

TOP THEORETICAL HIGH-SCHOOL GRADUATION RESULTS AMONG THE HUNGARIAN STUDENTS IN ROMANIA IN THE PERIOD 2012-2014. TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION AND POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

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Abstract: The Hungarian educational system in Romania has been a disputed, especially after 1989. There have been several studies conducted which tried to contribute to a better understanding of this subsystem from various perspective.

In this current paper I focus on the presentation of the best Hungarian or partly Hungarian high schools in Romania, in terms of passing and excellence ratio. There are various accepted approaches towards the territorial distribution of excellency, within the social sciences and educational sciences, and I will check if these have explaining value even in the case of the Hungaian high schools from Romania.

As an objective research method I rely on the publicly available results of the high school leaving exams, as since the recent reform they are standardizes exams and are a good standard to compare the countrywide results.

Keywords: high schools, passing ratio, excellence ratio, territorial distribution, high school leaving exam

Introduction

The situation of the Hungarian educational system in Romania has been the subject of long-running debates in the last two and half decades after the transition from the communist regime to the democratic capitalism¹. The main issues have been on one hand the legal belonging of the various properties and real estates², like schools and complementary buildings, on the other hand there has been an „evergreen” debate over the Romanian language. These partly come from the quite frequent experiences of ethnic Romanians who stated that in some regions of Romania they could not communicate in Romanian, the country’s official language³. Even if these are not precisely conducted researches and there are no empirical datas available, this raised often questions (many times with political connotations) about the efficiency of the tuition of the Romanian language⁴. Even Hungarians suggested that the way how Romanian language is taught is not the proper method for learning a language, as the basics of the language should be taught first, and literary analysis and grammatical deep-studies should be a further and optional stage. The main problems comes probably from the general approach of the policy-makers, according to which the Romanian language should be taught for every citizen of the country as mother-tongue, from the same books and with the same teaching curriculum.

These are the topics which are widely discussed in Romania’s public forums, and in the mass-media. There’s been, however, little said about the performance of the Hungarian

¹ Papp Z., p.5

² <http://www.szabadsag.ro/szabadsag/servlet/szabadsag/template/article,PMainArticleScreen.vm/id/2801> accessed on 09.10.2014

³ <http://think.hotnews.ro/legenda-paine.html> accessed on 09.10.2014

⁴ <http://www.hargitakiado.ro/cikk.php?a=MTYyOQ==> accessed on 09.10.2014

educational system on high-school level. The crisis of the high-school level education has been stressed by the press and the experts after the changes implemented in the methodology of the high-school leaving exams⁵. The main new feature was the video-recording of the exam, which led to the theoretical exclusion of any fraud, and not surprisingly re-drew the map of the high-school leaving exams' results. It did not only affect the Hungarian students but led to a general decrease of the obtained marks, and to an increase of the students who failed - often repeatedly- to pass the exam. This is likely to have further socio-economical issues, especially on the labour-market, but in this current article we can not study in details these risks.

We intend to present the territorial distribution and inequalities from the perspective of the Hungarian students' results at the high-school leaving exams. Years before we probably wouldn't have started concluding such a result, but we believe, that since the implementation of the more severe and general methodological regulations, the results of the high-school leaving exams can offer a reliable overview on the efficiency of the Hungarian high-schools in Romania.

Trying to avoid to spoil the results which will be presented detailed in the following pages we should set as a starting point, that the efficiency of a high-school may depend in largely from the qualities of the students they attend it. It is unlikely that any high school attended by poorly prepared students could reach outstanding results at the exams, but as a circle of consequences, once a school draws attention on itself by the students who achieve great results it will become the preferential choice for more parents willing to offer to their children the best school which might contribute to the success in the terms of the final results.

Theoretical approaches towards the territorial distribution of educational performance

The territorial aspect of the educational performances are a preferred research field and within the social and educational sciences⁶. The territorial distribution in terms of the educational institutions in quantitative and qualitative approaches is a key element when it comes to a comprehensive evaluation of a country's educational network. As the global tendencies related to the distribution of the population are undergoing serious changes⁷, it is a remarkable question whether the educational offer will follow and can adjust itself to these fast alternations.

The main tendencies that result large changes in the distribution of the population in various countries are the following:

- a large scale of urbanization, which ends up in a growing ratio of the urban population , especially in the developing countries⁸
- the urbanizational effects are correlated with a tendency which shows that more and more people live in cities in coastal areas , so the edge of the continents are getting more and more populated areas, as it has happened throughout the last two decades⁹

⁵ http://www.realitatea.net/rezultate-bac-2012-masuri-drastice-pentru-liceele-cu-rezultate-slabe-la-bacalaureat_964575.html accessed on 09.10.2014

⁶ Ashely, p 37.

