

The Highs and Lows of Reform. The Divergent Development of Public Education and Teacher Training in Hungary

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Abstract: The present theoretical study provides an overview of the somewhat hectic changes in Hungarian public education and, relatedly, teacher training in the past two and a half decades. The dynamic of harmony and disharmony that these changes are characterised by has created a rather quaint situation in educational policies. As a result, the trends that prevail in the Hungarian education system are some of the most distinctively atypical ones in the whole of Europe today, while higher education, including teacher training, is undergoing significant functional changes, which are relatively new in the international context as well.

Keywords: Education policy; teacher education; educational reform; Hungary.

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1. Introduction

Strange trends have been underway in Hungarian education in the past decades. When state socialism/communism collapsed in 1990, there was a sudden democratisation of the education system, as well as a rapid expansion of higher education, occurring within a few years. After the demand for higher education was repressed, the phenomenon – which occurred in Western Europe as early as the 1960s and 70s – prevailed increasingly and in a much less controlled-coordinated way. Between 1990 and 2002 the number of students in higher education increased nearly fourfold, while that of higher education institutions rose by 150%. At the same time there was less than 10% rise in the number of teaching staff, and expenditure

dropped by 70%¹. Since the mid-2000s, efforts have been made to lessen this pressure, to reduce the demand education services, the quality of which has been deteriorating. Today, it is not seminar groups of an unmanageable size that constitute a risk to quality education, but the fact that reduction was not followed by the transformation of institutional structure. Thus, now too many universities and colleges have to share too few students, while in most higher education institutions the instructors – quite low in number – fear for their jobs.

The rollercoaster ride that higher education in Hungary has taken in the past two decades has resulted in a much more significant transformation in terms of its social function than any changes in the preceding one hundred years altogether. We are no longer talking about elite institutions but, for the time being, massification, as well as globalisation and digitalisation, are the consequences that make the society back down.

The above mentioned issues are especially stirring in light of the reform processes in Hungarian education: the ups and downs of reform in public education started in the late 1960s and are still going on today. Furthermore, since 2010 the Hungarian education system is going through the most distinctively atypical development in the whole of Europe. Perhaps it is not irrelevant, then, to discuss jointly the recent reform processes of public education and higher education – this way we may get one step closer to the possible directions of how the role of the university could change in the 20th-21st century, and have a better understanding of a specific set of East-Central European social phenomena.

By summarising and systematising theoretical observations, the present paper attempts to compare and contrast the reform processes that have taken

¹ The number of students in higher education in Hungary: 1990 – 108,376 students, 1995 – 195,586 students, 2000 – 327,289 students, 2002 – 381,560 students. Expenditures in higher education in Hungary in proportion to GDP: 1990 – 2.26%, 1995 – 1.65%, 2000 – 1.53%, 2002 – 1.56%. Polónyi, 2004. 68-69.

Detailed data: <http://www.tarsadalomkutatas.hu/termek.php?termek=TABRA-A-156>

As a result of continuous decrease since 2006, in the school year 2014-2015, 307 thousand students enrolled in universities and colleges.

[ezehttp://eduline.hu/felsookutatas/2014/12/19/Kozel_14_ezerrel_kevesebben_jarnak_egyetemr_X3SB7B](http://eduline.hu/felsookutatas/2014/12/19/Kozel_14_ezerrel_kevesebben_jarnak_egyetemr_X3SB7B)

The number students in higher education per 100 thousand inhabitants in Hungary: 1980 – 967, 1990 – 972, 1995 – 1647, 2000- 3007, 2005 – 4323, 2009 – 3976.

The number students in higher education per 100 thousand inhabitants in the Czech Republic: 1980 – 1116, 1990 – 1101, 1995 – 1733, 2000- 2477, 2005 – 3290, 2009 – 3993.

The number students in higher education per 100 thousand inhabitants in Austria: 1980 – 1692, 1990 – 2605, 1995 – 2949, 2000- 3363, 2005 – 2969, 2009 – 3682.

The number students in higher education per 100 thousand inhabitants in France: 1980 – 1566, 1990 – 2799, 1995 – 3586, 2000- 3413, 2005 – 3586, 2009 – 3480.

