

MOVEMENT PARTIES AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY

LOCAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS AS SOCIAL INTERMEDIARIES IN THE CASE OF THE HUNGARIAN TWO-TAILED DOG PARTY*

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Introduction

The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) is considered a distinctive hybrid political organization within the Hungarian political system. Over the past decade¹, it has been established as a stable element within the Hungarian political framework. Originating as a small-scale street art initiative, it has evolved into a fully fledged political organization. Although the party has secured no National Assembly or European Parliament mandates, the 2024 municipal elections are recognized as its most successful electoral performance². In this election, 51 mandates were obtained, primarily in major cities and several smaller municipalities with populations under 10,000. Additionally, Gergely Kovács was elected as mayor of Budapest's 12th district, while the party also achieved a majority in the local assembly.

This organizational development has been underpinned by significant structural efforts through which a nationwide network has been established. This network operates in almost all significant municipalities and extends its presence to smaller settlements as well. The MKKP has employed community organizing methods to establish these local units, allowing them to operate independently of direct party leadership intervention (Szegedi 2022).

¹ 2014 is recognized as the year when the MKKP officially became a political party.

² Although the local elections held concurrently with the European Parliament elections brought some successes, such as the acquisition of mandates in several major cities, they were perceived as a disappointment by certain party members. The party failed to surpass the 5% threshold required for representation in the European Parliament, despite polling at 11% among decided voters in March, according to Medián (partpreferencia.hu). However, the sweeping changes initiated by Péter Magyar ultimately reduced the MKKP's support below the 5% threshold.



These units are sustained by strong internal cohesion, ensuring their functionality even in the absence of election-related stimuli. Unlike other opposition parties, the MKKP's local organizations are not contingent upon electoral success but rely on community engagement to maintain their continuity. Consequently, the party has expanded its voter base and support even following elections deemed unsuccessful (2018, 2019, 2022).

The MKKP, as an anti-political and centrist anti-establishment formation (Glied-Szegedi 2024), defines itself in opposition to mainstream politics and employs novel methods rather than conventional political tactics and tools. Consequently, the party is predominantly composed of non-professional politicians. This grassroots organizational structure and unconventional "amateur" political approach have been the MKKP's greatest strengths but also its most significant challenges. Integration into politics for the MKKP has necessitated a process of professionalization, which has generated numerous internal conflicts within the party. Such internal tensions have led, for instance, to the departure of Zsolt Victora in 2022, as well as the party's most significant internal conflict: the March 2024 re-vote on the primary membership decision and Gergely Kovács' resignation ultimatum. The latter event resulted in the departure of Tamás Gráf, the national network developer, and Tarcsay, a local organizer, from the party.

This study seeks to explore the relationship between the MKKP and civil society. The central thesis posits that the organizational model employed by the MKKP facilitates engagement with the non-institutionalized segments of civil society. It is argued that the party exhibits a high potential for involving local communities at the grassroots level. Two theoretical frameworks have been employed to examine this phenomenon: the theory of movement parties and Peter Mair and Richard Katz's three faces model. The former provides insights into the looser, movement-like characteristics of party organizations, while the latter aids in understanding the autonomy of local units from the central party structure, including the scope and actors involved in local decision-making. A more detailed presentation of the two theories is necessary for this study, as joke parties in general, and specifically, the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), can be categorized as movement parties (Glied-Szegedi 2024). In the case of movement parties, it has been observed that the autonomy of local organizations is strengthened, meaning that the *party on the ground* becomes more prominent. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the theory regarding the differentiation of party organizational components is essential.

To investigate these dynamics, semi-structured interviews (*Appendix A*) were conducted with activists, members, leadership figures, and representatives of the MKKP (*Appendix B*). Nevertheless, various sections are found to provide valuable insights for the present analysis. Additionally, the analysis examines the MKKP's municipal activities from 2019 to 2024 from the perspective of civil society. Specifically, the relationship between MKKP representatives and civil society is assessed through the municipal decisions initiated or influenced by the party's representatives.

