

SUMMARIVM

FROM EQUIVALENCE TO COMPETENCE

The current thematic issue *From equivalence to competence* guest edited by *István Polónyi*, was born, as shown by the title, with the aim to overview the educational policy aspects of equivalence of degrees and their changes over time. One of the consequences of labour market globalisation to education is the shift towards mutual recognition, international similarity and equivalence of trainings and degrees. Naturally, this is not being a completely new phenomenon, since the international similarity of craftsmanship of manufactures a scientific degrees were all taken for granted during the medieval times. However, the consideration for similarity, or rather, for equivalency, stopped by the 20th century, at the confrontation of world systems, and started again at the collapse of communism. Moreover, similarity now means more, and something else than in the past: it means the demand for similar statistical indicators (ISCED), similarity of parts of trainings (credit system), equivalence of degrees and diplomas, and it also means the identification of competences gained through different training programs. This process is enhanced by the EU employment policy, and – although undeclared on the Community level, nevertheless, existing – by its educational policy. Following from the historical roots of the Community, these public policies are mainly bureaucratic and coordinative in nature, in contrast with the main competitor, the USA, where the subsystems of employment and education are predominantly ruled by the open market.

The starting article by *Géza Sáská*: *From the equivalence of the nation-state to cross-country competencies* commences by arguing that the issue of equivalence of degrees itself, offered by various educational institutions of different countries, or supported by different non-governmental (either private, church or foreign) institutions, has itself (nation)-state origins. The school curricula regulating the content of elementary and secondary education have national range, and they represent state interests as much as the regulation of the legal validity of certificates does. Full acceptance of certificates issued by other countries would mean that in spite of the acknowledgement of the fact that they were gained through different curricula, there is no difference between them in terms of advantages. It is natural, therefore, that certificate-matching exchanges are regulated by – usually cultural – contracts among states. It is not the knowledge and the skills that we have to talk about, but the mutual reflection of national systems of education and of educational policies. Although these have educational reasoning behind, however, their main decisive factors belong to foreign politics. The consequence of globalisation and integration is change, focusing on two new policy principles: the concepts of lifelong learning and of competences. These specifically integrationist educational policy principles, precisely because of their general acceptance, are morally impeccable, their offered utopia is appealing, although they are blurry in their empirically interpretable content, leaving room for parallel, conflicting interpretations. The study analyses in detail the formation, the history and educational policy relevance of the two concepts. Finally it emphasizes that we are subjects and beholders of cultural transformation process of an unimaginable scale and extension, which could be understood even as a cultural regime change. One of the most important moments of the whole transformation is, when the interpretation and content definition of public and higher education grew over the authority of nation states and of national elites.

Ildikó Mihályi in her article: *School systems, degrees, certificates in Europe – past, present and future* states that the endeavours to integrate Europe at the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome are all concerned in some way with the issue of recognition of various certifications by other countries. The programs aiming at description of occupations, harmonizing endeavours, matching, and mutual recognition, all mark one more step in this process. The operation of the institutions of the European Union reflects the same community aim; as this is also reflected by the European Credit Transfer System from 1988, the introduction of EUROPASS in 2002, and by the European Qualifications Framework program launched in 2006, included in the Copenhagen directives and achieving the recognition of non-formal and formal learning. In the meantime, one can witness the paradigm shift in the judgment of qualifications, ending up in transforming the earlier dominance of theoretical knowledge into new demands for practice-focused competences.

According to the starting point of the study *Equivalence of certificates and diplomas at home and abroad* by *Gábor Mészáros*, the legal scope of a diploma is limited by the borders of the state that released it, therefore the worker or student moving outside his/her country boundaries practically loses the professional or higher educational rights he/she was entitled to. The recognition process through which the employee or the student

can access the labour market or the higher education system of the receiving country without repeating the courses, aims at substituting these lost rights. The article reviews the concepts of recognition, naturalization and equivalence, and then analyses the rules of recognition process of further learning, leaving a larger space for the discussion of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The author makes a difference between the "de facto" and "de iure" recognition processes about provisions on recognition from the professions' approach; and he also discusses in detail the European Community's legal recognition norms, among the "de iure" processes. Finally, the study reviews the other processes of recognition of foreign qualifications.

