

**PhD thesis theses**

Doctoral School of Earth Sciences

**DIMENSIONS OF TERRITORIALITY  
COUNT KLEBELSBERG KUNÓ  
EDUCATION POLICY -  
PARTICULAR  
TO BARANYA COUNTY**

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## **Introduction**

Kuno Klebelsberg served as the Minister of Religion and Education of the Kingdom of Hungary between 1922 and 1931, regulating the country's education policy throughout those years. The significance of his activities in cultural and educational history is unquestionable. He conducted his wide-ranging work, in a period of crisis, in post-Trianon Hungary. Klebelsberg's multidimensional contributions remain relevant in the modern day, his legacy covers all areas of education and still defines the main structure of Hungarian science policy.

After World War I and the Treaty of Trianon, Kuno Klebelsberg was appointed minister of culture and from the very beginning he set the goal of preserving the country's cultural institutions. In a time of economic collapse and crisis, he considered preserving culture while also making it more accessible as the key to saving the nation. The means for bringing culture to the general population, and creating a competitive, domestic workforce, was the development of the so-called 'népiskola', the people's school. In addition, the Minister of Culture was also responsible for strengthening higher education in Hungary at the time.

Kuno Klebelsberg's heritage has been the subject of numerous studies, examining from different perspectives his complex program at all levels of education. In order to prepare this study, it was crucial to get acquainted with the fields of geography of education and history of education. Moreover, it was necessary to learn how spatial structure affects economic and social systems, and how education affects the formation of territorial differences. Although the issue of spatial differences in education had already attracted the interest of researchers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only much later could the discipline gain independence within social geography. Both globalization and the rise of the knowledge economy have increased interest in educational geography. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social scientists were paying attention to territorial differences in knowledge, technological development and innovation, as well as studying its causes and effects. Nevertheless, the term 'geography of education' itself was not adopted until 1997. The institutionalization of the subdiscipline is important because focuses on the impact of the spatial dimension on society and on the economy, a factor which, if ignored, distorts the analysis of different processes.

## **Objectives**

The starting point of the analysis itself is the Klebelsberg's life's work, but its focal point is territoriality. On the other hand, it cannot be argued that the Klebelsberg program, offering a culture-based national policy response to the trauma of Trianon, is essentially a territorial policy. Neither does it constitute an integral part of some early, comprehensive regional policy. However, it is a typical product of the period when the state begins to recognize and shape the problem of territorial disparities. Yet, as it seeks to address policy and social problems, Klebelsberg's cultural policy inevitably takes on a territorial dimension – and thus becomes, as its most well-known aspect, a political action reflecting the specific challenges of the Great Hungarian Plain.

In this paper, I would like to demonstrate that depicting Klebelsberg's cultural policy predominantly in association with the issue of the Great Hungarian Plain is incomplete and somewhat one-sided. In fact, the most cited and well-known people's school program (including the construction of schools in the countryside) did not focus exclusively on the Great Hungarian Plain either. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to examine and present the program and its impact on a broader scale, investigating national, county and local dimensions. The study was written with the hope that a more nuanced, complex picture would help highlight the real value of Klebelsberg's legacy, somewhat remove it from the typically ideological discourse surrounding neo-nationalism and place it in the context of the early national policies of spatial-territorial relevance.

***The following main hypotheses have been formulated in relation to the topic:***

***Hypothesis 1:*** Klebelsberg's cultural policy is a long-term, exemplary, institution-building reform program covering all areas and levels of Hungarian cultural life, with the emphasis usually on the quantitative increase of schools and classrooms. In contrast, I propose that the reconstructive impact of the school establishment program is more significant than its expansionary effect.

***Hypothesis 2:*** The impact of the national schooling program was not even or identical across the whole country. Areas of the Great Hungarian Plain with farm settlements were over-represented, because the educational attainment of their population showed the greatest backwardness out of all societal groups. Another target of the program was likely, in the spirit of catching up, the development of educational infrastructure of smaller villages.

***Hypothesis 3:*** Klebelsberg's school building program is not only a response to Trianon, but also an attempt to monitor population changes, and to achieve greater accessibility of public education by focusing on geographical accessibility. The program is best known today for its impact on peripheral areas. Nevertheless, the policy's response to the problems of urbanization at the time was also of great importance due to the expansion and reconstruction of the country's institutional system. Investment in the rapidly growing peri-urban areas of the industrializing cities, mainly populated by the working class, played a significant role in Hungarian urban development.

***Hypothesis 4:*** The assumption was formulated that the program, conceived in the spirit of national conservative ideology, may have reflected national differences, i.e., the over-representation of exclusively Hungarian settlements and the under-representation of settlements with a significant population of national minorities.

