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The Bologna Process in Hungary

The author describes the influence of the Bologna Process to the higher education (system and policies) in Hungary. The first results of the cooperation of higher education institutions under EU umbrella, expected as well as unexpected changes in the organizations and cultures of the institutions are examined.

The paper is based on empirical researches and findings. Various interpretations of the 'Bologna Process' by different actors of the higher education policy arena in Hungary, their (the actors') various interests and drives are also questioned and described. Debates among policy makers and higher education practitioners, reflected in the media are presented. Besides, interviews of the leading figures of the Hungarian higher education on the one hand and the labour market on the other create the basis of the research results.

These results show the followings. There are significant differences among the relevant higher education actors about the necessity of the Bologna process. The role of the state in higher education as well as the legitimacy of other actors in the higher education policy formation are also debated. These debates go back partly to the different interpretation of the reform process (mentioned) and partly the different interests on higher education as public or private good. Some of the fightings are caused by a top-down policy shaping system which lacks the necessary social consensus making mechanisms and techniques.

To sum up: the Bologna process is a cover name for a radical reform in Hungarian higher education as well as in the entire society. The most vulnerable groups might be the students leaving the (new) system with the new BA or BSc degrees. They seem to be at risk because of the uncertainty of the new degrees (their values for further studies on the one hand and on the labour market on the other). If students of socially disadvantaged groups may leave the system *en mass* (which is expected by experts and urged by policy-makers), then the higher education system may not support the social equality, a social function having been developed after the political transition of 1989/90.

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Gabriella Pusztai and Péter Cs. Szabó

The Bologna Process as a Trojan Horse

Restructuring Higher Education in Hungary

Changes in higher education in Hungary are strongly related to those in the economic and social environment. Since the change of the political system in the late 1980s, Hungarian economic development has been marked by periods of contraction and expansion. Notwithstanding this process, influenced in part by the state's imposition of restrictive policies to control economic growth, the need for higher education has continually grown. The number of tertiary students increased fourfold between 1990 and 2003, and the student–teacher ratio increased from 5.9 to 16.5—more than two and a half times. By 2005 more than 40 percent of the appropriate age group participated in higher education. In Hungary these processes—such as growing needs and fewer resources—occurred within a decade and simultaneously, while the same processes were consecutive and lasted for a longer time in the West. Since other significant issues of higher educational policy remained unsolved during the alternation of cycles of restrictive and expansive educational policies, the current processes try to deal with the effects of this accelerated restructuring all at once during the “European harmonization.” The changes are called “reform” in Hungarian, an expression that has a positive second meaning in the Hungarian historical mind. Since restructuring of higher education is

interpreted in a wider aspect in Hungary, we examine this broader problem as the subject of article.

Hungarian higher education followed the Soviet pattern after World War II. Its characteristics were centralized direction, a low rate of participation, and determined professional training features. This can be connected to the fact that a binary structure of universities and colleges evolved in Hungary with relatively small institutions. This fact still has a powerful influence on the Hungarian implementation of the Bologna process. The reforms of higher education were and remain answers to all these challenges. The changes in Hungarian higher education did not begin with the Bologna process; they started during the change of political system, continued throughout the 1990s, and are still taking place. Higher education went through so many changes that the period after 1990 is regarded as the “the long decade of Hungarian higher education” (Fábri 2002).

Törölt: intense [PLEASE CLARIFY] vocational

The first higher education act [HEA] was enacted in 1993. Before that, all levels of education were regulated by the Unified Educational Act of 1985. The importance of the Act of 1993 lay in the decentralization of higher education, the establishment of the autonomy of higher education institutions, and the replacement of Soviet-type higher education with a modern one. A major element in making Hungarian higher education “eurocompatible” is the application of the European credit transfer system [ECTS], the result of a long process. Since 1990 there have been institutional attempts to restructure the old student assessment system and introduce an assessment system based on credit accumulation. ECTS was introduced legally with the modification of the Higher Education Act of 1996 and it became compulsory for all institutions from 2002. The question of diploma supplements belongs to the subject of *internationalization* as well. Their introduction was added in the modification of the HEA in 2003.

In 1999 Hungary was among the countries that signed the Bologna Declaration, which meant that Hungary undertook to establish a higher education system based on two major

cycles. The whole system has four levels in practice. At first, doctoral studies (the Ph.D.) were introduced in 1994, based on the 1993 Act. As for bachelor's studies, advanced vocational programs were introduced in 1997. The launching of three-year bachelor's studies became possible in 2004 with the modification of the Higher Education Act of 2003. However, at this time only a few programs were started in the field of information and communication technology. The two-cycle system was launched in 2006, as a result of the new Higher Education Act of 2005. B.A. and B.Sc. programs started at this time in all study fields. The process included the consolidation of more than 400 programs into 100 programs. In some fields, such as medicine, veterinary studies, pharmacology, dentistry, law, and architecture, the system kept the long single-cycle continuum.

