

GENDER HISTORY IN THE ACADEMY IN HUNGARY

© Orsolya KERESZTY
(University of Kaposvár)

keresztyorsolya@yahoo.com

History education in Hungary faces new challenges due to Hungary having joined the European Union in 2004. This means, for example, concentrating on and contextualizing the so called European culture, and in parallel with this it also means the balanced discussion of world, European, regional and national histories. What does history didactics mean nowadays in Hungary? What kind of sub-fields constitute the contextualization of history methodology in Hungary, and how does this discourse fit the European streams? What space is constructed for gender history, the history of minorities, or for national, European and world history on the power matrix of history teaching?

Keywords: gender study, gender history

The History Didactics section of the History World Congress held in Oslo in 2000 stated that new spaces, fields and focal points had been constructed in history teaching. For example, in the process of selecting materials for the syllabus this means the weakened hegemonic role of national histories and the history of politics and events, and more space for histories outside Europe, for the histories of women, children and the environment, and also cultural histories (Fischerné, 2002).

My research is focused on the topic of initial training for history teachers in Hungary. The analysis is based on a comparative study conducted in 2005, 'The Structures and Standards of Initial Training for History Teachers in Europe'¹. The study concentrated on various elements of initial history teaching in higher education. Many important issues were included, which addressed the content and structure of initial training for history teachers.

Apart from the so called general issues and problem areas of initial training for history teachers I will focus on the position of gender history and minority history in the academia. I have chosen these two fields because of two main reasons. According to the questionnaire, these two fields are totally neglected and sometimes even ignored and rejected in the academia, or provided with hostile environment. My second reason is that I work in the field of gender history, more precisely the history of women's education as a researcher, and I also consider it as one of my main initiatives to create space

¹ Structures and Standards of Initial Training for History Teachers in Europe. A Comparative Study, organised by European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture, University of Vienna, Department of Economic and Social History. 2003-2006. Expert on Hungary: Andrea Pető. Participants: Tamás Foki, Andrea Bodóczy, Zsuzsa Tarajossy and Orsolya Kereszty.

in the academy to be able to reconstruct the knowledges and foster the gender approach in higher education.

First, based on the existing literature and the remarks of the Hungarian experts, I explore the problematic and key issues, which include for instance the total negligence and absence of gender history, the unequal relationship between majority and minority issues, the question of critical thinking in the learning and teaching process, the negligence of historical relationships between the global, local, regional, national and European levels, and also the issue of awareness-raising about the European dimension.

Second, contrary to the fact that new dimensions are not addressed in institutional contexts in general, some existing Hungarian approaches that address critical issues will be discussed. These innovations are based solely on individual and cooperative efforts though. Apart from the Hungarian case the products and practice of EUROCLIO (that is an international organization for history teachers, which deals with exactly the same issues) are addressed in this study. Furthermore I suggest a gender-sensitive approach on the content and structure of initial training for history teachers, which takes into account the presently neglected issues, focusing in particular on education for democratic citizenship in the 21st century².

The questionnaire³

Six experts from universities of Budapest, Miskolc and Pécs participated in answering the questionnaire. All the six experts are university professors of history didactics or education. They answered the questionnaire in the form of interviews, since all of them indicated that it was impossible to cover the particularities of the Hungarian context according to the questionnaire due to its all-European categories.

The comparative questionnaire was constructed in a standardizing way to be capable of measuring European tendencies. Therefore it was supposed to use the same categories for each country, which sometimes resulted in situations where no possible answers could be provided by the experts. The aim of the questionnaire was to point out those fields that cannot be included in a standardized form of initial training for history teachers in Europe.

The questionnaire has three main parts. The first 'Initial Training of History Teachers' includes statistical data (A), the structure and the organization of initial training (B), the students (C), the trainers (D), and the training of teacher trainers (E). The second part 'History Teaching in Secondary Schools' include the subjects (F), the pupils (G), the teachers (H), the relation between school and university (I), and the status of the professions 'history' and 'history teaching' (J). The third part 'The Educational System' includes general information about the educational system (K), the diagram of the educational system (L), and key data of the educational system (M). Data on structures and standards of initial training was provided from year 2003/2004.

² All the translations in the text are mine.

