

Communist Education as Modernisation Strategy? Path Dependencies and Globalisation in Eastern Europe (1947-1989)

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This article engages with major convergences and divergences in Eastern European education. How should we understand the Soviet influence? How should we interpret the role played by path-dependencies and the subsequent globalisation of the Soviet model and through Western contacts? Soviet influence in education should be conceptualised as both an imperialist force and as a voluntary borrowing, followed by internationalisation with local adaptation. Nevertheless, as a result of transmission and translation processes, Communist education cannot be conceived of as a coherent model. Soviet education itself transformed over time and incorporated both Western and elitist elements. Nevertheless, a historical and comparative analysis indicates that Western and Communist pedagogy - in their local manifestations in each country - and proved to be competitive, alternative but not radically different patterns of modernisation in education in the satellite countries.

Keywords: communist education, reform, Eastern Europe, modernisation, globalisation

Introduction: Eastern European modernity between international diffusion and imperialism

Twenty-five years after the fall of the Communist regimes, historical scholarship engaging with education in the European Communist world is less substantial and robust than expected. There is a need for new theories to disentangle political evaluations of the former regimes from education analysis, and new perspectives on understanding Communist education. This situation is due, in part, to the historiographical pitfalls in approaching European history during and after the Communist era. Scholars have avoided the notion of Communist regimes, focusing instead on their more acceptable versions, such as socialism and post-socialism. Similarly, they have avoided Eastern Europe as a concept, seen as a Communist political construction or accused of hiding substantial differences between countries in the area. Unbalanced assessments of education under Communism are usually

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based, for instance, on an evaluation of teaching styles as undemocratic² or on the thesis of hyper-centralisation of the education systems.³

This article is in line with a growing interest in more recent histories of education and with a body of research that draws links between education and globalisation of both a historical and comparative type.⁴ A “multiple modernities” perspective has not, as yet, been applied to education in the Communist world, while a modernisation lag⁵ perspective has been, more or less explicitly, dominant so far. This theory can also explain processes of international diffusion or globalisation, focusing on a regional⁶ and thus lower level, such as the Eastern European area. From this perspective, the Communist regimes can be assumed to represent a different modernity path common to the Eastern area, each of these regimes revealing a specific mix of internal path-dependencies and Soviet influence. From this perspective, Eastern Europe is a fruitful concept, indicating the satellite European countries under Soviet influence, and can be read through the three cases considered here: Poland, Hungary and Romania. In addition, as Arnason convincingly argues, the Communist type of modernity is also deeply imbued with imperialism. In some areas, the reconstruction of imperial power on a new basis brought with it the maintenance of control and the imposition of uniformity on the dependent periphery of Eastern Europe, the case of Hungary and Poland; and in others, the Soviet model was adapted in national Communist states that escaped Soviet hegemony, such as Romania.⁷

While engaging with convergences and divergences between the three countries, the specific research questions are the following: How should scholars understand Communist education and the Soviet influence? How should we conceptualise the role played by path-dependencies and the subsequent globalisation on Soviet input and through Western contacts? In order to answer these questions, I will set the historical scene of the Eastern European Communist history and then engage with a theoretical framework that will allow us to analyse pre-Communist path-dependencies in

² Laura B. Perry, 'The seeing and the seen: contrasting perspectives of post-communist Czech schooling', *Compare* 35, no. 3 (2005), 265-283.

³ Monica E. Mincu and Irina Horga, 'Visions of Reform in Post-Socialist Romania: Decentralization (Through Hybridization) and Teacher Autonomy', in *Post-Socialism is not Dead: (Re)Reading the Global in Comparative Education*, ed. Iveta Silova (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, 2010), 93–123, here 104.

⁴ Kevin Myers, Ian Grosvenor and Ruth Watts, 'Education and globalisation', *History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society* 37 no. 6 (2008), 737-741; Joëlle Droux and Rita Hofstetter, 'Going international: the history of education stepping beyond borders', *Paedagogica Historica* 50, no.1-2 (2014), 1-9; Marcelo Caruso, 'Within, between, above, and beyond: (Pre)positions for a history of the internationalisation of educational practices and knowledge', *Paedagogica Historica*, 50:1-2, 10-26; Marcelo Caruso, 'World systems, world society, world polity: theoretical insights for a global history of education', *History of Education* 37, no. 6 (2008), 825-840.

⁵ Tamaz Kozma and Tunde Polonyi, 'Understanding education in Europe-East. Frames of interpretation and comparison', *International Journal of Educational Development* 24 (2004), 467–477

⁶ While I agree that a civilisation concept used to describe regional developments may be contested, the investigation of transnational phenomena at a regional level is a valid tool and is also supported by historical institutionalism and varieties of capitalism approach.

⁷ Johann P. Arnason, 'Communism and modernity', *Daedalus* 129 Multiple modernities, no. 1 (Winter 2000), 67-68.

education and globalisation trends and waves. The analysis of Communist education implies both the investigation of its relationship to the Soviet model and the main areas of convergence between the three selected countries. At the same time, the section dedicated to divergences reveals a peculiar mix of specific path-dependencies and the circulation of new global models, of Western inspiration, in parallel with declining Communist politics.

