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## Management of Social Inequalities in Hungarian Education Policy

Anikó Fehérvári \*

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*Abstract:* This study is an overview of Hungarian education policy in the period between 1945 and 2015 through looking at the most important journals and data archives. The study focuses on the education inequalities in public education. While in the socialist period the educational policy was mainly under the Soviet influence, after the change of regime the main influencers were the European developed countries and international organizations. The seventy years covered by the study are divided into five periods, each period was determined by an education act and its mentality (Act of 1945, 1961, 1985, 1993 and 2011). Overall, we can say that while the socialist era of mainstream education policy has been dominated by the egalitarian policy, after the transition it disappeared from mainstream politics and supplementary policies came to the forefront. After 2011 a sharp change happened in education policy, which brought back the emphasis on the familiar socialist egalitarian policies.

*Keywords:* inequalities in education, public education, socio-economic background, education policy

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## **Introduction**

This study is an overview of Hungarian education policy in the period between 1945 and 2015 based on the literature. The presentation of a period as long as a lifetime could fill several volumes, so we narrowed our research question in a targeted manner.

The narrowing happened both system-wise and content-wise. We have taken out public education from the education system, which means the study is not concerned with either higher education or adult training. At the same time, since these subsystems are organically connected, several references are made in the study to them. The examined period can be analysed in several different ways. This study is concerned with policies related to education inequalities in public education 1945-2015. In order to introduce them it is necessary to present the school system and its relationships hallmarked by inequality in the given period.

In the study, I review the most important education acts of the period above, as well as writings of scientific standards published in Hungary. There are four significant journals related to research in education (*Educatio*, *Iskolakultúra*, *Magyar Pedagógia*, *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*) and there is one data archive (*Magyar Elektronikus Könyvtár*), which collects books of scientific quality. Our analysis is based on these journals and the material from the archive, as well as on the resources published in them.

## **Results**

The seventy years covered by the study are divided into five periods (Hodgson & Spours, 2006). Each period was determined by an education act and its mentality. Each act results in different effects in the education policy. The laws recording education policy of the time are the following: Act of 1945, 1961, 1985, 1993 and 2011. The results of the study are divided into four chapters: 1945-1960 – period of expansion, from 1960 until change of regime – period of stagnation. The 1985-1993 period can be considered as a transitional one, the Act of 1985 contained measures which can be interpreted as change of regime in education policy. Consequently, these two acts and two periods are presented within one period of time. Though the period after 2011 is discussed in a separate chapter, since it is

quite different from the one preceding it, however, the consequences of current measures cannot be seen or are analysed purely in the short-term.

There were three criteria in each chapter: presenting the school system, its inequality policy and the impact of policy interventions, i.e. the relationships and degrees of inequalities of a given period of time.

#### *1945-1960*

In 1945, in Hungary, public education comprised six years at a public school. However, an amendment of law in 1940 (Article XX of Act of 1940) had enabled the introduction of the eight-year public school and this can be perceived as a step in the direction of unified public education.

The school system before 1945 was strongly selective, the system had several branches, which did not correspond and they were not systematic. Although the public school was a six-year cycle, in practice the learning path had already diverged after the 4th grade into an 8-year secondary school (high school, grammar school, *reáliskola*<sup>1</sup>) and a four-year middle school. Basic vocational training (this also meant several apprentice schools, for example industry and trade apprentice school, agriculture vocational school, a variety of industrial, commercial, and mining schools not forming apprentices) according to the law was based on a six-year public school, experience has shown that often those with a lower qualification have been included in training (Knausz, 1994).

Between the two world wars both the school structure diversified, and its operation and maintenance. Article VI of Act of 1935 tried to remedy this situation and served the purpose of unification and centralization of education authorities. Eight school districts were established in the country, headed by a school district royal secretary subordinate to the Religion and Public Education Minister. The impact of the church was then an important factor of education management. The competent church authorities formed the content of education independently (curriculum, textbooks, etc.) (Knausz, 1994).

All in all this school system which selected early contributed to the fact that the Hungarian social structure froze between the two world wars and was characterized by a great degree of immobility (Andorka, 1982).

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<sup>1</sup> Realschule, placed emphasis on natural sciences, provided students with a more practical knowledge as opposed to high school's theoretical knowledge, allowed entry into certain colleges and university faculties.

A comprehensive education reform started in 1945, in which almost all political parties agreed to introduce an eight-year unified primary education and to raising the compulsory schooling from 12 years of age to 14 years of age. These political parties believed this was the first step to democratization, an important means of fighting inequality. Although the leaders of the reform of the time represented a unified front with respect to the structure of the school, they had disagreed regarding substantive issues. In other words, they had a different opinion on the school's task. Obviously, the impact of the war could be seen in standpoints aiming at developing "new people", as well as putting an emphasis on "national" as opposed to "German". The management issue did not come up in the social and curriculum debate. This, however, also meant that the view about the role of church was unchanged, so the church kept an important role in education (Halász, 1984).

The Hungarian Government finally decided in summer 1945 about the eight-year primary school (Prime Minister's decree no. 6650/1945). Primary school was created from previous public school, middle school and high school lower grades. There were many obstacles to the operation of the new school: a lack of adequate material and human resources in addition to denominational fragmentation, which complicated the start of the new school. A monumental classroom building plan was intended to alleviate the lack of material resources. Restructuring the teacher training was supposed to manage the lack of human resources. To moderate the transitional lack a one-year academy was set up. What to teach in schools also posed a problem. Content regulation appeared only after the primary schools were developed. The whole curriculum was published in 1946 (Ministry of Religion and Public Education's decree no. 7500/1946). In other words, the school structure reform started without being planned and without ensuring its conditions.

The consequence of a primary school reform was the elimination of the old secondary system. A shorter, four or five-year long school was developed. Two basic changes happened between 1945 and 1948: those studying in different secondary institutions arrived at matriculation on a more flexible school pathway, and in 1947 a technological secondary school was founded, which can be connected to industrial secondary schools' reform.

