

SZENT ATANÁZ GÖR. KAT. HITTUDOMÁNYI FŐISKOLA
INSTITUTUM SANCTO ATHANASIO NOMINATUM

ATHANASIANA

56



Nyíregyháza
2023

ATHANASIANA
a Szent Atanáz Görögkatolikus Hittudományi Főiskola folyóirata

Alapítva 1995-ben

Főszerkesztő:
Ivancsó István

A szerkesztőbizottság tagjai:
Janka György, Szabó Péter, Véghseő Tamás, Vincze Krisztián

A szerkesztőség címe:
Szent Atanáz Görögkatolikus Hittudományi Főiskola
H 4400 Nyíregyháza
Bethlen G. u. 13–19.
Tel./Fax: +36/42/597-600
www.szentatanaz.hu
szentatanaz@szentatanaz.hu

Postacím:
H-4401 Nyíregyháza, Pf. 303

Felelős kiadó:
dr. Odrobina László mb. rektor

© Szent Atanáz Görögkatolikus Hittudományi Főiskola, 2023

ISSN 1219-9915

Megrendelhető a fenti címek bármelyikén
Az egyes számok ára: 1.000 Ft

INÁNTSY-PAP ÁGNES – SZILÁGYI BARNABÁS

Aspects for choosing the right educational institution in Hungary

CONTENTS: 1. Introduction; 2. Aspects of school selection; 3. Free school choice – intensification of social inequalities?; 4. Conclusion.

It is an important research question whether parents have the right to choose a school for their child. The vehemence of the debate on the right to choose schools is partly caused by attitudes towards certain basic principles.¹⁹⁴ According to one of the cornerstones of the opinions, all students should have equal access to schooling, regardless of their social background and individual performance. For this, it would be essential to minimize the differences between institutions and distribute students equally. According to the opposite, meritocratic principle, the student's future social position does not depend on his social origin, but on his inborn talent, acquired knowledge and diligence, therefore the choice based on knowledge and abilities and institutional selection have a serious role.

Considering school choice, the two principles differ because in the case of the first one, the assumption is that it is the best for society if everyone gets the same opportunity for schooling, without particular individual merit. By contrast, according to the meritocratic principle the individual must use his own resources in order to make maximum use of the opportunities provided by society. The conflict how to enforce these two basic principles makes the issue of school choice complex.¹⁹⁵ emphasizes that the debate over school choice is actually a legal issue. The comparison of Rawls's and Nozick's theories provides an opportunity for this. Rawl focuses on the fact that – referring to the approach of collectivism – even the most disadvantaged have the right to the common good. In contrast, Nozick takes the principle of a meritocratic society, based on which the individual's performance gives entitlement to the common good including the right to choose the right school for the individual. Besides both principles, many pro and con arguments can be made. In Hungary, the schooling system of state socialism seemingly avoided the issue of school choice, however, Andor and Liskó¹⁹⁶ draw attention to the fact that

¹⁹⁴ HALLINAN, M., „Social Foundations of School Choice”, in SAHA, L. J. (szerk.), *International Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Education*, Exeter 1997, 365–369.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ ANDOR MIHÁLY – LISKÓ ILONA, „Iskolaválasztás és mobilitás”, in *Iskolakultúra* (1999) 4–10.

hidden selection mechanisms operated within the system because „under the presence of the manageable school system, ‘an informal schooling system’ appeared which was mainly socially differentiated and in many cases selected even at the age of 6”. At the same time, they remind that the decision needed to select a school could only be reached informally because of the limited flow of information. According to their approach, the changes after 1990 (municipalities and churches also became school maintainers, funding and financing changed) made public education complicated and more difficult to review therefore the process of school choice also changed.

2. Aspects of school selection

School choice may have several aspects including political, legal, market-based, theological and social aspects, each of which approaches the question of school selection from a different perspective. Hill and Jochim,¹⁹⁷ Chubb and Moe,¹⁹⁸ Mintron,¹⁹⁹ Bulman and Kirp²⁰⁰ scrutinize political groups supporting and opposing free school choice in their studies and show that school choice can also be a political issue. According to the political and educational approach, free school choice is the basic principle of education policy based on individuals’ folkright and liberal pluralism, as well as the cornerstone of communities’ efforts to establish schools and convey culture. At the same time the state feels responsible for everyone, therefore freedom is superseded by the intention of equalization.²⁰¹ The political conflict related to school choice raises its head by emphasizing different preferences in each region and nation, but neither side seems to be an obvious winner. It is certain that those who argue for free school choice aim to develop new types of alternative forms of education, which most often predicts the possibility of developing education based on emphasizing minority rights.²⁰²