Understanding phases and varieties of Communist regimes

The historical period between 1947 and 1989 is usually known as Communism, real socialism, Marxist-Leninist socialism, Soviet-type or State socialism, etc. While socialism, often further downgraded to “real socialism”, appears to be historically a more appropriate term to describe these specific societal developments, Communism indicates the social, political and educational ideals. In this article, the latter symbolises both a political regime and educational model that are clearly typical in the European area under Soviet influence. Following the most widely accepted version, Communist regimes were imposed in the area between 1945 and 1949, even in those countries in which Communists enjoyed a certain support from the masses, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁸ Other historiographical interpretations see Communist regimes as a natural and foreseeable outcome, in line with the world view of the Soviet Union that perceived itself as the moral winner of the Second World War and hoped to radically innovate Eastern European societies.⁹

Historical reconstructions represent opportunities to acquire or lose legitimacy, particularly in the case of the history of the ex-Communist countries. Post-Communist historiography at large as well as education scholarship have proposed unbalanced and mainly negative interpretations of the Communist era, while over-evaluating the interwar and pre-Communist era. The consensus expressed by various social groups to Communism as a political project and the emotional fascination exerted by Stalinism have been disregarded. In the same vein, Michnick criticises the view to which Communism was nothing but a foreign graft on Polish reality¹⁰ while Hollis concludes that “[c]ommunism that has been imposed on the Eastern Europe cannot be seen as a completely non-European social model”.¹¹

Historians of the Communist period proposed a chronological view and identified 4 major sub-phases relevant for the three contexts:

- Stalinism (1945 – 1953)

⁸ Jean-Francois Soulet, *Histoire comparée des États communistes de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1996).

⁹ Tony Judt, *Europa iluziilor* [A Europe of illusions] (Iasi, Polirom, 2000).

¹⁰ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of salvation. Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Societies* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998).

¹¹ Wendy Hollis, *Democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe. The influence of the communist legacy in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Romania* (Boulder, East European Monographs, 1999), 24.

- the crisis (1953 – 1963), leading to a “cultural thaw” or “revisionism”
- the relaunch (1964 – 1979)
- the implosion (1980 – 1991).¹²

These phases characterise both the Eastern area and Soviet society, though differently and with various meanings in each country. Some remarkable events, such as Stalin’s death (1953) and Khrushchev’s “secret speech” (1956), led to de-Stalinisation. The same can be said of Gorbachev’s approach to politics, with its openness to reform. These events represent an influence from “outside”, the political centre of the so-called “Communist world”. Other significant moments took place in the satellite countries, such as the Prague Spring in 1968, a symbolic year after which revisionist and reformist hopes to change the Communist regimes were abandoned.

Stalinism represented the phase in which satellite countries lived their phase of maximum convergence with a Soviet-type society. In fact, it legitimised itself as a unique version of Marxism-Leninism and promoted the “official society” as an alternative to civil societies. However, a process of social homogenisation should be viewed alongside what happened during the fascist era. The next phase was initiated by Khrushchev’s secret speech at the 20th Congress of the PCUS, denouncing the errors of Stalinism. The consequences were a political “thaw” and a search for new ways to re-launch the Communist project on new bases. The revisionist phase, typical of Hungary and Poland, presented with the traits of a real crisis. In fact, since 1954 a certain “diversification” of the Communist project was in place, aiming to mitigate some critical developments but without challenging the system. The consequences were a decline in internal repressions, the decrease of heavy industrial investments, and a greater tolerance towards artistic and intellectual experiments. The meaning of the events of 1956 in Hungary was more profound, because they represented a model and a tradition for the years to come, that would continue to influence upon anti-totalitarian social movements in the region.¹³ The unexpected developments of multipartitism and even the neutrality of the Hungarian State were cancelled by the Soviet military intervention. In the Romanian case, de-Stalinisation proved to be a limited and strictly controlled process, showing more continuity with the previous phase.

Pre-Communist left wing politics played a massive role in Poland as a genuine internal tradition that opposed Bolshevisation and Stalinisation of this society and fuelled opposition against the Communist regime.¹⁴ Conversely, right wing politics were dominant in the interwar period in Hungary and Romania, so that both countries lacked such a powerful counterweight.¹⁵

¹² Soulet, *Histoire comparée des États communistes de 1945 à nos jours*

¹³ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventing politics. Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1993).

¹⁴ Tismăneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe: the Poverty of Utopia* (London, Routledge, 1988).

¹⁵ Hollis, *Democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe*, 32.

The years that followed were marked by a new closure, coinciding in the Soviet Union with the Brezhnev era, and symbolically characterised by the Prague Spring, with the decay of Marxism as a political source of inspiration. From a different perspective, Konrad and Szelenyi¹⁶ advanced the idea of an abandonment of the socialist ideal. They upheld the thesis of its development after the 1970s. The élites' profile opened to intellectuals and professionals and thus decisively contributed to a gradual transformation of the socialist system. Political tensions continued to characterise Poland and Romania, whilst the Hungarian "Kadarism"¹⁷ proved successful in introducing a new truce based on political compromise and economic concessions.

