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Parochial Schools and PISA Effectiveness in Three Central European Countries

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Abstract. In the 2000s, PISA surveys provided a real shock to the world of research on education. The hope of researchers of parochial schools was to receive a powerful measurement tool to benchmark performance of pupils and schools on an international scale. Unfortunately, the public PISA databases do not conclusively reveal whether the examined schools are public, private, or parochial. Furthermore, the PISA sampling is not representative regarding school sectors. There were, however, countries in every PISA wave where private schools performed better than their public counterparts, once the factor of parental background was taken into consideration. Recently, researchers have attributed this phenomenon to school climate and/or to educational values that may indicate a new type of effectiveness based on work values and on long-term returns on investments. During our analysis, we found that intersectional differences reported in scientific literature could be observed in Slovakia and Hungary, to the advantage of the parochial sector. In the third researched country, Poland, the advantage of the independent, private sector is considerable, compared to which the government-supported parochial schools are at a disadvantage.[1] We found that in the parochial sector, the dominant force of social background is more moderate than is the case in public schools. We also specifically examined reading comprehension competencies, as PISA had done in 2009.

Keywords: PISA, private schools, parochial schools, parental values, school performance

1 In Hungary and Slovakia, there were not any independent, non-public schools in the sample; this sector is present here at a very low rate.

Introduction

Surveys intending to make international comparisons based on whether a school is public, private, or parochial published significant results even before the turn of the millennium. Typical of these studies were the variety of cultural and social backgrounds of the examined schools and concepts pupils had of what constitutes effective learning. Some researchers rely on intelligence values, others focus on grades, and there are also those who use efficiency measurements of individual subjects to measure pupils' skills and knowledge (Dronkers and Hemsing 1999, Uerz et al. 2004). It is typical for schools in the private sector to be committed to focusing on their own sets of values and pedagogic values; their pedagogical and educational activities are strongly focused on values, and such schools select their pupils in order to get a group of parents and pupils with strong connections to these value sets (Pusztai 2011a). Their orientation to a chosen set of values determines how they perceive their own skills and knowledge. Parochial schools, even within the non-public sector, typically have holistic and long-term concepts of effectiveness which are independent of the results achieved in their teaching of subjects (Pusztai 2004, Morvai-Sebestyén 2014).

Unlike previously published, internationally comparative studies of the effectiveness of education in teaching skills and knowledge, which were tied to the factors of an examined nation's cultural determination and its educational system, i.e. its national curriculum, PISA chose to conduct a long-term study on the effectiveness of education in relation to the labour market although PISA's study has a rather more limited horizontal approach than the one mentioned above. There was a great international stir after the first PISA results were released, as they practically shocked politicians and public opinion in some countries. However, in other countries, the opinion of these same results was that they felt the functional principles of their own educational systems had been verified. Results in the international reports were also assessed by sectors, and from the beginning, they demonstrated the particular success of non-public schools. While PISA became such a catchword that it could be used even to justify a wide range of educational policy decisions, PISA's reports also led to non-public sector schools having to provide embarrassing explanations about their published levels of effectiveness in providing skills and knowledge (OECD 2012).

One of the characteristics of our own study of school sectors concerns the differences between how they are managed, whether as public, private, or parochial schools. Especially important for our study are the differences in their effectiveness in providing skills and knowledge. We generate effectiveness indexes on the bases of the schools' sociological and educational-sociological traditions. At first, we considered student progress in the educational system as one of the standard indexes, but because of the changes in the admission procedures for

higher education, which now allow those pupils into colleges and universities who earlier would never have made the cut, this index proved to be a decreasingly appropriate indicator. We therefore turned to devising other effectiveness indexes for predicting how pupils, after leaving the educational system, find their places in society as citizens, on the labour market, and in the family. We also studied what predictive power these indexes have, how they are related to each other and what kinds of qualities those schools possess which might strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of the education measured by such indexes. In harmony with internationally published studies, we found the best predicting indicators in the areas of work ethic, attitude to work, and the results for the efficiency of extra-curricular activities (Pusztai 2004, 2009, 2011a; Bacskai 2008).

