

Transition to a Modern Mass Higher Education System
Career Chances for Women Graduates in Hungary
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During the socio-political and economic transformation that began in 1989-90 problems of higher education also surfaced in a sudden and concentrated manner. This has happened frequently in history. Hungary, as other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, has had to face difficulties arising from trying to catch up with more developed countries at the same time as facing other problems that are characteristic of our age.

Changes in the Legal Framework

The new democratically elected parliament and government decided on a rapid expansion in higher education and a transition to a modern mass education system. The 1993 Higher Education Act and the 1996 amendment to the Act resulted in the implementation of important changes:

- The role of the Ministry of Education and Culture was altered to become a supervisory instead of the previous directory power.
- The Act recognized the representative bodies of the higher education institutions which were established at the same time in late 1980s (Rectors Conference, College Directors Conference, Chair of Arts College Directors).
- The National Accreditation Committee was set up, which has two interrelated functions, i.e. state recognition of academic programmes and institutions, and quality assessment (quality audit).
- The Higher Education and Scientific Council was set up, which is the Government's strategic advisory body.
- The Act guaranteed the autonomy of higher education institutions, as well as their right to start postgraduate programs, and award Ph.Ds.
- A new system of degrees - BA, MA, Ph.D. - was set up. Previously scientific degrees were not awarded by the universities but by a central body, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
- The incremental (past based) financing-system was replaced by a multichannel performance-related one.
- A tuition fee was introduced with effect from 1995.
- The Act facilitated the integration (merger) of smaller institutions.
- The Act permitted the establishment of private higher education institutions.

In 1995 a Parliamentary Resolution charted the principles for the development of Higher Education and the means of attaining the goals set. Aiming at European integration and recognising that Higher Education is essential in establishing a market economy and democracy, the Government submitted a quantitative and contextual proposal to the Hungarian Parliament containing short and long term goals, and detailed budget analyses to be carried out upon implementation of the program. According to the resolution the main principles of development are: quality, openness, free selection, accountability and efficiency, autonomy, and competition under equal terms. The percentage of students admitted to higher education must reach those of a developed democratic society, e.g. 30% of the age cohort. The number of short-term studies should be expanded, thereby reducing the average length and cost of training.

The Higher Education Act of 1993 laid the cornerstones of an autonomous higher education system, and framed the most important conditions for transition. In 1996 the Hungarian Parliament passed an amendment to the Higher Education Act. The main objective of the amendment was to set up a legal framework for a more streamlined structure and operation of the institutions. The

most important changes laid down in the modifications are the following:

- In the process of developing the system the main objective is to increase academic independence, responsibility, and the ability of the institutions to manage their resources more effectively and to utilize non-state resources to a larger extent.
- In order to achieve this the size of the institutions should be based on economic and professional criteria. The amendment created the legal base for the merger of institutions.
- The Act makes it possible to restructure the higher education system in a way that results in a vertically more proportioned system. It ensures that programs will link to each other and will be permeable.
- Post-secondary vocational education will be built into the higher education system, with programs of minimum two years.
- The introduction of the credits system will serve the flexibility of education.

In creating this system the European Credit Transfer System will be taken into consideration.

- The Act gives significant importance to scientific research. Different funds were established in order to support research activities. This support will be distributed mostly through competition.

To sum up, the legal framework of a modern higher education system is in place. The first question is: how does it function in practice? The second: how does the transition to mass higher education taking place at the same time as the transition to a market economy affect women's chances, women's opportunities in higher education and the career possibilities of women graduates?

Composition of Graduates by Field of Degree

According to the Government's expansionist policy the number of students attending higher education institutions has doubled in a seven year period. The proportion of students in the relevant agecohort was 11% in 1990, and 18% in 1997. The proportion is even higher in the case of first year students. As a consequence of the demographic curve, the bottom of the curve in the relevant cohort, this proportion will reach a 30% level in 3-4 years. Another intention of the government was altering the composition of students by field of study. Because of the state-socialist system and a less developed economy the composition of graduates and the proportion of professionals in the field of engineering and agriculture was higher, and the proportion of professionals in the field of economics, business and law was lower than that in the industrialised countries (see Table 1).