The number students in higher education per 100 thousand inhabitants in Italy: 1980 – 1953, 1990 – 2390, 1995 – 3145, 2000- 3106, 2005 – 3434, 2009 – 3339. Calculations by István Polónyi, based on UNESCO data. (Polónyi, 2013, pp. 69-70).

place in the past 20-30 years in Hungarian public education and teacher training – the latter being, in principle, closely linked to public education. The prerequisite of successful innovations is to ensure that the dynamic phenomena characterising two sectors (public education and teacher training) are in relative temporal consonance with each other. If, however, there are severe dysfunctional disturbances perceived in the system of education, we may assume that there are considerable differences between the two sectors in terms of their direction of motion and intensity.

2. Marathon reform

In comparison with other Central and Eastern European countries, the reformation of education in Hungary had made unmatched progress in the second half of the 20th century². By the end of the 1990s, the comprehensive reformation of the education system – on the basis of modern Western notions – had already taken place: basically all the criteria propitious for local innovations (a certain local autonomy, a professional and bureaucratic susceptibility to new ideas, a resolving of financial issues, time available for teachers' recreation and for experimentation, the nomination and election of a headmaster through professional consideration and based on local consensus) had been met in the educational system (Radó, 2001, pp. 90-94).

What paved the way for this change was the reform processes that have continually gained strength since the 1970s. There have basically been three prevailing tendencies, showing up parallel, and rather isolated, or at times specifically strengthening one another. On one hand, since the 70s there have evolved a professional-expert elite with an international insight and network of relationships (Trencsényi, 2011). Educational researchers have managed to carve out room for themselves, which is unprecedented in the region – with time they will virtually be able to criticise the entirety of the system. Within the state party they created for themselves forums (i.e. institutions, professional organisations, journals), still existing today, and which compete with one another, and, therefore, more channels for free thinking are utilized³. By the 1980s the possibility of making contact with the West had become quotidian for educational researchers in Hungary. As a result, there has emerged a notable generation of experts, who are frequently involved in comprehensive international projects and developmental activities today.

² Among socialist states it was only in Slovenia where, similar to Hungary, a considerable professional culture of thinking about reforming education was present. Nevertheless, the educational researcher elite in Slovenia could not achieve such comprehensive and profound results as the Hungarian one. (Radó, 91-92).

³ Under cover of school criticism, a more general criticism of the school system is provided by, for instance, Ferge, 1976; Andor, 1980-1981.

Besides researchers, the first pedagogical experimenters have also been given plenty of room – it is owing to them that the uniformity of state socialist curriculum policies have been demolished. The first alternative (e.g., Waldorf) schools already legally existed and operated on the eve of the regime change (Báthory, 2001, pp. 83-88; Mihály, 1999).

One of the characteristic features of this educational-researcher/expert and pedagogical innovator elite is that on one hand they did not operate, were not concentrated at, universities. Pedagogical reform discourse found its way outside of academia, while departments of pedagogy, and especially pedagogical colleges remained to be centres of Marxist traditions. There are hardly any university centres or professors that took an active part in this intellectual opening up⁴ (Németh, Bíró & Garai, 2016).

On the other hand, the educational researcher elite of the capital city was becoming more and more interdisciplinary – it was greatly affected mainly by business economics, sociology and economics. Furthermore, it was building an increasingly direct relationship with the decision-making advisors of the Ministry of Education and the more open-minded decision-makers of the state party who supported reform (Báthory, 2001, pp. 17-36, 66-83).

This prominent, influential group of experts had a profound influence on reform processes in two main directions, which at the same time denote the second and third of the three decisive tendencies present before the regime change. These tendencies include decentralisation, the gradual growth in the autonomy of schools, and, simultaneously, the weakening of party governance⁵. The Act of 1985 on Public Education ensured special rights to teaching staff in the region (e.g. the right of veto in the election of the headmaster, limited professional autonomy and opportunities for pedagogical experiments) (Báthory, 2001, pp. 57-66). Another permanent result achieved by educational researchers can be witnessed in the field of curriculum policies. Starting off with the curriculum of 1978 a prolonged change began. The curriculum was prepared for six years and another eight years were needed for it to be introduced comprehensively. Meanwhile, newer and newer corrections were made, as a result of which there were hardly any classes which started the school-year according to the same regulations as the class above them. In the situation that evolved, the decision-makers typically believed that the best way to solve the problems occurring in the system was by amending the curriculum. In light of the fact that the school

⁴ The only exception is probably József Nagy in Szeged, who laid the foundations of a Western-style teacher training as early as the 1970s, and today his work is perceived as an essential antecedent of the Centre of Pedagogy in Szeged.

