

Lilla Bauer

## PUBLIC EDUCATION POLICY IN THE YEARS OF TRANSITION

### Some remarks (comments) on the centralization of the public education system in Hungary

*This study examines the challenges and failures of the discourse on the education policy-making process. Fully matured reforms are hampered by a lack of continuity and efficacy. Organizational constraints, such as a lack of institutional dialogue, can be observed behind many education policy failures. This paper explores the implications of applying discourse analysis to research projects in the field of education policy studies in order to illustrate how new insights can be gained through a discourse analytical approach. I seek to examine elements of the policy-making process, such as policy formation, implementation, and evaluation. Actions of the state are implemented through increasingly complex sets of institutions. Organisations and structures provide the framework in which policies are defined and policy decisions are made. I hope that my analysis will yield evidence for my hypothesis that decision-makers are not quite clear about the fact that the implementation of the government's objectives and public policy programs do not necessarily coincide.*

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#### 1. POINTS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Before a political decision, decision-makers must measure the government's capacity. Due to the radicalism of a political decision the government can lose the achievements of the earlier years. All governments have to learn to appreciate the previous governments' political efforts and to respect their results. It manifests in careful and considerate decisions. Finally, the more difficult and slower way in reaching consensus between the actors of the policy programme and the wider society will pay off in the long run. The most important capital of any government is their citizens' trust. The failure of under-prepared public policy reforms puts this trust at risk. Last but not least, without the necessary financial and human resources it is an unwise and ineffective decision to establish a huge institution.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

I attempt to examine how certain elements of the policy process work and the formation and implementation of one particular policy with the help of a discourse analytical approach. According to my hypothesis fully matured reforms are hampered by the lack of continuity and efficacy. Organizational constraints, such as a lack of institutional dialogue, can be observed behind many educational policy failures.

In Hungary today we are in the middle of a very committed education reform process but there are plenty of difficulties in the implementation and there have been vigorous protests among education experts, education professionals and in broader society, too.

Another hypothesis is that in the governmental decision, which has centralized the educational institutions in the hands of a maintenance central office – called Klebelsberg Institution Maintenance Centre (KLIK) –, the strong political-ideological content disproportionately dominated the real potency and capacity of the government.

The third assumption is that the stormy radicalism of the political-ideological content substantially damaged the previous governmental techniques and attitudes which were the results of the modernization of the public education system and the public administrative reforms. In other words, it was detrimental to the efficiency-conscious and planned policy processes, the manager techniques and participatory governance attitudes. These attitudes and management techniques, to increase the chance of social consensus at the widest level of society, involved more educational actors in decisions.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

I would like to apply the argumentative, narrative, and cultural approaches to public policy analysis, to describe the 2010 – present period of public education policy studies, and in particular, the circumstances and functional anomalies of the foundation of the Klebelsberg Institution Maintenance Centre.

First, I would like to list some of the best-known versions of discourse analysis. I would like to list the reasons why I consider this theoretical approach very productive. I mainly use Marton Szabo's work in presenting public policy discourse analysis.<sup>1</sup> What are the characteristics of democratic and discourse praxis of the implementation and analysis of public policy programs? Public and common interpretation, which had four schools by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, plays a key role in it. The argumentative analysis examines the actors' refuting or supporting the public policy measures and how they argue for the most likely truth. Narrative public policy analysis examines how the actors interpret the events and explore their internal relationships along the temporal runoff. Cultural public policy studies reveal what cultural circumstances of the process of implementation are determining. Ethnographic

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<sup>1</sup> Szabó Márton: Közpolitikai diskurzuselemzés, Working Papers in Political Science, 2012/7. MTA TK Politikatudományi Intézet

public policy analysis examines the public policy programme in a concrete and unique way focused on the interpretation. The four common trends endeavor to show that in the implementation of public policy programs discourse coalition is a decisive factor, which might be formed by the stakeholders in public debates and discussions. Choosing the method of discourse analysis does not mean that I regard this method better and more productive than the other 'social engineering' policy process analyzing methods. I would probably also follow the golden mean, the "aurea mediokritas". There are four reasons why the narrative and the cultural-ethnographic discourse analysis seem more useful and logical to me. These are the following:

- One of which is very obvious: the political-administrative KLIK as a public program, and as an organization, was created recently.
- Fully-institutional and human resource capacity is not completed yet; therefore, it should not be assessed as a closed process, as a developed organization.
- The author has obtained her experience as an employee of the organization (as Head of Department of a school district of Budapest).
- The narrative approach will include a guided-interview evaluation – the author made interviews with colleagues in the same positions (school-district director).