Törölt: BSC [B.Sc.]

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The directing role of the state changed in the 1990s, as well, with the creation of different intermediary bodies. Concerning the Bologna process, different committees are now integrated by the Bologna board. One of the most significant intermediary bodies making decisions about the launch of new programs is the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC). Established in 1992, from 1993 its major task has been the continuous accreditation of institutions and programs. It plays a key role in the Bologna process, since universities and colleges have to hand in their applications for new undergraduate and master's graduate majors to the Committee. These applications must include a description of program courses as well as information about the scientific and educational activities of instructors. Although the minister of education approves the launch of new programs officially, the HAC is the major decision-making body that reviews new programs.

The Hungarian Scholarship Board Office was established in 1991 to coordinate student mobility. In 2004 a government sought to increase student mobility in order to participate in the European higher education area. In the mid-1990s, foreign students studying in Hungary comprised only 3 percent of all university students, more than half of them having Hungarian as their mother tongue, coming from neighboring countries. Only 2 percent of Hungarian

students can pursue foreign studies, well below the European Union average. This is because scholarships cover only 40 percent of living costs, and the Hungarian wage level is too low to allow the majority of parents to be able to supply the missing amount (Tót 2005).

Since 2001, Hungarian higher education institutions have been required by law to develop their own quality assurance systems. The institution of higher educational quality control is the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, and quality assessment is done by higher education stakeholders.

The Janus-face character of the debate on higher education

Publications about the restructuring of higher education and about the Bologna process do not evaluate ongoing processes in a unified tone. Some official documents, expert papers and reports connected to the government form one group. Usually, these papers aim to present the successes of the reforms in international fields (for example, in the Bologna follow-up process). These expert writings are aimed at Hungarian readers and usually show the positive side of the Bologna process. The main elements of rhetoric in these writings are such expressions as *thrift, efficiency and quality*, and *adaptability to labor market needs*. The main idea encompassing all of these is meeting the requirements of international norms and the challenges of a knowledge society. We can say that these writings reflect the tone of those internationally originated documents, such as the official documents issued by the conferences held in the framework of the Bologna follow-up process. These documents are good for learning about the chronologies of legislative processes or the official institutions of decision making. However, in this rhetoric not much is conveyed about the coherence between the Bologna process and restrictive state policies or about the strife between universities and colleges and the institutional-level difficulties caused by restructuring.

The other side of the dialogue over the Bologna process is represented by those writers who view reforms in terms of research. Many of these researchers have ties with the Budapest

Institute of Education Research and Development. Their writings analyzing changes from an economic and social point of view are not by any means optimistic concerning the reforms; they do not evaluate reforms as a way to “Bologna heaven.” The changes in higher education in the 1990s are viewed in a wider economic, social, and historical context. Changes are not simply considered as a manifestation of the vision of policymakers but the inevitable social consequences of the changes of the education system. The authors of the Higher Education Research study volume published in 2000 made such an assessment (Lukács 2002). Such factors of those inevitable social consequences include the diversification given as an answer to the challenges caused by the growing number of participants in education (Kozma 1998), changes taking place within the character and function of the actors of higher education (Kozma 2004), or the “coming closer” tendency of big international higher education models. The latter aspect has an outstanding role in the work of Prof. Ildikó Hrubos—the most important researcher of the implementation of the Bologna process in Hungary—and her colleagues, who examine problems in the frame of international comparison from the beginning (Hrubos, Szentannai, and Veroszta 2003; Bíró, Hrubos, Lovász, and Pásztor 2004; Hrubos 2006).

The latest work (2007) of her research team was an international and institutional-level study. With regard to Hungary they point out that the comparability and mobility declared as major objectives are still goals rather than features of reality, in spite of the fact that the government strives to bring the study programs of universities and colleges onto the same level, unlike in the Netherlands.

Hrubos and her coauthors believe that promotion of the division of tasks between the two sectors should be aimed similarly as in other countries and instead of the question of *homogenization versus differentiation*, the paradigm of simultaneous *homogenization and differentiation* should be promoted. In sum, we can state that the real problems and questions concerning the Bologna process do not appear in governmental or expert official papers but in

Törölt: 3

Törölt: 2

Törölt: [IN REF. SECTION, 2003]

the work of independent researchers.

