

# LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND SCHOOL SEGREGATION IN BUDAPEST

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## 1 Introduction

In this paper I examine what factors influence the reproduction of segregational processes in the Hungarian educational system and how these factors could be reduced. In my analysis I use the results of various Hungarian and foreign surveys, keeping in view the significant role local governments play in Hungarian educational management.

It was made clear by one of the first Hungarian research studies in the sociology of education (*Ferge, 1971*) that despite gratis education, significant social differences appeared in the access to educational goods in the consolidated period of state socialism. While children growing up in high-powered and intellectual families had a good chance to attend specialized secondary grammar schools most favourable from the perspective of further education, physical workers' children, if they made it to the level of secondary education at all, were bound to continue their studies in vocational or technical schools providing training for manual work. Another research study, conducted in the second part of the 1970s, pointed out that with respect to access to school services there were significant differences as early as on the level of primary education. While children of the higher social classes attended the centrally located schools and their specialized classes located in one of the capital districts, employing teachers of higher qualification, pupils belonging to the lower classes learned in the peripheral schools with less facilities or in the normal classes of the better schools of the same district (*Ladányi–Csanádi, 1983*). The same survey revealed that gypsy children belonging to the lower social strata were often sent to special schools for children with minor mental disabilities. While children's segregation based on their social background may be regarded as a spontaneous segregational tendency, in the case of gypsy children's mass placement in special schools the question arises whether there were ambitions of intentional separation or exclusion underlying such segregation.

## 2 Schooling in the first decade of democratic transition: growing school segregation

On examining the developing processes after the collapse of the state-socialist regime as reflected in research data, we can argue that in the area of our concern the continuation or even intensification of the earlier segregational tendencies is perceptible in many respects. One of the latest studies that analyses the education of Roma children on the basis of two consecutive research studies describes the changes thus: “Since the 1999/2000 school year [i.e. by 2004 – I. B.] the number of schools where Roma pupils are a majority has grown from 128 to 178, that is, 150 percent” (*Havas–Liskó*, 2005, p. 12). At the same time segregational processes prevail not only between schools but also within them, between classes or in some cases within individual classes. The authors of the 2004 study surveying schools with a high percentage of Roma pupils found that “one in six schools (16,1%) among the ones we have examined has separate classes of Roma and non-Roma pupils, and in the majority of the schools the difference in proportions of the ethnic make-up of classes is over 50 percent” (op. cit. p. 19). Researchers have perceived the intensification of segregation in another field of education as well: between 1974/75 and 1995/96 the proportion of Roma children among the pupils of special schools increased from 26.1% to 39.7% (*Havas–Kemény–Liskó*, 2002, p. 18).

Due to extensive research in the past fifteen years, now numerous factors potentially contributing to the subsistence and strengthening of segregational processes can be outlined. I will discuss these factors in the brief overview of the social situation of the Roma and in the parts dealing with the educational role of local governments.

## 3 Main characteristics of the temporary situation of the Roma population

As could be seen from the above, segregational processes primarily affect the Roma, a population whose members (typically though not exclusively) are positioned at the lowest grades of social hierarchies.

### 3.1 Education

If we examine the development of the schooling of successive generations, we find that among the previously very lowly educated Roma population a remarkable improvement happened in the course of a few decades. While only 27 per-

cent of the young Roma, aged 20–24, included in a research in 1971 completed the 8 years of primary school, in 2003, 32 years later, 82 percent of the same age group involved in a similar survey completed their primary education; that is, in three decades the proportion of gypsy youth completing primary education tripled (*Kemény–Janky*, 2004, pp. 78, 80). However, this improvement, due to collateral changes, including the devaluation of lower-level qualifications and the radical shrinkage of employment opportunities in the 1990s, has not yielded a substantial change in the situation of the Roma. “In the 1990s primary-educated people became unemployed and income differences between those with and without secondary education grew large. One fifth of Roma parents are in a situation allowing them to choose secondary education for their children. The rest, four fifths of Roma parents, cannot afford to do that. However, on a national average, 70–80 percent of parents have their children go to secondary school. (...) Thus, the distance between gypsy and non-gypsy youth has not lessened at all” (*Kemény–Janky*, 2004, p. 83).