During the 1970s and the 1980s a certain revival of the civil societies was visible, thanks to new initiatives from intellectuals and dissidents.¹⁸ A certain attitude of resignation, permeated by the myth of the irreversibility of the Communist era, was contrasted by this emerging ethos based on civic values and the human dignity perspective, particularly in Poland and thanks to more profound religious feelings. The *glasnost* (opening) era has been characterised as "a thousand and one communisms".¹⁹ While Hungary embarked upon the "new economic mechanism" and welcomed the free market principles, Romanian communism became more rigid and finally transformed into a new type of national-communism regime.²⁰ During the 1980s and under *perestroika* (restructuring), the Communist parties in the area adopted different political attitudes: the Polish and Hungarian parties endorsed a "Gorbachevist dynamic" of openness, while the Romanian party adopted strategies of resistance. In this phase, Soviet pressure, which had remained a constant over a long period, proved to be one of innovation. This direction was welcomed by countries already engaged in similar reforms, such as Poland and Hungary, other countries adopted a wait and see attitude (Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria), while the Romanian government advanced open criticism. For political science, these regimes in their final phases are to be considered as authoritarian regimes – Poland, advanced post-totalitarian – Hungary, while Romania concluded its parable as a sultanistic-personalistic totalitarian regime.²¹

Global models, Soviet influence and path-dependencies

¹⁶ George Konrad and Iván Szelenyi, 'Intellectuals domination in post-communist societies' in *Social theory for a changing society* ed. Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman (Boulder, Westview Press, 1991), 337-361.

¹⁷ The Kadar regime, also called 'goulash communism', based on its economic compromises, made Hungary a more relaxed society, effectively captured by the expression 'the happiest barrack in the socialist camp'.

¹⁸ Tismăneanu, *Reinventing politics*, 114-161.

¹⁹ Soulet, *Histoire comparée des États communistes de 1945 à nos jours*.

²⁰ Soulet highlights various traits such as a doctrinal and institutional orthodoxy, radicalism in the socialisation process, Maoist inspiration and the anti-imperialist fight, the cult of personality, internal repressions lead by the militia and the army, historical reinterpretation and a constant use of patriotism..

²¹ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

As recently captured by Schwinn, “[m]odernisation initiatives taken by particular countries galvanise the elites of other regions into action; and these elites’ capacities to respond as well as their strategies of institutionalisation vary in accordance with culture-specific patterns of thought, material resources and historical preconditions.”²² I endorse a regional approach, for which Eastern Europe and Western Europe are useful in understanding modernity. At the same time, these concepts cannot by themselves hinder the unfolding of diversities between countries in a given region.²³ This approach proves helpful to disentangle the role played by traditions/path-dependencies and the relationship to a modernisation project and globalisation processes, without losing sight of each country’s modernisation path and of the local processes of interpretation and adaptation of the models provided by “reference societies”²⁴.

A multiple modernity theory postulates that “a Western path to modernity can be acknowledged without denying parallel (even if more partial) developments in other regions” and so a distinctive set of patterns first invented in the West but not unilaterally imposed by the West²⁵ is not the only acceptable model. Eisenstadt and colleagues engaged with a regional dynamic of plural modernisation pathways in their well-known *Daedalus* issue²⁶, identifying mechanisms of mirroring and confrontation between such regions. Mechanisms of both “military and economic imperialism” and “selection, reinterpretation, and reformulation of these imported ideas”, and finally appropriation leading to local adaptations have been in place.²⁷ Another step forward was taken by Arnason, who posited that “[i]f the Soviet model is to be analysed as an alternative form of modernity, then *its global impact and self-presentation* should be taken into account”²⁸. At a more specific level, global models in education are therefore not to be seen as unilateral or unique. In fact, as showed by anthropological work in comparative education various and sometimes divergent trends are equally globally diffused and sometimes may be seen as the swings of a pendulum.²⁹

The Eastern as Communist modernisation of the satellite countries means that a historical investigation of globalisation in education should incorporate the Soviet/Communist pattern. Western influences are also relevant and identifiable not only as historical precedents but also as “contacts with Western pedagogy” and social sciences during Communism, which were particularly relevant

²² Thomas Schwinn, 'Globalisation and Regional Variety: Problems of Theorisation', *Comparative Education* 48, no. 4 (2012): 525–543, here 531.

²³ Björn Wittrock, 'One, None, or Many? European Origins and Modernity as a Global Condition', *Daedalus* 129, no. 1, Multiple modernities (Winter 2000)

²⁴ Jürgen Schriewer, 'Reference societies and model constructions: Questioning international policy studies', in *The public sector in transition. East Asia and the European Union compared*, ed. Joachim-Jens Hesse, Jan-Erik Lane and Yoichi Nishikawa (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2007), 85–102.

²⁵ Arnason, 'Communism and modernity', 63

²⁶ *Daedalus* 129, no. 1, Multiple Modernities (Winter, 2000)

²⁷ Samuel N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', 14-15

²⁸ Arnason, 'Communism and modernity', 79.

