

## COMMERCIAL SCHOOLS IN HUNGARY IN THE AGE OF DUALISM

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*The aim of this study is to introduce the operation of secondary commercial schools in Hungary in the age of dualism. The research has sought an answer, in one respect, to the question what significance commercial schools had in the Hungarian school market in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; in another respect, to the question what role these secondary commercial schools took in Hungarian vocational training; and last but not least, to the question what job opportunities secondary commercial qualifications afforded in the Hungarian labour market at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.*

**Keywords:** secondary commercial schools, higher-level commercial training, social composition of students of commercial schools

### Secondary Commercial Vocational Training in Hungary

In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sunday schools were determinant in the Hungarian vocational training, however, as of the 1850s, more stress was laid on secondary vocational training. The first important step in this respect was the opening of the Commercial Academy of Pest in 1857. The operational principles of the school were established by the Partnership of Wholesalers and Industrialists of Budapest and the Civil Patented Commercial Association of Pest. Training at the institute was launched with a preparatory and three academic classes.

After the Settlement of 1867, when the development of the economy accelerated and the demand for qualified workforce increased even more, great leaps forward were made in the field of commercial vocational training as well. As a result of the parliamentary debates in 1872 about vocational training, the issue of commercial education was transferred from the authority of the Minister of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce to that of the Minister of Religion and Public Education (Schack & Vincze, 1930:257). Ágoston Trefort, Minister of Rel. & Publ. Ed., enforced the first regulations for commercial schools in the same year (on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1872). According to those, Sunday schools and evening commercial schools were considered basic-level commercial institutions, where young people already working as apprentices could apply for. Beside basic-level vocational schools, there were three-year secondary commercial schools (henceforth: secondary commercial school) and upper commercial schools operating as well. The regulations concerning secondary commercial schools empowered them to operate as public schools, and placed them into a rank equal to that of grammar schools and secondary schools specialised in natural sciences, drawing and modern languages (henceforth: school of natural sciences). This meant that the students were granted all the favours that those of the other schools were (e.g.: one-year voluntary military service instead of the

obligatory one) (Schack & Vincze, 1930:259). The schoolchildren who had completed the fourth form of a grammar school, a school of natural sciences, or a secondary school of practical and general knowledge (henceforth: practical school), also the boys who had turned 14 and had passed the entrance exam could apply for admittance to secondary commercial schools. In 1881, the regulations were supplemented with the clause that the one-year voluntary military service applied only to those who had successfully completed the first four forms of any of the above-listed schools, and had passed the final exam at the end of their studies at a secondary commercial school. As of the mid-1880s, owing to the great interest in this school type, more and more such schools were established country-wide. The number of students learning in these schools increased right after schools of natural sciences were changed to be eight-form in 1878, which lengthened the period of study there. Another influencing factor might be that secondary commercial schools were preferred instead of the two upper forms of six-form practical schools, as the previous ones provided a qualification in addition to general knowledge, which afforded more opportunities for finding a job. As a consequence of this, among others, practical schools, which were transformed to be six-form by the Public Education Act of 1868, were run with only four forms in practice, for the two upper classes were attended by too few students. The boys' practical schools where the fifth and sixth forms weren't eliminated offered industrial, commercial or agricultural courses in these two upper classes. Contrary to schools of natural sciences, studies in secondary commercial schools ended one year earlier, besides, the right to one-year voluntary military service, which was a basic criterion of becoming a gentleman, was gained by finishing the latter ones as well. The popularity of this school type increased even more when the Act on the Qualification of Civil Servants was passed in 1883, which ensured students finishing a secondary commercial school the same rights as those finishing a (regular) secondary school. That is, finishing a practical school was equal to finishing a lower secondary school from the aspect of employment in civil service, and finishing a secondary commercial school was equal to completing all eight forms of a grammar school or school of natural sciences (Nagy, 2000:1314). Ministerial Decrees No. 28 093 of 29<sup>th</sup> July 1884 and No. 29 801 of 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1885 brought about new changes in the principles and curriculum of commercial schools (Mészáros, 1991:65). In accordance with the decrees, schools related to practical schools were considered secondary commercial schools as well.

