

Book Review


Hegedűs, R. (2020). *Kompetenciák–Hátrányok–Térségek: Avagy honnan, s hogyan jutnak el a hátrányos helyzetűek a felsőoktatásba?* [Competences–Disadvantages–Territorials: From where and how can disadvantaged students get into the higher education system?] Debrecen University Press.

Competence Results of Disadvantaged Students in Secondary School and Higher Education

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As researchers, we know that we cannot examine a phenomenon or process alone—we should study the environment and other phenomena connected to the topic of research. This is true of educational processes too, and this is why education is examined from economic, social, and territorial views. Roland Hegedűs's book about the performance of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students and the territorial perspective of their studies in secondary education and higher education in Hungary is found in this research field.

Hegedűs's book makes several preliminary points. First, increasing student outcomes results in improving economic outcomes, which is a self-motivating process because a region with good economic performance can invest more in education, thus increasing student performance. But this process also has a negative effect on disadvantaged students and territorial regions. Second, Act No. XXVII in 2013 changed the categories of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. Third, there was a process in which the maintainers of most educational institutions changed, around 2010. Based upon these points, Hegedűs researches differences between territorial access to education, differences in the performance of secondary school students, and differences in studies in higher education (level of study and field of study) from the perspective of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students.

The first three chapters of the book present background literature. In the first chapter, Hegedűs writes about social, economic, and territorial differences in Hungary, and the level of education and social development. The second chapter deals with the results of the National Competence Measurement (NCM) and the state of the school system in 2012. NCM is a Hungarian measurement for all sixth, eighth, and tenth-grade students for reading and math. NCM is often referred to as the little brother of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The third chapter concerns higher education (construction, function,

catchment areas of higher education institutions, factors influencing the choosing of a profession, and possibilities for a degree in the labor market, etc.). Although these topics relate most directly to the Hungarian situation, Hegedűs attempts to locate similarities in other international educational settings and in the results of other academic research.

In the empirical portion of the book, Hegedűs assembles five research questions regarding the teaching of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in secondary education and higher education. He examines three databases in his research: (1) NCM student, school, and institution-based databases in tenth grade in 2012; (2) the University Admission Database (UAD) in 2014; (3) data from a questionnaire on how factors influenced students from the University of Debrecen in their choice of higher education institutions in the 2016-2017 academic year. The author uses the statistical program SPSS to research this data and MapInfo to represent maps. Data are presented at the micro-regional level (micro-regions being smaller than counties but larger than settlements). Data analysis is optimal because the results are not very specific but can reveal differences between the studied areas. The NCM and UAD databases are at the national level; they contain data from all areas and students within Hungary.

The following three chapters investigate the results of this research. First, Hegedűs writes about the territorial achievements of students at the level of secondary school, and he also characterizes secondary schools. This chapter examines data from disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in NCM at the micro-regions level. Hegedűs compares the students' data according to their family background. Results confirm the findings that family background greatly influences student outcomes. The novelty of these results comes from dissimilar examinations of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students and the calculation of the expected data. Results also show disadvantaged students performing better in the central areas of the country than on the periphery; the differences between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged student performances are smaller in areas with better economic performance.

According to Hegedűs's characterization of secondary schools, disadvantaged students attend secondary schools of a lower character, and that choice of secondary school can hinder access to higher education. Disadvantaged students tend to perform better in high schools where the average performance is higher and there are fewer disadvantaged students. However, it is more difficult for disadvantaged students to enroll in the high schools with a higher average performance.

The second empirical chapter examines disadvantaged students in higher education. The sub-themes are the different professional areas, levels of education, and influencing factors in the choice of a higher education institution. Here, the author utilizes a database of students from UAD and the University of Debrecen. Results show that disadvantaged students chose, for example, sports or administrative, police and military, and medical and health sciences. Regarding the health sciences, Hegedűs means nurses or paramedics, not doctors. At higher levels of higher education, the author sees fewer disadvantaged students, and the fewest studying for a master's degree. Hegedűs's research shows that disadvantaged students prefer teacher training among the undivided training types. There is a difference in the choice of higher education institutions between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students because disadvantaged students tend to choose an institution close to their place of residence or regional center, and the capital is the least popular choice of locale for that group of students.

The third chapter is about students who have attended higher education. One of this book's most significant achievements is Hegedűs's integration of the 2012 NCM database with the 2014 UAD database. Because those in tenth grade in 2012 could enter higher education in 2014, their combined data from both databases could be analyzed. This is the first time someone has combined these databases in educational sciences or educational geography research. The author also examines regional differences in the results of secondary school students and the main characteristics of schools (school type, maintainers, students, the work of teachers, and

the admission process of secondary schools). Hegedűs's data shows that competency outcomes and key players in secondary schools are getting closer for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students entering higher education. Disadvantaged students in higher education have higher competence scores than disadvantaged students who have not continued their studies. According to Hegedűs's data, this means that disadvantaged students must apply themselves if they want to continue their studies in higher education. The school environment, the optimal faculty, and the permanence of teachers will help students achieve this goal.

In summary, the innovations of the book are: (1) the research topic, (2) the differentiated research on disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students, (3) the analysis of data on micro-regions, (4) the counting of expected data, and (5) the creation of a combined database of NCM and UAD. Results show that the students' choices of secondary schools are strengthened by their admissions system, i.e., there is a relatively homogenous group of students in higher education, and this does not depend on the family background of the students (disadvantaged or non-disadvantaged). Overall, the data demonstrate that disadvantaged students need to learn more in order to enter higher education.

I recommend Hegedűs's book to all those interested in disadvantaged students in competence measurements, research on regional differences, or educational sciences. This is an excellent book for professionals, anyone interested in the issue of education, and those who love to look at data and maps.



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