In the background of establishing primary school was the extension of

elementary schooling, and making the road to arriving at matriculation easier, was the unhidden motivation to increase the social opportunities of people from working class and farming backgrounds and thus enhance the development of a new power elite. This period is characterized by a democratizing-egalitarian education policy, which related not only to the generations growing up at the time, but also to adults. In 1945 the extension of adult training started with the organisation of secondary schools' evening courses and schools for workers (Ministry of Religion and Public Education's decree no. 19 100/1946).

There was not much change in the school management and teacher inspection system between 1945 and 1948. The biggest change was in the relationship between church and state. In 1947 there was already a growing tension between them, as a consequence of which the government nationalized textbook publishing first (Horváth, 1975, 1978), and then in 1948 the schools themselves were nationalized. This caused a huge lack of teachers in schools since priests and monks refused to teach in secular schools. The change to socialism which came in 1949, besides nationalization, motivated the government in power to rewrite education policy, the school content and regulation in response to the socialist ideology.

After the change to socialism the new government did not change the school structure, but it did change the school network. Within a short period of time it decreased the number of primary schools (abolishing small village schools) and by referring to equal opportunity reorganized enrolment districts. The biggest problem of the period was still the lack of material and human resources. Although the government had planned several thousand new classrooms by 1956, this was still not enough. A similarly large issue was the lack of vocational teachers: the newly established teacher training schools were not able to answer the demand for educators. The previously separate secondary teacher training remained, and to ease the lack of educators, 3-year vocational teacher training was introduced (Ágoston, 1950; Donáth, 2008).

Subsequent examination proves that the government at the time did not actually strive to alleviate the shortages, especially not the material ones. This was explained by the so-called overdevelopment theory, according to which certain infrastructural conditions (e.g. in education and health care) were relatively more developed compared to the general economic state.

This of course does not mean that the Hungarian education at the time was very developed, it merely means that the economy was underdeveloped (Berend, 1978). Consequently, after an economic boost following 1945, the background industries and services received only a modest developmental investment (Polónyi, 2015; Varga, 1983). This also means that the relative development became a disadvantage later, since there has been no great investment in education infrastructure ever since (Polónyi, 2015).

Although the egalitarian policy made the primary school qualification available to everyone, the quantitative approach induced quality deficiencies. These were demonstrated by teachers lacking proper training with only express training, and a high proportion of people did not finish school, mainly among children of lower social status. The analyses at the time determined that the main reason for dropping-out was the financial situation of families for example they had no shoes, there was a clothing shortage, there was a low recruitment of children early, and families had frequent illnesses (Ravasz 1949). They also found absence from school as a frequent reason, which later leads to study failure and grade retention. Measures to reduce drop-out included material incentives, for example, scholarships for students (in their 7th and 8th grade).

A similar measure was the support of learning and the introduction of learning rooms which extended the education time into the afternoon. In 1950 they introduced generation supplement classes, which were able to provide education for students who would repeat a school year due to their poor results in school (Ministry of Religion and Public Education's decree no. 1223-48-1/1950 III.). The Ministry aimed at reducing drop-out by changes in the curriculum. For example, in 1950 the learning material for grades 5-8 of primary school was reduced (Horváth, 1978). Apart from this, sanctions were introduced whereby parents had to pay a fine if their children were missing from school. The decrease of drop-outs was documented in one-year and five-year plans, formulated as actual goals, but they were not realized.

The socialist government started reforms not only on the level of primary school, but on other education levels, in order to develop a new power elite (working class). The aim was to get as many people from working class and farming backgrounds as possible into secondary school. This aim was perceivable both among school age and adult generations. Namely, adults who did not have matriculation could now matriculate by taking advantage

of flexible conditions making matriculating easily in one-year of training (Ministry of Religion and Public Education's decree no. 51 700/1948). In 1949, secondary schools were unified and built upon an already unified primary training. The four-year high school remained the only school type to have two subtypes: general and vocational. The latter trained for industrial, farming, economic and education professions, with professional training in the last two years (Knausz, 1994).

Knausz (1994) continues that secondary education of youth with farming or working class backgrounds was supported by numerous measures from 1949; they received scholarships, they could study in study rooms and they were accommodated in dormitories. There were still some drop-outs in secondary schools (8% in the first year, 3-5% in the upper grades). At the beginning of the 1950's, the power elite demanded and required good grades in the school reviews, i.e. they wanted the teachers to give good grades to children of farming and working class backgrounds. To prevent drop-outs in secondary schools the same strategy of reducing the curriculum in primary schools was also applied to secondary schools. Another measure was the introduction of year end exams in certain subjects including Hungarian, and mathematics, which was later applied to primary school as well.

The unified secondary school system did not stay viable for long, since economic interests pressured the government into introducing a new vocational training system. Firstly, industrial technical schools were founded to replace vocational secondary schools in 11 professions, putting greater emphasis on vocational training by increasing it from 4 to 5 years. This period in Hungarian education history was the period of forced industrialization (Knausz, 1994). Secondly, at the same time they needed to take into account that the results of transformational measures in education might appear in the economy only in a delayed manner. They tried to compensate for this by increasing the number of participants in adult training and apprentice training. The other change in vocational training system included the law regulating apprentice training adopted in 1949, which now determined training time to be 2 or 3 years. It was a decrease in study time compared to earlier periods. All this served the purpose of providing short-term responses to the demands of the economy (Knausz, 1994).

While the youth of working class and farming backgrounds were



positively discriminated for at this time at secondary school level, children of intellectuals were held back (Knausz, 1994). This suppression was somewhat alleviated at the beginning of the 1950's, since each student was schooled at the secondary level - who wanted to be, and could be - from working class and farming backgrounds.

While the period between 1948 and 1953 was the period of forced expansion, the period between 1953 and 1956 became the period of revision. On the one hand, learning material and curriculum reforms were put in the spotlight; on the other hand, school structure changed, too. The soviet pattern was applied to both of the above; polytechnic education was introduced, and in curriculum reform the learning material was further reduced and its ideological characteristic and preparatory function for real life enforced.

While basic training became general, secondary training came to a standstill after 1953<sup>2</sup>. Neither did the secondary training require the increase in the number of students learning in vocational training, nor did higher education absorb the students coming out from general high school<sup>3</sup>. At the secondary level the education system experienced stagnation. While in 1950 half of all primary students continued their studies in secondary school, by 1954 this proportion had decreased to a little under one third. The positive discrimination for students of working class and farming backgrounds remained, but forcing them to stay in the school system vanished, and as a consequence, their proportion in secondary schools decreased compared to children of other backgrounds. But even under these conditions almost half of the students were of working class or farming backgrounds, which is important because they provided the input for higher education (Ladányi, 1986).

