

Organizational and Conceptional Possibilities of Higher Education in Hungary, in the region West-Pannon

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1. The dilemmas of the Hungarian higher education

The history of the Hungarian education is a success story mainly as far as the quantitative figures are concerned. The Hungarian education formally met all those demands required by the objectives outlined in the nineteen's. Structurally it has been reshaped. The difficult process of its financing has become more acceptable. These factors have resulted in a rapid increment of the number of students admitted. This year in September the new credit system is being launched in all over the country. This significant step means a very important move forward as far as educational policy issues of EU accession is concerned. It is also the very first time that after long year of rigid structural framework graduates and undergraduates can move free in the course of their educational procedure. The increment of the number of students is forced by the market and our universities and colleges just wanted to reply market challenges. There is one thing which unfortunately has not changed. It is the mentality of the lecturers and the students.

The XXI. century higher education requires a totally different attitude relevant to the demands of the customer' sphere. It also means that the context of the education is to be revised. On the other hand we are absolutely aware of the fact that a quantitative explosion is always escorted by some unfavorable phenomena. In the period of 1990 - 2001 the number students enrolled trebled. A more dynamic trend could only be monitored in Portugal and Poland. Unfortunately this expansion tendency has not been supported by increasing state financial contribution. The consequences: rundown infrastructure, worn out buildings, student hostels in emergency state of conditions. Unfortunately even there is a shortage of them. In 1990 every second student could live in student hostel, recently this ratio is under the third of the student population.

Nowadays 107.927 fresher is expected to pay the total cost of their education. Unfortunately the successful student loan project is not capable to compensate for the high costs of the higher education. Educational policy decision makers were called for the dangerous outcomes of overpopulation in the higher education some years ago. The following question was raised: Is higher education a factory of knowledge or is a paper factory? Since the question was asked a very significant national debate has been in the professional literature in Hungary. The conclusion seems to be depressive:

in the factories of the higher education underpaid lecturers are fighting against students, who do not seem to have the minimum level of motivation required. But everybody will get a degree because that is the only way for the institute to get the norm based per capita state financial subsidy. Just the other way round lecturers are not interested in firing those students who are not capable for the degree course they enrolled.

The impressive increment of different degree courses are not supported by lecturers with the scientific qualification required. That is why the level of these new courses sometimes pretty poor. There is another new trend. It is the appearance of the so called 'traveling professors or Intercity professors 'who are on their way from one institution to the other. Their most favorable educational device is their recorded video lecture is a way to survive. Analyzing job opportunities of graduates highlights the dangerous trends as follows: over education, courses not required on the labor market. More and more young graduates are forced to contract for works with irrelevant job requirements. Just other way round they are expected to implement such a sort of work, which would only require GSCE and basics computer skills.

2. Hungarian higher education system: an overview

The Hungarian higher education has a dual system, there are colleges and universities, some colleges are associated with universities as college faculties of the universities. A university can offer college level courses, too. The tenure of training at college level (corresponding to B. Sc. level) is minimum 3 years, maximum 4 years; the tenure of education at university level (corresponding to M. Sc. level) is minimum 4 years, maximum 5 years (with the exemption of medical universities where the tenure of education is 6 years).

The higher education institutions can organize short-cycled post-secondary courses called Accredited Higher Vocational Training (AHVT) courses. The AHVT training is even more practice oriented as the college level education and gives qualification in a narrower field; it is not a degree course, the graduates do not receive diploma, but certificate. The 2 year AHVT programmes are offered mainly by colleges (sometimes by universities) and in many cases in co-operation with secondary vocational schools. According to the higher education law the definition of the universities (i.e. conditions of an institution to be recognized as university): They are higher education institutions able to organize training courses in more than one field of science (fields of science: social sciences, natural and technical sciences, life sciences and theology), and inside a field of science in more than one branch of sciences; carry out scientific research activity; have accredited Ph.D. courses; are empowered for habilitation process; their university professors should have Ph.D. degree and habilitation.

A college – according to the higher education law – can operate if it is able to organize more than one training course in a branch of science; it carries out research

and development activity, the college professors should have Ph.D. degree. The universities organize 3 year Ph.D. courses, specialized accredited further education courses (with a normal duration of 2 years), various continuing education courses.

The term higher education includes only higher education institutions recognized by the government (actually by the parliament), and we have state universities and colleges, higher education institutions controlled by various churches (dominantly by the Catholic Church) and private colleges. Until now private university has not been established.

