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**The construction process of the Hungarian tripartite secondary school system
(1921–1924)**

Thesis of the PhD dissertation

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Éva Szabolcs

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Aim and theoretical background of the research

The primary focus of my PhD dissertation is the construction process of the Horthy Era's first structural education reform, Act XI of 1924, which followed several foreign patterns, eminently the Prussian-Austrian model. The birth of the act, which established the tripartite secondary school system in Hungary, may be interpreted as a significant event, because – provided that the amendment of the Act XXX of 1883 in 1890 is not taken into consideration – more than forty years had passed since the former secondary school law. The access to this rest is also particularly remarkable because – since the beginning of the differentiation of the secondary schools' structure in the 19th century – the reform of the secondary level of education was permanently on the agenda of the modern period's education policy. The Act XI of 1924 also aimed to conclude this debate, and with the introduction of a new schooltype, the realgymnasium, it established the tripartite secondary school system in Hungary. With this action, after decades-long debate about differentiation or uniformization of secondary schools, the law committed itself to the former one.

In spite of the fact that it is a challenging question among scholars, the construction process can be interpreted as a sort of “black box”. The black box model, which is primarily used by natural sciences and informatics, is a system where only the input and the output are visible, but the inner structure is hidden (or not even important) for the observer (cf. *Farkas, T.Dénes*, 2013). The history of the secondary school reform (more specifically, its approach) has a number of similarities to this model. Accordingly, there is an enormous literature on the antecedents (1849–1921), the text, implementation and effects of the law and also, the features and statistic data of the school system (1924–1934). At the same time, far smaller emphasis has been placed on the process of the law's birth (from the first attempt of introducing the realgymnasium on 8 November 1921 to the publication of the law on 10th of May, 1924).

It is particularly true in the case of the bill's parliamentary debate, which – although its speeches were referred to and analyzed on several occasions – had never been a separate topic of a scientific paper. My research aims at filling this gap by the systematic exploration of the law-making process and policy discourses related to the concept (from a broader point of view, the reconstruction and analysis of the law's direct antecedents).

Behind this discourse three types of impact can be identified: international trends and effects (*Albisetti*, 1983; *Berg*, 1991; *Cohen*, 1996; *Németh*, 2005; *Russel*, 1899; *Scheipl, Seel*, 1987; *Schleunes*, 1989), the Hungarian antecedents and traditions (*Jóború*, 1963, 1972; *Kelemen*, 1994, 1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2003; *Mann*, 1997; *Nagy*, 1992, 1996, 2000b, 2002, 2011; *Simon*,

1984; Szabolcs É., Mann, 1997; Szabolcs O., 1984; T. Kiss, 1998), and also the general historical, political and pedagogical stratas of the Horthy Era and Bethlen's government (Nagy, 2000a, 2000c; Simon, 1959; Szabó A., 2000), which gave the circumstances of the law's birth (the so-called „black box” period).

The framework of the research was created on the basis of these three aspects.

Proposition and research questions

Because education acts can be described as a „collision point” between supporters and mavericks, the thesis statement of the dissertation is as follows: the polarization of the discourse can be detected in every main phase of the debate about the secondary schools' reform. Accordingly, this opposition appeared in the preferences of the different foreign models, the interpretation of the history of Hungarian educational law-making, the transparency of the preparation process, as well as in the dynamics and content latitude of the parliamentary debate. On the basis of the thesis statement, 17 research questions and hypotheses were created referring to each problem field.

Sources and methods

From the periods of the Act XI of 1924's construction process, different surviving sources are accessible. As a general rule, it can be stated that because of the huge damage of the relevant archival materials, the above-mentioned questions are hardly researchable through primary sources. Essentially, the only exceptions are the materials of the Committee of Public Education (amendments to the bill, the handwritten and printed versions of the report), the parliamentary diary and the text of the act. All other directly relevant historical records burned in the National Archives of Hungary during the fire in 1956 (Jóború, 1963; *Neveléspolitikai...*, 1959).

One possible alternative – which is used in this dissertation, too – is the sourcebook of Simon (*Neveléspolitikai...*, 1959), who collected education policy documents between 1919 and 1931. Besides different laws, decrees and regulations, various (not directly relevant) historical records, former materials of decision-making bodies (particularly the parliament and the cabinet), sourcebooks, books and periodicals are also available.