⁵ It was at this time that the decentralisation of education governance became highly relevant in the West as well (Halász, 2001, pp. 155-177).

structure was not changed significantly until 1989, the decision-makers' attitude proved to be a dead end street: compared with the 1960s, neither were there changes in terms of school types, nor was a door opened to the expansion of secondary education⁶.

The 1978 curriculum nevertheless proved to be imperishable. The work done on the curriculum in the 1970s aimed at doing away with its ideological nature and at validating curriculum theory. This way, the prescriptive central curriculum of 1978 was prepared in a spirit taking into consideration global planning (the unity of education and teaching), the internal differentiation of teaching materials, and the solid acceptance of differences between individual schools (Báthory, 2001, pp. 17-23).

The regime change brought about significant change in educational policies at two specific points. First, to meet different social demands, the previously uniform school structure became quite varied. The monopoly of the eight-year primary school (from age 6 to 14) ended; a great number of secondary schools started to offer 6- or 8-year secondary education. The selective feature of the school system has thus become more emphasised and these tendencies – in a way unequalled in Europe – grew ever stronger (Liskó, 1996; Halász & Lannert, 2003, pp. 119-132). There is, of course, no denying the correlation between longer-term secondary education and better opportunities for further education (at a more prestigious institution), between having a longer-term secondary education and a higher family social status. The elite secondary schools, gaining popularity in the mid-1990s, contributed to the fact that – according to the PISA survey at the millennium – there are striking differences between various Hungarian schools and students in terms of their physical location and social status (Vári, 2003; Lannert, 2003, pp. 70-73; Imre, 2003, pp. 74-78; Radó, 2007, pp. 24-36; Balázs, 2010, pp. 55-59).

The second great change was the spasmodic strengthening of processes of decentralisation (Balázs, 2000, pp. 17-128). The state gave up central control of education and passed the right of school maintenance on to local governments and other maintenance authorities. The latter include mainly various churches, which began to reorganise their network of schools with considerably great force after the collapse of state socialism. Besides, liberal education acts paved the way for alternative pedagogical initiatives, and, by and large, for the foundation of private schools. Most of the schools, however, came under local government control. Since it was the system of local governments itself that was responsible

⁶ It was only at the beginning of the 1990s that educational researchers in Hungary also began to deal with the issue intensively, acknowledging the strategic importance of the school structure. See: Furray & Kozma (1992, pp. 47-63); Lukács (1992, pp. 65-74); Setényi (1992).

for diversification and there were hardly any communities without autonomous rights of local government management, school structure as such became highly diversified. The authorities only supervised the minimum requirements of the law; the schools gained almost full professional autonomy. This situation was accompanied by the liberalisation of the textbook market. The disadvantages of this – unsettled and tangled – freedom were quickly noticeable in a country where the differences between the economic opportunities and socio-cultural features of community types (village – city, hick town – county seat, city in the country – capital city) are large. Consequently, decentralisation efforts also contributed to the continuous widening of the gap between the schools' power differences (Halász & Lannert, 2003, pp. 51-86; Pusztai, 2015, pp. 33-49).

In the mid-1990s debates over the curriculum intensified yet again. In 1995 the liberal Minister of Education of the second democratically-elected government introduced the National Curriculum (NAT). While the term itself is still part of curriculum regulations in Hungary, today it has a totally different meaning. When introduced twenty years ago, NAT was the «core curriculum», and content regulations followed the dominant Anglo-Saxon trends for the first time in the recent history of Hungarian education. NAT defined content areas, not subjects. It was thinking in two-year terms and did not ordain division into academic years. It did not regulate a process but determined output requirements, a minimum literacy level. It gave schools plenty of elbow-room to prepare their local curriculum and let the local curricula determine the number of classes, the subjects and their contents. Curriculum planners encouraged local innovations, trying out new subjects and new methods of lesson planning. They put an emphasis on ensuring interdisciplinarity. As opposed to teaching encyclopaedic knowledge, they preferred content designed to improve skills and talents.

