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**THE POSSIBILITY OF REPOSITIONING THE
OEUVRE OF FERENC MÓRA IN PUBLIC EDUCATION**

THESIS OF DOCTORAL (PH.D.) DISSERTATION

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The importance of the topic

Ferenc Móra is one of the most famous figures in Hungarian cultural history. Writer, poet, journalist, archaeologist, and museum director, Móra Ferenc is the name of numerous public institutions across the country, but his works and cultural output are little known. In public education, he is mainly known as a children's writer, and his writings are only known to students in the context of school naming ceremonies, competitions, and faculties.

The Palace of Culture, named after him, the Ferenc Móra Museum in Szeged considers it a critical mission to make Móra's multifaceted activity, the relevance of his writings, and the more nuanced knowledge of his personality as possible. To this end, the institution aims to make his manuscripts and correspondence preserved in the museum accessible and researchable. The museum intends to change the current image of Ferenc Móra, by revealing other parts of his true personality to the public.

Although I was motivated by the museum environment and my experience in museum education, I do not intend to carry out the project at the museum level. The model I have developed in the light of the Móra legacy can be implemented anywhere, in public educational and cultural institutions, independently of the Móra museum.

Structure of the dissertation

The doctoral thesis contains the following central research units:

1. Brief description of the career of Ferenc Móra, highlighting the most critical periods of his life.

Móra achieved outstanding results during his studies, and after a short career as a teacher, he was as innovative and modern a journalist. In a completely different field of his career, as a museum director, collections manager, archaeologist, and librarian in Szeged, Móra was also successful.

2. In researching the influence of Ferenc Móra, I became interested in the way his works are represented in textbooks. In my dissertation, I examined a total of 145 textbooks from the last 95 years. In 1925, Móra co-edited a series of reading books entitled *Betűország virágoskertje*, which were used for decades as a tool for teaching reading and writing in primary schools. In analyzing the textbooks, I did not limit myself to examining the Móra texts but also observed

the period in which they were published and the specific features of the volumes. The textbook analyses followed Berelson's method of content analysis.

3. I examined the textbooks currently in use and the National Curriculum's requirements for mother-tongue teaching in the lower grades, and the recent changes in the NAT.

4. I examined a specific segment of Hungarian public education and searched the websites of public education institutions in Hungary named after Ferenc Móra and analyzed how they present their namesake on the Internet. I searched the websites of public education institutions in Hungary named after Ferenc Móra and analyzed how they present their namesake on their websites. My analysis concluded that most of the 35 institutions named after Móra Ferenc are very outdated in their descriptions of the eponym, typically reinforcing a narrative of poverty and using outdated language in Móra's works. The texts describing the namesake typically do not explain why their schools were named after Ferenc Móra, nor do they present an attractive, likable human image of him for pupils to follow.

5. Ferenc Móra's ideas are still relevant today, and many of his writings can be found that are relevant to both those involved in public education, but this is not necessarily reflected in the works currently "utilized". Thus, this dissertation offers a model for enabling young people to learn about Móra differently.

The focus of the planned Móra project is on Móra's love poems and letters; therefore, a separate chapter in the dissertation is devoted to an accurate presentation of the story based on primary sources of the Móra legacy. This will be followed by a presentation of the empirical research, focusing on the unusual Móra study, which offers a new type of narrative to present the writer, and finally, the conclusion and the drawing of conclusions will conclude the thesis.

Key research questions

The main research questions are:

- Q.1. When exactly in the context of public education can students encounter the works of Ferenc Móra?

Q.1.1. What content published by Móra appears in today's textbooks?

- Q.2. In the more than eight decades since Móra's death, have there been any significant changes in the content or quantity of the texts used?

- Q.3 Are students familiar with the life of Ferenc Móra?

- Q.4. What narrative is known about the life of Ferenc Móra in the public education institutions bearing his name?

- Q.5. Is there a case for building a new narrative on the life and career of Ferenc Móra?

Q.5.1. Can Móra's love story and lyrics be presented to secondary school pupils?

Research methodology

1. At the beginning of the research, I tried to start from a neutral preconception, not based on any preconceived hypotheses, based on my years of experience in education and museum education. One of the essential goals of the research is to get to know the knowledge base in the public domain. In this light, I used qualitative methods in all phases of the empirical research.
2. I used a content analysis method to summarize Móra's works in primary school reading books.
3. Also, using the method of content analysis, I explored how the educational institutions named after Ferenc Móra portray the author through texts about the author.
4. In the course of document analysis, I summarised the recommendations made by the experts on the works of Ferenc Móra for the 1-4th grade according to the National Curriculum, the document regulating the content of education.
5. Other qualitative methods: individual structured interviews were used before the regular Móra sessions and focus group interviews after the sessions.

