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Spatial structure and internal relationships within Eötvös
Loránd University

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PHD DISSERTATION



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Introduction

Education systems have been at the forefront of social and political interest of the world for a long time. Geography of education can contribute to a better understanding of these systems based on geographic platform.

In my doctoral dissertation I studied the internal relationship of the Eötvös Loránd University and its determinants. Which factors affect relationships within universities? As a geographer, I was particularly interested in the role of geographic space in these processes. This can also be defined by how the geographic (outer) space interacts with the organizational structure of the university and with its internal connections (internal space).

Aims and methods of the research

Eötvös University – a community of knowledge. This motto of Eötvös University has been frequently used in recent years. The questions are adequate:

- What kind of community is it really?
- Is the ELTE community more than just a single sum of the eight independent faculties?
- How strong are the communities within the university?
- What is the role of the geographical space in the community development?
- What other factors affect relationships?

These were the central questions I was answering in the dissertation. The Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Education and the Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education joined the ELTE in 2000, so the operation of the two faculties also gave an opportunity to examine the effects of university integration.

During the research I tried to rely on other areas of science related to geography both in the literature used and in the applied methods. This interdisciplinary approach was also worthy to use, because the phenomenon of the relationship within the university is the interdisciplinarity itself.

In addition to reviewing the literature, the thesis is based on the results of two empirical researches. I conducted two questionnaire surveys among ELTE's lecturers and students. There was one questionnaire for the students asking about six hundred Eötvös Loránd University students on campus, using faculty and gender representative quotas sampling. The question bank of the university lecturers' survey was received by ELTE's all available lecturers and researchers, a total of 1.740 people, in electronic format and in the end I could summarize the results of 285 responses.

Summary of the research results

The most important research results and conclusions are presented in accordance with the structure of the dissertation.

- The dissertation can best be included in the field of geography of education, and within that it can be classified as a local milieu study. This research area deals with the environment, conditions and opportunities an educational institution provides to its employees. This environment includes the personal conditions (the actors themselves), material conditions (e.g. financial instruments, research infrastructure, libraries) and non-material conditions (e.g. institutional rules, organizational structures, institutional prejudices, university identity) also.
- I consider it an important achievement of the dissertation to demonstrate how, as a geographer, a new interdisciplinary approach can be achieved by thinking and by methods of other sciences (sociology, social psychology, environmental psychology, education sociology, independent higher education research) in an investigation of a phenomenon with significant geographic scope.
- While processing relevant geographic literature, I found a number of works that geographers did not really cite in the past few years, although they been presenting important results in the field of education geography already in the '70s and '80s. Among these, the studies at the Higher Education Pedagogical Research Center (Felsőoktatási Pedagógiai Kutatóközpont) could be highlighted.
- At the beginning of the dissertation, during the presentation of the ELTE I conducted a short investigation, which resulted in the mapping of the university's

national catchment area, its diversity in comparison to the catchment areas of the major rural universities.

- In the outer, geographic space, it is relatively easy to measure the distances, and this is presented in the chapter dealing with space theories. However, the inner space, the inner system also shows spatial characteristics, the distance can also be measured here, although in this case the term ‘similarity’ is more applicable. For example similarities in the historical antecedents of a faculty, or the organizational units close to each other in the hierarchy position them closer to each other in the inner space. This may also be a categorization based on qualitative characteristics, eg. similarly performing units that produce similar scientific performance or that are similar in higher education rankings are close to each other. In my research, however, the focus is not primarily on the similarities considered to be objective, but also on the more subjective, perceptual and interpersonal relationships, representations and opinions. In my understanding, the way how university citizens perceive the university plays a very important role in the university's inner space. Among the elements, this distance gets smaller, if they are in some way related, know each other, and have a positive opinion about each other.
- I used the method of mental mapping for the first time in Hungary, not for the examination of a country, region or settlement, but to examine a particular institution with a significant geographic extent. It has been proved that the method can be used to examine the internal relationship of a university operating at several points in the geographical area.
- According to the lessons learnt from mental mapping, the students are most familiar with the Lágymányos campus, the Faculty of Humanities (BTK) and the Faculty of Law (ÁJK) within the University. The Faculty of Education and Psychology (PPK) has been less marked, while the Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Education (BGGyK) and the Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education (TÓK) were hardly visualized on mental maps. The knowledge of student dormitories and other organizational units were also very weak. Therefore, it is worthwhile to inform the students more intensively about the possibilities offered by Budapest University Athletics Club, the University Library and the Botanical Garden.