In addition to the four reasons the author believes that there are political and ideological reasons behind the radical centralization and the establishment of KLIK instead of realistic government-administrative reasons. The maintaining center's name – Kuno Klebelsberg – suggests the same. Therefore, a short historical reference will also be included in this study.

### ***3.1. Methods and aspects of discourse analysis***

#### *3.1.1 The narrative public policy*

Narrative public policy analysis seeks to uncover how the actors speak at public political events in a time of political structure. The interpretation of public policy programs is important in the process of discussion of the events, but on the basis of the discussion which is also the way we tell stories on the dispute later. The narrative public policy analysis is sensitive to the reality and figments at the same time, to subjective evaluations of the facts and the facts themselves. As much as our decisions are defined by our affections, which facts arouse in us, they are also defined by the facts themselves. Behind the political decisions are sufficiently favorable cases, credible fiscal and monetary efficiency arguments, but the ideas and visions of power can not be sufficiently taken into account. Therefore, you should listen to the story of the preparation and of the implementation of the program, not only to the economic calculations and reports. The ability to name (label) something is a way of having power over it. To articulate, to name, to tell: these situations shed light on the person performing the action, the power of individuals, dominance, the person who suffered interference, the subor-

dination of people, and the vulnerability. A „Linguist merely employs systematically a cognitive faculty that is already in place for everyday linguistics functioning.”<sup>2</sup>

As we are talking about the subject of our research it already covers the subject of our evaluations, expectations and visions. Our speech also designates our headroom actually, foreshadowing motivations and options for action. Gadamer writes about the language of scientific research, in relation to linguistics: „The understanding and interpretation of texts is not merely a concern of science, but is obviously part of the total human experience of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

The narrative has five elements: [“the act, the crime, the location, the course of action and intention – agent, act, scene, agency, purpose] – (who, what, where, how and why).<sup>4</sup>

The story structured this way is also structured reality, which shows the actors what are the interventions and actions in the present context – from a particular aspect. It also shows the possibilities for the future: “The narrative form is better than anything else to depict how a programme will work and what changes the condition will achieve. That is the information the decision-makers are interested in before making decisions about resources.”<sup>5</sup>

Márton Szabó<sup>6</sup> draws our attention to the narrative coherence and creative power of consistency. Indeed, I have to admit that even as decision-makers (the author as a counsellor of the Ministerial Cabinet has seen and experienced the decision-making situation and possibilities) or as a bureaucrat implementing public policy decisions, or as a parent who is interested in education, it is difficult or impossible to see the process of some educational public policy programs as a coherent and consistent reality.

Emery Roe<sup>7</sup> points out that public policy processes are complex, polarized and have uncertain outcomes, which means that they lack selection and coherence needed to make good choices and successful action. The narrative should be able to perform this simplification.

Actually, the policy advisors and consultants of Cabinets are masters of public policy narrative: their job is to give a short essence of the most relevant problems. It is necessary for decision makers if they need to create programs, to know about the current status of processing, the outcome, or the failure of program. “A coherent narrative offers a credible explanation, even when external diversity of conditions is indefinite or it would be difficult to verify.”<sup>8</sup>

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2 Leonard Talmy, 2007. Lecture notes for ICLC, Krakow

3 Gadamer, H.G. (1975) Truth and method. London, Sheed and Ward.

4 Kaplan, Thomas 1993. Reading Policy Narratives: Beginnings, Middles and Ends. In Fischer, Frank – Forester, Frank (eds.): Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning. Durham – London: Duke University Press. 178.p.

5 Kaplan, Thomas 2000. A közpolitika-elemzés narratív struktúrája (ford. Boda Zsolt). In: Szabó Márton – Kiss Balázs – Boda Zsolt (szerk.): Szövegváltozatok a politikára. Nyelv, szimbólum, retorika, diskurzus. Budapest: Universitas – Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó. 559.p.

6 Szabó Márton: Közpolitikai diskurzuselemzés, Working Papers in Political Science, 2012/7. MTA TK Politikatudományi Intézet, 13.p.

7 Roe, Emery (ed.) 1994. Narrative Policy Analysis: Theory and Practice. Durham –London: Duke University Press.

8 Boda Zsolt 1997. Narratív közpolitika-elemzés. In Szabó Márton (szerk.): Szövegvalóság. Írások a szimbolikus és diskurzív politikáról. Budapest: Scientia Humana. 127.p.