Answers to the research questions

In formulating the questions, I wanted to explore the fundamental reasons why visitors to the museum arrive with little prior knowledge and therefore approached the research from the perspectives of educational theory, educational policy, and school history. Therefore, my interest is not focused on the mechanism of action of exhibitions or programs, nor on museum education or museum education. I was looking for what could have brought about this situation,

mainly why there is little knowledge about Ferenc Móra that can be developed by people who come to the museum. I wanted to explore the reasons and, based on my questions, to present an alternative solution to change this situation within the framework of public education.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, I formulated the questions that have been the starting point of the research all along. Although I have sought and provided answers to the questions posed throughout the thesis, this time, I intend to formulate the direct answers.

- Q.1. When exactly in the context of public education can students encounter the works of Ferenc Móra?

An analysis of the documents regulating education (the National Curriculum and the framework curricula) shows that Ferenc Móra's works are typically represented in the lower grades. Students encounter the author's works in grades 1 to 4, so the research focused on textbooks used in the lower grades, published between 1925 and 2020, and covering 145 volumes in total.

Q.1.1. What content published by Móra appears in today's textbooks?

An examination of the current textbooks shows considerable variation between the Móra content of the different textbook families. There are several series on the textbook market, and an analysis of these shows that most of the Móra texts are to be found in the textbooks of Mozaik Publishing in Szeged, and the least in the latest edition of the New Generation series recommended and supported by the Educational Authority. There is also a difference in the topics of the texts: the narrowest cross-section of the textbooks in the four textbook families analyzed in this thesis are the New Generation textbooks. The textbooks of the series contain only texts on animals and historical legends, while the textbooks of RomiSuli, Apáczai, and Mozaik Publishers contain several Móra texts inspired by autobiography or dealing with poverty. The assessment of these texts, specifically their legitimacy in public education, has long been the subject of debate in professional and parental forums. The novel "The Treasure Hunter in the Mist" is no longer compulsory reading in lower secondary schools, and teachers are free to decide whether or not to include parts of it in the reading material. This also contributes to the fact that there is a little known text about Móra's life for lower-school pupils.

- - Q.2. In the more than eight decades since Móra's death, have there been any significant changes in the content or quantity of the texts used?

Two years after Ferenc Móra's death in 1936, the first textbook was published, which already included the author's text. At the same time, the volumes of the Móra-Voinovich series of the *Betűország virágoskertje*, which also included Móra's writings, were also in circulation. From that time onwards, his writings were continuously available in primary school textbooks in varying amounts and with varying content. No direct correlation can be established between Móra's political and ideological views and the preferences of the current educational policy; the anti-clerical Móra appeared for the first time in a Catholic textbook, and students read more of him in textbooks published during the National Council for Public Education in 1945 than later during the initial phase of the left-wing Ortutay educational leadership.

The textbook analyses show that Móra's texts can be divided into seven major thematic groups: texts on natural phenomena, readings that bring personal experiences to life, fairy tales, historical events, legends, stories about animals, family-related and educational readings. His most frequently quoted texts are legends about historical events and personalities, fairy tales, and educational stories. Also frequently cited are his works on natural phenomena and animals, which in some respects can be linked to the university studies of Ferenc Móra, who graduated in natural history.

- Q.3 Are students familiar with the life of Ferenc Móra?

I was searching for the answer to this question in empirical research. In the individual interviews, most of the respondents (n=51) could only recall keywords when they heard Móra's name, such as *Kincskereső kisködmön*, Szeged, museum director, children's literature. Among the students interviewed, a small number (n=3) had more knowledge than the average: students who had visited the Móra Museum before the interview knew the story of Ilona Kalmár's love story. As the textbook analysis revealed, there is no biographical information in the primary school curriculum at the lower primary level; only in the case of readings with a personal relevance can it be assumed that teacher explanations supplement what is read. The novel *The Treasure Hunter in the Mist*, which was a compulsory reading book that introduced several biographical elements for decades, has been removed from the reading books in part. These

facts align with the museum's experience that young people do not have significant knowledge of Ferenc Móra's life.

- - Q.4. What narrative is known about the life of Ferenc Móra in the public education institutions bearing his name?

There are currently 35 public education institutions in Hungary bearing the name of Ferenc Móra, 34 of which are primary schools, and one is a grammar school. The schools are located in the most geographically diverse parts of the country, most of them unconnected with the writer's career. The exception is Ferenc Móra's hometown of Kiskunfélegyháza (two institutions bear his name).

The answer to the researcher's question when examining the school websites is that the descriptions of the namesake primarily use the narrative of poverty (second only to the data on Móra's parents) but in a much more emphatic and detailed way. Ferenc Móra's work as a children's author, which might be more relevant for a primary school website, is barely mentioned. The descriptions do not respond to the thematic shifts in emphasis of Móra's texts in current textbooks, i.e., although there are fewer and fewer if any, biographical texts in the reading books currently in use. Although the novel *Kincskereső kisködmön* is no longer compulsory, the descriptions on the websites still focus on Móra's description of poverty.

