

Doctoral Thesis

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**Public Education and Adult Education in Somogy County
between the two world wars**

**(In the mirror of the documents of the Somogy County
Andragogy Committee)**

Budapest 2011

Introduction

After the counterrevolutionary system had been established in 1920, a more than ever before autocratic and centralized form of government power was adapted. This practice influenced cult politics preeminently because culture was used in practice as an effective tool by the new political elite, converting it to a strategic sector. The government's attitude toward culture repositioned the status of andragogy that exclusively belonged to the civil sphere beforehand. Andragogy – or 'free education' as it was used back then – has gone through large scale developments during the era of political dualism and remained a social task despite having every intentions to change this. The idea of having andragogy under the government's jurisdiction was firstly introduced at the turn of the century as a resolution for financial and organizational difficulties, however, it failed to break through due to resistance from left-wing, liberal bodies. By 1920, time of war and revolution had created a new political environment. Cult politics and andragogy had become a top priority to the new authority. Adult education originally had a 'bottom-up approach' but all the aforementioned events created a unique situation which revalues and makes it an exciting subject to research.

I have already been a Ph.D. student when my teaching duties diverted my attention to the history of andragogy. While preparing for lectures, I noted that cultural politics of the era is well researched and documented, but only insufficient information is available regarding every day practice and actual events. After discovering the gap, I quickly changed subjects midst my doctoral studies, making this current research my official discipline. As a result of this quick change and being in the early stage, the subject title became too broad which caused some problems due to invariability. In my further research, I continued placing emphasis on unfolding the practical side, as I felt the gap lied there. It soon emerged that the deficiency is not accidental. At the initial phase, lack of attempts to explore of such activities was a common problem. There was no sufficient or adequate information available. As I previously mentioned; there is plenty of analytical literature and documentation available on the politics' official point of view as well as on its reflective governmental function. However, there is nothing available on the practical side, especially considering the countryside. Historical research papers that interested in cultural community life often note andragogy although the number, specifically engaging in the subject, is relatively low. Even those mostly exhausted enlisting related regulations and local associations whose main profile was adult education. It was not any different in Somogy County. This provides the

reason – in the researched county – why documents disclosed from national archives were not sufficient enough to execute further, in depth analysis on the subject. This imposed a huge hurdle at such a critical point of the research, when things turned for the better. From the Vice Seneschal's office, thousands of pages of files turned up from the Somogy County Andragogy Committee, a local organization in charge of andragogy during the Horthy era. These untouched files played a crucial role and enabled pursuit of aforementioned research with focus on the Somogy County of Southern Danube region. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity to research the Committee's local activity to find answers only to efface the initial research for the entire region. These findings do not presume large differences regarding the neighboring Tolna-county due to the two counties' similar financial and social positions. However, Baranya County was much more industrially developed, therefore, it would have needed further research and the results would have had pointed beyond a doctoral essay's boundaries, if we were to stay within the guidelines. This fact sadly determined that the main objective and the title both had been chipped; however it did open new dimensions for further development in research.

It appears from the previously mentioned facts that serious conflicts distended amid extremities from Horthy era's special approach - new to Hungarian history - and traditionally a social sphere initiated andragogy, creating a very interesting field to explore. Objective of my thesis is to examine the milieu influenced by new Hungarian mentality, social, political and economic situation during the interwar period. I found it crucial to clarify the beginning and the end of this period because the last years of the Horthy era strongly distorted it due to changes occurring post-war. Therefore, I have chosen year 1938 as the end year, although I found it essential to occasionally examine a couple of documents dated 1939. Year 1938 has earned its significance as the last peaceful year as well as the promulgation of the first anti-Jewish law. Wartime conditions caused significant changes in the already established andragogy practice, not to mention the anti-Jewish measures, which had derogatory, distorted impact on the culture's and education's personnel resources. Both created a new position on my research subject changing exactly the atmosphere which was significantly determinative in the 20s and 30s.

