

Comparative analysis of the latest large-scale education reforms in Poland and Hungary¹

Najnowsze reformy oświaty w Polsce i na Węgrzech – analiza porównawcza

Summary:

The aim of this study is to present the main features of the reform process in the Hungarian education system after 2010 and comparing it to the Polish education reform started in 2015. The analyzed education systems had common characteristics but since the fall of Communism they have developed differently. Nevertheless, we can observe several significant similarities in comparing the two recent reforms, the most prominent among them are the ways in which the reforms were prepared and implemented. In both cases, a dominant group with sufficient political powers decided to form the national education system in order to correspond to their worldview and political needs.

Keywords:

comparative education research, educational policy, centralization, Hungarian education system, Polish education system, educational reform

Streszczenie:

Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie głównych procesów reformowania węgierskiego systemu edukacji po 2010 r. i porównanie ich z reformą w polskim systemie oświaty, prowadzonej po 2015 r. Obydwa systemy oświaty mają wspólne cechy i pochodzenie, ale po upadku komunizmu rozwijały się inaczej. Jednak możemy zaobserwować wiele podobieństw w zakresie zmian wprowadzanych w ostatnich latach. Najważniejszy wśród nich jest sposób jak te reformy zostały przygotowane i wdrożone. W obu przypadkach dominująca grupa polityczna postanowiła stworzyć oświatę w taki sposób, aby odpowiadała ich światopoglądowi i potrzebom politycznym.

Słowa kluczowe:

badanie porównawcze, polityka oświatowa, centralizacja, węgierski system oświaty, polska oświata, reforma edukacji

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1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to present the main features of the reform process in the Hungarian education system after 2010 and compare it to the Polish education reforms which started after 2015. The motivation for this paper/study comes from personal experience. During my research stay at the University of Warsaw in the 2018/2019 academic year, as a Hungarian doctoral student whose research focuses on the changes of the Polish education system, I have been asked several times about the similarities between the current Polish and Hungarian education reforms. Due to the recent nature of the Polish reforms, there is as yet no such comparison in the literature, which could shed light on the processes that shape both countries' education systems.

The comparison of Hungary and Poland is common in academia and in everyday life, as both share many historical, geographical, and economic similarities. For example, a popular catchphrase in Hungary about the “Warsaw express”² is widely used when comparing the political and other changes in Hungary and Poland. We can also find several examples of direct comparisons in different research fields³. The comparison of the four Visegrad countries or sometimes other Central European countries is more common in education policy papers⁴. At times both countries appear as a reference point in studies focusing on different issues within their education systems⁵. The idea to restructure the Hungarian school system and implement a nine year-long compulsory structure similar to the Polish structure before 2015 has resurfaced several times in the past.

We can observe many similarities in the past of the two countries' education histories. The education systems that function today have common characteristics inherited from the socialist era but have since become quite differentiated. This paper focuses on the similarities of the reform process and the increasing role of the central government after 2010. The analysis is limited to one aspect of

² The expression originates from the 1990's and refers to the phenomenon that the Polish political changes in a way predicted the similar changes in Hungary.

³ For example: B.C. Illes, A. Dunay and D. Jelonek, *The entrepreneurship in Poland and in Hungary: future entrepreneurs education perspective*, "Polish Journal of Management Studies", 2015 vol. 12 no. 1, p. 48-58; or *Hungary and Poland in Times of Political Transition. Selected Issues*, eds. B. Pająk-Patkowska, M. Rachwał, Poznań 2016.

⁴ A. Pelle, É. Kuruczleki, *Education policies and performance of the Visegrad countries in light of their OECD membership: a comparative study*, „Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe”, 2016 vol. 14. no. 4, p. 174–207; M. Herbst, A. Wojciuk, *Common legacy, different paths: the transformation of educational systems in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland*, “Compare”, 2017 vol. 47. no. 1, p. 118-32.

⁵ For example: A. Fehérvári, T. Híves, *Trajectories in Hungarian Education – Transition to Secondary School*, “The New Educational Review”, 2017 vol. 48, no. 2, p. 154-166.

education change as there are countless local, national or supranational initiatives that shaped the education systems. For example, the development programs funded by the European Union in both cases have had a system level impact, the effects of which can be a topic for further research. As this study is intended mainly for Polish audience, I will describe the Hungarian reforms in more detail, using the Polish case as a comparison. From a policy perspective, the reforms are different, but we can observe a lot of similarities in the policy process: the way the reforms were prepared and implemented. In both cases, a dominant group⁶ with sufficient political powers decided to form the national education system to correspond to their worldview ideology and political needs.

