LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE SOUTHERN TRANSDANUBIAN REGION

PÉTER FODOR

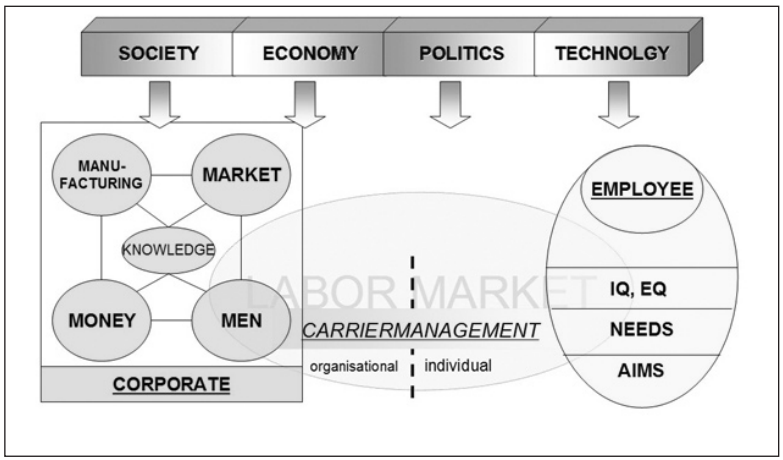
INTRODUCTION: LIFELONG LEARNING AS A CONCEPT

Numerous challenges and opportunities are facing the societies of the 21st century. Rapid changes have appeared recently both for individuals and for society. Lifelong learning has an important role both in the policies of the European Union, and in Hungarian national strategies. Since the settling of the Lisbon Strategy (The Lisbon European Council, 2000), this process has become even more enhanced. The European Union is willing to use the concept of lifelong learning to reach a higher level of competitiveness in the common economy. In my opinion this system, the main idea of lifelong learning, is economy-driven.

lifelong learning has three different levels in the economic view (1st figure):

1. The National/regional level.
2. Corporate level.
3. Individual level.

Figure 1: The system of Lifelong Learning



Source: edited by the Author

Each level has its own stakeholders and motivations. Each category places a different focus on the whole system, but the system is not complete without all components, the elements influencing each other and working together. Now the focus is on the national and regional level as this is the most interesting regarding the topic of the Southern Transdanubian Region. At this level we find economical, political, technological and social factors that constantly correlate with each other. Since the 1990s the development of science and technology has placed a demand for the constant and fast improvement of human capital. As in our globalised world information is flowing and spread through the latest information technology equipment, and as huge research and development sources have been spent on the improvement of manufacturing technologies, the obsolescence period of human profession-related knowledge is shortened. Due to that, the work-related knowledge of employees remains adequate for increasingly shorter periods. They are forced to renew it, enlarge the scope of it, or change it totally. Technological progress causes realignment in the national work-structure, which means that some professions are disappearing while new ones are appearing. Thus the employees have to train themselves constantly. This process is more than a single change. As the Kondratyev theory points out, the economy operates in long cycles, but for instance the Moore law[1] (1965) depicts that in relevant technologies and thus in technology-related knowledge the cycles are getting thinner and the periods change faster, and an acceleration process is under way.

In our democratic societies there is a need for fair living conditions and good wages. The population expects good economical conditions and sufficient workplaces. On the one hand the government has to influence the economical processes, to form an investor-friendly atmosphere that stimulates growth and thus indirectly stabilises workplaces, while on the other it has to shape the educational system that provides a competent workforce for businesses. The balance of the labour market, unemployment and participation rates are the indicators of success. If politics is able to supply an appropriate proper answer to the economical challenges influenced by rapid technological changes, if the educational system provides opportunities for the improvement of relevant vocational knowledge and if the members of the society are willing to study then a relative balance in the local and national labour market will be achieved.

[1] Moore's Law describes an important trend in the history of computer hardware: that the number of transistors that can be inexpensively placed on an integrated circuit is increasing exponentially, doubling approximately every two years.

Changing economical trends in the world are the basic factors behind the need for lifelong learning (LLL). For instance, the growth of the service sector raises training needs for the employees and for the national economic systems.
In conclusion we might say that LLL is:

- A response to economical demands.
- An intention of the government.
- An elementary need of the populace.

This means that society and the economy require employees who are able to work in groups, to solve problems, to adapt to rapidly changing requirements and who have basic skills.