The methodology of research

We analyzed press releases and interviews with higher education experts during our research. Analysis was based on qualitative methods in both cases. The first step of the analysis of press releases included examining the articles and publications of the media concerning the above topic. The analyzed units were longer articles and publications appearing in the media in the 2005, 2006, and 2007 volumes of six influential Hungarian newspapers: *Élet és Irodalom*, *Népszabadság*, *Heti Világgazdaság*, *Világgazdaság*, *Heti Válasz*, and *Magyar Nemzet*. The two daily papers represent aspects of the major political forces and those of the major voting groups; weeklies provide an opportunity for the representatives of intellectuals forming public opinion to express their different views and aspects. In order to collect data, we first had to interpret the concepts used in the social scientific terminology in connection with the examined topic, which were separated into dimensions and given keywords used in everyday language for each of them.¹¹ After collecting the articles and publications, the primary processing of their review followed.

During the reviews we focused on the major statements of the authors and the hierarchy of statements in the summary of the publications and on the summarized presentation of the reality construction reflected in the given writing. An outlined review of the domestic press dialogues in the examined topics was based on the summaries of publications, in which we aimed to present the diversity of the topics and opinions and the composition of those who commented on the topics. The authors of the examined publications can be divided into five major groups: economists, university instructors, politicians, journalists, and corporate bodies. On the whole, we can state that instructors of higher education institutions and economists supporting reforms form the two most dominant groups. While the writings have a distinguished and relaxed tone, it can be clearly seen that the values and system of reference of

certain interest groups differ in many ways, so their reality constructions often cannot be combined.

During the analysis of the interviews we aimed to grasp the theoretical constructions in connection with the examined topics among the actors within the field of higher education. The recording of the interview was organized by the Organization and Labor Sociology Workshop of the Social Research Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Those interviewed were leaders of higher education institutions and labor market representatives. During the analysis of the interviews, we aimed to typify the major statements in connection with the restructuring of higher education in the texts of the interviews. We progressed according to certain question fields, and tried to sum up issues of consensus and disagreement in the expressed opinions. In the analytical summary, we use the language of higher education research, that is, we do not use word-for-word quotations. We considered declarations as analytical units. By “declaration” we mean any theoretical unit of the interviews that has a certain meaning or can be analyzed or interpreted. This can be a word or a point of view expressed with more sentences, or even a whole part of the interview. We also believe that the way the interviewed subjects expressed themselves and their styles have importance, since these linguistic features can reflect their attitude.

Törölt: , but only refer to the pressmarks [OK??] of the interviews

Who drives higher education reforms?

The major points of the discussion of education include the most widespread views about the necessity and degree of the reform. The most interesting is the comparison of the opinions concerning the forces promoting the reforms, namely whether the reform has an offensive (switchover to a knowledge society) or a defensive (the weak stamina of state budget) feature, or whether it is stimulated by the inside educational profession or by the outside, that is, dictated by the political or economic subsystem.

Törölt: which advance on a widest scale [I.E., THE MOST WIDESPREAD VIEWS?]

A major question in the articles analyzing the reforms is the desirable role of the state in

education. According to the sharpest opinions, higher education is regulated by labor market demands and by the particular needs of students. The opposing opinions talk about state responsibility and institutional autonomy. According to some views, it was student needs alone that functioned as a regulator in the previous decade. There are different opinions in connection with the state's financial withdrawal. Some strictly believe that this withdrawal is due to market principles only, while others attribute it simply to state budgeting decisions. There are again different opinions in connection with the degree of remaining state finance. Some believe it desirable that state budget should further remain the main financing factor so that the life of institutions can be predictable; others think that there should be differentiated state finance based on quality or they would only award subsidies to preferred research universities. With respect to the possible conditions of public financing, we can mention the success of graduates entering the labor market or their involvement in the economic life of the region and in adult education. Nevertheless, there is also a peculiar market principle, according to which the state does not play any role in creating workplaces or coordinating any activities of the participants. The state only supplies information for the actors of the process.

Examining the interviews, we can see that from a different aspect other participants become important in the narratives about the reforms as well; that is, if someone does not speak as an outside expert, there may be other participants in their story. In these narratives, the participants of changes can be institutional units, mostly *faculties* that “make studies rigid” or *give* subjects to senior instructors, but a participant can also be a *department* that needs work. We read about the engineering field about a disciplinary community (academic tribes, by Becher and Towler, (1989) that managed to achieve something. The *Rector's Conference* can be interpreted as a decision-making body and as an arena (rectors represent their own institutions) at the same time. At other places, it is the head of the institution—the rector or perhaps the dean—who appears as the decision maker and “meets,” “wonders,” and “decides,” and so on. Naturally, the institutions themselves also appear in the interviews as participants

Törölt: primary rocks [??] (i.e.,

Törölt:)

Törölt: “

Törölt: d.”[WHY QUOTES?]

Törölt:

Formázott: Nem Kiemelt

Törölt: [OK?]

Törölt: [AND TOWLER!]

(or victims) of changes.

