

# AN EDUCATIONAL SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE HUNGARIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

KOZMA, TAMÁS. 2004. *Kié az egyetem? A felsőoktatás  
nevelésszociológiája [Whose is the University? Educational  
Sociological Approach towards Higher Education]*  
Budapest, Új Mandátum, 242 p.

© Jancsák, Csaba  
[jancsak@jgytf.u-szeged.hu](mailto:jancsak@jgytf.u-szeged.hu)

Tamás Kozma is a sociologist, a professor at the University of Debrecen in Hungary and the former general director of the Institute of Educational Research, one of the most widely-read authors of the social sciences (educational research, educational sociology). His work *Introduction to Educational Sociology*, which was published in several editions (1974, 1977, 1994, 2001), has been read by tens and thousands of students in higher education with the teacher training module. In addition to the above-mentioned special work on sociology, however, his book *Whose is the school?*, which was published in 1990, can also be mentioned as a scientific predecessor of the reviewed book.

From the beginning of the 1990s there has been a significant change in the Hungarian higher education: along with the change of the political system and the consolidation of democracy new places of education (for example denominational and foundational private institutions) and forms of education different from the previous ones (special trainings at university level, long-distance learning) have been created and there has been a significant increase in the number of students in higher education. This latter process is in accordance with the expansion typical for the European education (especially higher education). The sources of the expansion in Hungary have been the modern tendencies in the economy and educational policy as well as young people and their parents. (Gábor, 2000) After the creation of the capitalist environment there is no doubt in the minds of today's Hungarian people that in order to maintain the technical and economic development there is an increasing demand for highly qualified experts. Moreover, due to the increasing requirements of the unstable labour market, it is noticeable that young people become increasingly interested in education and knowledge (both in a qualitative and a quantitative sense) because this way they would like to increase their prospects for employment. The Hungarian social and educational policy supported the increase of the number of students in higher education as a means of maintaining (even increasing, in the case of disadvantaged students) opportunities for the youth. The general climate of opinion also contributed to this, since earlier the number of students in higher education was limited by party and state instructions. There were cases when a young person has successfully passed the entrance examination (that is he or she has reached enough points to be admitted), still, he or she received notification that he or she was not admitted "because of an insufficient number of places".

Besides there has been a depolarisation of the education, that is the rigid ideological control and orientation of the system ceased and it became acknowledged that the students and their parents have the right to choose their direction in the educational system. We can state that the extraordinary versatility is the fundamental uniqueness of the Hungarian higher education – this is represented in Tamás Kozma's book.

"What does an educational sociologist hope to find at the university or at the college?" – the author asks and he gives the following explanation: "He investigates the processes that take place among students, instructors and other employees of higher education without planning and organising but in a spontaneous way. [...] We may consider the institutions of higher education – universities, colleges – to be an unknown community in the real sense of the word; it is the site, the area where the students and instructors of the given college or university can be found. We observe and attempt to understand them." (Kozma, 2004:5)

The book in title "*Whose is the University*" is divided into two major chapters. In the first chapter the dissertation with the title *Higher education as a research problem* deals with the topic of the Hungarian higher education policy. The author guides the readers through the newer and newer challenges that the system of higher education faces (globalisation, expansion, new migration of people) and the political responses provided for these challenges (diversification, privatisation, virtualisation) as well as through an analysis of the changes that manifested in the management and arrives at presenting the elements of the reform processes in higher education (disputes over financing, integrational and social inequalities and higher education). "In the following by educational policy we mean – says the author – the intentions and decisions expressed by the different-level administrators of the education and those that are realised and can be documented in educational actions. Thus we conceive educational policy to be a characteristic reaction towards changes in the society which has become separated from the individuals. All educational policies are shaped in the midst of historical events in relation with the forces of the society. We conceive their changes and modification to be the answers educational policy makers give to the macrosocial 'challenges'" (Kozma, 2004:23) It seems well-founded to suppose that the role of education has changed within the society, because the individual, the diversity regarding the demands and desires and the primacy of competition and achievement have become centralised while at the same time the recognition of goals that had been highly valued earlier – like equality, solidarity and cooperation- vanished completely. (Kallen, 1995)

The second chapter of Tamás Kozma's book has the title: The institution of higher education. In the ten sub-chapters the author presents the world created by the instructors, the employees in non-educating positions (researchers, administrators and administrators) and the students as well as the processes going on within the environment surrounded physically by the university or college institutional infrastructure. Very probably these are going to be the most popular chapters. The author gives a spectacular introduction of instructor roles, the world of instructors (the chapters *The scholar*, *The teacher*, *The clerk*). The author asks the question "How does the formerly mysterious magician become an eccentric person first, than a poor one, than an embittered and marginal person and finally a plain member of the society of the nation's pedagogues. The question is answered relying on the thoughts of Becher, Chait, Bourdieu and Altbach. The 11th sub-chapter

of the book deals minutely with the question of the self-definition of university instructors, the scholar-researcher-pedagogue role. Here the Hungarian environment of the "homo academicus" described by Bourdieu, the scientific community as well as the roles of the instructors and the tensions encoded in these roles are presented, projected onto the end-of-millennium Hungary. "Namely, tension has arisen because of the changing requirements and contradictory expectations within the teacher's role. [...] With the appearance of the new students, the teacher faces a new generation that does not share the teacher's cultural background. The young people have to be convinced about and captivate by the culture represented by the higher educational system. [...] The proportion of traditional disciplines are undergoing a radical change. The structure of the education is not determined on the basis of the disciplines but on other aspects that fall outside the scope of higher education (e.g. finding employment, 'market demands' students' interests, etc." (Kozma, 2004:149–150) "New expectations are taking shape, not the education of the elite, but education, research, professional training, regional innovation, counselling, experting, supporting minorities and women, small entrepreneurs, innovation, providing students' lifestyle as a service at the same time; that is with the disappearance of the traditional, elite-educating aims of the higher education newer and newer demands are formed" (Lukács, 2004:23).