### 3.2 Employment

Surveying the employment dimension fundamentally determinant in the social situation and living circumstances of individuals in the democratic transition period, researchers found that within the Roma population the proportion of unemployed people reached a dramatic height in a few years. While within the economically active age group<sup>1</sup> the proportion of unemployed and inactive people was 35 percent at the end of 1993, the same proportion was 76 percent among the Roma (Data by Kemény István quoted in *Kovai–Zombory*, 2001, p. 82). The disparities between the employment patterns of the Roma and non-Roma population remain marked. For example, by data on the stability of employment a researcher found that “the discharge and in-job rates indicating the instability of employment of the low-educated average Hungarian population stay below 10 percent for both genders. The same rate referring to the Roma population, however, can be put to 2.5–3 times as high on average in the same years” (*Kertesi*, 2005, p. 189).

### 3.3 Housing

Analysts report similar features – bearing evidence to the significantly worse situation of the Roma – with regard to housing: “In 2003 28 percent of the houses of Roma families has one room, 42 percent has two rooms and 30 percent

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<sup>1</sup> Aged 15–59 in the case of men and 15–54 in the case of women.

has three or more rooms. In the total housing stock the proportion of one-room houses is 12 percent, that of two-room ones is 41 percent and 47 percent of houses has three or more rooms” (*Kemény–Janky*, 2004, p. 58). Unlike within the total housing stock, among houses inhabited by Roma people the proportion of adobe houses is significant – 20 percent. Moreover, nearly half of the houses inhabited by Romas is without modern conveniences (no bathroom and/or toilet) (op. cit. p. 59). It is another considerable factor that the housing circumstances of the Roma population are characterised by strong segregation again. “In 1971 two thirds of the Roma population was living in settlements, in strong segregation. By the time of the 1993 survey segregation had greatly receded. In 2001 we face the same segregational proportions as in 1971. The form is different because there are much less settlements, but the degree of segregation is the same today” (op. cit. p. 57). The strengthening of housing segregation may have several reasons: “Households of the higher layers of society becoming richer and capable of investing have moved and are moving away from their earlier residence. (...) A portion of families affected by unemployment has also moved, to cheaper areas, places and living quarters of the poor and the Roma. (...) Segregation has been further enhanced by ‘welfare’ housing projects, in the course of which secluding gypsies has always been taken great care of. An even greater influence has been borne by urban rehabilitation projects whose admitted aim and loudly proclaimed fruitage was the combing out of gypsies from entire neighbourhoods” (op. cit. pp. 59–60).<sup>2</sup>

### 3.4 Demography and income

As the last element of the overview of the position of the Roma in society, it is worth mentioning their financial situation, influenced by demographic factors. With regard to the above description of the educational level and employment of gypsies, and the fact that the fertility indicators of Roma women, though steadily

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<sup>2</sup> The cited stake of urban rehabilitation programmes is well reflected in these two excerpts from interviews with local government representatives of Józsefváros [a district of Budapest with a large proportion of Roma and poor population]: “So it’s whether we should expel gypsies and poor people from the development area or not. Now I’ve put it sharply and this is obviously not announced so openly in a public debate, but this is the basic issue. Basically the concept of Fidesz [leading political party in the local government] is to push out the poor from the revived urban areas.” About the same topic, a local leader of the political party mentioned in the above excerpt said the following: “It has to be pondered over whether I want to clear out the whole present population from the district or not. I don’t think I should. It’s not expedient to clear out the whole” (*Bajomi*, 2002).

decreasing in the last decades, still surpass that of the total population,<sup>3</sup> it is not surprising that a great percentage of the Roma population has severe subsistence problems. “18 percent of Roma households can make ends meet on their earnings, but are unable to save or invest. The income of 82 percent of gypsy households does not reach the minimum wage level calculated by the Central Bureau of Statistics (KSH) and can cover their basic needs only partially. 56 percent of gypsy households belong to the lowest tenth of the population in terms of wages – poor, in the strictest sense of the word, and cannot even keep a satisfactory diet” (*Kemény–Janky*, 2004, p. 121).

