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## Professional teachers' lives in Hungary during the communist regime<sup>1</sup> (1949-1990)

### Vita professionale degli insegnanti nell'Ungheria durante il regime comunista (1949-1990)

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**Abstract.** The study aims to introduce the memories of Hungarian high school teachers about their professional activities. The main aim is to investigate the experience of being a teacher during the communist era. Based on interviews with eleven retired secondary school teachers from a small town, the study attempts to depict personal life stories and identify altering pedagogical action models formed by history that are dependent on different social and political demands. With the help of the teachers' memories, the study represents their educational paths and the way these educational professionals see the tasks, the roles, the prestige of their profession as well as the way they experienced their failures, victories, and their active and retired years.

**Keywords:** teacher training, communist regime, teacher's professional life, school memories.

**Riassunto.** Lo studio mira a presentare i ricordi degli insegnanti ungheresi di scuola superiore sulle loro attività professionali. L'obiettivo principale è quello di indagare l'esperienza di essere un insegnante durante l'era comunista. Basato su interviste con undici insegnanti di scuola secondaria in pensione di una piccola città, lo studio tenta di descrivere le storie di vita personali e di identificare i modelli di azione pedagogica alterati formati dalla storia e dipendenti da diverse esigenze sociali e politiche. Con l'aiuto dei ricordi degli insegnanti, lo studio rappresenta i loro percorsi educativi e il modo in cui questi professionisti dell'educazione vedono i compiti, i ruoli, il prestigio della loro professione, così come il modo in cui hanno vissuto i loro fallimenti, le vittorie, i loro anni attivi e pensionati.

**Parole chiave:** formazione degli insegnanti, regime comunista, vita professionale degli insegnanti, memorie scolastiche.

<sup>1</sup> The word communist was not used in the Hungarian context. Not only in living language (vulgar tongue) but also in historiography the word socialism was the terminus. Today we can find both of them and the use of communism permits generalizations (Bihari 1996)

## INTRODUCTION (HISTORICAL BACKGROUND)

The development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's Hungarian intellectuals was defined by several significant turning points throughout history. Secondary school teachers' professionally transferring knowledge has always played an important role in the foundation of the intellectual life of the elite. They could form not only the quality but also the existence of the elite. In this study, the examined secondary school teachers were born in the 1930s and 1940s. Consequently, they have had to encounter three intellectual schools of three different political systems during their lives. They spent their childhood in the pre-World War II restricted parliamentary system, which propagated conservative, national Christian values. Hungarian history arrived at a radical turning point after 1945. Due to the Soviet influence, the communists gradually took over the power and established a one-party system (1948–1949).

The Soviet influence determined the history of Eastern Europe after the Second World War. The state of Hungary identified with the Soviet communist model. The period was labelled as “socialism” by Hungarians. The socialist era in Hungary consisted of three sub-periods: a transitional period between 1944 and 1949, the establishment of the communist dictatorship between 1949 and 1956<sup>2</sup>, and the third period, the Kádár era<sup>3</sup> between 1956 and 1988–1989. The following year was a turning point, as, after the change of regime, a pluralistic democracy began (Bihari 1996, 4–5; Romsics 2010, 271).

After 1945, with the elimination of the multi-party system, a one-party system was established (1949). The nationalisation of the factories, banks and mines without any compensation and the collectivisation of agriculture assured the further development of the economy. However, the collectivisation of agriculture was successfully completed only between 1958 and 1961, after the Revolution in 1956 (Romsics 2016). The cultural life had similar transitions. Schools owned by the church (about two-thirds of elementary schools and half of secondary schools) were nationalised too, in 1948. The new political leadership abolished the compulsory religious education. The acceptance of the Marxist-Leninist ideology was mandatory in the fields of culture and education. The intellectual elite of the pre-war bourgeois era, the

Christian middle class could not integrate after 1945. On the one hand, the large landowners and the upper middle class had lost their political influence by the late 1940s. On the other hand, the Jewish bourgeoisie and elite, that had played a determined role in the cultural life, fell mostly victim to the Holocaust. After 1945 the aristocrats, factory owners (who were alive and not emigrated) and wealthy peasants were relocated. Their places were taken by the leftist opposition of interwar period and by the young people of worker and peasant families. “Sovietisation” transformed family lives, too. Hungary went from an agrarian-industrial country to an industrialized country within two decades. The expansion of the education (with the compulsory eighty-year-long basic education) had spectacular results. If we sum up the efficiency of socialist pedagogy (between 1948 and 1989), we can state that illiteracy disappeared, the number of secondary school students has increased about fivefold. Following the Soviet model, the new regime wanted to create a new elite. Higher education supported the schooling of children of poor peasant or working-class origin (Romsics 1999; 2016).

The Revolution of 1956 attempted to make a change in the political system but turned out unsuccessful. The fight for freedom in 1956 has been the symbol of Hungarian independence ever since. The greatest loss of the country was the 200 000 people who left Hungary after the revolution (Romsics 2016).

If we analyse the political indoctrination, a specific interaction of politics, ideology and education, we have new aspects and results to debate about (Somogyvári 2019, 664–81). The idea of communist education as a modernisation strategy was borrowed from Monica Mincu. The author analysed the Soviet influence and its interaction with western educational patterns in transformed and adapted versions. In her perception, the Soviet influence in education should be as an imperialist force and as a voluntary borrowing. She underlined, the communist model cannot be interpreted as a coherent model. The communist states could realise their own answers by internationalisation with local adaptation in the Communist area (Mincu 2020, 319–34).