Hungarian higher education achieved a very high standard of excellence in the past and as a result enjoyed an excellent reputation throughout the region and the entire world. The system at one point produced the highest per capital rate of Nobel prize winners in the world. However, the Hungarian higher education system was not well prepared to meet the challenges that were emerging at the end of the 20th century. First, the system was rigid and unresponsive to the demands of a market economy. Secondly, the system was inefficient and wasted enormous resources. Third, the system was inequitable with the public sector, financing virtually all the costs of the system and private beneficiaries paying few of its costs.

In July 1996 Amendment was added to the Law on Higher Education. It integrated the post-secondary Accredited Higher Vocational Training into the system of higher education. The amendment defined a four-level structure of higher education, the four levels of the system are two-years for higher vocational training at its base, 3-4 years for college programs (in our terms they are undergraduate courses), 4-6 years for university programs (in our terms they are graduate programs) and 3 years for doctoral programs together with other specialized post-graduate programs (2 years).

Now we have 17 state universities, 13 state colleges (the number of state institutions was reduced from 55 to 30), 26 church-owned institutions and 6 foundation colleges. 1999 was the year of preparation for the integration, among others organizational and operational rules and rules of business operations were worked out, rectors and finance directors were appointed, the new senates were elected.

The main goals of the integration to be achieved are as follows:

- Offering a wider range of courses for the students and increasing the standards of education with an emphasis on the establishment of a flexible educational structure satisfying the changing demands of the labor market
- Unifying intellectual resources (initiating multi-, trans- and interdisciplinary activities)

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- Higher educational institutions should become the intellectual centers of regional development taking into account the tasks related to the inevitable consequences of the accession of Hungary to the European Union
 - Improvement of the stability of institutions since – due to the co-existence of various disciplines – institutions will become less sensitive to swift changes in the market and economy
 - Performance and quality oriented financing will enable the institutions to elaborate long-term institutional policies. The institutions are assured that rationalizing will not result in decreasing financial support provided from the state budget.
 - Efficient use of intellectual and infrastructure capacities, eliminating redundant multiple structures
 - More efficient income generation activity of the institutions.

There are other elements of the higher education development strategy:

- An expansion of enrolments, in 1991 only 12 percent of the age group 18-22 was accommodated in higher education, recently the ratio is 28 percent, and the government plans to increase the ratio to about 50 percent. It does not mean the doubling of the absolute number of students since the dramatic decrease of the young generation in Hungary,
- Equal access of young people to higher education by realization of a student loan system.
- Restructuring of the umbrella organizations of higher education (Hungarian Rector's Conference, Hungarian Accreditation Committee, Higher Education and Scientific Council)
- Introduction of the credit system in all higher education institutions
- Modernizing the higher education, which process is partially financed through a USD 150 million World Bank loan and USD 100 million from the Hungarian government, distributed through tendering.

All higher education institutions are obliged to prepare an Institutional Development Plan and subsequently, if they can get a share from the World Bank loan, a Capital Investment Plan.

3. *Quality assurance in higher education*

Standards of higher education and quality endorsement of the education are based on the operation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee and the Higher Education and Scientific Council. The endorsement of both bodies is necessary for introduction of a new course at any state or private HEI (higher education institution). The latter takes principally financial aspects, the regional distribution of the trainings, and the demand of the labor market into consideration. HAC examines the curricula, the qualification requirements, the quality of the academic staff, and the infrastructure of the proposed course into consideration.

In Hungary all the accredited courses (at accredited higher vocational, college and university level) have uniform qualification requirements accepted by HAC when the initiative of the given course was submitted from a HEI. The same course can be started in another HEI with the permission of the minister of education, based on the opinion of HAC and when the experts of the HAC form an opinion about the application of the institution they examine whether the curriculum of the course is in accordance with the previously accepted qualification requirements of the given course. It gives basis for the domestic recognition of qualifications granted by various HEI in Hungary.

In addition to the accreditation of new courses, the task of HAC is the periodical institutional accreditation (in every 8 years) based on a detailed self-assessment of the institution and the report of a visiting committee. If – as a result of the institutional accreditation – HAC has a conclusion that one or more courses are not satisfactory as far as the fulfillment of educational goals, standards of education are concerned, it makes a proposal to the minister of education either for the suspension of the right to conduct the final examinations and to issue diplomas in the given field of study, for a determined period of time, or for the withdrawal of state accreditation of the course.