⁷ Harris, p.59

⁸ Gilbert, p.18

-various local migration patterns appear and re-appear, like the moves of war-refugees or climate-migrants¹⁰

As we can conclude, the territorial distribution of the population in the most countries is still undergoing changes of larger or smaller scale. We can see, that there are some regions which are getting less populated (rural areas, landlocked regions) while other areas are getting more and more crowded and sometimes the signs of the excessive size of the population-concentration may also appear (especially in urban areas, metropolitan regions, coastal regions).

We believe, that as these tendencies have been undergoing for decades, or even centuries, the educational system can reflect these changes and the educational offer in both quantitative (as for the number of the schools on various levels) and in qualitative (as for the distribution of the best performing schools) approach can be adjusted to these alternations. As for the territorial distribution of the best performing schools, our hypothesis is that the existence of well-performing schools correlates with the number of the population and with the population density. So, where there are more people living and as a result there are more students, we believe that there is a better chance to find excellent schools than in settlements and regions with a lower number of population and lower population-density. The main reasons, according to our assumption are:

- a large concentration of various resources, like infrastructural, financial and human resources
- the possibility of dividing the children into various schools according to their skills and motivation, making it possible to create schools which puts together the best performing students
- the possibility of direct competition among the many excellently performing schools within the same city or region/micro-region which increases the chance of providing outstanding results

If our hypothesis is right, the best performing schools in world-wide approach are the most likely to be found in densely populated urban regions. This can be true even if there are some eclectic examples for countries in which the equality of the quality of various schools independently from the region and the type of the settlement is a key aspect in the educational policy making.. The most prominent example is Finland, where this is a leading principle of the organization of the education¹¹. As Finland's educational performance has drawn international attention and acknowledgement, it wouldn't be a wonder if other states followed this approach as a result of a modernizing process of their own educational systems. As some believe that the key element which led to Finland's impressive economic development in during the XX. century was largely due to the high quality of the education¹², the finnish way can be a viable option for all the countries which believe that investing in the future employees through the improvement of the educational system could rewarding decision.

⁹ <http://www.livescience.com/4167-flocking-coast-world-population-migrating-danger.html> accessed on 09.10.2014

¹⁰ <http://www.iom.int/cms/envmig> accessed on 09.10.2014

¹¹ Jakobson, p. 62.

¹² Kirby, p. 42.

The methodology of the research

In the research which we present hereby we used as source the publicly accessible data of high-school graduation exams in Romania, published on the website of the ministry of education. We collected data for three years, 2012, 2013 and 2014. We also used the available data from the Romanian general census carried out in 2011.

We included into the sample high schools in which there are classes which have Hungarian as teaching language, and it did not matter if they were partly or completely Hungarian schools. We did not include into the sample schools in which the number of all the Hungarian applicants for the high school leaving exams was under 10 and neither did we include the technical high schools (in which the students don't get general theoretical preparation but are instructed for various professions, like mechanics or specialized workers).

We only included into the research sample those students who applied for the high leaving exam including as mother-tongue Hungarian language and literature, so in our case, the definition for „Hungarian student” is simple: every student is considered to be such who has applied for the Hungarian literature as discipline in the frame this exam, meaning that he studied during the high school in Hungarian class, as this is a precondition for choosing it. Of course, there might be several ethnic Hungarians who thus are not included as they studied during the high school in Romanian classes without learning Hungarian language and literature. On the reverse, it is also possible that there are ethnic Romanian who for various reasons have chosen to attend a Hungarian class during the high school years.

We divided the schools into three categories, which we believe, should be treated as schools of different type and the comparison is often impossible due to the differences of the teaching-content and the methodology of the high school graduation exams. We set up categories for theoretical high schools, confessionnal high schools and technical high schools. In the current paper we present the data for the theoretical high schools

The presentation of the results

The two main questions indicators that we checked were the following:

- What percentage of all the applicants for the high-school graduation exam did actually pass the exam? So the first indicator is a passing-ratio.
- What percentage of all the students managed to reach outstandingly high average results (we set this criteria as 9 or higher as general mark). So the second indicator is an excellence-indicator.