“Soft” socialism in Hungary starting in the second half of the 1960s provided better living conditions, and it was called “goulash communism” or “refrigerator socialism”. This relative well-being of the society eased the ideological oppression as the standard of living and education rose significantly. Families could afford to buy a car and a weekend house; moreover, they could travel abroad. Hungarian citizens could visit Western countries, too, and it seemed to be the “happiest barrack” in the Soviet area (Romsics 2010).

<sup>2</sup> The leaders (M. Rákosi, E. Gerő and M. Farkas) of this period returned to Hungary from Moscow, where they had spent long years and had close ties to high-ranking Soviet leaders. They were direct representatives of Stalin's politics (Romsics 1999).

<sup>3</sup> This era named after János Kádár, the head secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Party, which became more relaxed after the beginning of the 1960s and functioned as a soft dictatorship.

The Soviet influence resulted in centralisation, it had similar effects than western modernisation tendencies. Hungary based on its earlier cultural heritage began to work out its educational reflection and adapted the western inputs, too (Mincu 2020). From the 60s, the Hungarian party changed its church and literature policy. Kádár had a compromise with the elite. There were three forms of authors and works: the so called “three Ts” (after the Hungarian words támogatott “supported”, tűrt “tolerated” and tiltott “forbidden”). Kádárism departed from the orthodox Soviet politics and worked out the Hungarian model of communism. The limited freedom helped to demolish the old system. The change of regime in 1989–1990 created the rule of law and political pluralism (Romsics 2016).

#### INDIVIDUAL LIFE AND MEMORY (RESEARCH FIELD, AIMS, METHODOLOGY)

The memories of the teachers give us an opportunity to study the changes of Hungarian history and their influence on education. The “personal stories/histories” told by the eleven interviewees depict the nature and the evolution of teaching in secondary school. They provide new aspects of the national history and history of education by projecting the everyday practice of the profession. The teacher’s life histories enable us to compare them to the most significant transitions of the Hungarian education policy. The personal reminiscences provide us with peace of information about the Hungarian pattern of socialist education.

The interviewees were all teachers of the same secondary school and most of them spent the majority of their active years and retired from there. The goal was to reach out to the oldest pensioners; therefore, the target groups were teachers between the ages of seventy and eighty. The oldest interviewed person was 84 years old. The two headmasters are exceptions, one of them did not retire from secondary school (70 years old) and the other is younger than the examined group (66 years old). However, they were both significant personalities of the institution as leaders. They had a deeper insight into the operation of the school as an establishment and the work of their colleagues among whom many of them were their former teachers. Unfortunately, not everyone was able to participate at the interviews as four persons cancelled the personal conversation due to medical problems<sup>4</sup>.

The former and current head of the school study supported to have contacts to interviewed teach-

ers. It was helpful that the interviewees had a positive approach and welcomed me in their homes and willingly answered my questions. All teachers agreed with the publishing of the interview material. They were proud to be interviewed.

Historical research of the 20th century gets new impulses from Jan Assman’s writing on cultural memory and the mapping of the nature of individual and collective memory (2013). Halbwachs (2010, 403–32) pointed out that remembrance is always influenced by society. However, individual recall of memories and memory are collective products while individuals belong to several different communities. The importance of individual memory and oral history was enhanced by several factors: as a result of the shift in lifestyle caused by technical development, while writing a diary and exchanging letters went out of fashion, the accelerated world made historical remembrance disappear (Nora 1984)<sup>5</sup>. Recalling and preserving personal memories are triggered and strengthened by career researches primarily based on interviews. On the other hand, technical development provided new tools for the researchers by creating the technical framework for storing and analysing great quantities of data. Besides, the reevaluation of the nation’s interpretational framework brought society into focus. Consequently, the structure of memory opened up the narrow frame of national memory and “socialized” it, making it interdisciplinary, involving sociology and anthropology. Criticism towards oral resources usually includes the following: their subjectivity and narrative nature which is also their advantage as they can grasp personal identity. The subjective form can provide a far richer and more nuanced picture of the past. The testimonies cannot be regarded as simple statements; we have to analyse complex meanings that include, as a narrative, the complex system of memory, ideology, and subconscious desires that come into existence in certain situations (Vértesi 2004, 1–15).

The reminiscient individual is given the option of keeping a distance from the past and to systemize, structuralise, and interpret the past concerning the future. This also helps the individual to create defence strategies too, meaning that recalling the past can even invoke a certain defence mechanism. Constructing the past includes the trinity of experience, sensation, and narrative. As the individuals turn towards the past, they write their stories from the future, making the present the past (Kovács 2000; Gyányi 2010).

During the interview, the reminiscient teachers recalled “the image of the serpentine river” with their

<sup>4</sup> The interviews were made in 2013 and 2014. The results of research have been published in Hungarian language since 2015.

<sup>5</sup> [http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00861/00012/99-3-10.html#P10\\_119](http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00861/00012/99-3-10.html#P10_119). Accessed: Mai 15, 2020.

narratives, which was kept in their course with guided questions (Esterberg 2001). Memories, intentionally or not, become “monuments” (Nora 1984), although the interviewees do not regard themselves as heroes. Several of them mentioned that they “only wanted to remember the good things”. They mainly constructed their life story from successive events but they did not rule out their negative memories either (Padrós and Collelde-mont 2017, 523–36). Secondary school teachers are active participants of social processes; however, the influence of their work can be felt much later. They cultivate and educate generations, crowds of “civilized individuals”.

