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**The impact of the Second World War (1939-1945) and  
wartime conditions on the life of the grammar schools of  
Baranya County**

Doctoral (Ph.D.) theses

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## Topic of research

The research focuses on the history of four grammar schools in Pécs and one in Mohács (1939-1945) in Baranya County between the two world wars. In Pécs, this includes one denominational girls' school, the Roman Catholic St. Elisabeth Girls' Grammar School of the Order of Women Canons of Our Lady of Pécs, and two parochial boys' grammar schools, the Pécs Nagy Lajos Grammar School of the Cistercian Order and the Pécs Pius of the Society of Jesus, and one state grammar school, the Hungarian Royal State Grammar School of Count Széchenyi István. While from Mohács, a city-run school, the Mohács Municipal Grammar School, was included in the study.

The research is a study of school history, covering several institutions within a well-defined historical period. In this context, it focuses on the effects of war events on schools, including war measures, war preparations, military training, etc.

The most important reason for choosing the topic is the relative lack of research on the issue. It is true, that research can be found on the functioning of the hinterland during the Second World War,<sup>1</sup> including research on the history of education,<sup>2</sup> and research on the history of schools has also touched on this period in some way.<sup>3</sup> However, the latter often do not examine the war years in detail or with this focus.<sup>4</sup> As a result, in turn, many questions remain unanswered, and in some cases, the statements related to the topic were incomplete or incorrect.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the selection of the institutions, the issue of feasibility (in terms of scope) was an important aspect, which helped mainly with the geographical delimitation. While the main role played in the selection of the school type was the fact that the grammar schools formed the backbone of the classical continental education system, i.e., institutions in a privileged position in certain respects were investigated.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g.: Gyarmati – Pihurik 2015

<sup>2</sup> See e.g.: Takács 2021

<sup>3</sup> See e.g.: Cserdi 2017

<sup>4</sup> The first example is the already mentioned Cserdi 2017, which provides data on the history of the Mohács Municipal Grammar School per academic year. An example of the second is Németh – Pasku – Simon 2007, which first mentions eras and then presents the history of Széchenyi István Grammar School based on the tenure of the principals. While an example of the third is Kalász 2012, which describes the 325-year history of the Cistercian Order's Nagy Lajos Grammar School divided into different eras.

<sup>5</sup> I would like to highlight just a few examples. Thus, for example, regarding the Széchenyi Grammar School, the authors Németh – Pasku – Simon (2007) wrongly claim that the institution left its building on Király Street in 1943. Cserdi (2017) wrongly suggests that the director of the Mohács Municipal Grammar School, Ferenc Hites, joined the army, while otherwise, he describes the circumstances under which he left the city. While the events of the war years are only presented in very broad outline in the case of the historically more elaborated Nagy Lajos Grammar School (Kalász 2012). (Kalász 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Kozma 2006: 225.

In summary, the dissertation is essentially school history research, thus one of the basic types of education history research. Through the dimension of school history, it is a micro-level investigation, narrowing down the observation to well-defined actors of a well-defined area, revealing events related to the history of the institutions that have not yet been investigated in detail.

## **Sources and methods of research**

The sampling method of the research was a systematic procedure, aiming to select the most relevant primary sources. At the same time, due to the circular strategy of qualitative research,<sup>7</sup> I also extended the range of sources by a theoretical sample in order to interpret them correctly. Using the logic of the snowball method to access harder-to-reach resources from existing sources.<sup>8</sup>

The sources can be divided into two major groups. One group consists of school notices, which provide very detailed and data-rich information on the history of each academic year. The scope of the notebooks included in the research goes beyond the period defined in the title of the dissertation: from 1938 to 1948.

The other large group was the documents of the Pécs School District Directorate General and the documents of the individual institutions, which can be found in the Baranya County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives. The examination of the documents of the directorate was of particular importance because Act VI of 1935 on the Administration of Public Education created circumstances in which controllability became a primary aspect, due to which every decision was influenced and every action controlled by the education administration.<sup>9</sup> While the necessity to examine the institutions' documents perhaps needs no explanation.