²⁹ Kathrine Anderson-Levitt, 'Introduction. A world culture of schooling?' in *Local meanings, global schooling. Anthropology and world culture theory*, ed. Kathrine Anderson-Levitt (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 1–26.

after the 1970s. Communist and Western pedagogy proved to be competitive, alternative but not radically different patterns of modernisation in education in the area of the satellite countries.

As transmission and translation process³⁰ of a Communist modernity, the Soviet influence is to be conceptualised as both as an imperialist force and as a volunteer borrowing and subsequent internationalisation with local adaptation in the Communist area. A notorious example of Soviet imperialism is the imposition of the Russian language in the school curriculum and of ideologically driven issues in education, linked to a censorship function and locally applied.³¹ One example of the Soviet Communist influence as a borrowing with local adaptations is the polytechnic idea in education and its continuous re-interpretation. This article draws on a larger comparative and socio-historical study, both synchronic and diachronic, engaging with Hungary, Poland and Romania during Communism and in the first decay of the so-called post-Communist transitions, and is based on extensive data collection on the three education systems.³² In order to respond to key theoretical issues that I raise in this article, I bring examples from major structural and curricular reforms over time and education politics.

Communist education through Soviet import: ingredients and variations

Bîrzea considers that after Yalta, the Soviet model became East European or socialist. The idea of Communist education was seen as opposing “liberal education” as based on several key principles of various practical configuration.³³ The articulation of the Communist model in these countries calls into question the idea of the influence of Soviet education as historically representing the ideal-type of a Communist model in education.

From the outset it should be clarified that Soviet education cannot be seen as a “model” in terms of internal coherence. In fact, between 1921 and 1984, the Soviet system was subject to six reforms promoting significant structural transformation, although as a reinterpretation of key

³⁰ Schwinn, ‘Globalisation and Regional Variety’, 538.

³¹ Joanna Wojdon, ‘The system of textbook approval in Poland under communist rule (1944–1989) as a tool of power of the regime’, *Paedagogia Historica* 51, no. 1-2 (2015): 181-196.

³² In order to respond to my research questions, I draw on a larger historical and comparative research project for which data has been collected between 1999 and 2001 and various publications have followed. See, for instance, Monica Mincu, *Educazione e cittadinanza nel postsocialismo. I cambiamenti nell'Europa dell'Est dopo il 1989* [Education and citizenship in post-socialism. Educational and social transformations after 1989] (Torino, SEI Frontiere, 2004). Monica Mincu, ‘Myth, rhetoric, and ideology in Eastern European education: Schools and citizenship in Hungary, Poland, and Romania’, *European Education* 41, no.1 (2009): 55-78. To have access to relevant historical documentation I have selected some major national and international institutions (UNESCO, IPE, the Council of Europe archives, OECD, the Institute of Education in Budapest and Bucharest) where I could consult their archives and I benefitted from talks with experts. Thus, I have collected a wide range of scholarly publications and policy documents published in French and English on the Hungarian and Polish education, and also in Romanian on the Romanian case during the communist era and the first decay of the post-communist period.

³³ Cezar Bîrzea, *Reforme de invatamant contemporane. Tendinte si semnificatii*, [Reforms in contemporary education. Trends and meanings]. (Bucharest, Editura Didactica si Pedagogica, 1976).

principles. Thus we can identify a set of specific principles, but not a coherent theory. In addition, these principles have been assimilated in a highly fragmented way. For political reasons, their impact was more significant during Stalinism, but after that it became weaker.

There is, however, a question over how far and in which ways Soviet education influenced the satellite countries' education systems. I advance the thesis that several factors should be considered when investigating the impact of Soviet influence and the emergence of Communist education:

- the various phases of the Communist regimes between 1947 and 1989
- the role played by long-standing path dependencies of the pre-Communist traditions, usually called “historical precedents”, (for instance centralisation and a “Herbartian culture” in education)
- divergences between countries, expressed as the relationship between the education systems in the area and their economic, political and socio-historical contexts
- contacts with Western countries in the pedagogical realm (the role played by the IEA, programming by objectives and school autonomy).

The educational traits that are common to Eastern European systems of education can be traced back to the original effort to endorse Soviet Communism. A “Communist legacy” in education, perceptible in the ethos of post-Communist schools during the first 10 years after the Communist collapse, was based upon some common elements. Although there was no fully developed “model”, these elements proved to be significant in creating transnational commonalities of a Communist vision in education. For Mitter³⁴ some key elements were the uniformity of the schooling processes and organisation, and polytechnic education. Karsten and Majoor identified the *numerus clausus* selective processes and centralised education planning, which had consequences in terms of a transformation of both secondary and tertiary education towards a vocational direction, the political and social conditioning of the whole education system, bureaucratic control and formal democratisation.³⁵ In the same vein, Szebenyi proposed five major indicators to study Central European countries: educational ideology, a detailed State-imposed curriculum, State monopoly on schooling, uniform school structures, highly centralised and uniform managerial apparatus.³⁶

³⁴ Wolfgang Mitter, 'Education in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in a period of revolutionary change', in *Recent trends in Eastern European Education. Proceedings of the UNESCO-Workshop held at the German Institute for International Educational Research*, ed. Wolfgang Mitter, Manfred Weiss and Ulrich Schaefer (Frankfurt am Main, 1991), 122.

