

*The last thing for the fish to investigate is water  
(English proverb)<sup>1</sup>*

## HISTORIC EXPERIENCES AS DECISION-INFLUENCING FACTORS OF STRATEGIES CONCERNING PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

**Sándor Striker**

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### Introduction

'Validation', 'competence', 'skills', 'tacit knowledge', 'prior learning', 'formal, non-formal and informal education', 'lifelong and lifewide learning' – these expressions dominate the horizon of the fields of education and vocational training of Europe in a desperate attempt of keeping pace with a shifting center of gravity of world economy. The combination of market and communication globalization together with the end of the mutual isolation policies of the pre-1990 Cold War created not only peaceful exchanges, but unexpectedly overweight competitors in world economy, in terms of the quantity of production (China) and of quality as well (e.g. Samsung) .

Europe tries to cope with the antagonistic phenomena of the appeal of post-welfare societies (immigration and East-West migration) and the economic challenges of financial crisis, unemployment and ageing, to mention only a few of the many.

The above quoted expressions are put forward for discussions to the European palette of educators and education administrators and a European Qualification Framework is to be worked out. In the present paper I tackle but one aspect of this gigantic effort with the hypothesis that these seemingly neutral expressions could be and may be as a matter of fact loaded with local backgrounds, which, in the worst extreme, can question their original usage, as it will be shown below. Thus there is the risk that under the heavy velvet robe of noble European notions local socio-cultural differences are either disguising themselves or running short of air, just because local wording does not fit the EU language – so, either way, this issue should not go unnoticed.

This paper provides a double example of *externalization* and *internalization* within the same field, i.e. the field of – predominantly adult – learning concepts and practices in a given culture. Externalization in this context is a process when an expression like 'művelődés' (see later as Hungarian wording for 'self cultivation') or 'adult education' are spread in the social arena, while internalization is a process as individuals of a social arena make up the local common sense of these expressions without feeling



the necessity of explanation. In the title I relate to 'historic experiences' which were formative factors of these processes.

I propose that it is not history, but the *pattern of certain histories* which is the formative factor, so it is not the *chronology, but the typology* of the formation process, what is to be considered. Saying this, I hope it can be forgiven and accepted, that I begin with the later developments – to give the real impetus to some yet unnoticed internalized factor of the past.

### **Á priori versus tacit knowledge and informal learning**

First of all I propose to differentiate between Kant's *á priori* knowledge and those other forms of knowledge which are based on experience. While – according to the German philosopher – humans are born with the capacity of counting, in my view the ways we count are locally determined. Why do I propose to investigate the cultural context behind tacit knowledge and informal learning? Because while *á priori* knowledge is the conscious cognitive faculty of ours, which is therefore *universal*, belonging to humanity, tacit knowledge and informal learning are *á posteriori*, therefore forming the unconscious, yet empirical, rooting in the locality, thus it *separates us* according to the realities – given cultures – they arise from.

The minute a baby is born, he/she finds himself/herself in a cultural context. Whether they are handled by a midwife, an obstetrician or a relative, washed and packed, or put onto the bosom of their mother, receive shots or not, and many more varieties of all kinds – one could enlist a variety of different procedures according to the location, belief system and social status of the mother/parents. The babies are then breastfed or not, carried on the back of the mother, on her bosom or put in a pram, all depending on the context they are born into.

Right from the first moments of a new life, a learning process begins, which is denoted as socialization by sociologists and social psychologists. In the present paper we set up the hypothesis, that this process of socialization is largely enculturation through unnoticed informal learning, an acquisition of cultural procedures and values, which then, in later life determine individual choices and life strategies.

Yet these determinants are latent and operate largely subconsciously, without the knowledge of the individual. In my view they contribute to a large extent to that sphere or dimension, which may be called tacit knowledge as well. This tacit knowledge serves – according to Michael Polanyi – to bridging the '*disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity*'

In the followings I wish to provide two examples, showing that this tacit knowledge in itself originates in a given local reality called culture. I will attempt to prove, that the sphere, the concept and the very expression 'adult education' is also subjugated to a given local reality in Hungary, and by unveiling the existence of this tacit knowledge one may bridge the gap – 'disjunction' – between the 'subjective' and 'objective' usage of this term.





