

RECRUITMENT PATTERNS OF THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES OF ELIZABETH UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS BETWEEN 1920-1940

Summary

General context

In the very broad domain of sociological research, the exploration of the relationship between inherited, family –determined status and the later social status of the individual has always been a preferred topic of interest. Even before research based on scientific standards, there was a public consensus that this relationship is somewhat strong. With the development of qualitative and quantitative scientific research it became obvious: family-determined status could affect the child's later social status in many ways, but in modern states education is among the most crucial components in later social positioning (Weber 1946, Lenski 1966).

The reason education is looked at as a factor of high importance in modern societies is the role it has in social mobility and reproduction. There are several ways to approach the relationship between individual educational attainment and later social-economic status: some claim education is the most feasible way to change inherited social status, others claim education is nothing else but a means of reproducing social inequalities. The question can be raised: does social stratification affect educational participation, or is the relationship reversed? Most critics say education is unable fully to fulfil its mission to facilitate upward social mobility; hence it is unintentionally contributing to the reinforcement of social stratification and therefore eventually is aimed at serving the interests of small elitist groups.

Much research has revealed that there is no society where the distribution of social position merely meritocracy-based. On the other hand it is also clear that family-biased social status shows direct correlation to educational opportunities; that is, children with a more advantageous family background will have a longer educational career which will result in a more advantageous social position as opposed to children of a less advantaged family background. The correlation is even more evident at the level of higher education.

The objective, background, methods and novelty of research

The overall objective of this research is to define the precise enrolment differentials of students enrolled in the Faculty of Humanities of the Elizabeth University (predecessor of the University of Pécs) between 1921 and 1940 through the investigation of their social background. The database used for investigation is a structured set of personal and education-related data of 1026 individuals enrolled in the Faculty between 1921-1940. The types of data are ideal to investigate both general recruitment patterns and local specifics. Data was collected from the students enrolment registry sheets stored at the University's Archive in Pécs.

Data fundamentally can be divided into three categories:

1. Data in connection with the social background of students (breadwinner's occupation, possible education, religion, place of living).
- 2: Data directly related to the respective student (date and place of birth, place and school of secondary education, religion), and
- 3: Data related to the educational success of students (Matura in secondary education, various exams at the university).

A total of 28 independent variables were collected from a total of 1026 students, which finally built a database of ca. 18.000 pieces of data (roughly 64% complete).

My initial thesis was that the recruitment patterns of university students in Hungary between the world wars was fundamentally similar, nevertheless apparent divergences can be identified alongside faculty profiles and university cities. In case of the faculty of Humanities in Pécs, with the investigation of students' social background I expected to identify groups whose representation is fundamentally different from the national average. The approach used is quite traditional in terms of focal points and methods: a very small segment of the phenomenon "social mobility" was investigated: educational mobility (cross sectional rather than a longitudinal) in the smallest faculty of Humanities in the Horthy era in order to investigate whether or not we can identify links between the social background of students and recruitment differences, that is, how family background affected participation in higher education.

Major theses and findings

1.a. The political forces supporting the establishment and preservation of the Faculty of Humanities in Pécs are practically the resultant representation of local and regional demands, as in terms of geographic origin, the biggest portion of student body were coming either from Pécs or the region.

Investigation revealed that roughly one-third of the students were from Pécs (which phenomenon is also visible in the case of Szeged and Debrecen respectively). In addition, we found that the Transdanubian region is 2.7times overrepresented compared with the 1930 census). Although we found that recruitment frequency from distant places is in inverse proportion to the distance to Pécs, but regions from where enrolment to Budapest seemed a more feasible solution (at least in terms of distance) are also overrepresented.

1.b. Proportion of female students is in close relation to distance between their place of living and Pécs.

Investigations revealed that the proportion of female students depends on the distance between their place of living and Pécs. Respectively, the proportion of female students from Pécs is the highest (in reality, the proportion of female students from Pécs is around 60%, which proportion is considerably higher than the national average of 40%). Recruitment from regions further from Pécs is not only lower, but the proportion of female students is also lower, that is, the distance factor did have a serious impact on recruitment.