According to the *legal approach*, at the international level, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) clearly states that „parents have the prior right to choose the education to be given to their children”. At the civil level, Point 2 of Article XVI. of the Constitution of Hungary (2011) regulates this issue at the highest level. It states that „parents have the right to choose the education to be

¹⁹⁷ HILL, P. – JOCHIM A., „Political Perspective on School Choice”, in BERENDS M. – SPRINGER M. – BALLOU D. – WALBERG H. J. (szerk.), *Handbook of research on school choice*, New York 2009, 3–17.

¹⁹⁸ CHUBB, J. E. – MOE, T. M., *Politics, markets, and American’s schools*, Washington 1990.

¹⁹⁹ MINTRON, M., *Political entrepreneurs and school choice*, Washington 2000.

²⁰⁰ BULMAN, R. C. – KIRP, D. L., „The shifting politice of school choice”, in SUGARMAN, S. D. – KEMERER, F. R. (szerk.), *School choice and social controversy: Politics, policy and law*, Washington 1999.

²⁰¹ PUSZTAI GABRIELLA, *A társadalmi tőke és az iskolai pályafutás*, Budapest 2009.

²⁰² HILL, PAUL T., „The new political economy of public education: Policy and research”, in FUHRMAN, S. H. – COHEN, D. L. – MOSHER, F. (szerk.), *The state of education policy research*, Mahwah 2007, 87–104.

given to their child” and considers it a constitutional right. Since the education system is plural from the view of the maintainer, too, we must focus on the special situation of religious schools when analysing the legal situation of school choice. The § 24 of the EMMI Decree 20/2012 (VIII. 31) provides guidelines about the regulations related to the designation of schools, which distinguishes between church-run and private public education institutions in this respect. They are obliged to admit all students only if there is only one kindergarten or primary school in the settlement.

According to the *market-based approach*, free school choice has a quality-boosting effect, which practically creates such a competitive situation in which schools stimulate each other to reach better achievements.²⁰³ Berends and Zottola²⁰⁴ mention that in many reformers’ view, the market-based consumer choice and competition between autonomous schools can start innovative processes, however, it can also start a process of segregation at the same time. Parents at higher rank are more likely to choose a school for their child where there is a smaller proportion of children of low-status parents.

In the *sociological approach* the reproduction model was dominant for a long time which stated that social disadvantages are reproduced with the help of school or the initial differences are intensified so much that they are unable to do anything against them.²⁰⁵ The theory of rational decision is described by Weber in his work *Theory of Social Action*, then reinterpreted by Boudon,²⁰⁶ who formulates the theory of rational action according to which individuals might choose the alternative in which they see the possibility of the greatest return. The parents’ decision appears along three factors: information, available possibilities of selection, investment-return calculation. Berends and Zottola²⁰⁷ remind us that the researchers who argue for the theory of rational action assume that the educational market is open, fair and unbiased. They believe this selection process will lead to „allocative efficiency” and may increase both the relationship between services and consumers and productive efficiency, which will encourage schools to provide better services.²⁰⁸ Further controversial issues arise in connection with the theory of rational action; Be-

²⁰³ CHUBB, J. E. – MOE, T. M., *Politics, markets, and American’s schools*, Washington 1990.

²⁰⁴ BERENDS, M. – ZOTTOLA, G., „Social Perspectives on School Choice”, in BERENDS M. – MATTHEW, G. – SPRINGER, M. – DALE, B. – HERBERT, J. W. (szerk.), *Handbook of Research on School Choice*, New York 2009, 35–55.

²⁰⁵ BOURDIEU, P., *A társadalmi egyenlőtlenségek újatermelődése*, Budapest 1978, 71–129.; IMRE ANNA, „Az iskolai hátrány összetevői”, in *Educatio* 1 (2000) 62–72.

²⁰⁶ BOUDON, R., „Beyond Rational Choice Theory”, in *Annual Reviews of Sociology* 4 (2003) 1–21.

²⁰⁷ BERENDS, M. – ZOTTOLA, G., „Social Perspectives on School Choice”, in BERENDS M. – MATTHEW, G. – SPRINGER, M. – DALE, B. – HERBERT, J. W. (szerk.), *Handbook of Research on School Choice*, New York 2009, 35–55.

