

Informal Learning in Historical Aspect

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Introduction

In today's unpredictable world one of the determining competences is the ability of learning. The necessary knowledge and set of behaviors with which it is possible to respond adequately to the continuous and ever-accelerating changes in technology, economics and society is acquired by learning. Although the life-long interpretation of learning is not a completely new concept (Field 2006), by becoming a comprehensive paradigm in education it improves the population's adaptation abilities and increases the chance for a thorough and successful preparation for the changes necessitated by new challenges. I said "population", as life-long and life-wide learning is everyone's concern, school-aged or having left school. In either case, the administration of education faces unique problems.

Schooling institutions are still in search of their destined new place in the present world, but it is already evident that they will have to take up a key role in the development of learning competences. Considering that the places of education have changed (Csapó 2002), schools can become integrators by opening up, preparing pupils for difficulties and showing them the joys of learning, and by introducing them to knowledge management. Getting them to enjoy learning and teaching them how to be effective at it. To make this reality, mass-education has to be replaced by individually customized education. (Halász, 2008) Similarly, in the case of adult education beside many specific issues the most important task is to direct the attitudes of the learners so that the activity becomes valuable and fruitful for them. Their situation is further complicated by bad memories and serious failures they might have encountered earlier at school. The existence of effective strategies and more interesting means of learning has to find its way into their mind-set, and they have to be made aware of the possibility of learning in a different way than they used to in spite of these long lasting experiences. This is what makes the study of the mechanism and role of informal learning, the formal application of the discovered solutions, and above all, the acknowledgement and legitimization of informally acquired knowledge crucial. Especially those with weaker positions in the job market

would benefit from the latter. However, surveys show that the majority of those enrolled in adult education prefer formal training (Radó 2006), allowing for the indirect conclusion that public opinion primarily associates learning with formal training, and attributes less significance to informal learning.

We agree with the scholars (Colley–Hodkinson–Malcolm 2003; Golding–Brown–Foley 2009) who take the stance that the task is not to separate the formal and informal properties of learning as precisely as possible, but to integrate them. Additionally, in our opinion, it is also necessary to show the importance of the informal aspects of the education of individuals. This is partly due to the amount of informal (also known as natural- or everyday-) education, which can accompany any kind of activity, thus being present during a considerable time in people's lives, even of the highly qualified one's. (Coombs–Ahmed 1974, 8) Secondly, the paradigm of learning throughout life (which combines the life-long and life-wide features) boosts the value of out of school education. Thirdly, it appears to be a worthwhile pursuit to study the history and the typical scenes of everyday (natural, informal) learning in a given period.

This article takes us back to Hungary in the 1920s and 30s. Although both the family and the church played a fundamental role in informal education, in this paper we are focusing on the period's unique scenes: the "levente" organization, the scout movement, and the sports associations. They have many things in common; for example all of them were governed by the Ministry of Religion and Public Education (either directly or via the Committee of Physical Education).

The Sports Associations

After the Treaty of Trianon sports and physical education gained a special role. Even though not exclusively for the sake of the activities themselves but because of military reasons, the popularity of sports brought real successes on championships, and involved masses. Thanks to the regulation of working hours and to the increase in free time, sports had become mainstream during the period of our interest. Due to military considerations junior physical education enjoyed explicit governmental support in Hungary, which helped the popularization of sports. In the 30s, the number of competitors in all sports taken together exceeded one hundred thousand. Hungary was on the way of becoming a major player in competitive sports, as demonstrated by the various achievements and successes in the Olympic Games. Just one figure of evidence: "Before 1918 the number of institutions for sports in Hungary was about 700"; by 1935 the same indicator had jumped to 6882. (Romsics 2005, 221) This is an enormous growth, even if we discount the 2000 shooting clubs which were largely linked with the levente associations. On the other hand one should not

dismiss the levente's contribution to the construction of sports and shooting clubs and other establishments. (Levente, 1932(3-4), p. 56) For example when the wooden stand of the Kispest Athletic Club (KAC) destroyed in a fire they helped in the reconstruction operations in 1935.

