



How to Improve the Hungarian Higher Education in Hungary? The Particular Situation of Rural Colleges

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1. Introduction

After the turn of the millennium, the social functions of higher education are growing, becoming more complex. This means new tasks for higher education participants. Institutions must adapt to changing economic and social expectations, requirements constantly. In Hungary, the co-operation of education, research and innovation plays a key role in development. However, due to the lack of resources, innovation-driven solutions take advantage.

2. International trends of higher education

In the last two decades there has been several new tendencies in the higher education systems of the European and the developed world. The most significant of these trends are as follows:

- mass education accompanied by the increasing concern that the quality of higher education and the level of education decreases
- the differentiation that allows institutions to meet the increasing requirements
- the shorter, 1-2 year training programs have received higher education status in the range of further training,
- the importance of re-training, which produces a demand for the training needs of atypical, irregular age, new training facilities have been introduced in higher education institutions,
- certain higher education institutions have introduced a variety of different programs (the universities also announced college programs, and colleges were given the right to launch certain disciplines at university level) as a result of globalisation, in parallel with the differentiation of the system of higher education within the countries, new forms of institutional cooperation appeared at international level, because of the free movement of labour there is need for a basic condition for mutual recognition of the qualifications, diplomas, which requires some coordination of educational systems (the subjects, students mobility,)

Mass education brought along the extraordinary complexity of higher education, caused by the rapid rate of specialization of sciences. More and more new departments and educational programs are established in the system.

Nowadays we are not talking about mass training, but the generalization of the higher education. (the 50% participation rate may be called the transition towards generalization, and above that we can say that higher education is general). This increase becomes self excitation process and we can witness the degrees' devaluation- In this situation, we will need different solutions in higher education, which are different from the solutions used earlier. Focus will be on the opening and the reflexivity of the higher education system. Focus will be on the need for the so called service institution, as well as the need of the institutes which are able to meet different student expectations.

Development of higher education in Hungary, in addition to the aforementioned tendencies, the European Union's strategic objective plays a significant role. Europe is in an age of transition.

Over the past few years there has been a crisis over the European economy's structural weaknesses.

Politicians at the European level have recognised that education and training are essential to the development of today's knowledge society and economy. The EU's strategy emphasises countries working together and learning from each other. EU education and training policies have gained impetus since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the EU's overarching programme focusing on growth and jobs. The strategy recognised that knowledge, and the innovation it sparks, are the EU's most valuable assets, particularly in light of increasing global competition. EU Member States and the European Commission strengthened co-operation in 2009 with strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training („ET 2020”) a follow-up to the earlier **Education and Training 2010 work programme** launched in 2001. At the same time the world is fast-moving, towards the long-term challenges and the globalisation, the of pressure on resources, the intensification of ageing become more and more intensiv. The EU must take ownership of the future. The Europe 2020 explores the social image of the 21st century market economy and three mutually reinforcing priorities takes into account:

Smart growth: knowledge-and innovation-based economy.

Sustainable growth: a resource-efficient, more environmentally friendly and more competitive economy.

Inclusive growth, high employment and social and territorial cohesion by encouraging the development of economy.

A series of benchmarks are set for 2020.

The benchmarks for 2020 are:

- at least 95% of children between the age of four and the age of starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education;
- the rate of 15-year-olds with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%;



- the rate of drop-outs from education and training should be less than 10%;
- the rate of 30,34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%;
- an average of at least 15 % of adults (age group 25-64) should participate in lifelong learning

Variable domestic higher education

Throughout the analysis of complex interdependencies it is crucial to look at the long term processes of Hungarian Higher Education. Debates over a new HE legislation may have more popular points, but careful analysis of profound changes is essential for lasting national regulations and successful institutional strategies. Who is willing to enter to tertiary education in 5-10 years? What social and job market demands should be accounted for? What is the expected international context for Hungarian higher education? How will of the Hungarian HE sector as a whole change in response, and how will the institutions reach their goals in a most successful way in this future context? It is not easy to find the answer to these questions.

Unfortunate demographic trends result in continuous decrease of the secondary school age group, and this will affect the number of HE applicants negatively in the next 8-10 years. Moreover the formation of the European HE area might be tempting for Hungarian students.