School management in OECD data

Organized by the OECD, PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) measures, on an international scale, the levels of skills and knowledge of pupils. In doing so, it aims to make assessments of the competence of pupils in applying their knowledge and skills on the labour market, while presenting its results for countries and educational systems in such a manner that each nation's results may be compared with any others. PISA measures such knowledge and skills that are attainable during primary and secondary education, in the areas of reading, mathematics, and science. The first measurement was made in 2000. Since then, the study has been organized every three years, emphasizing different competence areas each time. Mathematical and reading comprehension abilities are analysed on the bases of less questions. The survey evaluates 15-year-old pupils, who in most of the analysed educational systems are approaching their school-leaving age. The number of participant countries has been increasing, with even non-OECD countries joining the research; in addition to the 32 partner countries which took part in the 2009 survey, 33 other countries also took part in the PISA. During the research, the pupils' knowledge was standardized, the questionnaires – including those researching the pupils' social backgrounds, attitudes, study habits, and related conditions – were translated into the assessed pupils' mother tongues. The schools' management also fill in questionnaires, in which they provide information concerning the operational conditions of their institutions (e.g. number of qualified teachers, probable deficiencies, etc.). In some countries, parents are also provided with their own questionnaires to be filled in (Balázsi et al. 2010b.).

The PISA surveys could be perfectly suitable for studying the results of the public, private, and parochial educational sectors because of their cyclic quality and their global focus; however, there is little possibility for this as a consequence of the publication of the obtained data and the actual sampling procedures used by PISA.

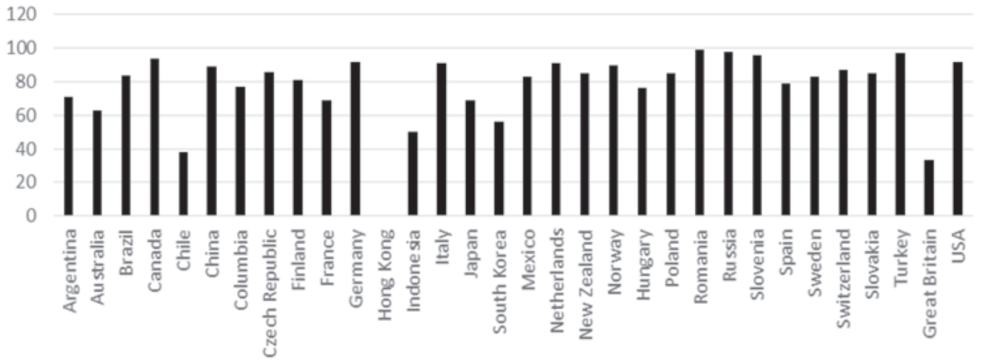
It is a problematic point that the PISA measurements performed by the OECD distinguish between three different sectors of school management in their data entry. Schools that are established and maintained by public or centralized budgets (e.g. local governments or higher educational institutes) belong to the state (public) sector. In the educational systems of PISA-examined countries, these kinds of institutes are in the overwhelming majority. The second institutional circle is that of government-dependent, private institutes. These are not established by a state organization, but by other entities, e.g. a church, foundation, or commercial enterprise, but they still receive more than 50% of the amount they need to function from their government. A great number of these types of schools are found in The Netherlands,[2] Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Most of these are actually parochial schools. The third small group is the group of non-public schools towards which the government either does not contribute or, if so, only to a small degree. These independent private institutes are dependent on foundational supports, tuition fees, donations and governmental budget resources are less than the half of their operation expenses. In Europe, this institutional form is rare, approaching a rate of 10% only in Malta, Cyprus, and Portugal. However, in other regions (e.g. in Brazil or Dubai), their rates are considerable (Key Data 2012). In most OECD countries, schools established by non-public organizations can receive government support if they meet the legally mandated requirements of the centrally-defined syllabus or educational requirement system. In such cases, the government contracts with the institution and contributes to its maintenance. The form, method, and the quantity of such supports can vary widely by country (Pusztai 2004). According to the data published for the year 2012, Hungary can be found in the mid-range of those countries with greater educational traditions and among those countries which possess broader parochial, non-public sectors and which also have educational systems almost solely based in the public sector (such as China, Russia, or Romania) (OECD 2014).