## Adult Education as introduced in Hungary

But first I would set forward the striking data, that according to the recent EU study the proportion of adult population participating in adult education in Hungary is one of the lowest in Europe (ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> of 27).

This statistic finding has a shocking effect and is quoted by experts and politicians at every 'objective' level in Hungary, especially since the idea of 'lifelong learning' has been taken just as a general policy in the European Union as sustainability and competitiveness. Is Hungary 'executing' European Union directives ineffectively, does Hungary not 'follow' the guidelines diligently enough, or are there other factors, which one should take into consideration when the 'adult education performance' of this country is assessed?

My proposal is that there are certain *recent* historic experiences which are influential factors in this 'low' participation in adult education in Hungary. This shortlist indicates the influencing factors which seem to be worth to be discussed in details to clarify the process, leading to this outcome

- (1) paternalization and formalization of adult education
- (2) infantilization of non-formal adult education
- (3) inherited and personal experience of full employment
- (4) incongruence of educational qualification and income
- (5) political stigmatization of informal learning
- (6) local media interpretation and representation of adult education as EU supported practices

All of which have contributed to the formation of a *new kind* of tacit knowledge about adult education in Hungary.

### The process of formation of tacit knowledge on adult education and adult learning in Hungary

The idea of lifelong learning is not a novelty but rather a trivality for Hungarians. One of the mostly quoted Hungarian proverbs on education is the following: 'A good priest learns till death.' This saying has ever been and is permanently quoted for those and by those, who seemed to be unwilling or unprepared to learn, or just accidentally bumped into new and surprising experiences. This proverb, at the same time, quite plausibly and rightly connected knowledge and learning activities to the clergy, as it has been a truly appropriate impression in a society where the Catholic Church ran 40 percent of public education and in general, churches ran the majority of elementary schools right till 1948.

No wonder, that when Hungary turned into a totalitarian country in 1948, one of the chief tools of the transformation was education. Schools with the exception of half a dozen were nationalized. As a matter of fact *all* educational processes were nationalized and centralized, private entrepreneurship just as much as charities (associations) were closed down and banned.





Illiteracy was to be defeated – a huge nationwide program was launched for that purpose, and it is neither the notion itself, nor to results of this huge enterprise what I criticize as crucial in forming the tacit knowledge factor of Hungarians.

Adult education on elementary and then on secondary school level were fully institutionalized on the base on pedagogy, i.e. the education of children. This contributed to a

(1) *full paternalization and formalization of adult education*. Adult learners were taken and handled as children, they were to sit into the same classrooms, into the same banks, using the same textbooks and same equipment with the help of the teachers of their own children. This practice prevailed for more than 20 years and affected two generations. 'Adults' Elementary School' became looked down and ridiculed, and the whole process was fully formalized and offered no choice for the adult to influence his/her learning process.

On the other hand,

(2) *non-formal education* - we will come back to the history of it -, *got infantilized*. As charities and all civil-voluntary associations were banned from the 1950ies, their educational activities disappeared as well. Only one association was allowed to operate, the 1830 established TIT (Society for the Propagation of Scientific Knowledge), which offered a rich choice of courses and a kind of a 'free university'. But even if hiring some of the top scientists for lecturing and offering some outstanding programs, it offered no interaction of the 'free university' kind for those adult participants.

From the above two developments I would conclude, that adult educational practices – both formal and non-formal - became fully formalized in Hungary, so as a result, the very concept of adult education became identified with centralized state provisions. This kind of comprehension was even strengthened by the practice, that at the workplaces 'educational sections' were set up, and their employees supervised the adult educational activities of the workers. This era created even a new term of 'inschooling' workers (the closest term to that is 'imprisoning').

Another political notion of those times also influenced later (negative) comprehension of adult learning, i.e.