At the end of this brief overview of the Roma population, most affected by segregational processes observable in education, let me add a final note. The above picture may seem somewhat simplified, due to the fact that discussing the large number of non-Roma families living in deep poverty, and the educational, housing and employment differences within the Roma population, would be beyond the scope of this paper. The authors of a study analysing the situation of Eastern European Romas thus describe the Hungarian situation, with reference to the above-mentioned aspects: “Hungarian Roma society is strongly polarized, primarily along structural factors. The process of gentrification has started among the Roma, but at the same time an underclass is in the process of forming, not only of Roma but overrepresented by Roma people” (*Ladányi–Szelényi*, 2004, p. 158).

#### 4 The educational role of local governments

After the brief overview of the situation of the Roma population I am going to describe the determinant role decision-making bodies play in the schooling of gypsy children. Among these actors local governments – the lowest level of the public administration system – deserve special attention, as during the democratic transition an earlier launched decentralisation process became suddenly accomplished with the introduction of the Local Governments Act in 1990, which devolved plenty of tasks upon these bodies. As far as education is concerned, this level of public administration has to ensure the kindergarten and primary school education of children inhabiting the area of the given local government. The regulation developed during the transition yields great liberty to local governments in this field, since it allows the provision of kindergarten and primary school education services not only through institutions of their own management but also through partnerships or in cooperation with religious or

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<sup>3</sup> For data on the fertility of Roma women and a detailed analysis of the number of cohabiting people, see: *Kemény–Janky*, 2004, pp. 17–36.

private schools. From the perspective of our topic the contemporary situation is problematic from several perspectives.

#### *4.1 Educational services depending on the type of locality*

On the one hand it is a considerable burden on local governments that the majority of the costs of kindergarten and school maintenance has to be borne by them. It is true that the central state budget has directly contributed to resolving these tasks by providing various types of financial support – e.g. the so-called ‘normative’ support, funding granted in proportion with the number of children attending the given institutions – but such resources, as the following quote shows, are insufficient. “In 2001 the total state support granted covered 58.2 percent of local governments’ expenditures on public education” (*Balogh–Halász, 2003, p. 95*). One of the problems with financing comes from the fact that there are huge differences between the income sources of local governments maintaining kindergartens and schools (especially the tax revenues kept at the localities). These differences are not sufficiently decreased by compensatory mechanisms (e.g. supplementary support for disfunctional local governments and compensation for regional disadvantages). This results in worsening conditions for kindergarten provision in less well-situated localities and regions – where the proportions of Roma population are particularly high. As an expert of education financing has recently written, “it is apparent from the indexes of provision that on the national level place-shortage ceased to exist by 2000, but on the regional level remarkable differences remain. The main feature of regional differences is that in the economically more developed, more prosperous regions the number of places increased or decreased at a lesser rate than in less developed regions” (*Kotán, 2005*). Institution leaders interviewed recently for a kindergarten survey describe the situation of poor localities graphically: “Another group should be formed in the kindergarten. We are forced to reject children whose parents are at home, who are mostly unemployed and Roma families. The rejected children come to the kindergarten only for the school-preparatory year and for some of them this is not enough. In one year they cannot learn Hungarian, they only speak their Romani mother tongue. Thus, it is us who generate enrolment in special schools.” “In our kindergarten Roma children do not speak Romani, but they do not speak Hungarian, either; their vocabulary is extremely limited. Every year at the learning skills test 6–8 children are retained for another year. These are mostly the children starting kindergarten only at the age of 5, due to place shortage. About half of the retained children can enter a normal class later, the rest go to special classes. This proportion would improve if every child started kindergarten at the age of 3” (*Vágó, 2005*).