As a result of the linguistic-hermeneutic revolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became important to reconstruct the hidden, inaccessible content of the text and to explore the context of the text organisation. Language text is no longer seen by science as a reflection of objective reality, but as an empirically graspable medium of the social world built by language. According to this interpretation, the human language creates meanings with which it shapes reality, thus the result of the interpretation is the “reality described by the language” (Carver 2004, 144).

On the other hand, it is necessary to recreate the genealogy of the pedagogical mentality in the postmodern era, as Marc Depaep (2007) pointed out, referring, among other things, to unconscious emotional manifestations and modes of action that have been incorporated into various pedagogical theories (ideals, sometimes utopias) and even in educational practice (Depaep 2007, 28–43; Németh 2002).

The oral history provides several opportunities for researchers to analyse the data: the tools of comparative history and content analysis enable us to compare personal experiences with written history within the historical framework of pedagogy. In this case, the qualitative technics (content analysis of interviews) gave a chance to know the hidden context and to bridge the individual stories with the official canon. With due criticism and generative build, personal flashbacks help to “solve intellectual puzzles” (Mason 2005, 15). It is possible to compare the micro-level to mezzo or macro-level of history. Moreover, we can look for the changes in teacher’s professionalization, and highlight the typical trends of Eastern European countries (Glatz 2005).

#### TO BE A TEACHER IN RURAL AREA DURING THE KÁDÁR-ERA

The life of the interviewed teachers is closely linked to Cegléd, small-town life, and their workplace, the Kos-

suth Lajos Secondary Grammar School. The small town with 40 000 inhabitants, 70 kilometres from the capital city Budapest has a history of more than 600 years. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the completion of the railroad, it became part of the country’s circulation although it kept its village-like character. Major progress was brought by the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as urbanisation accelerated. The citizens of the town wished “they did not have to go to Kőrös and Kecskemét (neighbouring cities) for the brain”. They wanted to establish an eight-year secondary school which, after lengthy struggles, began functioning as a state-owned secondary school in 1899. It generated fierce debates about whether the town needed an eight-year secondary school or an agricultural technical school would have been more useful (Reznák 1982).

National educational policy at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century supported the towns that did not have secondary schools. The ideology of the former progressive, aristocratic liberalism was overshadowed in multi-national Hungary and nationalist tendencies intensified. The young nation-state regarded education as a protective force to maintain Hungarian supremacy (Puttkamer 2003). However, minorities did not mean any threat to Cegléd as the population of the town was Hungarian.

The two-storey school building based on the school prototype of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy was finished in 1902. The new, comfortable school brought a great change into the lives of the students, mainly coming from wealthy peasant families. The new school had electric light, bell, flush toilet, a gym, and modern gymnastic tools. Citizens of the town were proud of the institution since the money necessary for the foundation was provided by them and they fought for the building and the reputation of the school. The town wanted to name the school after Lajos Kossuth<sup>6</sup>, leader of the revolution of 1848–49 but this could only be realised in 1920, and the name of the school has been unchanged since then. The more than 100-year-old school survived the several reorganizations of education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and remained a state-owned secondary school all along,

<sup>6</sup> Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) was the most popular freedom fighter in Hungary. He was a nobleman, lawyer, journalist, politician, and Governor-President of the Kingdom of Hungary during the revolution and war of independence between 1848 and 1849. After the fall of the Revolutionary War, he sought allies but gave up Hungarian independence because of unfavourable international circumstances for the Hungarian cause. He settled in Turin, Italy, and lived there until his death. For the rest of his life, he was active in Hungarian political life, opposing the compromise with Austria. Cegléd considered itself the „city of Kossuth” and 100 citizens of Cegléd visited the “hermit in Turin” in 1877 (Kossuth gave a famous recruiting speech in the city in 1848) (Reznák 1982; He 1911, 916–18) <https://archive.org/stream/encyclopaediabri15chisrich/page/916/mode/2up>. Accessed: June 15, 2020.

**Table 1.** Path of lives in place and time.

Interviewed teachers <sup>1</sup> and subjects taught by them	Place of birth <sup>2</sup>	Place of Secondary Grammar School	Place of Higher Education	Working places	Working years in KLG <sup>3</sup>
BB, male Chemistry, Biology	<b>Cegléd</b>	<b>Cegléd</b>	Budapest	Pásztó, Albertirsa, <b>Cegléd</b>	1957-1992
BK, female Hungarian/Russian literature and language	Budapest	Budapest	Budapest	Albertirsa, Cegléd	1964-1999
GK, male Hungarian/French literature and language	Kiskunmajsa	Kiskunfélegyháza, Baja	Szeged	Mezőberény, Cegléd	1975-2005
GI, male Chemistry and Physics	<b>Albertirsa</b>	<b>Cegléd</b>	Debrecen	<b>Cegléd</b>	1965-1994
GS, male History and Geography	<b>Cegléd</b>	<b>Cegléd</b>	Debrecen	Kőrösetetlen, <b>Cegléd</b>	1976-2006
KGY, male Biology and Geography	<b>Cegléd</b>	<b>Cegléd</b>	Szeged	Csemő, <b>Cegléd</b>	1973-2012
MÁ, female Hungarian literature and language, History	<b>Cegléd</b>	Kecskemét	Budapest	<b>Cegléd</b>	1964-1996
SLJ, female Violoncello, Choir leader	<b>Kenderes</b>	<b>Cegléd</b>	Debrecen	<b>Cegléd</b>	1975-2000/15
SZS, male Russian literature and language and Social Studies	Öregcsertő	Kalocsa	Szeged	<b>Cegléd</b>	1967-1993
TT, male Physical Education and Hungarian literature and language	Sopron	Sopron	Pécs	Sopron, Cegléd	1982-2009
TCZM, male Mathematics and Physics	<b>Nyársapát</b>	<b>Nagykőrös</b>	Budapest	<b>Cegléd</b>	1964-1992