In addition to its financial approach, PISA databases are not structured in such a manner to reflect the actual nature of a school's administration, when it is listed as a non-public sector school. Among the data on school administration, all in all, there is only one section from which we can hope to garner information on this question,[3] i.e. the question about the admission of pupils. The frequently

2 Classification of schools in the Netherlands changed in the year 2012 or it is not consistent in OECD data. The publication *Education at a Glance* (2014) indicates a rate of 91% for public-run schools in the Netherlands, while on the basis of the Dutch pupils who filled in PISA tests this rate is only 33.6%.

3 How often do they take into consideration the following during the admission of pupils? (A) scholarly achievement of the student; (b) the recommendation of the pupil's previous school; (c) the demands of the parents regarding educational and religious views; (d) the interest of the pupil in special programmes; (e) giving preference to those who belong to one family and (f) local pupils.

provided answer variations cannot be used in further analysis, primarily because they are not absolute in nature. Their more problematic deficiency is that they understand the features of an educational system in dimensions that greatly differ from one another.



Source: *Education at a Glance* (2014: 416)

Graph 1. *Rate of number of the pupils studying in the public sector at ISCED Level 3.*

Parochial or foundation-run schools have very different educational aims, operating features and parental backgrounds – among other differences. Moreover, parochial or foundational subsystems do not present a unified picture, whether examined on their own or even within a single country. At what rate public and non-public schools exist in a country and how big is the share of parochial schools within this rate depend on the traditions of the educational system and the development of educational sectors within the examined country. The differences among these functions are not reflected in the international comparison as such comparisons prefer to illustrate the effectiveness of non-public schools in a unified model, which simply gives a false picture of reality.

The advantage of non-public schools in PISA

We have seen what kinds of limits research of the non-public sector confronts. On the other hand, we pointed out that – in every PISA wave – in several countries there were differences in the effectiveness of the development of skills and competencies among school administrative sectors. As early as the first measurement, it was registered that non-public schools are more effective. This research is primarily attributed to Jaap Dronkers and his research fellows, who remind us the intersectoral differences and the necessity of their further analysis (Dronkers 2004, Dronkers and Robert 2005, Dronkers and Avram 2009).

They found that the PISA scores of pupils learning in government-aided (mostly parochial), non-public schools were higher than those of pupils studying in other sectors. In the traditional educational political narrative, this is usually explained by the higher social status of pupils' families in the government-aided private sector. Researchers also proved that there is considerable difference between the effectiveness of the public and non-public sectors when comparing the results of pupils with similar backgrounds. Several additional factors were taken into consideration in examining the causes for this result. Especially those factors have been examined that are equally typical for both private sectors, such as the different circumstances of school management and school autonomy, but there were analysed also independent factors such as the social background of the pupils, the historical and social differences, and even the school atmosphere. Between the two kinds of non-public and public schools, significant differences were revealed in every dimension. During the multivariate analysis, it turned out that the efficiency of learning skills and knowledge in private institutes not receiving government support was lower both in the case of the public and government-supported private institutes with pupils from the same backgrounds. This also means that the better performance of parochial schools cannot be explained in itself by school management, the social background of the pupils, or the differences between the developments of the non-public sector because the two kinds of non-public school sectors are very similar. However, the more favourable nature of a school's climate may explain the difference. Nonetheless, the positive effect of the school sector does not succeed equally in the case of every student. The form of school administration exerted a positive influence on the results of pupils from less good social backgrounds than their mates from better backgrounds, so parochial institutes created more equal opportunities. As we mentioned earlier, in these cases, researchers did not have the chance to distinguish between the types of organizations actually running the schools in the two private sectors, but in the researched countries, schools in the government-aided private sector are traditionally parochial schools.

German researchers completed research strictly on parochial schools (Standfest et al. 2005), placing at the centre of their analysis the efficiency of teaching skills and knowledge in these schools and a school's ability to reduce social disadvantage. Seen on the basis of their results, the 2000 PISA survey proved the advantage of German Lutheran schools. They especially found the school and home environments to be crucial, as well as how the values supported by the pupils' families and the teaching staff resembled each other. Where this was the case, the efficiency of passing on skills and knowledge of the school was significantly higher than expected. Vocational schools were analysed separately. The advantage of the parochial sector reduced social disadvantage, so they found that pupils from less advantageous backgrounds also performed better. On the

other hand, in German parochial vocational schools, PISA scores were higher in an absolute sense, even though this difference was not considerable in grammar schools. Explanations were found mainly in the factors of school climate; teacher–student relationships in parochial schools were found to be better, while the student–student relationship showed no significant differences. Thus, the advantage of the parochial sector in Germany was found in the harmony of values between the families and the schools and in good teacher–student relationships.