The stagnation and decline was also observed in adult education; both the primary and the secondary school evening classes were pushed back; the special, lighter way of learning for obtaining matriculation was abolished as well.

The result of the push back in heavy industry in 1953 caused changes to

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<sup>2</sup>This is the year Stalin died, which brought significant changes in the Soviet era.

<sup>3</sup> Higher education remained closed, the aim was to educate a narrow power elite, mainly supporting students of working class and farming backgrounds. Children of intellectuals were rejected. Figure 2 of the Appendix shows the number of students in higher education in relation to the relevant cohort.

vocational training, too. The number of students entering vocational training decreased. The framework numbers were designated centrally, on a national level. Apart from this, restructuring was carried out, the predominance of heavy industry professions was altered. The training became 2-3 years instead of the previous 3 years. In 1957, the Ministry abolished the compulsory corporate nature of internship, which was later modified so that the students spent the first year of their apprenticeship in a company workshop and their years 2 and 3 in a producing plant (Ladányi, 1986).

The effect of the period of Soviet power (the death of Stalin, the easing of dictatorship) on Hungarian education was apparent in the following: ideological pressure on the teachers eased; and the criticism of discrimination (regarding the chances to get into secondary schools) against intellectuals was even more intensified (Knausz, 1994).

The post-war land reform and socialist political system in this period resulted in a significant social mobility, and the resulting high rate of flow into agriculture can be observed, and through a strong expansion of the industry, a flow into the working class as well. By the 1950's, these two classes became even more homogenous, both regarding their income and their way of living. Shutting intellectuals out of higher education resulted in intergenerational mobility. Data showed a significant upward mobility among worker and peasant background; half of the leaders and intellectuals came from blue-collar families (Andorka, 1995).

#### *From the 1960's until change of regime*

The extensive educational policy from the 1950's was not sustainable. It became increasingly clear that the expansion of secondary education caused tension in higher education since not everybody who graduates from secondary level can enter higher education (higher education absorbs 20-25% of high school graduates). The focus therefore shifted to preparation for practical life and productive work, the polytechnic, which appeared in the 1950's, served this purpose as well.

Code no. III of the Education Act of 1961 founded the vocational secondary school which was a training offering matriculation, which made the student eligible for higher level further education. At the same time the

high school provided a vocational orientation<sup>4</sup> and thus a direct entry into the labour market. In other words, there were three secondary trainings built on the unified eight-year primary school; high school, vocational high school and apprenticeship training school<sup>5</sup>. While the first two ended in a secondary school leaving examination, the apprenticeship training provided a professional qualification (Figure 1 of the Appendix shows the shift in headcount towards the vocational high school.)

Another novelty of the Act of 1961 was raising the compulsory school age to 14 years old, which enhanced opportunities for all students regarding the acquisition of the primary school qualification. In addition, there was a shift in the educational policy prescribing the reduction of the learning material once again, which turned the direction of the movement towards a fuller curriculum which had been increasing during the new decade (Andor, 2005). All in all, the Act of 1961 did not turn away completely from sustaining the expansion of secondary training, it merely closed the doors to higher education. The introduction of a higher level technical training also served the above aim, such that students could enter higher level technical training with a general or vocational high school matriculation.

The next change occurred following the 1972 party decision, and meant a content intervention, rather than a structural one. The transformation had two goals: reducing the learning material and ideological enforcement. This is how the 1978 curriculum reform took place.

Cracks in the unified school system and primary school education became increasingly visible from the seventies. In his study, Andor (1987) poses the following question; why did a quantifiable change fail to bring about an improvement in quality. He sees several reasons for this. He believes the infrastructural investments from the fifties did not continue at a necessary pace, so classroom shortages or the inappropriate use of classrooms remained characteristic even in the seventies. He also identifies the quality of educators as an even more important factor. The study emphasizes that the Hungarian school system after 1945 constantly fought

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<sup>4</sup> At the same time, vocational high school was much criticized for its double aim (secondary school leaving exam and vocational training), since it failed to meet either aim in full.

<sup>5</sup> The structure of the education system has not change significantly since. Current situation is shown in the Eurydice's publication: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Publications:The\\_Structure\\_of\\_the\\_European\\_Education\\_Systems\\_2015/16:\\_Schematic\\_Diagrams](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Publications:The_Structure_of_the_European_Education_Systems_2015/16:_Schematic_Diagrams)

against a large number of teachers without qualifications, which did not change even in the seventies when their proportion was over 7%. Andor also highlights that the budget for primary education was low.

After 1945, the eight-grade elementary school and the raised compulsory school age played a major role in structural mobility, the school openly undertook levelling of cultural differences, allowing group social mobility (Ferge, 1972). An industrialization and modernization of a rather undeveloped farming society took place. From the 1960's social mobility slowed down and society became more closed (Andorka, 1955). Different kinds of inequalities in the school system emerged, which did not support the school's cultural equalization function. Elementary school study results were determined by family background, and it was also proven that during the eight years of primary education these differences increased with school embedding disadvantages. The academic careers of students could be predicted by socio-economic status with wealthier students getting better results. Further to social background students' outcomes were also dependent on their home post code with students much more successful in the capital than in villages. At the same time, with growth of urbanization, the difference between white and blue collar workers in the cities decreased.

From the sixties onward the march of education research has also demonstrated that the single eight-grade elementary school was far from uniform. At classroom level there were students of different competencies, i.e. there was selection already at entering the school, where the children were grouped according to their abilities and this selection was basically socially determined. The enrolment districts severely limited the base to choose from in a school, but parallel classes provided an excellent opportunity for selection by competencies. Analyses showed that homogenization according to grades meant the same as homogenization according to social status (Ferge, 1972).

In secondary school (high school) the differences are not as obvious, but this is merely due to the fact that the selection had already been rolled out in the elementary school, i.e. children of worse abilities, from families of lower social status were destined not to get into the secondary school education. At the same time, some sort of homogenization between or within schools can be found in all types of schools, from primary school to secondary vocational school. The more the focus is on successful further education, the more study result based selection becomes, which is also

basically selection based on social classes.