The above-described financing difficulties can render attending kindergarten impossible for many children who need this service most at smaller and poorer localities. This situation is especially problematic in terms of the not-so-novel recognition that the success of further school career of disadvantaged children largely depends on adequate pedagogical development from a very young age. It is to be noted here that by this aspect kept in view, in France it is possible for the children of disadvantaged families to start attending kindergarten at the age of 2, one year earlier than in Hungary (*Bajomi, 2005*).

Differences in the prosperity of localities maintaining educational institutions prevail not only in kindergarten provision, mandatory only from the age of five, but in the field of primary education as well. Even though it is beyond the scope of this essay to fully review the various factors influencing the quality of education (e.g. the state and equipment of school buildings), it is worth noting that a survey conducted a few years ago diagnosed considerable differences in professional qualification, which fundamentally influences the teaching process. "The proportion of unqualified teachers may be a good indicator of the differences between localities: while their number is neglectable in cities (in Budapest it is 1.77%, in other cities 0.76% /.../), in villages it is 3.26 percent. In this respect, small villages, where 4.65 percent of teachers work without appropriate qualification, are in a particularly bad situation" (*Imre, 1997a*). About changes in special school services particularly significant from the aspect of the schooling of disadvantaged Roma children, a village school director writes, "the maintenance costs of institutions have remarkably increased and the real value of support has decreased. If the decrease hits the bottom line, the existence of the institution is in jeopardy. On the everyday level this means less divided classes, workshops, specialisation possibilities. On occasion supplementary institutions get closed down (e.g. gym, library). (...) The economic committee of the local government (...) is less and less willing to finance overtime, afternoon classes, it is trying to decrease all kinds of material benefits, thus expedite the decline in quality. (...) Parents who are aware of this often do not enrol their children in the upper primary school. It is better for the children to choose the higher-quality town schools, undertaking, of course, the difficulties of commuting, as well" (*Tulok, 1997*). One more thing needs to be added to the above. School maintainers of localities with worse facilities often depreciate not only the educational services of the schools to a minimal level, but they are also compelled to restrict related welfare services determinant from the aspect of schooling of the disadvantaged: they terminate canteens, school doctor and health visitor services, etc.

#### 4.2 Deficiencies in the field of educational management

The issue of unequal distribution of resources is to be raised not only with regard to financial resources but pedagogical and educational management expertise, as well. The Hungarian national report in an international study on the correlation between education and decentralisation in Central Europe notes that “within local governments there is a separate education unit only in larger localities, but these, even in the case of bigger towns, deals with other issues (e.g. health, welfare, etc.) as well. (...) For numerous smaller school-provider local governments fulfilling educational responsibilities is a severe difficulty. Experts with a university degree are rare to see in these villages, thus the supervision of education is of uncertain quality” (Balázs et al. 2000, p. 40). According to the case studies of an empirical survey conducted in the middle of the 1990s, it was characteristic even of certain larger cities that the educational decision-makers of the locality could not professionally evaluate the operation of educational institutions: “(...) the local government watches the operation of schools only from an economic point of view, there is no professional-pedagogical supervision at all” (Halász, 1997, p. 67).

The above claims about the shortage of school management competencies throw new light on our earlier statements about the recent intensification of segregation processes among and within schools. At the beginning of the 1990s – and often even today – the school maintenance activities of local governments having become the owners of schools in 1990 focused primarily on the routine operation of local service systems, including the educational institutions of the locality. At the same time the assessment of the mode of operation, pedagogical characteristics and the broader socio-political context of the operation of the institutions was outside the horizon of local authorities in the years following the change of regime, and quite often it still is. An informative research study in this respect, conducted at the end of the 1990s, highlighted the fact that at the localities included in the research – where the majority of the population is Roma people wrestling with severe problems – elected leaders don’t do much to resolve local problems. “At localities where almost nothing happens on a local level (there are only such localities in our sample, with one exception) it seems that the state is expected to work a miracle (...)” (Pik, 2000, p. 338). On the other hand, the study pointed out that considerable differences can exist between the operation of kindergartens at similarly governed localities, mainly due to the attitude of the head of the institution – and practically independently of the activities of the local decision-makers. “Empathic atmosphere, in which the parent and the child is equally accepted, is of course beneficial. (...) In the above case study two villages of similar character and similarly negative attitude towards the Roma were compared. The atmosphere of the two kindergartens is different



