



From the bureaucratic model to the bureaucratic model

The post-socialist development of the Hungarian higher education

ISTVÁN POLÓNYI  and TAMÁS KOZMA* 

Institute of Educational Studies and Cultural Management, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

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ABSTRACT

The authors analyze the development of the Hungarian higher education system after the political transition of 1989/90. Higher education in Hungary as well as in all post-socialist countries has made a special path. It followed the development of higher education in other parts of Europe, though in a delayed and transformed, not infrequently distorted form. The authors first describe the development of higher education in other part of Europe. They start in the 'association model', evolve through an 'association-bureaucratic' model and arrive to a 'business model'. The evolution of Hungarian higher education is the reverse. It starts from a bureaucratic model, then touches the association-business model and returns to the bureaucratic model. The authors review the legal transformations behind higher educational development, dealing with some elements of this transformation (accreditation, post-socialist managerialism). The peculiarity of the Hungarian managerialism is that it was created by those who socialized in the course of the planned economy, often in government or party offices. They and their followers were the ones who introduced the post-socialist bureaucratic university model as well. They do not believe in market coordination as they grew up under or recall the fake market conditions of state socialism, thus they only rely on central control.

* Corresponding author. E-mail: kozmat@ella.hu

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university government, political transition, higher education development, Hungary

INTRODUCTION

In this study, we analyze the peculiarities of the development of the Hungarian higher education system after the social, economic, political regime change of the late 1980s. The higher education in Hungary – and in many respects in all post-socialist countries – has made a special path. In the development of higher education in post-socialist countries, the characteristics of the changes in higher education in developed Europe are delayed and transformed, not infrequently distorted.

For the first time, the article reviews the recognizable models of the development of higher education and their development over time, pointing out the different direction of Hungarian development (Hrubos, 2000; Kozma, 2004; Szabó, 2014). It describes the formation of the legal background of Hungarian development (Polónyi, 2015, 2017).

Then, they try to explore the reasons for the peculiarities of Hungarian university development, including the specific Hungarian development of accreditation (Kozma & Rébay, 2006) and management (Híves et al., 2000; Hrubos, 2004; Ketzer, 2015, 2020; Ketzner & Kováts, 2019; Szabó, 2014). Finally, the material briefly discusses the latest developments, the privatization of state higher education institutions, and the reorganization in the form of public foundations.

In conclusion, the paper concludes that the transformation of higher education models is a world phenomenon, but in the form in which it unfolded in Central and Eastern Europe, it is not found elsewhere. The reason for this, as the cause of almost all economic and political developments in the last half century, is to be found in regime change.

A special feature of Hungarian management is that it was developed by those who socialized in the planned economy, often in the offices of state power. The post-socialist bureaucratic university model is also introduced by them and their students. Growing up or remembering the fake market conditions of state socialism, they do not believe in market coordination, but only in central government.

THE DEVELOPMENT PATH OF UNIVERSITIES

Three types of development of university organizations can be distinguished (Kozma, 2004; Szabó, 2014): association (or municipal), office (or bureaucratic), and corporation (or business). The form of association means full economic and academic autonomy, the business form means economic autonomy – which severely suppresses academic autonomy –, and in the bureaucratic form, both the academic and economic autonomies are highly limited.

The university development of individual countries and groups of countries may show significant differences, but the historical development curve leads from the association model to the association-bureaucratic mixed model towards the business model (Fig. 1, continuous line). Development opportunities are diverse, as is the end result (more precisely, the state of development today), which in most part of the developed world is the corporate university, which is some form of this association-business model (Hrubos, 2000).