On a secondary school level, there is great difference between the social composition of students in high schools and students in vocational high schools. Blue collar workers' children are present in high schools at a proportion lower than the total average (50%), and in vocational high schools at a much higher rate<sup>6</sup>. A simple explanation for this is that since the high school is where the student has greater chances to get into higher education, this is where white collar workers take their children.

The seventies and the eighties were a productive period for Hungarian sociology and education research; numerous approaches and analyses were created, focusing on the period. In his study on inequality of opportunities, Gázsó (1982) concludes that differences in opportunities between different social classes and between genders decreased significantly after the war. Before 1945, a skilled worker's child had twenty times less chance than an intellectual's child to get into the intellectual circle; by the beginning of the sixties this difference had decreased to a fifth. Gázsó also concludes that certain inequalities were reiterated in the seventies, and although there was opportunity for upwards mobility, the layer of people in the most beneficial situation became more closed. Young people from leading and intellectual backgrounds had a 17 times greater chance to get into the above-mentioned layer, compared to children of semi-skilled and unskilled worker parents. The opportunity difference is quite large between skilled workers and intellectual parents' children, too (8.5 multiplier).

Péter Róber (1991a), tested the findings of the mentioned Andorka and Simkus in 1983 by empirical methods (logistic regression), namely the following: "from generation to generation more people acquired the eight-grade, and then the secondary and higher education qualification" [...] "The impact of parental social status was strong in every generation, [...] inequality has however strongly decreased at the primary school level with the introduction of a uniform eight-grade education" (Andorka and Simkus 1983, p. 609). Róbert concludes that the training expansion was closed by the beginning of the seventies in Hungary, meaning that most cohorts entering primary school obtained primary school qualifications. The impact of social background and post code on educational opportunities in Hungary had not changed. A single cohort may be considered an exception, the post-

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<sup>6</sup>Blue collar workers' children are present in vocational high school to a larger extent.

war cohort, where the background factor decreased transitionally. At the same time, Róbert emphasizes that this may not be a consequence of structural transformation, since an impact like this was observable in other countries as well (e.g. Holland). He also concluded that the impact of social background impacted those with lower qualifications and did not change in time among layers with higher qualifications. In the Hungarian school system what is most emphasized is obtaining the secondary school leaving exam, and social background has the greatest impact in this area.

Róbert's analysis (1991b) and numerous other studies proved (Andorka, 1995, Bukodi, 2001, Ladányi, 1994), that the positive discrimination approach applied by the socialist education policy with regards to children of working class and farming background was inadequate for the acquisition of higher education qualification.

### **From change from Socialist regime in 1989 to the present**

Although passed before the change of regime in Hungary, the Education Act of 1985 (Code III) is yet to be considered in Hungarian education research to be the genuine marker of regime change in education (Báthory, 2000). The Education Act of 1985 was regarded as an education control of European-style with alternative and autonomous approaches.

Due to the Education Act of 1985, an additional kind of school type was created, around the system of six-year and eight-year secondary schools. The system, which disrupted the continuity of the standard eight-year basic education existing until then, focused on a level of selection at ages 10 and 12. The new level of selection was in addition to the already existing one at age 14, providing an opportunity for the formation of elite education. Another result of the Act of 1985 was the appearance of foundation, private and alternative forms of education. Alternative and private education in Hungary fundamentally differs from the current systems in Western European countries. On the one hand, schools committed to reform pedagogy (Waldorf, Montessori etc.) are classified in this category, while on the other hand, they are not explicitly premises of elite schooling, they are actually quite the opposite. Therefore, in response to the shortcomings of the state school system, and instead of targeting elite education, alternative and private schools rather tend to operate with the aim of

educating disadvantaged students or ones with special needs.

Already in the 1950's, education policy aimed at expanding education to provide a standard level (school leaving exam), yet it was not realized until the end of the 1980's. As for schooling rates and the proportion of those completing their studies, a growth could be observed from 1989 onward. Approximately 70% of this age group (Figure 3 of the Appendix) made it into training offering graduation whilst students from vocational schools continued their studies at university in the highest percentage compared to other cohorts. As an effect, by the end of the nineties already half of the 18-year-old age group acquired a school leaving examination. Expansion of education offering graduation can thus partly be due to social and market demands. Already, since the nineties, the school leaving exam has been a dividing line between entering the labour market, and continuing further studies and this situation remains unchanged. Thus, expansion of the standard level can be explained with the growing demand for upper-level further studies, while the other side of the coin is the crisis in vocational training. Following the change of regime, the system of vocational schools simply collapsed; the Hungarian economy fell into a crisis, and large companies and corporations offering vocational training until then went bankrupt. This explains why the proportion of students opting for trade schools giving school leaving examination, jumped so significantly in schooling rates. (This realignment of training is shown in Figure 1 of the Appendix).

The Act of 1993 (Code no. LXXIX) was the first democratic law of education adopted after the change of regime. As this law entirely decentralized the educational system, it subordinated the matter of education to local governments' authority. In addition, it gave grounds for the continued existence of foundation, private and religious schools. Also, it provided a free choice of schools, thus annulling school districts, and terminating school inspections. The impact of social inequalities on the education of children will now be considered.

It was not until the early 2000s that decentralized education control and the maintenance role of local governments in effect showed their drawbacks, which created a critical situation by the end of the millennium's first decade. Local governments in Hungary had the option to sustain schools, from the smallest to the largest ones, and this resulted in a remarkable difference financially in the life of schools. Even though the



increase in education expenditure did not necessarily go hand in hand, the efficacy or resource use was just as important. Consequently, the shortage of financial resources and lower spending already excluded the very chance of being efficient. Hermann (2007) analysed school expenditures between 1992 and 2005. He concluded that in settlements where the rate of disadvantaged students is lower, the proportionate expense of schools proved to be less, too. That is to say that resources are scarce for exactly those who would badly need a higher amount of expenditure spent on them. As a result, this indicates a significant difference in opportunities in the educational system. Starting from the second half of the nineties, local governments attempted to solve this problem by establishing school partnerships. Local governments of typically minor towns and villages cooperated in joint maintenance of their schools. These partnerships also received support from education policy-makers within the normative financing system. However, no genuine changes were achieved.