There are no words mentioned about the reconciliation with social participants in the interviews, but the writers of press statements pose the question as a problem. While decision makers emphasize that the Higher Education Act was reconciled with all social organizations, according to the speakers of teachers' organisations, only "half-measure" reconciliations took place. According to unanimous opinion, while the social participants in question do not cooperate, they occasionally make sharp statements in various publications. **An often mentioned part of** the publications is continuous complaint about damage caused by mutual cheating. Representatives of student government complain that tuition fees were determined in the rectors' council and they believe that this income will not support quality work but rather prestige expenses (new cars, leather armchairs, etc.) for university leaders. According to the publications, opposing interests came to the surface between institutions, as well, when the old interest policies of the era before the change of the political system prevailed by determining a quota number based on the calculation of points.

Törölt: societies
[ORGANIZATIONS?]

Törölt: returning

Törölt: [= OFTEN
ENCOUNTERED IN??]

Törölt: injuries [DAMAGE?]

Criticism of the reforms

Sharp criticism of higher education reforms is emphasized both in the analyzed press publications and in the interviews. This concerns the steps following the Bologna process as well as the preceding period. Participants in press debates and interviews believe that the most significant changes in higher education after the change in the political system are undoubtedly the expansion and the mass number of participants. All those interviewed consider the expansion of higher education as a decline; all of them believe that higher education is "on the wrong path." Their view of higher education is depressing. We found hardly any that evaluated some aspects of the changes in a positive way.

From the change of political system until now, a common experience connected to the expansion has been the decline in quality. Its external feature is the multiplication of

institutions. Expressions referring to the consequences of the mass appearance of students belong to the same semantic context: “dilution,” “overqualification,” “devaluation.” This theory of quality deterioration can be extended to secondary schools as well; according to some opinions, even secondary schools fail to prepare students for higher education studies appropriately. Later in this article, as we examine the relation of universities and colleges, we mention that in most cases the connection between higher education and the labor market must be associated with the issue of quality deterioration. Virtually everyone notes the lack of connection between higher education and labor market: the shaping of the study structure is not adjusted to labor market needs but to student demands. Only one—a right-wing economist—believes that the mass number of students was necessary and the figures about participation are lower in our country than in other European countries. This economist is alone in not viewing the situation of unemployed graduates as a tragedy. According to his arguments, the contents of qualifications are not a good fit with work fields or job positions. He agrees that while it is true that labor market places for graduates do not increase at the same rate as the issuing of degrees, the graduates still have labor market advantages. In sum, interviewees view the mass feature of higher education as deterioration. In most of the interviews, the expression “teaching the elite” appears as a synonym of an earlier ideal situation. The most controversial questions in connection with the reforms’ implementation were, the amount of change, and the major direction of the reforms. Representatives of the teachers’ community think that the “reform waves” following one after the other are too frequent; many believe that it is the frequent changes in regulations that causes the problem. According to certain neoliberal “educationomists,” reforms progress very slowly. On the one hand, they blame organizations of higher education and research—such as the Hungarian Accreditation Committee and the Hungarian Academy of Science—for the slowness of the reforms. They also consider these organizations as a feudal, inbreeding, state social heritage, although most of them were established after the regime change. On the other hand, they hold

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Törölt: quantity

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Törölt: apostrophize [NOT A WORD... "CONSIDER"??]

responsible the activity of reactionary instructors, who, by the way, try to slow down the reforms and make them easier.

Many remarks in the press concerning the reforms can be connected to the debate papers of the well-known reformist economist Bokros (2007) who formulated radical theses in connection with the introduction of tuition fees in higher education studies and in connection with the future of universities. According to this, higher education is not a public service to which everybody is entitled on the basis of citizenry, and the studies of untalented students must not in the slightest degree be financed by the state. Low-standard higher education institutions must be closed and research universities must be given high state financing. Furthermore, teachers' wages' must be provided from tuition fees. According to critics, these suggestions are utopian and ill considered. Critics blame the radical reformer for damaging the social-political function of higher education rooted in European traditions. They view his theories as elitist and see him as a technocrat indifferent to social mobility.

In the debates conducted in Hungary, there is continuous reference to Western examples. Commentators in the press and in interviews refer to the examples of foreign higher education systems in terms of *pro* and *con*, particularly with regard to domestic higher education reform. Authors who support reform consider the successful economy and the higher education model of the United States as a pattern to follow. More critics of the reform argue that the transplantation of the American system does not suit the Hungarian context, as the way of higher education development is different here and the American model has not achieved its determined objectives either. Furthermore, it has not been functioning properly since its introduction has increased social inequalities. There is also doubt concerning the restructuring of higher education following a European Union pattern, according to which the higher educational policy of the last few decades, based on the restriction of social demands and the suppression of expansionist pressure, is a heritage peculiar to the postsocialist countries. We can find such authors who suggest the consideration of the Swedish, German, or the better-

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Törölt: heritage in [I.E., A HERITAGE PARTICULAR TO]

supplied Finnish and Spanish university patterns where—according to a Hungarian interpretation—the Bologna structure is not copied literally.