The national level consists of four elements, as we have seen. All trends show that both the state and individuals have to place an emphasis on renewing present knowledge and competences. lifelong learning is a framework for that. On the national level the aim of lifelong learning is to provide an appropriate input for the national and regional labour market to answer demands. The role of politics is to create long term educational policies and strategies that offer opportunities for the members of society to acquire basic skills, and later to be provided with permanent learning opportunities. This statement is true for both the national and for the subnational (regional) level. Numerous studies concern themselves with the regional differences which exist beneath the macro-or national level. For instance, we know that a huge gap exists between the Northern and Southern Italian regions, but the same is true for Hungary, too.

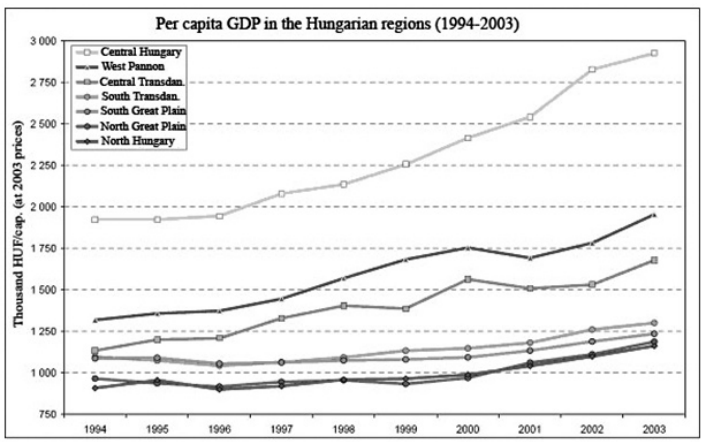
REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN HUNGARY AND THE SOUTHERN TRANSDANUBIAN REGION

In Hungary, both a north-south and a south-west difference can be seen. (HVG-Top 500, 2007). The figures show that the performance of the capital and the north-western parts of the country are significantly higher than that of the other parts of the country. While the northern part shows a rising trend, the southern parts are falling below the national average. Progress raises a need for a quality workforce on the labour market, but parallel with it there exists an oversupply, consisting of the population with lower levels of professional knowledge. These people are uneducated and thus disadvantaged, and yet the economy increasingly requires highly skilled workers.

There are numerous theories concerning the reasons for the growing differences. These include average infrastructural differences, the construction of highways, geofigureical determining factors, the structure and the role of higher education and the number of researchers, but the solution is not always clear. These growing regional gaps have recently been the cause of internal migrations, as can be witnessed in today's Southern Transdanubia.

With its 14169 km² South Transdanubia is the 3rd largest region of Hungary. However, the density of the population is the lowest in the country. There are 645 settlements with their own local government, but 51,4% of the settlements number less than 500 inhabitants (Southern Transdanubia Operational Programme, 2007). The accessibility of many of these villages is unsatisfactory. Several villages can be approached in only one direction, and do not have satisfactory public transportation. The spatial structure of the villages and the towns of the region is very unfavourable. The local government and agriculture are the largest employers in this area, which means that potential for economic sustenance is low. Both the subscribed capital and the contribution to the GDP of the Southern Transdanubian Region shows that our area is lagging behind and still shows downward tendencies (2nd figure).

Figure 2: Per capita GDP in the regions 1994-2003



Source: The New Hungary Development Plan, National Strategic Reference Framework of Hungary 2007–2013 Employment and Growth. 2007, p. 45. http://www.nfu.hu/download/480/NHDP_HU_NSRF-en_Accepted.pdf 2007-10-01

The activity rate of the population is 50,1% (Table 1). Compared with the national average, the negative difference is more than 4,7%, and we know that the Hungarian average falls significantly behind the EU average.

The unemployment rate reflects the above situation. The figures for Southern Transdanubia are almost the worst among the seven regions, and show a downward trend. The data for the small settlements rank the highest. The biggest employer is the state sector, followed by industry, primarily the processing industries.

