Generational Change and Succession Management in Retail Family Businesses in a County-Level Comparison

PhD Dissertation Theses

Lajos Kasza

Supervisor: Dr. Katalin Lipták, habilitated associate professor

Head of Doctoral School: Prof. Dr. Géza Tóth, university professor

University of Miskolc

Hantos Elemér Doctoral School of Management and Regional Science

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1. Introduction

Retail family businesses are of outstanding importance for the Hungarian economy and society, as they simultaneously fulfil local employment, supply, community-building and identity-preserving functions. In terms of access to everyday consumer goods and services, they provide such local presence that large corporate chains and online commerce are only partially able to replace. Over the past decade, however, demographic changes, the transformation of consumer habits, the acceleration of technological developments and the expansion of domestic and international competitors have increasingly forced retail family businesses to adapt. In this process, the issue of succession – that is, the way, timing and content of the transfer of ownership and management functions between generations – has become one of the key factors of long-term competitiveness. During my professional career, I have gained several decades of corporate practice and then top management experience, which in recent years I have applied in higher education, doctoral training and my own consulting business. As a master lecturer at the Department of Commerce and Logistics of the Budapest Business University I teach strategy and management subjects, while as a student of the Hantos Elemér Doctoral School of Management and Regional Science at the University of Miskolc I have acquired deeper theoretical and methodological knowledge in the fields of regional science, entrepreneurship research and econometrics. Together with my supervisor we discussed several times why Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Győr-Moson-Sopron counties became the focus of my research. My choice has both personal and professional reasons. On the one hand, because most of my professional and business development work serves the success of companies operating in these two regions, on the other hand, because friendly and family ties connect me to both counties, and thirdly, because from a research perspective I found it extremely exciting to examine what challenges and opportunities these two regions – which are on completely different development paths – face with regard to the operation and succession of retail family businesses.

1.1. Research objectives and research questions

The overall objective of the dissertation is to examine the conceptual framework, entrepreneurial attitudes, succession practices and economic and social embeddedness of Hungarian retail family businesses, regarding regional and county-level differences and similarities. Within this, special emphasis is placed on capturing the extent and nature of family influence, mapping the structural and behavioral characteristics of the enterprises, and identifying the factors that determine succession. The aim of the research is to contribute to the development of a conceptual and empirical framework that is suitable for distinguishing retail family businesses from general family businesses and thus provides a more refined, sector-specific interpretation of the family business phenomenon. Accordingly, I formulate several interrelated research objectives in the dissertation. First, my aim is to explore the structural (ownership, governance, size, age and performance characteristics) and behavioral (entrepreneurial attitudes, decision-making patterns, willingness to take risks) specificities of retail family businesses and to examine to what extent these differ from those of general family businesses. Second, I strive to create a multi-dimensional, six-criterion conceptual definition that can be empirically operationalized in the Hungarian retail context and is able to capture the complex nature of family influence (sectoral, ownership, governance, local embeddedness, generational and cultural-tradition dimensions). Among my research objectives there is also the analysis of the entrepreneurial attitudes of family business owners based on the GEM database and the data of my own questionnaire survey, with special attention to regional and county-

level differences, demographic background factors and firm characteristics. I examine to what extent the attitudes of family entrepreneurs differ from those of the total entrepreneurial population, what patterns emerge in the comparison of more and less developed regions, and how they are related to firm size, sector, age and performance. I also analyse how the motivations for becoming an entrepreneur and the demographic characteristics are linked to entrepreneurial attitudes, and whether groups of clusters with well-described attitude profiles can be distinguished based on the characteristics of family entrepreneurs. Another, practice-oriented objective of the research is to map the succession practices of retail family businesses, to identify "good practices" and risk factors associated with successful and unsuccessful succession cases. Based on the combined analysis of qualitative and quantitative results, I seek to formulate recommendations that can be used in practice and that can, on the one hand, support the family businesses concerned in consciously planning succession and, on the other hand, serve as a basis for decision-makers in developing targeted, sector-specific policy interventions.

1.2. Hypotheses

Empirical investigations are aimed at testing the closely interrelated hypotheses formulated along the above objectives. The hypotheses relate to the conceptual specificities of retail family businesses, the measurement of family influence, the nature and regional patterns of entrepreneurial attitudes, as well as the relationships between structural characteristics of the enterprise and its economic and social effects. I test the hypotheses in my dissertation based on my research. I present the results in the form of theses in the summary and conclusions chapter of the dissertation.

H1 The entrepreneurial attitudes of family entrepreneurs do not differ significantly from the attitudes of all entrepreneurs.

H2 The entrepreneurial attitudes of family entrepreneurs show regionally different patterns.

H3 The characteristics (size, sector, age, performance) and economic and social effects of the enterprise are differentially related to entrepreneurial attitudes in different regions.

H4 Based on the characteristics of family entrepreneurs, clusters can be distinguished by different entrepreneurial attitude profiles.

H5 Commercial family businesses constitute an independent, sector-specific subgroup of family businesses, which can be distinguished by structural and operational specificities.

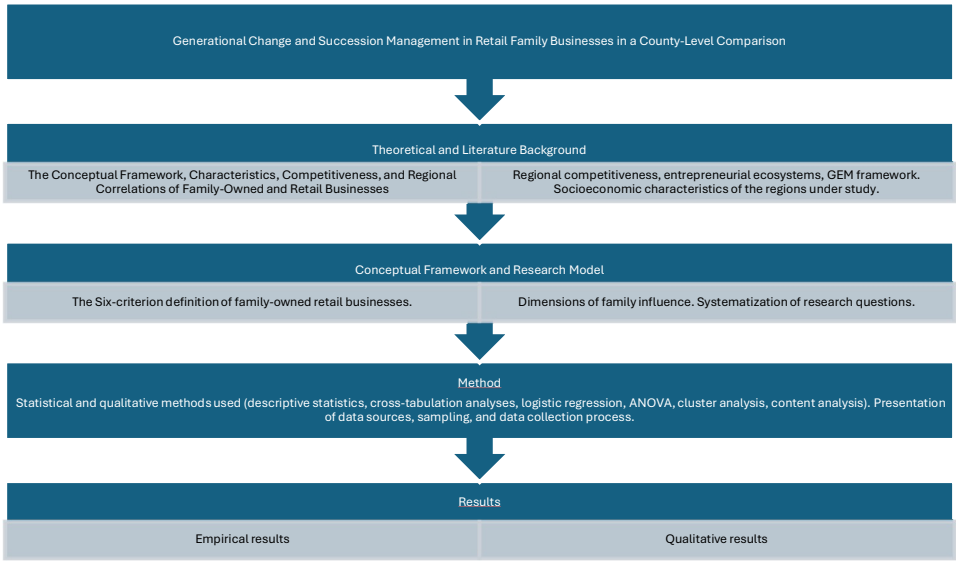
H6 For Hungarian commercial family businesses it is justified to define an independent, sector-specific conceptual category.

1.3. Structure of the dissertation and methodological framework

The structure of the dissertation reflects the interdependence of the research objectives and hypotheses, as well as the combined application of qualitative and quantitative methods. In the first major content unit I provide an overview of the domestic and international literature on family businesses and the retail sector, with particular emphasis on the conceptual definitions of family business, the dimensions of family influence, the specificities of retail family businesses and the theoretical and empirical results related to succession management. Another emphatic element of this chapter is the presentation of the literature on regional competitiveness, entrepreneurial ecosystems and territorial differences, which lays the foundation for the later regional comparative

analyses. The second main unit presents the theoretical and methodological framework of the research, the logic of the investigation and the databases. In this part I present in detail and justify the six-criterion conceptual definition proposed for retail family businesses and describe the data sources used – first the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) database and my own questionnaire survey. I describe the procedures applied in statistical processing (descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, logistic regression, analysis of variance, cluster analysis). The third content unit contains the empirical analysis of the entrepreneurial attitudes, structural characteristics, regional patterns and succession practices of retail family businesses. In presenting the quantitative results, separate chapters deal with the comparison of family and non-family businesses, the regional differences of family entrepreneurial attitudes, the relationships between firm characteristics and entrepreneurial attitudes, and the attitude profiles that emerge because of cluster analysis. In presenting the qualitative results, based on my research, I describe in detail the motivations, emotional and rational considerations related to succession decisions, the patterns of cooperation and conflicts between generations, and the lessons learned from successions. In the closing chapters I summaries the main results of the research, which I formulate in the form of theses corresponding to the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of my dissertation, and I also designate the theoretical and practical contributions of the dissertation. A separate subchapter deals with the limitations of the research, further research directions and recommendations that can be formulated for family businesses, consulting practice and economic policy. The overall aim of the dissertation is to contribute, through the presentation of a complex and nuanced picture of retail family businesses, to the development of domestic family business research, regional science and the discourse on entrepreneurial ecosystems, and to support a more conscious, data-based approach to succession management in practice. The procedure and main aspects of the study are shown in Figure 1.

1. Figure Flowchart of the dissertation



Source: compiled by the author

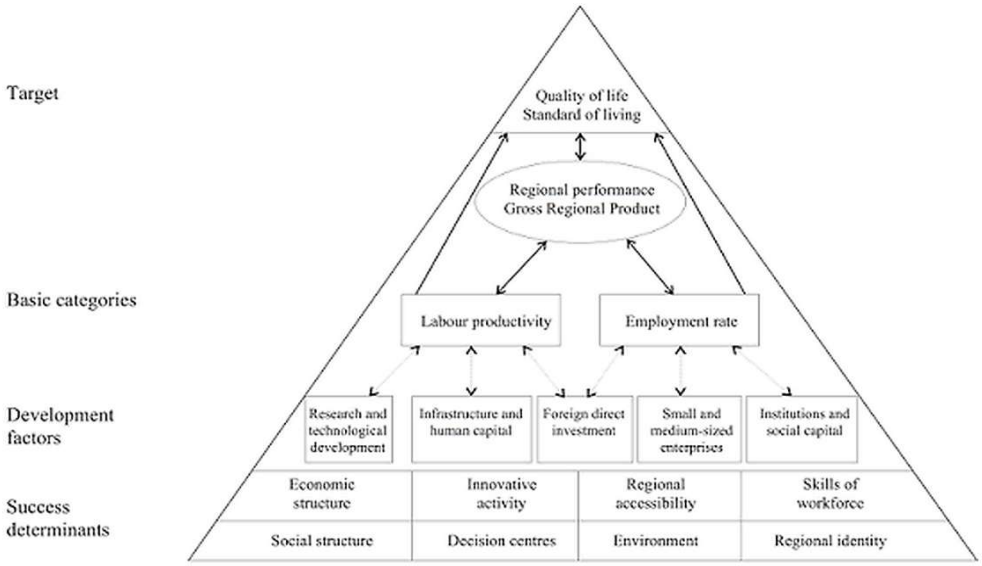
LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Competitiveness

2.1. General approaches to the concept of competitiveness

We encounter the concept of competitiveness in countless interpretations, not infrequently also in such contexts where the attached conceptual definition does not express the original intention, distorts it or gives a misleading explanation. In the early 1980s the scientific definition and study of competitiveness began in earnest. It is linked to the establishment of the President Reagan Commission on Industrial Competitiveness, created by President Reagan with the aim of proposing solutions to a then current problem, namely, how to strengthen again the weakened market position of the United States (Lengyel, 2003). Competitiveness is used almost as a synonym for modernity, innovation and the ability to renew. There are approaches in which it appears as a measure of the level of economic development of an enterprise, and we can also read that it can be related to economic growth, market position and the success of business activity. If we examine the approach of classical economics experts, we must mention the names of Heckscher (1919), Adam Smith (1776), Ohlin (1933), Ricardo (1817) and Krugman (1994). The primary aim of the theories and schools they represent was to try to clarify the concept or to define it as precisely as possible. In addition to the economic approach to competitiveness, in the 1990s a management science approach also appeared, which is associated with Porter. According to Krugman the concept of competitiveness is not interpretable for national economies, and they are worth examining only at the level of enterprises (Krugman, 1994). In agreement with Krugman's line of thought, competitiveness can really be most clearly observed and measured at corporate and industry level, and thus we must primarily concentrate on understanding these. The management science approach makes proposals for the development and improvement of competitiveness, in contrast to the other school, which sought rather to clarify conceptual problems (Lengyel, 2003). The regional competitiveness pyramid model developed by Lengyel (2006) systematizes in a hierarchical structure the factors influencing the economic performance and well-being of territorial units (regions, cities). The author distinguishes between long-term goals (outcomes) and the resources and drivers (inputs) that influence them. With its system-based approach it makes clear that well-being (the top) cannot be achieved without developing the foundations (education, infrastructure). It helps regional developers to identify in which areas intervention is needed in order to improve competitiveness and can thus also be used as a policy tool. Lengyel Imre's model has been used in numerous Hungarian and international studies, and its applicability is therefore beyond question.