Small proportion of incoming students together with a possibly increasing number of Hungarians moving to foreign institutions is just another risk factor in that process. One of the analyses concludes that the massification of higher education is not only an international trend but it is supported by a rational choice of applicants-graduates, of employers and of the wider circle of stakeholders even if it leads to 'overeducation'.

The number of students tripled in the 1990's but in the last couple of years this number decreased significantly which resulted the end of the extensive growth.

The structure of HE changed completely. Currently out of 69 HE institutions 26 universities exist in Hungary, 19 of these are governmental, 7 non-governmental. We also have 10 governmental colleges and 33 non-governmental (foundation and church) colleges.

Despite of the development of higher education in Hungary in the last few years/decade, the ratio of graduates are far beneath the average of the EU and the developing countries. In the OECD countries 30% of the population between age 25-64 are graduates, while this ratio in the EU 21 is 27%. While, in comparison, this number in Hungary is 20% (in 1997 the ratio was 12%) which shows a remarkable failure.

The legal background of higher education has also changed. The higher education law of 2011 (National Higher Education Act) describes the correction of the HE processes of the last 2 decades, focusing on quality improvement in order to achieve international competition. The main improvements are as follows:

- The separation of the function of university and college. Universities will be able to implement trainings in all training cycles. Colleges may provide bachelor trainings, also higher education trainings, but not master level trainings. (previously, colleges were allowed to provide master trainings also). As a new improvement, 1/3 of college training staff must have PhD degree.

- The government is entitled to upgrade current higher education institutes for education strategic purposes. Universities or university faculties providing outstanding quality training may be given 'researcher' classification. Colleges may be given 'applied research colleges' title if providing trainings on more internationally acknowledged educational fields.

- Financial support of higher education institutions is also being changed significantly. Beside of governmental support, the importance of secondary (applications) and the tertiary (business, civil) supporting resources is growing.

- The senate may approve the institution budget within the frames specified by the operator/owner. The senate makes decisions about the development plan of the institute, the establishment of the business organization, business shares and business co-operations with the approval of the owner.

- The Senate reduced the weight of the student representation of 25-33 per cent to 20-25 percent.

- The institution of post secondary vocational education (providing OKJ registration previously) terminated. This role is now taken over by higher education vocational trainings providing diploma.

- There are several improvements affecting students/learners also, such as application, circumstances of application, language examinations etc. The conditions of tuition fee also changes. There are 3 main categories, state scholarship students are fully supported by the government, the partially supported students pay half of the tuition fee the rest is supported by the state, and the third group is the self-financed students who pay the whole fee themselves.

- The Hungarian Accreditation Committee was established with the country's first higher education law in 1993. It is, according to the 2011 National Higher Education Act, a national body of experts facilitating the control, assurance and evaluation of the scientific quality of education, scientific research and artistic activity at higher education institutions. In 2005, bachelor and master programs replaced the traditional, single stream college or university programs. The majority of new bachelor programs began in 2006 and master programs in 2009. All of them have undergone the evaluation process. The new National Higher Education Act, passed by Parliament on 23 December 2011, lists the higher education institutions operating in Hungary to date. In order to receive state recognition and to issue degrees, all higher education institutions, including private ones, must undergo an evaluation.



- Based on the new National Higher Education Act, from 1 March 2012 on the HAC has 18 full members. (The Ministry for National Resources delegates nine members, three are delegated by the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, two by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, two by the Churches that have their own higher education institutions, one by the Hungarian Academy of Arts, and one by the National Union of Doctoral Students.) The president is nominated from among the 18 members by the minister in agreement with the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Domestic changes are well reflected by the main aim of the 'Széll Kálmán' plan:

Higher education must be attuned to the needs of the economy and the labour market. The number of participants in the various courses must match the expectations of the labour market, in other words, there should be no under or oversupply in certain professions.

The disproportionate tuition and institutional system of higher education must be modernized. The efficiency of the role which the state plays must be increased by modifying the internal structure of the system which defines the number of state-sponsored students.

One of the main tasks for the government is to create the frameworks and the basic infrastructure. Another main task for the government is to act as proprietor for higher education together with municipalities and representatives of businesses and to define precisely the demand in the number of people, their field and quality of profession as well as the fields where research work is necessary.