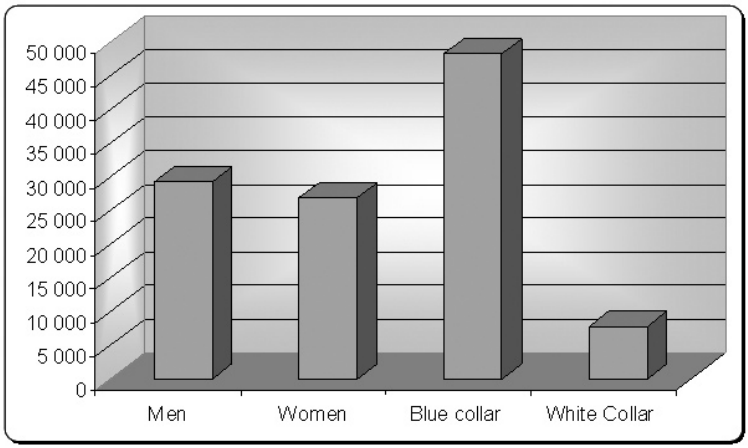
Summarising up the situation, it could be said that, compared with Hungarian and European figures, the Southern Transdanubian Region is underdeveloped. As Polónyi (2001) points out, the educational figures are unfavourable in Hungary and the data relating to inhabitants living in small villages even more so. In those villages where the rate of the Gypsy population is high, the percentage of those who have not completed their 8th or lower grades of the primary school is 55% among those aged between 45-49 and more than 70% among those above the age of 50. These figures demonstrate the fact that the current, average educational level of the Hungarian people is inadequate, especially if we focus on the needs of the developing Hungarian economy.

The Southern Transdanubian Region shows similarities with national data (2nd table):

- The number of those with only 8 or fewer primary years is very high.
- The number of people who have graduated in vocational schools is approximately 30-35%, but the structure of the output professions does not match the demand of the labour market and thus the needs of the economy.
- The practical knowledge provided by the school system cannot be used in real economical situations.
- The level of education in the population, combined with the geofigureical and regional disadvantages, strengthen each other and cause a negative acceleration effect.

Figure 3 figure clearly depicts the problem of the Hungarian vocational school system, which arises from structural problems. The former and current opposition party claims that more young graduates than ever have no job, which is true, but as the majority of the unemployed people are blue collar workers the main problem- is that the vocational school system is badly constructed. The formal educational system produces approximately 140,000 graduates per year, but 77% of those emerging from grammar schools are without a profession.

Figure 3: Number of registered unemployed persons by gender and profession in the Southern Transdanubian Region in 2005



Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office Headquaters of Pécs: The main figures of the unemployed people in the Southern Transdanubian Region: 12 / 2006.

The number of students at the universities has been showing an increasing tendency. Higher education is teaching 2,5 times more students then in 1995. One-third of the formal education system is preparing the students for physical jobs, two-thirds for white collar jobs, but the demands of the labour market lie in the opposite direction. The vocational system in Hungary and in the Southern Transdanubian Region does not adapt to the labour market situation.

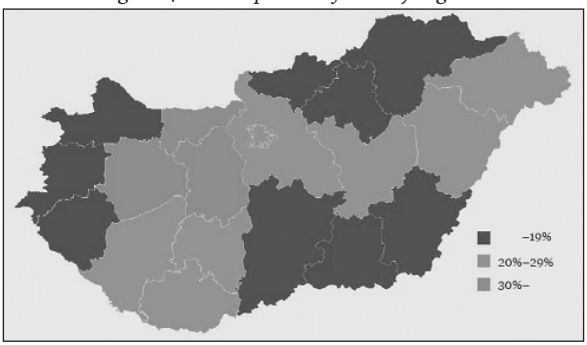
When analysing the overall lifelong learning activity of Hungary and the regions, the Southern Transdanubian region remains in the middle, as the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2004) points out. (4th figure). The role of Central Hungary is again overemphasized, but fortunately here the situation is adequate for Southern Transdanubia.

CHALLENGES IN THE HUNGARIAN ADULT TRAINING SYSTEM

The previous section provided a number of facts and figures supporting the idea that the Hungarian adult educational system has to be reconstructed to solve the above problems. Otherwise, the gap between the labour market demands, and the output of the educational system will be ever wider and deeper. As the facts listed above prove, rapid and adequate answers are needed:

- The needs of the economy and personnel demands should be harmonized, in order to satisfy the self developmental needs both of the economy and of individuals.
- Access opportunities should be improved for the disadvantaged persons and special target groups, thereby closing the gap among the regions, the various social groups, genders and ages.
- Flexibility of training should be ensured, in order to match the needs of the above mentioned target groups both in time and space; heterogeneous training forms should be used (typical and atypical forms, distance learning, e-learning).
- The government has an important role and responsibility in this process: Priorities have to be settled, systems and networks have to be made, and training should be motivated with financial means. Persistent support work is necessary to reach the aims and challenges of adult training.

Figure 4: Participation of LLL by regions



Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2004: Lifelong learning. Budapest 2004. p. 12

When outlining the range of duties related to adult training, we might say that the goals of training schemes are to provide an adequate workforce for employers, to eliminate the inequalities of the disadvantaged and to provide "willing-to-work and workable" workforces to the labour market.