1.c. Investigations also revealed that the group of Jewish students and the group of students from Budapest are overrepresented, and in addition, those belonging to both of these groups (Jewish students from Budapest) are even more overrepresented. Further inquiry showed that the ration of female students of this group is much higher than expected, therefore we can state the Faculty was especially popular with Jewish female students from Budapest.

2. The constantly growing number of enrolled students resulted that the ratio of students of lower family background (with lower SES) is increasing.

Investigation revealed that opening up of higher education to a wider social group resulted in that the basic recruitment differentials did not remain unchanged but the value ranges of differentials were expanded downwards.

3. Advantages of favourable vertical intergenerational mobility can be demonstrated on the database.

Investigations proved that the number of students with higher level educational family background (usually a breadwinner with a higher education degree) is overrepresented. The proportion of students from families where the breadwinners have doctoral degrees or other higher education degree is one-third, which is a very sharp overrepresentation if we consider the fact the proportion of people with higher educational degrees (including doctoral degree) was a few percent nationally.

Further enquiries also showed that breadwinners with higher education qualifications are 90% state-employees, that is to say, the status of employer (public or private) had a significant impact on recruitment in case of students with breadwinners with a higher education degree.

4. Investigations revealed that there are groups of similar social-economic status but with different cultural attributes (such as religion, ethnicity) which are overrepresented.

4.a. In addition to the overrepresentation of Jewish students, Lutheran students are also overrepresented. This is to be expected because traditionally the Lutheran population was the second most educated group in Hungary between the world wars.

4.b. The most substantial Swabian (ethnic German) community lived in Baranya county, close to Pécs, therefore the overrepresentation of students of Swabian origin is expected, owing to their relative proximity to Pécs.

5. The collected data of students made it possible to demonstrate that students originating from settlements with a higher level of urbanization factors (train service, major factories or state authorities) are more likely to enrol in higher education.

5.a. We managed to prove that existence of train services in the given settlement had a significant impact on recruitment (in case of settlements of equal administrative ranks). Settlements with train services are more likely to “send” students to higher education. It was also proven that, the advantage of train services is more explicitly visible in case of large villages (nagyközség).

5.b. Investigations revealed that if there is a major economic actor (such as factories, agricultural facilities etc.) in a small settlement the social composition of the local community is more similar to that of towns at least in respect of recruitment (if we accept the higher

ration of women is an indicator of modernity and higher level of urbanization). From such settlements the ratio of women is much higher than from settlements with no such facilities.

6. From available data investigations it was proved that there is a close relationship between students' age and their academic performance at various exams. In general we found that exams results passed at a lower age are generally better than exams passed at a higher age, that is, students getting diplomas at a lower age are academically better performing students.

The database contains considerable data relating to the performance of students in various university exams (grades). Investigations proved that those students whose Matura grades were better, finished their university studies with better results and in a shorter amount of time.

Summary

Factors affecting the recruitment base of the Faculty can be identified on three levels.

On a general level, we managed to demonstrate that students with higher SES are more probable to become university students. Defining higher SES is a very complex and challenging task, but in our case we made a parallel between SES and father's probable level of education. In the case of students with fathers with higher educational degrees we found that this relation is even more evident.

Factors influencing at national level can be further divided into spontaneous and non-spontaneous factors. The latter factors are those which were induced by contemporary educational policy (such as the numerus clausus Act in 1920 to limit the participation of Jewish student in higher education, or the 1928 Act to admit female students to the Faculty of Humanities). As for spontaneous factors we found that, in parallel with other recruitment studies, in terms of academic performance, Jewish and Lutheran students are generally much better, than students of other religions.

Finally we have to consider that one-third of the students were from and around Pécs, which makes it clear that, the existence of a higher education institution in a settlement is such a factor in itself that, in all probability, overwrites the usual selection mechanisms.