The most popular of the sports was football¹, thanks to its accessibility and low cost: it did not require either dedicated establishments or equipment, making it suitable for a multitude of boys who played it on suburban grounds or on a village's grazing field, even if only barefoot. (In rural areas boys had less time for football, because by the age of 6-7 they had been dragged into family work. First they were in charge of grazing the geese, and then they became responsible for the pigs). The other factor behind the popularity of football was that it offered pleasure, creativity, opportunity for personal and team achievement, created a tension of contention, was the trial of skills and strength, all at the same time. With its incredible ingenuity it attracted thousands to the audience week by week.

In the period of our interest, the number of athletic clubs soared. Let us consider the case of Szentlőrinc, a settlement near Budapest. Though its population was under eight thousand when it gained independence, at that time it already had its own club, the Szentlőrinc Athletic Club (SZAC), which was established in 1908. The club was meant to be a place of development for many fields of sports (athletics, biking, tennis, gymnastics etc.), but the popularity of football was unchallenged. In 1928 the settlement was promoted as a major municipality, as its population tripled. By 1934, two years before Szentlőrinc reached the status of a town, it had been the home of twelve clubs. (PIHGY 2007) The majority of the clubs were operated by social institutions, which took support from local craftsmen and tradesmen to cover running costs and to construct new ranges. Both the settlement's most significant industrial agents, the brick factory (Téglagyár) and the levente (detailed later) had its own sports club. The dominating sport was football almost without exception.

Typically, football clubs had three classes of teams: kids (10-13 years), junior (14-17) and adult (from 18 years on). Each of the classes had two teams: the adults had a primary and a backup team, while the others were mainly divided by age, although individual skills were also a determining factor. The hierarchical status of the players was strongly affected by the level of their team. Kids were watching the performance of "the old" in amazement, and while they were already proud of their admission into the club, they were dreaming about the time they could put on the club's champion uniform.

1 "In Hungary 'kicking the balls', alias football kicked off in 1895. The first public match was played in 1897, and drew 2000 viewers. In little more than a decade, in 1911, when the football team of the Ferencváros Athletic Club (Fradí) returned from its first tour abroad, the succeeding players were greeted by 30 thousand fans at the Eastern Railway Station." (Romsics 2005, 100)

Larger clubs had dedicated personnel, mostly once-active players, who regularly checked the grounds for some little compensation, for example for a free pass to the matches. They had a sense for choosing the quick and skilful kids, or those who played with a plan in mind, even if the execution failed. One of the recruiters was a tall, slender man in a long coat almost hitting the ground. In one of his hands was a notebook, and in the other was a pen. From time to time he called out a kid: Come here, boy! What is your name? Those getting recorded in his notes were sent for training in groups of 4-5. (personal account of Ráduly 2011) Clubs held recruitment events more than once a year, and often the primary team's trainer was present as well to get informed what talents to expect from the grounds in the forthcoming years.

The adults of the primary team had a hierarchy too, which influenced the weight of one's opinion in the dress room, or his turn in the shower (and whether he was left enough warm water). It went without saying that younger players addressed their peers who were older by 8-10 years formally. It was their honor to carry an accomplished player's volcano-fiber suitcase on the team's tours, or to clean their shoes. As a part of the integration process, seniors sent the juniors for newspapers and drinks. (Borsi-Kálmán 2008, 97–98)

Many things determined the success of a freshmen's integration, but there was one experience that everybody had to go through—the inauguration ritual. Usually this came right after the newcomer player's first match in the club. In the shower he was knocked down, dragged onto a bench, where every player spanked his naked butts once. When it was over the team with the captain in front greeted their new teammate with cheers and handshakes. The admission of those debuting in the national football team also involved spanking. (Rejtő, 1966) According to Buzánszky's memories, he received his on the train, traveling back from the national team's match. (personal account of Buzánszky 2010)

This ceremony formed such a bond within the team that ensured the holiness of the game, which had to be kept intact in spite of any possible debates among the players who were to fight for each other together. On the field, social boundaries are temporarily suspended – this is the democratic side of football. On the other hand, skills unveiled soon, which in turn determined the ranks of the players, giving the meritocratic aspect of the game. These features were attractive for the audience too, which is demonstrated by the doubling of the capacity of the stadiums of the two most popular teams, the FTC and the MTK, from 20 thousand people to 40 thousand.