The functions of adult training in this context are:

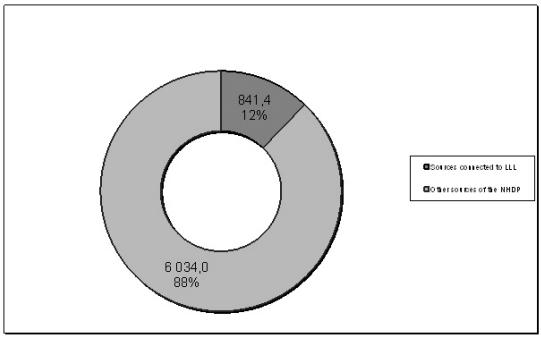
- To reduce the competence-gap of employees.
- To support the evolution of an identity consciousness, ability, and interest validation.
- To have permanent studying accepted as a program.
- To increase to feeling of security.
- To shape the vision of the future.

In order to execute the above-mentioned tasks in Hungary in general and in the Southern Transdanubian region specifically, national sources and the European Structural Fund provide money. The First National Development Plan (FNDP) has used 750 million euros to improve human resources between 2004-2006. Among the priorities of the FNDP were an elevation of employment levels and competitiveness within the workforce by ensuring adequate education. Training was a highlighted chapter of the national employment strategy.

During this period the legal and the financial conditions were formed: the Adult Education Act, a system of normative supports, the allowance of income tasks; the separation of the Vocational Fund from the Fund of Labour Market; and various programs. Along these steps the Human Resource Operative Program provided 66.7 million euros to assist in achieving the main goals.

Significantly greater resources will be used for similar goals between 2007-2013 in the New Hungary Development Plan (5th figure). This huge amount of money raises hopes of a solution to the current problems. However, we must point out that this resource is only a necessary condition; without well-formed strategies or hard operational work it will not be, cannot be successful.

Figure 5: Possible sources of NHDP for LLL



Source: Based on the NHDP, calculated by the Author.

CONCLUSION

The path of lifelong learning and the influencing factors of the national conditions were outlined in the first part. This necessary strategy has to be formed and carried out in Hungary, and Southern Transdanubia. In the second step, we examined the current relevant factors, figures and situations of the focus area. Defects were pointed out and opportunities were highlighted. In order to achieve a successful lifelong

learning concept, the Southern Transdanubian Region has to develop both formal and non-formal vocational school systems. It is a determining factor regarding economical development. For the global challenges, local answers are needed.

Our tasks are:

- Creation of a regional, vocational concept. This concept must be equal to answering demands of the labour market, and has to be matched with regional employment strategy.
- The establishment of a persistent and consultative forum. On this forum, through the discussions of the training market's stakeholders, parallel developments would be avoided, the best practices could be shared, and tenders could be conciliated.
- Social negotiations have to be organised and continuous, tight co-operation with the employers is needed.
- Regional vocational networks and knowledge centres should be set up. The role of these are to provide information and services belonging to adult education, to spread atypical training methods and ensure the training of experts working in adult education. Through this network regional, territorial, social and birth disadvantages should be turned transformed into equality.
- The regional and local aims of the vocational systems have to be pointed out, in order to effectively use local and European funds.

Table 1: Unemployment and participation rates in Hungary

	Unemployment rate	Participation rate
Central Hungary	4,3	59,1
Central Transdanubia	4,8	57,6
Western Transdanubia	5,1	58,5
Southern Transdanubia	9,2	50,1
Northern Hungary	12	50,9
Northern Great Plain	10,3	51,1
Southern Great Plain	7,7	52,5
Total population Aged 15–74	7,3	54,8

Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, Labour Force Survey Quater II, 2007 Budapest, 2007 Published by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office p. 45.

http://portal.ksh.hu/pls/ksh/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/munkero/munkero072.pdf 2007-10-01

Table 2: Rate of different educational levels in the population aged above 15

	Total	Less than 8th primary grades	8th primary grades	vocational school	technical school/ grammar school	university
Baranya County	342 239	37 288	122 120	68 794	81 457	32 580
Somony County	281 140	37 985	103 423	57 600	59 176	22 956
Tolna County	209 059	29 358	76 398	44 822	41 803	16 678
Southern Transdanubia	832 438	104 631	301 941	171 216	182 436	72 214
Rate in %		12,56	35,27	20,56	21,91	8,67
Hungary total	8 508 301	951 137	2 870 666	1 584 055	2 166 355	936 088
Rate in %		11,17	33,73	18,6	25,46	11

Source: edited by the Author

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CHAPTER 5

PROGRAMME – SPONSORS – AUTHORS