Tamás Kozma also points out that all this has implications on the instructor-student relationship and significantly alters it: "Both the youth and the teacher are in need of the master-disciple relationship. The student needs it in order to have a community behind him, the instructor needs it because as a teacher he needs to gain reinforcement..." (Kozma, 2004:150).

The world of the Hungarian students is presented in two chapters (there is a separate chapter dedicated to the teacher-trainee students). In societies with a decreasing capitation – explains the author – where young people are engaged in studying for longer and longer time (in different organisational forms), the campus becomes the place of living and socialisational territory for an increasingly longer period. This, naturally, does not only involve confinement from the world and concentration on studying like formerly in monastic schools. It rather means an alternative lifestyle which has to be accustomed to, which requires adjustment (be educated and socialised); and which with its inherent relative confinement and self-support suggests the possibility of an alternative social life (Kozma, 2004). The author uses several international (overseas and even African) case-study excerpts and examples to illustrate and comparatively analyse the students' lifestyle.

Young people are exempted from the responsibilities of adult life in the youth period spent at school. By expanding the period of time spent in education the time the individual spends with education increases nevertheless at the same time the collection of the cultural capital takes place at a deeper layer (in a more conscious way). It is typical nowadays for university students to try and collect as many certificates as possible in the education and professional training while attempting to establish themselves on the labour market by preparing different kinds of career plans and strategies. They try to create their adult identity, their own lifestyle, acquire new friends, establish sexual and work relationships, reach financial independence and if there is an opportunity, leave the family home.

The last chapter of the book seeks the answer to the question "What next?" The author emphasizes that the mass proportions of the Hungarian higher education that have been increasing since the beginning of the 1990s

will not stop in the wake of the introduction of the tertiary education but it will continue. However, since so far there have not been any more formal levels of the educational system in Hungary, it quasi "creates its own fourth level" (Kozma, 2004:212). Professor Kozma goes on to describe the creation of the fourth level of the education: "The reason for an increasing demand for a fourth level of the education is not only that the population becomes more and more educated, but also – and more and more frequently so – that what the immigrants had learnt at home is not or only partially adequate with what they found here and what they have to face. If all this is true, it means that there is a larger and more intensive social demand for a new, fourth-level education and it calls for an educational political answer" (Kozma, 2004:226). The tendency, that certain degrees are less valuable and the economy's demand for highly qualified work force creates a studying spiral is also observable in Hungary. Thus young people remain within the frames of education for as long as possible because it is necessary for them to obtain more and more certificates. This, however, may also result in universities becoming "waiting rooms" for those who will later make unsuccessful efforts on the labour market. "It is not merely the case of chances becoming more and more differentiated, but it is also everyday reality that knowledge-monopolies are realigned. Newer and newer code systems are created day by day and only those will survive who can decode these codes fast enough. The task of coding and decoding largely depends on what opportunities are provided by the power structure of the society and what incentives it gives" (Gábor, 1995:197). While the economy demanding high qualifications provides new opportunities for few people, the young people with "weak" certificates (degrees) find themselves in a difficult situation because of the devaluation of their qualifications. This tendency is further strengthened by the competition for more potential students among the institutions in the Hungarian higher education system. (In Hungary students in higher education may be financed by the state or they may pay their own fees.)

And finally some thoughts about the looks of the book. The B/5 format volume supports the author's intentions excellently (usability in education, readability, well-organised structure) both regarding typography and editorial work. A CD supplements the book with a content of almost 65MB. The disk is user-friendly because of its html table of contents the links of which lead to an enlightening of the related part of the book or chapter with the help of statistical data and figures.

## References

- GÁBOR, KÁLMÁN (1995): *Az ifjúságkutatás a kilencvenes években.* [Research of the Youth in the 1990s.] In. *Educatio*, 2
- GÁBOR, KÁLMÁN (2000): *Társadalmi átalakulás és ifjúság.* [Social change and youth] in. *Társadalmi átalakulás és ifjúság.* [Social change and youth] Szeged: Belvedere
- KALLEN, D. (1995): *Thirty Years of Secondary Education.* In. *European Journal of Education*, 30, 458
- KOZMA, TAMÁS (2004): *Kié az egyetem?* [Whose is the university?] Budapest: ÚMK

LUKÁCS, PÉTER (2004): *A felsőoktatás expanziója. [The expansion of higher education]* In. Ifjúsági korszakváltás – Ifjúság az új évezredben [Change of era in the youth – Youth in the new millennium.], Szeged: Belvedere

HRUBOS, ILDIKÓ (2000): *Új paradigma keresése az ezredfordulón. [Search for a new paradigm at the turn of the millennium.]* In. *Educatio*, 1