³ The official Web Site of the questionnaire is: <http://itt-history.univie.ac.at/>

My paper is based on the main critical questions of the questionnaire, though goes further. Based on the basic findings of the questionnaire I aim to explore the major problem areas, key issues and deficiencies of the initial training of history teachers in Hungary, concentrating especially on the space of gender and minority history.

‘General’ problem areas

Before analyzing the position of gender history in initial training of history teachers in the academy, I will discuss critical key issues and problems of history teaching based on the questionnaire, because, these also contribute to the fact that this environment does not foster, but sometimes neglects the gender approach in higher education. I will concentrate on two areas, firstly on the problems with the content and structure of history teaching in higher education. Secondly I will discuss the situation of professors of history and history methodology, and also the students majoring in history.

One of the most problematic issues of the questionnaire was the positioning of history methodology on the power matrix of different scientific fields. Contrary to the situation in the Western part of Europe, where history methodology is considered a legitimate scientific field, in Hungary its scientific characteristic is being questioned, and sometimes it is even considered as a part of educational studies or history. Its close connections with sociology, the history of education, and psychology cannot be doubted. Clarifying these connections and discussing the limits of competence would enable professional cooperation in projects requiring teamwork, for example, constructing syllabi (Katona, 1997).

The experts pointed out that there are two main opposing views on history teaching in the academia at present in Hungary. One claims that the chronological order of discussing history is the best way in history teaching. The other argues that this should be rejected, and an innovative thematic approach should be applied. Though very distant from each other regarding the main questions, the two agree on the basics namely that initial training for history teachers in the academia should be based on the requirements of the National Curriculum and the school leaving examination. The experts claimed that due to the autonomy of the institutions each has the responsibility to construct its own syllabus, while taking into account the accreditation requirements.

Though discussion of history in the Hungarian higher education is based on the chronological sequence of the events, more space is given to synchronic and thematic discussions of historical analysis. Still, the majority is given to political history, then social history, and much less attention is paid to economic history and social history. One expert stressed that the further the country is from Hungary, the less likely it is to be included in the syllabus, simply because the content of higher education should fit the content of secondary education. The so called Western European dimension of history teaching is getting overemphasized, and it does not leave enough space for the history of Central-Eastern Europe. In spite of the European dimension, which has created new challenges for history teaching due to Hungary’s access to the European Union in May, 2004, which supposes a special focus on creating connections and relationships that make the European culture different from the ‘other’, the regional identity has had little influence on history teaching (Knausz, 2001). This would be important, since ‘Central-Europe is not only a region, but more a philosophy: recognizing the fact that the problems of these countries and peoples have

almost the same structures, and these are different from the problems of the orthodox East and the developed West' (Knausz, 2001).

When the questionnaire was conducted in 2004, one of the main problem fields was argued to be the confused and undefined situation of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC), but due to the Bologna process some institutions accredited new majors, such as EDC. Not only EDC, but many other departments are being formed and also new majors are accredited from 2006 due to the Bologna process. This tendency contributes to the formation of Gender Studies courses also from 2006.

Another lacking factor is the absence of the unified professional profile for history teachers. However, one of the experts claimed that together with the students they create a profile each year. Thus this professional profile is based on the shared experiences, needs, interests and knowledges of the students. The absence of the professional profile serves to demonstrate the contingency that means that it is basically the individual professor's and the students' responsibility to construct, carry out and solve particular questions. When this is so with the so called general issues too, which involve everybody in the field of history teaching, we can easily think about the balance of individual efforts and institutional responsibilities concerning gender history in initial training for history teachers.

Apart from the problems with the content and the structure of history teaching in higher education, another issue was lack of continuing education courses offered for professors of history methodology. Apart from this, no PhD course has been offered in history methodology at the universities. Those, who wish to continue their education, should do a PhD either from history or from educational studies, or as the third option should educate themselves individually.

From 1998 it is a requirement at universities and colleges in Hungary that the future teachers take part in constructing the syllabi and other documents. The students also have the rights and responsibilities to create and revise the structures and details of certain courses. One the one hand one of the experts of the questionnaire mentioned that no matter students have the rights to take part in constructing the semester; they usually do not, due to lack of such initiatives in primary and high school. On the other hand the same expert admitted afterwards that even he as the professor considers this opportunity for students a fake democracy, since it is a chance for the professor to get rid of responsibility.