The first sparse initiatives coming under the adult education category started in the 18th century. Rare, but not isolated, high standard initiatives were already in the works although the later prevalent phenomena had not even had a name assigned to it yet. Work of Sámuel Tessedik, György Festetics and János Nagyváthy drew attention to peculiarity, which

characterized andragogy during the researched period, and to personal commitment which often was like a single wheel operating the movement. This clearly can be detected in the works of andragogy secretary József Felczán/Tamás even in the 1920 and 1930 Somogy-county. The idea of andragogy became more recognized amongst broader social strata in the early part of the 19th century and its institutionalization and establishment started after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise. Necessary ambition, or demand for a new form of culture, which could make it succeed as it did in Scandinavia and England has not come into existence from the targeted strata. After land distribution in Scandinavia, civics rapidly evolving from peasants have recognized benefits arising from culture, whereas, in England, the working class generated interested mass kept the Settlement Movement and Free University in motion. Lower classes in Hungary were not in the position to react consciously for innovative attempts, notwithstanding that neither land distribution nor industrial revolution was aiding the change in approach. Andragogy probably became a wide spread movement as a supplement to urban life, in the rapidly growing and developing cities by the turn of century. As a result of European trends, a large number of institutions have piled up to such an extent that organizational boundaries as well as financial resources had to be reevaluated. Irregular conditions, rigid mentality and limited financial resources offered to intensify governmental intervention as a solution. However, social differences did not agree. Although the government's interest has grown towards the cultural sector, thus far considered as social activity, only the new regime generated by World War I and its following events allowed a more in depth participation of the government which was required by some conservative bodies beforehand. As an option, legal regulation surfaced in the first part of the 20th century but it had not been put into action for decades to follow. Culture became a strategic sector, along with andragogy, both heavily concentrated and strictly monitored by the government. Realization of the administration's aim was intensely shaded by reality and, contrarily surveying national agencies and capital attitude, its exploration on rural areas was barely accomplished. We cannot draw conclusions that apply to the entire nation only by examining events in Budapest, since the capital's development was head and shoulders above the county by this time. Naturally, we have to underline differences in among counties. Different conditions applied for some areas of the Great Plain region as opposed to rigid Transdanubian counties stuck in a semi-feudal system through a large estate landholding structure. Andragogy outside of schools in the rural areas were beyond their primary objectives: supplemented missing local educational opportunities and strengthened identity as a measure for the local society's success.

The dominance of agriculture, restricted intellectual needs, a low level of urbanization and civilization characterized Somogy County at the time. A majority of the local cultural sector concentrated into the only city, and even that fell well short of the capital's development that presented national standards. Cultural institution was not complete, intellectual life operated by a few committed individuals, only a fraction of the influence on the not so small County due to the near complete lack of transportation infrastructure. Although the centralized andragogy's primary target audience was the Agrarians, who made up the majority of the county's population, neither the financial background nor the strongly related educational needs created that ambitious crowd, which were present in some fortunate regions that could have acted as a foundation for successful adult education. Most of these diversified Agrarians lived their lives in poverty starting from the small land owner to the penniless cottier through to the servant. They never had the chance to participate in educational programs nor benefit from them to improve the quality of their lives. Inhibitory factors included financial and infrastructural barriers, a lack of self-consciousness strongly related to poverty and finally vulnerability which shackled them to the patronizing landowner. The small land owners' strata, or rather calling them tiny land owners, was narrow, and were not better off financially than servants or farmers. Going to work on others' farms as day laborers created a much more hopeless fate than being a servant. The very few wealthy peasants were not utilizing andragogy when considering the need for education and culture. As an emerging stratum, they often wished to exploit the opportunities provided by public education when it came to considering the future of their children. De facto objectives of andragogy - enhancement of quality of life for lower class citizens, increasing self-esteem through cultural development - under such circumstances could not have prevailed. The cult government's intention was to create a solid base of united ideology, loyal printed media and any other resources suitable for propaganda that supported those objectives and would act as a background for the government. It could have been partially successful with the help of the aforementioned, especially, because public education laid down the foundation for the young generation as well as for their parents. However, this united base could not have formulated due to the lack of opportunity for a homogenous society. Motivated individuals existed amongst urban parties mainly from the industrialists and laborers. While, social life settings were readily available to the middle class, citizens of lower classes have created them for themselves in correlation with culture. It is no surprise that what was unsuccessful for the wealthy and strong, was favorable to them and set the stage for their own pursuits. In their case, it was not the end result of andragogy that provided the benefits, much more the actual

