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Being a good citizen, competitor and entrepreneur in Hungary and in Britain: utopia or reality?

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Introduction

Hungarian and British teachers live in two very different economic and social systems. Changes have occurred in both countries in recent years due to rapid social, economic and technological global developments, but large-scale socio-political reorganisation may have had greater effects in Hungary than the more gradual and limited changes in Great Britain. In instances of comparatively slow social change we might expect people to balance what worked in the past with what the new situation requires; while examples of rapid and pervasive change, like that those in Hungary, may require greater adaptative technique at the conceptual, emotional and behavioural level.

These dramatic changes have influenced the teachers' roles. There are two different concepts of the teacher: the educator and the instructor. Those who see the teacher as educator expect teachers to contribute to education for an active, contributing members of the community and nation, as workers, citizens, and parents. The teacher as instructor should not convey any particular social concepts to students, because this would conflict with freedom of the personality.

Under the socialist regime, schools were responsible for socialising children to be good citizens and were required to instil values reflecting a 'socialist personality'. After the political changes, personal development became the almost exclusive province of the family, and the role of schools was limited to teaching cognitive skills, as in most countries in the West where the teacher is considered as an 'instructor' (Trommsdorff, 1999). In Hungary the teacher is no longer expected to educate towards producing a certain type of person - partly because there is confusion around what type of person or what kind of citizen the school system is supposed to produce in the current situation. This is the indirect cause of the lack of systematic civic education in Hungary. In the previous regime a good citizen was one who did not interfere in politics, who followed the regime's point of view. The present democratic society, however, requires active citizenship.

Teachers who are now middle-aged had to change their educational attitude to meet the democratic principles of the new political system, and their general status in society has also changed. As public servants, their income decreased dramatically in comparison to others who are both highly educated and able to enter the business world. Teachers simultaneously lost both respect and their standard of living. They consider themselves the losers from the rapid structural changes from state-controlled economy to market economy. Successful entrepreneurs are the winners. Teachers are therefore in something of a social-moral crisis.

Not only have the concepts of teacher and citizen changed but also the concept of competition. The ongoing political changes in the former socialist countries, the emergent market economy, unemployment and competition in the job market and the growing number of enterprises that require a competitive spirit have created a new and harshly competitive environment, characterised by scarcity of resources. Competition, formerly ideologically a banned concept, has become favoured by the media and public discourse, but there is total confusion about the personal, interpersonal and moral requirements and consequences of competitive situations (Fülöp, 1995). This is partly because there have been no explicit or well-structured principles and rules to govern competition; and people are unprepared for the emotional consequences of open competition.

Democracies are characterised by an involved citizenry. This places teachers in Hungary in a paradoxical situation. They are expected to socialise future democratic citizens, but are not comfortable with the topic of citizenship. They were brought up in a society that did not require these skills or personal qualities and had no tradition of civic education to guide them, but they are expected to prepare students for the new political system, to be entrepreneurial and competitive. A study in 1992-1994 of Hungarian secondary school students showed that they had little idea about the meaning of citizenship, and had no interest in related topics. They did not think that schools had any role in bringing up people to be good citizens (Van Hoorn, et al. 2000).

Citizenship, entrepreneurship and competition

Like other social phenomena, the rules of the game in democracy and in the business world, concerning citizenship and enterprise are frequently conceived from the perspective of social dilemmas. In social psychology social dilemmas are characterised as situations in which private interests are at odds with collective interests. They arise when personal short-term interests conflict with the longer term consequences to all of those involved. As a consequence of acting either way in such a dilemma, we might regret having acted the way we did (Liebrand et al. 1992). People's reluctance to take social actions that could be collectively beneficial but personally costly, at least in the short term, is also a social dilemma: the pursuit of immediate self-interest ultimately leads to collectively irrational solutions.

Citizenship and entrepreneurship are also frequently conceived of as a dilemma between co-operation and competition – a person cannot be both co-operative and competitive at the same time (Deutsch, 1973). It follows that one cannot meet the expectation to be both a good citizen and a good entrepreneur. Citizenship and entrepreneurship can be also conceived of as a tension between collectivism and individualism.