2. Figure The pyramid model of regional competitiveness



Source: Imre Lengyel Regional statistic 2006/2

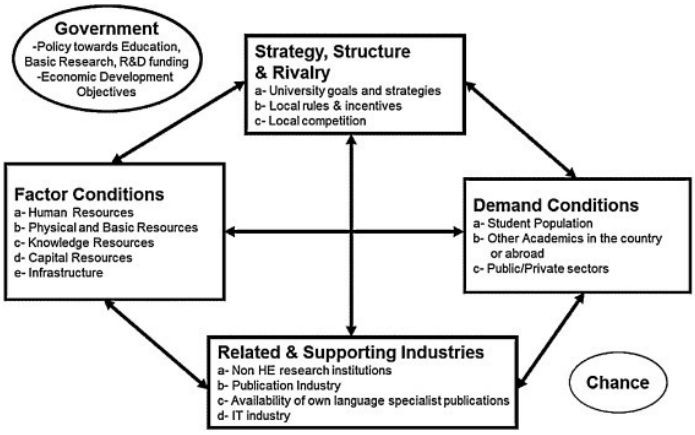
2.2. Theoretical framework and interpretation of organizational competitiveness

Competitiveness is one of the most complex concepts in modern economic discourse, and its interpretation fundamentally depends on the aggregation level of the data examined. Literature traditionally distinguishes national, regional, industry and organizational dimensions which, although they are in close interaction with each other, require different methodological approaches. The focus of the present dissertation is organizational (corporate) level competitiveness. My decision is justified by the recognition that the effectiveness of cross-border regional synergies and cooperations can ultimately be interpreted through the viability and adaptive capacity of the economic units participating in them. In defining the concept precisely, it is essential to synthesize different institutional and theoretical approaches. The guiding interpretation of the European Union (EC, 2007) links competitiveness to the production of outputs that can be successfully marketed on the international market, to qualitative job creation and to sustainable growth. From the research perspective the operability of competitiveness is provided by quantitative indicators of productivity, efficiency, profitability and market share. Among these factors, in the case of the domestic small and medium-sized enterprise sector, efficiency has proved to be decisive in the past decade, preceding the advantages derived from economies of scale (Kincses et al., 2022). It is important to emphasis that competitiveness does not mean market success itself, but rather the ability and opportunity for it. The leading figures of the Hungarian business economics school (Chikán et al., 2002; Chikán–Czakó, 2009), adapting the concept to the micro level, place the emphasis on sustainable value creation. In their interpretation a competitive enterprise is able, within the framework of social norms, to transform its resources into a stream of profit that ensures its lasting market presence and flexible adaptation to the changing environment. This approach highlights that the basis of competitiveness is the satisfaction of consumer needs at such a level that makes higher profitability possible than that of competitors.

The management science turn and Porter's approach

In addition to the economic approach to competitiveness, in the 1990s a management science approach also appeared, which is associated with Porter. Michael E. Porter fundamentally changed the scientific discourse on competitiveness by shifting the focus from microeconomic foundations towards strategic management (Porter, 1990). According to Porter, competitiveness depends on how firms are able to optimise the use of resources and how they can coordinate their activities effectively. This approach makes proposals for the development and improvement of competitiveness, as opposed to the other school which sought to clarify conceptual problems (Lengyel, 2003).

3. Figure Porter diamond model



Source: Compiled by the author based on Porter (1990)

According to Porter, these factors mutually reinforce each other and together create the so-called "competitiveness diamond". The model also identifies two additional supporting factors: the role of governments and random events.

2.3. Criticism and limitations of competitiveness theories

Competitiveness theories have received many criticisms over the years. Krugman (1994) called national competitiveness a "dangerous obsession", arguing that nations do not compete in the same way as firms. Others criticize that competitiveness indices oversimplify complex economic phenomena (Lall, 2001). The concept of regional competitiveness has also been criticized because it often mixes the causes and effects of competitiveness. According to Bristow (2005), regional competitiveness is in many cases just a buzzword without a clear theoretical basis. The Porter diamond model has been questioned mainly because of its deterministic nature. Rugman and D'Cruz (2000) argue that the model does not sufficiently consider the role of multinational corporations and the importance of global value chains. The competitiveness challenges of the Hungarian economy in many respects reflect the general problems of the Eastern European region. After the regime change, during the restructuring of the Hungarian economy, new competitiveness paradigms came to the fore. Foreign direct investment played a central role in developing competitiveness, but at the same time also created relations of dependence (Szalavetz, 2020). Hungarian competitiveness strategies emphasis the importance of innovation, digitalization and human resource development. The National Competitiveness Council regularly assesses the country's competitiveness position and makes proposals for development directions (NKFIH, 2021). Regional differences pose a significant challenge in Hungary (Lipták, 2013). Budapest and its surroundings are significantly ahead in

competitiveness compared to the eastern and northern Hungarian regions. This polarization is in line with the topic of the dissertation, which compares family businesses in two counties with different levels of development.

3. Theoretical background of regional economics

Regional economics became an independent discipline in the post-Second World War period, when attention gradually shifted from differences between national economies to intra-national, meso-level territorial differences. In development theory debates – especially in examining the catching-up of countries that had been freed from colonial status – it became increasingly clear that economic growth is spatially very unevenly distributed, and regional differences may persist in the long term or even deepen (Szentes, 2011). In parallel, regional economic research came to focus on how differences in development within a country arise, become fixed and then are reproduced, and by what instruments these can be mitigated. From the perspective of my doctoral research this regional framework has a dual significance. On the one hand, it makes it possible to examine the operational and succession processes of family businesses operating in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (BAZ) and Győr-Moson-Sopron (GYMS) counties not as isolated phenomena but embedded in the specific economic, social and institutional context of the given county and region. On the other hand, the comparison of the two counties – which represent two markedly different poles of the Hungarian regional spatial structure – clearly highlights the mechanisms of path dependence, agglomeration advantages and development traps. The aim of the chapter is, on the one hand, to review the main theoretical directions of regional economics, with particular regard to the distinction between development and growth, the concept of path dependence, agglomeration processes and new approaches to place-based development policy. On the other hand, in the chapter I use and incorporate the results of the study by Kocziszky and Szendi (2021) on the economic development paths of Hungarian counties and, on this basis, interpret the different development aspects of BAZ and GYMS counties and of the NUTS2 regions (Northern Hungary and Western Transdanubia) to which they belong. Linking the theoretical and empirical framework creates the basis for interpreting in later dissertation chapters the succession processes of retail family businesses as an integral part of the regional economic context. The distinction between the concepts of economic development and growth is one of the starting questions of regional economics. While growth is primarily a quantitative category – expressing the positive change in the per capita output (GDP per capita) of a given territorial unit – development is a broader, qualitative improvement in well-being. Development includes, in addition to the expansion of material goods, the increase in the level of education, the longer expected life span spent on health, the accumulation of human and social capital and the evolution of environmental pressures (Pike et al., 2006; Sen, 1987). The approach of Kocziszky and Szendi is also based on this distinction: the authors emphasis that economic growth is an important but not sufficient condition for development. Even with rapid growth it is conceivable that quality of life improves only moderately or even deteriorates, while more modest growth can also generate significant progress in social well-being if the allocation of resources shifts in a more favorable direction (Kocziszky and Szendi, 2021). This difference appears even more sharply at regional level, since due to the spatial concentration of economic activity, even in regions with higher output and income than the national average, serious social tensions may persist, while in other, lower-GDP regions social cohesion, the availability of public services and the state of the environment may be more favorable. In the theoretical interpretation of regional development four major schools can be distinguished, which also appear in the system of Kocziszky and Szendi: the

economic history school, the sociological (behavioural science) school, the institutional economics school and the geographical school.
Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén is an example of the danger of negative path dependence and lock-in after the collapse of coal mining and metallurgy, which were dominant in the socialist period, no new, high value-added economic structure emerged that could have put the county on a path of sustainable growth. In contrast, in the case of Győr-Moson-Sopron, historical industrial traditions, the border location and the institutional background suitable for receiving multinational automotive investments opened an evolutionary path that made the region an integral part of Western European value chains.

1. Table GDP/capita and Complex Development Index – BAZ. vs. GYMS

Year	BAZ – GDP per capita (thousand HUF)	GYMS – GDP per capita (thousand HUF)	GYMS/BAZ ratio	BAZ – Composite index	GYMS – Composite index	Index difference (GYMS-BAZ)
1995	420	612	1,46	5,38	6,44	1,06
2019	3336	5525	1,66	5,08	7,89	2,81
2024 (ex ante)				4,9	7,7	2,8

Source: Compiled by the author based on Kocziszky-Szendi (2021)

The empirical results fit well with theoretical approaches based on path dependence and cumulative causation. According to Myrdal's cumulative causation model, in regions with favorable initial endowments positive impulses, through self-reinforcing mechanisms, generate further advantages, while in disadvantaged regions the negative spiral becomes fixed (Myrdal, 1957). In the case of Hungary, Western Transdanubia – and within it Győr-Moson-Sopron – has, through its favorable geographical location, historical industrial traditions and favorable institutional environment, been set on a path that has been further strengthened by multinational investments and export-oriented production. Northern Hungary – and within it Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén – has, by contrast, become the loser of the heavy industry restructuring and has not been able to find a new, dynamic growth path. At the same time, the results also point out that development policy interventions – in particular EU cohesion funds – have not been able to significantly break negative path dependence in Northern Hungary. This is in line with Rodríguez-Pose's (2018) criticism that development policy often intervenes "in the wrong place and in the wrong way", without paying sufficient attention to the local institutional and social context.