<sup>1</sup> Their names are marked with their monograms. After the monograms their gender is indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Albertirsa, Nyársapát and Kenderes are located near Cegléd.

<sup>3</sup> KLG is the short form of Secondary Grammar School. It is called Kossuth Lajos Gimnázium today.

keeping its name and is currently functioning as a secondary school with four, five, and eight-year-long education, preparing students for further studies in higher education.

Interviews enable researchers to expose the extent of the movement of the examined teacher generation and to explore whether the mobility observed is fit to the political transitions following the war. Compared to the conditions between the two world wars, social mobility accelerated significantly. The question arises, how the interviewees were mobilised as a result of the new economic, social and political situation, how their social situation changes as intellectuals, and what distances they take in space and time.

By examining the spatial mobility of interviewees we can establish that out of the 11 teachers 7 are directly connected to the town (Cegléd). Four of them arrived at the secondary school from other cities (one from Budapest and three from rural towns: Sopron, Kalocsa and Mezőberény). All of them moved to the town for family reasons, three of them followed their spouses who are

from there. The connection is double in the case of five persons who were born in the town (or in a neighbouring village), and attended secondary school there. Later, their earlier teachers became their colleagues<sup>7</sup>.

#### CHOICE OF SCHOOL AND PROFESSION

Three of the interviewed teachers went to teacher-training school which required only secondary education and a qualifying exam had to be taken after receiving the secondary school leaving exam. Two teachers from Cegléd went to college in the neighbouring towns (Nagykőrös, Kecskemét) and the interviewed person from Kiskunhalas went to school in Baja. All three of them chose to study in higher education instead of taking the qualifying exam. It has to be mentioned that one

<sup>7</sup> In the table, Cegléd is highlighted in bold to indicate who was born in Cegléd, who attended secondary grammar school in Cegléd and who worked in her former secondary grammar school.

teacher attended a religious school (Kalocsa, Jesuit Secondary School) and was planning to pursue a career in the church, but due to political transitions, the secondary school was secularized.

As for secondary school studies, 1 out of 11 studied in Budapest, 5 in Cegléd, 1 in a secularized Christian secondary school, and 3 in teacher-training schools. Teacher-training schools provided 4+1 year education based on the law of secondary school teachers from 1882. They organised courses in pedagogy, methodology, and practical skills. The studies ended with a secondary school teacher degree and after a year of training, a qualifying exam could be completed. The three interviewed teachers chose higher education after the final exams, two of them attended a university and one attended a teacher training college (Table 1) (Vincze 2018).

The generation finishing secondary school in the 1940s and 1950s saw and experienced the complete transformation of the educational system that followed the Soviet example and secularized schools, reshaped the ideology, and the forms of education. Socialist education offered an ascension opportunity for students from rural, poor peasant backgrounds. For many people, this meant a real cultural uplift. The majority of interviewed teachers made their professional choices for personal reasons, based on their interest and with the examples and support of their families. They did not refer to any political or other external motivations.

To provide the workforce for secondary school, the former traditions of teacher training were eliminated and the three-year-long educational college was introduced in Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged and Pécs and started operating in 1947–1948<sup>8</sup> (Romsics 2010, 320; Ladányi 2008).

The higher educational reform (1948) aimed to adjust higher education to the needs of the people's democracy: 1. provide a progressive, well-qualified group of teachers 2. circumscribe scientific research and vocational training 3. validate the aspect and thought of social sciences 4. radically transform the composition of students 5. introduce a fixed study schedule, concerning personal needs. The system was overburdened and distorted (Ladányi 2008).

The choice of profession was modified in two cases, as mentioned before one of them decided to become a teacher instead of pursuing a career within the church (priest or missionary) although he had been more inter-

ested in an interpreter and translator training but had the perception of the absence of any support. The other one is the girl who was an aspiring markswoman who, at the age of 18, realized that this profession can only be pursued through military training that women were excluded from. So instead of the mathematics-physics major, she picked during the auxiliary application and went to the Lenin Institute which was an institution providing training in special Russian language and ideology (Marxism–Leninism).

The choice of profession and the choice of major and institution was coincidental in other cases. The future headmaster of the secondary school was studying to become a biology-geography teacher and was automatically admitted to the university in geography thanks to the result achieved on the national contest for students; however, this pairing was not taught that year so he chose the College of Szeged where he received practical training he was very satisfied with. The interviewee applying for history-geography major had more difficulties with the choice of profession. She was complaining about the lack of information and the fact that certain subject pairings were only launched in every two years. Choosing Russian as a major seemed like a unique choice in the case of the two colleagues teaching the Russian language and the basics of their ideology. After closing down the Lenin Institute, the Russian language teacher training was integrated into Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Teachers, the example of the parents (who are also teachers in two cases), and the landlord and landlady who were also teachers played a role in choosing a major.