### 3.1.2 Cultural public policy

The cultural public policy analysis method spread in policy-science after Thomson-Schwarz<sup>9</sup> pointed to the differentiability of political culture. Among other things, it showed that social reality is not equally and objectively given facts – everyone interprets the facts somehow. This interpretation depends on a number of circumstances; for example, on interests as well. However, these conditions are not objective and not accurately measurable. In fact, they are only discovered through the actions. They only get their meaning in the mix of unaccountably many factors, the process of implementation or action. Clifford Geertz writes “man is an animal who depends on the web of meanings created by himself. I consider this net culture, and I consider its analysis precisely because of this a law not seeking experimental science, but an interpretative science unforgivingly hold.”<sup>10</sup>

Geertz refers to the understanding of cultural factors. That our thinking, our actions are not only motivated by the reality of existing knowledge, but by our whole being as we understand and interpret the reality of the „here and being” (Dasein) defined.

We need to refer to Gadamer at this point, who fixes the principles of his philosophy in a view of reality, Heidegger’s Dasein (being present in) the category of departure and destination point. As Gadamer writes: “The temporal analysis of the human being according to Heidegger[...] convincingly demonstrated that understanding is not the subject of one behavior mode, but a mode of existence in this present existence itself.”<sup>11</sup>

That is, knowledge itself is existence. Gadamer goes over to the language and dialogicity. In the focus of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is Gespräch (talk): not Rede (speech) as an utterance, but Unterhaltung (conversation), as dialog. The dialogue interpretation is related interpretations, without a beginning or an end: it happens all the time. Therefore, it is never ready. Such continuous interpretation and dialogue with others interpreted public policy as a discursive reality. However, the reality is still in its concreteness, special and unique status, given the culture, and we are also uniquely part of this and leaders as well. This is also a time limitation and freedom as well. In ordinary language, says Habermas, open structure is: no guarantee of perfect order and clarity, but this advantage is not the handicap, it is clear what he did in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, because “we’re never one grammar’s captives.”<sup>12</sup>

Szabó emphasizes opportunities which public cultural policy analysis opens. While the objectivist-positivist analysts assumed a uniform culture and rationality, the cultural discourse analyst knows that there is none. With that realization public policy analysis can be made more sophisticated and thus more successful: already more than reading, the researchers’ calculated rationality. “The theory of political cultures [...] is about that the apperceptive schemes are often so incommensurable, the parties interested in the decision speak so many “different lan-

9 Schwartz, Michael – Thompson, Michael (eds.) 1990. *Divided We Stand. Redefining Politics, Technology and Social Choice*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf Press.

10 Geertz, Clifford 1994. Sűrű leírás. Út a kultúra értelmező elméletéhez. In Clifford Geertz: *Az értelmezés hatalma* (ford. Berényi Gábor). Budapest: Századvég Kiadó. 170–199.

11 H. G. Gadamer: *Igazság és módszer*, Gondolat, Budapest, 1984. 12.p.

12 J. Habermas: *A társadalomtudományok logikája* (Atlantisz, 1994), 208.p.

gauges “that the chance of compromise is small, in addition, in case of a number of large-scale or system conversion measures progressive realization is de facto not conceivable.”<sup>13</sup>

### 3.1.3 Ethnographic analysis of public policy

Improving the lessons learned from cultural public policy analysis, we arrive at the central issues of ethnographic public policy analysis, says Martin Szabo. The main tenet is that all organizations are specifically organized, work locally and manage individual devices; in addition, the dominant elements of the organization’s participants interpret their own operations. Almost every author of this trend emphasizes long-term research in the field of organizational analysis. An ethnographic researcher is involved in the life of the community, observing it directly and permanently, if necessary, even for years. The ethnographic public policy analysis reveals how a specific public policy programme in a specific community is achieved through the involvement of actors with very different status through long years. That is usually not based on some abstract “thin feature”, but on there and then, given the local circumstances in their complexity.