As our hypothesis was that the theoretical high schools with the best indicators in both aspects are likely to be found in the cities with relatively high Hungarian population, it is important to take into account the major cities with Hungarian inhabitants in Romania. We divided these cities into 5 categories. As for the results of the 2011 census, the city with the most ethnic Hungarian inhabitants in Transylvania was Targu Mures (1st category), with over 50,000 Hungarians. There are other cities with a number of Hungarian inhabitants between 40,000-50,000 (2nd category) like Cluj Napoca, Miercuria Ciuc, Sfantu Gheorghe, Oradea and Satu Mare. In the category between 30,000-40,000 (3rd category) we found Odorheiu Secuiesc, while in the 20,000-30,000 category Baia Mare. The group of the cities between 10,000-20,000 (4th category) Hungarian inhabitants was made up of Salonta, Arad,

Brasov, Gheorgheni, Targu Secuiesc and Carei. The other settlements were included into the category of the cities with less than 10,000 Hungarians inhabitants (5th category)

So, according to our hypothesis the best performing high schools should be in the cities in the first two categories, with a population of over 30,000 Hungarians (1st and 2nd categories)

The best theoretical high schools in term of passing ratio, based on the average figures of the three years, were the following: (name of the school, city, passing ratio, category of the city:

| Name of the school | City | Passing ratio | Category of the city |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 9.Liceul teoretic Mikes Kelemen | Sfantu Gheorghe | 83% | 2nd |
| 9.Liceul teoretic Tamasi Aron | Odorheiu Secuiesc | 83% | 3rd |
| 8.Liceul teoretic Szekely Miko | Sfantu Gheorghe | 87% | 2nd |
| 7.Colegiul National Unirea | Targu Mures | 88% | 1st |
| 6.Liceul teoretic Apaczai Csere Janos | Cluj Napoca | 89% | 2nd |
| 5.Liceul teoretic Bathory Istvan | Cluj Napoca | 90% | 2nd |
| 3.Liceul Janos Zsigmond | Cluj Napoca | 93% | 2nd |
| 3.Liceul teoretic Marton Aron | Miercuria Ciuc | 93% | 2nd |
| 2.Colegiul National Silvania | Zalau | 95% | 4th |
| 1.Liceul | Targu Mures | 96% | 1st |

| | | | |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| teoretic | | | |
| Bolyai | | | |
| Farkas | | | |

Source: www.edu.ro accessed on 09.10.2014

As the results show, the **overwhelming** majority (8 of 10) of the cities in which the best schools function are cities from the first two categories, so our hypothesis proved partly to be correct as the outstanding passing ratio seems to correlate with the size of the city up to a certain degree. However, there are two surprises, one being plausible, the other one being a truly mysterious for us.

Odorheiu Secuiesc with the Tamasi Aron high school scored well, but it is worth to know that the city is surrounded by several smaller villages, mostly all with overwhelming Hungarian majority among the inhabitants. Nevertheless, in the neighbouring Mures country there are likewise many villages and small towns in the bordering region with Harghita country, and for the inhabitants of Eastern-Mures Odorheiu Secuiesc is closer than the county's most important city, Targu Mures. So even if the city's population is not very large, the surrounding villages offer the high school the chance to carry out proper selection and to remain the elite-training institution of the wider region.

The situation of Zalau's Sylvania National College is different. On one hand, this is the only school on the top 10 list which is not completely Hungarian, meaning that there are also classes with Romanian teaching language, and evenmore, there are more Romanian than Hungarian classes. We think that discovering the hidden factors of their success will require further qualitative researches, but in the case if there are identifiable factors which lead to these unlikely outstanding results, they could be promoted and implemented in other schools too.

The major cities of the counties from inner Transylvania, which are often referred as „Tinutul Secuiesc” are all represented in the top ten results, Sfantu Gheorghe even with two high schools. However, if we take the level of the cities and not only of the single schools it seems obvious that the first place goes to Cluj-Napoca. Even if the number of the Hungarian inhabitants is well under 50,000, they are represented with three high schools on the list. So even if only 5% of the Hungarians live in Cluj, about 30% of the best high schools are in this city. What makes it more outstanding is the fact, that contrary to other major cities, like Miercuria Ciuc or Odorheiu Secuiesc, Cluj-Napoca is not surrounded with villages with significant number of Hungarian inhabitants. We believe, that the possible explanation should be related to the importance of the local Babes-Bolyai University. This institution has been for centuries the most important educational and cultural center for the Hungarians of Transylvania, and even today there can be no doubt that it is the highest ranking university on which the Hungarians from the region can study. We believe, that due to the concentration of the intellectuals from among the Hungarian Transylvanians in the city the best students after having finished the university tend to stay in Cluj Napoca, to live there after founding a family. This means, that the teachers in the high schools are likely to have been better performing students during their university studies than their counterparts from other cities' high schools.

The other possible explanation can be the existence of the perspective for the high school students to study further on the Babes-Bolyai University. In other cities the Hungarian universities have appeared recently, and as they did not have the chance to become any traditional institutions and so many families may not be sure whether it is really worth to send their children to these universities. However, in Cluj-Napoca the relatively high-level university is in the city, so there is no extra financial cost for the families in case the children decide to attend that the university. Having such a clear and obvious perspective can have positive effect on the everyday performances of the students during the high school years.