Week by week players would become celebrities, and if performed at international matches, representing Hungary, they would be praised as national heroes. The excellent performance in the 1938 world cup (silver) raised the popularity of football even more. The outstanding achievements of the Hungarian athletes are exemplified by the gold medals won at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam, Los Angeles and Berlin. Sports, especially football, thanks to its

popularity, played an important role in the formation of a collective identity. The merits of this collective identity are acknowledged even by today's EU-philosophy: "The organization of sport and of competitions on a national basis is part of the historical and cultural background of the European approach to sport, and corresponds to the wishes of European citizens. In particular, national teams play an essential role not only in terms of identity but also to secure solidarity with grassroots sport, and therefore deserve to be supported." [EU White Book, pp. 14-15]

Scouting

The scouting movement had started in Hungary even before the Horthy-era. Although the voluntary and open youth movement had reached the country quite soon after its British inception in 1907, it could not really take off until the 20s.

Among the first steps was the partial Hungarian translation and publication of Raden-Powell's fundamental work (*Scouting for Boys*) in the reports of the secondary school of Nagybecskerek by László Králik, teacher of the institution. The idea spread more widely as the *Torontál* newspaper quoted from the report in its 14th July 1910 issue. The article emphasized the practical side of scout training. "The members of the association are 12-18 year-old boys, who must meet high requirements. Members are expected to become acquainted with all sorts of real-life challenges. They have to spend time out in the wild and learn how to build a hut, cut wood, make fire, cook, pull a boat, drive a bike, march, observe people and animals. They have to adopt the rules of hygienic lifestyle, exercise their bodies with all kinds of games and sports etc. All these are learnt through practice in their free afternoons, Sundays, national holidays and vacations." Essentially, the article sketches out the informal education techniques particular to scouting, which largely builds upon outside activities.

Throughout WWI the movement temporarily recoiled, but afterwards it regained its momentum. In 1914 the number of scouts was between three and four thousand. By the end of the 20s it was almost 30 thousand. (Gergely 1989, 53) The Ministry of Religion and Public Education, which oversaw the educational aspects of the scout movement, took measures to encourage its introduction in schools, which resulted in this expansion. The Ministry's general decree not only declared the organization of scout troops as desirable, but also requested schools to house them as resources permit, and "find a way to provide participating teachers with four hours of allowance a week". (Gergely 1989, 58) The adaptation of scouting fitted well within the politics of Klebelsberg, the contemporary leader of the Ministry, who commenced large-scale cultural reforms after the Treaty of Trianon. The minister underlined it several times that "pedagogy does not respect the importance of physical and moral education enough". The reason for focusing on physical and moral education was (among

others) that the Allied ordered military restrictions on Hungary, and its compliance was closely supervised. Klebelsberg planned to solve the problem of physical training within the schooling system (together with intellectual education), and the scout movement seemed an ideal means.

Although the Ministry supported the introduction of scouting, a substantial portion of schools was not enthusiastic about it. Secondary school teachers who were directly affected had mixed feelings. (Gergely 1989, 57) Schools regarded the autonomy of the scout movement as a threat to theirs. By using policy as an excuse, they tried to impose limits on the principle of the free choice of troops. In spite of the Ministry's attempt to enforce the principle by an official decree, schools (especially state schools) tended to avoid cooperation.