Another reform measure was the “free choice of school”, as the Acts of 1985 and 1993 empowered parents with this right. The impact of this provision resulted in a few unwanted consequences. Much as everyone shared the view that free choice of school seemed to be a quite a permissive decision in the history of education in Hungary, at the same time, a number of studies by the mid 2010’s (Kertesi-Kézdi, 2005, p. 2013) showed that it also triggered undesirable processes, thus increasing differences among schools.

Free choice of school initiated mobility of high magnitude within major cities and among smaller settlements where mostly middle-class parents began to send their children to schools with higher progression rates to higher education. At the same time in smaller settlements the mobility was between small settlements or from smaller towns to cities. Although schooling catchment areas within districts was made more rigorous to prevent the development of enclaves of middle class parents sending their children to schools populated by middle class children, by the mid 2010’s, differences among schools persisted. Moreover, patterns of the socialist era returned where parallel classes in primary schools made it possible for children enrolling to be selected according to their skills and abilities. In addition to selection, parents with a knowledge of the education system could ensure their child attended their first-choice school by registering their child from an address in the catchment area of their preferred school.



Thus, children of parents with knowledge of the education system could be enrolled in a 'higher performing' school, and the children prepared for selection to ensure their high achievement and attainment in the education system.

In the autumn of 2015, a popular news site<sup>7</sup> conducted a survey among their readers asking them what they consider to be an acceptable act of cheating and what is unacceptable. More than 17,000 of them responded to the survey. 85% of those who responded declared that it was reasonable for a parent to cheat the education system and get registered at an address different to the one they lived in, so that their child might attend a 'higher achieving' school.

Zolnay (2015) also documented that a movement with a different direction began, namely the movement of disadvantaged or Roma students, who were refused admission to schools in their own districts. Roma children were offered places at schools outside their district that were not 'higher achieving' schools (Zolnay, 2015), where they were told, their child would 'manage better'. Zolnay continues that consequently, children of lower socio-economic status, or in other words from families with less human capital, and with parents who were less assertive than the dominant middle class group, not only failed to go to a 'higher achieving' school, they were also forced to travel further to a distant school. With disadvantaged children admitted to schools outside their district an ever-decreasing number of children who 'can manage' in high performing schools apply for the limited number of places.

Children with high funds of social capital from families of higher socio-economic status have a higher probability of being admitted to a high performing school. Schools are first required to admit all disadvantaged children from its school district, and second to accept students provided there is further capacity in the given school. Moving Roma students to a school in another district, away from the middle class children in the higher achieving schools, builds capacity for the achievement of children with higher socio-economic status to sustain their higher socio-economic status. The Roma children are disadvantaged by the move. The result is a lack of opportunity for social mobility and a barrier to the realisation of equity through social innovation and renewal.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://index.hu/kultur/2015/10/26/kerdoiv\\_ertekeles\\_aranyelet/](http://index.hu/kultur/2015/10/26/kerdoiv_ertekeles_aranyelet/)

A second major difference to the education system in 1985 - 1993 compared to school districts in the former socialist regimes, was that students could now select either alternative or private education, to which school district boundaries do not apply at all (Lannert, 2000). Free selection of state schools, alternative schools and private schools coupled with a decentralized and fragmented maintenance of schools' infrastructure resulted in even further inequalities at elementary level.

Domestic student performance measurements indicated the problem of inequity in schools offering student placement in the nineties (Lannert, 2000). Based on research results of Vári (2000) when comparing students with parents with lowest and highest qualification, the difference in the knowledge of the students is more than 20%. Vári (2000) identifies this is double the proportion of that in developed countries. In measurements (cognitive skills, mathematics, reading) only children with parents who had a secondary school leaving exam were able to perform above average. These differences in performance are strong predictors of who will attend secondary, and further education. In 1997, Liskó and Andor (2000) conducted research into the characteristics of primary school students who progressed to secondary and further education. They concluded that among the respondents, 80% of children who attended secondary and further education had parents who graduated from university, 60% of children had parents who had graduated from college, 40% of children had parents who had a secondary school leaving exam, and only 20% of children had parents who were skilled workers and attended high school<sup>8</sup>. Findings from the National Competence Survey Student Database (2014) has revealed the situation has not changed in 2014<sup>9</sup>.

International student performance tests (PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS) also

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<sup>8</sup> Half of the parents who graduated from university send their children to six or eight-year high schools. Although both vocational high school and general high school matriculation make the student eligible for higher education the general high school secondary school leaving exam increases the chances of entering a university. In 2004 and 2005 (this was the peak of mass entrance into higher education institutions in Hungary) 38% of students in higher education came from vocational schools and in 2013 only 26%. Source: [felvi.hu](http://felvi.hu) (please see Figure 2 of Appendix)

<sup>9</sup> In 2014, based on the national competence survey student database for year 10, 81% of children whose mother graduated from university, 65% of children whose mother went to college, 51% of children whose mother had a school leaving exam and only 25% of children whose mother was a skilled worker, went to high school (own calculus)

provide opportunity to view Hungarian data in relation to the international education environment. International surveys make it visible that in Hungary the relationship between school performance and family background is especially strong (PISA 2012, 2013; Balázsi-Horváth, 2011). Another worrying fact is that schools do not decrease, but increase the differences generated by family background, where the higher the year, the larger the difference. The choice of school or training largely determines the students' future path in life. Illustrating with actual numbers in the PISA (2012) mathematics test scores the unit change in the ESCS index measuring social background results in a difference of 47 points on average – as opposed to OECD countries' with 39 points on average – in other words, the Hungarian children with disadvantaged backgrounds could have scored 47 points higher, had their background not influenced the results. 23% of the performance of Hungarian students is influenced by their background, i.e. the performance variance of almost a quarter of the ESCS index is derived from differences. In this respect the OECD average varies greatly (14.8%), and among OECD countries taking part in the survey, only in Slovakia does family background factor have an even stronger correspondence (24.6%).

Settlement type and regional difference correlate with the level of schooling and the family background. The international student performance studies indicate that other countries also show discrepancies in performance between those living in larger settlements and those living in smaller settlements to the benefit of the former.