This study has been included in the thematic issue of *Civil Szemle* because the MKKP, as a unique political organization within the Hungarian party system, consciously strives to organize and strengthen local communities through its organizational structure. In doing so, it represents a distinctive form of interaction between Hungarian politics and civil society, fundamentally diverging from Hungarian political traditions.

Theory of the Three Faces

In their foundational study on political party organization, Peter Mair and Richard Katz (1993; 2002) proposed a conceptual model that delineates party structures into three primary “faces” or organizational components: the party in the central office, the party in public offices, and the party on the ground; offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the internal dynamics of political parties.

The first of these components is the party leadership, represented by the central office, whose principal role is to oversee the party's overall functioning. This includes managing electoral campaigns, coordinating the activities of party activists, and ensuring the smooth operation of the party apparatus at various levels. The central office serves as the hub from which strategy and coordination flow, providing a unifying direction for the party's efforts.

The second component, composed of party members who hold public office, includes representatives in national parliaments, governments, and local authorities. These individuals often gain significant influence within the party, primarily through their electoral success and public popularity, which can be influenced by external factors such as media visibility and public opinion. In many contemporary democracies, public funding for parties is often tied to electoral results, meaning that successful politicians not only enhance their standing but also contribute directly to the party's financial stability. This financial support further solidifies their influence within the party's internal hierarchy.

The third and final component in Mair and Katz's model is the membership base, commonly referred to as the *party on the ground*. This group comprises grassroots activists, loyal supporters, and reliable voters who participate in party activities, particularly during election campaigns, often serving as unpaid volunteers. Their primary function is to act as a conduit for local knowledge, feeding information up to higher levels of the party while also serving as the operational backbone during critical campaign periods. These activists provide crucial labour and energy that help drive the party's outreach and voter mobilization efforts, making them an indispensable part of the party structure. Furthermore, local organizations play a crucial role in the selection of candidates, policy issues, and even electoral defeats, which have been found to correlate with the weakening of the party's autonomy on the ground (Cross 2016). With the development of online spaces and communities, grassroots organizations within local party structures have been strengthened.



At the same time, well-known politicians attempt to exert greater dominance over the party as a whole through new digital media (Hanel–Marschall 2013). Moreover, in the case of new parties, the party on the ground is more dominant than other organizational units (Poertner 2023).

Since then, it has been regarded as the most significant theory in the non-hierarchical organizational approach to parties, serving as a general framework for research in which the relative weight of different organizational units within parties has been examined (e.g. Moens 2023) or the independent functions of specific components have been analysed (e.g., Hansen et al. 2024). Studies have been conducted on various cases, including the Five Star Movement (Crulli 2022; Oross–Mikecz 2018), the political groups of the European Parliament and European supranational parties (Calossi–Cicchi 2019), the National League for Democracy in Myanmar (Roewer, 2019), the Indonesian National Democratic Party (Trinanda–Astanjung 2023), center-right parties in Central and Eastern Europe (Enyedi–Linek 2008), and the new digital functions of parties as organizational units (Peña–Gold 2022).

One of the significant strengths of Mair and Katz’s theoretical framework is its adaptability, allowing for a nuanced comparative analysis of different party organizations across various political eras and party families. In modern political systems, particularly within cartel parties (Katz–Mair 1995; 1996) or business-oriented parties (Hopkin–Paolucci 1999), there has been a noticeable increase in the influence of party members holding public office. This shift can be attributed to several factors, including the growing personalization of politics, where individual politicians, rather than party platforms, become the focal point of public attention, which is amplified by media exposure. This mediatization of politics has elevated the visibility of successful politicians, who often wield considerable influence within their parties, at times challenging the traditional party leadership. Furthermore, the financial dependence on electoral success has made these officeholders key players, as their victories directly translate into funding for the party, reinforcing their importance. As a result, a significant portion of political parties has hollowed out one of their oldest and most essential functions: facilitating connections between civil society and the state, or “*high politics*” (Mair 2013; Panebianco 1988). Furthermore, the bureaucratization and professionalization of civil society have led to a decline in volunteerism, thereby constricting the social spaces that previously fostered connections between parties and civil society (Martin et al. 2022). It is asserted that a similar shift can be observed in the case of movement parties, specifically toward the party on the ground. Essentially, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a backlash against the utilization of parties dominated by elected representatives. Therefore, the study hypothesizes that these parties maintain closer ties with both formal and informal organizations of civil society, as they primarily define themselves in opposition to elites and elitism.