Citizenship and entrepreneurship are thus often thought of as contradictory phenomena. However, in practical everyday life people can and do find an balance or agreement between the two: there are ways that these concepts can be combined, compromised or integrated in the wider society. But rational solutions to social dilemmas are attainable only if sufficient number of citizens are willing to choose to compete co-operatively, to take into consideration both private interest and public interest at the same time. The social psychological literature suggests some interventions that may facilitate action- to serve the public interest. One solution is to increase the level of trust in society (Sigel and Hoskin, 1981), so that citizens can rely on fellow citizens and that they will also behave in a publicly responsible way. There are stronger tendencies for individuals to co-operate

when they think and trust that others will also co-operate. A relatively high level of citizens' trust is inherent in the concept of democracy.

Another solution offered by social psychology is the strengthening of group identity and interdependence among members. The perception of efficacy, the probability that one will make a difference with his/her behaviour, has been proposed as crucial factor in determining a willingness to contribute to public good. People are also more likely to consider collective welfare in relatively small groups, where there is communication and visibility: but citizenship implies belonging to a huge group of people - a whole nation - and this means that there is little individual responsibility and visibility. It becomes hard to evaluate the effects of one individual's behaviour.

How can a society or government elicit co-operative, socially responsible behaviour from multitudes of people? One solution, that has implications for teachers and schools, is the internalisation of certain social values and behavioural norms. In our study we investigated what kind of ideas British and Hungarian teachers have about socialising a good citizen, entrepreneur and competitor.

The British-Hungarian project

Britain has not experienced dramatic changes in its social structure in the 20th century, but Hungary has undergone at least two major changes of political system: one from feudo-capitalism to socialism and another from socialism to a capitalist market economy. The key concepts we have been studying - citizenship, entrepreneurship and competition (Davies *et al.* 2000) - have changed their meaning in Hungarian society and among Hungarian teachers within living memory.

The aim of our three-year long research project was to reveal how teachers in two such different societies perceive these concepts. Our broad aim was to understand what kind of conditions are needed to tempt people to behave in a way that integrates both citizenship and entrepreneurship, in other words, what motivates people to behave in a socially conscious way, decreasing the incentive associated with non-co-operative behaviour and increasing the incentive associated with co-operative behaviour. The goal of this particular analysis however is narrower. It is to present how Hungarian teachers perceive the possibility of combining self-interest with collective interest, individualistic ideas with collectivist ones, co-operation with competition, entrepreneurship with citizenship.

Subjects

Our subjects were 40 primary and secondary school teachers in each country; 20 from the respective capitals (London and Budapest) and 20 from smaller cities. The mean age of the Hungarian teachers was 41.4 years and their ages ranged between 25 and 65.

Method

Teachers were interviewed in depth. This paper focuses only on the Hungarian teachers' ideas about who they consider to be a good citizen, a good entrepreneur and a good competitor and how they think citizenship, enterprise and competition can be reconciled. Teachers were asked whether a good entrepreneur could be a good citizen as well, and if so what were the appropriate conditions. The responses were both qualitatively and quantitatively analysed.

Results

In the preliminary analysis the majority of participants (65%) indicated either explicitly or implicitly that one can be a good citizen and a good entrepreneur at the same time. Their answers about how this might be done can be sorted into eight broader categories:

1. Responsibility towards society: this included consideration of the common good by being charitable, creating employment opportunities and making useful products.
2. Responsibility and fairness towards the employees (e.g. paying fair wages, being a good boss).
3. Being law-abiding and paying taxes correctly. This is a significant moral requirement in a country where tax evasion is perceived as prevalent especially among entrepreneurs.
4. Honesty in general. In some answers this also includes the view that there is a flexibility within which one can bypass some rules and still be generally respectable. As one teacher said:

[The good entrepreneur who is also a good citizen] finds the way to pay the taxes and make his own profit as well. ... If entrepreneurs observed all the laws and rules they would go bankrupt ... You can't observe all the rules. But neither can you break all of them.