2. Table Theoretical Framework Connections – BAZ vs. GYMS

LEVEL	THEORY	BAZ COUNTY	GYŐR-MOSON-SOPRON COUNTY
Regional	Myrdal, Krugman	Negative cumulative causation	Positive agglomeration
Institutional	North, Boschma	Lock-in, weak adaptation	Strong networks, resilience
County-level	Kocziszky–Szendi	Stagnant composite index (5.08)	Increasing composite index (7.89)
Firm-level	SEW, succession	„The last retail store" role	Value chain integration

Source: compiled by the author

3.1. Regional economic interpretation of commerce

From the perspective of regional economics, the commerce sector occupies a special place. On the one hand it plays an intermediary role between production and consumption; on the other hand, it forms the "capillary system" of local economies: the density, profile and ownership structure of retail units reveal much about the socio-economic state of a region. Retail trade is essentially a locally based service that depends strongly on purchasing power, demographic trends and settlement structure, while wholesale trade is organized primarily around regional and interregional logistics hubs. From a regional perspective the dynamics of the commercial sector are closely linked to the economic structure of the region. In areas with high value-added industrial and service sectors, the volume and structure of retail turnover are also more diversified, a larger proportion of household consumption is directed at non-essential goods, and service-intensive segments (for example, specialized shops, premium products) can grow. In lagging regions, by contrast, commerce often has a "narrowed" structure: basic grocery and mixed shops dominate, while the retail network becomes thinner, especially in smaller settlements. Urban and settlement network theories examine the spatial location, hierarchy and connections of settlements, attributing a key role to commercial services (Christaller, 1933). These theories are particularly relevant to the analysis of commercial family businesses.

3. Table Comparison of Retail Data: BAZ vs. GYMS County (2010–2024)

INDICATOR	BAZ COUNTY	GYOR-MOSON-SOPRON COUNTY	DIFFERENCE / NOTE
GROWTH INDICATORS			
CAGR turnover 2010–2024 (%)	4,48%	5,84%	-1,36 pp difference
Turnover multiplier (2024/2010)	1,86x	2,21x	0,35x Gyor advantage
Turnover increase (million HUF)	211 000	346 700	-135 700 difference
Turnover increase (%)	85,9%	121,4%	+35,5 pp Gyor advantage
RETAIL NETWORK CONSOLIDATION			
Number of stores 2010 (pcs)	5 340	6 856	-1 516 difference
Number of stores 2024 (pcs)	3 610	5 320	-1 710 difference
Decrease in store count (pcs)	-1 730	-1 536	-194 pcs more in BAZ County
Decrease in store count (%)	-32,4%	-22,4%	-10,0 pp BAZ County is more aggressive
PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENT			
Sales per store 2010 (million HUF)	46,0	41,6	+4,4 BAZ advantage
Sales per store 2024 (million HUF)	126,5	118,9	+7,6 BAZ advantage
Productivity growth (%)	174,8%	185,6%	-10,8 pp Gyor better
PURCHASING POWER EVOLUTION			
Sales per capita 2010 (HUF)	352 556	654 128	Gyor 86% higher
Sales per capita 2024 (HUF)	701 537	1 384 769	Gyor 97% higher
Purchasing power ratio	1,99x	2,12x	Gyor grows faster

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS			
Population 2010 (thousand people)	697	436	+261 BAZ higher
Population 2024 (thousand people)	651	456,5	+194,5 divergence
Population change (thousand people)	-46	+20,5	-66,5 opposite trend
Population change (%)	-6,6%	+4,7%	-11,3 pp difference

Source: compiled by the author

4. Definitional Delimitation of Family Businesses

One of the important objectives of my dissertation was to provide a systematic overview of domestic and international definitions of family businesses, to conduct a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences among the individual approaches, and to offer a critical evaluation of the theoretical grounding and practical applicability of the respective definitions. Another essential expectation I set for myself was to propose a definition that is most applicable to Hungarian family businesses, and thus to develop an independent definitional framework for commercial family businesses, justifying the necessity of a different approach.

Defining the family business is a complex task because it concerns the interaction of two fundamentally different institutions -- the family and the business. The family is a social, emotional, and cultural system, while the business is organized around economic and rational objectives. This duality creates numerous tensions, which are also reflected in the definitions. The dimensional approach to family businesses is a complex analytical framework that does not determine the family character based on only one factor (e.g. the number of owners) but examines the joint presence of several dimensions. This methodology acknowledges that the family business is a continuously changing phenomenon interpretable across multiple dimensions, incorporating ownership, control, and the transmission of family values, as described by Handler (1989).

4.1 Proposed definition for Hungarian family businesses

Within the framework of my doctoral dissertation research, taking into account the specificities of the domestic economic, cultural, and historical environment (with particular regard to the post-transition restart and the dominance of SMEs), as well as the synthesis of international and domestic definitional approaches, incorporating the critical formulations and limitations I articulated, while emphasizing the advantages, I formulated the following unique definition for delimiting Hungarian family businesses:

A Hungarian family business is a business entity in which the family (persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption) possesses at least a 50% ownership stake and voting right (or 25% in the case of listed companies), exercises direct strategic control through at least one family member, while the identity and long-term orientation of the business are inseparably intertwined with the family's value system, as well as with the explicit intention of continuity across generations and succession.

In my view, the concept of the family business proposed by me is multidimensional, since it combines ownership, governance, generational, and cultural aspects, thus providing a holistic picture. It ensures flexibility because it does not require the fulfilment of all four criteria and therefore adapts to businesses at different stages of development (for example, a start-up may not

yet meet the generational criteria, but it may satisfy the other three). Operationalizability is also an important aspect, because the ownership and governance criteria are objectively measurable, the intentional element can be explored through questionnaires and document analysis (succession plan), while the cultural element can be examined through in-depth interviews and case studies. It is tailored to the Hungarian context, thereby considering SME dominance and informal characteristics, while also allowing the incorporation of larger enterprises. It also provides international compatibility, because it contains elements like the definitions of the European Commission and Chua et al., and can therefore be used in international comparisons as well.

4.2. Proposed definition for retail family businesses

The special characteristics of retail family businesses justify the creation of an independent concept. Their role and weight in the national economy, their specific role within family businesses, and their clearly delimited complex activity provide the basis for creating a distinct definition. On this basis, a commercial family business is an enterprise engaged primarily in retail or service-trade activity, the criteria of which are framed by Table 6.

4. Table Conceptual Framework of Family-Owned Retail Businesses

	CRITERION	REQUIREMENT
1	**Sector criterion**	The company's main activity is retail, wholesale, or a mixed commercial service activity. This means that more than 50% of its revenue comes from commercial activity.
2	**Ownership criterion**	At least 50% of the company's voting rights are owned by members of one family. In the case of listed companies, at least 25% is sufficient, but active family influence on strategy is required in that case.
3	**Management/operational involvement criterion**	At least one family member holds a strategic leadership position (owner-manager, board member), or the family plays an active role in the company's operational activities (e.g., store management, purchasing, customer relationship management).
4	**Local/regional embeddedness criterion**	A commercial family business typically operates in a local or regional market, and the family's reputation and local relationships are decisive for the company's success.
5	**Generational/intention criterion**	The family intends to continue and transfer the commercial activity to the next generation, or at least one generational transition has already taken place. This may be expressed in a succession plan or in the active involvement of the next generation in learning the commercial activity.

6	**Cultural/tradition criterion**	The company represents values in quality, service, and customer orientation that are closely linked to the family's name and reputation. Customers associate the brand with the family's identity.

Source: compiled by the author

In my view, we can speak of a typical commercial family business when all six criteria are fulfilled jointly. At first interpretation, my line of reasoning may seem to be an overly narrowed conceptual definition. However, while studying the literature and synthesizing the definitions of general family businesses, I concluded that these approaches illuminate the topic from different directions. They examine statistical, legal, financial, family, or structural elements, or some combination of these. At the same time, they do not consider the complexity that commercial family businesses display. My line of reasoning was supported by the analyses included in the dissertation and by the complete case studies. Professional discussions also reinforced my view that, although my six-element definitional criteria system may seem rigid, it nevertheless clearly delineates commercial family businesses. Taking all this into account, the definition of retail family businesses in my interpretation is the following:

A commercial family business is a business entity that derives the majority of its revenue (at least 50%) from retail activity, whose ownership and strategic control are concentrated to at least 50% (or 25% in the case of listed companies) in the hands of one family, while, alongside the active operational or managerial involvement of at least one family member, the family has an explicit intention to maintain the business across generations and to preserve customer-oriented cultural values, built on family reputation, in the local or regional market.

It is a legitimate question why there is a need for a different approach to retail family businesses, for their independent study, and, in line with this, for a separate conceptual framework? Retail has its own specific operational logic: rapid inventory turnover, low margins and profit, intense competition, and customer relationship intensity. These characteristics create challenges different from those in, for example, a manufacturing family business, where production processes and investments dominate (sector-specific characteristics). In retail, it is more common that family members participate directly in day-to-day operations (store management, goods handling, customer service), whereas in a manufacturing company the family is more likely to govern at a strategic level. This operational presence strengthens the intertwining of family and business, which is a distinguishing feature of retail family businesses (emphasis on operational family participation). In retail, local relationships, personal acquaintance, and the good name of the family are critical factors of competitiveness. The local reputation of a "Kovács General Store," built over generations, is a unique asset in competition with multinational chains. This local embeddedness is less relevant, for example, in an export-oriented manufacturing family business (local embeddedness and reputation). In retail, successors often "grow into" the profession from childhood (helping in the shop on weekends, working as interns during summer holidays). This type of "learning by doing" successor development differs from the filling of more professionalized positions requiring higher education, which are typical in other sectors. In retail family businesses, informal knowledge transfer (e.g. how to handle the customer, how to choose a supplier) is more pronounced (specifics of generational learning and knowledge transfer). Retail family businesses are particularly affected by the challenges of digitalization (online commerce, omnichannel strategy, digital marketing). Creating synergy between the digital competence of the new generation and the traditional knowledge of the older

generation is critical for survival. This justifies the separate emphasis on the generational perspective in the definition (challenge of digital transformation). Retail family businesses are often local employers, where the family value system (loyalty, care) also extends to employees. This paternalistic leadership style is more typical in retail than, for example, in the high-tech sector, where professionalization dominates (employment and social responsibility).

Based on all this, it can be concluded that the different approach and the independent definition do not contradict the general definitions of family businesses, but rather complement them with sector-specific elements that highlight the unique characteristics of retail family businesses, thereby enabling more precise and more targeted research, public policy, and advisory interventions. My proposals for identifying further research directions were summarized in the following table.

5. Table Suggestions for further research

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS	SUGGESTIONS
Empirical validation	The proposed definitions should be empirically tested on a large Hungarian sample to validate the reliability and applicability of the criteria.
Sectoral comparisons	It is worth developing sector-specific definitions for other industries as well (e.g., manufacturing, services, high-tech) and comparing their relevance.
Longitudinal research	Long-term tracking of the life cycle and succession processes of family businesses, examining how the definitional criteria change over time.
International comparison	Testing the proposed Hungarian definition in other Central and Eastern European countries (e.g., Poland, Czech Republic, Romania) to identify cultural and institutional similarities and differences.
In-depth study of commercial family businesses	The digitalization strategies of family firms in the commercial sector, their generational challenges, and decisions on local versus global expansion.

Policy recommendations	Developing targeted support programs for Hungarian family businesses (especially in the commercial sector) based on the definitions, considering succession challenges, financing difficulties, and digital transformation.

Source: compiled by the author

5. Theoretical Background of Succession Management in Family Businesses

A family businesses succession management is one of the most complex and significant research areas of business development. The succession process does not appear only in the economic sphere, but is closely intertwined with psychological, sociological, and emotional dimensions that stem from family structures. Over the past four decades, international literature has conducted extensive research on this topic; however, -- especially in the domestic context -- succession management still contains many unanswered questions. As the main research contribution of the chapter, I interpret it as exploring at the theoretical level the fundamental concepts and connections of succession management in family businesses, interpreting succession not as a one-time event, but as a complex, multi-level process system. On the one hand, the chapter synthesizes the classical international models (Handler's process model, Gersick's three-circle systems perspective, Decker and colleagues' five-phase approach), and on the other hand it incorporates the concept of socioemotional wealth (SEW), as well as the specific context of retail family businesses, thereby creating a bridge between international literature and Hungarian conditions. The multidimensional framework creates the basis for empirical investigations, enabling a deeper understanding of the patterns behind the succession processes of Hungarian retail family businesses.