4. *Hungary and EU accession*

Within the frames of education and training higher education as an inheritor of middle-aged European universalisms, and as one of the criteria of the modern European dimension higher education is not only the personification of institutionalized spiritual universalisms but higher education is the most significant factor of unified single market and is also an indispensable factor of characteristics of labor market. The Rome and Maastricht Treaties outlined the most significant characteristics of internal markets. Operation and efficiency of domestic market depend on the intellectual and professional skills and knowledge of the labor force graduated higher education institutions. Professionals skills and knowledge should meet the demands both domestic and foreign market. Mutual recognition of jobs and qualification is required to provide possibilities for labor force finding better job possibilities in the Community. This mutual recognition can only be implemented on

the basis of comparing the performance at the level of educational and training. On the other hand maintenance of a multicultural colorful Europe should rely on individual national educational trainings, safeguarding identification of each nation in the European Community. This dual educational objective requires specific educational project provided by the European Community which one hand have focuses on maintenance of equality of individuals nations and cultures and being transformed to the European dimensions on the other.

The European Community does not want to uniform the higher education systems of the member countries. Hungary as a candidate country does not have a particular model to be followed. At the same time all the countries who want to be members of the European Community immediately will be involved in a competitive situation even in the field of education. This particular situation makes it necessary to implement certain previous steps of accommodating. Besides the available state financial resources in the framework of tendering processes of European Community candidate countries are about to get some additional financial resources. The roles of tendering processes are to be improved, the ratio of self-financing should be increased and cooperation with costumers providing resources should be negotiated. Being qualified for competitiveness is a long and expensive procedure. First steps must be taken right now in order not only to suffer from the unfavorable tendencies of European accession but to rake profit from it as well. As far as this particular issue is concerned readiness for accession is not that evident. There are some positive tendencies but on the contrary some unfavorable tendencies occur. On the labor market Hungary may be competitive only with extraordinary capacities and characteristics.

It is the mutual interest of all those who are involved anyhow in the field of higher education to generate the implementation of the necessary changes (especially the restructuring of the required measures to adopt new style of attitude and mentality). According to the previous experiences of proposals of financing European Community projects are favorable for those member countries who had massive priority strategic issues, established marked oriented institutional background competitive, there responses follow the logic of the intellectual market and have also gained the required routine.

5. Hungarian tasks originating from the integration procedure

Having been involved in the negotiations of European Community accession the Hungarian higher education seem to be very much interested in the future cooperation with the other member countries. This procedure should be sped up as the accession is coming soon. Our future interest puts a tremendous pressure on us to take all the necessary measures just in the pre-course of accession as certain preparatory activities providing possible earliest utilization of accession. The most significant issues are as follows:

In my opinion one of the most significant handicap is that the level of strategic thinking is not satisfactory and to a crown it all some time is missing. There is no government strategy of higher education which could serve as a basis to harmonize the objectives, priorities of the higher education of European Community. This harmonization is the very base on which the Hungarian national interest should be represented. Without domestic national higher education strategy we are not capable to carry out efficient cooperation with the formation of the strategy of the higher education policy of the European Community.

One of the most important task is to develop the relationship with domestic higher education companies and enterprises. More improved coordination of their contribution in financing and investing in the higher education is indispensable. The tendency of expenditure of Research + Development is unfavorable. More sophisticated contribution of companies and industries are required. A domestic adoption of fund raising activities is also indispensable.

A new attitude a more significant role taking activity is required in the procedure of setting the basics of integration policy. Gaining the skills required, there distribution and research project tendering in that topics seem also to be indispensable.

In accordance with demand of economy working out special education projects should be simulated. These projects (especially in the scientific fields of technology and economics) should enable graduates to apply and develop modern information technologies.

Unfortunately we do miss certain tools and methods to measure and value the intellectual knowledge of our students. Similarly we do not have sophisticated system of evaluation of lecturers in the higher education. In my opinion establishment and application of these missing systems should be a significant measure of our European Union accession higher education policy issues.

According to general standards, graduates of the Hungarian higher education are competitive with graduates of other countries of the European Community as far as their knowledge on the requirements of the curriculum is concerned. The very point of their disadvantage comes to light if the issue of communication, ability of involvement in debate, and marketing, 'selling the product ' occur. Cooperative and communicative skills of our graduates should be developed. To achieve significant results both structural and mental measures should be taken.

To satisfy the needs of the demands of the society and to harmonize it with the supply of the higher education further research and analysis should be supported and financed by the management of the higher education. Nowadays the harmony of that particular demand and supply does not exist. This discrepancy spoils the efficiency of the higher education and in a long term it may undermine the competitiveness of Hungary and it may also - to some extent may spoil the efficiency of the European Community.