A „related” practical school refers to the type that offered a commercial course in the fifth and sixth forms, or, as of 1885, supplemented these two upper classes with a third one, thus changing them into a three-year commercial school. There were differences among „related” schools, however, in the form of their relation to practical schools. Either the curriculum of the practical school was connected to that of the commercial course, or the commercial school and the practical school were operated on the same premises and had joint management, while their curricula were independent of each other. The number of such “related” schools was rather small: at the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, only one fifth of all schools were connected to practical schools, and only ten out of these were related in their premises or direction (Schack & Vincze, 1930:264). The syllabus of secondary commercial schools was divided into two main, compulsory parts: that of the general subjects (Hungarian language, literature, German language, French language, history, mathematics, physics, commercial geography, chemistry and technical studies in chemical industry, and calligraphy) and the professional subjects (commercial mathematics,

bookkeeping, commercial correspondence, knowledge of wares, law on bills and commercial law, national economics, public finance and financial studies), but there were also optional subjects (practice in chemistry, and office practice). Upon the decree of 1885, the school-leaving exam agreed with the final exam.

### Commercial Academy or Upper Commercial School

As of the 1890s, secondary commercial schools became more and more popular with students, consequently the number of schools and students increased. In the mid-1890s, there were already 37 commercial schools teaching 5810 students (Schack, 1896:51). Decree No. 44.001 issued by Gyula Wlassics, Minister of Rel. & Publ. Ed., in 1895 made a significant change in this field. In accordance with that, the school type names used till then (secondary commercial school, commercial academy, and upper commercial school) were abandoned, and the unified name of upper commercial school was introduced (A kereskedelmi..., 1895:60). From among the academies operating in Hungary, only those in Budapest and Cluj-Napoca could keep their academic title. There was a change made in the supervision of schools as well, since it was transferred from under the authority of school inspectors to that of the director general responsible for commercial schools. A new curriculum was introduced in the same year, which included two new compulsory subjects: religious education and office practice, and which increased the number of lessons in foreign languages and commercial subjects in contrast to that in natural sciences. Entrance exams were eliminated. Students were admitted after finishing the first four forms of a secondary school or practical school, and completed their studies at the end of the third year. Under the decree enacted in 1895, final exams taken at this stage were officially called school-leaving exams. Earlier, only final reports issued by academies had been called school-leaving certificates, studies at other secondary commercial schools had ended by final exams, which had been considered equal to school-leaving exams in certain respect.

While school-leaving certificates issued by upper commercial schools and secondary schools practically agreed in terms of privileges, there were great differences between them concerning further education. The certificates of the previous ones didn't afford the same opportunities to continue studies as those of the latter ones, just as in the case of grammar schools and schools of natural sciences. Students having secondary commercial qualifications could continue their studies only at commercial academies, due to which this school type provided rather few alternatives to the youth. Therefore, it is no wonder that a considerable number of these students found employment and didn't want to engage in further education.

The number of students finishing upper commercial schools continuously increased: 236 in 1884, 586 in 1890, 1023 in 1895, and 1414 in 1901 (Schack, 1903:79). Reviewing the data of the academic year of 1900/01, you will see that, out of the 3290 school-leavers of all the 198 secondary schools in Hungary, there were 1414, that is 42% passing their exams in any of the 37 upper commercial schools. The number of students finishing upper commercial schools continued to increase in the following years: between 1901-05, 1566 from among 5667 school-leavers; between 1906-10, 1841 from among 6474; and between 1911-14, 2536 from among 7823 (Nagy, 1999:41). Beside the relatively high number of school-leavers, the increase in the number of students indicates the popularity of this school type as well. The number of students attending commercial schools increased to more

than tenfold between 1880 and 1910 (from 688 to 8308), and got near to that of students attending schools of natural sciences (10 668 in 1910).