6. Table Comparison of succession models

Modell	Focus	Key dimensions	Main elements	What does it highlight?	Connection
Handler succession model	Interpreting succession as a long-term, multi-phase process rather than a single event.	Temporality (a 15–25-year process), gradual role transfer, the founder's psychological ability to let go, and interpersonal dynamics.	Preparation (involving the successor, gaining hands-on experience), joint management, transfer and integration (formal appointment, formal legitimacy).	To understand the prolonged succession process, bottlenecks, the "invisible hand" phenomenon, and role conflicts.	It complements the structural (Gersick) and phase-oriented (Decker) models with time and psychological aspects, highlighting the role of the founder.
Gersick Three-Circle model (family-business-ownership)	The family business as an integrated system of three overlapping subsystems: family, business, and ownership.	Family subsystem (relationships, loyalty), business subsystem (structure, operations), ownership subsystem (property rights, voting rights).	Three circles: family, business, ownership; succession creates change in all three subsystems (generational change, management change, ownership restructuring).	To identify sources of conflict (e.g., "every child is an equal owner" vs. effective management) and reveal affected positions and interest conflicts.	A systems-level structural framework in which Handler's temporal phases, Decker's steps, and the emotional-motivational aspects of SEW can be located.
Decker and colleagues' five-phase model	Breaking succession into clearly separable, sequential phases for diagnostic purposes.	Process- and decision-oriented approach, critical decision points (successor selection and transition), and the role of communication and competency development.	1. Preparation, 2. Successor selection, 3. Implementation (transition), 4. Predecessor retirement, 5. post-succession stabilization.	To diagnose the causes of succession failure (especially in phases 2–3) and identify gaps in planning, communication, and competency development.	It provides a finer-grained operational breakdown of Handler's process logic and fits well with Gersick's system view (where, in which subsystem, disruption occurs).

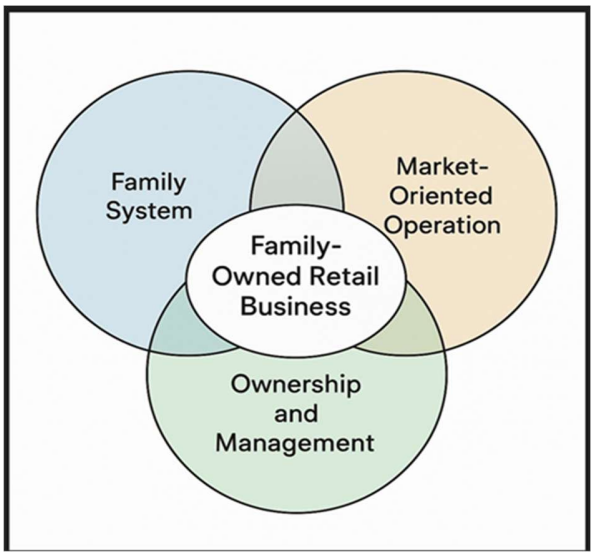
Socioemotional wealth (SEW) perspective	Emphasizing the non-financial, emotional, and identity-based benefits driving family businesses (family control, reputation, and dynastic ambitions).	Emotional attachment, family identity and reputation, maintaining family control, long-term orientation, and risk aversion in certain strategic decisions.	Not a phase model, but a theoretical perspective: it shows that in succession decisions, socioemotional wealth is often as strong as financial rationality.	To explain why family successors are often chosen over external managers, why transfer is delayed, and why temporary profit declines are accepted to preserve control.	A motivational-emotional lens that can be applied to the Handler, Gersick, and Decker models, helping to interpret succession timing, mode, and conflicts more deeply, especially in Hungarian family firms with high SEW values.

Source: compiled by the author

5.1 Specifics of retail family businesses from the perspective of succession

Retail - especially food retail and mixed retail - is traditionally a strongly family-oriented sector. In the European Union, trade is one of the largest employers among SMEs, and the share of family-owned shops is high (Mandl, 2008). In Hungary, in the years after the political transition, small family shops were established in large numbers, becoming essential supply points for local communities (Filep and Szirmai, 2006). Retail family businesses are particularly characterized by micro and small enterprise size (1--10 persons), strong personal customer relationships, local embeddedness (the shop also functions as a “community institution”), and continuous competitive pressure from chains and discounters. These characteristics place succession in a special context as well: the successor does not merely take over an economic unit, but also assumes a community role, a network of relationships, and an identity.

4. Figure Framework of retail family businesses



Source: compiled by the author

The succession perspective of commercial family businesses is strongly influenced by the regional economic environment. Purchasing power, demographic trends, and infrastructural conditions determine the market prospects under which the successor takes over the business. Lengyel and Szőnyi (2023) point out that there are significant differences among Hungarian regions in terms of economic structure and level of development. Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county struggles with deindustrialization and strong out-migration trends, and its purchasing power remains below the national average. By contrast, Győr-Moson-Sopron, thanks to its proximity to the western border and automotive clusters, is one of the most developed regions of the country. These differences naturally also appear in succession. Intergenerational differences in values and attitudes, alongside general interpretation and workplace socialization, are also one of the important challenges of succession management. For founders belonging to the Baby Boomer and X generations, business is often the basis of livelihood and the primary arena of self-actualization. For members of the younger Y and Z generations, however, work-life balance, flexibility, location independence, and diverse professional experience have become more important than ever before (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Generational differences are particularly sharp in the retail sector: a small shop often requires 10-12 hours of presence per day, including weekends and holidays. For many young people, this lifestyle is less attractive, especially when higher-prestige, more flexible jobs are available as alternatives in an urban or international environment. The overview above highlights that succession management in family businesses is a complex, multi-level phenomenon, and that understanding it requires the integration of several theoretical approaches. The classical models (Handler, 1989; Gersick et al., 1997; Decker et al., 2017) provide the logic for the process nature of succession, systems-level interconnections, and phased analysis. The concept of socioemotional wealth (Berrone et al., 2012) shows that succession decisions are driven not only by economic rationality, but also by strong emotional and identity-related considerations. The specifics of retail

family businesses -- local embeddedness, pressure from e-commerce, regional economic differences, and socio-demographic trends -- further refine the theoretical picture of succession management. The empirical chapters of the dissertation translate this complex theoretical framework into practice through the example of Hungarian retail family businesses in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Győr-Moson-Sopron counties.

RESEARCH RESULTS

6. Regional entrepreneurial attitude analysis based on the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2021-2022-2023 research

"The publication is based on the Hungarian data of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor research coordinated by the Budapest LAB Business Development Office, which were made available by the Budapest Business School, as the Hungarian partner of the consortium, under a special permit" (BGE Budapest LAB, 2021-2022-2023.)

"In practice, the measurement of entrepreneurial attitude is a complex process, and in regional analyses the collection of data is significantly complicated. A small number of empirical studies have focused on regional culture and the measurement of entrepreneurial attitude (Kangasharju, 2000), one reason for this being the lack of indicators with which entrepreneurial activity can be properly represented. Attitude is basically built up from a combination of initiative, will, innovation, and motivation, and is closely related to entrepreneurial competencies. Both entrepreneurial attitude and individual entrepreneurial competencies are important for future entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, the available literature is not always clear regarding entrepreneurial attitude and actual entrepreneurial behavior, and for this reason the quantitative and qualitative identification and examination of entrepreneurial attitude is not simple." (Kasza-Lipták, 2022)

6.1. Methodological background of the analysis

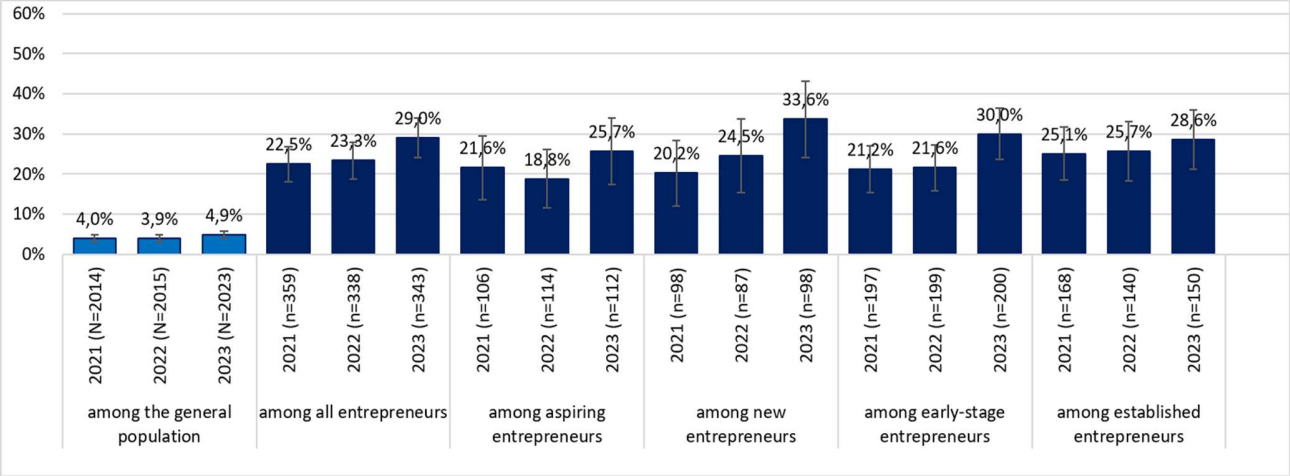
The source of the data processed in the chapter is the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) survey. GEM is the world's largest entrepreneurship research project: it has been running since 1999; in Hungary since 2020. Its research questions include the assessment of entrepreneurial activity and the state of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Hungarian data collection was directed by the LAB Business Development Office of Budapest Business School, and the data collection itself was carried out by the TÁRKI Public Opinion Research Institute by telephone among the population aged 18-64, with 2014 respondents in 2021, 2015 respondents in 2022, and 2023 respondents in 2023. Data collection took place on a sample drawn by multi-stage, equal-proportion stratified probability sampling, representative of the total population according to demographic characteristics such as gender, age, settlement type, and region of residence. The analyses were performed on the national weighted sample.

6.1.1. Sample of the analysis

In 2023, 16.9 percent of the 18-64 population were entrepreneurs in Hungary. This proportion is like the proportions measured in the previous years, which were 17.8 percent in 2021 and 16.8 percent

in 2022. Of these entrepreneurs, 29 percent started or are running a business to continue the family tradition: I consider them family entrepreneurs. In previous years, the share of family entrepreneurs among entrepreneurs was lower: 23.3 percent in 2022 and 22.5 percent in 2021 (Figure 1). These proportions were already calculated based on combined data from businesses at different stages. (Due to the methodology of the survey, in the questionnaires a separate question set is asked of managers of early-stage - nascent and new - and established businesses.)