²⁰⁸ SCHNEIDER, M. – TESKE, P. – MARSCHALL, M., *Consumer choice and the quality of American schools*, Princeton 2000.

rends and Zottola²⁰⁹ highlight four of them. On the one hand, they suggest that in fact this theory includes a market metaphor. On the other hand, a clarification is needed to see what the „best choice” means according to the definition of the theory of rational action. Another area of concern is the question of the uniqueness of parental choices. Finally, it also seems to be necessary to clarify the influencing role of race-ethnicity in the process of school selection. A modified application of Boudon’s theory of rational action has also presented itself, since several researchers state that the „rigidity” of the theory of rational action presumes a society that is without any cultural constraints. According to Pusztai,²¹⁰ within the sociological approach, the aspect of school choice according to people and society can be an interesting perspective which – among others – can be captured in Coleman’s and Boudon’s relevant theories. Pusztai’s comparative analysis points out that the cornerstone of Coleman’s²¹¹ theory is an intentional action to satisfy needs at the individual level. Since a society consists of individuals and their relationships, social phenomena can be interpreted as the effects of individual decisions. The effort to fulfil individual needs is realized in the environment, therefore the decisions, and consequently the process of school choice are not individualized activities but behaviour modified by the social environment. In Coleman’s view people make choices according to the dominant norms in their relationships. In contrast, Boudon argues that school choosers make an individual decision in which the most important consideration is the idea of individual return and benefit. The explanations of the rational action theory were compared in Sági’s²¹² study. According to Boudon’s theory, in the case of school choice, the primary and secondary effects of the involved family background prevail. The primary effect is the transmission of cultural capital. In the case of the interpretation of the secondary effect, Boudon²¹³ supposes that parents make a rational calculation on which institution may serve their child’s interest the best, and calculate the ration of investment and return. Sági²¹⁴ emphasizes that in Boudon’s interpretation, the „investment cost” is very varied regarding different social groups. Berends and Zottola²¹⁵ remind us that the

²⁰⁹ BERENDS, M. – ZOTTOLA, G., „Social Perspectives on School Choice”, in BERENDS M. – MATTHEW, G. – SPRINGER, M. – DALE, B. – HERBERT, J. W. (szerk.), *Handbook of Research on School Choice*, New York 2009), 35–55.

²¹⁰ PUSZTAI GABRIELLA, *A társadalmi tőke és az iskolai pályafutás*, Budapest 2009.

²¹¹ COLEMAN, J., *Foundations of Social Theory*, Cambridge 1990.

²¹² SÁGI MATILD, „Az iskolaválasztás oksági modellje a racionáliscelevés-elmélet alapján”, in LANNERT JUDIT (szerk.), *Hogyan tovább? Pályaválasztási elképzelések Magyarországon*, Budapest 2003, 52–57.

²¹³ BOUDON, R., *Education, opportunity and social inequality*, New York 1974.

²¹⁴ SÁGI MATILD, „Az iskolaválasztás oksági modellje a racionáliscelevés-elmélet alapján”, in LANNERT JUDIT (szerk.), *Hogyan tovább? Pályaválasztási elképzelések Magyarországon*, Budapest 2003, 52–57.

²¹⁵ BERENDS, M. – ZOTTOLA, G., „Social Perspectives on School Choice”, in BERENDS M. – MATTHEW, G. – SPRINGER, M. – DALE, B. – HERBERT, J. W. (szerk.), *Handbook of Research on School Choice*, New York 2009, 35–55.

researchers who argue for the theory of rational action assume that the educational market is open, fair and unbiased. Bell²¹⁶ draws attention to the same fact. The representatives of the rational action theory assume that this choice process will lead to „allocative efficiency” and might lead to a better relationship between services and consumers, and might increase productive efficiency, which will encourage schools to provide better services.²¹⁷ A number of controversial issues arise related to the theory of rational action; Berends and Zottola²¹⁸ propose on the one hand that this theory actually includes a market metaphor. On the other hand, in their opinion it is worth clarifying what „the best choice” means according to the formulation of the rational action theory. It is an interesting question what the concept of „best choice” means for parents. The question of the uniqueness of parental choices seems to be an area of concern. Can the types of the best choice be standardized considering different social groups? Boudon’s²¹⁹ reinterpretation of rational decision theory intends to handle the „rigidity” of rational action theory because rational theory assumes a society that is culturally bondless. According to Boudon’s rational choice theory (RCT), an individual will choose those schools for his child that are assumed to serve his individual preferences the best, and the individual will act only based on his own interest.