On the basis of the examined literature, we could see that the advantage of the efficiency of skills and knowledge learning in parochial or non-public schools are usually typical, but not everywhere. We think that it is worth examining how pupils' family backgrounds influence the sector's efficiency advantages. We think that it is important to do so in such a manner as not to focus on the final results of school selection, but to actually convey the real added value of these schools. In the PISA database, there is a socio-cultural family index created on the basis of the following variables: the highest level of education of the student's parents; their status on the labour market; types of products purchased for the home, including cultural elements, as well as goods facilitating learning (PISA 2009). In different PISA publications, filtering of the effects of these on the index is continuously mentioned with strong emphasis. We note that even this index does not deal with horizontal social differences (region, type of settlement inhabited), and thus it gives suitable information neither on the stratification for Hungarian nor for many other socially-geographically non-homogenous countries. If we study the data from 2012, we can see that, e.g. in Shanghai, South Korea, and Canada, the efficiency advantage of the private sector is significant, but there is no way to distinguish between the types of organizations actually running the schools. In Finland, pupils of non-public institutes also achieve better scores even if we are controlling the family background variable. We know that in Hungary there are very few parochial Lutheran schools, thus this shows realistically the advantage of foundation-run schools. In Poland, the data tend to show the advantage of the parochial but also independent, private sectors. In Slovakia and Hungary, the non-public sector also has an advantage, but for neither of these countries do we also know from which kinds of schools the pupils are included in the sample. On the other hand, e.g. in Switzerland, Japan, and Hong Kong, pupils in the public sector accomplish better. Studying the data, it is also conspicuous that in those countries where excellent test results are boasted about, the entered data for non-public schools are growing (OECD 2014).

Thus, we can see that it is different for each educational system that where, why, and how much the pupils in the non-public sector accomplish, whether better or worse. For this reason, it would be worth collecting data more efficiently in order to see how the non-public sector stands on efficiency of learning of skills and knowledge, then to which segment of the sector this result relates and

what could the reason be for certain results. If we can succeed in finding the reasons behind these questions, it would be beneficial towards improving state-run education, although we should not use examples coming from outside the system but rather to extend those good practices which are already prevalent in the education system. Therefore, it is worth thinking over how much the competence measured as a result of PISA surveys can be independent from the disposition rooted in social status.

According to Bourdieu, a class-specific disposition carries with it those predispositions which put into practice an implicit pedagogical action, requiring initial familiarity with the dominant culture, offering information which can be acquired only by subjects endowed with the system of predispositions that is the condition for the success of the transmission and of the inculcation of the culture. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture, related to a specific period of time and, as regards a pupil's reaction to cultural goods, is seen especially in a pupil's either familiar or convulsive reaction to school work (Bourdieu 1978, Nash 2002). It seems that the secret of schools run by religious organizations lays in their ability to modify the attitudes of their pupils which were originally based on status-formed disposition. As Bourdieu says, this can become possible with the help of a specific ethos.

Our research

In our research, we made a comparison of reading comprehension results of public and parochial schools of the PISA database from 2009. We worked with this database (and not with the latest from 2012) because of the difficulties of identification, as mentioned above. In this database, we could exactly identify which schools were parochial schools. In attempting to try to identify which kind of organization managed a school, we often found it very difficult to reach the responsible international contact (e.g. because of institutional conversions, personnel changes) who had both the information and the authority to give us the required data. Still, even when we could reach the right contact person, our inquiry was often received with suspicion, so it seems that the theme of parochial schools is still a sensitive issue in Central Europe. We did not get information on the Polish independent private sector from the informants because of the reasons mentioned above.

In this chapter, we would like to show briefly in what surroundings and with what backgrounds parochial institutes of the three studied countries (Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland) operate. We are only concentrating on their most significant

features and differences, and in the case of their historical overview we mostly limit our discussion to the years since the fall of communism in Central-Eastern Europe, in 1989–1990.

In the three of the concerned Central European countries, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, the rate of parochial pupils in the PISA sampling is between two and six percent. We analyse the results and answers of these pupils below.