- Q.5. Is there a case for building a new narrative on the life and career of Ferenc Móra?

The empirical study concludes - confirmed by the museum experience - that the memory of Móra texts, which are exclusively published in the lower primary school, fades over time.

The known oeuvre of Ferenc Móra has been enriched by the publication of new material from the closed Collection of Literary History at the Palace of Culture in Szeged, thanks to a paradigm shift in museology. The narrative of poverty and hard luck is the central narrative associated with Móra's life. The best-known book associated with his name, compulsory reading for decades, is still the *Kincskereső kisködmön*, which is not the most optimal choice of literature for pupils aged 6-10.

Therefore, a new framework for Móra's work is needed to ensure that his works are not forgotten. I suggest that this could begin in two ways: (1) firstly, it may be time to restructure the publication of his works for children: by changing the age range targeted so far - lower school - i.e., by presenting specific works later age. Many of Ferenc Móra's writings are excellent for social sensitization, and most of his autobiographical works are ideally suited to this. However, the proposed solution has an educational policy and curriculum theoretical aspect that goes beyond the scope of this research. (2) On the other hand, a new narrative needs to be presented to enable students beyond the primary school age group to become acquainted with Móra's works. The present thesis deals with the legitimacy, sources, details, and research, targeting the secondary school age group.

Q.5.1. Can Móra's love story and lyrics be presented to secondary school pupils?

The feedback from the focus group interviews suggests that the secondary school age group could be suitable for presenting Ferenc Móra's love poetry. On the one hand, the institutional framework of public education itself may provide an opportunity, and secondary school literature classes could be a venue for this, as there is no platform available to everyone after completing secondary studies. On the other hand, it is advisable to present love relationships outside marriage and poems that depict them to the secondary school age group at the earliest. The focus group interviews revealed that participants from general education and the higher education groups were open to love stories, correspondence, and poems. Although respondents do not typically read poetry for their leisure, discourse about love poetry could be incorporated into the sessions.

Based on the responses from the empirical research and the museum experience, it can be said that a new kind of narrative needs to be constructed in order to reintroduce Ferenc Móra. Móra's personal drama, human face, and unconventional ideas can provide a basis for looking at him from a different perspective. The poems and story of the Untitled book could serve as a basis for arousing interest in the writer-museum director.

Summary

In my doctoral dissertation, I set out to examine the role and impact of Ferenc Móra in the context of public education from a pedagogical perspective.

Based on my many years of experience as a museum educator and the lessons learned from the discussions at the annual national and regional professional forums on museum education and

museum and museum education, it can be said that active museum education is indeed limited to a few schools. Factors behind this include teacher motivation, the school's commitment to museums, mobility and flexibility of exchanges, and the financial background of the students' families.

Although I believe that museological work offers many alternatives for learning about Ferenc Móra's life's work, it only offers opportunities for a narrow group of people, the museum visitors. Given this, I believe that it would be appropriate to set up a Móra project that would provide an opportunity to present Móra's career and his lesser-known works, subject to the openness of the framework of public education and possibilities available. To this end, I have summarised my research on the literary history of the Móra legacy and then summarised the conclusions of my research on the subject, supplemented by further studies. My further ambition is that the works of Ferenc Móra, due to their local relevance, should be included in the maturity examination of the Hungarian language and literature subject as part of the topic of regional culture and literature beyond the borders, not only in his hometown of Kiskunfélegyháza but also in Szeged. In this place, his life's work was fulfilled. As a result, Móra has already been included in the school-leaving examination in a Szeged public education institution for the 2021-2022 academic year.

After having mapped out - together with a retrospective view of the past decades - where exactly Ferenc Móra's works are located in today's public education, this dissertation's most important objective was to explore new ways to raise interest in Móra's works and his character. In the words of the literary historian László Péter (2005), my ambition is "to make Móra's writings popular again, as hoped."

Ferenc Móra was not only an innovative, critical and modern figure of his time, but his ideas are also relevant today. The current state of education suggests that Móra's works are disappearing and that presenting him as a children's author alone is ineffective. At the most intensive language and vocabulary development stage, it is important to learn Móra's poems and readings. However, it is also necessary to present Móra differently within an institutional framework, and I consider the secondary school age group to be the most relevant target audience for this, using the Móra activities tested in the empirical research.

In my opinion, the framework of the compiled unconventional Móra lecture can serve as a short detour in the secondary school system among the canonized works of early 20th century Hungarian literature, can arouse interest in the author's other works and can provide an opportunity to strengthen local identity at the regional level.