

A Pedagogical Attempt at Modernization of Education between the Two World Wars (English Teaching in Sárospatak)

The aim of my thesis work is to describe the changes in the field of education in the Calvinist College in Sárospatak between the Two World Wars.

The changes in the social status of the country after Trianon resulted in the independence of Hungary. The Hungarian Diplomatic Faculty was established. The political and economic changes at the beginning of 20th century formed new social background for education. Teaching classic languages seemed to become less important and a greater emphasis was placed on teaching modern languages. Decisions in education were influenced by politics and economic demands day by day.

The state tried to set limits to education, still there were no signs against denominational education. The Reformed Church had to sustain its influence on education gained between the two world wars. Supporting schools by the Church was part of its strategy. The Reformed Church was able to sustain its important role in the education of the future generations. Its secondary institutions with a good level of education could guarantee the replacement of the intellectuals.

The essay attempts to show the preliminaries of education for its modernization in the 19th and 20th centuries. The region, the town itself and the College were developing in interaction, however, the decisions of the Reformed Church also had an impact on the College. The development of Sárospatak in the second half of 19th century was far behind that of Miskolc. The Reformed Church supported the Debrecen Theological Academy in a far greater degree than the Academy in Sárospatak.

The viewpoint of the Church can be agreed with as the town of Debrecen was able to offer more financial means in order to establish a new university, and thus the Theological Academy became part of the university.

In Sárospatak there were no means to do it, and as a consequence of this it became less important than Debrecen or Miskolc at the beginning of the 20th century. What is even more painful is that after Trianon the town became peripheral. To overcome the difficulties and problems due to the political and economic changes the Board of the Sárospatak Calvinist College contacted the most important politicians, among others Governor Miklós Horthy. The traces found in the archives are referred to in my essay.

There was a debate in the staff of the College about the crisis and the possible solution of it. There were two parties, one of them supported teaching classical languages and theological education, the other wanted changes and modernization in education.

Kuno Klebelsberg was appointed to work out the educational concept of compensation of the College for losing its Law Faculty. As he was aware of the fact that the Reformed Church had traditionally good contacts with Great Britain, and it was the country that could support Hungary in its efforts for revision, Klebelsberg suggested establishing an English boarding school in Sárospatak in 1928.

The Calvinist College had significant independence between the two world wars both in economic and educational fields, and it could also support the goals of the Reformed Church. There was a certain shift in the structure of the College due to the attempts for modernization. The number of staff increased and better qualified teachers began working in Sárospatak. The effects of the changes accumulated in the 1940s.

The registration of pupils underwent some changes. Formerly it was only regional, but from 1939 it became nationwide. 80 % of the students in the upper classes was learning the English language and this fact also had an influence on the social and sectarian composition of the student. Learning English brought about changes in the methodology of teaching as well. There was a vivid and fruitful cultural contact between the British Embassy and the College of Sárospatak. (There were theatrical performances in English in Sárospatak and study tours of teachers and students in England and in the US.) The extension of cultural relations was aiming at gaining the support of Great Britain to change the Trianon borders.

The antidemocratic development after World War II. put an end to teaching English, the church school was nationalized, but the effects of the attempt to modernize education in Sárospatak can still be traced.