5. Figure Proportion of family business owners among the total population, among all business owners, and among businesses at various stages, 2021, 2022, 2023 (%, 95% CI)

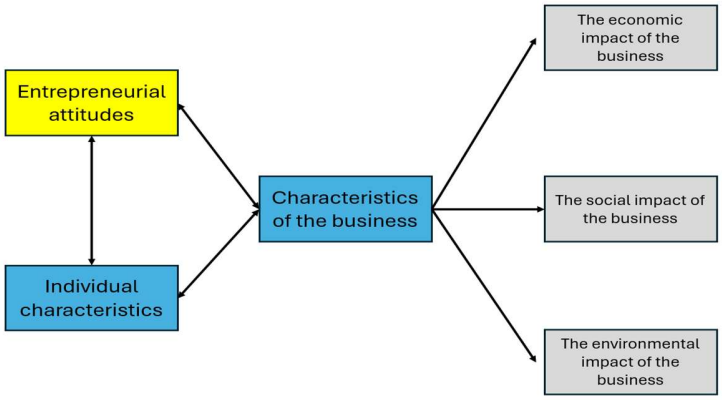


Source: GEM survey, Hungary, 2021, 2022, 2023. Compiled by the author

6.1.2. Research question

The research question of the analysis is 1) what similarities and differences can be found in entrepreneurial attitudes; and 2) whether there are differences in this across the regions of Hungary, and how the individual characteristics of family entrepreneurs (demographic characteristics, motivations, individual entrepreneurial characteristics) and the indicators of the family businesses they manage (age of the business, size, sector, objective) are related to entrepreneurial attitudes?

6. Figure Simplified analysis concept



Source: compiled by the author

The conceptual framework of the analysis is used according to the definitions described in the international GEM research both when creating the dependent and the explanatory variables (Csákné Filep J. et al. 2022, 2023, 2024)

Dependent variable: entrepreneurial attitudes among family entrepreneurs

The GEM research distinguishes three indices that can be used to characterize entrepreneurial attitude: the "perception of one's own entrepreneurial attitude" index, the "perception of the entrepreneurial environment" index, and the "evaluation of entrepreneurship" index (Linan, Santos, Fernandez 2011; Csákné et al. 2022). The variables included in the composition of the indices were measured in the research on a five-point scale, where the values mean that the respondent completely agrees (5), rather agrees (4), neither agrees nor disagrees (3), rather disagrees (2), or does not agree at all (1) with the given statement. When we work with the dichotomous version of the scale variables, those who agree with the statements (4+5) receive the value 1, while the others, together with non-respondents, receive the value 0. They are the respondents who agree with the given statement. The sum of the dichotomous versions of the statements belonging to an index (that is, the sum of the "1"s) forms the given entrepreneurial attitude index, whose value is either between 0 and 2 (in the case of the individual entrepreneurial attitude index), or between 0 and 3 (in the case of the entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurship indices). We also create dichotomous versions of these indices, and in such cases, we consider those entrepreneurs as evaluating the given attitude *very positively* who agreed with two out of two, or three out of three statements. Since one scale ranges from 0 to 2 and the other from 0 to 3, it is not surprising that a higher proportion of entrepreneurs evaluates the individual attitude as very positive (the share of those selecting the "2" value of the index), than either the entrepreneurial environment or entrepreneurship (the share of those selecting the "3" value of the indices). In some parts of the analyses, I use the original index variables with values of 0-2 and 0-3, and in such cases, I calculate the average values of the indices. Of course, in these cases the averages of the individual attitude index are not comparable with the

averages of the entrepreneurial environment/entrepreneurship indices, but the latter two are comparable with each other.

Explanatory variables of the analysis

I separated two major groups of explanatory variables: the group of individual characteristics and the group of business-related indicators. Several questions / variables belong to each variable group. Among the individual characteristics I included demographic characteristics of the individual such as gender, age (3 age groups), educational attainment (3 groups), and type of settlement where they live (4 groups), as well as region (7, and in certain analyses 2 groups). Among the individual entrepreneurial characteristics, I also included the motivations for which individuals became entrepreneurs, in addition to continuing the family tradition (to achieve something significant; to acquire great wealth or very high income; to make a living because there are few job opportunities). Also included among the individual entrepreneurial characteristics is the *entrepreneurial talent* index, which was formed based on responses to four statements. If the respondent fully or rather agreed with at least two of the following statements (or did not agree at all or rather did not agree with the "reverse" statements), they could be classified as a talented entrepreneur. If they agreed with 0-2 out of the four statements, then they were considered less talented. The four statements related to entrepreneurial talent are as follows: "Others consider you to be very innovative"; "Every decision you make is part of your long-term career plan"; "You rarely see business opportunities, even if you know the area very well"; "Even if you notice a profitable opportunity, you rarely take advantage of it." It can also be included among the individual entrepreneurial characteristics whether the individual is the owner or (only) a co-owner of the family business; whether they work in the business as an employee or as self-employed; and also, whether the respondent managing and/or operating the family business is a first-generation or multi-generation entrepreneur.

6.1.3. Statistical analysis

In the descriptive analysis I present both percentage distributions and averages, together with the 95 percent confidence interval belonging to the values (Székelyi, Barna 2004, Sajtos, Mitev 2007). In the bivariate analyses I worked with cross-tabulations (binary variables). To check significant differences, I used the significance test of the Phi/Cramer's V measure, at the 95 percent probability level, and the Adjusted Residuals of the cross-tabulation cells. I checked the differences between means with a one-way ANOVA test, verifying the differences with the significance test of the F-test at the 95 percent probability level (Székelyi, Barna 2004, Sajtos, Mitev 2007). In the multivariate analyses I used logistic regression analysis and cluster analysis. I calculated and present odds ratios and 95 percent confidence intervals (Székelyi, Barna 2004, Sajtos, Mitev 2007). In the cluster analysis I grouped entrepreneurial attitudes and individual characteristics, as well as business indicators, based on the similarity / difference of variables. My aim was to identify variable groups that "go together" with certain geographical places of residence (regions): that is, based on how characteristic or uncharacteristic the individual and entrepreneurial indicators are for groups of family entrepreneurs living in each region. In the cluster analysis I dichotomized the variables describing the individual characteristics and business indicators, as well as the three entrepreneurial

attitude indices (41 variables in total): the value "1" always means that the given characteristic is characteristic, while the value 0 means that the given characteristic is not characteristic of the respondent. I calculated a similarity matrix among the dichotomous variables and used the Phi coefficient to measure association. (The Phi coefficient is a test of the relationship or association between two dichotomous variables, like the chi-square coefficient.) I used this similarity matrix as the input matrix for the cluster analysis. In the first step I performed a hierarchical cluster analysis, using Ward's complete-link method and squared Euclidean distance. Based on the dendrogram of the hierarchical cluster analysis and the "suggestions" of the line diagram calculated from the distance of the merging steps of the variables / clusters, I continued with the three-cluster solution, but I also present the tables for the two- and four-cluster results.

6.2. Presentation of results

6.2.1. Descriptive analysis of family businesses

Based on demographic characteristics

Many family entrepreneurs are men (74.0 percent), aged 35-54 years (51.7 percent), and have secondary or tertiary education (39.0 percent and 39.1 percent) in 2023. By settlement type, they live in the highest proportion in other towns, and in terms of the regional location of their residence, in Central Hungary. Of course, this is true not only for family entrepreneurs, but also for all entrepreneurs, and not only for 2023, but also for the previous years. Among family entrepreneurs, the share of men is significantly higher than among all entrepreneurs (74.0 percent vs. 49.5 percent), and the share of those aged 18-34 is also higher (42.4 percent vs. 32.9 percent), while the share of women (26.0 percent vs. 50.5 percent), the share of those aged 55-64 (5.9 percent vs. 22.1 percent), and the share of those living in Central Transdanubia (8.2 percent vs. 15.0 percent) are significantly lower. The probability of belonging to the other demographic groups does not differ significantly between family entrepreneurs and all entrepreneurs. In 2021 and 2022, among family entrepreneurs there were higher shares of those living in Central Transdanubia than among all entrepreneurs (2021: 15.0 percent vs. 9.4 percent; 2022: 22.9 percent vs. 13.1 percent). In addition, in 2021 there were lower shares among family entrepreneurs of those living in Central Hungary (20.1 percent vs. 30.3 percent).

7. Table Distribution of entrepreneurs by demographic characteristics, 2021, 2022, 2023

Type	Demography	Family businesses			All entrepreneurs		
		2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Gender	Male	**69,5%**	**68,1%**	**74,0%**	63,1%	62,9%	64,1%
	Female	**30,5%**	**31,9%**	**26,0%**	36,9%	37,1%	35,9%
Age	Age 18–34	30,0%	27,8%	**42,4%**	29,2%	28,3%	28,3%
	Age 35–54	50,6%	49,1%	51,7%	50,4%	54,2%	51,4%
	Age 55–64	19,4%	23,0%	**5,9%**	20,4%	17,5%	20,3%
Educational attainment	Primary	30,3%	22,5%	22,0%	28,7%	17,4%	17,3%
	Secondary	33,3%	37,5%	39,0%	35,1%	36,6%	36,4%
	Tertiary	36,3%	40,1%	39,1%	36,2%	46,0%	46,3%

Settlement type	Budapest	**8,8%**	17,3%	24,6%	19,1%	20,9%	21,9%
	City with county rights	23,1%	17,7%	20,2%	21,8%	19,8%	21,3%
	Other town	31,5%	31,2%	31,5%	29,6%	33,0%	31,3%
	Village	36,7%	33,9%	23,7%	29,5%	26,3%	25,4%
Region	Central Hungary	**20,1%**	31,2%	38,9%	30,3%	38,4%	36,1%
	Southern Great Plain	9,9%	7,9%	15,4%	10,9%	9,5%	12,8%
	Southern Transdanubia	14,6%	8,1%	14,8%	12,4%	8,2%	10,8%
	Northern Great Plain	19,8%	9,3%	6,3%	13,5%	8,8%	6,6%
	Northern Hungary	10,3%	10,1%	5,6%	10,5%	9,9%	8,2%
	Central Transdanubia	**15,0%**	**22,9%**	**8,2%**	9,4%	13,1%	15,5%
	Western Transdanubia	10,3%	10,4%	10,8%	12,9%	12,0%	10,0%

Source: GEM survey, Hungary, 2021, 2022, 2023. Compiled by the author

Based on entrepreneurial characteristics

Let us look at how the further individual entrepreneurial characteristics are related to family entrepreneurial status. Regarding motivations - "Please tell me to what extent the following statements reflect the reasons why you deal with this business" - half of the family entrepreneurs (51.9 percent in 2023, 61.5 percent in 2022, 56.2 percent in 2021) are entrepreneurs to achieve something significant. However, the naming of the other motivations changed much more over time than this. While in 2021 only 19.9 percent of family entrepreneurs were entrepreneurs to acquire great wealth or very high income, in 2022 this proportion was already 36.0 percent, while in 2023 it was 85.1 percent. While they are entrepreneurs to make a living, 81.2 percent of family entrepreneurs in 2021, by 61.5 percent in 2022, and by 92.4 percent in 2023. In 2023, both early-stage and established family entrepreneurs most often mentioned livelihood as a business motivation (92.8 percent and 92.4 percent), while the second most frequently mentioned motivation was great wealth and high income (85.3 percent and 86.0 percent).

In 2023, for both early-stage and established family businesses, the primary motivation is livelihood. Compared with all entrepreneurs, family entrepreneurs mentioned significantly more often in 2023 that they are entrepreneurs to acquire great wealth or high income (85.1 percent vs. 77.0 percent;). Among both family entrepreneurs and all entrepreneurs, the share of those who considered themselves talented entrepreneurs increased between 2021 and 2023.