‘process’, the possibility to meet, develop strong ties and spend quality time within the community. Goals of the labor movement were projected onto culture in the case of the labor class, which of course could not have gained ground in public education. Industrialists were hoping for assistance in social mobilization and considered intellectual climax an important role to express their identity especially in a rural atmosphere, drawing a line in between themselves and the ‘uncivilized’ Agrarians. The ratio of these two layers was relatively low on the entire social scale as a result of low urbanization of the county.

Perversely, in spite of having the least financial setbacks, and evidently being the most open minded, the middle class was the least interested in adult education although several forms existed and they were also targeted by Klebelsberg program. While the middle class happily adapted the government’s propaganda, their actions were motivated by supporting the centrally managed morale rather than having the demand for culture. Club activity not only returned to public life but strongly emphasized serving the theory of cultural superiority. Participating in the social scene not only became accepted but highly desirable in the terms of social ambition. Naturally, there were people sincerely devoted to culture without a doubt, but they were outnumbered by individuals servicing prestige aspects. Testimonies complain about the lack of interest, a focus on financial aspects and the unnecessary, hindering of rivalry and bickering. Facts confirm that all the aforementioned delaying factors really existed. In most cases, associative boundaries created by these aspects became a battleground of financial and social ambitions, rather than scenes for culture; targeting associations, also working in the field of andragogy, often presumed their activities more useful in a charity role than in participating in intellectual development.

Andragogy was a special form of social responsibility for teachers doing work in adult education. Being a teacher was a prominent, acceptable carrier option for lower class citizens, yearning to belong there, but also burdensome and had to be adapted as a lifestyle. Financial appreciation was not even close to the associated workload and political affiliation was heavily monitored in the Horthy era (especially, at the beginning of the time of the so called ‘B’ listings, after the rise and fall of Hungarian Soviet Republic). However, the elite living in villages, ‘intelligence’ as a contemporary terminology, did not accept the teacher due to their lower descent who then got stuck in a temporary position in between the agrarian and the local upper class. Besides, numerous expectations had to be dealt with which were imposed upon them by villagers. Every task resulted in mixed attitudes due to strain and a lack of appreciation beyond the binding required scope of activities. This was the case

regarding andragogy too. The teacher's attitude ranged from the hardly working always complaining one to the hard at work, vocational and very enthusiastic person.