First, I review the possible reasons that led to the Hungarian reforms, then I discuss the trends in large-scale assessments to provide another view of the effectiveness and state of the two systems before, and in case of Hungary after, the reforms. In the second part of the paper, I highlight the similarities in the reform processes and describe the road to the centralization of educational governance in Hungary, signs of which can be identified in Poland as well.

2. Challenges in the Hungarian education system before 2010 with comments to the situation of Poland

In Hungary we can observe regular changes in the direction and priorities of education policy according to the political changes: “The Law on Public Education” (1993) underwent significant changes in 1996, 1999, 2003, and afterwards there were continuous changes every year until 2009⁷. In 2011, the cabinet decided to rewrite the law altogether and publish a new law on public education. The new law was one of the first steps in the education reform which generated systematic change in various policy areas (see section 5).

Similarly, education policy is tied to political changes in Poland: according to the database of the Polish Parliament (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) the “Law on the System of Education” (1991) was changed 110 times. A whole system reform transformed the Polish education system in 1999, the implementation of which was heavily affected by the political changes in 2002. More recently, between 2007 and 2015, the changes and reforms were pointed more-or-less in the same direction as there were no big political changes. When the Prawo i Sprawied-

⁶ M.S. Archer, *Social Origins of Educational Systems*, London – Beverly Hills 1979.

⁷ G. Velkey, *Dinamikus egyensúlytalanság A hazai közoktatási rendszer szétesése, felforgatása és a konszolidáció esélye*, Budapest–Pécs–Békéscsaba 2013, p. 5.

liwość (PiS) party won in the 2015 elections, they started a new systematic reform process instantly. This, similarly to the Hungarian case, was begun by a new education law, although several parts of the old law remained legally binding.

It is worth mentioning that the position of the education minister usually was fairly weak in Poland⁸ as well as in Hungary. Since 2010 there is no standalone Ministry of Education in Hungary, it is encompassed in the Ministry of Human Resources, which is also responsible for among other things higher education, health care and culture.

Before the reform, Hungary had one of the most decentralized education systems, where the local governments were responsible for the maintenance and financing of education. Of the 3155 local municipalities that were responsible for the maintenance of primary schooling 2809 were villages, therefore the average number of primary schools per municipality in Hungary was 1.14 whereas in Poland this average was 4.5. The system of local governments in Poland is less fragmented hence municipalities had more financial possibilities and freedom in shaping the local school structure⁹.

The financing of education tasks in both countries depended on government funds, which the local governments received from the central budget for the educational tasks in Hungary on a per capita normative basis, whereas in Poland it was part of the general grant and was not specified for education purposes.

In Hungary the educational spending and the value of the per capita central government substitute continuously decreased during the second part of the first decade of the XXI century¹⁰. The economic crisis in 2008 severely affected the Hungarian economy and the government needed to apply severe restraints to avoid bankruptcy. In response to the crisis the Hungarian government cut back its educational spending, while the majority of the OECD countries invested more into education during this period¹¹. Partially because of the economic crisis and financial problems of local governments, and partially because of the constant under-financing of educational tasks, the education system was characterized by heavy financial burdens. Many local governments were unable to finance

⁸ M. Zahorska, *Nieznośna lekkość... reformowania oświaty*, „Studia z Polityki Publicznej”, 2016 vol. 10, no. 2. p. 43-64.

⁹ M. Herbst, A. Wojciuk, *Common legacy, different paths: the transformation of educational systems in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland*, “Compare”, 2017 vol. 47, no. 1, p. 118-132

¹⁰ A. Fehérvári, *Normatív finanszírozás az oktatásban 2000 és 2009 között*, „Új Pedagógiai Szemle”, 2011 no. 6, p. 22.

¹¹ Interview with Gábor Halász at: https://tizperciskola.blog.hu/2015/12/23/2015_a_magyar_oktatásban, [downloaded on: 15.05.2019].

the minimal educational functions, contrary to this the wealthier local governments could provide European quality possibilities to their schools¹².