though, and that is why their attendance is different. The rejective, parent-blaming attitude of the kindergarten teacher can deter even the well-intended parent trying to integrate, as in Dalospetri” (Pik, 2000, p. 363). The disinterest of local decision-makers is well illustrated in a university thesis prepared in 2000, whose author reported that in the beginning and middle of the 1990s in eight villages of a crisis-stricken North-Hungarian region local decision-makers were unmotivated for years to take any measures against the fact that the majority of Roma children living in the village – like during state socialism – left the school system without completing the eight classes of primary education and did only six years on average, without any qualifications utilizable at the labour market (Bohn-Székely, 2000). And a very recent case study describes a situation in which the local government and the educational institutions of a locality bordering Budapest seem unable to find solutions to the challenges arising in the course of running the local educational network in a way that does not lead to grave conflicts. First serious conflicts were generated in the life of the locality by the fact that a special school educating mostly Roma children living in deep poverty, which was earlier situated in an extemporaneous building, was moved to a wing constructed adjacent to the primary school of the locality. Following this integrational measure, prepared obviously without appropriate consideration, serious objections have recently arisen against the new concept devised to resolve conflicts of the ‘co-education’ of pupils of the ‘normal’ and the ‘special’ school. Certain teachers and the local minority government representing the interests of the Roma have expressed their discontent with the latest idea of the local government, which would resolve the issue of educating gypsy children in special school in an extremely segregated way: they intend the new special school to be located at the segregated gypsy settlement of the locality (Matern, 2005). Finally, let me summarize the experiences we gained in the course of a research study conducted in a working-class district of the capital city (Bajomi-Berényi-Erőss-Imre, 2006). This study showed that huge differences have developed within the primary school network of this district. We found three main types of school: first there were the elite institutions recruiting pupils exclusively from the higher social classes through applying a non-official entrance test. Secondly, there were the so-called ‘bipolar’ schools where elite pupils were accepted in specialized classes, while disadvantaged children took up the bulk of normal classes with less qualified teachers who did not take these pupils’ special educational needs into consideration. And thirdly, there were schools in the examined district that had gradually specialized on the education of disadvantaged children. While special tuition for disadvantaged children has become a priority for the local educational government, the educational decision-makers of the district have not been able to handle the segregational processes forming among

schools competing one another due to the decrease in the number of pupils and to financing based on 'head quotas'.

The above examples are meant to illustrate the fact that in the greatly decentralised Hungarian school system serious problems are bound to remain unresolved and that strong segregational tendencies can evolve without countermeasures taken by local decision-makers.<sup>4</sup> If we look at the issue from the perspective of the education of Roma children, we may find that in many cases there is no chance for a change because of the attitude of decision-makers, because the leaders of the local government and educational institutions take schools' traditional mode of operation as natural, unalterable. For example, the fact that Roma children living at the locality receive education of a reduced value in segregated school buildings, or that gypsy children are unable to complete a normal primary school due to the lack of appropriate skills development and other special assistance, or that Roma pupils *ab ovo* start their primary education in special schools.

#### 4.3 *How to put necessary knowledge through to the target group?*

Another factor to encumber the development of adequate local solutions is that successfully applied education-management models and pedagogical methods to eliminate segregated education are not well-known locally. The case of the primary school of Pátka is rather edifying in this respect. This village school can now set forth significant achievements in educating Roma and non-Roma pupils together. However, teaching methods applied in the school were only transformed after the complaint of a group of parents led to an investigation by the Ombudsman of Minority Rights in 2003 to examine why Roma and non-Roma children were segregated during meals. Growing tired of the scandal swelling nationwide, the teachers of the school took the advice of the Ombudsman to cooperate with Ec-Pec Foundation (supported by Soros Foundation) and adopt its child-focused pedagogical programme, which was aimed to help the integration of children with a social and cultural background differing from that of the majority. It is to be noted that even though the development of the programme was to a great extent supported financially by the Ministry of Education with the aid