Despite the fact that the accessible set of primary sources is small and fragmented, the sources and the related methods of the dissertation can be divided into two main groups. The topmost

reason is that while for the analysis of the antecedents and the preparation period almost only output documents are accessible (reports, memoirs, laws etc.), in the case of the parliamentary debate (with the help of the parliamentary diary), it becomes possible to observe the whole discourse process.

The relevant regulations and explanations were analyzed by historical source analysis (*Kéri, 1997*), with the additional methods of keyword-based search, content-based categorization and statistical analysis. In the examinations of the other group of sources, I performed network-based content (*Krippendorff, 1995; Tikk, 2007*) discourse (*Kürtösi, 2005; Sanda, 2008; Varga, 2008*) and political agenda analysis (*Baumgartner, 2001; Török G., 2005*).

Results

In my dissertation, on the basis of the thesis statement, I aimed to answer the research questions of three problem fields. In the case of international models, it can be stated that a colorful pattern can be extracted from both Count Kuno von Klebelsberg's early memoirs (written before and during World War I) or the theoretical considerations of Gyula Kornis, as well as from the parliamentary discourse and its direct written antecedents.

It is particularly true in the case of the parliamentary debate, where a very broad spectrum – specifically 25 countries (and regions) – can be drawn from the references. Although the foreign patterns are diverse, more than four-fifth of them refer to six area (and particularly to four countries: Germany, France, Austria and England).

Furthermore, in the case of international patterns, the dominance of the Prussian-Austrian model's following (what is a common statement in the literature of History of Education) was confirmed empirically, too (see *Exhibit 1.*)

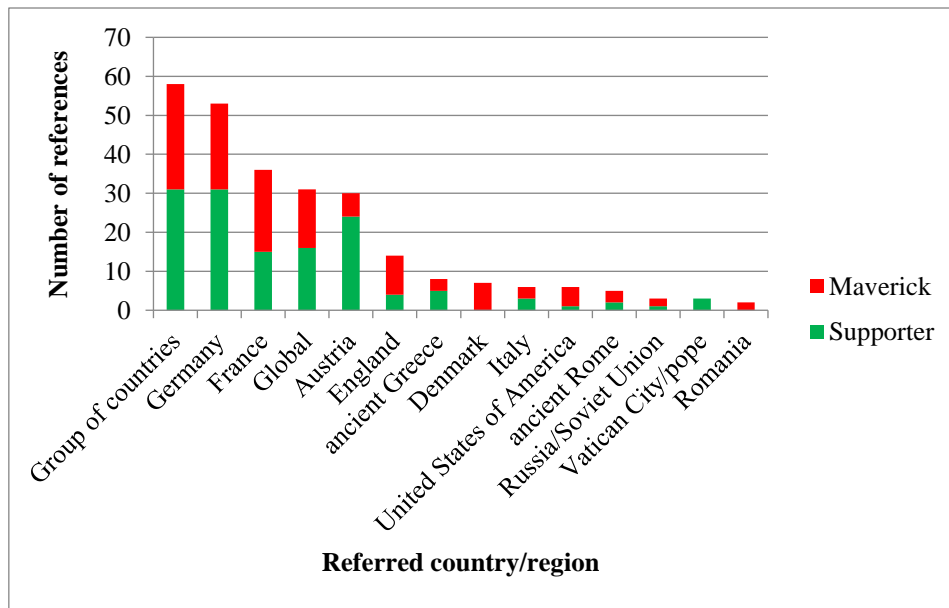


Exhibit 1.: Foreign patterns (which referred to more than once) in the parliamentary debate of the bill

Accordingly, the results – despite the wide spectrum – fall within the theoretical construction, that beside its miscellaneous institutional features Hungary – as most of the countries in Central Europe – primarily followed the German-Austrian trends (*Németh, 2005*).

However, the distribution of the international patterns is strongly polarized: while the supporters preferred Germany (and its forebear countries), France and England were overrepresented among mavericks. Additionally, Denmark’s relatively numerous references, and their exclusivity (only mavericks referred to this country) should be mentioned.