However, the Hungarian development path of universities from the middle of the 20th century to the present is different. Following the official higher education of the state socialist



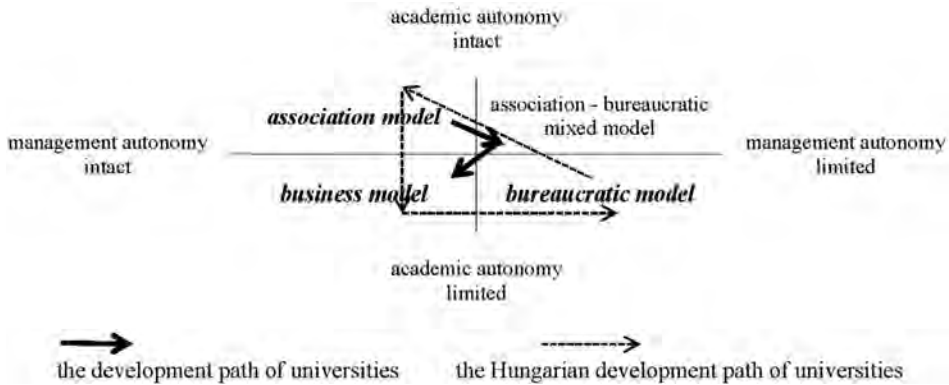


Fig. 1. The development path of universities (Our own model)

period, the association model, the full economic and academic autonomy, fell on universities due to the regime change. Subsequently, successive left-wing and conservative governments, while pursuing conflicting higher education policies, still had a common effort to move the university association model toward the business model. However, after 2010, the Conservative coalition that came to power suddenly shifted the organization of universities toward the office model, creating a fundamentally bureaucratic model (Fig. 1, dashed line).

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE “HUNGARIAN PATH”

To understand the Hungarian path, we first briefly examine the constitutional environment of higher education and then the main features of the laws regarding higher education (See Polónyi, 2015 for more details).

The Hungarian constitution, which was essentially the result of the Amendment (1989) of the Fundamental Law before the regime change, stated that “the Hungarian Republic respects and supports the freedom of scientific and artistic life, the freedom of education and the freedom of teaching. “However, the Fundamental Law adopted in 2011 states: “... higher education institutions are independent in terms of the content and methods of research and teaching, and their organizational order is regulated by law. The management system of public higher education institutions is determined by the Government within the framework of the law and their management is supervised by the Government.” The new approach obviously restricts the autonomy of universities, taking out the organizational formation and management from it.

In the following, we briefly review the characteristics of the acts of the Hungarian higher education (see Polónyi, 2017 for more details).

The last act of education of the state socialism was created in 1985, in which the aim of higher education was to train socialist specialists according to the needs of the economy. The last communist government ruling at the time of the regime change already left the adjective socialist in its act of 1990, it wrote only about higher professional education. In addition to the higher professional education, the act of the first civilian government after the regime change also writes about the education of intellectuals, and the amendment of the law of the left-wing coalition government of ‘96 has a similar spirit, too. In the act of the left government (2005),



besides the task of training intellectuals, education in line with the needs of the labour market appears. In the higher education act of 2011 of the newer conservative government, the word intellectual was never included, as it was the word literacy, but in the preparatory materials, the inadequate higher education regarding the labour market got a very strong emphasis.

In parallel with the transformation of the goals of higher education, institutional autonomy is also changing. The act of 1993 defines a classical Humboldtian university with essentially complete academic and significant economic, organizational autonomy. In 1996, economic autonomy was significantly curtailed by pronouncing the higher education institution a central budgetary body, radically restricting its freedom of management, and in particular that of the management of property, and subjecting it to a central license. At the turn of the millennium, the Conservative government restricted academic autonomy by making the appointment of a university professor subject to accreditation committee approval and transforming higher education admission into a central system, eliminating the independent admission activities of the institutions. The left-wing government of 2005 significantly expands the economic autonomy and shifts the institutions towards the rules of leadership, organization, and management of the economic university, but does not change the previously established system of academic autonomy. The Conservative government of 2011 is radically curtailing economic autonomy again and also restricting academic autonomy by making the establishment of a department subject to ministerial permission. The Conservative government being in its second term is introducing the chancellery system in 2015, radically reducing the decision-making power of the rector and making that of the senate essentially symbolic.

