

Stadtschulen als Zentren der Konsensbildung oder Quellen der Polemik

Urban Schools as Centres of Consensus or Sources of Polemics

From the beginnings of the movement, schools constituted one of the key building blocks of the Reformation in the urban environment. In the following presentation, my aim is to examine certain aspects of this process through the example of free royal and mining towns in Upper and Lower Hungary during the early modern period. At the outset, I would like to offer a few remarks on the spatial and chronological framework within which I will operate in this paper. I will then look at the initial position and intellectual context in which Reformation urban schooling developed in the Hungarian royal towns, as well as the expectations and roles assigned to it. Subsequently, I will attempt, from two perspectives, to illustrate both the possibilities and means for its successful implementation, as well as potential limitations or complications that could arise, particularly in certain periods.

To begin, a few spatial and temporal remarks. In the following text, I focus on two communities of royal towns, which, according to contemporary geographical terminology, were located in Upper Hungary – a group in the northeast, that is, the upper right on the map – and Lower Hungary – a group in the central region. In the early modern period, all these towns, as royal towns, enjoyed a specific legal status with extensive powers, especially in the sphere of self-administration, including the exercise of ecclesiastical patronage. In the case of the Lower Hungarian towns, these were also mining towns, meaning communities with a specific economic foundation.

As is often the case in the history of East-Central Europe, and particularly in the Kingdom of Hungary, all the urban communities mentioned already had names in several languages during the early modern period, attesting to a certain multilingual character. Since the time of medieval colonization, each of these urban communities had maintained a predominantly German demographic and cultural character. During the early modern period, these positions were weakened to varying degrees by the presence of non-German-speaking populations – primarily Slovak in all towns, in some also Hungarian (as in Košice and Prešov), and in certain cases supplemented by other influences (for example, Polish in the case of Bardejov). Some communities – such as Kremnica and Banská Štiavnica, and to some extent Levoča – maintained their German cultural character more consistently and for longer periods, while others – such as the smaller town of Sabinov – gradually became Slavicized or became arenas of conflict over positions in local administration, as in the case of Banská Bystrica. I

mention this linguistic aspect in particular because it also influenced the character of Lutheran ecclesiastical life in these towns, including schooling, as we shall see.

Chronologically, I focus on the period roughly between the mid-16th and mid-17th centuries, that is, the era in which all urban communities already had established Protestant ecclesiastical structures at both local and regional levels. In both cases, a *fraternitas* (*Seniorat*) of towns was formed in the second half of the 16th century, uniting individual towns, and in the case of the towns in the east, it was transformed at the beginning of the 17th century into an independent Protestant superintendency. Before the mid-16th century, Reformation ideas were still gradually spreading, consolidating, and systematizing in the urban environment, whereas in the second half of the 17th century, measures of re-Catholicization and counter-Reformation implemented by the Habsburg court and affiliated Hungarian secular and ecclesiastical authorities increasingly took hold, ultimately causing the collapse of the Protestant church organization in both groups of towns in the 1670s. The period selected for this study, therefore, represents an era of relative stability and close interconnection between the secular urban bourgeois and ecclesiastical Protestant spheres.

This interconnection was particularly evident in the organization of churches and schools. It is well known that Martin Luther, already in the early years of the Reformation movement in the 1520s, addressed secular authorities – especially town councils – with a call to establish and support schools. In subsequent developments, support for education became one of the key aspects of implementing Reformation ideas in practice, to a significant extent influenced by Philipp Melanchthon. In the analytical context, influence on the formation of church and school organization in the Hungarian urban environment – where other central secular authorities presence was not so thoroughly felt – became an instrument for confessionalization processes.

Among the complex set of intellectual impulses, it is particularly useful for our topic to highlight the evolving self-understanding of secular authorities, who viewed themselves as responsible for the communities entrusted to them not only in practical but also in spiritual terms, for example through the organization of church life and ensuring it both materially and substantively. These ideas became, so to speak, part of the “Reformation package,” making it difficult to identify specific intellectual influences from individual authors – whether theologians or legal scholars – in particular environments and localities. However, it is evident that at least from the mid-16th century, these perspectives resonated in the Hungarian urban environment and became part of the argumentation and support for practical measures taken by urban authorities. From the standpoint of intellectual development and political thinking, it is

noteworthy that schooling, alongside church organization, became a tool through which town councils – acting as the relevant authorities under the given conditions, referred to in sources with terms such as *Regiment*, *von Gott erwellte Regirer und Vorgeher*, and similar – were meant to fulfill their mission: vertically, for the “greater glory of God,” and horizontally, for the “*public good and common weal*.” Education at school – just as in the church through preaching or catechism instruction – was intended to bring positive outcomes for the community both spiritually and practically.