Where is minority history?

Minority history does not constitute a relevant part of history teaching in the academy in Hungary. There are two basic reasons for the separate discussion of minority issues and minority history. The first is that history should offer reference points for the identities of the minorities, and second, that if the majority and the minority constitute the society, their learning from each other and living with each other, the respect and acknowledgment of each other's particularities is the basis of social peace (Knausz, 2001).

Knausz (2001) argues that based on the concepts of plurality and diversity 'history teaching is mostly about the diversity of people, therefore it is considered as extremely important in fostering the acceptance of otherness, practicing tolerance towards other cultures and life styles. This could also be read that the aim is to produce openness in students that promote that they not only tolerate people thinking differently, but understand them, and make efforts to include the values of the others into their own system of values' (Knausz, 2001). Though I consider the absence and negligence of minority history a crucial problem, I do not agree with the reasoning of the quote above, since it does not reflect on the problem of 'otherness' and being 'different'. I think it is important to avoid the we-others dichotomy, in which situation it is 'we' that is supposed to understand the 'other' and learn from them. Apart from this, the use of difference always suggests something that is 'normal' and the rest is different.

Since history education is managed at different and various departments in the academia, there is diversity in terms of the visibility of minority issues, and also gender history. Only one expert of the questionnaire highlighted on the situation of roma people as not being a relevant part of history education in the academia. According to him, another essential part could be the discussion of the minorities after the Trianon Peace Treaty, which is usually part of the majority history, whereas it should not be. Both minority and gender issues raise the question of the position of those who are creating history, and also the position of the professor in the academy.

Where is gender history?

Éva Thun (2002) discusses in detail the position of Gender Studies and Women's Studies in Hungary. She finds that the integration process of Women's Studies and Gender Studies in the Hungarian higher educational system can only be described as a patchwork. There have been some courses related either to Gender Studies or to Women's Studies at some departments of the so called traditional disciplines, but their becoming an organic part of the system has not started yet. In spite of the individual efforts and initiatives of some professors, the environment of the university remains hostile towards Gender Studies and Women's Studies. Thun argues that this phenomena is due to the fact that the so called traditional environment of the university makes it difficult to discuss and construe the position of Gender Studies and Women's Studies in the academia. Presumably these circumstances contribute to the lack of source documentations and literature in these fields. Journals of different disciplines have published various papers related to Gender and Women's Studies, but these cannot be considered as continuous and repeated practices (Thun, 2002). There is only one institution, the Central European University that has established a Gender Studies department. The department offers education in English on a postgraduate level.

Just as minority histories, gender history also does not constitute a part of initial training for history teachers. The opinion of one of the experts of the questionnaire describes the mainstream attitude towards gender history in the academia in Hungary, when it was stated that the separate discussion of gender history is completely useless, and instead more emphasis should be given to the history of marriage, in particular the history of married heterosexual couples, and also the history of life style.

Apart from the initiatives in institutionalized higher education, there are also important private and collective ventures to integrate gender history a part of the syllabus, and also to foster the gender sensitive approaches in history teaching, analysis, and education (Thun, 2002). Fostering the gender approach was the main aim of an accredited further education for history teachers and university students majoring in history. The project 'Teaching women's history and children's history in high schools' claimed that 'If it is true for the situation of women that they were invisible in history, and the men-dominated power relations denied them their own independent actions, it is more relevant for children too. However, in the course of the last century defining and enforcing children's rights and also fighting for women's rights are the stories of success; therefore they are to be taught. The project was one part of a bigger program called 'History and the teaching of history in South-east Europe'. Its aim was to discuss the history of South and Eastern Europe from the point of the persons, and not from politics. The final outcomes of the project were two materials for high schools, namely 'Childhood in the past. 19-20th century' and 'Men and Women in the past. 19-20th century'. Instead of concentrating on the differences, the focus points of these two volumes were the shared and common problems of the region, especially on the relations between women and men (Kanusz, 2001).

In one of the last sections of the paper I have aimed to include a list that highlights the (in) visibility and space of gender history issues in the academies in Hungary. The list would have included the name of the academies that had gender history courses last semester. Unfortunately, not even one gender history course was offered last semester at Hungarian universities and colleges. The absence of the list clearly indicates the environment where individuals working in the field of gender history are supposed to work.