Thus, the Hungarian development path can also be interpreted as that the higher education policy has been running through the same development trajectory in 25 years after the regime change as the developed countries in more than half a century and it has even been running beyond this trajectory (as one minister having left recently who also oversees higher education said about centralisation: "it was taken too far").

The reason for the intention of the state both in the West and the East is that massive higher education is becoming increasingly important to the political sphere: the government is getting concerned about the growing cost of higher education and therefore, is more interested than ever in influencing the product range of the institutions of higher education regarding both students and researches (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007).

THE FORMATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND MANAGEMENT CHARACTERISTICS

From the office model to the office model

As previously mentioned above, three types of universities – and Hungarian post-socialist universities – can be distinguished (Kozma, 2004).

The university *as a bureaucratic organization* was established (reformed) in Hungary by the state-socialist era; in particular, by the fact that the planning bureaucracy of the government tailored the career and movement opportunities of universities. The university *as a municipality* was originally similar to organizations that, enclaved into capitalizing societies (even more preceding them), were created as self-organizing social units. In the Hungarian development,



this emerged after the regime change due to the collapse of the party and party state, the termination of the upper and inner control.

Today, however, in developed countries, universities are beginning to be similar to *businesses*. (Although, as Ildikó Hrubos warns, what universities are practicing, it is at best management with resources made available for them, mostly public funds rather than a business) (Hrubos, 2004). The universities have not become small or medium-sized enterprises in the way that the supporters of privatization formerly urged (Neave, 1988).

During the period of large university consolidations (in the 1980–90s across Europe, at the turn of the millennium in Hungary, see: Híves, Kozma, & Polónyi, 2019), nobody had expected yet the organizational developments that were gradually unfolded. As a result of many compulsive or escaping merging, some Hungarian universities have become wide-ranging and trust-like organizations (Teperics, 2005; Rechechnitzer & Smahó, 2011). The operation was possible by the development of sub-centres where the various activities of the university-trust and the economy's units cooperating with them were interwoven.

The unfolding of the large enterprise structure has a significant effect on the inner world of the university. The situation of the groups originally creating the university changes.

The economic and political expectations of the students and the social groups behind them play a considerable role in becoming a large enterprise (as a driving force but as a hindering factor, too). Also, many examples have been given and concluded by the relevant publications regarding the appraisal of the university administrators (Deem, Hillyard, Reed, & Reed, 2007). The managerialism, the ideology of universities becoming large enterprises, are mainly associated with them.

The post-socialist “university business” does not have an open market at all. This market, as that of any other governmental large enterprise, is shared by the state itself. Instead of competing with each other's services, they have established the market and even get state aid provided in it, where they have a “service monopoly” (Híves et al., 2000).

Governmental large enterprises – at least in Hungary – do not have a real competitor, due to their service monopoly. They are out into test maximum on an international level or only when a foreign service provider receives an opportunity to enter into the domestic market. Universities as state-owned large enterprises, however, succeeded to avoid such an intrusion. And it seems that national higher education systems becoming stable by the Bologna process guarantee also the area of European higher education – as a kind of intellectual customs frontier.

As the markets of Hungary, which had previously been limited by the state, were opening to let the international huge corporations enter or even to call them, half-higher education businesses started to operate in a more permissive governmental atmosphere, sometimes with local government support. Although these pieces of training were organized on a market basis, this “market basis” was ultimately state money, too. The intention of the local (city) governments to found colleges were rooted also in state resources.

The idea of economic freedom (neoliberalism), in particular, dominated the areas that had previously been under surveillance of planned economy. Instead of bureaucratic planning, they expected market environment and impacts, which resulted in economic planning developing into business planning and strategy formation. In this atmosphere, the management of universities changed, too. By the end of the 1990s, the model of “business university” was quite clearly outlined (Hrubos, 2004).



By the beginning of the first decade of the 2000s, however, the specific conservative turn of the Hungarian policy ignored the business university model.