In addition to these types of sources, I used as additional sources were the relevant documents of the Jesuit Archives and the Library of the Order History, the Monastery Archives of the House of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Cistercian Sisters, the published version of the work diary of the National Director of Youth Defense Education and Physical Education, preserved in the Archives of Military History. I also used legislation and press sources in several places, as well as publications and textbooks of the period for a brief examination of a particular topic.

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<sup>7</sup> Sántha 2006: 51.

<sup>8</sup> Sántha 2009: 92-93.

<sup>9</sup> Nagy 1992: 33-35.

It should also be mentioned that I set aside the records of the Catholic education administration. It is true that the autonomy of Catholic education was established in the 1930s, but the practical reality of it is not that clear. Moreover, by 1941, the influence of the royal superintendents was essentially independent of the maintainers<sup>10</sup> In other words, there is no evidence of a decision-making competence on the part of the Catholic educational administration that would have made an examination of this source indispensable. Were there any discrepancies, these can be easily traced back to school documents.

As far as the research method is concerned, I carried out a qualitative, analytical observational study with a historical analysis of primary sources.<sup>11</sup> The study itself can be looked at as being both a partly diachronic and a partly synchronic study, due to the historical periodization and the highlighting of the problem-historical node.<sup>12</sup> In addition, in justified cases, for example, in order to make the data more interpretable and to identify possible trends, I also make quantitative interpretations of the statistical data in the notifications.

## **The main questions and results of the research**

In general, the research examined the impact of the Second World War on the grammar schools included in the study. As a result, the conclusion is that the war had a significant influence on school life right from the beginning of the period examined. The wartime conditions imposed a very significant additional burden on the daily lives of students and teachers, which at the end of the war were further aggravated by infrastructural deficits. The war itself directly made teaching impossible for a while.

In the following, I would like to give answers to the specific research questions emerging as a result of the investigation.

- **In what ways were the institutions under investigation affected by the war? Is there any trend change as the war years progressed?**

In general, the war affected every aspect of school life, from the everyday life of the students to the pedagogical work carried out in the school. If we are looking for a turning point at which work became significantly more difficult, we can find such a point in time in different areas of the study. The air raid precautions, for example, affected education from the beginning, though

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<sup>10</sup> Nagy 2000: 141-143.

<sup>11</sup> Szabolcs: 84.

<sup>12</sup> Kéri 2001: 17-30.

not making it impossible. Perhaps the academic year 1943-44 can be viewed as a turning point in pedagogical work when the academic year was barely five months long and even the abbreviated curriculum could not be completed. However, as regards buildings, for example, only the academic year 1944-45 can be considered the most difficult when all the grammar schools were affected by military requisition.

Overall, the academic year 1943-44 can be considered a turning point, during which school life became increasingly "warlike". On the one hand, because of the unfulfilled pedagogical work, and on the other, because of the increase in students' wartime obligations. But it was the 1944-45 academic year that was hardest hit.

- **What position did the education administration take on the war and to what extent did this influence the life of schools during the war?**

The education administration had a very important role in the attitude of the schools to the war, almost all initiatives can be considered top-down. Also, the person of the director general in the school districts had a partial influence on the daily life of schools as well.

Director General Ferenc Fodor tried, several times, to give all-encompassing instructions and guidelines to the schools in written form every year. In these, he considered it important that teachers and students deal with wartime conditions, emphasizing their social duties. The war-related activities of the schools were carried out in accordance with these.

In the case of Palos Bernardin, the emphasis was placed on fulfilling school duties, he expected disciplined and diligent work, but did not emphasize social tasks.

Furthermore, in relation to Palos Bernardin, the fact cannot be ignored that he was the director general in 1944-45, that is, the academic year most affected by the war. It should be emphasized that he tried to do everything he could to maintain his education and the safety of the students. Despite this, a proceeding was initiated against him, in which the Hungarian Democratic Youth Association (MADISZ) presumably played a major role. The investigation finally ended with his acquittal in 1946, despite which he was removed from the post of director general.