The Hungarian results however show a difference that is higher than the international average (Balázsi et al., 2012). The Hungarian student performance studies also point to very strong regional differences, in which the country's northern regions (Northern Hungary, Northern Great Plain) performance lags behind the South (Balázsi et al., 2015). Both the settlement and the regional differences were already recorded in the survey in the sixties (Ferge 1972, Forray and Kozma, 1992, 1999; Kozma, 1987, Kozma, 1997). Building the variables of settlement, region and family background into a single regression model it can be established that the settlement disadvantage (county residence) shows a significant connection with student performance, but the most striking disadvantage in the model is still the family background (Fehérvári et al., 2014). The regional variable (residence in Northern Hungary and Northern Great Plains) was left out of

this model<sup>10</sup>.

Unintended consequences of free choice of schools is that the relationship between the family background and success in school has impacted students, and the education of Roma students the most. This topic appeared in the professional public discourse after the change of regime, in the period of socialism, but was considered taboo similar to many other topics including poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, and suicide. Accordingly, there were no research studies on the topic, except for István Kemény's research in 1971-72 (Kemény et al., 2003).

After the change in regime in the early 1990s, the education policy took a double approach, similar to many other Central and Eastern European countries of that time. Whilst one policy built upon national, ethnic affiliation advocating social integration through amplifying cultural identity, the other policy focused on citizens' social mobility and addressed disadvantage and inequity through social integration. The result was a strengthened national identity focusing on social mobility policies that were largely bottom-up, whilst being burdened with contradictions which excluded those not of the dominant group. Thus, the policies contradicted the same principles they wished to inculcate (Forray, 2014). In Hungary, amplifying policies to include minoritized groups by providing opportunities for Roma ethnic education through a desegregation policy, did not change the participatory processes and practices regarding school registration and operationalising Roma rights and entitlement in education. Education still remains the path to supporting integration of minority groups into the Hungarian society and their full participation culturally, economically, and politically (Forray, 1999, 2011).

During the expansion of secondary schooling it was the low prestige vocational training that absorbed the Roma youth. According to a 2006 study, from 1000 Roma young people in grade 8, 503 studied further in apprenticeships, 332 in vocational high schools and 87 in general high

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<sup>10</sup> In Fehérvári et al. (2014) [the logistics regression model we studied whether a county residence or a residence in residence in Northern Hungary and Northern Great Plains and the family background assign probability to belonging to an underperforming category, based on mathematics test score from 2014 national competence survey. The family background index included: schooling level of the parents, number of books at home, whether the students have books of their own, does the family own a computer, is it a multiple disadvantaged family.

schools, whilst the other 78 did not continue their education. The same study revealed out of 1000 non-Roma students 193 studied further in apprenticeships, 419 in vocational high schools, and 380 in general high schools with only 8 not continuing their education (Kertesi & Kézdi, 2010; 2014). Entering the secondary school system does not guarantee graduation, and Kertesi & Kézdi (2010; 2014) identify that hand in hand with the secondary school expansion, goes the increase in the number of drop-outs. Fehérvári (2013) reveals the drop-outs are more characteristic of the lower quality training programs Roma students are registered onto.

There are no time-series data available for the performance of Roma students<sup>11</sup>, data from a cross-sectional competence survey in grade 8 in a single year (2006) showed that the reading competence of one fifth of Roma students is uninterpretable (on the 0 level). Their mathematics score is even worse, with every other Roma student producing a zero level on their high stakes mathematics tests (Kertesi & Kézdi, 2009). Researchers studied what could be the causes of such poor performance on these literacy and numeracy high stakes tests. They examined whether there would be such a significant difference between the two groups if there were not such a large falling behind in the income and financial position compared to the non-Roma population. They arrived at the conclusion that the poor test results were not due to ethnic characteristics, but due to permanent poor living conditions and deep poverty (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2009).

The most important consequence of career survey in 2009, was that approximately 40% of Roma young people stayed in secondary schools without repeating a year. Compared to non-Roma young people, the proportion of Roma students who did not get a secondary school qualification is 9-10 times higher. Kertesi and Kézdi (2009) confirmed the relative lagging behind of Roma students in schooling was still present. This situation would be very similar at the moment.

The significant difference in schools which developed due to education inequalities mapped in this paper can be seen not only in students' performances but also in the quality of educators. Several research results show that institutions registering disadvantaged students have a higher proportion of low-educated teachers, inadequate professional teachers with

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<sup>11</sup> 1992 was the last year when the schools recorded in administrative records who is a Roma student. Now there are no records of this, only estimates, research data, and census data are available.

different specializations, and newly graduated teachers (Varga, 2009; Jackson, 2015), in other words lower quality teachers are educating more disadvantaged children that could reasonably be expected to widen the equity gap rather than close it.

Different studies focusing on social structure and social mobility support the findings of increasing inequalities in the education system. According to research, the intergenerational mobility was lower in the nineties than the eighties, and lower in the eighties compared to the seventies (Bukodi, 2001; Róbert and Bukodi, 2004; Róbert 1986, 1991). Analyses also showed that external effects/constraints caused by policy play an important role on social mobility, along with the intentions and self-belief of those who are disadvantaged (Kolosi and Róbert, 2004). Németh (2006) stands out among mobility studies in 1983, 1992, and 2000 which revealed the impact of schooling level is vital in gaining middle class privileges, and the students' background determines their schooling level and this has not changed over time. Németh (2006) found the father's job influences the family's background, which in turn impacts the kind of school they are registered with, which in turn impacts the school level.

Kolosi (2010) describes a period of almost thirty years of social structure change along the lines of uniform methodological principles, based on data measured at four different points in time. An important conclusion of the study (Kolosi and Keller, 2010) is that from 2000 - 2010 the strength of the relationship between employment and social status<sup>12</sup> grew, and the social inequalities also grew.

### **The age of reorganization and restoration, from 2011 to the present**

The new Education Act adopted in 2011 (Code no. CXC) aimed to reduce the inequalities in the Hungarian education system. The Education Act tried to address the problem of differences in financing between municipalities and small settlements in different regions, particularly the differences between the North and the South of the country, by centralizing education. Administration and governance of education systems was taken from the municipalities and subordinated them to a single central institution.