NAT was heavily attacked from various directions. Scientists and theorists – the academic sector – were apprehensive of their own disciplines being drained. The churches and other conservative groups were afraid that general human and national values would be neglected and effaced. Members of the civilian elite perceived the new diversification of the school structure as threatening the benefits and advantages of 6- and 8-year secondary education. Last but not least, teachers were also frightened by the burdens of excessive independence. Due to the extremely short deadlines required by NAT (in the case of, for instance, preparing the local curriculum) on one hand, and to their educational backgrounds, knowledge and preparedness on the other, most teachers reached back to the content and structural logic of the 1978 national curriculum when they were compelled to prepare their own local curriculum (Knausz, 1999, pp. 47-54; Chrappán, 2014, pp. 27-29).

When NAT came into effect, the league of educational researchers and reformers with Western European contacts and value positioning won the battle; yet, opposing tendencies started to intensify straight away. As I have shown earlier, since the 1990s there were signs suggesting that with the widening of the social gap education may eventually come off badly. Without a concomitant overall social consensus, new content regulations could not work in the long run. The right-wing coalition government that came into power in 1998 did not rescind NAT but complemented it with detailed, process-controlling curricula for each school type, thereby returning to the continental traditions of curriculum regulation (Vágó, 2003, pp. 53-61). For eight years from 2002 Hungary was again governed by a left-wing coalition. The government reissued NAT, which was in some respect even more radical than it previously had been: it did not determine the teaching materials (in terms of processes or output goals), but specified the developmental tasks of the school. It seemed that a less regulatory curriculum policy prevailed in Hungary (Nahalka, 2006).

For general internal political reasons, however, the left-wing coalition governing for two terms (between 2002 and 2010) turned out to be unsuccessful in its educational policy issues. The increasing demographic decline and the worsening economic situation in Hungary would have required closing down schools and laying off teachers, or generally rearranging tasks and thereby partly reconsidering the entire system of education. This would have meant a much more centralised education system, where such decisions do not fail automatically because of the resistance of those concerned at the schools, and where the painful provisions made are prudent enough and can take real, quality considerations into account. Due to the failure of these conditions, two decades after the regime change public education is almost impossible to finance.

In light of these circumstances it is plain to see that what evolved in the field of curriculum regulations and school structure is stationary warfare: standpoints and attitudes stiffened, became rigid; irreconcilable contradictions fossilised. The marathon reform could not achieve its main goal, general curricular changeover; while the structural issues that it neglected set in motion processes which are entirely antithetical to its original intentions. Therefore, in the 2000s other processes acquired new significance, which do foster the transformation of our pedagogical culture after all.

Hungary joined the European Union in 2004, at a time when the role of education received greater recognition in Europe. The aim of the so-called Lisbon Process to halt the continent's decline in global economic competition and help the millions of people sidelined because of this decline re-enter the job market led to intensive thought about education. Joining the EU reinforced international influence

on Hungarian public education, also increasingly affected by other global tendencies as well (Halász, 2006). It was at this point when the PISA survey, carried out to assess students' literacy, was launched in Hungary; professionals and the general public could first learn about its (fairly startling) results in 2002. Nevertheless, the «PISA-shock» was not as profound as it was in Poland or Germany; the painfully bad results could barely reach a social response threshold from the general public⁷.

The accession brought along financial support – an unprecedented number of development resources. The development programmes aimed to implement information and communication technologies in the schools, to improve foreign language learning, to develop competencies that form the bases of lifelong learning, and primarily to carry out interventions aiding social integration (Radó, 2008). It is true, however, that these development projects were more like campaigns in several respects, and thus they could not achieve the effect required on the foundation-stones of the whole structure (Halász & Lannert, 2006, pp. 119-120; Halász, 2007, pp. 210-216).