Finally, the *ecclesiastical/theological aspect* of school choice must be taken into consideration, since Greek Catholic schools are under the control of the Catholic Church. Thus, in addition to state regulations the guidelines of the church must also be taken into account when operating the school. Henry R. Levin²²⁰ draws attention to the fact that church education is not free in many countries therefore the issue of school selection for poorer families cannot be interpreted in the same framework as for affluent families. The Catholic Church clearly expresses its opinion about parents’ free school choice in its several documents. This issue is the most markedly described in the document entitled *Gravissimum Educationis Momentum* of the Vatican Council II. that states the universal right to education in its very first chapter.

„Everyone – whatever race, social class or age group they belong to – has an inevitable right due to their personal dignity to the education that serves the purpose of their life, adapts to their individual

²¹⁶ BELL, M., „All Choices Created Equal? The Role of Choice Sets in the Selection of Schools?”, in *Peabody journal of education* 84 (2005) 191–208.

²¹⁷ SCHNEIDER, M. – TESKE, P. – MARSCHALL, M., *Consumer choice and the quality of American schools*, Princeton 2000.

²¹⁸ BERENDS, M. – ZOTTOLA, G., „Social Perspectives on School Choice”, in BERENDS M. – MATTHEW, G. – SPRINGER, M. – DALE, B. – HERBERT, J. W. (szerk.), *Handbook of Research on School Choice*, New York 2009, 35–55.

²¹⁹ BOUDON, R., „Beyond Rational Choice Theory”, in *Annual Reviews of Sociology* 4 (2003) 1–21.

²²⁰ LEVIN, HENRY R., „An Economic Perspective on School Choice”, in BERENDS M. – SPRINGER M. – BALLOU D. – WALBERG H. J. (szerk.), *Handbook of research on school choice*, New York 2009, 19–34.

abilities, gender, the given culture and national traditions, and at the same time is open to fraternal relationships with other peoples, and thus serves real unity and peace on the Earth. True education shapes the individual and keeps the ultimate goal in mind as well as the interest of the society, of which the individual is a member, and in which he takes a role as an adult”.²²¹

Endre Tózsér²²² compares this document with Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and points to the fact that, although they are two texts of different styles, it is easy to notice the effort in the same direction. In point 1 of the Vatican Council II. it is stated that true education forms the individual while keeping the ultimate goal in mind to benefit the society of which the individual is a member and in whose life the individual will take an active role as an adult. The school educates for the society, since students can experience the community in the school environment, too, and after acquiring its norms and expanding this space, they reach the society as a whole. In point 3 of the document, he emphasizes that education is primarily the responsibility of the family, but it comes upon the support of the entire society. If the parents or other communities did not do this, it would be the duty of civil society to organize education in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, taking the parent’s wishes into consideration. Point 6 of the decree emphasizes that

„parents, whose primarily and inalienable duty and right is to bring up their children, must be free to choose the school. Therefore, the power of the state whose task is to ensure and protect the freedom of citizens must – in accordance with the requirement of distributive justice – ensure the distribution of the state subsidy in which parents can follow their conscience and choose the school for their children freely”.

In point 7 it is stated that the Church expresses its appreciation to those states and authorities that take into account the pluralism of today’s society, realizes true religious freedom, and helps families to ensure that the education of children in all schools would take place based on the religious and moral principles of families. In Hungary, on behalf of the Catholic Church, the Conference of Hungarian Catholic Diocese (CHCD) issued a statement in October 2009, according to which the Hungarian Catholic Church can – based on applicable laws – enforce its right to get to know about the religious commitment of parents/children/students during

²²¹ *Gravissimum Educationis* 1965 §1.

²²² TÓZSÉR ENDRE, „Nyilatkozat a keresztény nevelésről”, in KRÁNITZ MIHÁLY (szerk.), *A II. Vatikáni Zsinat negyven év távlatából*, Budapest 2002.

school/kindergarten admissions in its educational institutions. Based on the above, it may be a particularly exciting question whether the really committed and regular church going parents enrol their kids to Greek Catholic schools.