***Hypothesis 5:*** Klebelsberg's cultural policy played a prominent part in the emergence of Pécs, a small-town county seat developing into an urban center. It played a significant role not only through the relocation of the Royal Hungarian Elizabeth University to Pécs, but also through the expansion of the city's education infrastructure as a whole, which launched the spatial integration of the previously completely segregated mining towns in the area.

## **Research methods**

The results of Kuno Klebelsberg's school building program can still be found in the Hungarian education system in the present day. I decided to implement the qualitative method of historical analysis for my research, which meant utilizing sources such as newspaper articles, reports and legal texts written during the period of the school constructions. The sources have been examined partly descriptively and partly interpretatively, keeping in mind the importance of source criticism. Validity was ensured by using multiple sources, and by examining and summarizing the findings of numerous studies on the subject.

Klebelsberg's life's work, achievements, publications and texts constitute an immense amount of research material both in quantity and quality. Therefore, one of the most serious methodological problems was the delimitation of the research field. In addition to the prestigious literature on the history of education of the period, including the bibliography dealing with Kuno Klebelsberg himself, the primary sources of research are sources containing his speeches, publications and legislative proposals. Moreover, special attention was paid to the 1928 internal publication of the Hungarian Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education titled 'Hungarian Popular Education', which contains valuable introductory studies by experts of the period, as well as statistical data on the results of the school building campaign of Klebelsberg, and his further activities.

Through examining and organizing the data available, a school construction database was created. This makes it possible to spatially visualize the unfolding of the school construction program. The information from other socio-geographical data can be used to draw conclusions that help to understand the strategy of Klebelsberg. The maps produced from the database not only visualize the work of the statesman, but also display the spatial distribution of the results of the largest development program in popular education: accessible schools.

It is the intention of my research to treat and place the achievements of Klebelsberg's activities as the main shaping factors of Hungarian cultural policy in its entirety, while presenting his accomplishments on a national level, gradually narrowing the focus to Baranya County.

We processed our using geospatial approaches and methods, through the different spatial dimensions of the research. The sources on the people's schools included data on the construction and reconstruction of classrooms and teachers' dwellings based on the settlement system of the time.

A challenge during research was that the administrative structure of Hungary has changed significantly over time. The number and the names of villages changed quite dynamically, mainly by mergers of course, but less frequently new villages were also established. For instance, new farm communities were founded within the extensive borders of market or 'pasture' towns of the Great Hungarian Plain. In many cases, the basis for these settlements were the schools created as a result of Klebelsberg's work. Thus, the commonly used administrative boundaries were not directly applicable.

As for the geospatial representation of the data, version 3.22 of the QGIS program was used. The basis for the visualization of the administrative divisions of Hungary was the project 'OTKA K 111766: Building a Geographic Information System (GIS) for the Study of the History of Hungary and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1869-1910)' by Gábor Demeter, János Szulovszky and their colleagues.

A website called 'GISta Hungarorum' provides vector geospatial datasets containing digitized spatial data of pre-Trianon Hungary (DEMETER et al. 2017).7). The elements of this database were based on the settlement boundary layer, which had a pseudo-Mercator and Lambert projection with WGS 84 datum and UTF-16 encoded character set. The map reflects the boundaries of 1910. Nevertheless, this did not cause any problems during data processing, as there is no evidence from literature or practice that the administrative borders between settlements have changed in any significant number – the exception being the areas affected by the Treaty of Trianon. Thus, by intersecting the 1910 layer with the layers using the post-Trianon borders of Hungary, and making the necessary manual corrections, we obtained a functional and usable file that was suitable for spatial representation of the database. By merging the settlement boundary layers by code, we generated a layer of counties on the map for easier orientation. This layer reflects the situation after the creation of the 'administratively temporarily unified counties' in 1923, coinciding with the focus period of the investigated program. The historical geo-spatial analyses published in the context of the project have also provided the authors with a very significant contribution to the general socio-geographical background of the people's school program. (MONEYES, 2018; JAKOBI, 2018).

Our more detailed analysis of Baranya County was made with a slightly different logic. Since the aim of the study was primarily to show the survival and longer-term impact of Klebelsberg's investments in public schooling, the starting point was the current administrative structure, including the present county borders (for example, the district of Szigetvár was still part of Somogy County during the period under review), as well as the boundaries and names of the villages. The

solution here was that the municipalities established after the mergers ‘inherited’ the institutions of the predecessors in our calculations.

