

Theses of the PhD Dissertation

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HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN BÉKÉS COUNTY IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

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Topic and Objectives of the Treatise

The study aims to discover, by analysing quantity and quality changes, the historical perspective of public education and call the attention to special regional values through the example of Békés County in the light of the country-wide state and ecclesiastical tendencies. The researcher's intention includes showing the various churches' role in running different types of school and the Slovakian minority's fight for preserving their identity, by the way of questioning statistics, central documents and the county's educational files regarding the national groups.

In Hungary, just as anywhere in the world, political changes have a considerable impact on public education. During the 20th century more transformations of great consequence perverted the Hungarian society, affecting remarkably all the segments of school-life. The author treats the tendencies of the history of education during the twenty years following the Trianon Treaty, with special regard to the general and specific features of schooling in Békés County. The period between the two World Wars is of special importance in the history of the Hungarian education, since, notwithstanding a school network truncated by the annexations

and the economic setback caused by the lost war, there were considerable changes in the structure, administration, curricula and almost all spheres of education.

We believe that having joined the European Union we cannot neglect the values of the past. Treating the prehistory of the today policy of education may make us understand more regional factors and objective causes affecting the present practice of public education. It includes some issues of our times: e.g. the geographical, economic and social determination of the different level schools and the education-historical lesson that public education cannot do without its being harmony with the regional social concepts.

This present work addresses the history of education in Békés County in the period between the two World Wars investigating comprehensively the factors determining the conditions and operation of the county's school system, school-selection and study activities of school-age pupils.

Methods Applied

In the study's central focus there is a general survey of the elementary people's school, the urban and secondary schools following the four classes of basic education, and the teacher's training and practical secondary education based on the urban or the lower four classes of secondary schools, as well as the upper-level commercial and upper-level agricultural education to which a separate chapter is devoted.

The reason for the priority given to these types of institutions is that, beside the compulsory elementary people's school, these secondary schools were the most prevailing every-day schools, thus in our hypothesis relevant conclusions can be drawn from the details of the students attending them about the attitude to education of the population ranking in different social groups and the schooling tendencies in the county.

Beyond descriptions we have also applied theoretical-analysing methods, comparing in some cases the institutions not only with each other but with the relevant nationwide tendencies. The research is based on a general overview of the historical or education - historical literature regarding

the 1920–30s, including Kunó Kleberberg, Gyula Kornis and Bálint Hóman's books, writings.

The materials concerning the county were collected in libraries and archives. The information gained from the sub-prefect's reports located in the Békés County Archive, the school-inspectors' reports, the school-board's minutes, the urban, secondary, upper-level commercial and upper-level agricultural schools' matricula, certificates, annals, statistics submitted to the Békés County Administration Committee were completed with the files of the General Directorship of the Educational District of secondary and urban schools, placed in the Csongrád County Archive.

The laws cited from the National Code of Laws, the curricula, instructions issued by the Ministry of Religion and Education represent the main tendencies of the educational policy of the given period, while the attitudes to schooling are authentically shown by the period's pedagogical journals like the Evangelical People's School, Protestant Review and the Educational Review published in Szeged. Pedagogues from Békés County regularly published in these press organs, so the articles genuinely reflect the problems, proposals, methodical instructions, curriculum debates preoccupying the pedagogues

and educational superiors' circles in the elementary people's schools, urban schools, teachers' training school and secondary schools of the county in the 1920–30s.

The study addresses with special attention the attitude of the Slovak minority living under pressure of assimilation to the issues of education in the 1920–30s.

Relation of the given school-type and the minority-education is treated at all topics in an individual sub-chapter, indicating that the Slovaks did not live separately in the county, but took part organically, just as in all other parts of life, in the course of the Hungarian education. The county's tendencies regarding the Slovakian minority-education are followed in the documents placed in the National Evangelical Archive and the local archives of the Evangelical communities of Békéscsaba and Szarvas.

Some sources were approached with critics in our work and in case of conflict of data we used only the facts which were adequately proved.

Outcomes

- Evaluation of the period between the two World Wars depends on political affinities in the Hungarian literature. Attributes used before the change of political system “irredentist”, “chauvinist”, “nationalist” have disappeared in the publications after 1990. From then onwards works resting on more solid grounds have come to light, avoiding distorting the historical facts and stressing the values as well of the educational policy of the decades following the Trianon shock. The two great culture-politicians of this age Kunó Klebelsberg and Bálint Hóman regarded education, science and culture as a strategic sector of national policy. The outcomes of their material and structural concepts are still in work nowadays (clinics, research institutes, technical training, eight-year elementary education etc.) and especially Klebelsberg had a Europe-wide horizon relevant even in the 21st century.

- There are more similarities observable between the past and the present times. The most striking fact is that the school system in the 1920–30s reflected the contemporary social structure, just as it does today. It means that the size of the settlements was in close correlation with the level of the schools working there. In towns or bigger settlements, schools

of more importance were functioning, while in villages or farm-centres children learned in crowded, usually undivided elementary schools. Likewise in the 21st century, secondary schools are located only in places with a larger population. This generates migration, as children aspiring for higher qualification should leave their living place. There were no tertiary institutions operating in Békés County, so the ambition to have a diploma could not be fulfilled without moving to other regions. More of the young people beginning an intellectual career did not return to the county, thus the population’s education-level rose very slowly. This acute problem came up again in the second half of the 20th century. The county’s leaders learning from the structural gaps of the past did their best to extend the school system and bring tertiary education into Békés County.