Besides the maintenance of our national heritage, improvement of national identity Hungarian higher education should be ready for getting to know the European cultural heritage and answering the questions European identity. In case we are about to imagine our future as a member country of the European Community the above outlined issues should be articulated among our educational objectives, and specific ways of transformation of these issues is also a crucial task. To develop European identity awareness attitude new courses were introduced (European studies). One of the most significant issues of these new courses is how to strengthen the education of the European dimension. This educational process should be coordinated.

Besides the automatically approved degrees a more focused coordination of diploma recognition policy should be introduced in order to achieve automatic recognition of the degrees of the Hungarian higher education. To support student mobility institutes of Hungarian higher education should apply the regulations of the European Credit System.

In the course of the preparatory phase of accession involvement in open European Community projects should be stimulated and supported. Support of tendering (how to write, what to write, profession outlay) should be coordinated. It is the very time of learning the most important nuggets of tendering techniques and strategies, which in a long term may result in winning big tenders.

Language acquisition is a top priority in the European Community. Hungary does not seem to have good reputation in this field, so at least Hungarian higher education should adopt a better attitude and should set up structural basis of a more efficient foreign language teaching-learning process. Admittance of higher education institutions should be at least a fair knowledge of one of the language accepted by European Community (certification required) and by the end of degree course graduates should pass another language exam approved by the European Community. This significant step would provide better mobility for the graduates. A more proportion of graduates should be facilitated to be able to meet the demands of multicultural community. Higher education should play a more dominant role in foreign language acquisition and utilization. More students from abroad should be involved in the educational process with providing lectures in the accredited European Community languages. More technical and professional foreign literature should be applied in foreign language.

Most of our universities in Hungary operate on the basis of the old-fashioned German model: strong faculty and department position. Requirements of the structural modernization of our universities should be also taken very seriously. A more general trend of department organization level should be adopted.

As far as the managerial skills and operation efficiency is concerned new attitude is to be introduced. Management, rector, deans and the justification of role of the students concerned our attitude is based on the old Humboldt-model which is old-fashioned and was even eliminated in Germany since environmental conditions and university organization have totally changed. Institutions managed according to this attitude are not able to satisfy even the poorest demands of efficiency.

Most of the so called multi disciplinary universities in the fifties in the member countries of the European Community have been eliminated by the educational authorities. Instead of these universities a dominant character of specific university profile was established on dual structural basis. Before our accession to the European Community the integration procedure should be finished, which is really designed to restructure the broken university institutional model relevant to meeting the demands of the new situation. We ought to think it over if the structure of Hungarian higher education can really be regarded to be a dual one since during the last years it has been field up with the elements of linear structure. We also ought to think it over having drowned the conclusions that it would be worth moving towards to the direction of linear restructuring policy. Unfortunately in a very specific way the dual structure even exists in our new integrated universities.

Information technology should play a more significant role even in the simple educational procedure itself. The costs and the sophisticated installment policy require a well designed supported implementation process.

From the point of view of European Union accession our most significant weakness is the poor quality "I would say the lack" of the information system. To make decisions required tremendous responsibility for example evaluation of development projects frame figures of addition policy, norm-based financing: reliable data are not accessible. Based on the English example a professional entrepreneurship is to be established with the exclusive right installation an operation of information system of the higher education. This entrepreneurship collects, filters, corrects and records all the necessary data. Data are provided to decision makers. On request summary leaflets should be available.

In order to catch up with the European higher education the proportion of financing our higher education is to be revised. Member countries are expected to revise it. Expenditure comparing to GDP is very close to developed European standard but the per capita GDP is about one third of it. Real value decrement experienced in the last few years, however, will result in not catching up but legging behind. Since our GDP value is relatively low in percent comparison to the developed countries a lot more proportional expenditure is required. The efficient utilization will force a more professional higher education management if not the extra expenditure will disappear in the bottomless pot without increasing efficiency.

The most urgent issue is working out the strategy of Hungarian higher education development. Such a strategy which is workable during the phase of preparation and also can be applied after the accession. This strategy can provide dynamic basis in the course of the strategic policy and also articulates the most important strategic issues during the accession negotiations.

6. Possibilities and challenges

When we are about to prepare for the first period of negotiating strategies of higher education as far as European Union accession concerned we should clarify where the European Community is and where the European Community goes to. Simultaneously we have to answer the questions both concerning European Union accession and European Community challenges.