Movement Parties

Movement parties are generally considered modern, contemporary formations that became widespread from the 1980s onward (Gunther–Diamond 2003)³. Empirical research (Almeida 2015) has indicated that their emergence is closely linked to neoliberal economic policies and the waves of discontent they triggered, as certain opposition parties developed strategies centered on street-level activism, collective action, and closer collaboration with civil society. This emphasis on grassroots engagement and direct action has distinguished movement parties from more traditional political actors that rely on formal institutional structures. Fundamentally, movement parties are defined as those that adopt the strategies of social movements—such as loose organizational structures, street activism, grassroots democracy, and direct democracy—while also acting as challengers to political parties (Kitschelt 2006). Their primary tactics are, therefore, rooted in non-conventional political participation, with voter mobilization being primarily conducted through activism (Peña 2020), often complemented by populist and anti-elite messaging (Mercea–Mosca 2021).

Additionally, movement parties have been observed to demonstrate particular strength in the online sphere (Deseriis 2020), mainly to compensate for organizational shortcomings. Their online communities constitute a crucial element of their mobilization potential. Empirical evidence has been provided to support the correlation between non-conventional political participation, the use of the Internet as a primary source of news, and voting for movement parties (Mosca–Quaranta 2017).

The rise of movement parties has been found to exert a profound impact on the organization and functioning of political parties, particularly in addressing socio-economic challenges. In two-party systems, where new political actors face significant barriers to entry, social movements have frequently sought to influence established parties from within. Examples of this phenomenon include the influence of the Tea Party on the Republican Party in the United States, as well as the rise of figures such as Jeremy Corbyn, Donald Trump, and Bernie Sanders, who have sought to shift the ideological direction of their respective parties. In contrast, in multi-party systems, where the political environment provides greater flexibility, social movements have been more likely to institutionalize themselves as new political parties. Notable examples of such cases include Podemos in Spain, SYRIZA in Greece, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), and the Five Star Movement in Italy. These parties have been observed to have emerged from grassroots movements, challenging the established political order by addressing socio-political grievances that had often been neglected by traditional parties (Hutter et al. 2019).

3 Although Donatella della Porta and her colleagues (2017) have argued that movement parties emerged simultaneously with the appearance of political parties, and Marina Prentoulis–Lasse Thomassen (2019) have classified 19th-century labour movements as movement parties, these claims have been subject to further academic debate.



The organizational structures of political parties, particularly those of movement parties, have been found to reflect broader shifts in political participation and the evolving dynamics of engagement within the contemporary political landscape. Research conducted by Ingrid van Biezen and her colleagues (2012) has demonstrated that parties maintaining stronger ties with civil society largely owe this to their organizational structures. Specifically, it has been observed that parties that have preserved their organizational autonomy from their representative groups have remained significantly more connected to the civil sphere, particularly at the local level, highlighting the critical role played by local organizations in sustaining these connections.

Joke Parties and the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party

The theoretical foundation for categorizing joke parties as a distinct party family within political science remains underdeveloped, primarily due to their marginalization and exclusion from the classifications established by Beyme (1985). Joke parties exhibit significant diversity, reflecting the societal and political phenomena they satirize (Paár 2016). Nevertheless, they may be regarded as a party family, as their defining characteristic—humor—provides a basis for identifying shared attributes (Oross et al. 2018). Furthermore, notable similarities can be observed in their content and communication strategies, as most joke parties demonstrate anti-elitism (Szegedi 2021; Farkas 2018). This tendency can be attributed to the dynamics of political humor, which often ridicules more vigorous opponents, as weaker adversaries tend to evoke greater sympathy. Consequently, joke parties predominantly critique members of the political-economic elite or societal phenomena shaped by governmental influence.