8. Table Distribution of entrepreneurs by entrepreneurial characteristics, %, 2021–2023

Characteristics	Motivation	**Family businesses**			**All entrepreneurs**		
		2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Motivations for becoming an entrepreneur (share of respondents agreeing)	To achieve something significant.	56,2%	61,5%	51,9%	54,0%	61,0%	51,7%
	To acquire a large fortune or very high income.	19,9%	36,0%	**85,1%**	26,3%	29,6%	77,0%

	To make a living because there are few job opportunities.	**81,2%**	61,5%	92,4%	71,5%	63,4%	87,2%
Talented entrepreneur	Talent index low (4/0-2)	72,2%	72,7%	60,0%	69,1%	67,8%	65,0%
	Talent index high (4/3-4)	27,8%	27,3%	40,0%	30,9%	32,2%	35,0%
Business ownership	Owner	73,7%	65,1%	67,1%	75,5%	72,6%	67,4%
	Co-owner	26,3%	34,9%	32,9%	24,5%	27,4%	32,6%
Owner sequence	First owner	**74,1%**	**78,5%**	87,6%	87,1%	90,1%	86,2%
	Not first, or does not know	25,9%	21,5%	12,4%	12,9%	9,9%	13,8%
Economic activity	Employed	29,0%	46,9%	37,9%	30,0%	39,1%	36,2%
	Self-employed	71,0%	49,6%	58,5%	68,0%	57,4%	57,9%
	Other	0,0%	3,4%	3,6%	2,0%	3,5%	5,9%

Source: GEM survey, Hungary, 2021, 2022, 2023. Compiled by the author

Relationships between entrepreneurial attitudes and entrepreneurial as well as business characteristics. Multivariate analyses

The odds of very positively evaluating the individual attitude are significantly higher among family entrepreneurs if they consider themselves very talented (OR=2.874; 95 percent CI: 2.135-3.868); if they are the owners of their business (OR=1.570; 95 percent CI: 1.147-2.148); if they are self-employed (OR=1.683; 95 percent CI: 1.235-2.293); if the business has at least 6 employees (OR=2.772; 95 percent CI: 1.499-5.126); or if they formulated objectives for the future of their business (OR=1.793; 95 percent CI: 1.225-2.625), while controlling for all other aspects analyzed in the chapter. The entrepreneurial environment was evaluated as very positive with significantly higher odds by talented entrepreneurs (OR=2.407; 95 percent CI: 1.625-3.566), by managers of businesses in the early stage (OR=1.950; 95 percent CI: 1.122-3.391), by those whose business growth expectations are higher than one year before the survey (OR=1.801; 95 percent CI: 1.190-2.727), and by those whose market is national or international (OR=1.605; 95 percent CI: 1.002-2.573). Entrepreneurship itself was evaluated as very positive with significantly higher odds by entrepreneurs who placed environmental and/or social impacts before business growth and profit (OR=1.648; 95 percent CI: 1.181-2.299).

As another type of multivariate analysis, I carried out cluster analysis on the combined database of the three years. My aim was to answer the question whether any co-occurrence can be observed between family entrepreneurs living in the respective regions and their entrepreneurial attitudes. Clustering the variables serves to arrange the variables into homogeneous groups (clusters) that are closely related. Since my cluster analysis started from a similarity matrix containing Phi values, the dendrogram in fact shows the co-occurrences between the variables belonging to a given group (a broader or narrower group, depending on the selected number of clusters). Whichever grouping attempt we look at, the indicators belonging to the first cluster always belong together: the characteristics of family entrepreneurs living in Central Hungary are that they are young, have

secondary education, have an early-stage business, are entrepreneurs for family reasons as well as for great wealth and high income, their business belongs to a consumer-oriented sector, has a national and international market, more than 25 percent of turnover goes to export, is innovative, has goal setting, expects employment growth next year, and will use more digital technologies. The second cluster includes family businesses living in Western Transdanubia, Southern Great Plain, and Northern Great Plain, and they are those who evaluated all entrepreneurial attitudes very positively. In addition, they are characterized by being men, by having at least 6 people working in their business, and by doing business in the industrial, transport, and warehousing sector (mainly entrepreneurs from Western Transdanubia), by living in a large city, and by starting a business in order to do something significant (mainly entrepreneurs from the Southern Great Plain region), as well as by considering themselves talented entrepreneurs and expecting business growth in the future (mainly entrepreneurs from the Northern Great Plain). Finally, the group delimited by the third cluster includes family entrepreneurs from Central Transdanubia, Southern Transdanubia, and Northern Hungary. They are more likely to do business in the business services sector (mainly in Central Transdanubia), are middle-aged women with tertiary education (mainly family entrepreneurs from Southern Transdanubia), or live in a small town, work as employees, or live in a village with primary education, manage a one-person business, and became entrepreneurs in order to make a living (mainly entrepreneurs from Northern Hungary).

9. Table Profile of family entrepreneurs living in more and less developed regions

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 2	Cluster 2
Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 3
Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
Central Hungary	**Southern Great Plain**	Age 55–64	**Central Transdanubia**
Age 18–34	Entrepreneurship: positive	Established business	Business services
Secondary education	Lives in a large city	Owner	**Southern Transdanubia**
Has an early-stage business	Reason: to make a difference	Self-employed	Age 35–54
First generation	**Western Transdanubia**	Number of employees: 1–5	Woman
Consumer-oriented	Man	Agricultural sector	Tertiary education
Reason: building great wealth	Number of employees: 6+		**Northern Hungary**
Market: national, international	Industrial sector		Lives in a small town
Export: 25%+	**Northern Great Plain**		As employee
Innovative business	Entrepreneurial environment: positive		Priority to social and environmental impacts
More digital technologies next year	Individual attitude: positive		Primary education
Has goal setting	Talented entrepreneur		Lives in a village
Expected employment growth	Expects business growth		Reason: for livelihood

Source: compiled by the author

The Central Hungary region (HU10) is in the lower-right quadrant, in the company of characteristics such as entrepreneur with secondary education, working as an employee, and business belonging to a consumer-oriented sector. All the other regions are in the left (upper) part of the figure, and they show a close relationship with the characteristics indicated there. It is also visible that the positive perception of entrepreneurial attitudes is most typical of family entrepreneurs living in the Northern Great Plain region (HU32), and less so of those living in Central Hungary.

7. The situation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME sector) in county comparison (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Győr-Moson-Sopron counties)

Several definitions of small and medium-sized enterprises are known throughout the world, and there are several influencing factors that determine this. The definition raises three important questions: "what do we consider to be an enterprise, on the basis of which indicators, and where do we draw the boundaries between the individual size categories" (Kállay, 2010). Those activities can be regarded as enterprises which are profit-oriented and are carried out on a market basis. The simultaneous presence of both elements defines the form of enterprise; therefore, non-profit organizations cannot be regarded as such. Small and medium-sized enterprises are one of the driving forces of the economy and play an important role in every country in the world, as is well illustrated by the fact that this sector accounts for 56% of the EU's GDP. The main characteristics of SMEs are that they employ fewer than 250 people, and their average annual turnover is below 50 million euros. SMEs are generally more flexible than large multinational companies; due to their small size they can respond more quickly to both major and minor changes and are easier to organize. SMEs face several difficulties, such as limited access to finance, a complex regulatory framework and increasing market competition, and their success depends on overcoming these obstacles (Horváth et al. 2019).

The main problems of the SME sector

1. Weak efficiency: The productivity of an average Hungarian SME is only one third of the level recorded for large enterprises.

2. Poor bargaining position: They suffer a significant disadvantage because of their small size and, consequently, their limited economic power, in price negotiations, whether for the final product or for raw materials. They have limited access to the capital market and customer acquisition is difficult.

3. Lack of qualified management: according to research by Budapest LAB (GEM 2022), in recent years only about 29 percent of SMEs have entered new markets and 60 percent do not engage in any export activity.

4. Shortcomings of the state and EU support system: compared with larger companies, SMEs find it particularly difficult to access sources of finance.

5. High public charges and administrative burdens: the public charges borne by SMEs are higher than those of large enterprises, and the time spent on administration is also excessively high.

6. Moderate research and innovation performance: a large proportion of SMEs lack the knowledge and capital needed for innovation, and there is even a certain mistrust about whom they could turn to acquire this knowledge. Very few SMEs use modern enterprise management software, and one in five enterprises does not even have a website.

7. Low wage levels: access to skilled and experienced labour is also limited. The emigration of labour to Western Europe, which can be estimated at around 600 thousand people, affects the SME sector most severely (Horváth et al. 2019).

The analysis of spatial differences in the retail sector is of particular importance from the point of view of regional economic development and the examination of territorial inequalities. The time series comparison of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County (BAZ) and Győr-Moson-Sopron County (GYMS) between 2010 and 2024 highlights particularly well how different economic and social trajectories are reflected in the development of retail turnover, the store network, productivity and purchasing power. The aim of my analysis is not only to present the numerical differences, but also to explore their causal background, interrelations and possible explanations. The investigation is on the one hand quantitative – since I work with specific indicators – and on the other hand qualitative, as I also reflect on the economic and social processes underlying the figures and on the persistent nature of regional development disparities. One of the most important elements of the structural transformation of the retail sector is the consolidation of the store network, that is, the decrease in the number of stores in parallel with the increase in per-unit turnover. In Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, the number of stores fell from 5,340 to 3,610 between 2010 and 2024, which means a decrease of 1,730 units, or about 32.4%. In Győr-Moson-Sopron County, over the same period the number of stores decreased from 6,856 to 5,320, which corresponds to a decline of 1,536 units, or approximately 22.4%. At the same time, the data also indicates that the decrease in the number of stores does not mean a weakening of retail trade, but rather a structural change. In both counties the decline of small, low-turnover shops and the advance of higher-productivity units, often operating in networked form, can be observed in parallel.

10. Table Retail shops per ten thousand inhabitants 2000–2024

Area	Store number 2000	Store number 2024	Change in store number	Store/10k 2000	Store/10k 2024	Store/10k change
Northern Hungary	17447	10387	-0.4046540952599301	133.915653171737	96.87269173089406	-0.2766141266050359
Western Transdanubia	17089	10514	-0.3847504242495172	170.23391847818507	107.8782742349046	-0.366293890199509

Area	Store number 2000	Store number 2024	Change in store number	Store/10k 2000	Store/10k 2024	Store/10k change
Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	9548.0	5673.0	-0.4058441558441559	126.71583297611006	92.8588849404266	-0.2671879846464535
Győr-Moson-Sopron	7430.0	4953.0	-0.3333781965006729	171.11575301294997	105.014756767759	-0.3862940441268926

Source: compiled by the author

Overall, the retail indicators delineate marked, multidimensional differences between Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Győr-Moson-Sopron counties. The growth rate of turnover, the absolute expansion of turnover, per capita purchasing power and demographic trends all indicate the lasting advantage of Győr-Moson-Sopron County. In the case of BAZ County, what can rather be observed are relative attempts at catching up, the constraints of network consolidation and improvements in productivity taking place alongside limited purchasing power. At the same time, it is important to stress that BAZ County is not simply a "lagging" area, but can in some respects also be interpreted as an adapting region. The level of turnover per store is competitive at both points in time, which suggests that the actors remaining on the market have been able to increase their efficiency, concentrate on their turnover and respond to the territorial and structural changes in demand. It can be concluded that regional development differences are persistently reflected at the level of retail indicators and in many cases deepen over time. Secondly, it sheds light on the fact that the structural transformation of the retail network (decline in the number of stores, increase in per-unit turnover) takes place in different ways in regions with different levels of development. Thirdly, linking demographic and purchasing power trends with retail indicators helps to understand how the size and quality of the consumer market influence network decisions and the level of service.