The effective fulfillment of this goal can be considered on several levels. First and foremost, good personnel provision was necessary. Here, the role of teachers or school rectors was naturally central. Attention was paid to their education and intellectual background – each town in the studied period naturally sought to recruit the best and most prestigious candidates. This also extended to their material support, as well as the material provision of schools and their students, which was managed by town councils and prominent individuals within the urban community. For example, the town council of Banská Bystrica dealt with covering the basic living costs of students as early as the 1550s, partly in an effort to assume responsibilities previously covered by the Fugger company funds, which had ceased to be active in Banská Bystrica in the preceding period.

Another dimension is the question of linguistic diversity within urban communities and how it was reflected in school organization. In humanist gymnasia, of course, the language of instruction was Latin, and school rules and schedules were aligned accordingly. In higher grades, on the more prominent urban schools, Greek could also be included in the curriculum. In addition, the teaching staff of Latin schools included German, Slovak, and Hungarian assistants to rectors, or cantors. Beyond helping with instruction in lower grades, where students’ knowledge of Latin was still insufficient, teachers designated as cantors had a particularly important role connected to the school youth: assisting with the liturgical and religious life of urban churches. Sources repeatedly show expectations placed on German, Slovak, or Hungarian cantors to train their students in liturgical singing, which was then incorporated into the worship life of the towns’ churches. Broader circles of townspeople were evidently interested in this aspect of schooling, as in towns from Banská Bystrica to Košice there are repeated requirements to provide suitable, linguistically specific assistants for rectors or cantors, so that no group of students or townspeople would be disadvantaged in terms of opportunities or expectations both in school and church. In rare cases, sources also mention vernacular – primarily German – schools for the children of ordinary townspeople, whose task

was to teach practical skills such as reading and arithmetic in the “local” language. For example, this existed in Banská Bystrica in 1577.

In addition to such practical skills, however, town councils primarily expected something else from their schools. First and foremost, they aimed to strengthen both piety and education, which was to benefit the urban community spiritually and practically. For piety and education to be effectively conveyed, it was necessary that these qualities already be present in the teacher, a point that was also emphasized, as we will return to shortly. These virtues in the students, many of whom would eventually become full members of the community, were intended to foster inner peace, harmony, and unity among the townspeople. These principles represented some of the fundamental values and goals in urban political thinking of the period and, ideally, were to be instilled through school education.

One of the primary sources for understanding of the processes is school regulations (*Schulordnungen*), which were issued by town councils or drafted by individual rectors for their own use and could then be submitted to the town council for approval and official implementation. There is not enough space here to discuss the content of school regulations in detail, so we will limit ourselves to a few basic observations. The regulations themselves can testify to intellectual transfer and the application of foreign influences in local Hungarian conditions. A particularly interesting example is the school regulation from Banská Bystrica from the 1560s, which 19th-century scholars already identified as a faithful copy of a regulation from Neuburg-Zweibrücken. Two decades later, a new, independent school regulation was drafted in Banská Bystrica by the local school rector, Paul Halvepapius, himself a native of Brandenburg. These texts exemplify different ways in which contemporary intellectual developments could be reflected locally – on the one hand, through the wholesale adoption of a foreign text, and on the other, through the creation of an independent text that reflected foreign influences while attempting to apply them to local conditions. This dimension is also evident in Halvepapius’s other activities. In 1584, he was called from his teaching post to serve as the town pastor. In his new position, he sought to implement several reform proposals in church service regulations, which, however, were not well received by his colleagues. One of the objections was the critique that not everything practiced in Germany could automatically be applied in the Hungarian mining towns, whose local conditions were, after all, different and in some respects unique.

The second aspect I would like to highlight here is the way in which confessional impetus was applied in these regulations. In virtually all school regulations, the instruction in piety was typically placed first – both conceptually and spatially within the text. This

instruction, however, was not limited to general formulations emphasizing personal piety, regular attendance at church services by students, and similar practices. The regulations could also include more specific confessional and doctrinal positions that schooling was meant to convey to students. In the school regulation from Levoča of 1589, religious instruction is defined through a set of authoritative texts. The starting point was, naturally, the Word of God, followed by the basic creeds – the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian – while contemporary texts supplement these with the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, Luther's writings, and – interestingly, given the late-16th-century date of the regulation – the *Formula Concordiae*. The author of the regulation instructed that students should “from an early age become accustomed to a clear understanding of the true doctrine,” supplemented by instruction in Luther's Catechism and Leonhard Hutter's *Compendium Theologicum*. All these texts were intended not only to “strengthen them against ancient errors and abuses” but also against “the fanatics of our time, who seek to sophistically distort the true meaning of the Augsburg Confession.” This confessional and practical educational aim is particularly understandable given that, at this time, so-called crypto-Calvinist disputes were occurring in the free royal towns of Upper Hungary. Efforts to instil a firmly defined confessional identity in youth were thus aligned with the foundational confessional positions binding for the urban community as a whole.