³⁵ Sjoerd Karsten and Dominique Majoor, 'Education in East Central Europe: educational changes after the fall of communism' (New York, Waxmann, Munster, 1994), 157.

³⁶ Peter Szebenyi, 'Change in the systems of public education in East Central Europe', *Comparative Education* 28, no.1 (1992): 20.

The history of education systems from 1947 to 1989 and beyond, can be seen as a slow and gradual erosion of the initial impact of a Communist orientation. It consisted in several key principles derived from Soviet education and cannot be seen as a perfectly coherent model.³⁷ An erosion of these more ideological issues, and a stabilisation of some key characteristics, such as comprehensive schooling, was further combined with high selectivity at subsequent levels.

During Stalinism, Eastern European systems of education were transformed in line with Soviet principles. During the Communist era, part of society considered Soviet education as radically different from a European model, and this fuelled further efforts to overcome and transform education systems. However, some major characteristics such as organisational centralisation came to reinforce centralistic traditions already in place, a result of French, Tsarist or Austro-Habsburg influences. Even the Hungarian system, whose dual tradition incorporated both centralisation at higher secondary level, a result of the 18th-19th century Habsburg Catholic influence, and decentralisation at the primary level under the 19th century Protestant influence, on a municipal model of control, was to be considered overall as relatively centralised. In fact, State control in education was increasing after the 1930s. The enactment of the Communist law actually acknowledged the *status quo*. To sum up, political and institutional centralisation was already a local tradition, which the Soviet influence confirmed and further reinforced.

Eastern European systems of education were traditionally articulated into primary and secondary schools (*lyceum*, in the Romanian and Polish cases and *gymnasium*, in Hungary), post-elementary grades, various vocational schools and tertiary industrial, commercial or other institutions. In the immediate post-war period, the reform principles of 1931 in the Soviet Union represented the core of a Communist as Soviet structural model implemented in the satellite countries: 7 years of general school, 2 years of lower secondary polytechnic education and a 2-year selective cycle of specialisation – *tecnicum*. This structural model was translated as a general comprehensive school of 7 years initially (in Romania and Poland) and subsequently of 8 years (in Hungary and Romania) or 9 years in Czechoslovakia; followed by secondary education of 4 years (academic and technical) and of 3 years (vocational training). The restructuring of the Hungarian system of education meant not only the extension of primary school from 4 and 6 years to 8, but also the elimination of the middle school (4 years) and the lower grades of the secondary school (from 8 to 4 years).

Bathory highlights the positive consequences of the 8-year general school and its common standardised curriculum introduced at the end of the war in contrast to the cultural deprivation of the Hungarian workers and peasants, as in the other countries in the area.³⁸ Other scholars, such as Nagy,

³⁷ Karsten and Majoor, *Education in East Central Europe*, 157.

³⁸ Zoltán Báthory, 'Il contenuto dell'educazione' [The content of education] in *I giovani in Europa: qualità della scuola, qualità della vita* [Youth in Europe: school and life quality], ed. Lucio Pusci (Napoli, Tecnodid, 1988), 124.

identify some limits to Communist comprehensivisation in curriculum unification and standardisation without considering differences of social contextual conditions and of the actors involved, both students and teachers.³⁹

Communist states eliminated private and faith-based schools and preserved the monopoly upon the newly restructured school structures. In Hungary, Romania and Poland, the Communist Parties further reinforced structural unification through curriculum standardisation, State monopoly of textbooks and direct control of the education systems.⁴⁰ Dialectic and historical materialism became pervasive in textbooks, whilst religion was abolished. A homogenous education offer was meant to promote equality through a system of unique textbooks.

Educational planning based on a manpower approach was introduced in the area on the Soviet model in the 1940s, a global development not limited to the Communist world.⁴¹ However, intense bureaucratisation limited its potential and transformed it into a “mechanical implementation of decisions already taken”.⁴²

The ideal of a centralised command type economy supported vocational and technical education during the 1940s and 1950s.⁴³ In 1951, the Hungarian Ministry of Education suggested that “utopic issues must be abolished” and general education was considered a major priority, given the unbalanced numbers of graduates produced through vocational education at secondary and tertiary levels of education. During the 1960s, a participative and “socio-economic” conception of educational planning was envisaged, in clear contrast with Communist ideology and the centralistic political orthodoxy. After the introduction of free-market economic principles alongside the centrally planned Communist economy in 1968, a new recursive concept of planning was put forward. The same developments happened during the 1970s and the 1980s in Poland, as a consequence of a similar economic reform and increased awareness of the difficulties of the education system. A top-down approach was abandoned in favour of a “demand creating” model.⁴⁴ In spite of these efforts to develop a national model of educational development, the *numerus clausus* policy to enrol to secondary school

³⁹ Maria Nagy, 'Hungary' in Karsten and Major, ed., *Education in East Central Europe*, 33.

⁴⁰ Nagy, 'Hungary', 32. Also Wojdon, 'The system of textbook approval in Poland under communist rule (1944–1989) as a tool of power of the regime'. Ryszard Pachocinski, 'Poland' in Karsten and Major, ed., *Education in East Central Europe*, 129.