(3) *the policy of full employment*. As the state of the workers was established, unemployment was ruled out as a capitalist phenomenon. For as long as 40 years unemployment was unknown and not experienced in Hungary, which gave the comfort and security for millions, but at the same time it contributed to a process of accommodation, where employees felt quite assured that they were nothing to do to keep their jobs and nothing to learn to keep up with their trade. For them 'adult education' was an activity of either the dummies (see above), or of those with political inclination, as a 'Marxist-Leninist College' was also available to get an educational degree on political basis.

One could argue, that vocational training and advancement in the factory hierarchy surely must have been an incentive for the lower skilled workers, but yet another factor,





(4) *the incongruence of educational qualification and income* distorted this, otherwise so clear-cut labor market model.

From the 1950ies a set salary scale was introduced in Hungary, where one could advance a step every three years, and salaries of a given job were the same all over the country. Classification was set according to qualification as well - let us take the industrial sector – to manual worker, semi-skilled worker and skilled worker, and then it proceeded to technicians and engineers.

The problem started at the boarder line between skilled workers and technicians. Or I should say, between workers and diploma holders. Workers were taken (based on V.I. Lenin's principles) as the ruling class and the core of the workers' state, while university and college graduates first as satellites, then as allies – with salaries set not much higher.

A process of counter-selection was noted: talented young men became skilled workers for the better wages, as they could take up working at the age of 17 (after having finished their vocational training school), gaining 6 years of advantage in wages compared to the university graduate engineer. According to statistics, the salary of an engineer caught up with the salary of a skilled worker of the same age in their early 40ies – only after nearly 20 years at work!<sup>2</sup>

This was surely against a positive attitude on adult education, but it was never admitted, not even talked about.<sup>3</sup> I got to note and emphasize, that this salary incongruence – even without official backing – is still in effect in Hungary.

The final impact of that totalitarian regime on education in my view is the

(5) *political stigmatization of informal learning*. As Hungary turned into an ideologically controlled one-party system in 1948 educational goals and values were re-oriented towards set aims of that monolith set of 'world view' ('Weltanschauung') as they said, no other spiritual and mental value systems were accepted. Family members were to participate at events individually, according to their respective workplaces/schools. Unlike in the case of church-going – where families went together – this new era aimed at weakening the role of families, and, furthermore, by introducing new mass organizations for the youth (pioneers and young communists) they weakened and even demised peer groups, labeling them as '*gangs*'.

The regime did its best to question, invalidate and stigmatize all informal ways of information exchange (communication) and any alternative opinion forming, including the *blurring* the programs of foreign radio stations. Rumors, hearsay (*rémhírterjesztés, pletyka, stb*) were officially defied in the media, alternative views were criminalized.

At this point I got to relate to one of the statements in the Introduction of this paper on the *pattern of histories*. It is not the privilege of the history of Hungary that these processes developed. The introduction of nationwide adult education was launched for real reasons – to cope with illiteracy – but gradually was taken over by the paranoia of any illegitimate and/or totalitarian regime. It was introduced as an *externalized* notion of the ideological and political leaders of the country





to speed up social processes in the country, but as some other classic examples of externalization, institutionalized adult education reflected the fear and distress of those leaders as well.

This is why some 40 years of this practice – in addition to the above scenario - included the purposeful invalidation and even stigmatization of informal learning, too. Knowledge was to be ‘given’ in schools and by the media, which, from the time of launching the first TV programs in 1958, laid a great emphasis on education. A high quality regular ‘school television’ program was broadcasted to support schools <sup>4</sup>, and within media journalism the new job of the ‘news explainer’ (*hírmagyarázó*) was also introduced. <sup>5</sup>

This leads us to the last factor on our ‘list’,

(6) *the local media interpretation and representation of adult education* as one of those EU supported practices. From the mid 1990ies Hungary became more and more involved with the preparations of accession, receiving the so called PHARE subsidies together with Poland. The media was eager to pick up the topic, partly due to available communication resources included in these subsidies, partly because much of the funding ended up at good communicators and opinion formers anyway. Adult education received a favorable ‘backwind’ and together with vocational training a whole new organizational network was set up to ‘follow’ and ‘execute’ EU policies, in somewhat of a similar manner COMECON policies were ‘followed’ and ‘executed’ during the preceding long-long decades. For the well informed in the educational arena it became an available source of survival or an easy additional income.