Interpretations of the Bologna definition

During our research we focused on the extent to which the representatives of the social and education policy interest groups are informed about the Bologna process. Thus we collected interpretations of the process in publications. Authors emphasize that the Bologna reform is targeted toward unity and transparency, as well as strengthening student mobility. According to some representatives of the academic world, the real objective of Bologna reforms is minimizing the amount of money states devote to higher education. Some university faculty interpret change as a lessening of the curriculum and what was taught in five years must now be reduced to three years. According to some, Bologna is misunderstood. The original goal of Bologna, they argue, was to create transferability and comparability and not to change the multichanneled higher education to a single-channeled one. Thus, all those mistaken steps that washed away differences between universities and colleges must be returned back. There is also a view according to which the aim of the Bologna reform is to merge European cultures and spread a European value system and the ideal of the European citizen. On the basis of more pragmatic readings, however, the objective of Bologna restructuring is to improve language skills, to orient higher education to practice, or to produce a work force to match the economic needs of nations and regions. According to a recent interpretation, the essence of the Bologna process in Hungary is to bring studies at the same level into competition or to change universities into colleges. Some think a latent goal of the Bologna process is to expand pedagogical departments propagating the European Union ideology, while others argue that the Bologna process is an opportunity to reinforce pedagogical studies and teacher training.

Personal conceptualizations of the Bologna process are also encountered. Based on its substance, the process is regarded by many of those interviewed as preservation of the old

Törölt: of specialist papers [??]

Törölt: reduction in study-work [SCHOOLWORK?]

system. They think that in many cases what happened was not much more than “putting a second coat” on old studies and subjects, “cutting” five-year studies into two, “stiffening” the old structure, or possibly “putting everything” into the three-year undergraduate training (not considering what remains for the master training period). The expression of a degraded version of university training—meaning the previous five-year study program—fits into this streamline, too. These statements suggest that this enforced structural change has not delivered a mature substantial change. According to an argumentation for the reform, an advantage brought by two-cycle study programs is that the division between the levels of degrees helps to “filter” the mass of students. Moreover this filter makes it possible to involve only the best in high-level theoretical training.

Törölt: “

Törölt: stupefied [MEANING CLEAR?]

Criticism of the Bologna process

Both surveys show that the most remarkable element of the opinions about the Bologna process is criticism. All the interviewees considered the realization of the Bologna reforms a mistaken rather than a positive development. Almost regardless of the dimensions, the interviewees basically interpreted the processes as a conflict or fight. (It is particularly true for the sector dimension.) One interviewee described the period of change to new training forms as “hostilities.” There are positive interpretations, too, but these are rather about necessity (these consider reforms to a necessary answer given to mass education). In a certain number of statements, we felt that the Bologna process was associated with decline. Interestingly, according to one opinion, “[Bologna] had to be smashed.”

Törölt: cause of which is assigned to a

Törölt: [CLEAR??]

Analysis of journals shows that the main debates about Bologna in 2005 targeted the risks of developing a two-tier higher education system and then the basic principles around substantive questions, such as whether master’s studies should convey specialized or generalized knowledge. According to a view that often comes up in these publications, the restructuring of the Hungarian higher education follows a one-sided or misunderstood interpretation of the six points of the Bologna Declaration—emphasis was only given to the

creation of a multicycle structure and no attention was paid to those points about quality assurance or encouraging student and teacher mobility. The most common opinions among the criticisms about the Bologna reforms say that the structural reform was a slap-dash effort—the Hungarian one was the most rapidly conducted change in Europe, leading to the disappearance of many majors. Another risk of a short period training is that students would not be able to pass language exams in the first phase of the two-cycle study program. Because of B.A.–M.A. accreditation processes, college faculty were required to have a Ph.D. In Hungary, however, most college professors (assistant college lecturers, college lecturers) have no scientific degree—one can become not only a college lecturer but also a senior college lecturer **without** a Ph.D. Thus, to help their lecturers acquire a scientific degree, colleges hurry to finance a course for them in a market-oriented doctoral school where they can acquire a Ph.D. even if they produce only a simple thesis on the level of a master's. This diminishes the quality of doctoral schools, as people avoid those doctoral schools with higher requirements, or candidates pressure such schools by attending other universities where one can acquire a doctoral degree without even visiting the university or can be given 10–20 credits without any real input. In connection with the basic study cycle (B.A. level) there is a common concern that graduates would not be able to find a job. However, the 35 percent limit for students to be accepted for the master's training] is found to be too low.

Törölt: [DO YOU MEAN "WITHOUT"??]