*Table 1. Number of boys studying at secondary schools between 1880-1910  
(Karády, 1997:178)*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Commercial Schools</b>	<b>Schools of Natural Sciences</b>	<b>Grammar Schools</b>
<b>1880</b>	688	5098	33 399
<b>1890</b>	2900	7300	35 971
<b>1895</b>	2854	8800	40 483
<b>1900</b>	5269	9686	49 464
<b>1910</b>	8308	10 668	60 613

## Higher-Level Commercial Training

In 1883, the Commercial Academy of Budapest launched its One-Year Commercial Course for those having a secondary-school certificate, in order for the students to acquire the commercial knowledge they lack. In 1900, this course was terminated and a two-year academic (college) programme was offered instead to those wishing to continue their commercial studies at higher level, which raised the Commercial Academy of Budapest to college rank. The course had altogether 859 students during the 17 years it was conducted (Schack & Vincze, 1930:397). Short after the launching of the programme in Budapest, the two-year Eastern Commercial Course was introduced in 1891 under the direction of the same academy. As of 1899, this training was organised by a new independent state institution, the Eastern Commercial Academy of college rank. The school was opened with the primary aim that students, apart from mastering Eastern languages, should get acquainted with the conditions of production in the neighbouring countries, thus helping trade in the area. In this way, they could contribute to promoting commercial relations with the “East” yearned for by the state. During the 28 years of its operation, 30 students on average completed the programme at the academy a year, an average 50% of whom worked in the trade with the East (Schack & Vincze, 1930:399). The Academic Course at Cluj-Napoca commenced in 1902, and was similar to that of the Commercial Academy of Budapest. While the academies in Budapest and Cluj-Napoca were established by local organisations, the Export Academy of Fiume (Rijeka) opened in 1912 was operated, similarly to the Eastern Commercial Academy, as a state institution. Its main task was to impart knowledge essential for overseas trade to students having finished secondary school.

Gyula Wlassich, Minister of Rel. & Publ. Ed., regulated the operation of academies in his Decree No. 13.315 of 9<sup>th</sup> March 1900 (Schack & Vincze, 1930:399). In accordance with that, only students having finished secondary school or commercial school could apply. During the two-year training, lectures of minimum 60 lessons on trade and economy had to be delivered to students beside the practical seminars held, which ensured the high standard of education. The students of the commercial academies in Budapest and Cluj-Napoca typically arrived from the surrounding regions and found employment also in the area after taking their degree. The educational structure and standard of the two institutions were similar, however, there were great differences in the social background of their students (Lengyel, 1989:120). While significantly many of those completing their studies in Cluj-Napoca worked as civil servants and bank-clerks of lower ranks, 50% of those earning a diploma in Budapest became owners or directors of industrial, commercial or financial businesses or enterprises, and only 10% of them became civil servants (Lengyel, 1989:120).

Table 2. Professional distribution of students taking their degree in the Commercial Academy of Budapest and that of Cluj-Napoca in 1894/95 (Lengyel, 1989:121)

Position	Commercial Academy of Budapest %	Commercial Academy of Cluj-Napoca %
Banker, bank executive / official	10	3
Bank-clerk	18	32
Businessman / entrepreneur, manager / managing director	16	-
Company official	16	2
Tradesman / merchant (self-employed)	23	9
Commercial official	5	5
Landowner, farmer / smallholder	4	5
State and local community official	1	23
Railway official	3	8
Other (teacher)	4	5
Soldier	-	8
Altogether	100	100
Study trip abroad	29	43

Commercial and economic studies could also be pursued at the Department of Economy of the Hungarian Royal Technical University, which was established in 1914 with the aim of training experts in economy by imparting theoretical and practical economic knowledge. However, only students having completed a two-year course at a commercial college (academy) could apply. When finishing this one-year course at the technical university, students were awarded a degree in economics, similar to that conferred in engineering, and could also study one year further for a doctorate (Orosz, 2003:89).