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<sup>4</sup> And it is also an example of pressuring local leaders into making decisions generating segregation by the non-Roma majority population of the locality. The Jászladány school conflict that stirred up a great storm in the past few years burst out when the leaders of the local government strongly supported the plan of establishing a foundation-school. According to the local Roma leaders, the establishment of the school was motivated by the unspoken purpose of keeping gypsy children away from this school, whose parents could not afford the costs of private schooling.

of EU resources, the leaders of the locality were at first reluctant to accept the recommendation of the Ombudsman (*Pálmai, 2006*).

The problems of the local lack of expertise and competence in pedagogical development were drafted as early as the beginning of the 1990s. Traditionalists gave agency to the County Pedagogical Institutes founded in 1985 and the Regional Educational Centres, decentralized educational management organizations set up in 1993, to resolve these problems. A liberal concept was also formed, which emphasized the necessity of creating a market of professional services and the principle of free choice between service providers (*Horváth, 1994*). To regularize the forming market of service providers, a list of officially registered pedagogy experts was drawn up at the beginning of the 1990s, but due to the haphazard way of becoming included in the list, the local government purchasing the services in many cases cannot be at all assured of the reliability of the experts' advice. It was a further problem that less prosperous local authorities could not afford paying for expert work. These difficulties were somewhat ameliorated by the Ministry of Education at the end of the 1990s, when the so-called "SZAK application" was introduced, providing local governments with funding available for expert studies. However, it is to be understood that the availability of funding is no guarantee that every local government that should improve the quality of services will request expert help. An important development to be mentioned here is the integrational programme introduced by the new Ministry of Education set up in 2002, including several sub-programmes, one of which is the establishment of the National Integrational Network, whose task is to make education-management solutions and pedagogical methods aiding the reduction of segregational processes and the realization of integrated education widely available, by way of participation of experts and model institutions. (To our knowledge, no analysis of the efficiency of the operation of this network has been prepared to date.)

From what has been described it may be apparent that in the case of an extremely decentralised educational system there is a high chance for certain serious problems to remain unsolved and, as a consequence, to permanently collide with the interests of those in a weak advocacy position. The situation is not significantly improved by the fact that since the democratic transition national and ethnic minorities, including the Roma, can form minority local governments, bodies that are authorized to express a preliminary opinion on plans concerning the given minority. From this perspective the following statement of the Ombudsman of National and Ethnic Minority Rights is noteworthy: "This year again a major group of submitted cases was made up of petitions about ignoring or contravening the right of minority local governments to assess and agree on issues related to education." "(...) The most common type of complaints attests that certain local governments are not familiar with or do not take seriously the

relevant legal regulations. For example, in certain investigated cases the local government wants to reorganize or terminate educational institutions or appoint new headmasters without acquiring the agreement of the minority government or refuse to reckon with its veto ruling” (*Report*, 2004, pp. 50–51). A further difficulty is that most minority local governments representing the Roma are not sufficiently prepared to draw up relevant alternatives and professional recommendations in the course of the local educational decision-making process, due to a lack of appropriate training, awareness, services and professional counselling to help their work.