In connection with the research focusing on Pécs, we tried to outline the geographic environment of the settlement at that time in order to examine the spatiality of the school in Gyárváros (an area in Pécs, whose name translates as ‘Factory Town’). There were no detailed maps available for this purpose, corresponding exactly to the conditions of the 1920s and 1930s. Here, the starting point was the current street network and building structure (using the ‘buildings’, ‘roads’ and ‘railway’ layers from the Open Street Map files). These structures had to be ‘deconstructed’ to fit the conditions of the time. The primary source of information was the digitized, georeferenced sections of the 1941 (fourth) military survey (Arcanum Database), as well as aerial photographs from the late 1950s available on [fentol.hu](http://fentol.hu). The cadastral map available in the Arcanum Database helped us draw the administrative boundaries of the period.

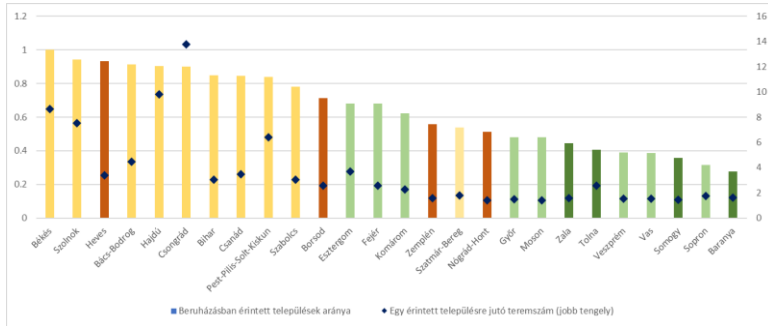
### **Summary of the findings**

1. Klebelsberg’s cultural policy is a long-term, exemplary, institution-building reform program covering all areas and levels of Hungarian cultural life. An important building block is the school building plan, which includes a nationwide program for the construction of public schools as well as the expansion and improvement of universities. In this context, cultural policy takes on a complex spatial dimension and can be seen as one of the early territorial interventions at the national level in an attempt to reduce territorial disparities. The analysis of the data found that classroom constructions were sometimes expansions of already-existing infrastructure, since investment plans were not only directed at settlements without schools (although the emphasis was definitely on these new constructions). Overall, it can be assessed that the measures have mainly delivered qualitative improvements, with the bulk of developments coming not from network expansion but from capacity expansion and capacity renovation. A comparison of some of the indicators shows that the program brought many positive changes: illiteracy fell from 15.2% in 1920 to 9.6% in 1930, and an even more favorable rate of 5% was achieved in cities.
2. Investigations confirmed the high share of beneficiaries among the counties of the Great Hungarian Plain. There was considerable educational expansion on the periphery, with many schools and classrooms being built in places where previously no educational facilities were available. In addition, it should be highlighted that the reconstruction programs had a great impact on the rural towns of the Great Hungarian Plain (affecting both their centers and outskirts).

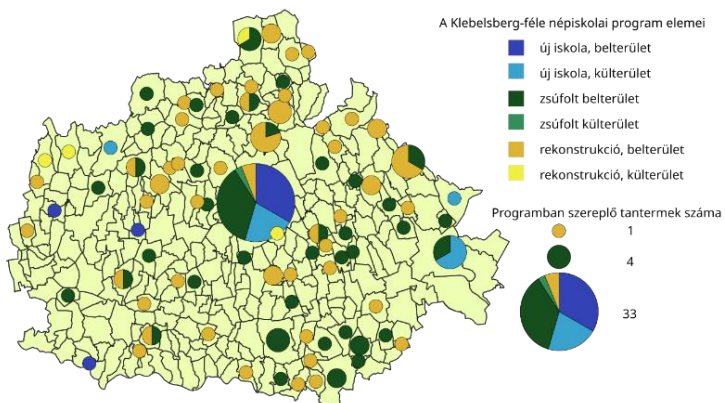
On the other hand, the second half of the hypothesis was not proven. Territorial analyses have also revealed that some of the counties with sizeable ‘small village’ population appear as negative anomalies (primarily in South Transdanubia), while others (e.g., Borsod, Vas) can be considered as only moderately affected at most. Elsewhere, for example in the case of Zala, however, we can find examples of intensive involvement of small village areas. Analysis by settlement size confirms this correlation, the program did not force the expansion of the institutional network below a certain settlement size. Below 500 inhabitants, only one in five municipalities were included in the program, meaning that they also took into account longer-term sustainability and the overall capacity of the country and of local communities.