The above-mentioned financial problems show us one piece of a complex picture. Another factor that possibly fostered the need for changes in the Hungarian system – from the perspective of the central government - was the relative powerlessness of the educational ministry, which is a natural effect of decentralization. The local governments easily bypassed the national initiatives if they conflicted with their own interests, which illustrates a decentralized, weak state that was not able to enforce its plans¹³. Moreover, according to Györgyi: “The system of educational decision-making remained unstable for two decades after 1990: there was no widespread consensus on how to distribute decision-making powers between the local, regional and national levels in order to establish a well-functioning education system.”¹⁴ In the Polish system we can observe similar uncertainties in the division of responsibilities between the local governments, the regionally deconcentrated education authorities and the state¹⁵.

3. What can large-scale assessments tell us about the state of the Hungarian and Polish education?

The international large-scale assessments can provide another view at the situation of the Hungarian education. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) started its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000 where every three years 15-year-old students from all over the world are tested in reading, mathematics, and science. The average Hungarian results in comparison with the Polish results and the OECD average can be seen in figure 1.

The OECD average is a commonly used benchmark for comparison across education systems. However, please note that its reported values in different reports depend on the actual membership of OECD in the time of publication. For the sake of clarity I use the currently (2020) available data in the OECD PISA data explorer, which creates the OECD averages from the current 35 OECD member

¹² G. Velkey, *Dinamikus egyensúlytalanság A hazai közoktatási rendszer szétesése, felforgatása és a konszolidáció esélye*, Budapest–Pécs–Békéscsaba 2013, p. 6.

¹³ Z. Györgyi, *Közoktatás-irányítási változatok*, „Új Pedagógiai Szemle”, 2016 vol. 66, no. 5–6, p.21.

¹⁴ Z. Györgyi, *Initial experiences on the introduction of centralised education management*, [in]: *Snapshot of Hungarian Education 2014*, ed. A. Fehérvári, Budapest 2015, p. 50.

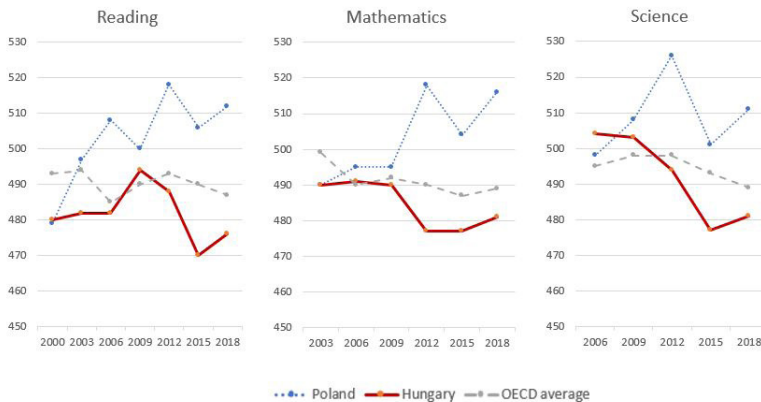
¹⁵ M. Herbst, J. Herczyński, M. Federowicz, M. Smak, D. Walczak, A. Wojciuk, *Bilans zmian instytucjonalnych Polska oświata w okresie transformacji*, Warszawa 2015.

countries. It results lower OECD averages in the early editions, than what was originally published. At the same time using the same average enables longitudinal comparison.

The results of PISA 2009 showed a promising improvement in the reading performance of Hungarian students and the average scientific literacy results of Hungarian students were above the OECD average. Halász suggests four factors that might have played a role in the improvement of the average reading performance:

“1) increasing the awareness of the importance of literacy development in higher grades; 2) improving the education of the most disadvantaged groups through integration programs; 3) curriculum innovation and the intensive development of classroom level activities and 4) creating effective feedback mechanisms”¹⁶.

Figure 1. Average PISA performance of Hungary in comparison with Poland and the OECD average.



Source: PISA Data Explorer (OECD, 2020).