- **In what way did the war affect the physical functioning of schools, especially the use of buildings?**

Perhaps one of the most widespread claims and ideas about wartime school stories is that the school buildings were mainly reserved for military hospital purposes. This was also basically proven in the present investigation, but at the same time, this was not clearly the practice of military seizures in the institutions examined institutions. In the case of Pius Grammar School, for example, the seizures did not affect the entire institution for a long time, only one of its halls (e.g., the gymnasium) and not exclusively for hospital purposes.

The entire building of the grammar schools (both in Pécs and in Mohács) was only occupied very late, essentially in the 1944-45 academic year. Until then, they only had to host other schools, but the difficulties that arose (afternoon teaching, shortened classes, etc.) were mainly borne by the host institutions. This was presumably due to their status as grammar schools, as it was a phenomenon common to all institutions. The 1944-45 academic year, however, created a new situation, without exception, all five grammar schools were affected by the military seizure, which caused significant difficulties, primarily in connection with the resumption of teaching in 1945. Then again, other institutions were included, too.

It was also a challenge that there was significant material damage to the schools, including school equipment. During the investigation, it seemed that schools with religious backgrounds were able to solve damage restoration more easily. While the Mohács Municipal Grammar School needed very significant state aid, the Széchenyi Grammar School struggled with basic accommodation problems.

- **How did the war affect the everyday life of students?**

The impact of the war on students was one of the broadest and most controversial themes of the research, so several sub-issues need to be examined, such as defense education and military preparation, war-related tasks, the situation of Jewish students, and the situation of male and female students.

As for the pre-military training of students, Act II of 1939 became mandatory by law within the framework of Levant training, within school frameworks from the 1940-41 academic year. As part of this, a school Levant team had to be established in all boys' grammar schools. Almost all schools expressed criticism regarding the Levant training. A major difficulty was that Levant training significantly increased the workload for students, and schools were confused by the involvement of a new actor in the monitoring of students.

Military training also appeared in other areas. This was the case, for example, in scouting, or by introducing everyday physical education and national defense into the school

curriculum. In addition, from 1943, national defense education also began in the girls' grammar school.

In addition to national defense education, many other tasks increased the students' burdens. So, for example, air defense, charitable tasks favoring the residents of re-connected areas, soldiers and the families of conscripts, or getting involved in initiatives organized by the Red Cross. In addition, in view of the war situation, students also had to carry out economic tasks, primarily within the framework of the Student Hive Association.

The students of the boys' grammar schools were especially affected by the fact that they were also used for labor service from 1943, and then following the advancement of the front, they also had to bear the burden of the public labor service. Female students were completely left out of these.

It is worth noting that all this would have involved such a large number and variety of tasks that they were often not clearly demarcated, and it is not possible to determine the quality of the activities carried out by the students. Hence, perhaps the best way to summarize the issue is that all of these tasks were compulsory due to the student status of the participants.

As far as Jewish students were concerned, it can be said that the relevant laws were not observed by the schools until the 1943-44 academic year, based on the number of students of the Israelite faith, but in that year their admission ceased in all other schools examined except the Széchenyi Grammar School.

Another circumstance that should be highlighted in relation to Jewish students is that their participation in the Levant movement was prohibited from 1942, and was replaced by the auxiliary labor service.

The last sub-question concerned the differences in the situation of male and female students. It can be said that in most areas there was no discrepancy by gender. At the same time, the lack of pre-military training, labor service, and community service meant that female students were in a slightly better position. It is interesting to note, however, that defense education, although filled with content intended for girls, yet appeared for them.

- **How did the war affect the work of teachers?**

In the case of teachers, the most serious circumstance of the war was the shortage of teachers due to returning military service, with the exception of the teaching staff of St Elizabeth's Girls' Grammar School. The institutions had to solve a 10-20% shortage of teachers per academic year, mainly by substitution. In this regard, there is not much difference between the schools in

terms of the maintainer, at most, it can be observed that also in Catholic schools mainly (but not exclusively) secular teachers were conscripted. This issue did not finish directly with the end of the war, as several teachers were taken prisoner of war, resulting in permanent personnel problems for the schools.

