

The Greek Catholic Basic Schools of Bereg County in the Beginning of the 1880's

Mariann POLYÁK

The foundation of the educational system in the dualism period was settled by the Act XXXVIII of 1868. This was obligatory in the whole Carpathian basin and formulated general rules in connection with the educational institutions. While József Eötvös Minister of Education made efforts to raise the standard of education with this new act, the following orders of the state withdrew the minority problems also into the educational field. The decade after the creation of the Act of 1868 was the golden age of minority schools, because they continuously had the chance to teach in their mother-tongue, they could publish their own course books and other study-aids as well.

The next determining act of the period was the Act XVIII of 1879, which made an end to this prospect. This law obliged the teachers to teach the Hungarian language in their schools as a subject. With this new act the aims of Eötvös were turned to another direction.¹

We are going to examine the effects of the above mentioned acts, so that how the acts of 1868 and 1879 on basic schools succeed until the school-year in 1881–82 in Bereg County, where the majority of the inhabitants were Rusyns. The other question is that how far the role of the state could be realised in connection with operating the schools in the county.

Denominational and state schools in the school-year 1881–82

The report of the royal school inspector, Ferenc Halász² is an excellent resource to give a summary on the conditions of schools at the beginning of the 1880's.

¹ SZABÓ JÓZSEF, 'Görögkatolikus népoktatás az önkényuralom korától az iskolák államosításáig', in *Acta Academiae Paedagogicae Nyíregyházensis* Tomus 13/A, *Nevelés- és Művelődéstudományi Közlemények*, Nyíregyháza, 1992, 9–17.

² Ferenc Halász (1849–1910): He worked as a clerk at the royal Ung-Bereg counties' school inspector's office from 1869. He became the royal school inspector of Bereg county from 1876 till 1888. After it he was the school inspector of Heves county. From 1895 he was the leader of the state public education subclass in the Religion- and Educational Ministry. He wrote books and articles about the public education of Bereg county and the role in education of the state.

This report³ was written on the 14th January 1883. Using this as a basement, we can observe that at the 276 settlements of the county there were 267 educational institutions in 1881–1882. These schools functioned at 217 settlements, so at 59 settlements there were no educational institutions. This is a little less, than one-fifth part of the settlements. This report was made for the administration committee, which ensured the state control above the schools. The head of this committee was the Lord Lieutenant, who had reporting and ordering permission in connection with the denominational schools.⁴ This way the denominational schools were checked by the church school-inspector and the state inspector too.

These 267 institutions contained all types and all grades of schools, so all the denominational and state, and all the village and civil schools. The biggest part of the schools in Bereg County belonged to the Greek Catholic denomination of the Eparchy of Munkács, what we would like to study thoroughly. There were 144 Greek Catholic and 17 Roman Catholic schools, besides the 70 Protestant and 1 Jewish schools. The rest according to the maintainer: 18 belonged to the state, 14 were village schools and 3 were private. According to grades, 2 were civil schools, and all the others were primary schools.

Out of the 267 educational institutions, the students were taught in Hungarian language in 120 schools, in Russian in 36, Russian-Hungarian in 100 schools, German-Hungarian in 11 institutions.⁵ Out of the 144 Greek Catholic denominational schools there was Russian teaching in 136. The act in connection with the obligatory teaching of the Hungarian language could have been kept in the educational institutions of the county except for those Greek Catholic denominational schools where they only taught in Russian language (it is also mentioned Rusyn or Ruthen language). This way the language of education was only the national language in every 4th Rusyn school, however they only used the Hungarian in 8 Greek Catholic schools.

The royal school inspector dealt with those 59 settlements in more details, where there were not schools at all. He collected not only the names of these villages, the number of the local inhabitants and 6–12 year-old school-able children, but also the names of the nearest village and how far these were from each other. We can see from his chart that most of the villages without schools had only a little population and from all the villages – except for 2 settlements – the students could attend the school of the village in the neighbourhood, because of the small distance.⁶ These 59 villages without a school were in most of the cases from the northern part of Verecke-district and eastern part of Munkács-district; so these settlements were in the hilly area, inhabited by Rusyn people. The school

³ Report on the Conditions of the Educational System in Bereg County in the School-year 1881–82, State Archive of Sub-Carpathian Region, fond: 151, opis: 14, jegyinyica: 1003, pages 1–10. (Later: Report).