The independence and autonomy of local governments was considered highly valuable during the political transformation, partly as a consequence of the forceful abrogation of the independence of numerous localities during state socialism. However, considering the shortages in access to educational goods and in the competence of local decision-makers, it is a reasonable question to raise how to move towards a system of public administration which – while it allows the prevalence of the merits of decentralized management and democratic decision-making near one’s locality – is more preferential to expertly developed democratic decisions, which would also provide a greater chance to reduce inequalities in access to educational goods. The public administration model of Sweden is remarkable in this respect. While in Hungary educational decisions are made at more than two thousand localities, in the Scandinavian country having approximately the same population as Hungary there are approximately three hundred subregions with independent legal-political status that dispose of broad authority regarding the issues of operating, broadening and narrowing the local school network (*Haecht*, 1996). It is to be mentioned here that a similar system for developing the Hungarian system of public administration was envisaged by two renowned figures of twentieth-century Hungarian social science, István Bíbó and Ferenc Erdei. However, the concept favouring a close cooperation between towns and the neighbouring localities could not be realised either directly after its conception, during the short democratic period following World War II, or in the course of the numerous reorganizations of public administration later, although in some eras certain points of the concept came into the fore again. (In the period following the evolution of political pluralism certain elements of this concept were realized in the form of so-called ‘subregion-level administration’ and ‘subregional cooperation between localities’.)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed description of the history of Hungarian public administration reforms and issues of the concept of ‘city and environs’, see: *Hoffman*, 2003.

#### 4.4 Educational cooperation between local governments and schools

Even though the author finds it desirable to restructure the local government system in a way that the subregional level would be turned into an independent level of public administration, a fast change in this direction cannot be expected, due to various adverse interests. This is also unlikely because as a counter-reaction to the earlier forced merges of localities, the independence of localities became a very important value in the course of the democratic transition. And, as is the case with other reforms as well, considerable counter-interests would have to be reckoned with, as the elimination of mayor positions or the restraintment of authority would be undesirable for many local leaders.

Despite the fractured character of the public administration system and educational management within it, educational partnerships connecting localities and schools, sometimes with a remarkable history, do exist. Also, there are plenty of markers to the fact that educational decision-makers on the top level consider it more and more important to facilitate cooperation between school-operating authorities and between educational institutions. As it was found in a research study carried out in the second half of the 1990s (*Györgyi–Imre, 1998*), the educational partnerships<sup>6</sup> of that time operated on the basis of agreements between local governments were mostly subsistent forms of cooperations that had been formed at the time of establishing school districts during the communist era, when localities left without educational institutions had to find a solution to the schooling of children living in their area.

However, there are also new forms of horizontal cooperation between localities and schools that can be interpreted as solutions provided to the difficulties emerging after the political transition. Thus, today numerous partnerships embracing schools especially at small localities, often called ‘school unions’, exist, within the framework of which cooperation is realized in some relatively well-defined areas between otherwise independent schools. For example, the schools of rather isolated localities often join forces to organize competitions for their pupils and professional lectures for their teachers. There are also examples of otherwise poor localities pooling their funds to hire a pedagogy expert for some task, whose work they would not be able to finance alone (*Pásztor, 2004*).

Recently it has been suggested that partnerships should take part in solving the problems related to substituting teachers on leave, and that several small localities could simultaneously utilize the work force of teachers partially employed in small schools. However, the fact that teachers are employed by individual local governments encumbers the rationalization of teachers’ employment (*Halász, 2000*).

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<sup>6</sup> The number of these at the time of the cited research was below 300.

Besides the presently utopian notions of travelling teachers, it has also occurred recently that sub-regions and their school-users may need other travelling experts, as well. For example, in a North Hungarian subregion the notion of travelling experts was realized as early as in the 1990s, in a way that specialized educational services (e.g. medicinal gymnastics, speech therapy, parental counselling, career counselling, etc.) would be available for small localities involved in the educational partnership. The educational decision-makers of the administration unit of Pest County embracing the capital city followed this early initiation by starting to expedite a cooperation agreement for similar purposes only at the beginning of the new millennium (*Gerencsér, 2001*). Cooperations between localities may also alleviate the above-described lack of competence in educational management. As a Hungarian expert thereof writes, "It is more and more prevalent that localities enter into partnership in order to jointly create the management or administration competence that they would be unable to do alone. In this respect the widely-known initiation in Borsod County, which resulted in the formation of a subregional network of public education experts who can provide professional assistance to the school providers of the region in their public education decision-making, is remarkable. In this case the costs of employing the expert are jointly provided by the concerned localities, and they all enjoy the advantages of increased management expertise"<sup>7</sup> (*Halász, 2000*).