### Organising Commercial Vocational Training for Women

The first official statement that there was a pressing need for organising vocational training for women was made on Aladár György's motion at the Congress of Craftsmen in July 1879. For in earlier years, girls had had the opportunity to gain basic commercial knowledge only at private courses. As of the 1870s, girls finishing public elementary schools and demanding more education could study at practical schools, upper schools for girls, boarding-schools for girls, or teacher-training schools, since there were no secondary (grammar) schools for girls at this time yet (Kéri, 2008:102). The first independent commercial course was introduced in the girls' practical school of the 5<sup>th</sup> district in Budapest in the autumn of 1888. In the first two years, commercial subjects were taught for six months, then, from 1890, for eight months a year. There was great interest in the course from already the first year, which played a significant role in its being granted the right to operate as a public school by the Minister of Rel. & Publ. Ed. in 1890. The organisation of commercial courses for women was regulated by Count Albin Csáky in his Ministerial Decree No. 59.258 of 15<sup>th</sup> March 1891 (Schack, 1896:116). According to this, instruction lasted eight months a year, from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> May. The following subjects were taught: commercial mathematics, bookkeeping, knowledge of bills and trade, office work and correspondence, knowledge of wares, commercial geography, and calligraphy. Girls under 18 having completed the fourth form of a practical school or upper school for girls or having passed the entrance exam could

apply. The interest in commercial training for girls is evident from that in the school year of 1891/92, such courses were introduced in local girls' schools in 16 towns in Hungary (Debrecen, Győr, Kaposvár, Miskolc, Oradea, Cluj-Napoca, Pécs, Bratislava, Sopron, Szeged, Timișoara, Zalău, Novi Sad, Hlohovec, Rijeka, and Budapest). 6% of the girls enrolled were under 15, 62% were above 15, 29% above 17, and 3% above 18. According to the statistics of this school year, 47% of the girls completing their studies found employment mostly at shops and post offices. From among those, 170 girls worked for "strangers", while 53 had a job in their parents' or husbands' shop. Although the interest in such courses was intense and the number of applicants was high, 8 of the 17 courses were cancelled the next school year (while 6 new ones were launched). The reason for this, among others, was that there were much more courses introduced than needed by the labour market at that time, therefore, the majority of the girls completing their studies could not find a job in the given town or its surroundings. In spite of this, the number of students increased year by year: there were 405 girls enrolled in 15 schools in the school year of 1892/93, 450 girls in 13 schools in 1894/95, 592 girls in 16 schools in 1895/96, and 940 girls in 17 schools in 1898/99 (Felkai, 1994:118; Schack, 1903:125). Considering the position of women in the society of the time, we should be also aware of that only 70% of the girls enrolled with the aim of having a trade to be able to earn a living, and about 50% of those found employment at the turn of the century.

The first independent, three-form commercial school for women was opened in Bratislava in 1909. Girls were given the opportunity to take a commercial school-leaving exam as of 1912. It should be emphasised, however, that the school-leaving certificate for girls, who could take this exam only as private students between 1883-1896, was not equal to that for boys until the Secondary School Act of 1934. It is well known that, initially, this inequality formed the basis for excluding women from college and university studies.

### Social Composition of Students of Commercial Schools

There were 37 commercial schools operating in Hungary at the turn of the century, which can be divided based on maintenance as follows: 19 state, 7 community, 6 council, 2 denominational, and 3 private schools. They were attended by altogether 5701 students, 1755 of whom were studying in Budapest. 65% of all students had attended practical schools, 20% had attended grammar schools, and 15% had attended schools of natural sciences previously (Schack & Vincze, 1930:64).

The denominational distribution of students was the following: 47% Jewish, 34% Roman Catholic, 7% Lutheran, 6% Reformed, 5% Greek Orthodox, and 1% Greek Catholic. The over-representation of Jewish students was not exceptional, as they were represented at secondary schools at a rather high rate as well (23%). The relatively low number of Christian students was due to that by finishing a secondary commercial school, students didn't qualify for "high life" jobs, so these schools were not enough "noble" for them. The high rate of Jewish students at secondary and higher education institutions issued partly from that the level of one's education was closely related to their social status in the Jewish society. "Profound respect could be earned only through intellectual achievement, since property, being uncertain in uncertain legal circumstances, was not enough in itself." (Bányai, 2005:15) Traditional Jewish families applied rational strategies when choosing schools, so parents possibly enrolled their children in schools in which, apart from gaining higher social prestige, they could learn a trade as well. This is clear from that in 1894,