“Beyond the fact that organizational ethnography can show the busy life of organizations, it also allows you to clarify two further aspects for which other methods, such as survey methods, are less suitable: (1) the operation of the organizations’ “hidden” dimensions (two) players in the context of relationships.”<sup>14</sup>

Organizational ethnography researchers are not only permanently present in the life of the community, but also propose ways to make the study programme better, since they not only observe, but also participate. “These proposals are quite powerful, because they are born in collaboration with the local participants (involving them in the process), researchers attend to the members’ inquiries about the details (accordingly inform them), and it also allows for research proposals to be born through the repeated participation (and it should not be a far-fetched theme set by the leaders or the principal investigator’s discretion).”<sup>15</sup>

## 4. THE ISSUE

### **4.1 Public Policy Situation – elimination of a decentralized education system, establishment of the Klebelsberg Institution Maintenance Center (KLIK)**

On 1th of January, 2013 the Hungarian public education went on to work in a completely new structure. Between 1990 and 2013 the educational institutions were maintained by local governments. It was a totally decentralized system. The way how it worked was: the lo-

13 Boda Zsolt 1997. Narratív közpolitika-elemzés. In Szabó Márton (szerk.): Szövegvalóság. Írások a szimbolikus és diszkurzív politikáról. Budapest: Scientia Humana. 123.p.

14 Yanow, Dvora – Ybema, Sierk – van Hulst, Merlijn 2012. Practicing Organizational Ethnography. In Gillian Symon – Catherine Cassell (eds.): The Practice of Qualitative Organizational Research. Core Methods and Current Challenges. London: Sage, 7. p.

15 Neyland, Daniel 2008. Organizational Ethnography. London: Sage Publications, 2.p.

cal authorities received money from the state budget for their duties for the free and compulsory public education in accordance with the number of students they had. However, this amount was not sufficient to maintain the schools, buildings, pay the salaries of teachers and cover teaching materials. Therefore, the maintaining school municipality supplemented the money received from the state from its own budget and from income from the self-management. Thus, there were large differences between the operating standards of schools in various regions of the country.

On 1th of January, 2013 the state left the maintenance of the school buildings in the hands of the local governments without providing any central funds. Providing school apparatus (desks, printers, copiers, computers) was also the responsibility of the municipality, but the teachers' salaries were paid by the state, and the pedagogical work, the development of the methodology, illustrative material for lessons, field trips, academic competitions, sports competitions were also financed the state.

The establishment of the Klebelsberg Institution Maintenance Center took away any possibility of education management from the local government and achieved a total top-down model of governance. My assertion is that the center's name clearly reflects the political will that the government did not want to involve the society in his decision and the professional public either. With a huge illocutionary force it decided the way in which the government handled the issue of the differences between schools. Indeed, it did not initiate any social and professional discussion on how to deal with the quality differences between schools. Its decision was not preceded by a preliminary impact study, and you do not know whether that would be treated as a public policy programme set up by the Centre or in the public administration or the public education system side. There was no broad social or professional consensus behind the creation of the KLIK and controlling municipal schools by the center<sup>16</sup>

They have created a completely new structure that only has clear political goals, but the implementation has not had any concept. All capacity-chaining features of the new structure were changing daily and the functioning seemed an enigmatic decisions-chain to the public and the profession. Neither consensus after discussion of technical arguments, nor social consensus was behind these decisions.

#### ***4.2 Weaknesses in the public policy process of establishing and building the new system***

What steps have been left out or were fragmented in the process of centralization?

- I. The absence of political, professional and social consensus.
  - There was no consensus among policy makers in the government decision-making party whether all government schools should be taken into state maintenance or only those where the local governments do not have enough resources;

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16 [http://www.pedagogusok.hu/index.php?cikk=010421\\_vitak\\_a\\_kormanyparton\\_belul\\_is\\_az\\_iskolak\\_allamositasarol](http://www.pedagogusok.hu/index.php?cikk=010421_vitak_a_kormanyparton_belul_is_az_iskolak_allamositasarol), [http://eduline.hu/kozoktatas/2011/4/1/20110401\\_iskola\\_allamositas\\_orban\\_fidesz\\_vita](http://eduline.hu/kozoktatas/2011/4/1/20110401_iskola_allamositas_orban_fidesz_vita), <http://eduline.hu/cimke/Klebelsberg+Int%C3%A9zm%C3%A9nyfennart%C3%B3+K%C3%B6zpont>

- There was no consensus within the ruling party’s decision-making on how the situation of local governments will be affected by the centralization;
  - Sharp disputes between the government and the opposition did not finalize an agreement.
- II. The shortcomings of the decision-making phases.
- Raising funds sufficient to assess the establishment of new institutions (centers, school districts), school maintenance and calculating the total cost of teachers’ salaries;
  - Planning the vertical structure of the resulting institutional structure of public education hierarchy management for institutional capacity;
  - The horizontal structure of the resulting institutional structures, in particular at the regional level;
- III. During the implementation process of the strategy and process the claims arising under sections: capacity change – monitoring
- IV. A survey of the provision of human resources: job – proficiency – number of status coherence.

