills through their lifetime, and to become critically reflexive digital environmental subjects.

Coming back to the differences between the report and the media project, we have to mention a difference that allows us to create a different narrative about Tomor. It should be stressed that this other narrative does not negate the narrative of the digital divide articulated in the report but relativizes it by its very existence. So, the video was shot in Tomor, as part of the Dunaszekcső-Tomor participatory media workshop. The concept of the workshop, which took the form of a summer camp, was to bring together young people aged 10–18 living in two locations, first online for three days and then in the physical space for another three days. During the first three days, both in Tomor and Dunaszekcső, their film teachers taught them how to use a camera and a microphone and how to produce various media genres (e.g. interviewing). After the exercises, they made, among others, "postcard"-type films, in which they introduced their own community and talked to the distant group about their relationship with it. These "postcards" were then sent as MP4 files to the other community, who in turn also sent them a postcard film about their location. Practising filmmaking roles or participating in the editing of films made young people aware of the process of digital filmmaking, the actual and virtual components of the process, the specificities of the surrounding actual and virtual environment, not to mention the positive role played by the fact that they were already involved in a creative and dialogical process online before the physical encounter.[10]

The postcard film *Tomor1* uses a guided tour scheme, which proves to be a very creative solution by the young filmmakers.[11] The one-handed camerawork films the guide from a bicycle, who also rides his bicycle along the main street of the village, slowing down at certain places of interest, and the young people standing there, turning to the guide, in fact to the camera, give a few sentences about the place. The first stop is the playground, where Laci tells us that young people used to come here to socialize, but there are no other entertainment facilities in the village; then comes "Andi's shop", which Adrian tells us used to belong to his godmother Andi but has recently closed down; from here we come to the statue of the village's namesake, Pál Tomori, where Letti and Kamilla are standing, speaking about Pál Tomori; at the nursery, the youngest camper, Geri, tells us that he "didn't like studying there very much, but it was fun"; and, finally, we arrive at the Reformed church, where Niki

9 On the workfare system in Hungary, see Keller et al., 2016.

10 On the participatory film method called catalyst method, films and their analysis, see: Haragonics, 2022; Müllner, 2022. The two articles cited here, together with other articles, were published in the special issue of the Hungarian social science journal *Replika* on participatory film (no. 124). The same collection of essays will be published in English, in the journal *Film and Media Studies – Acta Universitatis Sapientiae*.

11 The cast (in order of appearance): Levente Siroki, László Mogyoró, Adrián Siroki, Letícia Mogyoró, Kamilla Horváth, Gergő Horváth, Nikoletta Jóni. Camera: Tamás Jocha.

tells us that they usually organize a summer camp there for children. The four-minute forty-seven-second film features not only landmarks but also other attractions such as a wooden tower, the local government building, the car of the mobile post office, a parked intercity bus, the bridge over the brook Vadász. Yet, the most important conceptual element is that the young people are personally connected to the places they are showing. An emic narrative without external framing is created before the viewer's eyes, with the narrators narrating each location to the camera, which is representing the external observer. Although deprivation is expressed (the playground as the only place for young people, the closure of Andi's shop), it does not dominate, nor does the presentation of the village focus on illustrating deprivation, compared to the description of the location in the report mentioned above. Indeed, in this film, with one or two exceptions, there are no "dilapidated houses", not to mention "children with torn shoes on adult bicycles" – which is not to say that perception focusing on deprivation is false, it simply means that from the emic perspective of the young people filming, this is not a relevant visual information. With digital literacy as a competency, they wanted to show their critical environmental subjectivity through the gaps, while at the same time highlighting local landmarks that were important to them. All this took place in a hybrid space, in actual locations and in the virtual media space, actively communicating with another group at a distance (then nearby). The subject of the film is not the actual state of digital education, but digital media is its medium and channel, the learning and confident mastery of which is a process for young people in Tomor, who are not a homogeneous group in terms of age and film expertise. The Dunaszekcső-Tomor participatory film camp is the culmination of a process that has been going on for two decades.[12] Watching *Tomor1*, it becomes clear to the viewer that the locals are not playing the victim role familiar from the documentary tradition or mass media representation, that they are not on the losing side of the digital divide, and that digital education is not experienced by them as a fiasco. Again, it is in these victimizing roles that the residents of Tomor *can be authentically portrayed* regarding the actual state of digital education in Hungary, but this is not the preferred perspective of the young people themselves. They prefer to portray themselves as active and competent in the actual and virtual spaces, and, indeed, they prove their competency.

6. Conclusions

In the title of this paper, I aimed to endow with metaphorical power the bicycles that appeared in the two media materials. In the *Szabad Európa* report, the rhetorical image of children with torn shoes riding adult bicycles powerfully

12 On the film and media camps led by László Siroki Jr. in Tomor, see Gunther (2017) and on local community organizations in Tomor, see Sélley (2006).

portrays the social conditions in disadvantaged, predominantly Roma settlements. The rhetorical power of the image lies in the fact that it presents deprivation in a discursive and conventional cutaway shot,[13] and also in the fact that it suggests that children do not progress along their life paths by age-appropriate means, i.e. that they engage in adult activities (starting a family early, engaging in early start of work, etc.) instead of learning. In the other material, the bicycle plays a constructive and integral role in the filmmaking process by ensuring the smooth movement of the camera and maintaining the viewer's attention. This is as creative and genuinely cinematic an idea as the tour guide, whose functional role is to direct the viewer's gaze through the visual process. The content should be analysed together with the media project in which it was produced, taking into account its educational purpose, actual-virtual spaces, media genres, allied actors, etc.

The two images and the two media materials present two different environmental subjects, albeit not in mutually exclusive ways. *Szabad Európa* reports on the difficulties of digital education through the accounts of a mother in the capital and two mothers in Tomor, making the reader/viewer aware that it is not a "gypsy problem"; yet it also shows the difference between the opportunities available to the inhabitants of the two settlements. The rhetorical introduction, which presents an etic perspective, is followed by emic perspectives, and the testimonies confirm that the epidemic has also had a devastating effect on digital education, mainly due to the dysfunctionality of the government. If a reflexive and critical digital environmental subject is a prerequisite for the sustainability of digital life, the crisis has demonstrated this in a negative way. Disadvantaged and/or Roma communities have found themselves in an even more difficult situation, their prospects for learning and thus employment have deteriorated, and the degree of socio-ethnic segregation in Hungary is predictably increasing. The participatory media project does not refute this prediction but presents an alternative narrative of the same physical space, with a different "cyclist" at its centre, who is an active and conscious participant in the digital space. It is no substitute for state-level intervention, nor does it compensate for the lack of it, but it can contribute to the sustainability of digital life if researchers and civil forces work in alliance in order to discursively-medially construct the digital environmental subject in virtual space. We need to find the digital-based formats, methodologies, digital ecocritical collaborations and alliances that can respond to the three digital environmental representational crises. This requires a deconstruction of the majority conception of the Other projected on the "other side" of the digital divide, a reflection on the discursive construction and materiality of the digital environment, and, as a result, the emergence of an active digital environmental subject.

13 For a discussion of the shoe as a conventional, cutaway shot, see Hammer (2006).

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