Plans and possible contributions

I have discussed the key issues and problems of initial training for history teachers, especially concentrating on the issue of gender history and minority history. One immediate step should be the critical revision of the content of history education in the Hungarian academy, including the re-discussion of the relationship between national, regional, European and world histories, and also the visibility of gender and minority history. Another close step would be the definition and positioning of history didactics on the power matrix of the academia, and the discussion of diverse critical questions among various scientists, both from Hungary, and also from parts of the world.

One example that aims to establish strong collaboration and close relationship between the participants is EUROCLIO that was established with the help of the European Council. It includes European, regional and national Teachers' Associations, and aims to help history teaching, in terms of living in peace, democracy, and developing critical thinking. Apart from EUROCLIO, the European Council makes efforts in different fields as well, such as having organized the conference 'The role of non-governmental organizations in the field of Education for Democratic Citizenship' that aimed to develop a forum where the participants could discuss their topics, and they could also learn from each others' examples and experiences. The issues discussed at the conference are similar to the problem areas highlighted in this questionnaire and selected for this paper. One of the main

foci of the conference was the positioning of the European dimension after 2004, of which Education for Democratic Citizenship involves a great part. One defined aim of the conference was to provide space for those initiatives coming from the civil society that are working in the field of education for democratic citizenship, in the field of informal education.

Another way of managing the absence of, for example, gender history is the strengthening the connection between formal and informal education, and increasing the role of civil society in this process. This contribution may create an important space not necessarily in the formal academia, but in the form of initiatives coming from the civil society. One initiative is from our Hungarian NGO called IgEN, International Gender Equality Network that aims to organize a Feminist Open University (FOU), a series of roundtable discussions open for anybody interested in gender and feminist issues. The university will take 18 months, from January 2006 to June 2007. Having completed the course, the knowledge and the experiences of the course will be published in a book. The course will be a space for those professionals and non-professionals who are working on issues, or are interested in issues that are connected to gender and feminism, and also a platform for future initiatives and projects that are critical to the realization of women's human rights. The Feminist Open University is unique in this field in Hungary, since it aims to provide a platform for future initiations for those who wish to share a common ground. The topics of the Feminist Open University will differ from session to session, and will include, for example politics, history, education, environment protection, media, body, geography, etc. Technically the Feminist Open University will be organized once a month, and each session will take four hours. A person, who has the professional background and knowledge about that particular field, will be asked to lead each session, and each discussion will be based on readings selected by professionals and provided by the organizers. Each session is to be moderated by a member of our association.

I started my paper with a personal reason why I have chosen minority and gender history to concentrate upon, and I will also finish my paper with a personal contribution. As it could be read earlier, there were no courses offered in gender history at universities and colleges last semester. From next year though, there will be at least three courses offered by three universities. As I consider myself working in the field of gender history in the academy in the future one of the courses is offered by me, with the special aim to create space for gender history in the academy.

In sum as for the situation of gender history and minority history in Hungary it is important to consider that individual contributions are needed especially when the formal educational system is highly resistive and rejective towards the gender approach in higher education. One of the result of this situation is that those individuals working in the fields of Gender Studies, who 'speak the same language', have been creating informal networks with the help of which keeping in touch, helping each other, working with and learning from each other is getting easier, and also in the hope of reconstructing knowledge to be able to construct space for the gender approach in the academy too.

References

- Fischerné, Dárdai Á. (2002). Történelemdidaktika és történelemtanítás az új évezredben. In: *Módszertani Lapok, Történelem*, 12. pp. 1-16.
- Katona, A. (1997). A tantárgypedagógia kérdéséhez - a történelemtanítás felől szemlélve. In: *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 6. pp. 99-111.
- Knausz, I. (2001). A történelemtanítás funkciójáról. In: Donáth P. & Farkas M. (Eds.): *Filozófia, Művelődés, Történet*, pp. 147-163. Budapest, Trezor.
- Thun, É. (2002): A nőtudomány és a társadalmi nemek tudománya I-II. In: *Magyar Felsőoktatás*, 3-4. pp. 50-51.