Other aspects of the Bologna process: quality assurance

Some aspects of the Bologna process are important elements of the official Bologna discussion but are paid little attention in the examined texts. These are the issues of quality, institutional autonomy, and accreditation. The topic of student mobility remains almost entirely unaddressed in both press releases and interviews.

In our view, the question of quality assurance is either not considered in the texts or is mentioned suspiciously, with an implication that it is a “good business opportunity for someone” or that a professional staff of experts can be made up from those marginalized from other professional circles, and so forth. Some of interviewed teachers said that quality assurance is feasible if based on the inner academic logic of the education system, whose

Megjegyzés [P.G.1]: Yes, 65% don't get in.

Törölt: [MEANING 65% DON'T GET IN?]

Törölt: I

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Törölt: [I.E., SOME OF THEM SAID?]

means are the entrance exam system and the professional conditions of appointment, and a more emphatic voice for academic bodies. At the other end of the quality discussion, it is said that higher education needs external quality assessment and only representatives of the labor market can be competent in this regard. A rarely heard view stresses the importance of students' opinions, which are already credited with forming certain rankings in Hungary and thus an important issue how much time teachers are ready to devote to them.

In journals we also witnessed an encounter between views about the institution and functioning of accreditation. On one hand, because of the criticism toward educational systems—overwriting some decisions of the HAC—the functioning of certain departments previously found unsatisfactory by the HAC was authorized. On the other hand, the institution of accreditation is also criticized since there is mutual accreditation in HAC and thus it is proposed and desirable to involve the social and professional public in the accreditation process. In the interviews, the question of accreditation is associated with the problems around interest assertion. Teachers think that the different opportunities for interest assertion are rooted in the fact that the university sphere is more dominantly represented in the Hungarian Accreditation Committee than that of the colleges. There is a hint not only that interests are split in the dimension of the two sectors but there is also a center–periphery dimension, that is, a stronger position of institutions situated in the capital compared to those in the countryside. Moreover, representatives from colleges in smaller towns talk about this making their existence impossible in certain regions.

Autonomy

The issue of autonomy does not directly belong to the changes urged by the Bologna document. However, the way in which the institutions welcomed the changes was represented not only by governmental but also by international actors' spirited discussions about how autonomy should be interpreted in modern higher education. The idea of an endangered autonomy comes up rather in publications from university colleagues. According to their opinions, the higher education crisis is rooted in the fact that the universities—that is, a common republic of students and teachers—have not been functioning for decades. They say that an answer to the indisputable problems of higher education should be to enhance autonomy and to reinforce the personal responsibility of elected leaders.

Universities and colleges

Törölt: [IS THIS A SUBHEAD UNDER "AUTONOMY"?]

In Hungary the change to linear training is strongly influenced by the heritage of a dual higher education. From the very beginning, what role the different types of institutions should play in the future has been much discussed. On the surface, in open discussion it is very often embodied as a question of quality assurance. Indeed, we assume that bigger and older institutions wish to keep their previous prestige and position in the hierarchy of higher education. Survival is, however, the crucial issue for smaller and newer institutions in the fight for students. In press releases (as part of the public debate) rural colleges are represented as institutions lacking personnel and physical infrastructure. This is mainly true for radical reformers and those writing in the name of local interests. The former argue for shutting them down, while the latter talk about the risks of liquidation, for example, losing labor force supply in the countryside, and urge an intersectoral approach and regional sensibility. Some suggest drawing a higher education map that would serve harmonization of study programs and needs.

Törölt: a deal [CLARIFY]

As mentioned above, in the analyzed interviews opinions about the relation between the two sectors are characterized by a conflict approach, and we notice a conflict or even a “war” paradigm. Analyzing the relevant statements, we find some common elements in the way of thinking of almost all interviewees, as follows:

—The relation between colleges and universities is burdened with conflicts that are—seemingly for the present—irremovable and irresolvable. The two sectors (and their institutions) turn out to be competitors. If there is still an opportunity to cooperate (a “strategic alliance”), it is limited to working out substantial requirements. But the question of making input (entrance) requirements easier or stricter in different majors is already perceived as influencing future students in their choices. Thus if entrance to a college is made easier, students would be attracted there and thus universities seem to be interested in maintaining entrance requirements uniformly at a higher level. Possibilities for cooperation are also limited by frame conditions appearing as accreditation requirements (one teacher at one job); however, those conditions, in fact, prevent some institutions (colleges) from offering courses.

—This battle has two dimensions: one could be called an “intangible” dimension—competition for prestige—and the other is rather economic, a fight for students. Indeed, all are of the opinion that the survival of the institutions is at stake in the reforms and the main pledge of this survival is to attract students. Nevertheless, not only two opposing sectors, but individual institutions (as well as their departments) fight against each other.