Moving to the second point, the question of personnel: the free royal towns of Upper Hungary and the royal mining towns of Lower Hungary sought candidates for teaching posts among local Hungarians as well as foreign figures. Perhaps the most prominent figure from the beginning of the period studied was Leonhard Stöckel, a native of Bardejov and later rector of the town school, who will be addressed in another presentation. Examples of broader trends can also be seen in other figures, such as Stöckel's successor at the Bardejov school, Thomas Faber. He represented both a continuation of Stöckel's work and an illustration of the trends outlined, on multiple levels. Faber was a native of Banská Bystrica, exemplifying contacts within Hungary between the two groups of royal towns, in the east and center. He studied at the local school in Bardejov and at the University of Wittenberg. After Stöckel, Faber did not merely inherit the intellectual leadership of the Bardejov school but also became part of Stöckel's family by marrying his daughter. At the same time, he acted as a mediator for the next generation of his students, transmitting the form of Wittenberg Reformation that was critical of Calvinist-leaning interpretations. Research has identified over 30 of his students who went on to teaching and preaching positions not only in towns but across Hungary, thereby contributing through these personal connections to the formation of a specific theological generational

stance. For instance, one of the first superintendents of Hungarian Lutheran churches in the early 17th century, Isaac Abrahamides Hrochot'ský, was among Faber's students.

Research in this area is ongoing, but it can already be noted that the personality of a significant teacher – particularly in the absence of a stricter institutional framework in the second half of the 16th century – played an important role in the Hungarian Lutheran churches. Through personnel policies at their urban schools, royal towns could thus contribute to strengthening a specific theological profile of the emerging church, even beyond the boundaries of the towns themselves.

The same, however, applies in the opposite direction: any heterodox views held by a teacher could become a problem or a challenge for the town churches, which also considered themselves spiritually responsible for the communities entrusted to them. The turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, characterized by the so-called crypto-Calvinist disputes, offers several such examples. One can point to Johann Mylius, who worked at the school in Levoča at the turn of the 1580s and 1590s. Doubts about his Lutheran orthodoxy began to emerge, accompanied by suspicions of crypto-Calvinism. After dramatic disputes at the synod of 1593, he ultimately left Levoča and moved to Kežmarok, where, with the support of the local noble authority, an intellectual centre had long been forming based on theological interpretations that were more critical of certain positions of the developing Lutheran orthodoxy. Notably, Mylius' argumentation at the 1593 synod consisted of defending local theological traditions of the *Confessio Pentapolitana* and the "more flexible" Melancthonian interpretations. In his view, his opponent, Senior Severinus Sculteti, by supporting the Formula of Concord, had become a "theological innovator," contrary to local customs. However, finding himself relatively isolated with this position among secular and ecclesiastical representatives of the seniorate, Mylius chose to move to Kežmarok, the seat of Sebastian Ambrosius Lam.

Even in this example, it is clear that it would be mistaken to view town school rectors merely as passive figures responsible for implementing predetermined doctrinal positions in instruction. In many cases, they were intellectually active and independent personalities. Their efforts could positively and formatively influence the doctrinal positions of their community, as in the case of Stöckel in the mid-16th century. At the same time, their positions could encounter resistance and become obstacles to their further work, as the example of Mylius in Levoča illustrates several decades later.

As I have already mentioned, institutional acceptance was not always the only important factor in building influence; the creation of intellectual networks through colleagues and, especially, students – who would later occupy positions in secular or ecclesiastical

administration – was also significant. A useful source in this regard is dedicatory verse or even entire verse collections accompanying the publication of Lutheran-Calvinist polemical literature around 1600. Participation in these literary disputes and the identification of authors of individual verses allows us to better identify potential membership in respective factions and lines of intellectual conflict, often directly linked to a specific town school and a significant local teacher.

In conclusion, several key points can be summarized.

From at least the mid-16th century, the town school became an important component in shaping the specific character of a given urban community. Not only the municipal authorities but also the broader urban community repeatedly showed a strong interest in its organization and form. In particular, town authorities were aware that schooling was part of their responsibilities as magistrates, understood vertically in relation to God, from whom ultimately their power derived, and horizontally in relation to the community they governed, whose interests they were obliged to promote.

A crucial element in shaping the school was the selection of the rector, who could significantly influence the intellectual and doctrinal framework within which the school operated. This was important not only in terms of immediate presence but also regarding the impact on students, which was then transmitted generationally and geographically. In an era lacking a more stable territorial Lutheran church organization, town schools, though limited in location and administration, were intended – and expected – to extend their influence well beyond the town boundaries.