Table 1: The proportion of women in the graduate population in %

Type of degree	Total	Age group			Distribution of Graduates (men and women together)
		25-29	30-34	35+	
Industry, Construction	18,6	22,8	22,2	17,2	22,6
Transport	15,9	20,0	23,5	11,9	1,3
Agriculture	20,7	27,1	29,8	17,9	7,6
Commerce	54,1	50,0	61,9	52,3	1,3
Economics	50,1	61,4	71,3	42,6	7,5
Finance, Accounting	64,8	65,4	86,4	61,4	2,0
Computer technics	49,6	51,9	48,5	58,8	1,0
Health, Social Services	61,3	71,6	71,7	57,0	7,8
Education	69,7	81,7	79,6	62,5	36,0
Arts	41,2	54,5	45,2	37,1	1,9
Law	32,5	56,6	52,6	26,2	5,4
Other	9,3	12,5	15,7	8,5	5,6
Total of which	45,2	58,3	56,8	39,3	100,0
College	53,7	62,7	63,8	47,5	54,5
University	35,0	49,5	45,2	31,4	45,5

Source: 1990 Census.

Table 2: Women's participation in Higher Education in %
Field of study

Field of study	1989/90		1997/98	
	Proportion of women in student population	Composition of students by field of study by men and women	Proportion of women in student population	Composition of students by field of study by men and women
Engineering	15,0	21,1	25,5	24,8
Agriculture	25,5	9,6	48,6	9,4
Economics, business	60,6	9,4	56,5	10,2
Medical. health services	59,6	12,8	64,0	8,0
Law, public administration	54,6	4,6	59,3	5,5
Liberal arts	74,1	7,0	69,8	13,4
Natural sciences	41,3	6,2	41,9	6,3
Teacher training, higher g.	68,5	13,8	70,9	10,1
Teacher training, lower g.	90,8	9,6	85,8	5,8
Fine arts	53,7	2,8	56,2	1,9
Police, military	0,0	3,1	16,4	1,5
Theology			62,9	3,3
Total	48,9	100	52,4	100
of which	56,8	47,7	56,1	47,1
College				
University	41,6	52,3	49,2	52,9

Source: *Statistics.: Higher Education*. Ministry of Education and Culture, 1990-1998.

Because no census has been taken since 1990 we can only draw conclusions as to the changes in the composition of graduates by analyzing higher education data. Table 2 illustrates this by comparing figures for the academic years 1989/90 and 1997/98. The intended changes have not, or only partly, occurred. The inflexibility of the higher education system is illustrated by these facts. Despite intentions the proportion of students in engineering has increased, whereas the proportion of students in economics, business and law has only increased slightly and not approached the necessary level. The proportion of students in teacher training has increased and declined in the liberal arts. But there are reasons for this. The higher level of teacher training has been relocated from the teacher training colleges to the faculties of liberal arts in universities. Theology appears as a new figure in higher education statistics after the political changes, mostly in programs for teachers of religion, as the demand for teachers in this field has increased in recent years.

Women's Participation in Higher Education

According to the 1990 census the proportion of women in the total number of graduates was 45%, and this figure clearly increased as we examined younger and younger age- cohorts (see Table 1). These figures demonstrate the rapid increase in the number of women in intellectual occupations. More detailed analysis, however, shows

that women gained mainly lower level degrees or qualifications in professional fields that enjoy less prestige and less advantageous positions in the labour market. The increase of women has been more marked in colleges than in universities. As far as particular fields are concerned the extent of feminization varies widely. It is greatest in the field of teaching, where the proportion of women has traditionally been high and feminization is constantly increasing. In the fields of engineering, agriculture and transport, where the proportion of women is lowest - although it is growing - the dominance of men prevails among graduates as well. What is the future in these two fields? According to the data on student composition in higher education after the political changes, we cannot expect any significant changes in the field of teaching.