In the same decade Hungary took a big step toward breaking away from thinking in terms of a teaching-material-centred curriculum. Competency-based education is an umbrella term for a set of programmes which served the purpose of enabling teachers to do away with the exclusivity of encyclopaedic, knowledge-centred teaching. Several projects of further training on the development of teaching materials and textbooks focused on info-communicational tools, co-operative techniques, methods of experiential education, art and game-based pedagogy, task banks based on reading comprehension and problem-solving, or disseminating alternative evaluation strategies. These innovations, collecting and studying good local examples, gave hope that pedagogical thinking-practice in Hungary might overstep decades – or even centuries – long traditions and finally turn its focus to what happens in the classroom (Nahalka, 2006).

In 2010, after a prolonged domestic political crisis, the new right-wing conservative government could begin its term with a majority of two-thirds in the parliament. The Ministry of Education was given to the Christian Democrats, who were considered to be fairly conservative even within the government itself. Therefore there was an increasing feeling that the following years to come were to be understood as a very determined, at times even harsh, counter-strike launched against the developments of previous years. The former (domestically) extreme decentralisation was followed by rapid centralisation: a monumental central school maintenance organisation came into existence under which every municipal school was nationalised. It is the Ministry that decides about

⁷ In Poland reformers, intervening because of the PISA results, achieved impressive results. Kwiek, 2014.; Farnicka, 2015.; Velkey, 2015.

the appointment of headmasters; the finances, management and professional work of each school are determined by state school-district governance through rigorous central regulations (Kozma, 2014, pp. 4-12). A similarly explicit standardisation happened in content regulations as well, which is thus closest to the curriculum model of the 1970s (Chrappán, 2014, pp. 28-30). In two stages, the formerly liberalised textbook market has shrunk – at the moment there are only two kinds of textbooks per subject available for each class. In the spirit of centralisation, there are concerns for reintroducing the system of school supervisors or superintendents. This system had a centuries-long tradition and was abolished in Hungary in 1985; in the state socialist era it supervised adherence to central laws and, from a political perspective, played an active part in keeping a watchful eye on teachers.

Only church schools can escape the obligatory notion of centralisation – in itself raising considerable professional concerns. Church schools could retain their autonomy in terms of financing and school management. Teachers' and parents' search for stability lead to keeping clear of the state's monumental institution maintenance centre (that makes decisions slowly and with little precision) and being inclined to choose a church school – sometimes even when they are not really religious (Péteri, 2014, pp. 22-23).

This centralised school system, struggling at both a macro and micro level, has numerous challenges to face⁸. On one hand, demographic trends in Hungary enforce a large-scale closing-down of schools and thus mass redundancies of teachers. In the former, fragmented system such serious measures were impossible to make – a centrally controlled system is obviously much more suitable for this. The question remains, however, whether in case of financing a streamlined network of institutions, monolithic and normative decision-making, neglecting local specificities, can establish an effective mechanism that can be sustained in the long run. Furthermore, it is doubtful if the almost entirely uniform dichotomy of curriculum and textbook (embodying mid-20th-century content regulations) can be maintained in today's digital world. We may also wonder if this centralised control over education, which has experienced some very unpleasant professional failures and scandals in the first years of its existence, will stand the test of time.

3. Changes in higher education and teacher training

One of the most important fields of the aforementioned rapid expansion of higher education that took place in the 1990s was teacher training. Compared

⁸ These challenges are subject for debate in education. For intervention-oriented analyses see Fazekas–Köllő–Varga, 2008; Radó, 2013.

to previous years, the number of students admitted increased fourfold – and this happened at a time when apparently there were fewer and fewer beginning teachers needed, due to the fact that the number of births has been continually decreasing in Hungary since 1975⁹.

Particularly exposed to the waves of expansion, teacher training underwent significant changes, in terms of both its quality and function. While conditions of staff and equipment did not improve significantly, the increased number of students necessarily led to the transformation of ways of work in higher education. It became plain to see that there were masses of students that never for a second intended to work as teachers. In correspondence training, a large number of police officers, public officials and artists appeared, as well as teachers who only needed a higher degree for salary increment. In full-time training, excessive admissions meant that a dominant number of students took part in pedagogical training with a general interest in the humanities, but no firm occupational intentions (Polónyi & Tímár, 2001).