The studied region and its parochial schools after 1989

We have information on the religiousness of the three countries from the research study Aufbruch 2007 (Tomka and Zulehner 2008). In Slovakia and Poland, the rate of those who belong to a church is high, at 84 and 90%, respectively, while in Hungary it is only 51.4%. Therefore, from this point of view, parochial institutions operate in different religious atmospheres. The picture becomes more unclear if we study how many citizens are attached to their churches more strongly or less strongly. We see that in Poland the level of ecclesial religiousness is significantly higher than in Slovakia (actually, after Poland, Romania ranks second among all examined countries in the Aufbruch 2007 study) and in Hungary the figures are proportionally below the average figures the Aufbruch 2007 research provides in both categories (*Table 1*).

Table 1. *The proportion of those who belong to a church as a function of the strength of their attachment for three countries (%)*

	Attached less strongly	Attached more strongly
Hungary	21.4	30
Slovak Republic	46	38
Poland	21	69

Source of data: Aufbruch 2007

As for the denominational rates, in Poland, almost every church member is Roman Catholic. The rate of Roman Catholics in Slovakia is 69%, while 7% are Lutheran and 2% Reformed Christian, the latter of whom are mostly Hungarian in ethnicity. In Hungary, half of the population is Roman Catholic, the second more populous confession is Reformed Christian (16%), with Lutherans and Greek Catholics composing roughly 3-3% of the population.

The rates of attendance and the histories of the parochial schools differ among the countries of the region. After the political transformation in the 1990s, several parochial schools started to operate. Those started by foundations were largely the first schools to be founded and to start to operate as educational institutes after the elimination of the state monopoly. At the time of communism, only few parochial schools were tolerated in Poland and Hungary (a total of 5 schools in

Hungary). After the fall of communism in 1989, a number of new parochial schools were established. There were not any parochial schools in Slovakia before 1989, so there were no continuous traditions to build on there. Where such schools had existed in the former Warsaw Pact countries, these institutions paved the way for expansion and new schools. As they perform public duties, the state financed the better part of their educational programmes. That is why international literature, as we mentioned, lists the church sector also in the government-aided private sector. In Poland, this category is made up only of parochial schools, but the remaining portion of parochial institutes belongs to the independent private sector.

Results

Below, we study whether we can speak about the effectiveness of teaching skills and knowledge competencies in the parochial sector, similar to what was documented by the literature during the analysis of the PISA 2009 data. If we can, then we shall see whether this effectiveness stems from the backgrounds of the pupils or whether other factors contributed to this success.

The data of *Table 2* show the difference between the effectiveness of teaching skills and knowledge competencies and the social background of the pupils who attend schools in the different sectors in each country. Here, we measured this effectiveness with PISA ability point of the effectiveness of learning the skill of reading comprehension,[4] which is a standardized measure. We measured family background using a consolidated social cultural index (ESCS).[5] We chose this method from among the traditionally used indexes because this method was the most appropriate for measuring the effectiveness of reading comprehension (r^2).

Table 2. *Pupils and results in the PISA 2009 in the three Central European countries*

		Public	**Private**	**Government-aided parochial**
Hungary	Reading comprehension effectiveness (PISA score)	497	475	550
	The index of economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS)	-0.2	-0.25	0.51
Poland	Reading comprehension effectiveness (PISA score)	501	569	530

4 The average score among OECD countries is 500 points and the standard deviation is 100 points.

5 The index was created using student reports on parental occupation, the highest level of parental education, and an index of home possessions related to family wealth, home educational resources, and possessions related to "classical" culture in the family home. 0 centred 1 dispersion normalized index. This PISA index is an index with a value of -1 and 1. The average value among OECD countries is 0. If the value is negative, the index is below the OECD average.