The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) initially expressed its street activism primarily through various forms of street art, including posters, graffiti, pictograms, and stickers, displayed in public spaces (Bucs 2011). Beginning in the mid-2010s, the MKKP increased the frequency of these street art activities and embarked on more ambitious projects, such as building or renovating bus stops and voluntarily repairing roads.

A notable shift occurred during the 2018 parliamentary elections, when the MKKP ran a national list and garnered 1.75% of the vote (NVI 2018), making the party eligible for state funding. Although the MKKP's street actions are designed to involve civilians in playful and participatory projects, they often deliberately provoke conflicts with local or state authorities. Initiatives such as constructing bus stops, repairing roads, or painting sidewalks in bright colors draw attention to neglected urban areas and implicitly critique the inadequacies of local governments, all while maintaining a humorous and irreverent tone (Oross et al. 2018).

In parallel, the party experienced significant growth in both its voter base and organizational infrastructure. In the 2019 local elections, the MKKP secured two municipal

council seats and a deputy mayor position (NVI 2019). By the 2022 elections, it had increased its share of the vote to 3.27% (NVI 2022). Following 2019, the MKKP underwent a significant transformation, becoming more professionalized by hiring paid staff, and evolving into a nationwide organization with local branches in most major cities outside Budapest (Szegedi 2022). These local branches placed a strong emphasis on community building, a key priority actively supported by the party.

Political Community

We can consider any organization in which a network of relationships, a sense of belonging, and a communication network have developed among its members based on specific values or similarities as a community (Szegedi 2022). Classical interpretations distinguish between traditional and mechanical organizations (cf. Tönnies, 2001). The former is based on traditional relationships, such as kinship and neighborhood. At the same time, the latter is organized around personal interests and has some form of legal codification, for example, commercial contracts. Furthermore, within a community—depending on its level of development—various functions may emerge, ranging hierarchically from the redistribution of the community’s products and services to full solidarity (Warren 1964).

When discussing political communities, the major classical theorists primarily refer to it as an identity created from the relationship between sovereignty, the state, people, and territories (Baker–Bartelson 2009), which essentially meant the nation (cf. Durkheim 1964; Elias 1991; Anderson 1983) and continues to be understood this way even today (cf. Mölder et al. 2023). However, this paper interprets political communities as local communities intentionally formed for a political purpose (cf. community organizing [Stall–Stoecker 2016; Alinsky 1973; Bobo et al. 2001]). This research refers to the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party, a political organization that engages in community organizing through the establishment of local branches (Szegedi 2022). This is not entirely foreign to the behavior of political parties in Hungary, or in any other country. In Hungary, Fidesz has been particularly effective in establishing strong online and offline networks among the party, its supporters and sympathizers, and the broader society (Metz–Várnagy 2021)⁴.

If a political party engages in community organizing, and we accept that the primary function of parties is to exercise public power (cf. Sartori 1976), we can conclude that they do this with political goals in mind, to strengthen their agenda. However, the organization of a political community by parties is more likely to be successful if it is centered around specific issues rather than general values or ideologies (Debié 2012). Additionally, it enhances the community’s resilience against economic and political pressure (Maeda et al. 2016).

4 However, other parties have also made attempts at this, such as the Momentum Movement, where elements of community organizing are clearly present in its youth organization, *TizenX* (Fényes 2023).



By creating online communities, the number of loyal voters can also increase (Koc-Michalska–Lilleker 2019). The formation of community identity reduces the chances of political disengagement (Shaw 2007). Furthermore, renewal and innovative ideas are often the results of community work, allowing community members to become active shapers of politics (Bainter–Lhevine 1998). Additionally, the knowledge and experience of political communities can play a significant role in expanding the knowledge base of civil society (Miller 2008), by building connections with the broader civil society, which is crucial for the social embeddedness of political parties.