The situation is more complex in the case of graduates in technology, especially engineering, and agriculture. Since 1990 such graduates were mainly employed in large state owned (public) companies and cooperative (public) agricultural combines. Their situation was probably the one most directly affected by privatization. Some of them - mainly the young graduates - had and have a good chance of finding employment in the growing private sector. Those in middle age or approaching retirement, however, have come into a critical situation. Not only are their former relatively good positions at risk, but in many cases even their jobs, where they are in crisis stricken branches of industry, e.g. mining, heavy industry, textile and food production. All these have reduced the prestige of these professions and their attractiveness to young people, first of all young men. The consequences appear in the higher education data. In the 1989/90- 1997/98 period the proportion of women increased in engineering. Between the two extreme cases - teaching, where the proportion of women is very high and engineering where it is low - we find widely differing situations in the other professions. The proportion of women was relatively high and increasing among graduates in economics and business, especially finance and accountancy, before the political changes. In evaluating these phenomenon we must bear in mind that, according to sociological research on the careers of people working in these professions, women tended to be employed in less prestigious institutions and in lower-ranking positions than men. Despite these facts this is the profession where women have reached a favorable situation as a result of the transformation of the economy. Private ventures and new entrepreneurs offer many opportunities and high salaries to well-qualified experts in business, finance and accountancy. Already the majority of these - particularly the younger ones - are women. But what happened in higher education? Men reacted very quickly to the changes. Male student participation has grown in the field of economics and business! In the so-called socialist period women graduates had gained ground spectacularly in the fields of law and public administration. This increase has been due partly to the fact that during the four socialist decades the legal profession was held in very low esteem. In a system of planned economy and more or less exclusive state (public) ownership, lawyers and judges were badly paid and counted as bureaucratic and overpoliticised office jobs. As a consequence of the socioeconomic changes these professions have become more highly valued. A great number of new

legal rules have come into place, and with the spread of private ownership the amount of litigation involving businesses and individuals has increased. There is a growing interest in employing people with degrees in law - private ventures and rich clients are willing to pay them handsomely. So these professions have got a significantly better position during the transition to market economy. It is interesting to note that parallel to the transition the expected changes in the composition of students by gender has not occurred. In the field of law and public administration the proportion of women has even grown. Probably in the first period of transition the attractiveness of the business sector appears most, so men intend getting degrees in this field. The attractiveness of the legal profession will be apparent in one decade. Is there a chance that after 2000 the tendencies will turn to the opposite in this field, and the proportion of men will rise?

There are two professions where the increase of women has not been accompanied (as cause and effect) by a relative deterioration in income or a decline in prestige in the socialist period. These are the medicine and the arts. These professions have maintained their favorable position, and at the same time women have become a majority. But it is "evident" that women were and still are employed in less prestigious institutions and positions, i.e. almost all hospital surgeons are men, whereas laboratory doctors are women. We must assume that the positions will become even more sharply differentiated in the future, with the development of a new dimension - private practice in the case of doctors, as the restructuring of the health service is in the process at the moment, and a proper market system in the field of arts. It is too early to have an adequate opinion of the phenomenon that the proportion of female students has grown in the field of medicine and arts in the 1989/90 - 1997/98 period.

Conclusion

To sum up we can say that in the present situation and for the next decade prospects for women graduates show wide discrepancies. The changeover to a market economy affected and affects them in different ways. But in general we realize that private ventures tend and will tend to give preference to young men, who are more independent and mobile than young women who are more burdened with family obligations. In middle-age and the older generation men and women are affected by the difficulties accompanying the changes, but there is some polarization in every cohort and field with male graduates typically going into well-paid, varied careers in private firms, while women remain in the more static, lower-paid jobs in public institutions. There are two professions, economics and law - key elements in a market economy - which, in contrast to industrialized countries, are overfeminised in Hungary due to the effects of a previously state controlled regime. It seems to be a fact that this situation has not changed after the 8 year period of transition. This will result in a favorable position for women in the labour market even in the next decade. It is also advantageous that the proportion of female students did not decrease but increased, even at universities and colleges. Young women have realized the growing importance of higher qualifications as the most relevant, and maybe the only implement to avoid the unfavorable effects in

the labour market, which will probably affect women more extensively in a market economy than in state-socialism.

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