The first part of the article by *József Temesi: Connections among the higher education credit system, the qualifications framework and equivalence*, stresses some of the main features of the credit system and of qualifications framework, and presents their interrelationship. It also analyses the European and Hungarian set-up, their contradictions and problems. Meanwhile, the study tries to recall the important role played by the credit system on the equivalence process, concluding that the credit system (and the system of qualifications) were useful technical tools in the equivalence assessments; they helped ranking the learning results from the individuals' different learning paths, both quantitatively and by levels. However, these assessments cannot replace the content analysis of the curricula, and except for some obvious professional equivalence, they cannot be used for automatic equivalence decisions.

In the first part of his article *Equivalences and competences in the world of language tests*, *Jenő Bárdos* stresses, that the most important postulate from the point of view of language tests and their equivalence is, that language competencies can be described and measured, even more, they can be measured by tests. Furthermore, the language tests are able to generate in students all important components of language competences; therefore by measuring the performance achieved on the tests one can assess the actual knowledge of the candidates. The article analyses in detail the core of the postulates and their connections, and then describes the effects of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) on the language tests and its application in Hungary. At the end of the article, the author discusses the causes of language test fetishism in Hungary, and the motivations of learning foreign languages. The author states that according to the surveys, four fifths of young adult candidates take the tests for instrumental reasons, not merely by inner motivation. Only three things are of interest for them: the test to be easy, to be closely located and that they get the certificate. This draws the attention to quality assurance, and to the importance of creating standards for assuring the transparency of the competitions.

Péter Tibor Nagy commences his article *Highlights in the history of equivalence* by establishing that equivalence is at the border of separate problems in the history of education, pedagogy and socialization. He also states that "recognition" of degrees can mean two separate things. On one hand, the proof of some previous training is necessary in order to participate in certain education programs. On the other hand, recognition of degrees might also mean that there are certain social positions for which the "natural" selection only (based on background, wealth, or the power over state violence) is not enough, but of those who possess the necessary descent, wealth and army, *only individuals* going through a certain training process, and possessing a certain amount of knowledge can fulfil these positions. The article outlines the social interconnections between the equivalence of degrees, the university learning and the higher education qualifications, according to the main historical periods.

The study by *Zoltán Györgyi: Employers and diplomas – equivalence and competences* deals with the issue of comparability of diplomas, based on a survey conducted in 2006, examining the expectations of employers vis a vis their workers having higher education degrees. More exactly, the author expresses that the starting points of comparability could be the diplomas, which could be adapted in content to the expectations of the employers. In order to achieve this, on one hand, it is necessary to know the needs of the labour market, and therefrom, what could be considered as being the task of higher education. According to Györgyi, the most important task would be that those concerned should reach a conclusion on the matter.

István Polónyi: Administration instead of market? Education, diplomas and competencies in a new era examines from an economic educational approach the transformations characterizing education in today's economy, labelled as informational, post-industrial, knowledge-based; he also discusses how these affect the recognition of diplomas and degrees. After an overview of the specificities of the post-industrial period, he points out that the effect of this era on education might derive from the massification of education, and from the growing need for professionals in the services sector. The fast expanding education moves out from the educational system, triggering out regulatory state measures. Globalisation, as well as integration, acts in the same direction, demanding free movement of labour and generally employable labour skills on the global (or integrated) labour market. Nevertheless, this requires the equivalence of degrees, then, gradually, the similarity of educational systems, and later, the equivalence of gained competences. These processes reside the extension of state (or EU) bureaucratic coordination. Whatever is left to the competence and sovereignty of the American employers and workers, in Europe is decided by central competence classifications and compelling systems of agreements. The question whether the state-ruled market is able to countervail the dynamism of the free market, is a very serious one.

Text of István Polónyi – translated by Ágota Szentannai