In a few years' time pedagogical faculties had to face a difficult situation: seminar groups made up of a relatively small number of highly selected and motivated students who intended to become teachers were replaced by huge student populations who were much less conscious and followed more general intellectual goals. The problem was intensified by the fact that teacher training in Hungary remained almost entirely untouched by the «marathon reform» until the regime change, and prominent experts usually did not work at universities.

After the regime change there were fewer alterations in teacher training than there were in public education. In terms of its structure, this sector of higher education remained quite static up until the millennium. Until the so-called Bologna Reform teacher training programmes were organised in accordance with a dual model of higher education: secondary school teachers were trained at universities for five years, while lower and upper primary school teachers, as well as kindergarten teachers, attended colleges for four and three years, respectively. Whereas at colleges teacher training was predominantly practice-oriented, at the university level it tended to be rather theoretical, since disciplinary, academic considerations went before the task of preparing students for working in schools (Halász & Lannert, 2006, p. 330).

The rapid growth of student population and the change in its constitution compelled the internal transformation of teacher training, which, on one hand, meant structural change. The Higher Education Act of 2005 aimed at radically

⁹ The number of births in Hungary: 1975 – 181,262 persons, 1980 – 150,196 persons, 1990 – 125,181 persons, 2000 – 97,123 persons, 2010 – 90,335 persons. https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/eurostat_tablak/tabl/tps00111.html

reforming the system and involving Hungary in European higher education. The act introduced a three-level system: the first being training leading up to a bachelor's degree (BA), qualifying students for the labour market, or to a higher vocational education. The first level leads to the second, a master's degree (MA), while the third level is the postgraduate (PhD) (Halász & Lannert, 2006, pp. 26-27).

The Bologna system, introduced in 2006, abolished the traditional dual, one-cycle form of teacher training, thence students could get their teaching qualification in the second cycle (MA) of the multi-cycle system. This meant that at the end of their BA training they could decide whether or not they would continue on in their studies and become teachers. From this point on, teacher training was standard and unified, that is, any MA diploma entitled its owner to work both at an upper primary school as well as a secondary school. (Lower primary school teachers and kindergarten teachers continued to be trained at a BA level.) Building from the BA level, MA courses were designed specifically to help develop the competences necessary for the teaching profession. The greatest innovation of the new teacher training programme was that it made a 6-month teaching practicum in a public education institution compulsory.¹⁰

Owing to the new system, students did not have to make career choices until the second of the consecutive programme cycles. At the same time, BA courses offered a ten-credit block of orientation in pedagogy-psychology, which was hoped to aid students' decisions so that only the most motivated and suitable ones would chose teaching as a profession. The MA cycle enabled students to attain teacher competences more thoroughly and placed a greater emphasis on subject methodology. These structural elements clearly pointed to the internal renewal of the content of teacher training. Due to the stage of 10-credit foundation courses and the shorter yet denser MA studies, the whole of the curriculum had to be reconsidered. Furthermore, the BA level as a foundation stage basically – albeit 5-10 years behind – legitimised the shift in approach that higher education had developed earlier because of the masses that came along with expansion. The new approach meant that instead of the former in-depth, knowledge-centred and science-focused courses, new courses appeared which were more general, awareness-raising and aimed at providing a wider range of knowledge (Kozma, 2014b., pp. 15-19).

It must be admitted, though, that this shift in approach did not come off smoothly everywhere. Representatives of disciplines with centuries-long traditions tended to follow the notion of «less about everything» in trying to reduce the formerly taught subject matter at a rate proportional to the time

¹⁰ For detailed accounts of the Bologna-style structure of teacher training see Pukánszky, 2013, pp. 596-599.

allotted (*pro rata temporis*). (This was quite problematic in the case of History and Mathematics, for example, while more modern trainings, such as economics, easily solved the problem.) A great number of instructors thus experienced these changes as a decrease in the quality of higher education. A characteristic gap was created – not for the first time in the history of teacher training in Hungary – between educational researchers, specialist academics teaching pedagogy and those who work at the various departments and are responsible for students' studies in their major subject¹¹.

In the field of teacher training, the designers of the Bologna-type training considered the aim of the reform to be a greater emphasis on improving teachers' competences (not only attainments and knowledge). By reviewing these competences, they determined the content of the training, which basically meant that they paid less attention to content and professional issues – the Bologna-type training intended to build teacher training on concrete pedagogical needs (Chrappán *et al.*, 2014).