In addition to dealing with the substitutions, teachers were also burdened with additional tasks such as participating in the pre-military training of students, organizing the teaching of the new subject, Defense Studies, air defense duties, and repeated curriculum changes. In the spring and summer of 1944, following the early closure of the academic year, there were also illegal attempts to recruit them into the civil service. While in 1945 teachers had to organize their own democratic in-house retraining course, which placed an additional burden on them.

- **How did the war affect pedagogical work?**

The circumstances of the war did not have a significant impact on the pedagogical work carried out during the first years of schooling. Nevertheless, the increasing role of military preparation in the life of schools from 1939 onwards posed a serious challenge to education, and from 1942 (and 1943 in the girls' secondary school) it was introduced as a school subject in the form of defense studies, alongside the daily physical education which served a similar purpose. This created new challenges for pedagogical work in several respects: the workload of the students continued to increase, and there were no teachers with this specialization, making it difficult to find competent teachers to teach the subject. In addition, the slow emergence of textbooks did not make their situation any easier.

In the second half of the period examined, i.e., from the academic year 1943-44 onwards, the war had a significant impact on the work done. For example, the academic year lasted only five months, which forced teachers to cut back considerably on the curriculum. In addition, this academic year also saw a break in the attitude of students towards learning, which further reduced the effectiveness of school work.

Not surprisingly, the 1944-45 academic year also saw a very testing time for school work. The academic year was interrupted for over two months, and although an attempt was made to compensate for this with an academic year that lasted until July, it was not effective either, because of the high absenteeism of students, for instance. It was not until May that the students were, on a rough estimate, fully reunited. The other reason was that political issues arose in some subjects, regulating the curricula.

It is also worth mentioning that under wartime conditions, neither students nor teachers could concentrate fully on school work. In addition to the events of the end of the war, the emergence of a new political system, the creation of a new students' organization (MADISZ), or the involvement of teachers in trade unions or political parties could also distract attention from school.

Overall, especially in the academic years 1943-44 and 1944-45, the war made effective teaching almost impossible. However, under these circumstances, the leaders of the public education system and the teaching staff tried to be fair to the students in terms of their grades and progress.

- **Are there differences in responses to the challenges of war by the maintainers of the institutions? If so, what are they like?**

In the course of the study, I dealt with both denominational and non-denominational institutions. For this reason, it may be interesting to see whether there were any differences in reactions to the war that emerged on the basis of the maintenance of the institutions. The short answer to this is no, at most on one issue. The institutions were given the same instructions and if there were, for example, any objections to these from Catholic institutions, which in principle had autonomy, those were not raised. A good example of this is the Girls' Levant Movement, which, although not supported by Catholic circles, did not meet with any opposition at St Elizabeth's Girls' Grammar School when the school team was set up.

There are, however, differences on some issues, especially the boys' activities as Levants, which were met with dislike by both Pius and Nagy Lajos. It is true, for instance, that the municipal grammar school in Mohács also made similar criticisms.

However, if we were to single out an institution with a certain character of its own, the Jesuit Pius could be brought up, which refused to send any of its teachers on (illegal) administrative service and tried to circumvent the admission of the Fiume Street elementary school.

Finally, it may be worth pointing out that there is a further peculiarity in relation to the observance of Jewish law since the Catholic education administration issued much more intensive instructions on the subject, which reveal conflicting attitudes (e.g., the expectation of strict observance of the law, and in contrast, that a Christian student cannot be considered Jewish).

All in all, it can be said that, regardless of who the maintainer of the schools was, the institutions were affected in very similar ways, with students, teachers, and education all suffering the same hardships. However, differences can be found on certain issues, while respecting the law.