The author of this paper was one of the directors of 198 school districts. Her intention was to compare her own school district’s struggles to the other 197 school district director’s experience. Only eight people responded to this request. Two people excused themselves because of the lack of time, one person refused the issues indignantly and 5 people responded.

The surprising result reflects the uncertainty in the same professional circles, what is more: the fears. The secrecy, news blackout, and complete information retention are natural concomitants of the activities behind which there was no consensus.<sup>17</sup>

The five people gave the same answers:

- school district infrastructural deficiencies: building, equipment, telephone, computer expertise in staff;
- unclear responsibilities between the school district and the center directors and school district directors and school principals;
- the impotence of the central management;
- unplanned professional and financial tasks;
- fears of publicity and open benchmarking of individual solutions.

The State Secretariat expected the resolution of the issues raised by the parents and the schoolmasters from the KLIK-Center but the solutions or resources and decision-making powers were not given to the President of the KLIK-Center or – who knows –, the Chairman of the Centre was unsuitable to direct with proper authorizations. The problems of educational administrations were played down or denied.<sup>18</sup> The teachers, schoolmasters, education experts, parents, and of course the opposition parties electronically and through many

<sup>17</sup> <http://hirlevel.egov.hu/2013/02/13/kozel-sincs-minden-rendben-az-allami-kezbe-kerult-iskolakban/>, <http://www.hirklikk.hu/facebook/page/article.php?id=220204>, <http://oktapolcafe.hu/tag/allamositas/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.fidesz.hu/hirek/2014-03-20/jelentos-valtozasok-tortentek-az-oktatasban-az-elmult-negy-evben/>



demonstrations, professional consultations, and meetings protested against the dysfunctionality of KLIK and the deterioration of the quality of education.<sup>19</sup>

Based on this it seems that we keep nothing from among the governmental experiences, tools, and attitudes of the governments between 1990 to 2010.

## 5. WHAT WE HAD LEARNED FROM MANAGERIALISM AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

It seems that all government knowledge that the New Public Management and Good Governance toolkit recognized between 1990 and 2010 have been forgotten. In 2010 the FIDESZ-KDNP government came to power and saw the opportunity for the New Weberian model: strengthen the state and public administration system with using the toolkit of NPM and the attitude of Good Governance. In this study a detailed presentation of these models is not possible but, according to the opinions of numerous analytical researchers, both models have certain virtues.

The virtues of NPM worth retaining are market-efficiency, which technique applied in administrative processes transforms the inflexibility and difficulty of traditional public administration system.<sup>20</sup> So the fact that the decision maker assesses how to budget the government resources to derive the best results from a programme in the shortest time.

„Most developing countries are adopting the model without considering the socio-economic and political implications. Perhaps because of their vulnerable position at the international level, these countries are being forced to adopt the model. Although there is an obsession with the experiments with market solutions, still there is a long way to go to replace the traditional model. In some cases, some precepts of the traditional model might help to restore order in the administrative system, i.e., getting the fundamental rights – a prerequisite for economic growth and development.” – established by M. Ehsan and F. Nazogirin in the conclusion of their study about the vision, expectation and practice of NPM in developing countries.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, the NPM was called to life by real-life needs. A traditional administration was not able to handle a number of challenges that characterized the end of the 20th century.

Accordingly, the NPM emerged in response to a number of environmental challenges which governments everywhere have faced in the past twenty years.<sup>22</sup> For example: large, expensive public sectors with increasing efficiency. The traditional Public Administration was not able to

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19 <http://www.tanszabadsag.hu/blog/2014/01/>

20 Hood, Christopher. 1991. "A Public Management for All Seasons?", *Public Administration*, Volume 69, No.1. Hughes, O. E. 1998. *Public Management and Administration*. London, Macmillan. Pollitt, C. 1990. *Managerialism and Public Services: The Anglo-American Experiences*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Pollitt, C. 1998. "Managerialism Revisited" in Peters, B. G. and D. J. Savoie (eds.) *Taking Stock: Assessing Public Sector Reforms*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

21 MOHAMMAD EHSAN, FARZANA NAZORIGIN: IDEAS AND PRACTICE OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT: LESSONS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 3 :30-48, July-September, 2003.