The time factor was important in two cases. The choice of shorter college education made it possible to start working earlier. Another example is choosing teacher training (biology and chemistry) instead of medical studies also meant a faster option for earning money.

Four out of 11 were working constantly during their university studies, although they emphasized that they could cover their living costs with their scholarships and they spent their earnings on clothes, culture, and supporting their families. Several of them emphasized how grateful they were to their families for making them able to study at university.

Returning to their families was an important aspect when choosing a job. Young job seekers who were born (five of them) in Cegléd, took the final exams, and lived here all returned to the secondary school. This trend slightly contradicts the great social mobilization that accompanied the industrialisation and the urbanisation. Budapest had a significant appeal before the two world

<sup>8</sup> The length of the training was reduced to two years due to the lack of teachers in 1949–1950 and secondary-level primary teacher training was reinstated. They were transformed in top four-year pedagogical colleges.

wars and the proximity of Cegléd made it even more attractive. Taking a job was not a question of choice. Counties had pre-contracts with teachers so they can keep some intellectuals on their territory for a minor scholarship and provide as many specialised teachers as possible. Almost all interviewees admitted that starting the job was not easy, not even if they knew the headmaster of the Kossuth Lajos Secondary School, the desired institution. The educational department of the local governments apportioned the jobs to the new applicants and they recruited the workforce. It is necessary to clear, that the party (MSZMP)<sup>9</sup> could have a say in the assignments. Relatives of officers<sup>10</sup> and the elite beneficiaries of the party had preference. After graduating from university, many could begin their professional life only in elementary schools of nearby settlements (6 persons).

Getting the job was an important element of all reports. All interviewees emphasized the role of seeking information, waiting, and coincidences. A typical example of this is the account of the teacher of History and Geography about entering the Workers' Militia<sup>11</sup> besides becoming a party member to get the teaching job at the secondary school. Two colleagues arrived from another side of the country. The P.E. teacher left Sopron for Cegléd. After the college years spent in Pécs, he went back to teach in Sopron because of his contract but love was stronger and he followed his fiancée to Cegléd. The teacher of Hungarian and French languages spent several years in Mezőberény, which he left for personal reasons. He arrived at the secondary school, after teaching in a primary school for multiple years, and finally found the professional environment what he had always been looking for.

As a feature of the path of life of the teachers, we can state that the significant social mobilisation characteristic of the period (from villages to towns, from the countryside to the capital) is not typical of these educational professionals. The educational contracts with the counties that regulated the movement of the workforce played the most essential role in this besides the centralist party-state governance. As for literacy, the majority of the interviewees (9 out of 11) became first-generation intellectuals with a degree. The objective back then was to give the working class and poor peasant children an advantage when it comes to further education. According to the statistics, in the school year of 1937-38, the

composition of the enrolled students was the following: 19 working class, 114 peasants, 50 256 other origins. However, in 1951 it looked like this: 33 830 working class, 22 640 peasants and 50 256 other origins. Universities had a quota and the social composition and the ratio of female students were restricted (Pukánszky and Németh 2004). Women were granted equal conditions with Law Article 22 of 1946<sup>12</sup>.

The changes in higher education at the beginning of the 1950s can be seen in the quantitative indicators while mass culture saw rapid development. The media, the radio, and the cinema became educational and recreational tools for the masses.

The growing need for professionals meant a significant rise in the number of students. The number of students was restricted by the five-year plan (and other one-year plans). Jobs were given out from a federally content is missing (Ladányi 1999, 81-2)<sup>13</sup>. 67% of secondary school students were of working-class or peasant origin. The number of secondary school students "only" doubled, probably because of the higher requirements while the number of students in technical institutes rose by 3-400%. The ratio of female students also grew significantly. By the middle of the 1950s, the number of full-time students tripled.

The strong presence of Soviet culture, the mechanic translation of Soviet textbooks<sup>14</sup>, the emphasis on practical training, the elimination of certain majors (sociology, physiology, a double major in two modern languages), cutting the pedagogical-psychological courses did no favour to the standard of higher education. Education was ruled by schematism, dogmatism, and vulgarism (Ladányi 2008, 90-5).

Although natural science subjects were added to the secondary school curriculum, the overburdening caused a significant level of dropout that they tried to stop. The main goal of secondary education was to provide a good workforce, to teach the ideology of Marxism and Leninism, to defeat reactionary doctrines, and to prepare students for higher education.

Among the parents of the interviewees, one had a father working as a primary school teacher and another a secondary school teacher and some were skilled professionals: rail-man, post-man, mechanic. The ones with peasant origin did not give an exact account of the size of their property (one of them emphasized his poor ori-

<sup>9</sup> MSZMP: Hungarian Socialist Party (Hungarian Workers' party before 1957), which had the exclusive political power.

<sup>10</sup> Cegléd had a military barrack for the largest army corps of Southern-Hungary.

<sup>11</sup> The semi-military defensive body of the MSZMP between 1957 and 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Law Article 22 of 1946. <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-evtortveny?docid=94600022.TVI&searchUrl=/ezer-evtortvenyei%3Fpagenum%3D51>. Accessed: Mai 15, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> The first five-year plan accepted in 1949 increased the number of students by 8 000 but the modification in 1951 changed it to 30 000.