The Hungarian public education – which followed the above-mentioned foreign patterns – was a high priority issue in the interwar period, even more in the case of the Horthy Era’s secondary schools, which were always regulated in separate and not in integrated laws (see *Exhibit 2.*). Haller’s ministerial decree, the first reform attempt of this exceptionally intensive period, was unsuccessful because of its timing and the continuously weakening position of the under-secretary, who facilitated the forwarding of the questionnaire.

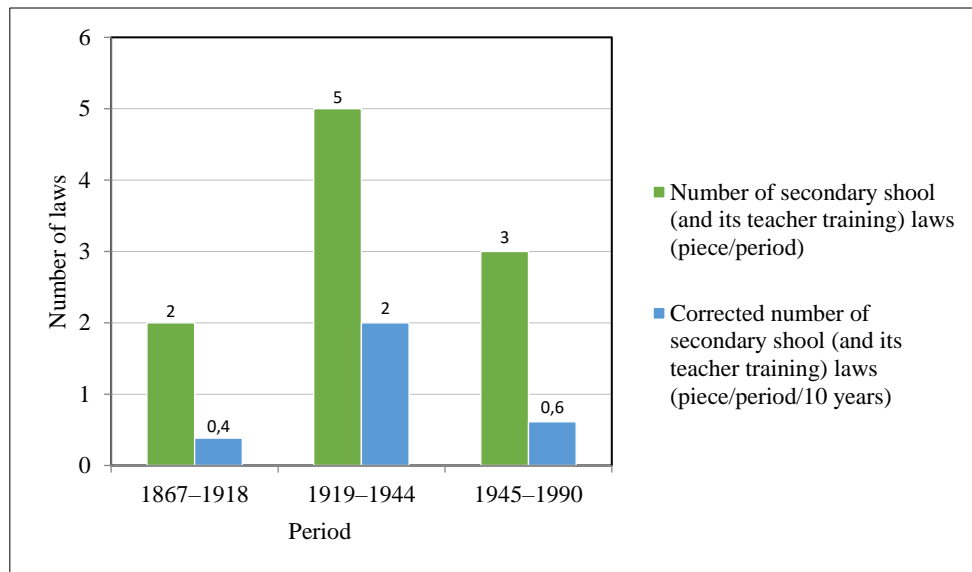


Exhibit 2.: The quantitative features of law-making in the field of secondary schools and its teachers training (1867-1990)

Despite the failure of this attempt, it clearly showed the intention of Sándor Imre, who tried to enforce his own conception in the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, and it pointed out on how the two interest-groups – the state civil schools (and their professional and pressure groups, which aimed to get the same rights as the secondary schools, supported by Sándor Imre) and Count Kuno von Klebelsberg and Gyula Kornis, who had conservative purposes – tried to make the best of this deliverance possibility.

Because the latter group was stronger in enforcing its interest, the reform of the secondary schools started up contrary to the reform attempt in 1919. However, it was unclear, as no secondary school law had been created since the Act XXX of 1883 and its amendment in 1890, how the issue appeared after more than forty years on the agenda of the parliament?

The persistent work of Gyula Kornis, Count Kuno von Klebelsberg's calibre and position, and also the uniquely privileged situation of education policy contributed to the re-entering of the item on the agenda. At the same time, the reform was born after several turns: the concept of the integrated education law, which emerged in the keynote address of Bethlen, seemed to be rejected after the publication of Vass's secondary school decree.

Gyula Kornis, the councilor of the National Council of Public Education (NCPE), criticized the decree of Vass, and the NCPE came to a decision about the integrated conception accordingly.

In the next phase – supported by Kornis – segmented regulation came to the fore again, but the exact turning point could not be revealed in my dissertation.

According to this, Count Kuno von Klebelsberg initiated the elaboration of the bill. During the examination of the parliamentary debate, it also became clear that the statement of *Simon* (1959), which claimed that the conception was a collective creation of Fináczy, Klebelsberg, Kornis and Pauler, in fact based on the exposé of the minister (*Nemzetgyűlési Napló*, 1922–261), but the division and the proportion of the work has not been clarified yet.