Szabó (2014) reviews the acts of higher education from the point of view of leadership. He states that in the last Education Act (1985) of the state-socialist time period the Secretary (General Secretary) and the Officer (Economic Manager) are both mentioned, indicating that the status of the higher educational institution is half an association, half an office. There is a considerable state influence, the rector, rector deputies, and besides these mentioned two leaders, deans can also be appointed by ministerial approval only. The Higher Education Act of 1993 pushes back the structure of management from office model to association model. The leaders, with the exception of the economic leader, are selected and their selection is under internal rules. However, the Act of 2005 breaks up a number of points regarding the association model, primarily for the purpose of professionalisation. Evaluating the experiences of higher education having become mass education, it builds on the presumption that the association model is unsuitable for high-quality mass production.

Then from 2010, there was a turn in the connection of the maintainer and the institutions because business management tools had clearly failed. In the field of higher education – but also in many other areas, the for-profit techniques having been used were removed. In the formulation of Szabó (2014: 23): “The governing bodies believe that using horizontal relationships instead of the clear inferiority and superiority is weak. They do not have enough intellectual strength (they are not used to the theory or the practice of business approaches) and motivation (the maintainer is a non-profit, too, that is, poorly motivated) to operate appropriate performance management systems. At the same time, the institutions have already become sufficiently experienced to get out of the rules set out inaccurately, to avoid any accountability. Therefore, the relationship based on trust, on concepts of long-term vision believing in common values is less effective than the “traditional” model based on sanctions, unilateral, unexplained decisions, constant threats.” Szabó believes that “essentially the (market) socialism management principles and techniques are contained back in the Chancellor Model of 2015 which assumes that the complex relationship system of higher education can be managed by simple means. It is merely a chosen leader independent of institutional interests who solves efficiency problems. In the (Hungarian) chancellor model, the chancellor takes some rectorship competencies and restricts, “directs” the supposedly incorrectly operating institutions, excluding “academic leaders” from substantive decisions and restricts the rector’s competencies. “In the justifications of the model, there is a great emphasis on strengthening the ownership role, but no system of interest or control mechanisms are required to operate the institutional internal services on a high level.” (Szabó, 2014: 25)

Accreditation

Accreditation was an unknown concept (an unknown policy) even in the 1980s in the Eastern part of Europe. At the bureaucratic university of the state socialism, there was no quality assurance, more specifically the quality assurance was a party check. The education controllers and the higher educational institutions began to get acquainted with the accreditation only at the dawn of the regime change.

By a superficial comparison, which compares the practices of England, France, and Germany (Kozma & Rébay, 2006: 16–48), it has turned out that there are/can be different models of the



accreditation of higher education. At the time of that investigation – at the end of the 1990s – there still seemed to be an open path to a more bureaucratic (French) or a marketable (English) practice. However, when the researchers compared the Eastern Central European accreditation policies, a completely different image could be seen. The state management returned to higher education more openly or only hardly hidden. Accreditation did not look as an interference of the market in the higher education policy in the Central Eastern European states but as the outstretched arm of the state trying to recover its power over the higher education that had been lost during the regime changes.

The Hungarian accreditation body has undergone a broadly similar development to the higher educational autonomy. Initially, its members were delegated by higher education institutions and research institutes, and later public education and various user organizations also sent members and it elected its own president. From 2010, however, a significant change took place, for a while the majority of its members – later after the protest of the ENQA, only half of the members minus one person – are delegated by the Minister, and the president is also appointed by him.

Post-socialist managerialism

Several publications on the Hungarian peculiarities of higher education management have been published (see, for example: [Ketzler 2020, 2015](#); [Ketzler & Kováts, 2019](#)). Here we now highlight some of the beliefs (beliefs) of educational management, which have become well-known and even accepted in the management of Hungarian post-socialist higher education.