⁴ Act VI. 1876. about the administrative committee.

⁵ Report, p. 1. verso.

⁶ Report, p. 3. verso.

inspector did not mention any settlements from the southern, flat Mezőkaszonyi-district and Tiszaháti-district which were mainly inhabited by Hungarian people.

His aim with this chart was to survey how many children could not attend a school at his/her permanent address; or whether it was possible to find a school for them without building schools. The royal school inspector pointed out, that there were only two villages, which were as far from the neighbour village that it was impossible for the students to attend these day by day. These 2 villages (Új-Rosztoka and Cserejócz) had the next school more than 5 kilometres far. The students of the other villages could attend the educational institution of the neighbour village.

According to the school inspector, the problem was not in those small settlements, where the few students could go to the neighbour village to study, but in those settlements, where there were schools, but these could not receive the big amount of students, if they wanted to be up to the laws. The laws ordained how many cubic meters big the classroom had to be per students. The schools in most cases were built before the law of compulsory education and of course these were very confined, not suitable for the rules which ordained much bigger rooms. What is more, the number of school-able children grew year after year according to the reports, due to the compulsory education.

Halász attached importance to establish state basic schools on such settlements, where there were a lot of students who could not attend the local school. So they did not plan to build school buildings even in the smallest villages but to educate the school-able students in the biggest scale. They did not plan to build schools in the smallest villages in the mountains, because the children from these villages could go to the neighbour village and 2 or more villages could maintain one school effectively.

Three schools were settled in the school-year of 1881–82: a Protestant, a Greek Catholic and a teaching place for a state itinerant teacher. Halász wanted to solve the education of the school-able students in the small mountain villages with establishing itinerant teacher positions. They built new school houses at 10 places during the year, out of which 7 were Greek Catholics, 2 Protestants and 1 Roman Catholic.

There were 301 classrooms and 267 teacher-accommodations in the 267 school buildings, most of these were the property of the denomination and some were rented estate. 200 of the classrooms had enough height, 101 were low; 195 were large, 106 were confined; 184 had full furniture and 117 had lack of furniture or did not have any furniture in it.⁷ In average there were 44 students in one classroom. The average values are illusory because these do not show us the extremes. Most of the Greek Catholic schools were not suitable for the laws, a lot of these had the lack of furniture or completely without it, and the number of the school-able students in some villages was bigger then one teacher could teach legally.

⁷ Report, p. 1. verso.

There were some sources for supporting the schools, these were the following ones: the biggest part of the incomes was in cash, the rest were made up of the income of the real estates, interest of capital, school fees, state aid and local or church aid. The expenses were about the same amount as incomes, most of which was spent for the teachers' salaries, a smaller part for the salaries of the teaching assistant, cleaning, repairing, heating, school equipment and for the course books of the poor children. The direct tax for the whole year in 1882 in the county was 464027 forints 0 koronas; 127418 forints were spent on supporting the schools, so this was the 27,4% of this tax.⁸

Students at school-able age

The number of the inhabitants of Bereg County was 153235 persons in the examined school-year, out of which 26109 were at the school-able age. This is the 17,4% of the whole population and only 17654 were effectively attending school, so the 67,6% of the school-able students. 13194 students went to the elementary from the 17654 students who attended the schools and 4254 to the repeater school. So the 72,2% of those who should attend the elementary school attended it in reality and only 50,7% of those who should attend the repeater school. The average of these two gives the 67,6% of all those who should attend schools. 139 students attended the civil schools and 67 girls the private schools. There were 13559 Greek Catholics out of the school-able children.⁹

The royalschoolinspector gave a detailed account of each of the denominations. He did not take notice of the Evangelical denomination, but he tried to explain the bad circumstances of the Jewish students. There were more than 700 school-able students in both of the cities of the county: in Beregszász, and in Munkács. But only half of them were sent to school according to the laws in Munkács; the rest of the Jewish school-able students attended hidden (black) schools according to their traditions. These hidden schools were at the worst parts of the settlements and the teachers were immigrants from Galicia. The caste-system was attached to the circumstances of teaching, which had damaging effects on their education. The authorities were ineffective against these black schools up to this point. If there were so poor surroundings for the Jewish school-able children at these schools in towns, we can imagine how bad circumstances could have the ones in the districts of Verchovina and Upper-Highland – this was the inspector's note.¹⁰ Halász's aim was to make this situation at the mountainous territory better by the established and the planned state schools.