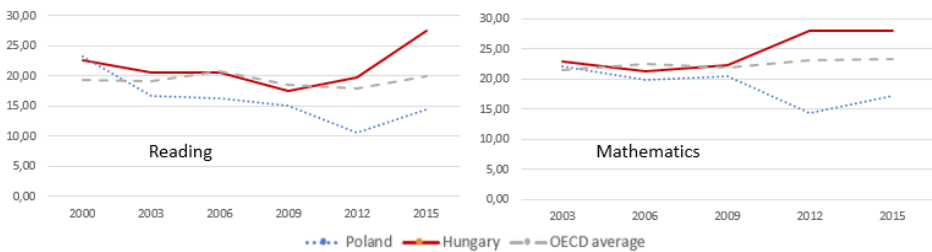
The subsequent editions of PISA showed a steep decline in the average Hungarian results, which was accompanied by an increasing share of low performers (see figure 2). It is also worth noting, bearing in mind that the different assessments study slightly different things and focus on different age groups – that we cannot observe a similar trend in other international large scale assess-

¹⁶ G. Halász, *The background of the improvement of PISA results in Hungary – the impact of the EU funded educational development programs*, „Trendy”, 2011 no. 2; English version <http://halaszg.elte.hu/download/Trendy.pdf>, [downloaded on:28.09.2020.], p. 4.

ments like Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)¹⁷ and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)¹⁸, nor in the average results of the Hungarian National Assessment of Basic Competences.

At the same time, each of these large-scale assessments and PISA also highlight, that student achievement shows strong correlations with their socio-economic background, and that there are large performance gaps between schools. Moreover, the national assessment reveals substantial differences in student performance between regions and regarding the size of municipality¹⁹. The segregation of the education system was an issue before 2010 as well, but as the 2019 Country report of the European Commission highlights: “the education system has become more segregated in recent years, which is only partly explained by residential separation.”²⁰

Figure 2. The share of low performers in reading and mathematics literacy in the different PISA editions in Hungary, Poland and the OECD average.



Source: PISA Data Explorer (OECD,2020).

According to their improvement in PISA, Poland went through a different journey. The 2012 PISA results showed outstanding results for Poland as it has become a top performer country in Europe since 2000, when the average Polish results were below the OECD-average. Moreover, the share of top performers grew, and the share of low performers declined during this time. We can find various answers in the literature explaining the Polish PISA success: the improvement is usually connected

¹⁷ B. Szalay, I. Szepesi, Cs. Vadász, *TIMSS 2015 Összefoglaló jelentés*, Budapest 2016.

¹⁸ I. Balázsi, P. Balkányi, Cs. Vadász, *PIRLS 2016 Összefoglaló jelentés a 4. évfolyamos tanulók eredményeiről*, Budapest 2017.

¹⁹ L.D. Szabó, I. Szepesi, J. Takácsné Kárász, Cs. Vadász, *Országos kompetenciamérés 2017 Országos jelentés*, Budapest 2018.

²⁰ *2019 European Semester: Country Report – Hungary*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-hungary_en.pdf, p.28, [downloaded on:20.03.2019].

to the extension of compulsory general education to nine years with the implementation of lower-secondary schools in 1999²¹, the 2008 curriculum reform²², and the external exam system²³. The trend of Polish PISA results points toward the continued effectiveness of the Polish education system despite the lower Polish results in 2015.

The Hungarian national PISA report²⁴, similarly to the Polish report²⁵, suggests that the change to computer-based testing in 2015 could have influenced the results and they are not entirely comparable to the previous editions. In the 2018 edition of PISA Poland's average performance improved significantly in all three fields, while the Hungarian results seems to stabilized under the OECD average. The 2018 Polish national report concludes²⁶ that unlike in 2015, the computer-based assessment did not cause problems for students.

The Polish external assessment system has a different role than the Hungarian national assessment of basic competences and in its original form does not enable direct comparisons. Polish researchers rescaled the results of the lower-secondary school leaving exams to a common scale, and their analysis does not confirm the Polish PISA success, and shows opposing trends in math, reading and science⁴³.

4. Similarities in the reform processes

In Hungary, two distinctive proposals were published in 2008 and 2009 by two different groups that aimed to provide a solution to the challenges that the Hungarian education system faced at that time. Despite the proposals and the problems mentioned above, in 2010 the general opinion did not consider the field of education as the most problematic domain²⁷. Similarly, the forthcoming systematic changes in the educational system were not foreshadowed in the campaign programs nor in the plans of the cabinet.

²¹ M. Jakubowski, H.A. Patrinos, E.E. Porta, J. Wiśniewski, *The effects of delaying tracking in secondary school: evidence from the 1999 education reform in Poland*, „Education Economics,” 2016 vol. 24, no. 6, p. 557-572.

