

Concepts in educational policy in Hungary after the change of regime between 1990 and 1998

Aim of research:

- The aim of the research will, firstly, be to analyse the appearance of interests and political aspirations in the field of public education, and, secondly to analyse strategies, regulating means and policies present in public education at the time.
- The presentation of the accelerating transformation process appearing along with the change of regime in Hungarian public educational politics beginning in the middle of the 80's- the detection of the cause and effect relationship, the survey of the principal stages and the most significant acts (legal regulations) and the presentation and analysis of the most important conceptional tendencies.
- The introduction of the programmes and objectives in the public educational politics of the governments in power (Antall, Horn) and the parties that entered the Parliament in 1990 and 1994: the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP), the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), and the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ). An attempt will also be made to thematically analyse and compare these objectives. (ideological aspects, preferred values, objectives in the different fields of public education: structure of schools, education management, legal regulations and financing)
- The exploration of the actual realisation of the government programme, where the emphasis will fall on two main areas: at the level of the legal and content regulation, but other areas will also shortly be touched upon (structure of schools and education management).
- An answer will be attempted to be given to the question of what concepts and what political endeavours stand in the background of each educational strategy and measurement, and how these are related to the changes and cultural processes in the subsystem of society (demography, structure of society) and public administration.
- The research will aim at summarising the dilemmas and peculiar characteristics of educational policy in Hungary after the change of the regime (1990-1998), and to outline the developmental and reversal tendencies in a complex way- striving for objectivity- examining the system of correlation, mechanisms and tendencies of politics and public education situated in a Central and Eastern European context.

- The presentation of the developmental process and the acceptance of the Public Educational Act of 1993 together with the subsequent legal amendments. The dissertation will shortly analyse and, in some places, compare particular projects to one another. It will strive to introduce the long and treacherous road that leads to the introduction of the National Core Curriculum (NAT). It will briefly analyse and compare the particular amendments made to the curriculum.
- Nevertheless, the research will not be concerned with the question of professional training, teacher policy, and Trade Unions and Civil Organisations. It will only touch upon the fields of the examination system, financing, and structure of schools, as well as the challenges of the EU-Accession in public education.

Research Methods:

- Analysis of Content and Documents

Exploration of primary sources: platforms of government and political parties, Public Education Draft Bills, the Public Education Act of 1993, the versions of the National Core Curriculum, the National Core Curriculum accepted in 1995, Parliamentary Educational Committee Reports, other documents of the ministry, journal articles presenting official statements and concerned with press conferences of the Ministry of Education.

Secondary sources: A great number of journal articles published on the issue, volumes of essays and studies, as well as monographies.

Venues of Research: National Pedagogical Library and Museum, Archives of the Parliament, Library of Parliament and the Archives of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Structure of Dissertation:

The structure of the dissertation reflects a particular logic; it does not exclusively follow the specific events in a chronological order (this is the reason for the chronological register in the appendix). With reference to the two basic documents, the Public Education Act and National Core Curriculum, the dissertation focuses primarily on introducing and analysing their variations as well as how the process is induced. Part of the research will be solely dedicated to the latter, while there will be no distinctions made between the particular government cycles.

Deductions and Results on the basis of the adapted primary and secondary sources:

- The reform of the system of Public Education is not exclusively connected to the political change of the regime, since the endeavours striving to reform the system and improve its quality appeared much earlier, and towards the middle and the end of the 80's these processes became even more arduous.
- At the time of the first free political election in Hungary, besides there being a professional élite urging innovation, different parties and various interests of these parties appeared which were, from an ideological point of view, quite different. The dissimilarities in values resulted in different parties adopting different concepts for the reformation of Public Education. Nevertheless, none of the new political powers were properly prepared to continue the reform process, with the exception of the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) none of the parties possessed a supportive professional élite that the reforms could have been based on.
- At the time of the formation of the multi-party system, all political parties declared that they would not consider education the venue of political battles: education should be neutral. Later on, however, the government and the opposition found each other face to face with the cardinal questions of education. Therefore, it can be stated that educational politics did not become a part of the agenda raising constitutional questions between the government and the opposition, there were no negotiations concerning this issue among the members of the opposition.
- The question of education and within that, public education did not usually belong to the most significant ones in the platforms of political parties; the platforms were exhausted in the declaration of some general principles. The rate of professional, political, and ideological elements in the educational programmes of the parties improved to the benefit of the latter by 1994, that is, the professional aspects prevailed.
- Two tendencies developed out of these concepts which can be regarded as most important: the so called conservative concept which strived to mediate, and furthermore, direct the scale value, while the other concept is an adherent of the liberal, minimal and constitutionalised restrictions, it does not consider the national values as a basic point of departure, or a content to be mediated, but considers it the result of the development of the full spectrum of different school alternatives.
- The government crisis and the weakening of the manageability of the system can be perceived (most prominently at the time of the first government cycle). As it is proved by

the dispute of the Educational Act, the definition of the sphere of authority of the Ministry of Education and the local government, the distribution of the control tasks, the financing of institutions and the enforcement of independence in every category caused a problem.

- The period of preparation of the Public Educational Act obviously meant the phase of learning for the new players of the political stage. It was at this time that the frames and forms of democratic negotiations and consultations began to become outlined which made the communication possible between members of the legislation, the different professional and diverse social groups.
- Negotiating with the new professional organisations undoubtedly played a great role in there being several compromises in the Public Educational Act accepted in the summer of 1993.
- The uncertainty to be experienced in the system could largely have been related to the dramatic challenges in public education of the time. The acceptance of the new law, its coming into force, despite all of its regulational contradictions, created many more calculable circumstances in the field of public education, improved the opportunity of solving the conflicts in public education within the frame of the law, and also promoted the stability of the newly improved public educational system.
- The legitimacy of the preparation of the National Core Curriculum (NAT) remained uncertain all throughout, namely, as it was not obvious on which behalf the commission took place in. The uncertainty, along with the political transition, was partially unavoidable. Nevertheless, the consequence of the latter was that the experts playing a role in the preparation of the National Core Curriculum(NAT) had to take a disproportionate risk upon themselves, and that the whole process was perpetually exposed to the danger of wasting all the invested resources and professional efforts in case of losing the necessary political support.
- By means of the government introducing the National Core Curriculum (NAT)-after approximately fifteen years of theoretical construction, and six years of disputes not only professional but setting wide public opinion in motion- Hungary pledged itself to the bipolar regulation of public education. The National Core Curriculum (NAT) is in the first place the document of central management, whereas its restrictions are inseparable from the decisions made at a local level.
- In the first cycle no professional forums were established that would have had the aim of involving great publicity to the matter and analysing the challenges awaiting public

education comprehensively and formulating long-term tasks and proposals for political legislatures. In the second cycle, however, a project called "A magyar közoktatás távlati fejlesztésének stratégiája" (The Long-Term Strategy of Hungarian Educational Reform) (1996) was ready. It attempted to raise the political decision making unto a higher level by considering the potential alternatives and reconciling the social and institutional factors touched upon by those decisions.

- Viewing the stability and political change, the powerful transformation of concepts in public education after the change of government in 1994, can be perceived. This caused confusion in many fields, for instance in the management of education, whereas the question of the National Core Curriculum became sound.

A tájékozódást segítő legfontosabb szakirodalmak:

Báthory Zoltán (2001): Maratoni reform Önkönet Kiadó

Halász Gábor (2001): A magyar közoktatás az ezredfordulón Okker Kft. Budapest

Kelemen Elemér-Setényi János (1994): Az oktatási törvénykezés változásai: Hazai és nemzetközi kitekintés FPI, Budapest

Sáska Géza (2007): Rendszerek és váltások Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó

Felsőoktatási kutatóintézet Új mandátum Könyvkiadó, Budapest