- In pursuit of realising certain education–political concepts it is not enough to declare laws or decrees but essential to create material background for the implementation of the planned project. E.g. the idea of compulsory elementary education was formulated as early as in Baron Eötvös’ law on people’s education but cannot be realised before Kunó Klebelsberg issued Act VII of year 1926 on the expansion of

people's schools. Due to this law in Békés County 134 new classrooms and 58 teacher's apartments were built, accordingly reducing to 1/3 the number of those not attending school among school-age children.

- As early as the 1920s teachers noticed that the discrepancies in children's study progress cannot be attributed alone to the differences in abilities. The social background played also a crucial role in the fallback of many children not able to keep up with their classmates. These children were usually raised up in families not really motivating them for general cultural reception. With regard to the social gaps pedagogues received well the teacher's freedom guaranteed by the Curriculum Instruction. Discussions took place in the various professional training courses on that it wasn't enough to widen but also essential to deepen the knowledge acquired. Less but reliable learning is more fruitful for the students who cannot make use of superficial knowledge in practical life. Differentiation was another major issue in these circles apprehending that for some students the pace should be slowed down while others could bear larger amount of school-work.

- Békés County is also a region of more co-existing minorities. Out of the Slovakian, German, Romanian

population we have selected specifically the Slovaks in our study for examining their schooling customs. The reason for highlighting them is that this population outnumbers by many times any other minorities in the county and their ratio at national level is also considerably high. In Békés County more Slovaks live than in the rest of Hungary as a whole.

- A basic issue of approaching the question of minorities is education. In the regions inhabited by Slovaks, in Békéscsaba, Szarvas and Tótkomlós and their peripheries, in the elementary people's schools children were taught Slovakian writing and reading, moreover, at the parents' desire, the Bible-classes were held in Slovakian. Thanks primarily to the Evangelical Church holding their mission to help the families settled down in the 18th century preserving their identity, as late as the 1930s ¾ of students with Slovakian background had the chance to learn their mother-tongue in the elementary school. This may contribute to that Slovaks, facing central political pressure for their assimilation at the time, though having decreased in their numbers are keeping their language and culture up till now. In the 21st century in Békéscsaba a grammar school, in the other two cities elementary schools are operating in which the language of instruction is Slovakian.

- As for the students of the secondary schools in Békés County we can observe some similarities and some specific differences if we compare the national data with those of the county. In accordance with the national average, Israelite students were overrepresented in their proportion in the secondary schools of Békés County. The fact that here as well they preferred the Evangelicals (Evangelical grammar schools were attended by twice more Israelite students than other grammar schools) confirms the outcome of Viktor Karády. A specific feature in Békés County was the parents' occupation: most of the population of the county (situated in the Great Plain) lived by agriculture, consequently all secondary schools were attended by children coming from families ranking in lower social groups.

- Protestant dominance typical of the county characteristically shaped the school-system as well. While in Hungary 1/5 of the elementary people's schools were run by Protestants, in Békés County 3/5 of the people's schools were supervised by them. Regarding secondary schools they had an even larger share. Out of seven secondary schools, a state, a Catholic, three Evangelical and two Reformed institutions provided learning opportunities for the county's students. The

only Evangelical teacher's training school was set up in Szarvas, where the Evangelical dominance was evident, though the picture should be completed with the fact that most of them came from other counties. Out of the urban schools and technical schools no more than one was run by a church (Catholic), indicating that in accordance with the national trends the Protestants withdrew from these types of schools.

- Planning is an important factor of establishing and running the educational structure. A positive outcome can be achieved if the leaders of the educational sector don't insist stiffly on the frame of the structure, but response flexibly to the social demands. A response of this kind came from the side of the top-leaders when they supported the local initiative for extending the agricultural training in the urban schools of Orosháza and Békéscsaba. A new type of school, an upper-level agricultural school, was established, following on one hand Sámuel Tessedik's tradition, meeting on the other hand the demands of the population living by agriculture in the region.

- Schools, from the elementary to the secondary schools, were in service of not only the school-age children but the adult population as well. Most of the programmes organised by the

People's Educational Committee were held in the elementary and secondary schools, and the county's pedagogue society undertook an active role in holding lectures, and running courses for grown-up people.

- Though the research treats the events of a period taking place 80-90 years ago, the topic bears messages for today as well. In our opinion it is difficult to elaborate a successful education-political concept if we focus only on the challenges of the future and easily pass our ancestors' valuable experiences. This encourages us to reevaluate the 20th century's Hungarian pedagogical ideas. We need to learn from the past and don't take pain to re-discover those used as early as decades ago in Hungarian schools. The issues of the future cannot be approached adequately unless we combine the up-to-date know-how with the values of the past and avoid repeating the old times' failures. We dare to claim that our history of education has numerous values that may give solid ground as well for addressing the issues of the educational affairs today.

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