<sup>14</sup> Among the new university textbooks published between 1950 and 1952, 86 were translations of Soviet textbooks (Romsics 1999, 360).

gin). Based on the interviews, we can see that by choosing, modifying a major, and with some bypasses and compromises, they were able to study and get a degree. The order of the Council of Ministers in 1952 introduced the mandatory written and oral entrance exams but the origin and the ideology (Marxism and Leninism) of the student still played an important role during the selection process. Some of the interviewees mentioned the experience of the entrance exams, mostly those who felt their oral exam was a success (Ladányi 2008).

### PROFESSIONAL LIFE

The interviewed persons preferred to talk about starting their jobs in detail. Struggling with bureaucracy and their first day at work were significant memories for all of them. The future headmaster, for instance, started his professional life in a divided village school where four classes studied in one room side by side. The lodging, the serenity of the countryside, and the challenges of teaching attracted him. Teachers described their travelling difficulties in detail.

Teachers in rural school usually got a room or an apartment but married couples had to travel to their workplace every day. Buses or trains only commuted a few times a day and it was a real relief if they could buy themselves a motorbike. Four out of the 11 had to participate in post-graduate education while working to supplement their college degree. They took part in 2-3-year long correspondence courses while working and having a family.

Teachers could engage in their interests during their work, too. Two typical cases: the Hungarian/Russian colleague who was not originally planning to become a teacher and did not enjoy this role, found joy in establishing the school's library that she could complete a librarian course for. The Hungarian/history teacher studied theatre directing and for many years working with the talented students planning to become actors with great success.

The everyday tasks of a teacher are determined by current expectations. Besides teaching their subjects, which was the most desired task, teachers had to fulfil many other roles as well. Being a class-master had great prestige, all teachers fulfilled this role, some of them only for shorter, some for a longer time. The number of classes they took on (a term lasted for 4 years) depended on other roles and personal attitude. Only the choirmaster was not a class teacher.

Among educational and training tasks, being the leader of the professional community was an honour in

the value hierarchy, and 3 out of 11 fulfilled this role. Colleagues could become presidents of the final exam committee with certain teaching experience, usually after ten years of teaching; 3 out of 11 took on this task. As special task, the librarian teacher led the administration of the final exams.

Two out of eleven became principles; both were vice-principles first, one became the head of the secondary school, while the other led the agricultural technical school. Almost all secondary school students were members of the Hungarian Youth Communist League (KISZ). Four out of 11 were members of KISZ for a shorter or longer time. The leadership usually aimed to appoint a party member but life usually interfered. It was mostly the younger colleagues who fulfilled the task, only 2 out of 4 were party members. Only two mentioned the party membership but 6 out of 11 were members of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP)<sup>15</sup>. Two fulfilled an important position and two could participate in other trade associations in the form of the trade union movement and labour-related cases (lawsuits). Three colleagues were representatives in the local government and the head of the secondary school was a member of the educational committee. The teacher of chemistry and physics fulfilled the highest political and administrative function. First, he worked as deputy mayor, later as headmaster of a secondary school. The 10-15 years following the change of regime was characterized by the growing influence of teachers in the political governance of the town, the satisfactory support of educational issues, and the teachers' role in making decisions (school developments, construction works, reorganizing school districts, etc.).

Creating their own organizations, associations, and journals and the cooperation to maintain these were important elements of the professionalization of teachers (Németh 2009). Six out of 11 belonged to different professional organizations, usually to national associations specialized in their field. These organizations aimed to unite the teacher of a given field and organize vocational training, provide regular professional communication, organize contests, found prizes, and help to strengthen their subject. A few examples for this are the Society of Geography Teachers, the Eötvös Loránd Physics Association, the Association of Teachers of Hungarian, the Board of Trustees of the Three County Mathematical Competitions, the National Council of Choirs (KÓTA, from 1970 to 1990 and its successor). Besides, the teacher of biology and chemistry, as a member of the Hungar-

<sup>15</sup> The Hungarian Socialist Workers Party was founded in 1957, after the revolution of 1956 was put down; its predecessor was the Hungarian Workers' party. It functioned as a sole party, a state party and had an exclusive political power.



ian Entomological Society (where he got into through his university professor), brought his students to several events. The sciences survived the constant shifts of emphasis of the education policy (it preferred social sciences over natural sciences and then the other way around) but the ideological influence was able to make some disciplines disappear (genetics, psychology, sociology which were labelled as unwanted bourgeois sciences in the 1950s).

Secondary school teachers lost their former role as a "scientist teacher" after World War II, and they rather became movement leaders, bureaucrats, mass educators and representatives of the state will. However, we can say that the former examples (their teachers who grew up in a civil school system before 1945) strongly influenced their behaviour and literacy was an important requirement among their ethical norms. For the teachers of this old generation, mediating culture and the reinforcement of the enculturation process survived as serious traditions. The two Hungarian teachers left significant and long-lasting marks behind. They directed theatre plays and extraordinary school celebrations and supported the aspiring actors among students. It is worth to note that between 1950 and 2000 about fifteen former students of the school became famous actors. The colleague reorganizing the school library converted it to the ETO system and finally made it transparent and utilizable. The history/geography teacher contributed to the promotion of traditions by organizing the annual Kossuth quizzes. Naturally, the annual "*Who knows more about the Soviet Union?*" All schools organized this "Quiz" every year during this period. Russian was introduced as an obligatory foreign language in 1949 that meant a new challenge in language teaching since teachers were needed in a relatively short time. The Lenin Institute, the College of Foreign Languages (by training interpreters and translators), and the teacher training colleges and universities helped its formation. The Hungarian-Soviet Friendship Society sponsored the quiz.