—Another common element is that the rank and reputation of the institutions depend mainly on their graduates' opportunities in the labor market. In this sense, we assume that interviewees attribute this judgment to outside actors but also identify themselves with it. For both universities and colleges, this is an important dimension that differentiates the two sectors. Interviewees connected to a college or a university view the chances for a connection to the labor market in a different way.

Törölt: appreciation
[REPUTATION??]

We mentioned that when we are talking about the relations between institutions, it is not only a university–college relation that appears in the statements. The interviewees often refer to a hierarchy that characterizes the whole institutional system and in which all institutions have their well-identified positions. This is the hierarchy of metropolitan universities, rural universities, rural large colleges (of regional importance), and small colleges of local interest. The role of small colleges in local society, from the perspective of big institutions, is mentioned condescendingly by the interviewees rather than as a real argument for the existence of those institutions. As for the system as a whole, beyond the fight between institutions, the internationalization of challenges seems to be a factor that can lead to cooperation at national level. A consensus arises here in the sense that the Bologna process means integration into the international higher education hierarchy from the point of view of Hungary.

Törölt: ironically
[CONDESCENDINGLY??]

Higher education and the labor market

A key element in statements interpreting the two opposing sectors is the relation between theory and practice in the programs, namely whether the labor market needs graduates with theoretical or practical knowledge. This also relates to the fact that there are mainly only bachelor's courses in Hungary in 2007. The basic question arises over whether new basic majors should be made more oriented to theory or to practice. It seems from the interviews that this issue needs more thought, since the present situation is controversial. It arises from the fact that the same basic

programs lead to master courses and the labor market at the same time. However, it is evident that those in the college sector support practice (“competence”)-oriented programs, while those from universities support the theoretical ones. These two opinions are supported by the same logic of argumentation, which is that their graduates are more qualified for their jobs than those graduating from their counterparts. College statements often refer to particular firms that indicate their needs for graduates with practical skills (they need professionals who “can keep the books,” otherwise we “train for the street”). Because of the university lobby, basic courses ‘have lost practical training’. The message in the statements connected to universities is, however, that in the long run in-depth programs are more useful. Competences cultivated at a university course include knowing how to learn or the capability to solve and interpret problems. Thus, students would rather vote for a “more prestigious” course as the decisive element of their finding a job will be the place where they have received “the paper.” Summing up, we feel as if the well-known train of thought linked to secondary education were reborn in these statements according to which the problem is that we lack real skilled workers because our vocational training has been ruined. Suggestions for solving the conflict between theory and/or practice are formed at both sides, mainly saying that the two sectors should really separate and there should be declared practical and theoretical basic programs that should also be separated according to types of institutions. It would be desirable to make basic programs longer (seven semesters). In this sense colleges have an advantage against universities. In the interviews about adult training, it is mentioned that nonpractical and practical training need not be mutually exclusive; rather, students in a course chosen on the basis of personal interest could start another course that offers more chances for entering the labor market.

Adult training and high-level postgraduate training are presented in the press as a means that can correct the discrepancies between the output of mass higher education and labor market needs; it is also conceivable that adult training and continuing education are not suited

for this purpose since being privatized, which led to a loss of quality and diminishing of state subsidies without real ameliorating effects.

Some authors commented on the vocational higher education programs introduced at the postsecondary level in the 1990s and intended as an “antechamber” for entering higher education and getting credits. Representatives of neoliberal educational policy considered this an alternative to the expensive and longer higher education courses and emphasized its practical and preparatory role for working life. According to supporters of tuition fees, those fees will make vocational higher education programs popular, while those who stress the sociopolitical aspects are afraid that it will push lower-status people in this direction (the “service-stairs” effect). They are often taken up as programs offering a possibility to enter higher education. The “theoretic versus practical” debate has not yet been resolved.

While a business representative stresses that nowadays a skilled worker needs more and more theoretical—even “university-like” knowledge, another mentions in connection with university graduate engineers that most of them should rather have practical skills.

Privatization

It turns out that higher education reforms are considered to be critical by the members of the academic society regardless if they are quoted in the press or anonymously in an interview. There are, of course, proposals for solutions as well that often refer to possible connections between higher education and the economic sphere. It could be phrased as follows: the idea of the privatization of higher education is no longer only present at the governmental level of the higher education debate. The definition of privatization is certainly not unified and can have different meanings in different texts. Privatization can mean the appearance of privately financed institutions in the educational market. The private sector of higher education is not large in Hungary. This sector also includes some universities financed by the state and run by the church. While it is stated that privately financed higher education institutions function more economically, there is no unanimity about whether these institutions are attractive to

their clients because of their high-standard programs or because their degrees have become a product that can be acquired with money rather than high-level performance. More radical reformist publications give space to the idea that public higher education institutions should also be run according to the private university pattern. A counterargument against privatization, however, says that the educational system has long-lasting external economic and social effects that are not necessarily considered by a private institution. Thus, higher educational functions can be transferred only to a limited extent.