After the analysis of the surviving documents, it seems that among the actors of education policy, definitely Kornis took the biggest effect on the outcome of the reform again. The counterexample of this huge application of energy is József Vass, who, in essence, „left” his own reform: he did not participate in the developing of the curriculum, and despite he appeared two times during the parliamentary debate, he did not ask for the floor.

After the tabling of the bill, the parliamentary debate had started, in which the key actor – from the aspect of the discourse’s dynamic– was Count Kuno von Klebelsberg. During the general debate – even if it happened according to the rules – the speaker remarkably restricted the time of mavericks’s speeches. Beside this it can be detected that the opposition speeches were more willing to refer to differing opinions.

From a content point of view, the key speeches of the parliamentary debate (see *Exhibit 3.*) were comparable in a three dimensional space (international aspects – legislative environment – school structure). The supporter-opposite and the indegree-outdegree distinctions did not influence the content significantly (both close proximity between supporters and mavericks and relatively big distances among the speeches of the same attitude can be observed), but the opposite and the indegree speeches are more homogeneous. One of the noticeable results is the shortage of legislative environment against the wide spectrum of the school structure. But the most surprising result was the substantive closeness of Count Kuno von Klebelsberg’s last speech in the general debate and the remarks of Anna Kéthly, one of the biggest critics of the minister. One of the possible explanations is that in his third speech in the parliamentary debate, Klebelsberg did not refer to those elements any more which place (for example) his exposé so far from Kéthly’s only speech.

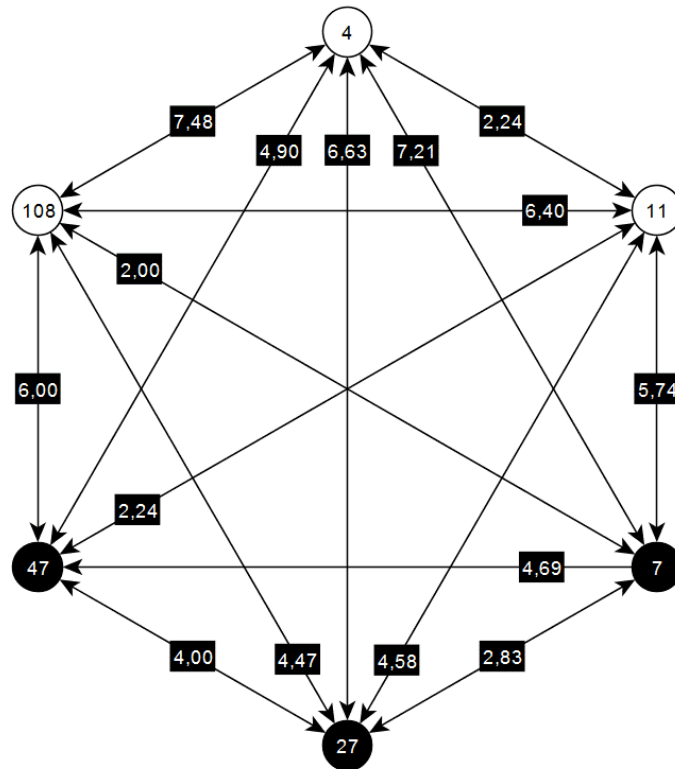


Exhibit 3.: The distance of the key speeches in the three-dimensional space. The numbers correspond to the following speeches: Count Kuno von Klebelsberg (#4), Anna Kéthly (#7), György Lukács (#11), Pál Hegyemegi-Kiss (#27), Pál Bozsik (#47), Count Kuno von Klebelsberg (#108)

It is also important that the debate of the deputies cannot be interpreted as an isolated discourse. The members of the government, deputies, journalists, other participants in the gallery, and also the parallel issues – either by chance or permanently – had an effect on the debate.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the thesis statement of the dissertation (the polarization of the discourse can be detected in every main phase of the debate about the secondary schools' reform) was successfully confirmed. However, it should also be noted that this polarisation appears with differing intensity in each phase of the decision making process, and in some subphases – for example in the thorough debate or in the case of content aspects – the difference between the supporters and the mavericks is not big enough to confirm the significant role of the party affiliation.

At the same time, it is undeniable that the peculiarities of the Horthy Era's law-making strongly influenced the preparation of the secondary school reform, which, in addition, because of the privileged situation and sensitiveness of public education showed a strong, ideological hue.

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