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**R&D partnership: The CEE story of the  
“Comprehensive Movement”**

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**Proposal Information**

*Aim*

The research aims to explore the links between school development and the demands of local communities in present-day Central and Eastern European (CEE) societies.

*Rationale*

Before the sociopolitical turn of 1989/1990, schools in Hungary and East Central Europe were strictly centralized and monopolized by the communist parties and the governments. Schools and curricula were centrally managed, subjects (e.g., Russian language teaching) were prescribed and compulsory, and the structure of education was uniformly defined – throughout the region – without considering the demands of the consumers

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(the local population). As an outcome of the Helsinki Process (since the mid-1970s), this rigorous centralization began to ease. In some countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary), new changes have been emerged (Cerych, 1997). The most well-known of them was the so-called “Comprehensive School.” A “New Deal” between “the Party” and the people involved more room for maneuvering for local communities and more flexible government policy considering some local needs and demands. This process has accelerated after the political turn of 1989/1990, especially in some countries (Poland and Hungary). As a result, the local population (its political actors) put increasing pressure on the government institutions (including the local schools) to meet their local needs and demands.

### *Background*

The “Comprehensive Movement” emerged in the 1960s and 1970s throughout Europe (Levin, 1978). In many of the member states (Laender) of the Federal Republic of Germany, lower secondary education has been restructured (Mitter & Shaw, 1991). Grades 7–9 were reconstructed during the long and well-designed Swedish school reform (Husén, 1989). Comprehensive secondary schools were also established, advertised, and published in England (Manning & Pischke, 2006). The role of local communities in the CEE states was increasingly emphasized during the process of the sociopolitical turn (1989/1990). The movement in Western Europe has the political aim to reduce social inequalities (Ford, 2006). In the CEE states, however, the role of the comprehensive school movement was to increase the influence of local communities on the schools (Kozma, 2018; Kozma & Tozser, 2016). By this way, the comprehensive issue in the CEE states became part of the long-debated question of “school and social environment” (Egelund & Laustsen, 2006; Viteritti, 2012). The new wave of educational centralization after 2010 in Hungary threatened the influence of local communities, which they had received by the political turn of 1989/1990. How do local communities try to enforce the influence on their schools in the new wave of educational centralization today? It is the question of the current research. This research fits into our research interests on social innovation, which is reported in NW 15 at ECER 2018 (Forray & Kozma, 2018).

### **Methods**

#### *Field of study*

Two upper secondary schools (ISCED 3) were selected from the central region of Hungary (Kozma et al., 2018). One of the secondary schools (X) came under the direction of the Ministry of Human Resources after the centralization process of 2010; the Ministry of National Economy runs the second one (Y). Before 2010, both were comprehensive in the sense that they offered general and vocational education and training programs

“under the same roofs” according to the needs and demands of the local population as well as the local economies and service sectors. Their “comprehensive school” profiles have been developed during the years after the political turn of 1989/1990 when the local administrations owned those institutions.

#### *Information sources*

The most important source of information was the interviews with teachers, heads of institutions, and political actors of the local communities (26 interviews between 2014 and 2018). Interviews were completed by personal observations (field studies). The results obtained were compared with those findings we obtained, studying cases, and stories of local social innovations (Kozma, 2016). We also obtained statistical and background data from official sources (Central Statistical Office, 2016, 2018).

#### *Story-telling and narratives*

We put particular emphasis on collecting narratives we heard from the interviewees (Hyvarinen, 2012). This method was used because the shifts of government education policies and their impact on institutions and their former local authorities after the year 2010 were a political transformation process. In our opinion, political transformations can be traced and followed primarily through stories of the political actors involved (Kozma, 2018).

#### *Results*

Based on the needs of the local population over the years (1990–2010), both schools have become more responsive (both academic and vocational programs). After 2010, the Ministry of Human Resources has transformed School X from a comprehensive school to a purely academic-type institution. Because of this, local people cannot study a profession at School X anymore. The local community and its leaders now feel that they are no longer partners with the institution. The Ministry of Economy has transformed School Y into a vocational training institution, in which, students, if they want, may choose academic programs. Institution Y is increasingly involved in the local economy; in addition to this, it became a partner of the nearby higher education institution (a place for practice). The institution is constantly becoming the town’s most important educational and cultural center.

#### **Conclusions**

The “story” of Schools X and Y is an example of the importance of R&D partnership in education. Schools are not only the institutions of the local community, nor are they

exclusively government organizations (in Central and Eastern Europe, the state and its authorities own about 80%–90% of the educational institutions). The “Comparative School” idea expresses this shared character well. The school is an organization that is influenced by the government on one hand and by the local community on the other hand. The influence of these two actors is in a dynamic balance. Traditional educational research recognized this dynamic balance for a long time. However, traditional education research usually approaches the schools from student performances or institutional management. The dynamic balance and its importance can only be understood if we consider schools and local communities as partners that collaborate in studying, developing, and maintaining the school as a government/local organization.

**Keywords:** comprehensive school, political transformation, Central Europe, social innovation

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