Also the educational system of the Greek Catholics had much room for improvement, and its reason in this case was poverty. The people were kind and

⁸ Report, p. 2.

⁹ Report, p. 1.

¹⁰ Report, p. 4. verso.

they tried to keep the laws. Halász found it interesting, that the Reformed Church had 6% less students in this school-year, although they had good circumstances and they had a prospering education.

The list also examined the students who attended schools according to their languages. We found this result: Russian – 47,4%, Hungarian – 42,9%, German – 9,1%, Tót (which is a synonym for Slovakian) – 0,4%. Not all of the school-attending students went there during the whole school-year. 20,4% of them only went to school during the winter, so only for one semester, the biggest part attended it during the 2 semesters. We also get to know from this report, that 84,3% of the students had course books.

There were 1558 children more who should attend the schools compared to the previous school-year, but in reality only 245 started to go to school in this school-year. In connection with the increasing number of the school-able students the report mentions that this increase was not the result of the growing of the population, because the public health was in a very bad stadium. But it was rather the result of the stricter checking, the authorities took care that the school-able children attend school and they punished the parents of those who were absent.

Absence was a big problem, during the whole school-year there were more than 434 thousand half-day missed by the students. This means that on average every student missed 25 half-days and the excuses were accepted by the authority only in 492 cases. For the missed and not excused days, the parents had to pay penalty, this way the authorities collected 573 forints and 95 koronas, which was spent on the education of poor students.

The role of the local principals in education

Halász, as the royal school inspector, tried his best to make the people keep the laws. For this he got the authorization based by the Act VI of 1876 on the role and tasks of the administrative committee. Based on this, with other tasks, the administrative committee of the county had to check the public educational institutions. They checked the members of the local school committee. We can observe from the numbers that they did not manage to achieve the total compulsory education.

The school inspector made his opinion clear in more cases, that the biggest problem in the educational system – besides the poverty – is the behaviour of the local priorities. He said that it was the fault of these people, that they still did not know the exact number of the children who had to attend school. These people did not write the list of the children yet. These people were the members of the school council too, and their task was to punish the parents who did not send their children to school. They could have done it according to the list of the cantor-teacher. They had to decide in the problematic questions in connection

with the local school, give reports to the inspectorate, provide information about the school and to follow the prospect of the school life from the absent pupils till the increase of the school equipment. These local authorities were so careless because they also did not attend school, so it was not a miracle that they were not able to grasp the importance of education and they were unwilling to do their job of their own free will¹¹ – wrote Halász in his report. The local priest was The head of these local school councils in every Greek Catholic school. The members of the local authorities were the village mayor and other important persons.

Teachers of the people

There were 295 teachers in the 267 schools, out of which 242 were normal teachers and 53 assistant teachers. According to their qualification, 227 had a degree and the remaining 68 were not qualified. They were obliged by the Religion- and Educational Minister in 1878 to obtain their degree during one year; otherwise they would have been moved from their position. But most of these teachers worked in a village, where their payment was very low, so this way they did not have the danger that someone else wanted to apply for their positions. This way the minister's order was not put into effect so at least the school was functioning in a kind of way. Most of these unqualified teachers worked in the villages in the mountains; most of them were Greek Catholic teachers.

According to their period of service: 95 worked between 0–5 years, 53 between 5–10 years, 41 worked for 10–15 years, 34 for 15–20 years, 32 for 20–25, 15 for 25–30 years, 25 worked for more than 30 years.¹² There were 13400 students attending school every day in the county, this consists of the students of the basic and the civil schools, but not the students of the repeater schools. We can count 45 students in average for every teacher in the basic and civil schools in this school-year.