Schools		Other	Total
State	Church		
162	252	184	598

Table 1: Number of scout troops by institution in 1931

As a consequence of the general attitude of the teaching staff, though scout troops were present in schools, the movement's particular educational practices were not accepted. (Certainly, there were exceptions², but those did not change the overall situation, only made it more varied.)

The media in Pestszentlőrinc reported about scouting-related events several times. The development of scouting in the settlement can be traced by following the local newspapers. There are three troops we can read about: the 920th St. Lőrinc (Szent Lőrinc) Scout Troop was formed in 1927.³ (*Pestszentlőrinci Újság*, 13 Aug 1927) The troops were led by teachers of religious education. The St. Lőrinc Scout Troop intended to have their first camping in the summer of 1928, and in order to realize the plan they asked for support from the council for the low-income scouts. (*Pestszentlőrinci Hírlap*, 1 Jun 1928) In celebration of the March 15th Hungarian Revolution of 1848 the troop also gave an all-evening performance in the Fórum movie theatre in 1930. (*Pestszentlőrinci Hírlap*, 14 Mar 1930) In 1936 the St. Flórián Scout Troop held a flag blessing ceremony (*Pestszentlőrinci Újság*, 16 May 1936), and the St. Lőrinc had a large feast celebrating their tenth anniversary: there was thanksgiving in the Catholic Church, they garlanded the war monument⁴, and held an assembly of honor on the Szemere rifle range. (*Pestszentlőrinci Újság*, 13 Jun 1936) A year later the

2 "The first 'scouting class' was launched in the secular state school of Körmend. There were also initiatives to organize intern schools for scouts. On its May 15th 1935 meeting the OET made a decision to consider the 'idea of nurturing schools'..." (Gergely 1989, 191–192)

3 Foundation dates of the other teams, the 828th St. Flórián (Szent Flórián) and the 947th György Rákóczi I (I. Rákóczi György) were not available in the newspapers.

4 The monument's construction finished in 1938, and it was unveiled on 28th May. (*Pestszentlőrinci Hírlap*, 4 Jun 1938)

scouts of Szentlőrinc cut the ribbons of a scouting house. The event was complemented with a mass, a service, and a performance with guest scouts. The following year the scout meet-up and camping, which the cultural minister Earl Pál Teleki attended too, was hosted in the garden of that house. (*Pestszentlőrinci Hírlap*, 25 Jun 1938)

Soon the movement, which originally targeted adolescent boys, extended its scope both in age and sex. Its remarkable growth in Hungary is exemplified by the organization of girl troops in the early 20s. (Although they had to overcome heavy opposition, especially by the church.) As a comparison, the number of girl scouts in England was 94 thousand (1917), in the USA 114 thousand (1922), in Poland 17 thousand (1923), and in Hungary 5000 (1928). The goals and educational methods of girl scouting was tailored according to the “dominant views of girls’ and women’s education” of each country. (Gergely 1989, 85) Despite the challenges, the Hungarian girl scouting did not only take off, but was also awarded the honor of hosting the first scouting world congress in Hungary.

The question of extending the age limits was raised already at the onset of the movement, but the resolution, the concrete measures were delayed until the early 20s. There also were multiple so-called preparation movements which consolidated the to-be scouts: wolf cubs, apprentices, and boy scouts. They all trod different paths, and for a long time sought to oppress each other. (Gergely 1989, 93–99) The birth of rover scouting was onerous too, but thanks to the efforts of the Hungarian scouting’s major leaders, Pál Teleki and Sándor Sík⁵, in the spring of 1926 a national meeting could open with 161 delegates of 12 cities. In the beginning of 1933 the number of rovers was 3603. (Gergely 1989, 102–103)

The scouting movement had always maintained an elitist impression, though there had been attempts to involve the young craftsmen whose majority was above 19. In 1932 the number of scouting craftsmen was about 5300, making up approximately 14% of all members. (P. Miklós 2003)