²² I. Białecki, M. Jakubowski, J. Wiśniewski, *Education policy in Poland: The impact of PISA (and other international studies)*, „European Journal of Education”, 2017 vol. 52, no. 2, p. 167-174.

²³ A. Zawistowska, *The Black Box of the Educational Reforms in Poland: What Caused the Improvement in the PISA Scores of Polish Students?*, „Polish Sociological Review”, 2014 vol. 3, p.333-350.

²⁴ L. Ostorics, B. Szalay, I. Szepesi, C. Vadász, *PISA 2015 Összefoglaló jelentés*, Budapest 2016.

²⁵ *Wyniki Badania PISA 2015 w Polsce*, Warszawa 2016.

²⁶ M. Sitek, *Program Międzynarodowej Oceny Umiejętności Uczniów. Wyniki badania PISA 2018 w Polsce*, Warszawa 2019.

²⁷ M. Kopasz, Zs. Boda, *A közoktatás reformja és az oktatási rendszer iránti bizalom*, „Educatio”, 2018 vol. 27, no. 4; DOI: 10.1556/2063.27.2018.002.

Kopasz and Boda argue²⁸ that between 2010 and 2013 the relevant stakeholders were not involved in the Hungarian reform process. The conception for the reform and the new law was prepared by a small group of specialists, most of whom remained anonymous in the process. It was published at the end of 2010 which was followed by a limited amount of time for consultation in the first part of 2011²⁹. The final draft of the law was published at the end of September 2011 and accepted by the cabinet by the end of October. The lack of real debate in the process, and the reform plans generated resistance within the education sphere³⁰. Nevertheless, after the parliamentary debate it was accepted and declared in December 2011.

In Poland on the other hand, the liquidation of lower-secondary schools, with the return to the old system of eight years of primary school and four-year-long secondary school, was a recurring topic of discussion and it was included in the campaign program of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* in 2015. The necessity of another school structure reform was justified by the public opinion and the needs of the voters. This argument was also used as a justification for the speed of the reforms. The preparation started after the elections at a rapid pace. The public debates over the plans were held in the first part of 2016, the results of which were presented in June 2016. During the conference the minister of education reinforced the reform plans that had been present since the campaign. The draft of the law was published in September 2016, and after public and parliamentary debate it was accepted in December 2016 and declared in January 2017. The structural changes initiated by the new law were implemented in the same year in September. The rapid changes caused organizational and structural problems, which was especially difficult for the last grades of lower-secondary schools and the students who continued primary school in 7th grade. The audit of the reform³¹ by the Supreme Audit Office (*Najwyższa Izba Kontroli*) *inter alia* criticized the speed of the reforms, especially connected to the changes in the core curriculum.

In both cases the preparation of the reform and the consultations were rushed, and the consultations did not touch upon the underlying principles, solely on the concept of Ministry. The opposition of the reform in Poland tried to stop it through strike and referendum, and they managed to collect the required number of supporters, but

²⁸ M. Kopasz, Zs. Boda, *A közoktatás reformja és az oktatási rendszer iránti bizalom*, „*Educatio*”, 2018 vol. 27, no. 4; DOI: 10.1556/2063.27.2018.002.

²⁹ <http://nahalkaistvan.blogspot.com/2011/10/torvenytervezetrol.html>, [downloaded on: 15.05.2019].

³⁰ <https://24.hu/belfold/2011/10/24/tiltakozasok-a-hoffmann-vegjatekban/>, [downloaded on: 15.05.2019].

³¹ *Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, Departament Nauki Oświaty i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, Zmiany w systemie oświaty*, Warszawa 2019.

it was hindered in Parliament³². Furthermore, alongside the opposition of teacher organizations and other social groups, both reforms were criticized by the academia³³. In Hungary, the opposition of the academia was less obvious, and several critical, opinion-leader researchers joined the combined network³⁴ of opposing non-governmental organizations. The Polish reform was conducted despite the success of Poland in the PISA, as according to the minister of education's opinion³⁵ PISA has little in common with the structure of education system.