The solution of the payment for the Greek Catholic teachers was a difficult question, for both the state and the churches. The royal school inspector gave an answer why it was not possible to increase the salary of the teachers in the Greek Catholic denominational schools, though they could increase the quality of teaching by appointing qualified teachers to places, where there are unqualified teachers. The highest authority of the Munkács eparchy tried its best last year to increase the salary of its teachers in its schools. They made new payment letters (=contracts) in every school, in these they increased the payments of the teachers, but it was not possible to collect the wages not even with force because of the poverty of the citizens.¹³ The biggest problem was still the poverty of the local people, they were not able to produce the salary contracted in the payment letter

¹¹ Report, p.4.

¹² Report, p. 1. verso.

¹³ Report, p. 8.

before, and especially they were not able to raise it into a higher level, as the teachers in the flat region.

The salary of teachers was also very varied in the county. Those who worked in the flat region earned more than the average but it was impossible for the Greek Catholics to live from their payment. Traditionally they received their payment in most of the cases in agricultural products and not in cash. As far as it concerned the teachers' salary, a normal teacher earned in average in our county 358,5 forints, but an assistant teacher only 204,6 forints. This payment seemed to be fair, but in reality it shows us a big fluctuation, because there were a lot of Greek Catholic cantor-teacher posts, which earned maximum 150 forints a year¹⁴ – the royal school inspector summed up the facts.

Inner life of schools

The law of 1868 regulated precisely the functioning of schools, also the minimal length of the academic year. The minimal year lasted for 8 months, and this term was kept in 226 schools from the 267. The document did not mention how short term they had in the rest 41 schools.

The inspector also reported the results of the schools, what kind of marks could the different schools achieve based on the average marks. There were 32 schools with the best mark in the county from the 267, and from these 11 were state schools, 4 village schools, 1 Greek Catholic school, 14 Protestant schools and 2 private schools. The remaining 7 state schools had a good mark, also the 10 remaining village schools and the 3rd school of the private ones. The only official Jewish school got a good mark too. There were no excellent result in the 17 Roman Catholic denominational schools, 11 reached good and 6 small result.

The Greek Catholic and also the Protestant denominations had not only excellent and good but also small marks as the result of the school-year. Out of the 70 Protestant schools as we saw above, there were 14 with excellent result, 47 with good and 9 with small result. These are the results of the Greek Catholic denominational schools: out of 144 schools there was only one excellent, 78 were good and 66 were small in their results. If we mark the work of the denominational schools according to their results, the Greek Catholic schools reached the worst place, because they had only one institution with excellent result and almost the half did not meet the requirements.

¹⁴ Report, p. 7. verso–8.

Schools using not Hungarian as their teaching language

As we mentioned it before, we know that 147 schools in Bereg County did not use just the Hungarian as the teaching language. In 11 schools the teaching language was German and Hungarian, all the others were Greek Catholic denominational schools. The teachers taught in both Russian and Hungarian from the remaining 136 schools in 100, but in 36 they used only the Russian language. The Hungarian was the teaching language in 8 Greek Catholic schools. The law of 1879 – mentioned in the introduction – gave orders about the teaching language of the educational institutions.

There were 34 teachers in the Greek Catholic schools who spoke only a little Hungarian and 11 teachers did not speak the Hungarian language at all.¹⁵ It was a problem, even in those schools where they taught the Hungarian language as well, that the teachers did not teach it as it was recommended by the laws, that is to teach the students to express their thoughts in Hungarian. They only practised writing and reading mechanically.

The minister sent leader books and syllabuses to the teachers in Bereg County in order to teach the Hungarian language better and he also gave the students ABC-books and reading books with the same aim. 8 of the Greek Catholic teachers who had good results in their schools were given a reward: each of them got 30 forints for the good results in teaching Hungarian. Those 13, who achieved very bad results, they were obliged to take part in a supplementary Hungarian course during the summer vacation, which they had to attend in the training college of Sárospatak or Máramarosziget.

State schools

The administrative committee considered its most important task – immediately after its formation – to ensure the Hungarian education in the non-Hungarian area as well, as only 62 settlements of the 276 in the county were Hungarian, and the others were almost all Rusyns. One of their tools was to establish state schools, where the language of teaching was Hungarian. The committee could provide very good results achieving this aim during the last 6 years.¹⁶ According to the plans they wanted to establish state schools in big, non-Hungarian settlements. They could establish 22 state schools until 1882. All of these had the Hungarian as the teaching language and all could show a very good result. They founded 4 state schools in the school-year of 1877–78, 3 in 1878–79, 2 in 1879–80, 3 in

¹⁵ Report, p. 5.