Scouting did not cease to be an opportunity to keep up with international acquaintances and to function as a door to the British world in the 1930s either. An important event was the 1928 Girl Scout International Conference on Parád as well as the fact that the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts was formed in Hungary. The other outstanding event was the 1933 World Jamboree on Gödöllő. Preparations had begun in 1931 already with Pál Teleki as commissioner in charge. Teleki (and the rest of the government) recognized the possibilities offered by the meet-up (they had to compete with the USA and Czechoslovakia to win the organization rights), and in spite of the great recession they managed to find resources to provide a sufficient amount and

5 Their vision was “the upbringing of a youth with European education, who have character and discipline, who accept and follow the direction of the ‘authorized’, and who change society by showing example (future leaders of the society, intellectuals).” (Gergely 1989, 101)

quality of informational and propagating publications. Troops were preparing for the proper reception of the foreign visitors too, which the leadership aimed to control closely. Hungarian scouts were expected to be attentive, invite the guests and share their meals. The guides clearly saw the potentials of informal learning when they encouraged the observation of “the spirit, regulation, spiritual life, camps, [...], skills, campfire performances, order, hygiene and respectable conducts of the foreign scouts”. (Gergely 1989, 157) Governor Miklós Horthy visited the international camp at Gödöllő too.

Teleki’s idea of a wholesale scouting society did not come true, it could not achieve success even in schools, but the movement was proved strong enough to keep its independence from the levente associations at the cost of some compromises. Pressurized by the War Office, the levente association’s pre-military training became compulsory for young members, but reviews and reports bear witness that the guides did not put emphasis on it; the original Baden Powell ideas remained intact. The relationship between the scouts and the levente as perceived by those young men who belonged to both is well characterized by the memories of the actor Imre Sinkovits: “attending the levente was obligatory. I did not like it. I was a scout. Fire and water! In the capital, at any rate.” (Balatoni–Takács 2003) While scouting was a voluntary and blissful activity, the levente was perceived as a forced duty for many.

The Levente

The idea of military education and preliminary training had been around in senior circles of the War Office since the turn of the century, and practical implementation had begun in the form of organized shooting courses. By 1910 already 163 courses had been offered, and this number had doubled by the end of 1913. Until the outburst of WWI the number of participants had reached 20 thousand. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 15–17)

Following the Treaty of Trianon, pre-service training gained special attention, because the chief staff of the War Office intended to keep the military potential up in a disguised manner amidst the military sanctions imposed and strictly monitored by the Entente. The staff was not satisfied with the possibilities given by scouting, and instead pulled off the formation of the levente associations which served their militant (but still covert) interests better.

Masking the military purposes required cooperation by the Ministry of Religion and Public Education (VKM). In order to reach nation-wide scope and drive the young into participation, new laws had to be passed. Only after laying the legal grounds with the physical education act (1921/LIII) could the War Office reach out for the boys under 21 who have left school by placing physical education into the state’s responsibilities. The act’s first paragraph decrees that “levente juniors are obliged to physical exercise three hours a week at least for 8, at most for 9 months”. On the basis of the resulting process enabled by the act, Hungary can be praised as the leading pioneer of the institutionalization of the

physical education of the out of school youth in the Horthy-era, coming ahead of the western countries. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 60) The 1921 act already warranted sanctions in case of non-compliance, but in the time span under consideration this clause did not have as direct consequences as in the 40s.

Reluctantly, the War Office agreed on cooperation with the VKM, but it sought to dominate from the very beginning. The levente associations were directed by the National Board of Physical Education, with a general as a behind-the-scenes associate chairman. The general was supported by commissioned officers. “Members were divided into 3 age groups, each of them featuring a different kind of training. The first group consisted of 12-15-year-olds, who received elementary training, played sports, and underwent moral education. The second group encompassed the 16-18 year olds, and their program enhanced the first group’s with part-time military pre-training. The young men of 19-21 constituting the third group received vocational pre-training: $\frac{2}{3}$ -parts military, $\frac{1}{3}$ -part sports training.” (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 69) Nonetheless, the heads of the education department also exercised their right to effect educational goals. Therefore, despite the undeniable militarist ideas and aims, the levente cannot be classified as a purely military organization. Especially in its early years, thanks to the civilians in the leadership, the meetings were more similar to sport events than to military trainings.