The conclusions of the national analysis in this respect are confirmed by the studies on Baranya. The rationale for this relatively concentrated development, favoring larger settlement sizes, is strongly supported by the fact that municipalities involved in the people’s

school program were able to preserve their own schools at a higher rate and for a longer period than average in the face of school mergers and school closures that began in the 1970s. In this manner, it can be argued that the people's school program has in fact contributed meaningfully to the development trajectory of our rural settlements. The renovation of the educational infrastructure at that time contributed significantly to the modernization of villages, but it could also be argued that it had a selective effect, i.e., it induced a differentiation between villages that only really started to unfold and intensify in the context of the socialist settlement network development policy.



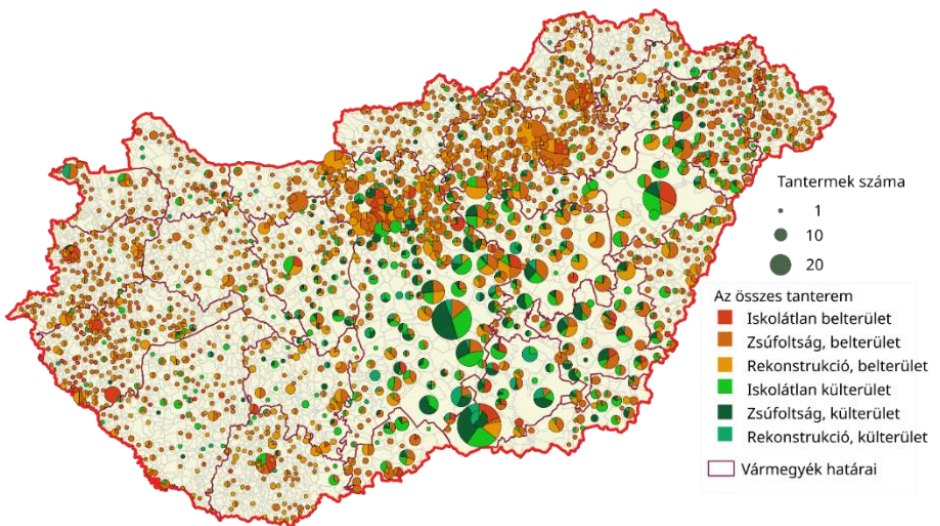
*Proportion of municipalities covered by the investment and number of classrooms per municipality in each county*



*Classroom constructions by the Klebelsberg program in the present territory of Baranya*

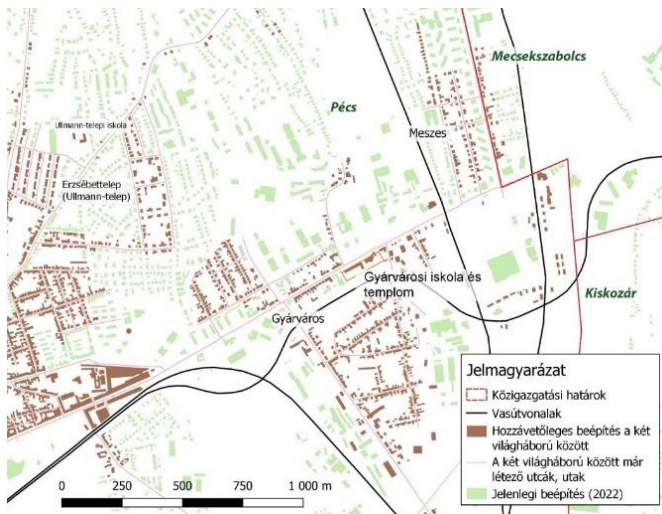
3. A more detailed analysis of the people's school program reveals its more complex dimensions. In addition to the neo-nationalist motivation and the emphasis on cultural supremacy in the political-ideological field, the program also reflects the fact that Hungary underwent a rapid transformation during the war, even without taking the Treaty of Trianon into account. The wartime boom accelerated industrialization, which was accompanied by the restructuring of urbanization. Former traditional centers (such as the large market towns in the Great Hungarian Plain) were joined at an accelerating pace by settlements without a well-developed institutional network. Rapid population growth has created significant deficiencies in educational capacities. Several elements of the development program respond to this situation: Territorial analysis revealed that industrializing municipalities tend to be overrepresented among the investment recipients. In particular, the industrial region of Dörög and the then still administratively independent suburbs of Budapest (Csepel, Kispeszt) represent this type of municipalities.

Analyses of Pécs also helped to better understand the importance of the people's school program in urbanization and urban development. In Pécs, the 'Klebelsberg school developments' were impactful mainly in the outskirts populated by industrial workers. The school of Gyárvaros, presented more in detail as a case study, became the center of development in a disorderly part of the city, inhabited by a particularly 'low-status' population.