We can observe in both countries an aim to return to the classical values of education, which is connected to a traditional, idealized image of the education system. Part of it can be labeled as communicational changes, but there are also concrete steps in that direction. In Hungary, the integrational politics that characterized education policy between 2002 and 2010 were replaced by moral principles that became the basis of education policy³⁶. The signs of this approach are evident even in the change of the name of the new law³⁷, which can be considered a communicational change toward the importance of pedagogy without direct influence on the schools. The importance of the moral aspects in the role of schools and pedagogy can also be seen in several changes that were introduced with the new law. For example, religion or ethics lessons became compulsory once a week in primary schools. The concept of community service was also introduced, of which 50 hours is required in secondary schools in order to take the mature examinations.

In Poland, Prime Minister Beata Szydło, in her exposé speech³⁸ to the parliament in 2015 described the planned reform as a return to the knowledge-based schooling instead of test-based approach that was attributed to the Polish education in the past. She also emphasized the importance of patriotic education and the importance of vocational schooling. Marta Zahorska suggests³⁹ that in the vision of the reformers the traditional values are connected to the return of the traditional good four-year-

³² <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,22124043,reforma-edukacji-pis-odrzucl-wniosek-o-referendum.html>, [downloaded on: 15.05.2019].

³³ <http://ibs.org.pl/news/apel-naukowcow-zajmujacych-sie-badaniami-edukacyjnymi-do-minis-ter-edukacji-narodowej/>, [downloaded on 15.05.2019].

³⁴ <http://www.tanszabadsag.hu/blog/alapito-nyilatkozat-teljes/>, [downloaded on: 15.05.2019].

³⁵ <https://serwisy.gazetaprawna.pl/edukacja/artykuly/1000126,pisa-to-badanie-15-latkow-nie-ma-nic-wspolnego-z-ustrojem-szkolnym.html>, [downloaded on: 15.05.2019].

³⁶ E. Neumann, *Politika a padosorok között*, [in]: *Tudás és politika. A közpolitika-alkotás gyakor- lata*, ed. E. Berényi, G. Eröss, E. Neumann, Budapest 2013, p. 161, cited by: M. Kopasz, Zs. Boda, *A közoktatás reformja és az oktatási rendszer iránti bizalom*, „Educatio”, 2018 vol. 27, no.4; DOI: 10.1556/2063.27.2018.002.

³⁷ Unfortunately the two words can be translated to English as education, which doesn't make distinction between the two meanings. We can observe the difference in Polish though (and as I write this article for a Polish audience I feel it can be relevant): the previous law was about *oktatás – kształcenie* and the current one is about *nevelés – wychowanie*.

³⁸ <https://www.premier.gov.pl/expose-premier-beaty-szydlo-stenogram.html>, [downloaded on:13.05.2019].

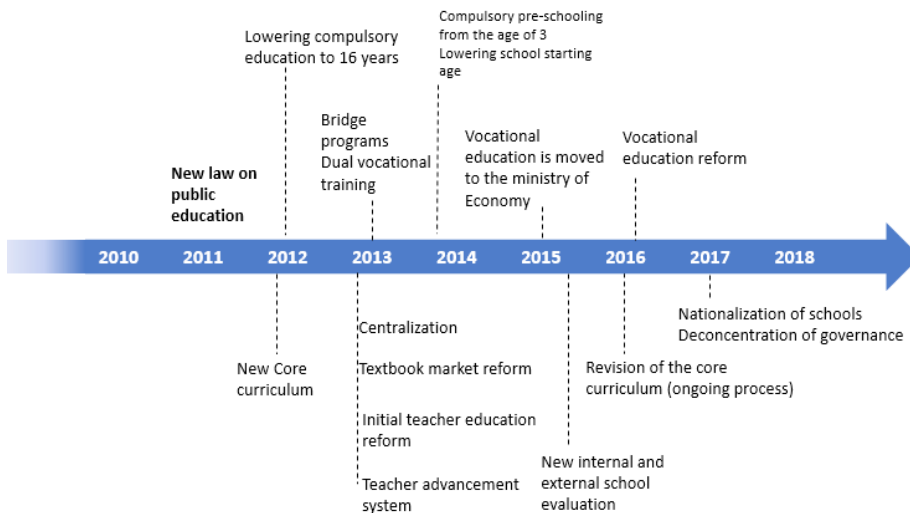
³⁹ M. Zahorska, *Nieznośna lekkość... reformowania oświaty*, „Studia z Polityki Publicznej”, 2016 vol. 10, no. 2, p. 43-64.

long liceum⁴⁰, but as nowadays a much higher percent of polish students plan to go to general secondary education - thanks to the massification of secondary and tertiary education in the nineties - the elitist picture of liceum will most likely remain a false hope.