		Public	Private	Government-aided parochial
	The index of economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS)	-0.3	1.1	-0.2
Slovak Republic	Reading comprehension effectiveness (PISA score)	476	474	529
	The index of economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS)	-0.1	-0.03	0.19

Source: PISA 2009 datas

The data reveals that the background and results of pupils who belong to public, parochial, and other private sectors develop differently in each country. In Hungary and Slovakia, parochial schools accomplish the best results, while in Poland the pupils from the private sector schools do. Here, of course, it is about averages, as in both Hungary and Slovakia public sector school types are more diverse in form, while the parochial type schools are relatively homogeneous. Mostly, grammar schools belong here; in Poland, this age-group takes part in unified, lower secondary education (Gimazjum; see above). Usually, parental background and the effectiveness of education visibly go together; therefore, a pupil's family background largely determines the pupil's effectiveness in learning skills and knowledge competencies. Simultaneously, this does not occur on the same scale. In Hungary and Slovakia, in the public sector, the predictive power of parental background is stronger (r^2=0.25 and 0.14) than in the parochial sector (r^2=0.19 and 0.08), while in Poland it is higher (public r^2=0.14, parochial r^2=0.27).

We analysed the reasons behind the differences among the sectors using multivariate regression calculation. It comes as no surprise that those pupils obtained the highest scores on the reading comprehension tests who read a lot and liked reading. The main predictor among several different possibilities (parental background, features of school climate, type of organization running a school) proved to be the effect of the love of reading. In Hungary and Slovakia, effectiveness of learning the skill of reading comprehension is most closely connected with the type of school visited. The index of the love of reading directly follows this. In Poland, the situation is different in this respect as school type was of no significance. This is why the love of reading ranked first in this country (see *Table 4*).

It is evident that there is a significant relationship between the parochial sector and learning effectiveness. During our analyses, we found that in the PISA 2009 study, the relation between the school sector and the maintainer is strong everywhere. However, for Polish schools, we can report the ascendancy of the private sector over parochial schools (see above); with multivariate regression analyses, the parochial-organization-run schools were ranked lower. In Slovakia, if we study the

school type, we find that the effect of parochial schools corresponds with the effect of grammar schools as school type – so not the effect of the organization running a school but the school type – is stronger. Yet, in the case of Hungarian pupils, it is noticeable that, after school type, social background, and pupil behaviour, the subsequent explanatory variable is the parochial organization which runs the school. In the studied countries, according to published research studies, the love of reading gives the effective advantage of pupils from parochial schools. In parochial schools, many more pupils learn for whom reading is an important and pleasurable activity (see *Table 3*). Attila Nagy, in a research on reading comprehension, argues that this relation is probable, but it is still not proved (Nagy 2011).

Table 3. *Averages of the love of reading index*[6] *in each country and sector (averages)*

	Public	**Private**	**Parochial**
Hungary	0.12	-0.12	0.68
Poland	0.01	0.6	0.19
Slovak Republic	-0.12	0.11	0.67

Source: PISA 2009 data

As the love of reading became the most determinative factor, we turned to study this, as well as traditional effectiveness indicators. We determined the average of the index and we divided the pupils into separate groups as to whether they were above or below the average. We compared those pupils who liked reading more and less than the average, and investigated what sectors, school types they visited and which schools they graduated from (*Table 4*).

Table 4. *Logistic regression outputs. The dependent variable is the students' reading habit, i.e. if the student reads more than the average or not.*[7]

			Exp. (B)
Hungary	school type	grammar school	5.97[7]
		vocational	1.86
		primary school (reference group)	
	maintainer	other non-public	0.59

6 Joint and individual features of the love of reading are included. 0 centred 1 dispersion normalized index. From among several different statements, the pupils used a 1–4 scale to report how much they agree with a listed statement. Such statements included: "I only read if it is a must or if I have to"; "Reading is my favourite activity"; "I like talking about books with others"; "I like going to bookshops and the library"; "Reading is a waste of time for me." This PISA index is an index with a value of -1 and 1. The average value among OECD countries is 0. If the value is negative, the index is below the OECD average.

7 Compared to the constant (primary school), in the group, the number of those who like reading more than the average raises with such a chance.