The redistributive nature of the financing of adult education clever ways and tricks, together with immaculate book-keeping made and still make the field of LLL a plentiful pasture for many. The current developments of adult education in Hungary, these success stories - together with those, where book-keeping failed to prove to be fully successful, thus the ‘service providers’ ended up at the wrong end of the news - did not do much to involve the decisive part of adult population in a participative and positive way in LLL. Far too many could conclude as ‘you know, it is one of those things ...’, with a bit of a grin resembling the manipulations of those pre-1990ies, and far too many can get away without proper qualification and training.

I wish to conclude, that the above six factors have been considerably influencing the comprehension of adult education in Hungary. Ever since the formalized introduction of adult education in the 1950ies it became part of the educational regime, a propagated concept and a centrally controlled execution - unlike in England, where the equalitarian and benevolent aspects of adult education were quite clear right from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and unlike in Denmark and much of Scandinavia, where the folk high-school initiatives identified themselves similarly with the concepts of autonomy, voluntary activities and individual progress. One could ask, was it only, could it be only the paternalistic, centralized system of the totalitarian regime, which distorted the concept of adult education so thoroughly in Hungary?

This question quite rightly elevates the issue into a yet wider context – a wider, cultural one, I would propose.





## The cultural context of non-formal education in Hungary

A typical 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectual movement was launched by a leading literary figure, Ferenc Kazinczy in the 1810s: the renewal of Hungarian language. Kazinczy argued for the creation of a national language suitable for scientific discourse, as the official language of the country – which was under Austrian rule – was German and Latin since centuries, and Hungarian language was spoken more or less only the uneducated underclass, the peasantry.

Kazinczy launched a nationwide enterprise and began to operate a whole network of correspondence from his remote manor Széphalom in order to ask literary friends to contribute to this task and to propagate the results. Grammar rules were worked out, new expressions created and printed, pamphlets pro and contra published – and, as an effect, the vocabulary of Hungarian language was, so to say, updated to the requirements of e.g. natural sciences and philosophy. Kazinczy's notion – even if he met modern a strong opposition – turned out to be a great success. It took time, but the renewed and enriched language gradually gained acceptance – even in university Pest, where, too, German and Latin were used till the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Kazinczy's work included the 'magyarization' of Latin expressions as culture, education, creativity, etc. Setting off from 'culture' he followed Cicero's proposal, that cultivation should not be restricted to 'agriculture' as we humans can 'cultivate our head' as well. Thus Kazinczy created the Hungarian version of 'cultivation' – 'művelés' – and with the appropriate ending he created the expression 'self cultivation' – 'művelődés' – as well.

During the so called Age of Reforms in Hungary. i.e. from the mid 1820-ies, more and more private circles were set up, more and more Hungarian language periodicals lunched, to fulfill the aim of that period, which was to strengthen national feelings and identity. 'Self cultivation' (művelődés) was a voluntary activity, autonomous and uncontrolled in an era of foreign rule and censorship. 'Self cultivation' symbolized the program of those times under the slogan of 'progress and patriotism' and furthermore, played an important role in creating a public space.

'Self cultivation' became an independent category of its own right. Reading circles, choirs, clubs, associations, community houses and other civil institutions were set up to facilitate these activities, organized and hosted courses of all kinds – but they were not called and not taken as 'adult education' institutions. From the 1870ies – as Hungary re-gained statehood in the dualist Monarchy – the national educational system was worked out and introduced – but 'self cultivation' remained to take place in cultural institutions as musea, libraries and other public cultural spaces.

The expression – together with the activities it denotes – became fully *internalized*. The word 'művelődés' (self cultivation) is widely and permanently used for individual and community activities. The adjective form marks community cultural houses – of which 2600 (!) still operate in Hungary – and from time to time the word 'művelődés' (self cultivation) replaces 'culture' in the title of the respective Ministry in Hungary. As a title, however, it is always translated into other languages as 'culture'. It became a legal entity as well: Para 70/F. § (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of





Hungary „guarantees the right of self cultivation (művelődés) for her citizens” and remained to be a constituent of the new Basic Law „Each citizen of Hungary has the right of self cultivation” under the article ‘Freedom and Responsibility’, Article 11, Point 1.<sup>6</sup>

Ever since its introduction in the 1830ies, the sphere of ‘self cultivation’ has become the predecessor of the then not existing word ‘enculturation’, denoting the active and participatory acquisition of cultural values in a non-formal way.