5. The rise of the central government’s role

The Hungarian reforms consisted of several parts, the most important of them can be observed in figure 3. The reforms were implemented gradually; the changes in 2012-2014 were indicated by the new education law, whereas most of the changes since 2014 can be seen as the correction of the original reform. Of the different changes henceforward described, I will focus on the Hungarian recentralization process which I compare to the Polish aspirations for centralization during the current reform period.

Figure 3. Education reforms in Hungary after 2010.



Source: the author’s own product.

The recentralization of the public-school system was part of the public administration reform and reorganization of responsibilities. Many local govern-

⁴⁰ Liceum – the Polish name of the general secondary school. It is used for the 4-year-long secondary school before 1999 and after 2015 and also for the 3-year-long secondary school between 1999 and 2015.

ments suffered under heavy financial burdens which was mostly the result of financing the developmental costs from foreign currency-based credits before 2008. The government consolidated all the local governments between 2011-2014 and took over several responsibilities that belonged to the local governments previously⁴¹. “From 2013 the role-taking and influence of the state has significantly increased and continues to grow, whereas the main focus of local government activities is directed at the municipal management, the involvement of the local society and the self-organization of the local community”⁴².

One of the main arguments behind the recentralization of the school-system was the idea that the inequalities in the education system derive from the different financial situations of the local governments. If the central government were responsible for public schools it could provide similar financial possibilities for the schools, regardless of the location of the school.

A new central maintenance organization (Klebsberg Institution Maintenance Center – KLIK) was established in the summer 2012 and took over the schools from the local governments, which operated through local offices at the district level⁴³, although most of the relevant decisions were made in Budapest and not in the educational districts⁴⁴. The municipalities and cities with more than 3000 residents could continue the maintenance of schools’ infrastructures or hand them over and pay a fee to KLIK. In the first year KLIK took over around 50% of schools (see figure 4).

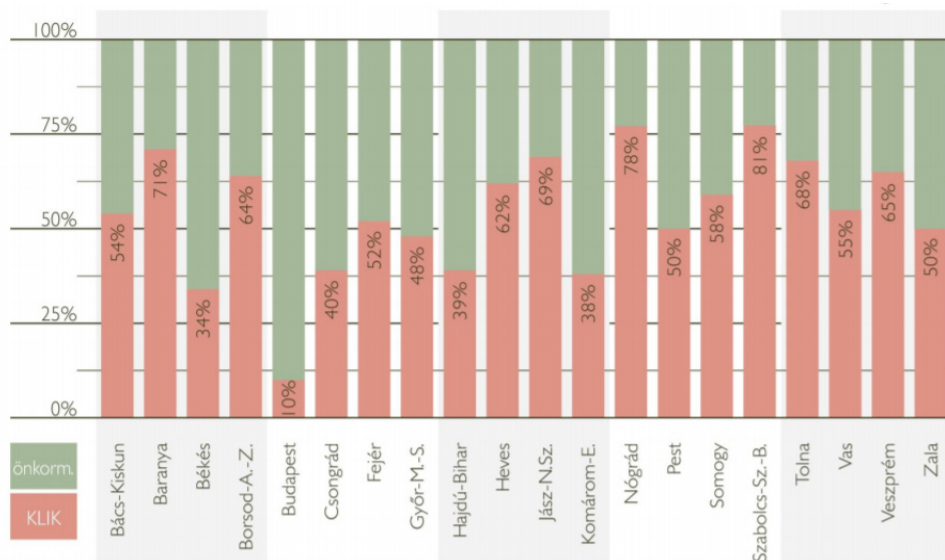
⁴¹ Cs. Lentner, *A magyar önkormányzatok adósságkonszolidációja*, „Pénzügyi Szemle”, 2014 no.3, p. 330-344.

⁴² É. Steiner, *Introduction to the Hungarian Local Government System*, [http://www.manorka.net/uploads/images/Kiadványok/Local Governments_boritoval.pdf](http://www.manorka.net/uploads/images/Kiadványok/Local_Governments_boritoval.pdf), p. 5, [downloaded on: 18.03.2019].

⁴³ The district (járás) system was established as a state administration level in 2013, altogether 175 districts were created. Their size is between the size of the local governmental municipality (község) and country (megye) levels.