Local Governments, Politics, and Civil Society in Hungary

Hungarian civil society faced significant structural deficits following the regime change. Although it emerged from the underground culture of the socialist era during the 1990s and 2000s, gaining general acceptance, this acceptance primarily pertained to protest culture. Even in the 2000s, researchers identified substantial limitations, such as a marginal presence or being perceived as “*exoticisms of intellectual subculture*” that were incapable of mobilizing broader societal engagement (Szabó 2004: 166). Consequently, non-institutionalized civil society participation did not become widespread within Hungarian society, serving instead as an advocacy tool primarily for a narrow intellectual elite. Institutionalized civil society, such as NGOs, was similarly underdeveloped. Experts in the field struggled to find practical solutions to enhance the civil sector or encourage broader societal participation (Szabó 2009; Tórkés 2009; Kákai 2010; Domaniczky 2010). Therefore, the role of government and local governments in engaging civil society and fostering public involvement in political issues became especially significant. A practical method for this involvement is through local government engagement in local decision-making processes. This can occur in two main ways: civil organizations can participate in elections, enabling their members to serve as representatives, or they can be integrated into decision-making processes, utilizing their local knowledge to engage citizens on issues directly affecting them (Csegény–Kákai 2001).

Between 1990 and 2010, however, the civil sector encountered numerous financial challenges. Its funding is derived mainly from normative subsidies, with this proportion gradually increasing over the two decades. Additionally, there was a stark contrast between state and local government support, with the latter falling significantly short, rendering the civil sector increasingly dependent on the state. Furthermore, non-normative support was a key characteristic of the period, allowing for discretionary allocations, as funds were not automatically tied to specific functions (Bocz 2009). Despite underfunding and preferential treatment given to organizations aligned with political interests, there was generally no overarching political distrust toward civil society as a whole. A broad political consensus existed regarding the necessity and support for civil society, except for far-right parties (Zsolt 2020).



However, the position of civil society shifted radically after 2010, as a newly emerging political framework sought to redefine the relationship between the state and civil society (Brachinger 2022). Of the three main functions of civil organizations—advocacy, community organization, and provision of public services—the government aimed to involve the civil sector in decision-making solely in terms of service provision (Sebestyén, 2016). Thus, the government effectively rejected the self-organizing, community-building, and monitoring roles of civil society. Ádám Nagy (2016: 147) categorized seven obstacles imposed by the Hungarian state on civil society, obstacles that, though present before 2010, were significantly strengthened and broadened in scope after this period. These obstacles included: *“1. regulations irrelevant to the sector; 2. dismantling of civil autonomy; 3. degradation of civil financing; 4. inextricable entanglements; 5. distortion of civil ethos; 6. increased bureaucracy; 7. scapegoating.”* In addition, the populist government revived the state-socialist “good vs. bad” narrative against civil society, based on a populist dichotomy (Rixer, 2020). Essentially, the populist “us vs. them” contrast was extended to civil society, with “us” symbolizing the “good” and “them” the “bad”.

Attila Ágh (2016) attributed the fundamental weakness of civil society and its susceptibility to political co-option to “democracy without participation,” characterized by a lack of social solidarity and a prevailing inaction in participation. Similar trends are evident in empirical research by Andrea Szabó and Márton Gerő (2019), which shows a gradual decline in political association in Hungarian society outside of electoral contexts. However, their research also indicates higher levels of participation in local issues, suggesting that local civil society may be more readily engaged in local government decision-making processes. In this regard, local government representatives and local branches of political parties could play a significant role. Consequently, after 2010, Hungary’s active social segments increasingly turned to non-institutionalized forms of civil advocacy. Social movements and waves of protest, cyclically reemerging in the socio-political space, represented relatively novel phenomena in Hungarian civil and political advocacy. These movements were fuelled both by the discrediting of opposition parties and the systematic obstruction of civil organizations (Kákai–Glied 2024).

Local Party Organisations and the Civil Society

The local organizations of the MKKP function with a remarkable degree of autonomy, as the national leadership largely refrains from intervening in their activities. These local branches are free to act within the broader framework of the party’s image, provided their actions remain consistent with its guiding principles and values. This decentralized structure not only fosters innovation but also empowers grassroots participants to take the initiative, enabling the party to maintain a dynamic and adaptable presence at the local level.