⁴¹ 'The first practical application of the approach was in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s and shortly afterwards other Eastern European countries introduced the approach on the basis of the Soviet model of planned economy and its methods'. Janos Timar, *Planning and educational policy: methods and experiences in Hungary, 1948-1988* (Paris, IPE, 1990), 38.

⁴² Timar, *Planning and educational policy*, 8.

⁴³ Timar, *Planning and educational policy*. This approach was also justified by the objective situation of the Eastern countries in need of technical specialists and experts. The negative side effects, such as excessive numbers of graduates in engineering and agriculture and the related underestimation of humanistic studies lead to a lowering of the education quality.

⁴⁴ Karol Pelc, *Co-ordinating the forecasts and policies of technological, employment and educational development in Poland* (Paris, Unesco, 1986), 10.

and university, an enduring trait of the Soviet and Communist model, was preserved for ideological reasons.⁴⁵ In fact, a major premise was that the State or society was supposed to guarantee graduates a job appropriate to their qualification. An instrumental view on education as a means to reach economic and social aims started to be questioned and a new concept of education for personal development was slowly entering the scene. Though of Soviet inspiration, the consolidated functional view of education corresponded with satellite countries' internal expectations of closing the gap with Western countries. At a deeper level, this was supported by a long-standing political myth, the cultural synchronisation of the East with the West. It is noticeable that a Soviet as supra-national vision in education met with significant expectations and path-dependencies and finally led to a specific vision of modernisation during the Communist era.

The Romanian case of education planning followed the original top-down pattern, which can be explained by the increased isolation and lack of economic and social innovation after the 1970s. The last decline of a dictatorial Communist regime went hand in hand with an education politics aimed at abolishing school year repetition. While in principle this transformation was in line with practices in some Western European countries, in practice the absence of effective politics of inclusion and support for those at risk of dispersion greatly diminished its potential. Its main rationale was of a political type, since the "socialist competition" meant that schools were supposed to constantly report higher numbers of graduates. Technical and mostly vocational education was available for large numbers of students, but few could enrol into general academic education.

The polytechnic principle is not unique to Communist education. It works on the principle of combining theoretical and practical preparation, balancing general academic with vocational and professional, and came to coincide with a specific institution, the lower secondary school, which was part of the general comprehensive school. Bîrzea considers that it legitimised Communist comprehensive schooling of a polytechnic type in the Soviet Union, DDR, Czechoslovakia, and formed an alternative to polyvalent schooling in the Federal Republic of Germany, Spain, Belgium, France or comprehensive in Sweden, Great Britain and Holland.⁴⁶

The polytechnic principle was inspired by the objective need to prepare a qualified labour force and it incorporates the idea that each level of the education system should allow both for continuation of studies and integration of the working world. The ambiguity was visible when it was assumed to be "a technical orientation of the curriculum" or a "laboratorial practice".⁴⁷ It has been

⁴⁵ Timar, *Planning and educational policy*, 97.

⁴⁶ Bîrzea, *Reforme de invatamant contemporane*. [Reforms in contemporary education], 90.

⁴⁷ Following Smart, this idea implied both a polytechnic horizon, that is the study of various industrial branches in order to gain an organic vision of the whole system of production (as a general education aim) and the 'basis of production' and a 'development of concrete work skills' (secondary education main priorities). Kenneth F. Smart, 'The polytechnical principle', in *Communist education*, ed. Edmund J. King (London, Methuen, 1963), 211.

one of the most relevant aims of Soviet education, though variously defined and pursued over time.⁴⁸ Polytechnic aims formed part of the first Soviet education reform in 1921 and the associated creation of a unified school. The changes in 1931 linked this principle to the lower secondary school level, while the reform of 1958 extended it to the whole secondary education cycle. Subsequent reforms oscillated between more academic or vocational orientations. The 1964 reform was meant to strike a balance between these priorities, while the 1973 reform was again focused on the polytechnic aim through the creation of a school cycle particularly dedicated to this. The last reform in 1984 also prioritised vocational and thus polytechnic orientation.

While the satellite countries have followed this idea closely, both rhetorically and practically, it is evident that these contrasting developments could not provide a coherent model ready to be exported and thus local borrowing and adaptation left considerable room for variation. Once again, there is no clear understanding and model based on the Soviet experience, but rather a myriad of developments. For instance, in the Romanian case, it was put forward as a principle of “integration between teaching, research and production” particularly during the ‘80s and the very pillar of the whole system of education.⁴⁹ On practical grounds, it led to introducing various vocational specialisms into secondary education, mainly industrial and agricultural, which brought with it a limitation for general-academic education.⁵⁰

This section engaged with structural and organisational issues that fuelled a common Communist pattern in education across the countries in this area. From the analysis conducted so far, it emerges that the Soviet model in education was both imposed and also freely imported and reinterpreted, which matches the modernisation perspective advanced in this article. At the same time, although from within a common pattern in education, single countries in the area exercised certain margins of autonomy from the original Soviet model implemented mainly during Stalinism. Moreover, even if the Soviet model mediated the introduction of a (Jacobin) modernisation, it contributed significantly to producing a regional version of modernisation in education based on educational planning and specific comprehensive schooling.