The European Community also faces significant challenges of the millennium and significant radical social changes. There are three massive attacks and their impacts influencing the education system. The first is **information revolution** (shock). The information revolution restructures our whole life integrates working and learning, integrates the role of the lecturer and student. The second shock is the **shock of globalization**. This trend is to establish the global labor market in a decade, with creating total mobility of labor, balancing wages and consuming structures. This trend is followed by unfavorable identity clashes. Some countries lag behind being excluded from the European Community. The third one is the **civilization shock**. This civilization shock means that skills and knowledge become rapidly outdated resulting in a sense of lack of security; ethical challenges (see genetics). This trend overestimates quality and creativity. These four factors give a big lesson to learn for the educational system.

- Prepare human beings to understand changes, improve creativity, improve decision making creativity based on stable standard of values (general educational skills)
- Minimize the number of drop outs, minimize the number of students of low education, minimize the overspecialized courses, minimize individual tragedies (for example three compulsory languages at unified basic education level, information technology, social intelligence, adaptation skills)
- The educational system should have a wide input and colorful output. The system should be able to harmonize knowledge gained in different places at different times, in different forms. (it means that everybody should be equipped with a sort of “personal competence card” internationally accepted and unified, bearing all the approved skills and certificates.) This cannot be implemented without the cooperation of the family-student-company-institute of higher education.

- To achieve these goals clarification of some significant issues should be implemented: -quality of education; - educational methodology; - financing forms, etc.

The quality of education is a very exciting question since it is almost close connection with any other educational issues. That is why the term of quality is being defined again and again and nowadays the meaning of quality is often associated with assurance.

So it seems to be obvious that the institution we are going to be accepted (European Community) besides the respected performance of our higher education some other properties will also be tested, which we can not be that much proud of.

7. What is higher education worth if Hungarian

In 'Agenda 2000' Article 4. European Union experts valued all the national branches of the economy from the point of view of the European accession. Just few branches were valued in such a positive way as the Hungarian higher education was. In my opinion it was not accidental. It was a pleasure to hear that, but I think there is no reason for sitting back. Before being absolutely happy it is worth thinking over some significant issues:

- The brief report does not only speak about success but also it highlights some challenges and there are also some problems articulated. The report does not say that our accession will be implemented without problems but it says 'significant difficulties are not expected'. It should really mean that for example comparing to the agricultural sphere or the environment protection the position of the Hungarian higher education is not that bad.
- In the language of diplomacy 'challenge' means problem and problem means threat.
- What sort of institutional reforms would be topical? What curriculum development and supervision would be ideal? I am absolutely convinced that our achievements were implemented under East-European conditions (institutional culture, professional management, institutional body operation, strategic attitude, lack of marketing and controlling, mechanism of decision making.) Our curriculum – in a wider sense: instructional requirements,- are really very far from entering the "learning society". (Concentrated courses, flexibility, credit system, feedback of the opinion of graduated and customers)
- How to introduce new educational programs and subjects (how is the number of students authorized), what is the accreditation procedure of multi-, interdisciplinary like? If anything in the world is really difficult and unbelievably complicated it is new educational programs introduction. There is only one thing being more difficult (almost impossible): canceling the old educational program.

- **How to implement a modern education technology, installment internal quality assurance program?** For example application informatics (ad absurdum: multi media) in other non- informatics courses, frequency of student evaluation, publicity, feed back.
- **How to be prepared for the Research + Development program?** In two years time in about 12-13 billion HUF has been paid to Brussels, and in the forthcoming years we have to tender this money back in a totally different tendering conditions.
- What measures to be taken (can be taken) to solve the problem (threat) of low wages and the lack of financial resources? Getting to know the guidelines of the reform fiscal policies of state budget, we can not be to optimistic.

8. *Some consequences*

Having analyzed the challenges of the European Community accession of the Hungarian higher education we should not be too clever to be able to draw the following conclusions:

- The challenge is tremendous. If we response on time and are response are correct it may provide us enormous possibilities. If not it would give us serious threat.
- The Hungarian higher education made steps forward in the course of integration in the last period. The next steps should be harmonized with the formal ones (integration, World Bank loan, Credit system).
- The very fact that the European higher education status has not been fixed yet so we have to match to a system which has not been outlined properly, and the other factor namely the poor response capacity of the higher education system should force all the interested institutions and individuals to feel mounted responsibility to harmonize all the necessary reform steps to be taken. (government , institutions)
- We should have a strong professional strategy, which can guarantee that a political course replacement will not automatically result in fundamental strategic changes. In case such a strategy is established by the time of European Community accession Hungarian higher education will be capable to meet all the demands.

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