One party member emphasized the significance of local activism: “What is realized at the local level depends on the local activists.” *So, if someone says they want to build a bus stop here and finds helpers who say, ‘We will help build it,’ then that bus stop is likely to be built.*” (Party member 2., online interview, 20. 12. 2023.). Or as one other said: *Since this is a bottom-up organization if someone has a good idea and we can realize it, then we do it*” (MKKP party member 2., personal interview, 11. 12. 2023). Another activist elaborated on the autonomy granted to local branches: “In theory, local organizations can make independent decisions.” *Only if it does not fit into the direction, they might say okay, do it, but we will not associate our name with it. So, you do what you want*” (MKKP party activist 1, online interview, 31. 01. 2023). These statements illustrate how MKKP’s organizational framework is intentionally designed to grant local branches the freedom to shape their priorities, develop projects, and address community-specific needs with minimal interference from higher leadership.

Local organizations bear a significant portion of the responsibility for the party’s active work, particularly in areas that do not involve national media or high-profile political issues. Instead, these efforts are often rooted in creative and community-oriented initiatives, such as street art and urban beautification projects. For example, activists often take on tasks such as restoring neglected public furniture, repainting benches, or revitalizing community spaces. These activities not only draw attention to the party’s presence but also create tangible benefits for residents, blending political activism with civic improvement. The Dog Party fundamentally relies on the independent initiatives of its activists. *Every local group and every activist observe their surroundings with a keen eye, and if they identify something they can change or carry out an attention-grabbing action for, they can request [...] any support from the party headquarters [...] to help them realize their ideas.*” (Party activist 2, online interview, 20. 12. 2023.)

Decision-making processes within these local branches are typically collective, ensuring that a wide range of voices and ideas are heard. This grassroots democratic approach reinforces the sense of community and collaboration that defines the party’s operations. *“In more significant matters, such as deciding who will be a candidate [...], it is the membership that makes the decision. However, if we see that the local community [...] does not favor someone who wants to be a candidate in their area, then that person [...] is filtered out.”* (Party coordinator, online interview, 30. 01. 2024)

Additionally, MKKP places a strong emphasis on its ties to civil society. Many of its activists are simultaneously involved in other civic organizations or the social welfare sector, allowing them to integrate their party roles with broader social commitments. For example, one of the activists said in an interview: *“I have been an active participant in public life for at least 30 years, involved in the work and founding of numerous civil organizations, from establishing the Rotary Club [...] to countless other initiatives. There are a few things I have been part of, ranging from the disabled sports federation to many other activities. [...] What I am most known for here is that I run a business club.”* (Former party activist, personal interview, 08. 06. 2021.)



This dual engagement strengthens the party's connection to the communities it serves and expands its influence beyond traditional political boundaries. The participatory and accessible nature of MKKP's organizational model lowers barriers to entry, making it easy for individuals to join and contribute. Unlike traditional political parties that often require formalized membership and adherence to rigid structures, MKKP encourages involvement through collaborative and creative actions, such as community art projects and urban renewal efforts. This inclusive approach allows anyone, regardless of prior political experience, to take an active role in the party's work. As Gráf Tamás (online interview 2023. 12. 8.), former network developer of the MKKP, described: *"We operate completely differently from other parties; our membership is small [...]. In our party, someone can become a member only if they have actively organized or participated in some activity for the Dog Party for at least a year and if the membership approves their inclusion."* By prioritizing hands-on and impactful actions, the party creates an environment where grassroots participants feel directly connected to the outcomes of their efforts.

This deliberate organizational structure ensures that local branches operate as independent units, distinct not only from the higher levels of the party but also from other branches within the same tier. Such autonomy allows each branch to address the unique needs and challenges of its specific community while staying aligned with the party's overarching mission. For MKKP, the primary goal of this decentralized model is to balance resources effectively and establish strong, self-sustaining local communities. These communities are designed to remain active during election cycles and throughout the year, driven by internal motivation and shared goals rather than external pressures (Szegedi 2022). Ultimately, MKKP's model reflects a broader civic empowerment and engagement philosophy. By emphasizing local autonomy, grassroots democracy, and strong ties to civil society, the party creates a framework that is both flexible and resilient. This community-focused activism enables MKKP to operate as a dynamic force for social and political change, grounded in its members' collective energy and creativity.