One-cycle teacher training thus ceased to exist and gave place to a new two-level system, divided into BA and MA training programmes. Beyond structural changes, the reform served to represent and implement a new kind of approach to teaching, student behaviour and attitude to learning – as indicated by the standards and requirements concerning teachers' expertise (as described above). Nevertheless, the Bologna-type teacher training was soon strongly disputed.

The opponents of the two-level system were apprehensive about severe teacher shortages (Balázs, Kocsis & Vágó, 2011, p. 317). Criticism – especially on the part of various disciplines – was levied against the training covering «one and a half majors»: students do not study their major and minor subjects at an equal rate, since the subject that they major in at the BA level (a full-length degree course) is more intense than their minor subject (a half-length degree course) taken up later on. This means that a teacher graduating with a degree in German and English does not have the same level of competence and specialised knowledge as a teacher of English and German does, even if their diploma evaluation is the same. According to those arguing against the Bologna-type training, the pedagogy-psychology module was way too overpowering, and so representatives of the humanities and natural sciences wished to reduce it (Pukánszky, 2013, p. 600). It is true that the Bologna-type training intended to assign more credits to elements of the pedagogy-psychology module than ever before in the history of teacher training in Hungary. Subject methodology was also a debated issue, as the Bologna programme listed it among subjects and disciplines, and this was strongly objected by methodologists (Pukánszky, 2013, p. 601).

¹¹ The Bologna-type teacher training is still supported by experts of education. See for example Hunyady, 2010; Pukánszky, 2015; Trencsényi, 2015.

There were some who were only a year or two away from completing their master's degree when, in the autumn of 2010, it turned out that the government would put an end to this training structure. Without doubt, the government's decision was strengthened by evident shortcomings and weaknesses. Three years of undergraduate education proved to be too few for students (having to meet the requirements of a condensed curriculum) to prepare themselves to write their theses and take their state examinations – three years were not even enough to acquire full knowledge of their subjects. As a result, masses of students were 'lost' in this busy period and only a few could actually get a degree. Meanwhile, due to the government's drastic reduction of the expansion of higher education, the number of students dropped considerably. As a result of this decrease and the diversification of MA trainings, the number of students applying for teacher training programmes decreased significantly, and at numerous training centres all there was left were those students finishing their training. Within a short period of time there was a lack of teachers in Hungary, especially in the field of the natural sciences, where teacher training almost entirely ceased (Balázs, Kocsis & Vágó, 2011, pp. 318-319).

The new training structure introduced in Hungary in September 2013 yet again offered two kinds of teacher training: for primary school teachers it is 4+1 years, while secondary school teachers study for 5+1 years. In both cases, the final one year is for a so-called block individual teaching practicum in a public education institution, a leftover of the Bologna system in a one-year format. The asymmetry of the two degree courses (as major and minor) was eliminated, meaning that an equal number of credits need to be accumulated in the two degrees. A further innovation was introduced in the form of an admission eligibility test: at the oral entrance exam applicants have to prove that they have the competences necessary for the teaching profession. It is, however, highly debated whether anyone at the age of 18 can be 'diagnosed' or defined as being suitable to become a teacher (Pálmai, 2014). To sum it up, students intending to become teachers yet again have to make their career choice at the age of 18, and in this way, after matriculation, they apply to an institute of higher education. In accordance with the specificities of the Bologna system, the first three years are the same for each student, and when they complete their bachelor's degrees they have to decide once more which type of public education institution (primary or secondary school) they wish to teach in after graduation.

This old-new system is expected to take teacher training out of the crisis, to end our lack of teachers, and higher education institutions hope that «everybody will chose the secondary school teacher training programme, because it qualifies one to teach at upper primary school as well, but conversely this is not the case» (Pálmai, 2014). Owing to the one-year individual teaching practicum, «there will come an end to the odd situation in which after a 6-month teaching practicum

students graduate in January but can only start working in September» (Nagy változások jönnek...).