The role of the andragogy assistant also emerged from teaching positions but only two existed at the time. However, unlike teachers, the job promised career enhancement and increased prestige, even though it did not offer financial benefits. Current political and public trends, social expectations all played an important part in the assistant nomination and in his demotion too. Individuals who were singled out could be assured that they entered into a politically and socially supported circle that had a number of options offering financial benefits on the side. Exceptionally prominent publishing activity can be observed in one of the assistant's case, which activity commenced or partially originated from the desire to gain profit. Financial benefits could have been suppressed by the benefits from social networking. The andragogy assistant was in daily contact with the political and economic elites of the county and city, due to the well-structured national organization of personnel who had a much wider and renowned influence. All this could have created a lifelong livelihood as demonstrated by the career of József Tamás, who stayed in office for decades. The protected 'career' provided security to develop and enhance the profession to a certain extent since the appropriate educational discipline was non-existent. The previously mentioned gentleman did just that, because he had the time and devotion to follow it through. This activity could have strengthened the position of the secretary and promoted optimization of adult education. The most ideal source for researching the ongoing cultural activity in the county is directly exploring documents of the responsible committee, the Extracurricular Education Commission's. The organization was established in the early 20s as part of the reorganization wave, and its operation was determined in the next two decades by activities being established at the time. Considering everyday practice, the next few years after the 1922 formation was the time of outlining the committee's profile that was different from the free education on many accounts. In spite of elementary circumstances this era was widely orientated considering the covered social strata. The currently unfolding Klebelsberg culture politics also considered urban middle class groups eligible for scholarships. Pre-war traditions of free education also privileged the urban class, although revolutions virtually stripped them from free educational support. Appreciation of association and emphasis of assuming social role are both reflections of the pre-war condition of adult education. Early in the interbellum, new methods were still undeveloped and the old ones have not met the new standards yet, which mainly were dictated from political sources. The theory of focusing on

unspoiled rural population has already come into existence, but underdevelopment resulted in continuation of old innervations which created duality. While the adult education center and few boards were in the center of the Commission's attention in the 20s, fighting against significant illiteracy in conjunction with rhetoric of the government, their operation became defined and the targeted audience narrowed particularly to peasantry by the 30s. Plans and reports in the same format and in quite large volume were distributed twice a year which now allows a more in depth research of the everyday practice. The movement of peoples' writers and consequences of the Great Depression both strengthened focus on the agricultural class and Bálint Hóman's culture politics substantially institutionalized it. However, the 'farmer's' position did not improve in the past 10-15 years – what could have possibly helped - and well researched sustaining patterns in andragogy reveal the difficulties. Documents reveal that although there are more than 20 forms of educational activities that existed in villages, the really popular ones were not necessary amongst the most utilizable ones. The most hosted occasional events, which also provided the largest participating audience, were successful because they were cheaper and easier to organize than a lengthier course, even if they offered beneficial knowledge. It was also easier to bring an audience to these events. The most popular events of course were the entertaining ones rather than the educational ones. Entertaining shows, singing and dancing were for relaxation even though they had an ideological base connecting them to political programs. Their importance manifested in organizing the masses, but their contents relayed autocratic messages, although in a light form. Female education programs, where conservative approach was the most prominent, were special and quite popular despite not having much contextual difference since the 18th century national initiatives. Participants did not, or had very little chance to utilize the acquired knowledge. Unfortunately, taking over foreign patterns were already objected in the 19th century, and it became more justified during this time. Social and political circumstances optimizing these patterns stood no chance even if they were functioning well in other parts of the world.

Overall, partaking in popular education was beneficial for the entire society. Of course, it did not necessarily declare unequivocal success of political ambitions targeting andragogy, or objectives originating from the gist of adult education, or the evolvement of the masses through education were ever achieved. Even if these ambitions only partially succeeded, the movement had a less direct but perhaps more assertive benefit. Without a doubt, these indirect results were the perfect foundation provided by the new wave cult

politics. Andragogy was expanded over the broadest social classes ever recorded in the history of adult education – providing an everyday topic in journalism -, all because it was converted, along with many other educational areas, into a strategic sector. It allowed the society that were shaken by the war and revolutionary events and shocked by the Treaty of Trianon, which caused mental and economic distress, to utilize this stratum for resumption and to resolve the necessary identification crisis caused by historical events. Educational activities just starting up in the early stage of the examined period provided a link for the new state ideology and the opportunity to partake in the reconstruction of the new Hungary. (That is what journalism hinted) There is no surprise the movement was off to a vigorous start in the 20s –history of the People’s College represents this start the best in Kaposvár - but the initial momentum shattered during the consolidation days. The Great Depression and changes in political attitude created new preferences and gave a new boost in the 30s, but building a community remained the greatest accomplishments of andragogy throughout the period.