22 Sarker, A. E. and R. D. Pathak. 2000. "New Public Management: An Analytical Review", *Productivity*, Volume 41, Number 1. 57.p.

deal with technological innovations, so the development of information technology was needed. Increasing efficiency in resource management is also expected as economic recession and competition simply demand it. In the competitive world people are demanding quality public services. They are now keen on comparing the services of all organizations.<sup>23</sup>

New Governance calls for the involvement of the wider sections of society in decisions. Adam Rixner calls this governmental model as builder of social construction, the main instrument of building and strengthening the social solidarity. Good governance has major characteristics which are the criteria of real and working democracy. It is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.

### *5.1 The lack of middle level*

Attila Agh wrote in his study in 2004 that the traditional disease of Hungarian social structure is the “missing middle”.<sup>24</sup> The “good governance” model tried to weaken the overdominant role of the state. In contrast, civil society and its institutions (local governments, associations) were intended to be reinforced. This approach, the structure of mutual trust in the positive effects may allow first and foremost cooperation between the state and the citizen. Therefore, after the party-state dictatorship, the active channels of the grass-roots initiatives should have been encouraged. They know large sections of society’s problems and they could convey them to decision makers. Good governance is not ‘good’ only because the government was elected in a legal manner by the citizens. John Frivaldszky points out that it is good also because the members of the political community actively participate in decision-making.<sup>25</sup> In the Good governance model, the citizens are not only subjects of the legislative and governance activities, but they are also its active participants. Frivaldszky gives a long account of the advantages and disadvantages of the good governance model. We now come to focus on what the researchers uniformly called an advantage, since it is obvious that this is the dividend, the experience as a lesson that is worth keeping, and this knowledge should be used.

However, the lack of multi-level research in the middle of the whole structure of government is missing. Between the central and local self-governments serious distortions and imbalances were observed in respects of both administration and the use of resources, writes Ilona Kovács, Pálné in her 2008 study. She states that there is a regional middle level “black hole” in the distribution of real money. This fact is a hotbed of corruption. On the other hand, the implementation of public policy programs increases the lack of mid-level local party political influences. So finally, it is no wonder that the implementation of the pro-

23 Hughes, O. E. 1998. Public Management and Administration. London, Macmillan.

24 Attila, Ágh: Közpolitika, in: Mi a politika? Osiris, Budapest, 2004. 159.p

25 János, Frivaldszky: A jó kormányzás és a helyes közpolitika formálásának aktuális összefüggéseiről, in: A jó kormányzásról, szerk: Szigeti Szabolcs és Frivaldszky János, L'Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest, 2012

grams is difficult, or even fruitless, because they do not achieve their original goal and in the meantime, they will consume a lot of money.

In Ferenc Mező's study, written in 2010, he sheds light on the lack of the democratic functioning of the middle level. It states that although there are regional governing bodies, they are not legitimate because they are not led within the framework of democratic elections. So in fact, the interests of Budapest are the toys of the capital city's authorities. Mező also draws attention to the fact that in all of this context, the regional institutional system does not have financial autonomy.

## 6. „COG IN THE WHEEL – STORY”

The author discussed with several of her colleagues how they see the centralization of schools. They were „cogs in the wheel”, executors, interpreters of the process and they suffered from the circumstances at the same time. They presented the following professional story:

The decentralized system of public education was an integral part of the administrative system. The lack of mid-level management, regional management, fragmentation and weak sophistication caused the excessive strengthening of the local level. The mid-level, democratic control, the regional specific, transparent control was missing. Without it, there was no real accountability and effectiveness. Decisions were forced from the top but the public policy programme was implemented locally.

We thought this was to be improved by strengthening the middle level, which would have created a balance between the central and local administration and by continuing to strengthen the involvement of wider society in public policy implementations. Well-structured administration of this state may increase the management and decision-making power. These conditions are able to increase the confidence of citizens, through their involvement in the decisions and activity. This is what strengthens the state: confidence of smaller or larger communities of the State, the public administration holding the toolkit of managerialism is much more efficient. The strong mid-level balance is the basis of accountability.

The idea of a public school district integrating administrative districts – 198 administrative districts and 198 school districts – could be a good idea. The pace and force of unprepared decisions, however, are all seen as harmful. We felt that with the conversation occurred just what happens after the child has been bathed: „the baby was poured out with the bathwater”. It was impossible to plan the work, so we have become uncertain. We were constantly scared and did not know when and what decisions and what we can do. The KLIK Center was in silence or held extremely long and unproductive meetings about particular, incidental issues for 200 people at the same time, or scolded us that we do not work well. We also saw, we have witnessed, when the Secretary of State acted in the same way as the President of the KLIK Center. The extreme uncertainty sharpened the conflicts and distrust between people.