- I have examined the links between the faculties with further questions both among the students and for the lecturers. Based on these, it can be stated that within the University there are very weak links between the faculties. University citizens are less familiar with the other faculties, and each other's buildings are rarely explored. In the professional relationships of lecturers, co-operation within ELTE with other faculties does not play an important role. These findings are particularly true for Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Education and Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education, which were integrated in 2000, and the two faculties are quite distinct from the rest of the University.
- The students' identity is strong on the basis of the questionnaire results. Regardless of the faculty, university identity is on the same level as national identity, the faculty identity, and especially the university program identity is even stronger. Most of the time the University and the corresponding faculties were characterized positively by the students. It is important to emphasize that I have found a strong correlation between the student's satisfaction with university education and university identities. It is clear that those who are more satisfied with the curriculum are more attached to the University. This correlation demonstrates that university identity cannot be built without proper training, which is virtually a precondition for the creation and development of a functioning community. This statement adds even more weight to the negative opinion of the lecturers about the university and their own faculty. Compared to the basically more positive attitude of the Faculty of Education and Psychology members, more than half of such assessments of Faculty of Humanities and Faculty of Science (TTK) lecturers were clearly negative. Many people connect bureaucracy and financial shortage to ELTE and their own faculties. In these areas, interventions are necessary on the basis of the results of the surveys in order to make the University more successful.
- The bias of the students and educators of the different faculties of ELTE can influence the internal functioning of the university. Based on the questionnaires, several problem areas are outlined. Among the students, the negative judgment of the Faculty of Law can be highlighted and that, contrary to the Faculty of Humanities, aversion to lawyers does not diminish with deeper knowledge, but rather grows. The lecturers' survey shows that the worst disagreement is between

Faculty of Education and Psychology and Faculty of Humanities and Faculty of Science. About the Faculty of Education and Psychology, representatives of the last two faculties expressly declare their opinion negatively, mainly because of their role in teacher training and university decision-making. Although the depth of the research is inadequate to judge the tensions between the faculties in detail, however, it is sufficient to draw attention to the existence of negative emotions relevant to the operation of the university.

- Based on the results of the student survey, I tried to present the factors affecting these relationships in a summary model, but it is important to emphasize that almost all of these elements require further studies. The figure also illustrates that many of the elements of the university's internal connection system are being shaped simultaneously, and in my point of view it is not possible to separate them. It is a remarkable achievement that in the processes the geographic space plays an important role as well, which may be most obviously found in the weak connections of the Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Education and the Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education within the university.
- Collaborations between sciences show recent points of scientific attachments. Using to the results of my research, it might also be worth thinking about the potential opportunities at university level to collaborate in the different disciplines. This may mean academic co-operation between lecturers, but it may also be interesting for students. For example, it would be worth examining what sort of useful knowledge is available for students of different specialties outside of their own disciplines or even faculties. For students studying at the university, it is however useful to get acquainted with other specialists during academic years, not just in terms of gaining knowledge, but also for the future, at work or in everyday life.
- One of the aims of my doctoral dissertation was to contribute to understanding the impact of institutional integrations on internal functioning. In the case of ELTE, the Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Education and the Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education are particularly interesting in this regard. In almost all respects my research results confirmed that, even though these faculties have belonged to ELTE for more than fifteen years, almost every aspect of their relationship with the rest of the University is very weak. The results of

the surveys show that, following the implementation of higher education institutional integration, it is not enough to keep an eye on economic impacts, but the emerging new organizational structures must also be addressed by establishing working relationships. The findings revealed in the dissertation can not only be considered after a transformation in higher education has already took place, but even hypothetically, it may be useful to consider the implications of intra-institutional relations before a planned integration.