- **What air defense tasks were assigned to the institutions?**

Air defense is a specific issue, as it was already present in schools before the immediate threat of war.

Looking at the issue at the institutional level, entire institutions had to be prepared for a possible air raid. Part of this was to draw up air emergency plans, which governed the protocol to be followed in the event of an air raid. In addition, various air defense equipment had to be procured and shelters had to be provided, which posed a serious difficulty for most of the schools examined, for example, in the autumn of 1944, when the air threat was already very serious, at St Elisabeth's Girls' Grammar School, the lack of shelter also hindered the continuity of teaching.

In other respects, students and teachers were also affected by the air defense, due to the fact that they had to be involved in the air defense duties of the city. The initial involvement of the students was such that in the long term it threatened the pedagogical work, and the education administration had to intervene. Nevertheless, the students' air ambulance service remained all along the war and was only abolished in the summer of 1945. In addition, students were still required to receive instruction in air-raid warfare, although it is not clear from the sources how this was incorporated into the daily life of the grammar schools I examined.

Air defense was also a burden on teachers, if not on the entire teaching staff. Some of them were expected by the Air Ambulance League in various roles (e.g., as instructors), which added to the pressure on the already overburdened teachers.

- **In what way did schools reflect on territorial recaptures and reoccupations, in particular with regard to Baranya Triangle?**

The issue of territorial revisions should be considered in two parts. On the one hand, how schools responded to them. In principle, all territorial growths were commemorated, but not to the same extent. Transylvania, which was the beneficiary of the most supportive initiatives, played a particularly important role in this respect.

The second part of the question relates to the reclaimed Baranya Triangle, which, although did not receive much attention in general among the five institutions, is a priority for research because of its geographical location. The area was part of the Pécs school district, and Mohács considered the area its own natural "living space". In this context, it is not surprising that its grammar school immediately showed great interest in students from the Baranya Triangle who were about to start their secondary education or had previously studied in a school in Yugoslavia (e.g., Zagreb or Osijek) and wished to continue their studies. The institution also organized a course for these students to facilitate their transition to the Hungarian education system. Despite this, the government initially refused to admit the upper-class students, a position which was eventually changed by the Ministry, presumably at the instigation of the headmaster of the grammar school. It did, however, make the passing of a private differential test a condition for admission to grammar school. Later, this criterion became general, and as a result, for example, several students from the Baranya Triangle entered the Cistercian grammar school in Pécs. Overall, however, only the grammar school in Mohács paid attention to these students at an institutional level.

- **How did the democratic transformation of the institutions take place?**

The democratic transformation in schools is closely linked to the political changes that followed the Soviet occupation of Hungary. The transformation processes in the school district, including the grammar schools, began with the significant involvement of the Russian military command. Soon afterward, the new Minister of Religion and Public Education, Géza Teleki, issued the most important instructions for the democratic transformation of education, partly restoring the pre-war situation (e.g., regarding the territory and powers of the school districts), and partly introducing a whole new content and educational purpose to school work, with democratic transformation at its heart.

As far as the schools were concerned, this process affected both the students and the teachers, who could not and probably did not want to disconnect themselves from the events around them. For example, the MADISZ was set up in Pécs and Mohács with the participation of students from the grammar schools. Teachers were united in the nascent trade union. As regards teachers, it is worth mentioning that almost all of them were certified during the certification procedures. It is true that some teachers were subsequently subject to a more serious investigation.

Teachers were also involved in the democratic transformation of schools. This was partly done through internal retraining courses organized by the institutions. In the case of those grammar schools where related sources remained, it appears that schools had different understandings of democracy and democratic re-education.

The democratic transformation and re-education did not end in the summer of 1945 but continued in the following academic year. This period saw the publishing of the volume of *Democracy and Public Education*, which was a clear guide to schools on how the concept of democracy should be interpreted and what role schools were to play in the transformation.