## 7. THE NAME AS A SYMBOL

During our discussions we mentioned the choice of the name of the new center.

The center is named after sustaining institution to Kuno Klebelsberg, who was the minister of Education in the 1920s. Klebelsberg was the main representative of the cultural superiority ideology; according to which after the military defeat Hungary can only win back its old influence in the region through culture and human knowledge that is though the minds, as armed revenge is not possible. The cultural superiority theory as the foundation often cited from Klebelsberg's 1922 speech at the ministerial chair occupation when he said: "the Hungarian homeland today cannot primarily be great with the help of the sword, but with the help of culture" (Klebelsberg, 1927, 604-608.)

Gabor Palló presents the Minister in 2007 as follows: "The education was a particular combination of military, education system, and foreign policy. Schools served the existing political system with their curricula, with their content. Klebelsberg found important advisors in the development of the organization and the education system. Ákos Pauler, an important Professor of Philosophy of the age, and education professor Erno Fináczy helped, but mostly piarist monk Gyula Kornis, philosophy professor, academician, who was also president of the Academy for a short time in 1945. Kornis worked in rank of Secretary of State for Klebelsberg."<sup>26</sup>

Finally, we remembered that we all started to work in the school district enthusiastically. The most important thing was creating a more equitable distribution of resources in the schools, and we wanted a good relationship with the owners of the school buildings, with local governments as well. We trusted in the support of school principals, too. However, it became clear very soon that these expectations were illusions. Suspicion arose that the attacks of centralization aimed at building a kind of political-ideological domination. The largest and most powerful social opinion-forming institutions are schools and teachers.

I left KLIK. Now I remember Geertz' thoughts: „This interpretation depends on a number of circumstances, for example on interests. However, these conditions are not objective and not accurately measurable. In fact, they are only discovered through the actions. They only get their meaning in the mix of unaccountably many factors, the process of implementation or action. Clifford Geertz writes "man is an animal who depends on the web of meanings created by himself. I consider this net culture, and I consider its analysis precisely because of this a law not seeking experimental science, but an interpretative science unforgivingly hold."<sup>27</sup>

## 8. IDEA OF THE „SMALL BUT STRONG STATE”

In 2010 FIDESZ-KDNP came to power with the slogan of the neoweberian government model: „small but strong state”. My claim, however, is that the total top-down governmental systems, which present a creation of the Klebelsberg Institution Maintenance Centre , is not

<sup>26</sup> Palló Gábor: Klebelsberg Kuno: Politikus kultuszminiszter, Magyar Tudomány, 2007. 12. szám, 1619.p.

<sup>27</sup> Geertz, Clifford 1994. Sűrű leírás. Út a kultúra értelmező elméletéhez. In Clifford Geertz: Az értelmezés hatalma (ford. Berényi Gábor). Budapest: Századvég Kiadó. 170–199.

consistent with this governmental vision. The new Weberian model on the one hand, probably only flourishes where there is a well-established, fulfilling Weberian administration.

### ***8.1 What model of democracy has emerged in Hungary, between 1990 – 2010?***

The public management reform began in 1990 with new politicians and top level technocrats outside the government. Their attitude and their division of labor, their role interpretation was founded on the ancient cast: politicians decide and bureaucrats serve and execute. In 2010 the situation was better. Democracy is a learning process, and we learned a lot during the 20 years: lots of techniques from the toolkits of managerialism and we were touched by the breeze of a new mode of politicization. Of course, we had plenty of deficiencies. If we compare the characteristic of politicization of public administration in Western democracies with the Hungarian practice, we recognise the following:

- Not enough progress has been made in transparency, accessibility and responsiveness.
- Performance management and budgeting have not been planned and implemented.
- Public policies exist without a relevant strategy.
- The relationship between politicians and civil servants is not consolidated.<sup>28</sup>

The new weberian model is a good mixture of the legacy of the authoritarian governmental system where the politicization of public administration is strong and dominant (this is the „strong state”). There is a working institutional mechanism of participative involvement of citizens, and the government could use lots of valuable techniques from the toolkit of managerialism (this is the small state, because the state shares the responsibilities and uses the efficiency marketing strategies and tools).