Today educational experts struggle with terminological problems as formal-, non-formal and informal education, especially within the field of adult education. Social statisticians collect data on involvement of the populations in these fields. No wonder, Hungarians are at the lower end of European statistics – the fact is that cultural statistics are not of interest for the EU, but, on the other hand, those hundreds of thousands of Hungarian adults, who take part in traditional folkdance or handicraft activities or sing in choirs and learn a new song every week do not consider themselves as participators in ‘adult education’ of the kind they were to be participating in those pre 1990 times described above.

So their perception of what they do is different from the ‘adult educator’s’ perception, even if they could be just as correctly taken as participants in non-formal adult education – an image they would refuse for the above mentioned historic and socio-cultural reasons.

## Summary

In the present paper I intended to indicate, that special socio-cultural developments in a culture may cause different comprehension of the same expressions and phenomena. Hungarians ‘perform’ poorly in EU adult education statistics, but it is not well known, that participation in adult education and participation in ‘self cultivation’ activities in Hungary – owing to the reason listed above – is sharply separated<sup>7</sup>. Adult education was a concept externalized in inappropriate ways long after another concept, ‘self cultivation’ became internalized by the population. Both expressions became a part of tacit knowledge which goes unnoticed in everyday life. Furthermore, as I also noted, owing to a rather special socio-economic background – another every day experience – adult education is not emphatically in the focus of life strategies of the labor force in Hungary.

It would be important to improve cross-cultural communications to interpret and accept these differences according to their valid content. It would be worth of an effort to promote adaptation processes and to accept local alternatives within the European Qualification Framework and other EU educational policies in order to build on local realities in a more effective way.

Yet it is just as much important to notice, that a given locality can generate a sphere for autonomous and fully voluntary human activities, which allow freedom of creativity for any member of that community. These activities then keep re-creating the public space, thus, as a matter of fact, re-creating the community, and with it they transfer the tacit knowledge of the whole process.





## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Originally quoted in S. Striker: *Az ember tragédiája rekonstrukciója* ('The Reconstruction of The Tragedy of Man'), 1996, p.107. to indicate, that Kant's ethics got so much internalized in the reform era of the 1830ies of Hungary, as if all would be born with views like his.

<sup>2</sup> Statistical data barely supports these statements any more, as in many fields – car repair, construction industry, catering and other services - skilled workers have more opportunities for private entrepreneurship than engineers, but company incomes of the more than 800 thousand companies in Hungary are difficult to be compared to income statistics.

<sup>3</sup> A propagandistic project of the 1970ies, called 'skilled workers to university' sometimes resulted in family conflicts not only for the shift in personal values, but because of the rather unexpected outcome: graduating students ended up with the lower salary of an engineer after five years of university studies.

<sup>4</sup> Teachers could just switch on the one and only television channel available when the appropriate lesson was broadcasted; the national curriculum was fully standardized in all terms; textbooks were identical, timing was set and, in addition, didactics and methodology harmonized.

<sup>5</sup> A few days after John Lennon was shot and killed on December 8, 1980, the Hungarian Minister of Interior, István Horváth interpreted the murder as yet another indicator of the high crime rate in the U.S.: „had John Lennon lived in Hungary, he would have been still alive”. This explanation clearly seemed to cover up – with some friends we figured – that Lennon would have been educated not to become himself to begin with in Hungary.

<sup>6</sup> Between 1991-1997 the author was in charge of the codification process of the Act on public libraries, musea and public self cultivation ('közművelődés') as Director General of the Hungarian Ministry of Culture ('Művelődési') and Education, approved as Act 140 of 1997 by the Parliament in December, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Statistics on the two are collected and published by two separate ministries under two separate entries – the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor on adult education, while the Ministry of Culture and Education on 'self cultivation'.

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