Another important topic in the debate on Hungarian higher education is the question of running public institutions in a corporate way. In the publications of neoliberal economists, it is portrayed as a desirable goal and its realization is helped by the economic managing councils of higher education institutions. Many in the academic sphere are afraid of the power of outside economic experts over higher education administration. They also have a fear that corporate influence on higher education may cause a fight among the economic lobby groups with different interests around certain higher education institutions. Moreover, there may be a danger of misuse of valuable state-owned properties. Some think operating councils would result in better functioning.

In both press releases and interviews about the relation between trainings and labor market, the authors and interviewees emphasized a third form of privatization, cooperation between economic and higher education actors. In both cases, this is among the very few points settled by consensus. The objectives of the knowledge centers building around universities are univocally in a positive context. Nevertheless, authors and interviewees only rarely go beyond declaring the adequacy of these principles. There is also a concern about involving private capital in research, according to which companies applying clever contracts would draw capital away from research centers.

According to head-hunters and other corporate representatives, a way of fostering cooperation between higher education and the economic surroundings would be to maximize

fieldwork during the training period (trainee programs) as it could improve study programs and help finding a job afterward. To build better cooperation, institutions of higher education must pay more attention to the development of new skills, such as communicational skills, adaptive abilities, readiness for teamwork, diligence, and labor ethics. Creating an innovative and entrepreneurial environment is considered to be difficult because national big business sphere does not spend much on research and development compared to the international level. Representatives of the other side, however, look at universities reservedly, saying higher education training is not of adequate quality and is generally underfinanced. They mention another problem as well: the relation between national research and development and companies is not coordinated by the state.

Törölt: Recruiting

Törölt: "mock-moon"
[MEANING? I HAVEN'T
HEARD THIS EXPRESSION]

Conclusion

Today, it is clear that the social and economic processes stimulated by the changes of the political system in Hungary have had an impact on the higher education system. The expansion and reform of this system reveals certain common features with the mass education processes at work in Western higher education systems. A main difference between them, however, is that mass education in Hungary has developed under restrictive (neoliberal) economic circumstances because of serious national budgetary shortfalls. From the early 1990s onward, a series of reforms of higher education were initiated to meet modern economic and social needs. Thus, the reforms under the Bologna process have not been without precedents in Hungarian higher education.

Through Hungarian journals and interviews with members of the academic world, we tried to capture a picture of the state of higher education reform and, particularly, the Bologna process itself. Accordingly, we do not identify this picture with reality but consider it a version of this reality constructed with the help of textual interpretations. A more general conclusion of the survey is that authors and interviewees talk almost uniformly, despite the reforms—or even because of the reforms—about a crisis.

In connection with the change of the educational paradigm, significant disagreements have arisen over the magnitude of the crisis, the necessity of reforms, the desirable role of the state in education, and the forces that are compelling the reforms. Criticism against the ongoing reforms is manifold and can be viewed throughout various publications. The big debates about

the Bologna process are mainly triggered by its different interpretations. A common view is that there has been no phase of conciliation among the various social actors. Interviewees are living through these changes in higher education as a loss of previous values and quality. According to reform ideas inherent in the Bologna process itself, dividing trainings into levels would alleviate the effects of the declining quality caused by mass education at many points. Actors see this strategy as an immature abolition of an old and reliable system, both in terms of student needs and market demands. While new courses essentially preserve substantial elements of the old system and the transformation of the old-type courses happens only formally, it is not accompanied by a search for solutions that respond to labor market challenges. We can rightly speak about a “war paradigm” in connection with the discussion on the relations between the university and college sector—and among individual institutions. The fight, at an intangible level, is about maintaining prestige. However, at the practical level, all of them struggle for students. A main slogan in this fight is quality that is strongly related to the practical (i.e., labor market) utility of the knowledge and skills attained during the study program. It seems that a possible solution to all these antagonisms would be an integration of life-long learning and adult education in the academic sphere.

Among the proposals for ameliorating the problems of higher education, some ideas that coming closer of the academic and the business spheres—or just privatization of higher education—necessary. Privatization can happen in various forms but opinions are unified on the belief that the influence of the business sphere not only can lead to more effective functioning of the institutions but can also help in creating courses that satisfy the social need for a better connection to the labor market.

Törölt: keep an approximation
[MAINTAIN A
CONNECTION??] between

Törölt: [CREATE?]

Note

1. The keywords were student mobility, integration, the Bologna process, B.A., M.A. studies, marketability of diplomas on the labor market, further education, adult education, and private higher education.

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