- In addition to structural changes affecting different institutions, there are internal integrations and divisions, and in doing so, it is also worth considering how the acted areas are affected, what positive and negative consequences are possible for intra-university relations.
- In my opinion, these ELTE results also demonstrate that this research approach can also be useful for examining other higher education institutions. It is also an important achievement that it has been proven that institutions operating at several points in the geographical area should consider the relationships between the different parts of the organization, and that questionnaire survey and mental mapping can be an effective tool. The method could be used not only between universities, but also between government institutions or members of the corporate sector, of course, by applying the modifications required by the characteristics of the given organization.
- In recent times, it has also been proven in many cases (for example, in the case of political elections) that despite the modern technological possibilities, the distance between the various social groups increases in some respects. For example, social separation, which is reinforced by social media ("Facebook bubbles"), can also provide the false illusion to one that there are no differently thinking people. During the processing of the research results, the existence of this phenomenon has repeatedly occurred to me, and that these processes persist in a relatively small social community, among the citizens of ELTE as well. Therefore, although this phenomenon goes far beyond the subject of the dissertation, I think it is worth to evaluate the results from this point of view as well.

- Perhaps for those who know the ELTE well from the inside, many of the above statements may be familiar. For example, the differences between the faculties outlined in the lecturers' survey are probably not surprising to those who have already participated in university decision-making processes. In my opinion, however, it can be considered as the result of my research that these features have been published in relation to the internal functioning of ELTE in a form that might be appropriate for further consideration and looking for solutions.
- As mentioned in the introduction, my research aim was primarily to get to know the status and the extent of the situation, because the citizens of the University should work together on the areas to be improved. That is why it was a great pleasure for me that a number of university leaders received the results right after the student survey was completed. Non-geographer-based education researchers were also interested in the results of the published research. With this the dissertation's purpose of drawing attention to these phenomena has already been partially realized. After the situation has been discovered, however, it is important to emphasize that further studies are needed to better understand the processes.

Publications related to the dissertation¹

- JANCSÓ T. (2013): *A magyarországi felsőoktatási intézmények hallgatói létszámának változása 1989 után [Changes in student numbers of Hungarian higher education institutions after 1989]*. – In: Geográfus Doktoranduszok XIII. Országos konferenciája – konferencia kiadvány [Proceedings of the 13th National Conference for PhD Students in Geography]. Konferencia helye és ideje: Szeged, 2013.11.21-2013.11.22. SZTE Természettudományi és Informatikai Kar Gazdaság- és Társadalomföldrajz Tanszék.
- JANCSÓ T. (2013): *A magyar felsőoktatás területi szerkezetének és hallgatói létszámának alakulása 1900-tól 1945-ig [The development of the territorial structure and the number of students of Hungarian higher education from 1900 to 1945]*. – In: BOTTLIK ZS. (eds.): *Önálló lépések a tudomány területén [Stand-alone steps in the field of science]*. ELTE TTK Földtudományi Doktori Iskola, Budapest. pp. 29-46.
- JANCSÓ T. (2016): *A földrajzi tér és egyéb tényezők szerepe az egyetemek működésében - az ELTE hallgatóinak mentális térképeinek tükrében [The role of geographic space and other factors in the functioning of universities - in the light of the mental maps of ELTE students]*. – *Educatio* 25. 4. pp. 617-628.
- JANCSÓ T. – SZALKAI G. (2017): *A magyarországi felsőoktatási vonzáskörzetek jellemzői, az intézmények elérhetősége, és a középiskolák szerepe a jelentkezésekben [Catchment areas, geographical accessibility and the role of the high schools in the Hungarian higher education system]*. – *Földrajzi Közlemények* 141. 4. pp. 370-385.
- JANCSÓ T. (2017): *The role of the university identity and students' opinions of each other in the university operation – through the example of Eötvös Loránd University Budapest*. – CEHEC 2017 conference volume, Budapest. (In the process of publication)

¹ Complete list of publications: <https://vm.mtmt.hu/search/slist.php?lang=0&AuthorID=10037803>