Diversification through path-dependencies and Western imports

Historical research agrees that a Communist paradigm remained robustly in place until 1989 and preserved its key characteristics, even in more dynamic education contexts such as Hungary. However, differences between countries were increasingly more significant, as a result of long

⁴⁸ Kenneth F. Smart, 'The Polytechnical principle', in King, ed., *Communist education*.

⁴⁹ Ioan. G. Stanciu, *Scoala si doctrinele pedagogice in secolul XX*, [School and pedagogical theories during the XXth century] (Bucuresti, Editura Didactica si Pedagogica, 1995), 317.

⁵⁰ Jana Švecová, 'Czechoslovakia' in Karsten and Majoor, ed., *Education in East Central Europe*, 95.

standing path-dependencies and the relationship of the education system with their economic and political contexts. Some Communist regimes allowed more innovation and knowledge circulation through increased contacts with Western Europe and the non-Communist world. This part will deal with selected historical, structural and organisational issues that may be of relevance from this perspective. In addition, the Soviet influence as different from the European and Western tradition in education will be questioned.

Given the geopolitical location, since the 19th century, various influences have impacted on the education systems in the area. Mitter maintains that Austrian and Habsburg politics have influenced education politics of the ex-Czechoslovakia and Hungary, parts of the ex-Yugoslavia and have partially impacted in part on education developments in Poland and Romania, in competition with French influences.⁵¹ In the Romanian case, various legacies can be discerned in some macro-geographical areas. In Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina German and Austrian influences dominated, given the political dependence of these areas; while in the “Old Kingdom” provinces of Walachia and Moldova, the French orientation was a relevant factor, since the *élite intelligentsia* was French-oriented. Reforms in the Old Kingdom at the end of the 19th century favoured the administrative unification of the education system after the national Unity of 1918. A German-Austrian influence was dominant in Hungarian education. In Hungary, this has been particularly related to technical, commercial and vocational education and to apprenticeship models, which played a significant role in the development of this country.⁵²

Long-standing path-dependencies acted in the region in various ways. In Hungary, the few faith-based schools that survived intensive nationalisation continued to play a symbolic role as an alternative to state education. These represented the memory of the pre-Communist past in which education diversification was allowed. At the end of the 1980s, the prestigious 8-year *gymnasium* was re-introduced in Hungary and ex-Czechoslovakia as one of the first measures of the post-Communist era and a clear sign of a long-lasting national specific. Another peculiarity was that across the area the length of primary and secondary studies was 12 years, instead of 10 in the Soviet model. For instance, in the Romanian case, after 1965, pre-university education lasted 12 years, following a previous adaptation to the shorter 10 years of schooling. Another traditional issue that was revived was the distinction between science and humanities in identifying the profile of the various schools, abolished initially by the typical Soviet classification between academic, technical and vocational institutions.

⁵¹ Mitter, 'Education in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in a period of revolutionary change' in Mitter, ed., *Recent trends in Eastern European Education*, 124.

⁵² Gábor Halász, *Secondary education in Hungary* (Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 1995), 6.

A line of research thinking on Communist education that emerged during the 1990s considered that the so-called “historical precedents” in the education field that re-emerged during the 40 years of Communism were mainly of Western origin. The evaluation implicit in this assertion is that Soviet education was non-European and as such the Soviet influence in the area of the satellite countries was in clear discontinuity with the previous period. Classical scholarship on Soviet education⁵³ and its relationship with a Communist education ideal proves to be more nuanced. In fact, many of the paradoxes of Soviet education, particularly related to polytechnic education and to its ambiguities, can be explained through a deep dissonance between Communist ideology promoting equality and the previous Russian education tradition in line with European elitist humanism. This tradition was typical not only of the Eastern area but of the Soviet Union itself. In fact, the “European tradition of élites, of the lower status of manual labour, of the high importance of learning, was bound to reassert itself in the kinds of education which were considered appropriate, and necessarily so, in the selection of students to pursue these different kinds of education”.⁵⁴

One could easily argue that the pre-Communist legacy acted as a point of contrast to the subsequent Soviet influence that would influence every country in the Eastern area, but also as a differentiating power between the education systems in these countries. Another line of argument is that Soviet education represented a mix of a European elitist model and a new ideal of egalitarian education of a Communist type, and as such can be seen as a carrier of globalisation. Comprehensive schooling, national curriculum and education processes in search of a uniform, fair treatment for all pupils were meant to facilitate social mobility, in line with similar developments in the West. These proved to be quite successful during Stalinism and up to the 1970s. At a time when new social stratification was re-emerging, at the end of the 70s and during the 80s, the education system proved to be used differently, reinforcing social stratification (rural-urban divide, the *numerus clausus*, private schooling)

The three contexts considered here have known phases of opening to and partial synchronisation with developments that were in place in the non-Communist world. In the Romanian case, this phase took place before the establishment of a totalitarian regime, 1963-1974, while in Hungary and Poland, it coincided with the late 1970s and 1980s, when Hungary evolved into an advanced post-totalitarian regime and Poland into an authoritarian military regime. This opening phase manifested in the Romanian case with knowledge circulation and intense translation particularly in social sciences and sociology, that proved to be a relevant input to studies on social stratification. In Hungary, more significant contacts with the non-Communist world in the education

⁵³ King, *Communist education*.