Scientific work and research did not disappear within this period either. The teacher of Biology and Geography, who had an important role in the leadership of the school, got a degree in geography, kept contact with his professors, and acquired a Ph.D., too. As a headmaster and even as a pensioner, he supported and organised local researches. The teacher of History and Geography who got a degree in Debrecen was devoted to local history. He wrote several books through processing the 100-year history and foundation of the secondary school. Both colleagues helped several of their students into the National Competition for Secondary School Students and many of them even got to the final round.

The reminiscent teachers mentioned that they had to take on several other tasks, which meant smaller or bigger burdens and in many cases, they were not financially compensated for them. These included the various forms: f. e. fire and safety education, mass sport, canteen supervisor, supervisor of study room, clubs, and tutoring. The most liked and mentioned activity was the organisation of school trips for students and schools. A significant activity of the school was the organisation of the competition of Singing Classes, associated with the name of Zoltán Kodály<sup>16</sup>. The "reversed day" has a long tradition, during which let, even in the years of dictatorship, a democratically elected student headmaster directs the school.

The reminiscent teachers were talking about their past tasks, successes, and difficulties willingly and enthusiastically. Several prepared in advance and wrote down the most important and significant events. They are proud of their students and of helping them to continue their studies. A lot of them were able to graduate from university and become successful doctors, lawyers, and teachers. Several teachers mentioned that a great challenge was for them to help students with learning difficulties. It was sometimes not easy to avoid failing them at the final exam in natural sciences. This challenge was a bigger pedagogical effort than to teach talented students. The "saved" examination-candidates were all very grateful.

Among their pedagogical methods, they emphasized the importance of demonstration and the maintenance of motivation. They had tried several methods for their subjects. The most remarkable are: lectures of the Hungarian Entomological Society for those who were interested, theatre visits, teaching Transylvanian-Hungarian literature, screening of films, hikes, factory visits, experiments conducted by students, listening to music. When asking them about their everyday routine, they all talked about frontal teaching. However, their teaching was based on the non-formal and informal learning, too.

#### CAREER, PROFESSIONALIZATION AND DE-PROFESSIONALIZATION

The study focuses on individual professional lives of secondary grammar school teachers. The question arises as to whether career patterns can be observed based on individual professional life. First one, it is necessary to

<sup>16</sup> Kodály Zoltán (1882–1967) was a Hungarian composer, pedagogue, linguist, music educational reformer and philosopher. He developed the internationally well-known Kodály Method, which based on folk music and choir movement.

underline that the notion of career was not acceptable and used in socialist era. Career belonged to the bourgeois phenomena. In the interwar period, the indicators of becoming a teacher related to confessional, gender and social aspects. More and more teachers had academic ambitions and having a doctoral degree got a job in secondary schools (Biró 2015, 13–29).

After 1945, the success of professional live mainly depended on political orientation and credibility (membership of party), on social origin (background of worker or peasant family) and exemplary lifestyle. In the historiography of the socialist era, vocational qualifications and educational qualifications are also available remained the general criterion of professionalization. However, within the professionalization of the elites of the monolithic party state education is not the only criterion. After the World War II, society lost the control above the elite's selection. There was no relationship between getting into the elite and individual abilities. The main criteria for selection were obedience, commitment and loyalty. The leaders of the party have decided on all major state matters. Since the state apparatus officials were usually party members, participated in the control of the state administration as party members. The party and the state were inter-woven, individual careers also prevailed. The centralized political system has created a huge number of political and economic bureaucracies. In 70<sup>th</sup>-s and 80<sup>th</sup>-s, the importance of expertise increased. The change of position at mandatory intervals has generally resulted in horizontal mobility. It resulted in a circle of under-qualified cadres: according to contemporary terminology, the cadre did not lose, only transformed (Rácz 2013, 1–40).

If we examine the process of professionalization, we can find the effort to unify the standards, but there may have been person-specific differences between members of the profession in the exercise of their profession. The prominent persons of their professional group of teachers have influenced their students (Johnson 1972, 46; Friedson 2001, 139). However, the national transformations significantly changed the prestige of teachers during the socialism. It had several unfolding negative tendencies, too (Garai and Németh 2018, 219–32).

The professionalization of high (secondary grammar) school teachers came into effect in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Hungary, this process was delayed by the fact that the nation-state was created with the compromise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867<sup>17</sup>. The ruling of secondary schools and teacher

training in 1883<sup>18</sup> set the bases of the two forms of the eight-grade Hungarian high school training, namely, arts and science. This act unified the teaching canon. The idealised, humanist model of literacy was the centre of the training. The main goal was to educate the students to be moral persons and responsible citizens. Afterwards, the teachers and the participants of the teacher training founded different professional societies, in which they could stand up for their profession, their interests, and pedagogy as a science. Several pedagogical pieces of work were born: studies, workbooks, and overarching volumes about the history of pedagogy. The professionalization of teachers was widely accepted due to the numerous promotions, professional societies, and prizes for extraordinary work. The fact that secondary grammar school teachers had considerably higher wages than elementary school teachers was a token of society's respect for the profession. Secondary grammar school teachers were honoured members of the middle class with high prestige and reasonable remuneration. The "numerus clausus" in 1920<sup>19</sup>, mainly concerning intellectuals with Jewish origins, significantly influenced, mainly restricted the recruitment of teachers during the two world wars besides the strong appearance of women in the field after the acceptance of the secondary school law of 1934 that modified the school structure<sup>20</sup> (Nagy 2009, 291–305).