- *Education as a service industry.* The approach and methods of corporate governance become applicable by identifying them with economic activities, e.g., education with the service industry. In this approach, the service provider is the school, the university (in other words, “the institution providing educational service”); the service users are the learners and/or the social groups behind them, represented by them (e.g. parents). The teacher is the workforce employed in the service (“education professional”). The service itself is that the school, the university can meet the requirements of the labour market, to provide a “powerful” degree. Thus, the expectations of the “labour market” dictate to the university rather than the much broader social environment surrounding the university ([Deem, 2001](#)). However, after the conservative turn of education policy in 2010, it is no longer a service but a public service.
- *Institutional quality assurance.* The education service must remain of the same uniform quality as any other service. This quality should constantly be monitored and standardized by various procedures. The corporate quality assurance systems cannot be applied to the scientific world because their philosophy is different. They are still used, not only because the domestic higher education is dictated by international standards, but also because a real quality assurance tailored to higher educational institutions has not been developed yet. Institutional quality assurance has become a routine to get over with, done by those on the edges of the academic world, and it is a mandatory activity for the managers of the “university-business”. Quality assurance is primarily the continuous, administrative control of instructors (professional staff). This has also been undergoing a special development through the transformation of Hungarian higher education. Though the Act of 1993 mentions the quality only in connection with accreditation, the Act of 2005 already establishes institutional quality assurance systems and governmental quality assurance in the spirit of managerialism and considers accreditation only as a periodic and mainly an entry quality assessment. However, the Act of 2010 again interprets



only the quality control role of the accreditation. The Government Strategy Paper of 2016 states, “Day-to-day operations, strategic decision-making, evaluation of educators, researchers, teachers and programs all revolve around quality which is guaranteed at the national level by strict, objective accreditation criteria and full publicity.” (Fokozatváltás, 2016: 15) Thus, quality assurance remains the nationalized accreditation alone, as one of the control tools of the state in the post-socialist bureaucratic university model.

- *Internal management systems. “Evidence-based” management.* Like all large enterprises, the “university businesses” have their own so-called internal management system, as well. The “university businesses” in Hungary have developed this recently (such as the data-based management information system”, the “graduate career tracking system”, and the “student, educational registration systems” of those that have been operating for a longer time). What they all have in common is that while they started as institutional internal systems, they have become also tools for government control and management by now. According to the aforementioned Government Strategy Paper of 2016, fact-based decision-making will become commonplace, both in the cases of sectoral governance and individual institutions, using detailed and accurate electronic registration and IT systems. The result indicators established by these are used in the (central) strategic decision-making and in setting the directions of development (Fokozatváltás 2016: 15).
- *Rankings.* Institutional rankings were originally intended to orient students, but they have evolved into supranational competitive lists by now. Research achievements stand out from teaching activities, their measurement has become a profession. Institutional, national and international databases on scientific publications and information have gradually been transformed into monitoring the performance of teachers and researchers and have become one of the tools of an “evidence-based” higher education policy. In the financing of Hungarian higher education, hand-distributed resources following the ministerial evaluations have always played a smaller or larger role. Following the change in the education policy in 2010, institutional “excellence” became a separate public money allocation, but its allocation criteria are not transparent.

The language of the “new evaluating state” is sought to be understood by the university leaders and administrators, too. They are forced, as well, since they are in a relationship with their maintainer, the state.

As Szabó (2014) states, the managers of Hungarian higher education are usually characterized by amateurism. No senior manager, or ministerial, maintainer manager, is required to have a degree in business and organizational science or to have expertise in higher education marketing, finance, quality assurance, human resource management, etc. territory. Management positions are usually related to teaching positions, sectoral managers are also connected to institutions, institutional ones to faculties and departments. It also follows that “marketing attempts have failed, and bureaucratic coordination and centralization are strengthening.” On the one hand, the (correct) assumption of the maintainer is that the combination of a self-interested (non-philanthropic) worker and an association [higher education] model unsuitable for economic-business activity is not suitable for high-quality mass production. On the other hand, it is because of the lack of professionalization of the maintainer and because of the search for a quick solution that market coordination does not suit central management: it is awkwardly managed, emphasizing the failures of the previous changes having advertised as connecting to the market.