⁵⁴ John Figueroa, 'Selection and differentiation in Soviet schools' in King, ed., *Communist education*, 126.

area had been in place since the International Evaluation Association (IEA) studies, including the Hungarian case, which greatly contributed to stimulating reforms in the country. As is the case with the more recent PISA studies, public discussion about the negative IEA results on Hungarian education opened the way to new directions.⁵⁵ In the Polish case, similar developments are visible in the 1973 policy report "*The principles and thesis of the State of education report in the Popular Republic of Poland*", which commented on "the strong influence of international debates".⁵⁶ Another vector of globalisation proved to be a traditional social actor, the Catholic Church. Its role has been considerable in proposing an alternative vision to official Communist ideology. A certain pluralism in education has been ensured by the presence of a Catholic pedagogical culture, defended by the Catholic Episcopate in 1973 on the occasion of education reform debates.⁵⁷

Hungary proved to be most robustly oriented towards a Western global model of education reform. Economic changes such as the introduction of the market economy and the type of the Communist regime in Hungary allowed significant space for manoeuvre under the official rhetoric. The Hungarian pedagogical community was tightly linked to major international actors such as UNESCO and the World Bank, and its visibility in the international pedagogical arena has been one of the highest. Since 1978, Hungary created a mixed model based on the central standardised curriculum, the officially approved school textbooks and a number of measures that allowed for more choice. Choice has been introduced through electives, the possibility to distinguish between minimal and optimal standards, and the possibility for the teacher to choose between three alternative sets of textbooks.⁵⁸ Curricula developed at the level of individual schools have been encouraged from the centre and subsequently diffused through the central administration and locally contextualised, as well as certain margins of teachers' autonomy. This reform has been introduced during a period of social consolidation, usually considered to be less likely to promote reforms in education.

The 1985 Hungarian Education Act was a coherent attempt to radically alter the Communist pattern of Hungarian education, after more than three decades. While during the 1970s a more neutral concept of education reform was put forward, during the 1980s, the more radical idea of autonomy guided the vision of reform. It is clearly suggestive of the increasing relevance of a new global (as Western) orientation, in line with structural adjustment reforms promoted by the World Bank in developing countries. It advocated more flexibility in teaching and educational organisation with the abolition of the system of school inspection, in favour of global evaluations of institutions. These new

⁵⁵ Zoltán Báthory, 'La participation de la Hongrie aux études internationales d'évaluation des résultats scolaires' *Perspectives* XXII, no. 4 (1992): 487.

⁵⁶ Mitter, 'Education in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in a period of revolutionary change', 123.

⁵⁷ Szebenyi, 'Change in the systems of public education in East Central Europe', 20.

⁵⁸ Nagy, 'Hungary', 46.

directions could not be implemented straight away, since the gap between rhetoric and practice was substantial, but such new liberal horizons are indicative of how the scenario was changing.

Concluding remarks

A recent study in the history of education field that engaged with internationalisation identified the 1980s as a turning point between two phases: an earlier phase of diffusion, identified as “above” the national context, and a recent and more clearly global move as “beyond” the national, whose mediators are largely international organisations.⁵⁹ This is also in line with what happened in the East European area, where an initial “above” the national global phase, on a Soviet pattern, has been followed by a “beyond” move, significantly more visible in Hungary than in the other two countries.

As argued throughout this article, the Soviet influence in education should be conceptualised as both as an imperialist force and as a volunteer borrowing and subsequent internationalisation with local adaptation in the Communist area. Nevertheless, as a result of transmission and translation processes, communist education cannot be conceived as a coherent model. The Soviet education itself transformed over time and incorporated both Western and elitist elements.

In addition, from the historical and comparative analysis, it is possible to assert that Communist - in its local manifestations in each country - and Western pedagogy proved to be competitive, alternative but not radically different patterns of modernisation in education in the satellite countries. The Soviet influence, encapsulating relevant contradictions in itself and prevalent during Stalinism, as a supra-national global vision in education, met subsequently with local expectations and path-dependencies and finally led to a particular vision of modernisation during the Communist era. Linked to a re-emergence of the national specific in each country was a visible change in orientation towards new global models, with a clear anticipation of the neoliberal Western model during the late 1980s in Hungary.

A revised reading on education in the light of the multiple modernities theory suggests that, while a Communist pattern is visible up to 1989, nevertheless significant differences emerged at the interplay of path-dependencies, local adaptations of the Communist global model in this region and the relationship with Western pedagogy. In addition, it can be seen as a variation of the developments that occurred in the Western part, with the major difference of the ideological factor in illiberal political regimes.

⁵⁹ Marcelo Caruso, 'Within, between, above, and beyond: (Pre)positions for a history of the internationalisation of educational practices and knowledge', *Paedagogica Historica* 50, no. 1-2, (2012): 10-26.

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