the rate of Jewish students was 18% at boys' grammar schools, while it was 38% at schools of natural sciences, which gave more practical training (Karády, 1997:85). There is an evident link between the rate of 47% of Jewish students at commercial schools and the rather significant representation of Jewish people in the economic life of the age. All the Jewish families cherishing traditional values and living mainly on trade that could not afford or did not want to enrol their children in Christian grammar schools showed a preference for commercial schools to be attended after finishing a practical school, as such schools, even if not too many, were maintained by the Jewish community too. By finishing such a school, their children not only learned a trade but also received a school-leaving certificate, which ensured their upward mobility in society. We should be aware of that it was of prestige for families living on trade, whether Jewish or not, if their children had such a certificate, for the status of these people had been traditionally very low on the prestige scale of occupations in the high classes (Karády, 1997:53). It is an indisputable fact, however, that, compared to families of other religions, Jewish parents were more ambitious to get their children to attain higher qualification than themselves.

When reviewing the occupation of the parents of students attending commercial schools at the turn of the century, we will find, not surprisingly, that 32% of the parents were tradesmen, 20% were intellectuals, 18% were craftsmen, 14% were local farmers, 8% were of independent means (landowners), and another 8% had other jobs to make a living.

Considering the denominational distribution of students of women's commercial courses, we will also find that the rate of Jewish students was high there as well (33%), but the majority of students (50%) were Catholic, and there were 16% Lutherans and 1% Greek Catholics (Budapest..., 1901:138-143). 36% of the parents were intellectuals, 29% were tradesmen, 16% were craftsmen, 8% were independent owners, 3% were local farmers, and 8% had other jobs to make a living. Contrary to boys' parents, the majority of girls' parents had intellectual jobs. This difference in the social background might be due to that the more educated their fathers were, the greater opportunity girls had to study further at secondary or higher level, but establishing the truth of this assumption requires further research.

### Jobs Taken between 1860-1901 by Students Having Finished Commercial Schools

There were altogether 16 968 students finishing commercial schools in Hungary in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. 448 of them died before being employed, and the job of 2107 former students was unknown (see Vincze 1930, p. 334). Based on the data available, 52% of those finishing commercial schools could find proper employment in trade (24% worked in goods commerce, 21% in banks, and 6% for insurance companies). Another 37% of them primarily made use of their commercial knowledge at industrial companies, in the civil service, at transport companies, and in agriculture as accountants or controllers. Consequently, 11% of those having commercial qualifications decided to take a completely different job. These data allow for the conclusion that commercial qualifications gave the young not only social prestige but secure job opportunities as well. A significant part of those finishing a commercial school immediately found a job and usually became independent at the age of 28, while others continued their studies at a commercial academy, after the completion of which they went to work in another town or country, following the tradition of guilds (Lengyel, 1989:117).

Considering the outcomes of György Lengyel's research on the economic elite, which show that 13% of the managerial positions in economy after the First World War were taken by people having finished a commercial school or commercial academy, it is even more evident that a school-leaving certificate issued by a commercial school offered better employment opportunities in Hungary at the turn of the century than that of a grammar school.

## Summary

Studying commercial schools operating in Hungary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the data throw light on that despite commercial vocational education was given a powerful stimulus only after the Settlement of 1867, by the end of the century, commercial schools gradually became more popular with pupils wishing to continue their studies at secondary level. In certain respect, commercial schools were classified as secondary schools after the Secondary Education Act was issued in 1883, under which students finishing a commercial school gained the same rights as those finishing a secondary school. The popularity of commercial schools was owing to, on one hand, that training there was one year shorter than at other secondary schools, even though school-leaving certificates issued there offered rather limited opportunities for continuing studies; on the other hand, that social privileges granted by such a certificate were practically the same as those granted by certificates of other secondary schools. Another factor to be taken into account is that at that time, finishing a commercial school not only meant upward mobility in society for the young but also afforded relatively good employment opportunities, ensuring to earn a fair living as well. Based on the above, it can be stated that in addition to their role in vocational training, upper commercial schools played an important part in secondary education.

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