Involving Civil Organisations

In the case of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) during the period between 2019 and 2024, municipal engagement was observable in three⁵. Districts of Budapest. Among these, Gergely Kovács (District XII) and Veronika Juhász (District II) participated in municipal activities solely as representatives; thus, their influence on actual municipal decisions was marginal. Nevertheless, their methods of engaging civil society in local politics, despite not holding decision-making positions, remain relevant.

5 Not accounting for Zsolt Vitorá, who entered the municipal assembly of Zugló as an MKKP candidate but left the party in 2022 to continue his municipal work as an independent representative.



In contrast, Zsuzsanna Döme, as Deputy Mayor of District IX, had a direct impact on municipal decisions, making it an important area of analysis to understand how the MKKP interacts with civil society when in a decision-making role. Dávid Nagy, the party director of MKKP, had the following to say about cooperation with civil organizations in municipalities: *“There are several places where [cooperation with local civil organizations] is being discussed because, in municipal elections, there are far more civil organizations involved—not just pseudo-civil organizations but genuine ones. We are receiving inquiries, and we will decide on these on a case-by-case basis”* (online interview, 03. 02. 2023).

Gergely Kovács characterized his term from 2019 to 2024 with the following statement: *“With the power of publicity and action, we managed to achieve quite a lot in District XII over the past four and a half years”* (MKKP party 2024a). In District XII, the MKKP often fulfilled functions typically associated with civil organizations. For instance, during the COVID–19 pandemic, the party’s activists (termed passivists) assisted the elderly—who were advised to stay at home—by shopping and performing other essential tasks for them, as well as providing hot meals for those in need. Additionally, they succeeded in having local council meetings broadcast on the local TV channel, as the MKKP had previously streamed these sessions themselves in the absence of official broadcasting. They also publicized a municipal grant intended for civil organizations, which had previously been accessible only to organizations affiliated with the Fidesz and KDNP parties. Furthermore, the MKKP’s primary activity in District XII involved anti-corruption efforts, with the party assuming the watchdog⁶. The role is typically associated with civil society organizations (MKKP party 2024a). As Zoltán Bürger explained: *“They [municipal representatives] are the ones who most often find themselves in a position to carry out a type of political work that is of the watchdog nature—being close to the action, they gain access to information that not everyone has”* (online interview, 02. 03. 2023).

Similarly, in District II, the MKKP focused on assuming civil organizational functions and facilitating the socialization of political issues. Examples include firewood donations to those in need, carried out with the involvement of the party’s passivists (MKKP party 2023a), as well as collecting books for the Budai Children’s Hospital (MKKP party 2023b). Additionally, social engagement, solidarity, and community organizing played a prominent role in the MKKP’s political agenda. Initiatives included the *“Star in a Strike”* program, which provided childcare support for striking teachers (MKKP party 2022a), and, upon Veronika Juhász’s suggestion, the district launched a new grant program allowing individuals to apply for funding for community-building projects (MKKP party 2022b).

In District IX, similar activities were observed. Although Zsuzsanna Döme initiated numerous proposals, the municipal council did not support many of them. However, during the COVID–19 pandemic, the district implemented a community assistance system that involved 600 volunteers.

⁶ This was also the title of the MKKP’s investigative/anti-corruption YouTube series.

Moreover, at the Deputy Mayor's suggestion, the district launched a participatory budgeting program, reformed the grant application process for civil organizations, and made vacant municipal properties available for cultural or social use through a competitive application process. Public outdoor neighborhood meetings were also introduced to incorporate residents' input into municipal decisions. In 2024, the MKKP proposed extending the community activity grant to address micro-local issues (MKKP party, 2024b).