8. Empirical research on the succession management situation of retail family businesses

8.1. Research methodology

The data were collected in March 2024. The empirical basis of the research was a self-administered questionnaire, which I distributed via the internet, using the Messenger application, with the help of the network of contacts built up in more than 10 years of advisory activity, targeted specifically at founders of retail family businesses and potential successors. This mode of distribution proved advantageous in several respects: it involved low administrative costs, provided rapid access, and was aligned with post-pandemic digital communication habits. At the same time, this approach

resulted in a purposive sample, which entails limitations in terms of representativeness (Babbie, 2016). The questionnaire was designed along three main objectives: first, to explore the basic characteristics of the enterprise – including the duration of operation, the date of establishment, the legal form and the number of employees; second, to understand the intergenerational situation – the age and life-cycle characteristics of the founding generation, as well as the age and educational orientation of the successors; third, to map succession attitudes and perspectives – the founders' intentions regarding business transfer, the successors' willingness to take over, and the factors that motivate or hinder these processes. Structurally, the questionnaire consisted of three sections. The common introductory section, in three questions, identified the presence of a family business, the legal form of the enterprise and the role of the respondent – that is, whether they were replying as a founder or as a successor. The founder-specific section, in eight questions, examined the founder's demographic characteristics, the history of the enterprise and the prospects for succession. The successor-specific section, in ten questions, explored the successor's age group, educational background, succession readiness and motivations. The structure consisting of a total of twenty-one questions focused both founders and successors on the questions that were directly relevant from the point of view of the research. The questionnaire was disseminated using a non-probability sampling procedure, constrained by the research budget and the accessibility of the target group. The respondents were drawn from my personal and indirect acquaintances, which corresponds to social network sampling, the so-called snowball method (Goodman, 1961). This method may lead to geographical, social and sectoral selectivity; however, in exploratory research it is generally regarded as an accepted procedure. During the data collection, a total of 84 complete questionnaires were received, which means that all respondents were involved in some form of family business, either as founders or as successors. This high proportion can be explained by the fact that my network of acquaintances overrepresents people connected to family businesses. Of the 84 respondents involved, 45 completed the questionnaire as founders and 40 as successors, which can be regarded as an almost equal ratio favorable for comparative analysis (52.4 percent founders, 47.6 percent successors).

8.2. Research findings

These proportions show a significant correspondence with the 2023 data of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO, 2024). The dominance of sole proprietorships and limited liability companies reflects the real structure of the Hungarian enterprise sector: at national level, sole proprietorships account for 31 percent and limited liability companies for 22 percent. Limited partnerships, with a share of 5 percent, are also represented in the sample in a similar proportion. This consistency suggests that the structure of the sample – at least in terms of legal forms – faithfully reflects the national enterprise structure. The preference for sole proprietorships and limited liability companies can be traced back to more favorable legal, fiscal and administrative conditions, as well as to choices adapted to enterprise size.

10. Table Distribution of Family Businesses by Legal Form (N=84)

Legal form	Number of businesses (pcs)	percentage (%)
SE	33	39,3

Ltd.	32	38,1
LP	14	16,7
Plc	3	3,6
Holdco	1	1,2

Source: compiled by the author

The examination of the age-group distribution of founders reveals that most leaders of family businesses belong to the active age group.

Almost half of the enterprises – 48.8 percent – were established between 1990 and 2000, which is due to the post-transition liberalization of the Hungarian economy and the preparations for accession to the European Union. In this period the founders typically started their entrepreneurial activity in their thirties and forties. The lower share (27.3 percent) of enterprises established after 2000 can be attributed to the effects of the 2008 global economic crisis, the 2020 pandemic and the rise of online commerce, which made the establishment of traditional family businesses more difficult. This trend is particularly important from the point of view of succession: the founders of the 1990s are now in their fifties and sixties, while their successors have entered the 30–40 age group – this is the optimal period for generational change. If the transfer does not take place within the next five to ten years, the risk of failure will increase significantly due to the potential incapacity of the founders.

11. Table Current Status of Business Transfer (N=45)

Status of business transfer	People	Percentage (%)
Already completed	4	8,9
Not yet completed	41	91,1

Source: compiled by the author

This figure is particularly critical because 24.4 percent of founders fall into the 61–75 age group and a further 2.2 percent are over 76. If transfer does not take place in time in these cases, there is a risk that the enterprise will be closed and the jobs associated with it will be lost. The four enterprises already transferred presumably belong to the group of firms founded in the early 1990s, which means that transfer took place after around 25–30 years of operation – in line with Handler's (1989) model, which defines the succession process as a cycle of 15–25 years.

A total of 82.2 percent of founders have complete confidence in the successor's ability to continue the business, while 17.8 percent are uncertain or do not have full confidence in the successor.

12. Table Founders' Confidence in the Successors' Preparedness (N=45)

Level of trust	People	Percentage (%)
Complete confidence	37	82,2
Uncertain	8	17,8

Source: compiled by the author

The high level of trust suggests that founders pursue deliberate preparation activities: involving successors in education, ensuring the acquisition of practical experience and transmitting values all contribute to this positive assessment. In the case of the 17.8 percent of respondents who are uncertain, it can be assumed that the successors have not yet reached the necessary level of competence, do not show sufficient commitment, or that the enterprise, by virtue of its founder-centered nature, is difficult to lead without the original owner. The age group distribution of successors clearly reflects that the sample is predominantly composed of the younger generation of active labour-market age. Ninety-five percent of successors belong to the 18–45 age group. Members of the 18–30 age group, who account for 42.5 percent, are typically still in the education system or at the stage of early labour-market integration, so succession is for them a future perspective. Members of the 31–45 age group – 52.5 percent of respondents – are already actively involved in running the enterprise or are in the phase of the transfer process. This latter group consists mainly of descendants of enterprises founded between 1990 and 2005, who can take over the family business in their thirties and forties.

To the question of whether they are studying or have studied in the field of expertise of the family business, 60 percent of successors answered yes and 40 percent answered no. The majority positive answer can be regarded as a positive signal in terms of succession prospects, as preparation in this direction increases the probability of takeover.

13. Table Educational Orientation of Children (N=40)

Educational direction		people	Percentage (%)
In the company's field of expertise		24	60,0
Other expertise		16	40,0

Source: compiled by the author

At the same time, 40 percent studying in another field does not automatically mean unsuccessful succession. Several possible explanations may arise: some successors deliberately choose broader training to bring a more holistic perspective to the enterprise; others wish to keep their options open by trying out several fields; and still others simply wish to pursue a different career path. To the central question of the research – Would you be able and willing to take over the family business? – 77.5 percent of successors answered yes and 22.5 percent answered no. This 77.5 percent acceptance rate can be considered a positive result and exceeds the 60–70 percent figures typically found in international research. At the same time, it must be considered that the successors in the sample form a selected group – participation in the research presupposes a higher level of interest in the enterprise.

14. Table Willingness to Have Children (N=40)

Answer	People	Percentage (%)
Yes, able and willing	31	77,5
Not, would not like to take over	9	22,5

Source: compiled by the author

Most of them – 55.6 percent – justified their decision by saying that they have other plans in life. This answer is in line with modern career aspirations, in which autonomy and freedom of career choice appear as key values. The 22.2 percent answer I would like to live elsewhere reflects the phenomenon of outmigration from rural areas, which represents a particularly critical problem in regions such as Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, where the rate of population decline reaches 13.5 percent. It is also noteworthy that among successors rejecting succession there is a divided view regarding the intention to start their own business: 44.4 percent would like to start their own business, while 55.6 percent do not wish to become entrepreneurs. This suggests that almost half of the rejecters do not reject entrepreneurship as such, but specifically refuse to continue the founder's enterprise.

15. Table Reasons for Rejecting the Succession (N=9)

Reason for rejection	People	Percentage (%)
I have other plans in life	5	55,6
I would like to live elsewhere	2	22,2
I am interested in a different field	1	11,1
Other	1	11,1

Source: compiled by the author

8.3. Conclusions

Based on the empirical survey, four statements can be formulated. First, in terms of the typology of Hungarian retail family businesses, the sample is characterized by micro-enterprises (1–5 employees) and by the duality of sole proprietorship versus limited liability company, which corresponds to the national structure (KSH, 2024). Second, the succession potential is high but not guaranteed: 66.7 percent of founders and 77.5 percent of successors are open to succession, while 22.5 percent of successors do not wish to continue the enterprise, indicating the presence of intergenerational value differences. Third, the problem of critical timing is perceptible: 91.1 percent of founders are still operating within the framework of first-generation leadership, while a significant proportion of founders of the 1990s are already in their fifties and sixties – the next five to ten years constitute the succession window. Fourth, educational orientation is dual: 60 percent of successors choose field-specific training, while the willingness to take over (77.5 percent) exceeds even this ratio, which suggests that educational background is not the only factor of preparedness. All these findings provide a basis for the empirical examination of the regional comparison of the two counties – Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Győr-Moson-Sopron.

9. Case studies

In my dissertation I present two case studies. My aim is to bring my previous theoretical approaches and statistical analyses into human – founder and successor – proximity. Behind the data there are always stories, destinies and families striving to make a living. With 15 years of consultancy experience behind me I have worked with more than 50 companies, 27 of which were family

businesses. During our typically several-year-long cooperation I not only came to understand the processes and support their success, but also succeeded in developing deep human, often friendly relationships with many outstanding people. This chapter offers an insight into these everyday realities.

The experiences of the East and West Hungarian family businesses presented in the case study chapter point to both common patterns and marked differences within the domestic SME sector. The East Hungarian paint retail examples – Puskás Paint Shop in Sajószentpéter and Marex Festék Ltd. in Kazincbarcika – clearly illustrate that personal advice based on professional expertise, local embeddedness and a family-like atmosphere provide a competitive advantage that multinational DIY chains can only partially imitate. At the same time, these enterprises face serious challenges in terms of online presence, professional marketing, labour recruitment and the weaker purchasing power of the region, all of which directly influence the success of generational change. The examples of Puskás Paint Shop and Marex Festék Ltd. show that deliberate capacity expansion, increasing shop size, franchise-type cooperation (PPG Trilak Paint Studio) and the expansion of services – for example free home delivery – make it possible for a family business to build a stable market position alongside multinational competitors. At the same time, the East Hungarian case study also highlights that the success of generational change strongly depends on the volume of the business, the existence of a local market monopoly or strong competitive situation, and on whether there is a motivated, professionally prepared successor who is willing to accept the sacrifices associated with the family entrepreneurial way of life.

In contrast, the case of Fazekas Printing House in West Hungary presents a generational change process consciously prepared over several decades, in which the founder prepared succession through the early involvement of the children, targeted professional training and the gradual transfer of responsibilities. The enterprise's competitive advantage lies in the combination of technological versatility, the flexible service of unique, small and medium print runs and personal, trust-based customer relationships, which positions the company well against large printing houses optimized for mass production and online service providers. Differences in mindset between generations – particularly in the assessment of risk-taking, technological renewal and digitalization – are also present here; at the same time, family harmony and mutual trust make it possible for these tensions to be resolved in a constructive way.