Changes in 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian or semi-totalitarian states have generally resulted in the loss of a monopoly over expert (educational) institutions and the field of teacher training. The concept of "de-professionalization" was born to mark it (Jarausch 1983, 9–36; Friedson 2001). The interviewed persons indicated that they have had social responsibilities as well, they provided which they did not specialize in, as well. They suffered several repressive measures (in the entrance

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Herbartian System in Hungary, as well. He implemented standardised teacher training and organised the first Teacher Training Seminary, which offered pedagogical and psychological courses to teach students. Kármán founded the first practice school in Hungary in 1870. Practice teaching became an obligatory component of teacher training.

<sup>18</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=88300030.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fpagenum%3D31>. Accessed: June 15, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> By the Teleki government, law XXV (numerus clausus as closed number) was legislated in 1920, that restricted the number of non-Christian students to be admitted to higher education. It was modified in 1928 and due to international press, the number of Jewish students increased. <https://net.jogtar.hu/getpdf?docid=92000025.TV&targetdate=&printTitle=1920.+%C3%A9vi+XXV.+t%C3%B6rv%C3%A9nycik&referer=1000ev;https://web.archive.org/web/20190106153317/http://regi.sofar.hu/hu/book/export/html/13270> Accessed: June 15, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=93400011.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fpagenum%3D41>. Accessed: June 15, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Count József Eötvös created the act about the folk school education and the act of minorities (1868). Mór Kármán supported by Eötvös set the base of Hungarian teacher training, and he worked out the

examination, military training). The totalitarian state gave key positions to an ideologically conforming group. The state has changed previous ethical rules, reforming the requirements for recruitment and the framework for a professional operation (Friedson 2001; Garai and Németh 2018, 219–32).

The radical transformation in Hungary after 1945 exiled the bourgeois intellectuals and encouraged the education of working-class and peasant children which led to a heavy dilution and breaks the process of professionalization (Németh 2009, 279–290). Broadening higher education further decreased recruitment that was accompanied by low self-esteem and serious professional depreciation, resulting in a so-to-say “de-professionalization” (Fónai and Dusa 2001, 41–49). The depreciation of prestige was further worsened by the constantly decreasing salary of teachers (Nagy 2001, 8–86) which, in the 1950s and 60s meant that they had the salary of a skilled worker or even less. As a result, the profession was quickly feminised and many of the men chose a different career or working in an office instead of teaching. The occurring changes transformed the living circumstances of teachers too, they gradually differentiated and they rather became part of the lower middle class.

## CONCLUSION

The memories of the retired small-town teachers recall the everyday life of the “*perceived history*”. These teachers do not see themselves as heroes but they are proud to look back on their professional life. They feel they had contributed to the development of the intellectuals of their town. Besides successes in competitions and entrance exams, their list of victories also includes students who became good parents and honest, happy adults. They appreciate the feedback and help of the former students and their children and grandchildren more than honours. They are honoured citizens<sup>21</sup> of their town. The prestige of the profession of the secondary school teachers was never questioned in the local community.

These professional lives, strongly connected to the small town, returning to the birthplace, and lacking great spatial and professional mobilization are somewhat different from the national average. In the mirror of the interviews, it seems that teachers in the countryside enjoyed more prestige and could preserve more professionalism. The atmosphere of the local community and the traditions of the secondary grammar schools could help in the professional integration of teachers. Not only educators

born here but newcomers could find their professional identity. Significant migration of socialism (from village to town) cannot be (or partially) detected here. Affection towards parents, the spouse, and the alma mater is the main issue determining the choice of the workplace, which was influenced by educational contracts.

The interviewees emphasized that it was important for them to provide for their families (own flat, detached houses, car, garden) and educate their children, in addition to completing studies in higher education. Not all, but some of them were willing to directly speak about political issues (being a party member, ideological questions, education policy) and they avoided making a judgement about the education and the conflicts of the past few years, hence, as witnesses of a past era, they did not facilitate the research.

The wisdom and the lifestyle of their old days can be an important lesson for future generations. They have several recreational techniques and they spend their days actively and are all balanced and positive individuals. It is worth paying attention to them since they know the secret of a long life. Where do they find it? Useful activity is different for everyone: gardening, quiz games, learning poems, cycling, swimming, walking, cooking, growing herbs, singing in choirs, learning a foreign language, engaging with grandchildren. They see their steady family background and the support of their colleagues as the most essential elements of their professional life and personal happiness (all interviewees are married and have kids).

How do these interviews contribute to pedagogy? They provide a lot of new, additional information on how the multiple reforms transforming education affected the everyday life of the people involved in education. We can gain a whole lot of new and useful information by examining the changes in the process of professionalization. Discovering the personal paths of life in the earlier dictatorships of the Central-Eastern European region would open up a new perspective in the future (Glatz 2009, 1–11). Besides the macro-historical processes of a region with a nearly similar history, the micro-stories could lead us to new, undiscovered phenomena of pedagogy.

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<sup>21</sup> 2 of 11 (the choir leader and the principal of the secondary school) received honorary citizenship.

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