Perhaps the most distinctive initiative reflecting the MKKP's approach to engaging civil society and strengthening local communities was the "*Rózsa Sándor Public Money Squandering Fund*" (RÓSÁNEKATÉKA). Through this program, the party allocated a significant portion of its state funding via grants to support local activities aimed at fostering community organizations (e.g., community gardens, bus stops, dog parks) or civil organizations (e.g. Angyali-szigeti Civilek Egyesülete, Tabu-lapláza Alapítvány, Kéz A Mancsért Civil Állatvédő Egyesület) (MKKP party 2022c).

Conclusion

In summary, it can be stated that the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) adopts a unique approach to engaging with civil society. On the one hand, significant emphasis has been placed on building local political communities within its organizational structure, which are easily accessible and open to participation by virtually anyone in local activities. This approach enables the joining of local units of the party to transcend mere formal relationships, fostering informal networks characterized by distinct internal cohesion and operational dynamics, thereby cultivating a unique set of relationships among group members. Consequently, the party's local organizational units function autonomously at the local level.

On the other hand, the practice of community organizing continues to be utilized by MKKP representatives, even when they hold political power. In many cases, local communities and activists are incorporated into municipal activities. Furthermore, municipal operations frequently encompass functions traditionally associated with civil organizations, such as anti-corruption initiatives and social services.

The organizational efforts of the MKKP can be considered relatively successful, as the party has continued to operate despite several unsuccessful elections. Additionally, its voter base has steadily expanded from one election to the next. Although the party did not achieve the 5% threshold in the 2024 European Parliament elections, its performance, when compared to the 2022 elections, showed an improvement in relative terms under conditions of lower voter turnout (NVI 2024; 2022). This indicates that voter participation among MKKP supporters is more potent than that of other parties, a factor attributed primarily to the strength and activity of its local communities. Furthermore, the party has become a genuine alternative at the local level in the eyes of voters⁷.

7 It is impossible to know what results would have been achieved if the Tisza Party had also participated.



A key aspect of this success lies in nominating candidates for municipal elections who are prominent and actively engaged organizers within their respective local political communities. The municipal elections can be unequivocally regarded as a success for the party. The central question remains whether the MKKP can effectively leverage its mandate until 2029 to continue its growth or whether it will consistently remain below the 5% threshold.

The principal objective of the MKKP – to establish strong, independently functioning local political communities within the increasingly constrained political and societal space occupied by the state (Ágh 2022) – has demonstrated the capacity to offer a genuine alternative to mainstream parties (i.e., cartel parties) and can be deemed successful.

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Appendix A

List of interviewees

Position	Date of interview	Mode of interview
Regional Coordinator	2021. 05. 07.	Personal
Former Party Member	2021. 05. 15.	Personal
Candidate for Representative, Party Member	2021. 05. 20.	Personal
Former Activist	2021. 06. 02.	Personal
Independent Local Organizer, Activist, Municipal Representative (2019–2024)	2021. 06. 08.	Personal
Co-Chair	2021. 09. 06.	Online
Former Board Member	2021. 09. 07.	Online
Co-Chair	2021. 09. 17.	Online
Candidate for Representative, Activist	2023. 02. 01.	Online
Operational Director	2023. 02. 03.	Online
Board Member	2023. 02. 03.	Online
Former National Network Developer	2023. 12. 05.	Online
Candidate for Representative, Municipal Representative since October 2024	2023. 12. 11.	Online
Regional Coordinator	2023. 12. 18.	Online
Candidate for Representative, Activist	2023. 12. 20.	Online
Regional Coordinator	2024. 01. 13.	Online
Regional Coordinator	2024. 01. 30.	Online

Appendix B

Questionnaire

How can someone be an activist of the party?
Does the activist have an impact on the decision-making?
How many members does the party have?
How can someone become a member of the party?
How many local party organizations does the party have?
How are the local organizations' relations with the party elite?
How centralized is the party organization?
How big is the role of the party leader in the party?
How are the representatives' (local council, European Parliament, etc.) relations with the party elite?
How big is the overlap between the representative and the party elite?
Who has the bigger influence on the decision-making?