⁴⁴ Z. Györgyi, *Initial experiences on the introduction of centralised education management*, [in]: *Snapshot of Hungarian Education 2014*, ed. A. Fehérvári, Budapest 2015.

Figure 4. The percentage of public schools maintained by KLIK after one year of operation by country. (green - local government; red - KLIK).



Source: Press conference presentation by the director of KLIK, http://kk.gov.hu/download/8/e4/90000/Sajtótájékoztató_20140115.pdf, [downloaded on: 7.03.2019].

We can find signs toward the centralization of different educational tasks in the Polish reforms as well. The role of the Kuratorium Oświaty⁴⁵ gradually diminished during the first decade of XXI. century⁴⁶. This process turned over during the current reform, as the Kuratorium received back the decision-making power regarding: 1) the local school structure (the opening and closing of schools) 2) the appointment of directors and 3) the control over the organization plans of the schools. Moreover, the appointment of the head of the Kuratorium became the direct responsibility of the Minister of Education, before the reform the Kuratorium had belonged under the head of the regional state administration (Wojewoda).

The implementation of KLIK in Hungary was problematic as its budget was underestimated and there was a visible lack of protocols in the beginning. The KLIK was “struggling to manage the high number of institutions under its

⁴⁵ Regionally deconcentrated state administration organisation responsible for the quality and control of education.

⁴⁶ M. Herbst, A. Levitas, *Decentralizacja systemu oświaty w Polsce 2000-2010: czas stabilizacji i nowe wyzwania*, [in:] *Decentralizacja oświaty*, ed. M. Herbst, Warszawa 2012.

care and the associated information reporting and financing requirements⁴⁷. At the end of 2015 a widespread teacher protest manifested because of the overall state of public education and the problems with central maintenance. In response to the protests, the Minister of Human Resources tried first to understate the problem, for example when talking about the centralisation in a TV interview, he said „We overpushed the bicycle a bit⁴⁸. The ministry later tried to manage the protests by initiating an education roundtable, which several organisations refused to take part and started an alternative roundtable⁴⁹. The roundtable resulted in the reorganization and deconcentration of KLIK to 59 school districts with greater autonomy. At the same time the KLIK took over the maintenance tasks from every local government. The protests continued for a time that year but eventually ran out of momentum.

The Polish government's response to the nation-wide teachers' strike in 2019, - which was connected to low salaries, and not directly to the structural reforms - was similar to that of the Hungarian government. They also summoned an educational roundtable in which, similarly to Hungary, several organisations were not invited or declined to take part. The teachers' trade unions similarly decided to create an alternative way to debate the problems of the Polish education system⁵⁰, and tried to continue the protest, although with less efficiency, during the next school year. The difference between the two cases is that the Hungarian protest happened during the second year of the cabinet, while in Poland half year before the parliamentary elections in autumn.

6. Conclusion

During the paper I focused on the reform processes in the education systems of Poland and Hungary while touching on the content of the reforms, whose comparison could be a topic for further investigation. Both reforms were prepared and implemented similarly: seemingly the preparation of the reforms in both cases involved extensive consultations, but their realizations were rushed. Several stakeholder groups therefore felt that they were not involved in the process causing opposition toward the reforms. The resulting protests were also handled alike: education roundtables were assembled for consulta-

⁴⁷ Z. Györgyi, *Initial experiences on the introduction of centralised education management*, [in]: *Snapshot of Hungarian Education 2014*, ed. A. Fehérvári, Budapest 2015, p. 58.

⁴⁸ https://hvg.hu/itthon/20160126_Balog_Zoltan_klik_kozpontositas, [downloaded on: 17.03.2019].

⁴⁹ A. Marton, *Rövid emlékeztető a 2016-os tanári tiltakozások két és fél hónapjáról*, „Új Pedagógiai Szemle”, 2016 no. 1-2.

⁵⁰ <https://znp.edu.pl/5524-2/>, [downloaded on: 15.05.2019].

tion, but the stakeholder opposition mostly stayed away. The implementation of the further steps of reforms was conducted in a similar fashion, which caused problems during the transition periods. The Hungarian centralization efforts aimed to reduce the selectivity of the education system, but the results of different large-scale assessments show that the selectivity of the system became even higher. The processes in the Polish system seem to point toward the centralization of education as well and it is possible that it would lead to the recentralization of education governance, similarly to what occurred in Hungary.

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