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<sup>12</sup> Financial situation, living circumstances, income.

Education management expected this shift in power to make the distribution of resources more equitable within the national education system (Fehérvári and Németh, 2015). The implementation of centralizing the education system that started in 2013 is currently being reviewed. Whilst a centralized education system remains the main direction for the government, Balogh (2015) identified that the Hungarian education system has an enormous lack of resources. The lack of resources is having a negative impact on delivering equity of offer and outcome for students regarding level of schooling and their engagement with the labour market (Balogh, 2015).

The Act of 2011 extended the early years provision. Hungary had always had good indicators of quality in the field of pre-school education, but the Act reduced the mandatory age of kindergarten to three years old, which used to be compulsory age of five. The Act of 2011 therefore ensured children spent at least three years in kindergarten before starting school. The venue for mitigating for disadvantage was therefore moved from school to kindergarten. The Act was passed as a result of education policy makers and education experts being convinced that the earlier the institutional system intervenes to mitigate for multiple disadvantages, the more successful the mitigation will be, as identified by Pascal and Bertram (2013), and OECD (2012). Interestingly, Altwicker-Hámori and Kollo (2012) make the point that children in Hungary they call 'low status', benefit from starting school one year later. However, their paper was submitted to the journal in 2011, so the impact of the Act of 2011 in reducing the mandatory kindergarten age of children spending three years in kindergarten before school will not be known until these children reach at least year four by 2018. On the other hand, Fehérvári and Németh (2015) do identify a positive effect of kindergarten before the 2011 Act on student performance in the data of the national competence survey.

The survey confirms that students who attended kindergarten for three years before it became mandatory for all, perform better in mathematics and reading comprehension in all three years (6, 8, 10), compared to those who did not go to kindergarten or only attended for 1-2 years. Equal access, equal opportunities, and disadvantage mitigation have all received special emphasis in the National Core Program of Kindergarten Education (Government decree no. 363/2012. (XII. 17.).

The Central-European analysis (Simon et al, 2009) divided the possibilities of education policies serving the management of social



inequalities into two groups; mainstream and supplementary policy. Mainstream policies are the following: egalitarian policy, region-based complementary funding, school structural reform, policies of professional accountability, school improvement, and personal development. Supplementary policies include; enforcing measures, minority education models, anti-discriminatory policies and special educational needs policies.

After the change of regime education policy considered education inequalities as a priority area, however, it did not adopt any of the presented mainstream policies systematically, although the accountability policy was raised on numerous occasions (Radó, 2000, Kertesi, 2008). The measures aimed at tackling inequalities have not been joined to form a single education reform (Györgyi, 2015) and feature supplementary policies. Desegregation policies prevailed as supplementary policies until 2010 in public education, and without being implemented with mainstream policy of desegregation, had very little impact (Györgyi, 2015). The 2011 Education Act did implement both mainstream and supplementary policies to desegregate the education system and empower all Hungarian citizens as identified earlier. The review of the impact of the egalitarian Education Act of 2011 Act is focused on the impact of creating a critical mass of institutions implementing desegregation, that could tip the balance and cause change for equity and renewal at the system level. The review is ongoing, but is hindered by the lack of availability of appropriate impact assessments, and program evaluations, due in part to the relatively short time the 2011 Act has been in place to gather meaningful and worthwhile feedback of impact (Fehérvári and Németh, 2015).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Hungarian education policy is not free of global impacts. While in the socialist period the educational policy was mainly under the Soviet influence, guidelines for party decisions, which were of course significantly influenced by Moscow, were formed into education policy goalposts. After the change of regime, the main influencers were the European developed countries and international organizations. According to the UNESCO 2015 report, (Fehérvári & Németh, 2015) as education becomes a global product, rather than a public service provided by the traditional national government,



there is an increasing level of responsibility for Hungarian education with intergovernmental, international organizations (foundations, NGOs, think tanks). At the same time, this process is rather ambiguous, since the national ethnic, cultural, economic, social and civil dimensions are still present in the national education policy. The tensions created by supporting the national identity of a dominant group, whilst enacting policies of inclusion and desegregation, are not easily navigated. Besides extending into the government, international influence is present in the national education policy through resources for development, where resources are paired with goals and values. Fehérvári and Németh (2015) identify that Hungary has joined the Europe 2020 strategy with one of the aims to lift 450,000 people out of poverty (KPMG, 2013, p.4).

The processes described above in Hungarian education policy reveal that the accession to the European Union launched a process of strategic planning and individual strategies strongly aligned with the principles the European Union poses as an expectation. The European Union is reviewing the direction of use of national developmental funds in a more targeted manner, and in a more-value-bound manner.

On the other hand, there is a certain contradiction in Hungarian education policy. Namely, while the international principles and approach dominate strategic planning, the legislation follows national principles.

The Act of 2011 thus goes against international trends, a notable example of this being the abolition of a decentralized system. All in all, the education policy after 2010 shows many similarities to the politics of socialism before independence with an approach to equity and renewal operationalised through education policies. Both periods before and after independence are characterized by egalitarian policies with a standardization of processes and expenses. In the socialist period this was complemented by enforcing measures, or affirmative action, which preferred certain social groups from the working classes and farming background in both secondary and higher education levels. At the same time it may also be concluded that the restoration of independence through radical change resulting in the change in regime, would not have occurred if there had not been a desire for a different ideology.

The first ideology is a planned collectivist approach that seeks to provide an education for the masses whilst constructing the mechanisms for ensuring sustainability of the education system and society. The second

reveals a more individual approach where neo-liberal market forces operate that position the learner as a consumer of the commodity ‘education’ (Taysum, 2012). Those from the middle classes, with the capital to understand the system, can ‘cheat’ the system, widening the gap between those with multiple disadvantages and those that enjoy middle class privileges. It may be argued that the two extremes of these approaches have not met success. The collectivist extreme of communism has not worked where there have been significant issues regarding rights and responsibilities associated with participation in civic processes. The individual extreme of capitalism has not worked where there has been significant widening of gaps between the rich and the poor leading to contradictions in the mainstream and supplementary education policies of the 2011 Education Act. Thus, a persistent characteristic of both eras pre-independence, and post-independence is the reproduction of inequalities in education in terms of rights and responsibilities of Hungarian citizens in their participation in society culturally, economically, and politically.