Several publications on the Hungarian peculiarities of higher education management have been published (see, for example: [Ketzer, 2020, 2015](#); [Ketczer & Kováts, 2019](#)). Here we now highlight some of the beliefs (beliefs) of educational management, which have become well-known and even accepted in the management of Hungarian post-socialist higher education.

If we look at the ministers in charge of the sphere that includes Hungarian higher education after the regime change until now, we see that half of them came from the academic sphere in terms of their “original occupation” and half of them were politicians. There is no one-way trend in the process at all. It does not appear that ministerial status would become more of a political status, indicating the professionalization of politics. At the same time, the narrower portfolio of higher education majorly has been managed by a leading university lecturer (university professor or associate professor) since the regime change. The responsible of this position must be chosen from the controlled sphere more and more, as partly he keeps in touch with the sphere and partly with the decrease of autonomy increasing number of tasks are transferred to the ministry, which must be controlled by a person who understands the functioning of the sphere. But there is nothing to be surprised about, because as [Pulay \(2009\)](#) pointed out, the model of continuity and stability of public administration in Hungary failed, “the Hungarian practice has not followed the spirit of the European model.”

CONCLUSIONS

The transformation of the models of higher education is a world phenomenon, but the form in which it was unfolded in Eastern Central Europe, cannot be found elsewhere. The reason for this, as the cause of almost all economic and political developments in the last third century, is the regime change.

It was the regime change that created the pattern – the economic-organizational background – which initially established “university businesses” and pushed them towards trust (also, towards a latent cartel). In the “university business” organization, the formerly most influential group, the teachers, is gradually being devalued. In turn, the university administration that was once looked down upon and treated badly is being overestimated. “Higher education managerialism” is their science ([Kozma, 2011](#)).

However, the first decade of the 2000s brings a radical change. Following the perceived or real training and management problems of the higher educational institutions, the education policy puts an end to the university business experiment and replaces it by radical centralization, narrowing of economic and academic autonomy, i.e., restoration of the bureaucratic model. The former “new evaluating state” connected to managerialism will be replaced by the old, directive, centralized governing state.

A special feature of the Hungarian managerialism is that it was developed by those who had socialized in the planned economy, often in the offices of the state power. The post-socialist bureaucratic university model is also introduced by them and their students. Growing up or remembering the fake market conditions of the state socialism, they do not believe in market coordination, but only in central control.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

István Polónyi is professor (economist) at University of Debrecen, Faculty of Arts, Institute of Educational Studies (since 2014). Before 2014 he is worked UD Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. He has university doctor (Budapest University of Economics, Department of Work and Educational Economy, 1984), candidate of economical sciences (which equivalent with a PhD) (1994) and his habilitation at Pannon University (economical sciences) (1997). In 2000 he was appointed university professor of the University of Debrecen. He has written 25 books and edited 18 books. In addition, he has written 77 book chapters and more than 130 scientific articles. His research areas: economics of education, education policy, labour economics.

Tamas Kozma is professor emeritus (sociology of education, comparative and higher education research) at the Institute of Educational and Cultural Studies and founding president of the Center for Higher Education Research and Development, both at the University of Debrecen (Hungary). He has studied theology, history and education in Budapest (Hungary), Szeged (Hungary) and Cluj-Napoca (Romania). He has received his Dr Univ from the University of Szeged, his C.Sc (Candidate of Sciences) and D.Sc (Doctor of Sciences) from the Hungarian Academy of the Sciences, and his PhD and his habilitation from the University of Debrecen. He was the general director of the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research (Budapest) between 1990–2000. He has published 18 books and around 200 papers and articles (mostly in Hungarian and partly in English). His recent volume (in Hungarian) titled “*The Right Time. Education and Transition, 1988–1993*” His research activities can be followed on *Academia.edu* and *ResearchGate*. Prof Kozma is–among others–the founding editor of *HERJ Hungarian Educational Research Journal* and is president of *HERA Hungarian Educational Research Association*.

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