3. Free school choice – intensification of social inequalities?

Regarding how parents look at a school while choosing a school, we must refer to the theory by all means that interprets schools as special, culture-creating institutions. According to the theory developed by John Meyer and his colleagues,²²³ parents consider school rites, ideology, the teachers' and students' sense of identity to be a more important operating principle than the effort for scholastic success, since these shape and form the school and thus the choice of school as well. Meyer and his colleagues point to that enforcing the principle of equality in the school system only offers the myth of rationality, which is impossible to enforce.²²⁴ Referring to Lin,²²⁵ Berends and Zottola emphasize that the school is the „network” of administrative workers, teachers and students, through which the student acquires the dominant social norms and rules needed to maintain inequality.

Nagy,²²⁶ Kertesi and Kézdi²²⁷ also dealt with the issue of free school selection in Hungary. Kertesi and Kézdi's results show that „the free school choice reduces the role of residential separation in the segregation between schools by the fact that many students of higher social status attend schools further away from their home. According to their opinion, „in towns where more students go to schools further away from their home, the segregation between schools is also stronger”. Berends and Zottola²²⁸ mention that, according to many reformers, the market-based consumer choice and the competition between autonomous schools can initiate innovative processes. In addition, free school choice may contribute to the reduction of bureaucracy, and consequently new organizational and institutional strategies can initiate, which can foster better student performance. Besides, they draw attention to the fact that the process of choosing a school creates a new opportunity for parents to improve the relationship between home and school, and consequently

²²³ MEYER, J. W. – ROWAN, B., „Institutionalized organizations. Formal structure as myth and ceremony”, in *American Journal of Sociology* 83 (1977) 340–363.

²²⁴ PERROW, C., *Szervezetszociológia*, Budapest 2002.

²²⁵ LIN, N., „Building a network theory of social capital”, in *Connections* 1 (1999) 28–51.

²²⁶ NAGY PÉTER TIBOR, „Egyházi iskolaindítás és az állam az első parlamenti ciklus idején”, in *Magyar Pedagógia* 3–4 (1995) 297–313.

²²⁷ KERTESI GÁBOR – KÉZDI GÁBOR, *Iskolai szegregáció, szabad iskolaválasztás és helyi oktatáspolitikai 100 magyar városban*, (Budapesti Munkagazdaságtani Füzetek 6.), Budapest 2014.; KORZENSZKY RICHÁRD, „Egyházi iskolák a törvényt módosítás után”, in *Új Pedagógiai Szemle* 2 (1997) 65–71.

²²⁸ BERENDS, M. – ZOTTOLA, G., „Social Perspectives on School Choice”, in BERENDS M. – MATTHEW, G. – SPRINGER, M. – DALE, B. – HERBERT, J. W. (szerk.), *Handbook of Research on School Choice*, New York 2009, 35–55.

schools can be more open to parental needs. In their opinion, this tendency can be favourable especially for lower-status parents, because this way they will feel the school less „distanced” and „distant”, and will be better able to convey their own needs to the school, which can result in better student performance.²²⁹ However, Holme²³⁰ reminds us that parents make their decisions regarding school choice based on their resources linked to their own socioeconomic status. They choose such a school where students with a higher social status study and avoid schools attended by minority and poor children. It is likely that the strength of this striving differs by social stratum, however, recognizing this striving, educational institutions do not aspire to increase the quality of education, but to make the composition of the students of the school attractive to those of higher status.²³¹ And this can foster the process of segregation. Forray²³² and Jankó²³³ report on the social effects of school districting in detail. Their study reveals that districting is not only a social but also an economic and demographic issue in the given region.

4. Conclusion

Overall, we can see that the researchers from different disciplines approach the issue of school choice from different views. The researchers of educational science are searching for the answer, among others, to what organizational structure, pedagogical program and institutional infrastructural aspects count when parents choose a school for their child, as well as to what social background variables the types of school choice can be connected.

²²⁹ COOKSON, J. P. W., „Privatization and educational equity: Can market create a just school system?”, in *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 1 (2002) 57–64.

²³⁰ HOLME J. J., „Buying homes, buying schools: School choice and the social construction of school quality”, in *Harvard Education Review* 2 (2002) 177–205.

²³¹ GEWIRT, S. – BALL, S. – BOWE, R., *Markets, choice and equity in education*, Buchingam 1995.

²³² FORRAY R. KATALIN, *Az iskolakörzetesítés társadalmi hatásai*, (Egyetemi doktori értekezés), Szeged 1976.

²³³ JANKÓ KRISZTINA, *Az iskolakörzetesítés társadalmi hatásai*, (Doktori értekezés), Debrecen 2011.