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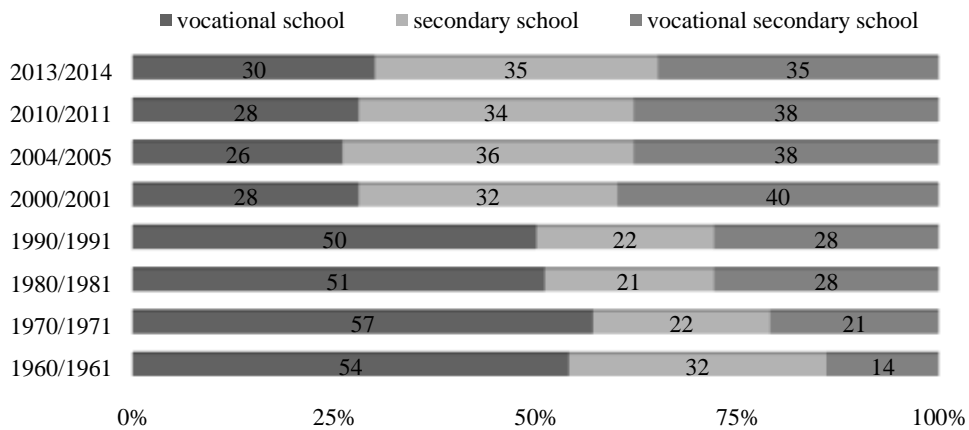
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#### *Education Acts*

- Article VI of Act of 1935
- Article XX of Act of 1940
- Code no. III of the Education Act of 1961
- Education Act of 1961
- Education Act of 1985
- Education Act of 1993
- Education Act 2011
- Government decree no. 363/2012.
- Ministry of Religion and Public Education's decree no. 1223-48-1/1950 III.
- Ministry of Religion and Public Education's decree no. 19 100/1946
- Ministry of Religion and Public Education's decree no. 51 700/1948
- Ministry of Religion and Public Education's decree no. 7500/1946
- Prime Minister's decree no. 6650/1945

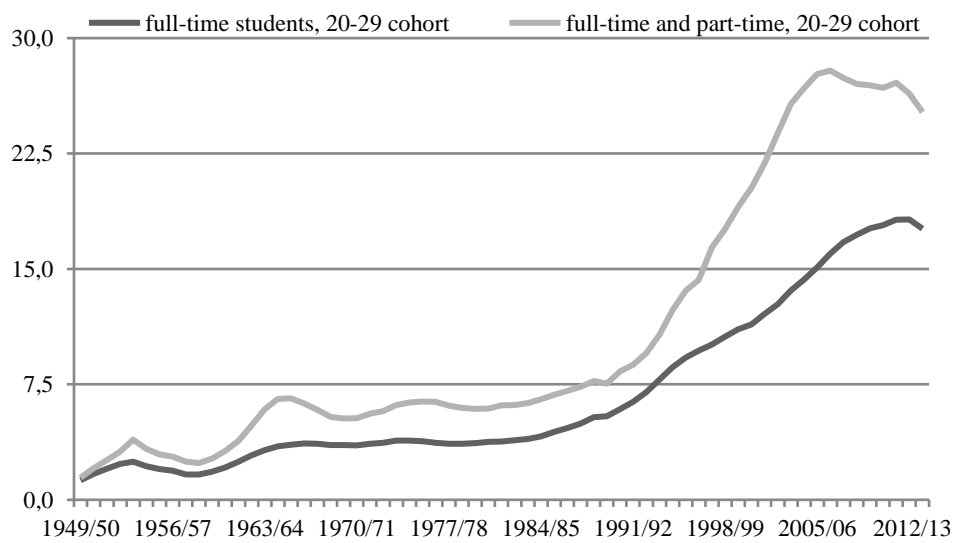
**Appendix**

Figure 1. Students in first grade, full-time education, 1960-2014



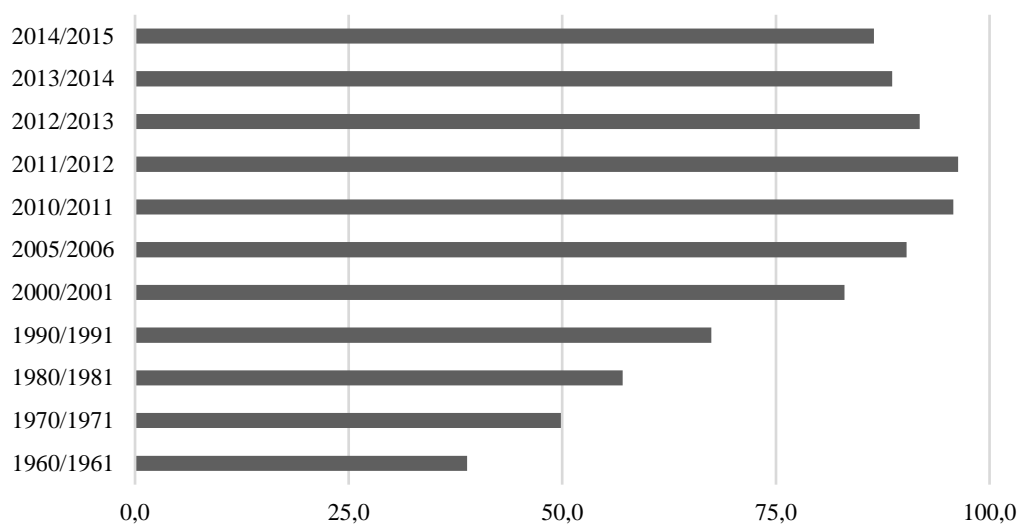
Source: Statistical Yearbook of Education, the Ministry of Human Capacities 2015.

Figure 2. Full time and part-time students in higher education, 1949-2013, %



Source: Statistical Yearbook of Education, Ministry of Human Capacities 2015, Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

Figure 3. Rate of secondary schools' pupils completing studies 1960-2014, %



Source: Statistical Yearbook of Education, Ministry of Human Capacities 2015, Hungarian Central Statistical Office.