These aren't evidence-supported theories yet, but we believe that these might be relevant contributing factors.

After having analyzed the table of the best high schools in terms of passing ratio, let us present the table of the best high schools with the best ratio in the terms of excellence, by other words, the high schools in which an average student can have the biggest chance of getting a very high final mark at the high school graduation exam (we set this criteria as mark 9 or above, in the educational system in which marks are given from 1-10, the latter being the best).

The major conclusion that we can draw from this table is that there isn't any school in the top ten in terms of passing ratio from counties which are in border-regions. By other words, the border-counties seem to perform significantly worse. As there are some large cities in the western part of Romania, like Oradea and Satu Mare, which have significant Hungarian population (they are in the 2nd category according to our classification) and still were not able to provide any school with results enough for a ranking in the top ten. We believe that the main reasons are on one hand the social attitudes of the population, as these border counties might have a value-order in which the practical skills, especially for trading and commerce might be more appreciated than the theoretical knowledge and as these values might be transmitted from generation to generation the attitude of the children is not similar to the ones from Cluj Napoca, for example. Not having traditional universities, the students from Satu Mare and Oradea might not see as a clear perspective for themselves the success in life through learning excellence. On the other hand it is very likely that the traditional elite families of the region tend to send their children to Hungary even for the high school studies. While taking into consideration the current infrastructural context, from Inner-Transylvania it takes 6 hours to arrive to Debrecen and 10 hours to get to Budapest, from Oradea and Satu Mare these figures are only 1 and 4 hours.

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| Name of the school | City | Excellence-ratio | Category of the city |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 10.Liceul teoretic | Cluj Napoca | 11% | 2nd |

| | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Apaczai Csere Janos | | | |
| 9.Liceul teoretic Bathory Istcan | Cluj Napoca | 11% | 2nd |
| 8.Liceul teoretic Szekely Miko | Sfantu Gheorghe | 87% | 2nd |
| 7.Liceul teoretic Carei | Carei | 12% | 4th |
| 6. Liceul Janos Zsigmond | Cluj Napoca | 13% | 2nd |
| 5. Liceul teoretic Szekely Miko | Sfantu Gheorghe | 14%% | 2nd |
| 4.Liceul teoretic Marton Aron | Miercuria Ciuc | 17% | 2nd |
| 3.Colegiul National Unirea | Targu Mures | 18% | 1st |
| 2.Colegiul National Sylvania | Zalau | 23% | 4th |
| 1.Liceul teoretic Bolyai Farkas | Targu Mures | 26% | 1st |

Source: www.edu.ro accesed on 09.10.2014

This table confirms the suggestions that the previous one has already offered us, as in this list we find three cities which are neither from the first, nor from the second category. The Sylvania National Colege proved to be the second best in terms of passing ratio and they preserved their position in the case of this ranking too. The high school from Carei did not get into the first ten on the previous list, but they achieved the impressive 7th place in terms of excellence-ratio. The reasons are unknown for us, but a major question is whether in our further researches we will find any similarities in the applied teaching methods of the two

mentioned high schools (if yes, it will be proved that there are methodological means which can significantly increase the chances of creating outstanding schools) or we will find quite different attitudes and methodological backgrounds as explaining reasons for these surprising performances.

Conclusions

After having analyzed two different tables, we have the fair chance to draw some relevant conclusions. First and foremost, our initial hypothesis seemed to be correct, as the dominance of the cities with larger number of Hungarian inhabitants is absolutely overwhelming in both results. The city with the most Hungarians, Targu Mures ranked first in both rankings. Cluj Napoca, the city with the second-most Hungarians represents itself with three schools in each table. The other major cities also proved to be well performing in these terms, the only two exceptions being Oradea and Satu Mare. We believe, that the most important reason for the unexpected relatively poor results of these cities' high schools might be the fact that it is likely that the traditional elite families which probably form the social background in the case of a large ratio of the successful students, in these border-counties like Bihor or Satu Mare send the children to Hungary to study further, even already on the high school level. The inhabitants of the Hungarians from Inner-Transylvania have far less possibilities to do so due to the poor infrastructural conditions and considerably bigger distances, let alone the collateral costs..

We also found two high schools, from cities which have less than 20,000 Hungarian inhabitants which achieved remarkable results, one of them being second-ranked in both tables. These are remarkable exceptions, but the specific reasons for these outstanding performances have to be analyzed in the future with proper scientific means, in the hope of discovering any forms of local initiatives or innovations in methodology that can serve as an example for other schools in order to improve the results of the students in the high schools and especially to increase the averages scores achieved at the high-school leaving exams. This way it would be possible to promote the equality of chances among the students coming from various regions so the regional background wouldn't be as important and determining factor as it seems to be now.

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