The formation of partnerships between schools and school-providing localities is rooted not only in spontaneous initiations but also in the fact that the encouragement of cooperation has become a priority of educational policy since the second part of the 1990s. Authorities stimulate partnerships with various financial incentives as well, for example with normative support for commuting children, supplementary normative support for children attending schools operated in partnership, and support for localities that educate children aged 6–10 locally, in the school of the locality and children aged 10–14 in a school operated in partnership (*Halász–Palotás, 2003, p. 70*). One of the applications of the Public Foundation for the Modernization of Public Education (KOMA) in 2004 supported the development and implementation of programmes that aided the improvement of cooperation between sub-regions or school unions. Regarding financial resources becoming available and expanding in the course of the EU accession,<sup>8</sup> the principle of partnership is a priority, as well (*Bajomi, 2000*). Educational policy advocating cooperation between schools and localities is manifested in the recently launched model program supporting the establishment of

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed description of the founding and operation of the Ózd area educational cooperation, a model sample from our perspective, see: Bognár, *n.d.*

<sup>8</sup> Especially in the case of PHARE programs after 1999 and the Human Resource Development Program (known in Hungarian as HEFOP) accepted and presently running as part of the National Development Plan I.

subregional educational partnerships, through which one such program in each county could receive funding. In 2003 another nation-wide experimental program was launched, whose aim was to build up functioning subregional systems of educational expert services. As a consequence of several concurrent factors, the number of school partnerships is on the rise. These factors include educational policies and related financial support aiming to encourage cooperation between schools and localities; demographic processes resulting in a gradually decreasing number of children, which increasingly necessitate cooperation; and the shortage of financial resources necessary for maintaining small localities. While the above-cited research conducted in the second part of the 1990s (*Györgyi-Imre*, 1999) reported 295 partnerships registered with the Ministry of Education, data from 2002 proves the existence of 563 educational partnerships in Hungary, nearly 80 percent of which were operated by localities with less than 2,000 inhabitants (*Halász-Lannert*, 2003, p. 396).

As could be seen from this brief overview, encouraging horizontal cooperation has become a priority of educational policy. However, as recent research shows, cooperation between schools and localities is not so prevalent. In recent surveys focusing on the education of disadvantaged children in districts of Budapest, the weakness of relations between educational institutions and non-governmental organizations is striking. "There is no substantive cooperation between the different institutions participating in the education of children. We can also see numerous indications of the fact that the employees of certain institutions are content with accomplishing the tasks imposed upon them, but they do not really care about how productive the complex work of various experts and institutions is" (*Bajomi*, 2002). "The Local Government, (...) once a month or even more frequently, summons the meeting of headmasters, where the latter get informed about changes and decisions of their concern, and at the same time they can attempt to influence the decision-making processes. (There is also a forum where headmasters can form their opinions and collate their standpoints without the presence of district educational decision-makers: this is the headmasters' work team.) Apart from these there are no local fora, institutional framework, media (e.g. in the form of a newsletter) for the horizontal association, cooperation, information flow of teachers and educational institutions, and institutions, NGOs providing other human services. It can also be claimed that assessments, analyses of district-level educational matters – with the exception of the storm-stirring 'reorganizations' – do not reach broader publicity" (*Bajomi-Berényi-Erőss-Imre*, 2006).

The above statements recording the lack of cooperation – obviously applicable not only for two districts of Budapest – are alarming, because the chance for solution for the issues of segregational processes in localities and schools, and of the improvement of the schooling of disadvantaged social groups discussed in

this paper lies – as international experiences also show<sup>9</sup> – in multi-faceted, collective analytic work by various partners and in cooperations based on joint strategic planning.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, analyses of the operation of EAZ (Educational Action Zone) regions in England running in the framework of positive discrimination, and of prioritised educational regions in France and Belgium. (Bajomi, 1993), (Bajomi, 2004) (Bajomi, Berkovits–Erőss–Imre, 2003).



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