5. Patriotism: a few teachers indicated that to be a good citizen an entrepreneur should contribute to the development of the country and produce goods for the domestic market.
6. Competence and success are also among the perceived characteristics of good citizens/entrepreneurs.
7. Other individual characteristics, such as being well-educated and thinking in the long-term rather than the short-term, are mentioned.
8. The role of structural determination is also stressed, meaning that to create good entrepreneurs who also are good citizens a society must have reasonable tax rates, a good legal system and an efficient law-enforcement system.

I think the state administration has a huge role in these issues as well. We see huge amounts of state funds disappearing into some pockets and it's a tragedy because honest citizens feel they are being cheated.

One-third (35%) doubted if one can be both a good entrepreneur and a good citizen as well in today's Hungary. They attributed that to:

- an economic environment (e.g. the tax system) in present day Hungary that makes it difficult to be both law-abiding and successful in business;
- human nature, thought to be characterised by selfishness and greed.

Being a good citizen and a good competitor at the same time requires the following according to the teachers:

- clear and transparent conditions, rules and criteria of competition

- fair play; observing the rules of competition
- competing in a constructive way by developing oneself and the community, and avoiding destructive competition in which the way of getting a better position is to destroy the opponent.

Being a good entrepreneur and a good competitor at the same time involves:

- good individual skills or abilities such as an educated mind, acceptance of risk, endurance, competence, good organisational skills, creativity
- keeping the rules of competition.

When teachers comment on the difficulties of reconciling these two roles they emphasise that in Hungary there are no clear rules or control of competition due to the lack of a tradition of a capitalist market economy.

Enterprise and competition are closely related: the most interesting question is whether and how citizenship can fit in with enterprise and competition. According to Hungarian teachers if an entrepreneur or a competitor wants to be a good citizen he or she should:

- display a certain amount of loyalty and consideration of the common good and the interests of the community, e.g. donating to charity if one is well off;
- pay taxes and observing the law;
- in the case of employers, be fair to employees;
- take private interests into consideration in a way that does not harm others;
- be a patriot who takes the country's interests into consideration.

Teachers point to the role of the social, legal, economic and political structures as decisive factors determining to a very large extent whether the above requirements can be met.

It's hard [to be a good citizen and a good entrepreneur] because laws are like that ... if you are doing it honestly and observe the law you can't be an entrepreneur at all because you would have to suffer a deficit.

The majority of respondents doubted whether the current environment in Hungary is open to honest competition. Their statements reflect a kind of social cynicism mixed with references to 'early capitalism' and 'capital accumulation' being made:

We're living in a tough period in Hungary. It's called the period of the accumulation of capital. We could also call it theft. (Teacher from Budapest)

After making the first million one can be a good citizen. Till then one rather has to be a good entrepreneur. (Teacher from provincial city)

Summary

The preliminary analysis of the Hungarian interviews throws light on the special features that characterise Hungary's changing political, economical and social environment. More than one-third of the Hungarian teachers are disillusioned and cannot imagine that somebody can be a good citizen, entrepreneur and competitor at the same time. Taxation is a sensitive issue. Tax rates are relatively high and there is a widespread belief

(reinforced by some minor and major scandals) that entrepreneurs as well as members of the socio-economical elite are very successful in tax avoidance. Patriotism is also on the agenda – not surprisingly in a country where important questions related to this issue could not be debated freely for decades.

British teachers tend to view the question of combining citizenship, enterprise and competition in terms of community and individual goals and frequently mention the need for considering the community if an entrepreneur wants to be a good citizen. Hungarian teachers primarily emphasise the role of society and its responsibility in establishing a structure that makes it possible to integrate these three different roles and identities. This view puts society into the focus rather than the individual's personal qualities and characteristics.

These findings raise several questions about citizenship education in Hungary. Whether or not the youth of Hungary develop the values, knowledge and abilities associated with democratic traditions and market economy has serious implications for the vitality of democracy and the future of the country. However, if a significant number of teachers feels that their role in this process is strictly limited because it is the socio-economical structure that determines the way people act, then we cannot expect a huge impact from the educational system.

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