¹⁶ The supervision of the schools was done by the administrative committees, which were established by the act VI. in 1876.

1880–81 and 10 in the 1882–83 school-year.¹⁷ These state schools were not all established in Rusyn villages, some were founded in the mainly Hungarian Tiszaháti district.

There were 25 teacher-positions created in these 22 schools, they taught 1445 students and this cost 11847 forints for the state in a year. One of the 2 civil schools also belonged here, which was established in 1882–83 in Munkács and 3 teachers worked in this school for girls only. They founded 2 basic state schools in Alsó-Verecke, Szolyva and Bilke, one of the schools was for boys and the other for girls only; the rest of the state schools were mixed. 7 of these schools were formerly village schools, later these were declared to be state schools.

Itinerant teachers

There were a lot of very small Rusyn villages along the Munkács-Verecke road, where the people could not give a normal payment to their cantor-teacher for a living because of their poverty and the small number of inhabitants. This meant that sometimes they could only offer 20–30 forints (usually agricultural product) as a salary in a year to their cantor-teacher. (The law determined the minimum in 300 forints a year.)¹⁸ The authority of the village was also not able to help in this problem. The state was not able either to build a school to every little village, so for this problem the solution was to apply itinerant teachers. The administrative committee decided to establish itinerant teacher positions in these villages already in 1879. The task of the itinerant teacher was to teach the Hungarian language in more villages, in a certain time and to help the local cantor-teachers to get to know the last teaching methods. They spent 2–3 days in one settlement. The itinerant teachers taught 647 students and their salary was 3350 forints. According to the report 6 itinerant teacher positions were founded and their work seemed to be successful. The Ministry was planning to establish more itinerant teacher positions in other counties as well based on these examples.

Conclusion

We can observe from this report what the problems were in the following decades in connection with the denominational education. Halász considered the solution only solvable with governmental help. It was necessary to have compulsory education, organised teacher training, the payment for quality teaching, modern methods, course books and school buildings in order to raise the standard of the

¹⁷ The Report was written about the school-year of 1881–82, but it was written on the 14th, January, 1883.

¹⁸ Act XXXVIII. 1868. § 142.

education. Creating all these depended very much on the budget, how much the government was willing to spend on it.

We can conclude that the act of 1868 gave a huge impulse to the developing of both the Hungarian education and to the schools using their minority languages, to their modernisation, to raising up their teaching-educating level, to the increasing of literacy and to having the basic education around the decades in the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁹ Those minority schools which used only their language, they got into a difficult situation with the act of 1879, from the point of view that they had finish up this exclusiveness. The state offered its help where it was a problem to keep the laws, so they could promote quality teaching. Obviously this process did not solve the problems entirely. There was a continuous struggle between the state inspectors and the bishopric inspectors and also between the church inspectors and the local authorities during the period of the dualism.

Gyula Wlassics - the Minister of Education at the turn of the century - did not find the number of state basic schools, the pedagogical work in these institutions and their conditions adequate. He wanted to carry out the modernisation of teaching-educating and lifting it up to the level of the age independently of the maintainer of the schools.²⁰ The report of the royal school inspector Ferenc Halász gave an evidence that the mentioned acts could not be introduced immediately to the denominational schools in Bereg County in most of the cases, these needed more time. The basic conditions were missing from most of the Greek Catholic schools in Bereg County to achieve the quality of the teaching ordered by the law. This generated a lot of very difficult questions. The school inspector could show only some smaller results to the administrative committee. The committee tried to have a bigger influence on the basic schools, so they established more and more state schools.

¹⁹ MÉSZÁROS ISTVÁN, 'A Kárpát-medence magyar iskoláinak ezer esztendeje', in *Szemelvények Kelet-Magyarország és Kárpátalja iskolatörténetéből*, Nyíregyháza, 1998, 105.

²⁰ PORNÓI IMRE, 'A népoktatás fejlődése az Eötvös-törvénytől az 1940:XX. törvényig', in *Szemelvények Kelet-Magyarország és Kárpátalja iskolatörténetéből*, Nyíregyháza, 1998, 38.