In 1942, Ferenc Fodor, the director general of the school district, began his letter to school principals on the care of young students with a strong statement: 'Our nation is once again living in historic times.' This may seem a cliché, but the truth of the statement is unquestionable. The five grammar schools I examined had to endure a period during the war in which the responsibilities of all those involved in school life increased considerably. The workload of teachers and students increased not only because of the explicit presence of defense education but also because of the work they had to do in support of the defense. As the years went by, the conditions of war made it more difficult to carry out the tasks at hand, and the arrival of the front made it impossible. These circumstances can indeed be called, not only in the life of the nation but also in the history of the institutions I examined and presented, a historic time. Moreover, all this did not finish with the end of the war, since in the new political and thus educational policy framework, although the organizational framework was not immediately and completely changed, processes were set in motion that had a significant impact on school work and everyday life, and the institutions had to cope with the aftermaths of the war.

### **Possible directions for expanding the research**

In the course of the research, I explored and presented almost every topic from the point of view of school history that could be of interest to researchers. However, this does not mean that there are no areas that could lead to further research development in relation to this dissertation. In this manner, a possible way of directly extending the present research is the inclusion of a life-history perspective. In other words, research (e.g., through school newspapers, biographies, diaries, and possibly interviews if still possible) into how the various actors in education experienced the war period. There are also a number of sub-themes that offer the possibility of directly continuing the investigation. For example, the fate of students from the re-occupied Baranya Triangle after the re-annexation of the area could be examined.

In addition, the choice of topic was also fortunate, as the study revealed many issues that offer good research prospects. For instance, a comprehensive study of the issue of defense education, including its philosophical aspects, as well as research into the subject of defense education, the study of related textbooks, the issue of women's defense education, and its impact on the image of women and the education of girls, etc.

There are also a number of unanswered questions from the period of democratic transition in 1945. Although the topic is not entirely untouched, the situation of teachers, for example, has been examined by Erzsébet Golnhofer (2004), as well as by Elemér Kelemen (2007) both of whom deal with the establishment of a trade union, for instance. However, a number of issues remain untouched, which I was only able to examine partly in the context of this dissertation. Examples include the democratic retraining and re-education of teachers and students and the MADISZ.

A third topic is the examination of the person of Palos Bernardin, Director-General of the School District. Palos, at the height of his career, was an important figure in Hungarian education at the time, not only involved in the administration of the education system but also playing a leading role in, for example, scouting. As a result, the study of his life may clarify our knowledge of a number of issues related to the history of education.

## **Benefits and potential applications of the research results**

An important question may be how this research can be useful for educational science, what are its possible fields of application.

In general, the benefits of research in the field of education can be mentioned in relation to the benefits for research in the history of education. For example, it may help to understand a particular problem in the history of education in a broader context (the impact of the Second World War on education), it may help to develop a pedagogical approach, taking into account situations of force majeure, or it may help to understand the cultural history of another country (Yugoslavia). Moreover, historicity can help to strengthen our sense of Hungarian identity and our commitment and responsibility towards our country.<sup>13</sup> Viewed in an even broader context, this research also carries the benefits that can still be mentioned in the context of research on the history of education. By this, I mean temporal causality (causality is particularly relevant to this topic) and historical relativism.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Based on Kéri 2001: 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> Based on Vörös 2015.

I would also like to emphasize that, as micro-historical research, it helps us to look at and understand parallel macro-issues that are salient from the point of view of educational history and educational science, such as the functioning of a highly centralized educational system and its consequences.<sup>15</sup>

It is also useful that research on school history contributes to the knowledge of the national school system in general. As I presented above, they can also reveal new potential areas of research, as this dissertation did. Moreover, the study can also be useful for institutions, reinforcing the identity of students and teachers in relation to their own schools.<sup>16</sup>

The benefits of the present study can be achieved through one main application: in education. Namely, when the new knowledge revealed by the research is applied in the history of education. In other words, if the institutions examined in the research incorporate the new knowledge into the history of education curriculum.

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<sup>15</sup> Based on Gyáni 2019: 46.

<sup>16</sup> Based on Kéri 2001: 93.

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<sup>17</sup> Author data sheet:

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