*All classroom construction planned in the program*





*The approximate built-up density of the wider Gyárvaros area in the interwar period<sup>4</sup>.*

4. The fourth hypothesis could not be proven. Although the overrepresentation of Hungarian settlements compared to German and Croatian villages is, albeit faintly, visible, the difference is not conclusive. The disparity may also stem from the fact that the focus of the program (as described above) was the Great Hungarian Plain, where there are few German settlements. This, together with the program's concentration in the Budapest area, explains the overrepresentation of Slovak settlements.
5. If we want to exhibit the main findings of the analysis on a regional scale (after the national one, we have to note that the expansionary effects of the Klebelsberg program (which is generally understood in the context of the expansion of the school network) are not or only barely recognizable in Baranya County. Overall, only a small number of completely new facilities have been added to the institutional network in the region. The greatest impact of the reforms, if the number of population reached is taken as an indicator, may have been in Pécs, the results of all other measures in the county can be considered marginal.

The example of Pécs, analyzed in detail, demonstrates that investments in reconstruction, capacity building and the development of new schools can be seen as a coordinated response to a real social and urban development problem. It must be noted that, in addition to improving supply in rural areas, the policy has also provided significant support for urban growth.

In relation to territorial consequences, it is also essential to mention measures affecting higher education. In pre-Trianon Hungary, regional decentralization of higher education had already begun before World War I, as the University of Debrecen and then the University of Bratislava were founded in this framework. Although the relocation of 'refugee' institutions in post-Trianon Hungary did not exclusively reflect regional political considerations, the insistence on the Transdanubian region and the subsequent selection of Pécs determined the territorial dynamics of the development of higher education in Hungary in the long term. To this day, the northern part of Transdanubia has not yet developed the universal higher education and research center for which the foundations were laid in Pécs in the 1920s, under very difficult circumstances. Even at the turn of the millennium, the decentralized and overly

fragmented institutional network in northern Transdanubia presented challenges in terms of both sectoral and regional policy.

It is also worth underlining that, in light of recurring public debates and enrollment figures of the 1920s and 1930s, university development was in many ways ahead of real demand. The first decades of the University of Pécs were not only financially, but also intellectually, challenging. Demand for higher education in the region remained modest throughout these decades, and the increase in the number of students was not particularly dynamic. It is certainly true that initially university infrastructure struggled to keep up, but from the 1930s onwards, the deteriorating economic situation meant that the maintenance of a university with a 'sub-optimal' number of students was constantly called into question. In the institutionalized anti-Semitic climate between the two world wars, the Elizabeth University was one of the institutions which, by interpreting numerus clausus 'less restrictively', opened loopholes to increase the participation of Hungarian Jews in higher education. Although, as can be seen from many sources, this was not without conflicts. In this sense – by making virtue out of necessity – they have created an inclusive tradition to which the citizens of the University of Pécs can look back with a certain pride.

Although the development of the Elizabeth University was interrupted in 1940 by the relocation of the Faculty of Humanities, even within these new circumstances Pécs has remained what Klebelsberg intended the city to be: the Transdanubian bastion of Hungarian higher education. Nowadays Pécs is no longer a rapidly declining former mining town and county seat, rather it is the undisputed center of the region. This role is the result of the decision taken as part of cultural policy in the 1920s.

#### **List of publications on the topic:**

György Muity ; Adam Nagy ; Gábor Pirisi

Territorial impacts of the Klebelsberg people's school program

TERRITORIAL STATISTICS (forthcoming)

György Muity ; Adam Nagy ; Gábor Pirisi

The industrialization of Pécs and the development of elementary education in the era of Klebelsberg - The establishment and establishment of the Gyárváros School in Pécs

MODERN GEOGRAPHY 17 : 4 pp. 67-81. , 15 p. (2022)

György Muity

The numerus clausus and the conflicts arising from its introduction at the Elizabeth University of Pécs in the early 1920s

NEW PEDAGOGICAL REVIEW 3-4: 124-137 14 p. (2022)

Mrs. Langer, Judit Buchwald ; György Muity

Investigation of the economic causes and the impact of commuting for education in the region around Austro-Hungarian border

OPUS ET EDUCATIO: WORK AND UPBRINGING 6 : 3 pp. 325-334. , 10 p. (2019)

Mrs. Langer, Judit Buchwald ; György Muity

Career aspirations and success narratives of Hungarian children and their parents commuting to Austria for learning purposes

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT 18 : 1 pp. 118-126. , 9 p. (2017)

György Muity

Klebelsberg and the sporadic training of Hungarian sailors

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT 16 : 1 pp. 116-120. , 5 p. (2015)