The common lesson of the case studies is that the key to successful generational change is timely, deliberate planning: the early, gradual involvement of children, the provision of formal training aligned with the company's profile, and the step-by-step transfer of decision-making powers and customer relationships. Both cases point to the fact that adaptation to technological and market changes – the integration of tinting machines and franchise systems, as well as digital printing and online solutions – only becomes a genuine competitive advantage if it is realized while preserving family values, personal professional advice and local embeddedness. Taken together, the East and West Hungarian examples convey the message that the survival and generational change of family businesses are not only corporate, but also broader regional economic policy issues: only the

combined presence of a conscious ownership strategy, appropriate successor development, a supportive institutional environment and family harmony can create the basis for long-term viable and competitive Hungarian family businesses.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

The basic assumption of my dissertation was that retail family businesses are simultaneously economic and socio-community actors whose operation and succession cannot be interpreted independently of regional economic trajectories and the specific forms of family influence. In my research I therefore examined the characteristics and properties of commercial family businesses at several levels. At the conceptual-theoretical level, this meant reconsidering the definitional frameworks of family business and commercial family business; at the macro- and meso-levels, a comparative analysis of county-level SME sectors and retail indicators; at the national level, an investigation of entrepreneurial attitudes based on the GEM 2021–2023 database; and at the micro-level, the study of succession processes through my own questionnaire survey and two case studies. The combination of different data sources and methods made it possible to interpret generational change not merely as a firm-level HR problem, but also as an issue of regional competitiveness and social sustainability. I present the confirmation of my hypothesis in the form of theses below:

167. Table Summary table of hypotheses and theses

	HYPOTHESIS	THESIS	RESULT	Method
H1-T1	**The entrepreneurial attitudes of family business owners do not differ significantly from the attitudes of all entrepreneurs.**	**The entrepreneurial attitudes of family business owners – individual attitude, perception of the entrepreneurial environment and perception of being an entrepreneur – do not differ significantly from the attitudes of all entrepreneurs in the three years examined (2021–2023).**	CONFIRMED	Descriptive statistics, t-test, χ^2-test
H1-T2	**The entrepreneurial attitudes of family business owners show regionally different patterns.**	**The entrepreneurial attitudes of family business owners show a regionally differentiated picture: while there is no significant regional difference in individual entrepreneurial attitude, the perception of the entrepreneurial environment and of being an entrepreneur differs significantly between regions.**	PARTIALLY CONFIRMED	Confidence intervals, regional comparison

H1-T3	**The characteristics of the business (size, sector, age, performance) and its economic and social impacts are differentially related to entrepreneurial attitudes in different regions.**	**The relationships between entrepreneurial attitudes and business characteristics and economic and social impacts are regionally conditioned: in each region different factors are associated with entrepreneurial attitudes and in different directions.**	CONFIRMED	Pearson correlation, logistic regression
H1-T4	**Clusters distinguishable based on the characteristics of family business owners have different entrepreneurial attitude profiles.**	**There are clusters that can be distinguished based on individual and firm characteristics of family business owners, which also show regionally different features and can serve as a basis for designing targeted business development interventions.**	CONFIRMED	Hierarchical cluster analysis, k-means clustering
H1-T5	**Commercial family businesses form a distinct, sector-specific subgroup of family firms, distinguished by structural and operational characteristics.**	**Commercial family businesses constitute a distinct, clearly delineated subgroup of family firms, distinguished from other family businesses by the joint presence of operative family involvement, local-regional embeddedness and reputational orientation.**	CONFIRMED	Literature review and critical analysis of the conceptual framework. Comparative analysis of international and Hungarian definitions.
H1-T6	**It is justified to define a separate, sector-specific conceptual category for Hungarian commercial family businesses.**	**The sectoral, local and behavioural criteria embedded in the definition of Hungarian commercial family businesses are theoretically well-grounded and align with international trends in defining family businesses.**	CONFIRMED	Conceptual model building and operationalisation. Questionnaire survey, application of the F-PEC scale, statistical comparison. Comparison of international definitional frameworks.

Source: own compilation

Integrated interpretation of the dissertation's results

On the basis of the comparison of the different data sources – definitional frameworks, GEM analysis, county-level SME indicators and my own succession research – **one of the central findings of the dissertation is that the succession of retail family businesses cannot be interpreted as a purely micro-level or purely macro-level phenomenon.** The forms of family influence, succession intentions and entrepreneurial attitudes can only be understood by considering regional economic trajectories, local consumer markets and the institutional environment. The example of

Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén clearly illustrates that, in the context of negative path dependence, demographic decline and low purchasing power, maintaining the family shop is often more a matter of community responsibility than of economic rationality, which points to a specific, place-bound form of socio-emotional wealth. In contrast, in Győr-Moson-Sopron the higher level of development, industrial clusters and better infrastructural conditions create an environment in which succession not only carries the possibility of survival, but also of growth, profile change and value-chain integration. Here socio-emotional wealth is linked not primarily to the ethical function of being the "last shop", but to economic performance, innovation and network positions, which produces a different type of motivational structure for founders and successors. The regional attitude differences shown by the GEM results – for example, the differing perception of the environment and of entrepreneurial life in more and less developed regions – fit well into this dual structure.

In this sense, the six-criterion definition framework for commercial family businesses can be interpreted not only as a conceptual, but also as a diagnostic tool. With its help, it is possible to identify those firms in which family influence, local embeddedness and intergenerational transmission are simultaneously present, and whose succession is therefore not only a firm, but also a community-level issue. The picture emerging from the GEM data – namely that the attitudes of family entrepreneurs do not fundamentally differ radically from those of other entrepreneurs, while regionally differentiated patterns can be observed – also suggests **that the family character in itself does not determine entrepreneurial thinking, but when embedded in the regional ecosystem it can significantly modify the context of succession decisions.**

The results of my own empirical research shed light on the micro-level decision logic: despite high levels of trust and willingness to succeed, the absence of actual transfer suggests that the greatest obstacle to generational change is often not to be found in family relations, but in the external economic and social conditions. For the younger generation, mobility options – a career in a large city or abroad, a more flexible lifestyle – are in many cases more attractive than a shop-owner lifestyle involving 10–12 hour working days and weekends, especially in less developed areas. Thus, the assessment of the family business as a career option is closely linked to regional development and the range of alternative opportunities.

Limitations of the research

In interpreting the results of the research, I consider it necessary to highlight the methodological and conceptual limitations of the study. First, although the proposed definitional frameworks are based on an extensive review of the Hungarian and international literature, they ultimately also contain normative decisions as to which dimensions of family influence are considered relevant and with which threshold values. Other definitional choices could lead to a different set of enterprises, as demonstrated by Kása Róbert and co-authors, who showed that different definitions yielded family business ratios of between 22 and 83 percent on the same sample. This conceptual uncertainty means

that the definitions used in the dissertation are primarily valid in a well-defined Hungarian retail context and may need to be adapted in other sectors and countries.
Second, the county-level SME and retail analysis is based on aggregated statistics that do not separate family and non-family firms, so conclusions regarding family businesses in this part are necessarily indirect and inferential. The complex development index and the retail indicators characterize the entire enterprise population; therefore, statements on family businesses assume that these firms are distributed structurally and territorially in a similar way to the SME sector. This assumption is partly justified based on Kása's results, but its empirical validation remains a research task. Third, macroeconomic shocks during the period under review – particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, the inflationary shock and supply chain disruptions – may distort time series and may not necessarily reflect long-term trends. Fourth, the GEM-based entrepreneurial attitude analysis relies on cross-sectional data collection, which limits the possibility of drawing causal conclusions. Although correlations and logistic regressions allow the identification of statistical associations between attitude indices and explanatory variables, the direction and mechanisms of these relationships cannot be unambiguously demonstrated: for example, we cannot determine whether positive attitudes lead to better firm performance or vice versa. A further limitation is that the attitude scales used in the GEM questionnaire are based mainly on self-reporting and Likert-type items, which may be sensitive to socially desirable responding and current mood states. In addition, in the regional breakdowns the proportion of family entrepreneurs in some cases results in low sample sizes, which reduces the power of statistical tests and increases the probability of error.

Fifth, the sample of my own empirical succession research is not probability-based, but relies on snowball and convenience sampling, which entails significant limitations for generalizability. Businesses recruited from personal acquaintances and professional networks are more likely to have higher educational attainment, better digital competences and stronger advisory links than the total population, which may overrepresent firms that prepare more consciously for succession. The online questionnaire format also inherently excludes those entrepreneurs who are less familiar with the use of IT tools, which can be a particular source of bias among older founders. The sample of successors is smaller than that of founders; therefore, successor-specific conclusions must be treated even more cautiously, especially in more detailed breakdowns. Sixth, questionnaire-based data collection necessarily simplifies the complex emotional and interpersonal dimensions of succession. Although my research did ask about motivations, values and family dynamics, structured questions cannot fully capture intergenerational conflicts, tacit expectations and hidden power relations. The two case studies presented partially compensate for this shortcoming but cannot substitute the results of a more extensive qualitative study – interviews, observations, document analysis.

Seventh, the research focuses mainly on the supply side, that is, the perspective of founders and successors, while the demand side – residents' preferences, loyalty, attitudes towards digital channels – appears only indirectly. Eighth, the spatial focus of the study on two highlighted counties makes a deeper regional comparison possible, but at the same time limits the national generalizability of the results. Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Győr-Moson-Sopron indeed represent two opposite poles

of the Hungarian regional spatial structure, but the characteristics of family businesses in Central and Southern Transdanubia, the Great Plain or Central Hungary may differ significantly from these. Ninth, the time horizon of the dissertation concentrates mainly on the post-2010 period, which means that the generational change experiences of the first decades after the transition and longer-term time-series comparisons are only partially reflected. Tenth, the dissertation did not deal in depth with issues of gender roles, female successors and intercultural family patterns (e.g. mixed marriages, diaspora links), even though the literature places increasing emphasis on these dimensions.

These limitations at the same time help to delineate further research directions. First, it would be justified to carry out a representative, probability-based national survey of retail family businesses, which would allow for a broader testing of the definitional frameworks and for the comparison of different sectors and regions. Second, it would be worthwhile to launch longitudinal, panel-type studies that follow the succession process not only at a given point in time, but through the phases of preparation, transfer and stabilization, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Third, the further development of GEM-based analyses could focus on linking entrepreneurial attitudes with administrative firm-level data (turnover, employment, exports, investment), thus enabling a more precise exploration of the nature of the relationship between attitudes and performance. Fourth, the analysis of the digitalization strategies of retail family businesses, their e-commerce adaptation and multichannel operation could open up a new perspective in succession research, particularly because the digital competences of the younger generation often exceed those of the founders.

Fifth, examining the role of female successors, gender patterns and the erosion of gender stereotypes would be justified as a separate sub-project, given that international results suggest that the involvement of female successors can increase the success of succession and the level of organizational professionalization. Finally, further development of the regional economic framework – by including other counties with different levels of development and economic structures – could contribute to place-based development policy that builds on family businesses as endogenous resources and designs a differentiated toolbox of interventions. The generational change of retail family businesses is not merely a series of individual and family decisions, but a territorial process that fundamentally influences the economic vitality, service provision and social cohesion of rural areas. The aim of the dissertation has been to make this complex system of interrelations visible through conceptual-theoretical, statistical and empirical tools and thereby to contribute to the development of more conscious, data- and place-based succession management and development policy thinking among Hungarian retail family businesses.

Summary

The central theme of the dissertation is the succession of retail family businesses in Hungary, which the thesis interprets simultaneously as an economic, social and regional development policy issue. The topicality of the subject lies in the fact that a significant proportion of family businesses were founded by the first generation around the time of the regime change, so that generational change

will become a mass phenomenon in the next decade. In the retail sector – particularly in rural, peripheral areas – these enterprises often operate as the “last points of supply”, providing basic services to the local population, jobs and community space at the same time. In this sense, success or failure of succession goes beyond the level of individual enterprises and has a direct impact on the economic vitality, service provision and social cohesion of rural areas. The aim of the dissertation is to explore this complex system of interrelations and to develop conceptual, empirical and practical frameworks that support more conscious, data- and place-based succession management among Hungarian retail family businesses.

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Authored publications related to the dissertation topic

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A vezetői attitűdök hatása a szervezetek versenyképességére
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