Jenei says that the new-Weberian model could be the good solution, but there are certain preconditions to it. Firstly, “we must not try to avoid the Weberian phase of development. Moreover, we need a balanced position and public administration needs a stable political background and strong consensus of the political parties in supporting this process.”<sup>29</sup>

The governance of the state needs, but this does not mean that you do not need the market, bureaucracy, or civil society networks, and they cannot be related to governance in any way; but it does mean that the issue of governance is unimaginable without the problems of the state.

For proper public policy decisions and good judgment there is something that cannot be formalized, that is the mere legality of ensurance is not guaranteed to justice, but first and foremost a form of exercise and it requires certain discretion, however, in a legally circumscribed manner.<sup>30</sup> The legality of administrative decisions, the legality and effectiveness of governance is not a problem-free relationship, since the first does not guarantee the latter.

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28 J. Jenei: Solidifying system of democracy in the central and eastern European new EU members, *Society and Economy*, Journal of the Corvinus University of Budapest, 32. pp.33-46. 2010.

29 same, 40.p.

30 FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: *Államépítés, kormányzás és világrénd a 21. században*. Budapest: Századvég Kiadó, 2005. 99.

Effective management requires a form of government discretion, therefore the carefully circumscribed manner endeavors to ensure the executive power.

What the author experienced as a school district director, as well as the complaints and fears expressed by her colleagues and school staff, makes her believe that the main problem is that there was a lack of consensus. The government considered the decentralized education system harmful. Fair enough – this could be an argument. However, these arguments would have been vitally needed! Moreover, it could also be fit to show why an unprepared and super-fast centralization is the best and only solution.

The disfunctional working of KLIK has initiated many ministerial commissioner reports,<sup>31</sup> which might not have been revealed to the public. Later, one of the Department Heads of Education Ministry – the sister of the President of Republic – also produced fault-finding report about KLIK.<sup>32</sup> Secretary of State Education officials would not comment on the two official reports. It is unprecedented. No one even considered it necessary to correct the errors of the investigation reports which also had an impact on the assessment.

## 9. CONCLUSION

During the second Orban government, the same academic and theoretical backgrounds were included in the transformation of public education. The meritocratic approach is basically recommendable: but hiding the political will behind elevated ideals was hazardous in the past and it is today, too. However, the balance between cultural-traditional ideas and modern governmental practice and techniques can be created only by social balance.

The centralization of the public education system is not a fault but a vision in itself.

However, if the political decision does not measure the government's capacity, that is a mistake. To make a political decision without using the governmental administration's previously acquired knowledge and experience is not a good choice. The political decision, without a broad social consensus behind it: is not a wise decision.

“We were in the middle of creating essentially new relationships between government and civil society and among market types, public, and third sector organizations” – this was Jenei's statement in 2010.<sup>33</sup>

My opinion is that the consensus is absolutely missing from behind the reform of elimination of the decentralized public education system in 2013. Furthermore, the government eliminated the experiences of managerialism as a method and participative involvement as a mechanism and the attitude of social and civil dialogue, as well.

31 [http://hvg.hu/itthon/20140127\\_Index\\_megvan\\_a\\_jelentes\\_csak\\_a\\_baj\\_van\\_a](http://hvg.hu/itthon/20140127_Index_megvan_a_jelentes_csak_a_baj_van_a)  
<http://www.hir24.hu/belfold/2014/01/27/kimeletlen-jelentest-kapott-orban/>

32 [http://index.hu/belfold/2014/03/05/ader\\_huga\\_szerint\\_racionalizalni\\_kell\\_a\\_kliket/](http://index.hu/belfold/2014/03/05/ader_huga_szerint_racionalizalni_kell_a_kliket/)

33 J. Jenei: Solidifying system of democracy in the central and eastern European new EU members, Society and Economy, Journal of the Corvinus University of Budapest, 42. pp. 2010.

Overall, the centralization of public education is a governmental and public policy failure at the same time.

Governmental failure, because:

- of a lack of political, professional and broader social consensus,
- there was not sufficient political wisdom accepting and appreciating the previous political – administrative results. Thus, not only the changes which did not work well are swept away, but also what did work,
- changing of the entire public education governance structure was violent and too fast. However, this process was only a consequence of the transformation of the whole administrative structure, which integrated public education governance,
- the government did not communicate the anomalies of KLIK's working,  
Public Policy failure was the implementation of centralization with creating KLIK:
- They were not given the basic conditions of establishing and working of KLIK. From one day to the next the ministry was trying to figure out how it could provide the necessary financial and human resources for this.
- The whole process posed a great risk to supporting and guaranteeing the quality of public education.