			Exp. (B)
		church	3.99
		public (reference group)	
	social background	social background	1.6
	school background	school background	1.47
Poland	maintainer	other non-public	2.9
		church	1.5
		public (reference group)	
	social background	social background	1.55
	school background	school background	1.27
Slovak Republic	school type	grammar school	2.68
		vocational	0.81
		primary school (reference group)	
	maintainer	other non-public	1.5
		church	1.75
		public (reference group)	
	social background	social background	1.46
	school background	school background	1.3

Source: PISA 2009 data

We can see that in the case of Hungarian and Slovakian schools the type of school is determinative. Among grammar school pupils, in Hungary, almost six times more pupils enjoyed reading in comparison with the average. Among the same level of Slovak pupils, 2.5 times more liked reading more than the average. In Hungary, the effect of parochial schools is also considerable; this effect represents an almost four-fold increase compared to publicly-run schools. If we study the attitudes related to reading in each country and sector, we find that the attitudes of Hungarian parochial pupils typically differ from pupils of other sectors. The rate of those who read because it is only a must or just for getting information is significantly less. Fewer consider reading to be a waste of time and for most of them reading is their most favourite free-time activity. Social factors related to books also appear more strongly, e.g. these pupils are happy to receive a book as a gift or like exchanging books with friends. However, there was no significant difference among sectors, e.g. among library use, going to bookshops, or having conversations about books. In Poland, we did not experience such a degree of difference; the responses of the three sectors were similar there. It was a surprising result that 60% of Polish pupils from parochial schools (2,814 children out of 4,870) are not happy if they receive books as presents, although in the other countries the majority likes getting books. In Slovakia, there is a characteristic difference between the parochial and the other two sectors, just as

is the case in Hungary. The exchange of books is also popular in the parochial schools in Slovakia, and there more pupils from parochial schools enjoy reading for the pleasure of it than for the sake of getting functional information.

Conclusion

In our paper, we showed that parochial schools have a special atmosphere. In a paradoxical way, the key to this stimulating institutional atmosphere probably lies in the undervaluation of its importance in PISA and other competency-based studies, as compared to the average school. How can this be happening? One qualitative study made in parochial schools illustrated that they do not consider grades or test scores to be predictors of how students will succeed in adulthood but rather the pupils' co-operating skills, trust, civil activity, common standards and aims, and how they support each other (Morvai and Sebestyén 2014). Research into how any of these considerations came into being would be a rather more complicated task. Background questionnaires used by PISA also try to reveal certain behaviour patterns and attitudes (in questionnaires for school administrators and pupils), but these do not serve as forecasters but rather for describing school environments. From a cyclical study of these, researchers have pointed out four areas: behaviour during lessons as a climate index; more serious school offences as indicators of school discipline; data of absenteeism and tardiness as a disciplinary index and aspiration to receive more education. However, the analysis of this last factor as an independent factor is rare. It is noticeable from the 2012 questionnaire that there are considerably less questions on values and aspirations compared to earlier trends. In their stead, prevalent were questions related to methods and habits of the study of mathematics and informatics, and the research was exaggeratedly simplified – for the sake of convenience – on studying with a view to the later labour market (whether he/she has been to a factory visit, whether the pupil knew how to write a CV or has inquired about how to apply for a student loan); in other words, questions which are not topical at this age. Questions of attitude to work are not considered.

In our study, we would have liked to show some of the new forces that can be learned about parochial school pupils in the Central European region, using data from the 2009 PISA study. We were able to study parochial schools in three countries (Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) as such a large amount of parochial pupils were included in the sample from here. As the sampling made during the study is not representative for parochial institutions, we are not allowed to argue that our statements are true for all parochial pupils. Still, they are essential for orientation as we do not know about any similar international database.

During our analysis, we determined that in Slovakia and Hungary, we can observe intersectional differences written in the secondary literature on the advantage of the parochial sector. In the third studied country, the advantage of the independent private sector is significant, compared to which government-aided parochial schools are at a disadvantage.[8] We also saw that in the parochial sector the determining power of social background is more moderate than in the public sector. Looking for the reasons behind such a finding, we determined that those who read a lot and who read for fun obtained considerably better results on the test, as well as those pupils from schools in those sectors which have advantages in their learning effectiveness (in Hungary and Slovakia, these pupils are from the parochial schools; in Poland, these pupils are from the private sector). It is in these schools that there are more pupils who read. In this respect, the determining effect of the school type prevails because in both Slovakia and Hungary the reading attitudes of grammar school pupils are significantly stronger than of those pupils who study at primary schools or in training institutions (vocational school, trade school). Of all factors mentioned, all other explanatory variables showed only a marginal effect. That the effect of school type appears in the results is because most parochial schools are grammar schools. However, in Hungary, it seems that the attitudes toward reading of those pupils in parochial institutions are more characteristic than those of other pupils or even of those parochial pupils from other countries (Bacskai 2012).

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