Higher education as a whole needs to transform to be able to fulfill social functions and utilize its capacities. 2/3rd of the applicants manage to get enrolled nowadays so it is not enough to open the gates any wider. Addressing high school graduates would mean a possible solution. Older groups can also be enrolled in master and other further trainings or supplementary trainings if we make these attractive for them. Both ways fit the EU normative and European trends and helps to fulfil Hungary's contractives as an EU member.

The specific situation of colleges

The diversity of Hungarian higher education is well known by the Hungarian HE experts. By using the result of a domestic research project (Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem TÁMOP 4.2.1.B-09/IKMR-2010-0005) we can classify the higher education institutes in 8 clusters, starting from the smaller church colleges up to the international universities. Based on this classification, the Dunaujvaros College belongs to the 3rd group which is described by a bigger number of students and a wider training profile. There are 10 colleges in this cluster. Beside their common characteristics, they show some differences also because they provide economic, industrial and pedagogical education. All colleges are affected by the economic crisis and changes described by the 2011 educational act. They need to make strong efforts to survive but the solutions are different.

The Dunaujvaros College is at Dunaujvaros which is one of the youngest and the most dynamically developing towns in Hungary, is suited on the right bank of the river Danube, in the heart of the country, just 70 kms south from the capital, Budapest. The modern town of Dunaújváros was born as the result of a grandiose socialist investment project and has only a five decades, or two generations history to look back on.

In 2000, when we had the opportunity to become an independent higher educational institution, we had a definite notion of how to become the intellectual innovation centre of Dunaújváros and the region. We put the enlargement of our training and research areas to this service; we have been building a European Campus. For today we can claim that we are prepared for the challenge - with the motorway M6 and the bridge built near Dunaújváros named after the former name of the settlement, - to build the latest logistic centre of Hungary.

With our conscious educational and infrastructural developments we achieved that the number of students has become ten times larger in the last fifteen years, and now we have about 4000 students. From 2006 we offer eight BSc/BA undergraduate programmes and twelve higher-level vocational training courses. From 2007 our first Master course, the Teacher of Engineering MA programme is also available. From the same time international students also study at our institution, we teach them Engineering Business Management BSc, Computer Engineering BSc, Communication and Media BA and Business Administration BA in English language.

Since 2009 the number of our students has increased, the economic environment became unfavorable. A new strategy had to be established to be able to function successfully.

The college recognized the advantage of the mutual agreement between the economy and higher education and put significant efforts by ensuring resources for the operational diversification to improve the quality of educational level based on regional enterprise needs. The main element of our strategy is to establish the unity of education, research and innovation. Within the frameworks of this strategy we established a regional knowledge center. As a Regional University Knowledge Centre we are building a student-friendly, European campus so that students like living here, would want to stay here, so that they know what they learn and why. We want to provide all the services that make a European citizen happy today.

Utilizing the opportunities of the new higher education act we targeted the 'Applied Research College' title. We renewed the educational research laboratory hubs (TÁMOP, TIOP projects), some of these are unique in central and eastern Europe. (Gleeb laboratory, Bosch laboratory). We established Ecotech Ltd, providing R&D (research and development) activity, technical transfers, coordination of innovation activities and also enhancing industrial connections.

We established mutual cooperation agreements with the biggest industrial companies of the region (ISD Dunafer ZRt, Hankook Tire, Alcoa Köfém, PAV ZRt).



The transformation of the college management is in progress. This means the formation of a 2 dimension, matrix characteristic enterprise type higher education institute. We try to establish a strong connection with foreign universities and colleges and also expand our foreign language training. Foreign students are also attending our school and we educate our Chinese and Turkish students in the English language for 4 types of bachelor degrees.

In the last twelve years, due to the nearly 10 billion HUF developments we have established a campus: with our downtown main building and our neighbouring student hostels our establishments and our rented student hostels create a real circle ring. With our current and prospective partners just as the future graduates our common interest is to provide a training which corresponds to their needs, and we collaborate to serve one another's favour in the fields of education and research development. Our purpose is to continuously train ourselves, face challenges and seek success through intellectual and constructive work.

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