Although the law was passed, the country-wide establishment of the levente associations did not go on flawlessly. The affairs of the city of Kispest pars pro toto can give a good representation of the general struggle. Kispest, like other cities of the county of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun, had its own physical education committee. To fund operations they organized spectacular competitions promoting sports, football matches as well as dancing evenings, performances, and balls. One of the critical issues of running up the system was the supply of instructors. On the April 1922 meeting of the National Board of Physical Education concluded that the enforcement of the act was at jeopardy if the existing 1400(!) instructors’ drilling is not finished by the end of the year. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 44) The trainings began under the supervision of the VKM, but local initiatives were launched too. Thus did the responsible committee of Kispest in order to fulfil its own requirements, and three other towns of the county offered instructor training courses too. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 48)

In the spring of 1924 an executive order proclaimed the re-election of the committee members in every town possessing a functional council. Hence Kispest’s reformed committee consisted of the mayor, the chief medical doctor, the physical education manager, the junior’s coach, three members of the council, and three additional competent people appointed by the lord lieutenant. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 49) Since financing the levente associations was the responsibility of the authorities, its chief officers were often inactive, occasionally hostile with regards to levente matters. In Kispest the budget was deemed

insufficient for the construction of a new field, thus the levente took the existing ones into use. Their numbers (of those obliged to partake) was 1899 in 1924, one of the highest in the county. At many sites committees complained that even a 10-20% show-up rate on the Sunday appointments was an achievement, and that those who had been married were impossible to pull in. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 109)

As revealed by the 1923 document “National defence and the military aspects of the education of the young”, the War Office was interested in physical education in schools (thus in the stricter enforcement of compulsory schooling too), but was even more so in ensuring the regular training of the young graduates, because “the human resources accumulated here, which actually constitutes the majority of the nation [...] must not slip out of the reserves of national defence even after finishing school.” (Gergely–Kiss 1976)

The heads of the War Office expected the pre-service military training to be equivalent to a three-month drill, and consequently did not have intentions to allocate time for indirect learning in the program. It had become more and more pronounced by the involved military officers that the time of playing around, playing football and shot putting was over. On the other hand, the department of education did not wish a simple clone of the military training. Both parties had only partial success in asserting themselves. The 1927 Physical Education Decree brought uniformity to and mass adaptation of pre-service training, but it did so by sketching out a versatile, attractive, flexible and indirect junior education program. In practice, due to the lack of trained personnel, educational aspects weakened. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 65–69)

The government soon recognized the propaganda-potential of the awards earned in sports, and for this reason it supported clubs. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 70) The National Board of Physical Education sought to build cooperation between the levente movement and the social sport associations. They had a good case achieving compromise, though the levente primarily anticipated material and professional backing, therefore augmenting their organization, while the social associations wanted a boost in the sports activity of the levente movement. The heads of the levente were more receptive of those sports which were in line with military preparations, like riding, air sports, shooting, cycling, combat and defence sports (wrestling, box, judo), water sports (rowing, swimming, sailing) and winter sports (skiing, snowboarding, skating) as well as motorcycling and driving.