These years, within the subfields of the Humanities the Ministry of Education only supports those students with fully state-funded places who intend to choose the teaching profession, thus the number of students in teacher training is on the increase again. Although this rise is nowhere near the expansion witnessed in the 1990s, the «depopulation» experienced in the mid-2000s may also be over. Moreover, unlike other areas of public education, teacher training is not bound by stringent central regulations of content – higher education is essentially characterised by academic freedom in teaching, learning and research. Currently, the number of students who intend to choose teaching as a career is quite balanced – the only question left is what further changes this situation may compel, regarding the (still) fragmented institutional infrastructure. If we find an adequate answer to this problem, then it is likely that the majority of the professionals dedicated to the Bologna reform will also settle for this new, professionally acceptable state of equilibrium.

Of all the dynamic processes, there is one tendency that remains undiminished: researchers belonging to the pedagogical elite and informed about European and Anglo-Saxon education, have solidified their position at the universities, their views weigh heavily when decision is made about professional issues. Today it is already the second generation of this elite that fills positions as professors and heads of doctoral schools at Hungarian universities. While content regulations and school structures hark back to the middle third of the 20th century, the kind of pedagogical thinking that dominates teacher training is 21st-century, up-to-date and child-centred. Moreover, this professional university and academic elite essentially reigns with full autonomy.

4. Summary

We have demonstrated how the Hungarian system of education has constantly experienced dynamic tendencies since the 1970s. As a result, by the 1990s the Hungarian education system became one of the most progressive ones in Eastern-Central Europe. However, the delayed processes of reform, characterised by high fluctuation, are currently in a phase that enables one of the most conservative, mostly atypical and strictest state governance in Europe.

On the other hand, due to the opposing trends of the past decades, Hungarian teachers and pedagogical developers have now accumulated a highly diverse set of experience and knowledge, as well as an extensive international professional social capital.

Moreover, since the beginning of the 2000s this set of knowledge and experience has – in a professional sense – been in parallel with the knowledge and values of the professionals working in teacher training. In fact, in the final decades of the 20th century, teacher training in Hungary hardly noticeably steered away from the dogmatic Marxist, conservative pedagogical perception of the 1960s and 70s. Almost everything that was progressive in pedagogy in Hungary was conceived and gained strength outside of teacher training. This situation changed entirely in the second half of the 1990s, at the time of the intense – and, according to many, also destructive – expansion. Partly because of generational reasons (the representatives of old-school pedagogy grew old and were replaced by young professionals with differing views), partly through conscious reform policies in higher education, the best experts of educational research and teacher training in Hungary, who have an in-depth knowledge of Western trends, are now professors and researchers at Hungarian universities.

This fact has facilitated adjustment to the challenges of the period of expansion. At the millennium, teacher training in Hungary exchanged its curricula in the course of a few years and without major difficulties, and it could also adapt to a more general, competence-based training of the masses of students planning to enter the teaching profession.

After the regime change, the atmosphere of greater freedom and the since then reduced pressure of extension triggered a considerable change of function in Hungarian higher education. We illustrated this change through one of the most tangible examples: while in public education the reform processes have long been characterised by high amplitudes and one dramatic turn of events has followed another, the closely related area of teacher training got over less shock in a shorter period of time. Such shock provided opportunity for traditional elite to progress from a narrowly defined, science-focused, encyclopaedic teacher training, devoid of progressive thought, to a competence-based teacher training, which is open to development and change, follows ongoing processes in the West on a daily basis and provides relevant supply for a wider range of social needs.

The hypothesis outlined in the introduction of this paper prevailed in the Hungarian context as follows: when (in the 1970s-90s) public education was influenced by reforms, teacher training was predominated by dogmatic and provincial forces. By the time the modern turn took place in teacher training (the second half of the 1990s), social support for reform in public education had already been lost. Moreover, since the very beginning of the 1990s intensive selection mechanisms have started in school structure. With the exception of a short, few-year-long period, harmony between the two sectors have never been realised, which is still a sufficient reason for excessive swings and extremities.

It could prove the power of universities and the significance of their function change if – compared to the disharmonious relationship between public education and teacher training – a much more permanent and effective harmony emerged. Opportunities for such harmony may only exist in case public education policy – intensively centralizing and neglecting 21st-century challenges – fails, and so long as the professional unity of those working in teacher training remains or increases.

5. References

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