Five years after the onset of levente training in Pestszentlőrinc, it founded its local Levente Association in 1923. Similarly to other associations, its board members were delegated from the municipal chief officers. The group included community veterinarian dr. Mihály Sury, public trustee Sándor Zöld, parson dr. Béla Wimmerth, community doctor dr. József Dora and chief administrator Lajos Kuszenda. (The latter two persons held positions in the Szentlőrinc Ath-

letic Club, too.) Another feature shared by the levente and sports associations was their frequent financial struggle, which they attempted to remedy by organizing events and balls, such as the ball of levente held in the Andreics restaurant (Pestszentlőrinci Hírlap, 24 Feb 1928). More often than not, the profits of these events were not sufficient for the expansion of their inventory. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 101)

The levente sport venues in Pestszentlőrinc were behind the bulletproof ramparts of the Szemere shooting club on the Keglevich street, and its community made strides to assimilate. The venues were not reserved exclusively for levente training, but it was open to the public too, and often the neighboring Szentlőrinc Athletic Club's trainings were held there. (*Pestszentlőrinci Hírlap*, 24 Feb 1928) Dust caused recurring headaches in the settlement, so planting new trees in the area was always a source of excitement. The local newspaper wrote about ornament trees planted in honor of Miklós Horthy, István Széchenyi, Sándor Petőfi, János Arany and Ferenc Rákóczi on the levente sport venues. (*Pestszentlőrinci Hírlap*, 27 Apr 1928)

The great recession set back the culmination of the levente movement. As though the act on physical education and its executive order decreed duties for employers in relation with the levente training, factories, including the Hoffer Factory on Kispest, opted to ease their economic situation at the expense of the levente. In spite of their obligations to support the levente movement by creating societies and supplying them with equipment, employers excused themselves by first reducing the staff enlisted for service, then disbanding existing societies on the basis of insufficient number of men of age, and sold the sports equipment. They accepted to pay monthly contributions to the municipal funds rather than operating a society which would have cost 20 thousand pengős. Conversely, there were a few donors too. For example, baron András Wolfner "built home, supplied with a library, radio, sports equipment, and bought winter and summer uniforms" for the levente of Ócsa. (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 109) However, in the years of recession the general state of affairs was more resembling to what a November 1931 report gave account of: "25-30% of the levente of Kispest is without shoes and uniform". (Gergely–Kiss 1976, 111)

The levente movement got more and more involved with the society in Pestszentlőrinc, which was granted city status in 1936. It was the place where the shooting club occupying an impressive area was opened. With the contribution of the Aeronautics Sports Society of the Technical University of Budapest the settlement also founded its own club with the same name. Levente bands and parades were never missing from any feast. (*Pestszentlőrinci Hírlap*, 4, 11 Jun 1938)

The levente movement faced resistance from a number of directions in the period of our interest: the department of education did not sympathize with the idea of the militarist approach, so it tended to promote sports as well as flexible and attractive junior activities, and push the movement in that way.

A proportion of teachers tried to exclude themselves, and those who still joined made efforts to divert the curriculum away from the militarist direction. The majority of the young were reluctant to participate too, not in last because it was compulsory. This was pointed out by the reports in the 20s, stating that only a fraction of the enlisted showed up on the meetings. Public shaming was not unusual, as demonstrated by the memories of the above quoted Imre Sinkovits (“... the trainer—a gym teacher—called me out on a levente practice. ‘Your name?’ I tell him. ‘Speak up!’ I do so. ‘Up, up!’ In the end I was howling almost in tears: ‘Imre Sinkovits!’ ‘You hear it, boys? That’s how a Hungarian levente is called.’”) The drilling traditions and the military hierarchy explain the humiliations, but did not make the levente more popular.

A more balanced picture can be obtained by reading the accounts of Ignác Kokas, born in Vál in 1926. (MTV, 2010) For the young painter who lived his entire life in his birthplace, it was the opening of a new world when he went to Agárd to a levente camp, whose commander-instructor suggested him to pursue higher education in a teacher training school, and even wrote the application for him. For Kokas the levente was a focal point in his life.

In Place of Conclusion

Scouting, the levente and the sports associations greatly influenced the lives of the young, but this was not exclusively due to the stated goals of the respective organizations. A more complex examination of the landscape is in order, since the field of informal learning is too complicated – twisted, so to speak – for the effects of the organizations under discussion to take place fully as intended. This is why it is worth uncovering as many individual stories as possible.

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