

Women's Education in a Benedictine High School: A Case Study

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This case study explores the circumstances and experiences surrounding the introduction of coeducation at the Czuczor Gergely Benedictine High School and College in 2008. The analysis reviews the international, domestic, and Benedictine aspects of the history of women's education. The historiographic research is supplemented by an interview conducted in 2024 with Archabbot Emeritus Asztrik Várszegi OSB. The operator attributed the Order's pioneering activities and strategic reorientation to societal changes, a return to tradition, family demand, and various economic factors. The study analysed in-depth interviews conducted in 2022 with the first female graduates of the Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers. The six interview questions included in the research focus on the reception and experiences of female pupils, and the longer term influence of Benedictine education. The results of the inductive, qualitative thematic content analysis show that coeducation is the natural approach to schooling; therefore, it should not be treated as an end in itself, but as a path and a means.

Keywords: women's education, coeducation, Benedictine pedagogy, Czuczor Gergely, Benedictine High School and College

Introduction

The aim of the present case study is to explore the circumstances and experiences of the introduction of coeducation in the Czuczor Gergely Benedictine High School and College in 2008. The paper also addresses the situation of private female students graduating from the Győr Catholic High School between 1905 and 1918. Despite the lack of coeducational opportunities in the examined institution at the dawn of the 20th century, it is worth noting that the admission of female pupils reflected the spirit of inclusion and openness of the Benedictine Order, enabling a better understanding of the developments of the first decade of the 21st century. The Benedictine period of the school's history began in 1802, but it took another 206 years for female pupils to benefit from Benedictine education provided for boys in Hungary. The introduction of coeducation was justified by social changes, a return to tradition, demand from families, and various economic factors (Várszegi, 2023).

A general review of the international and domestic context at the two turns of centuries provided the basic point of the research. The chaotic circumstances of the two examined historical periods, the complexity of decisions facing individuals called for a Catholic response to the challenges of modernity. The case study focuses on women's education and the corresponding reforms undertaken in the Order of Saint Benedict at the turn of the millennium, enabling the survival of the school and enhancing educational standards. The author visited and interviewed the first female graduates from 2012 on the occasion of their 10th graduation reunion in 2022, and

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several interviews were conducted with prominent figures of the Order: Asztrik Várszegi Archabbot of Pannonhalma, who authorised the introduction of coeducation, Sister Mária Emerika Matkovics, Abbess of the Order of Saint Ursula of Győr, and Katalin Koncz, former Director of the Győr female College of the Ursuline Order.

Grounded in a qualitative, interpretive approach, this case study undertakes an in-depth analysis of a particular phenomenon, essentially responding to "how" and "why" questions. Babbie (2001) describes case studies as a qualitative field research paradigm, whose focus is limited to a particular example of something. As stressed by Golnhofer (2001), case studies play an important role in situational analyses performed in various learning environments and can inform educational policy and pedagogical decisions at national, school, and individual levels.

Theoretical and Historical Background

The paper explores the structural changes implemented in a Benedictine high school in Hungary, beginning with a presentation of the international, domestic and Benedictine aspects of the history of women's education. The second part undertakes a review of the international and domestic experiences of the introduction of coeducation, and a pre-reform situation analysis of the Czuczor Gergely Benedictine High School and College. The challenges of women's historiography are also addressed by the document analysis, and the study concludes with the presentation of the biological-developmental context of coeducation (Darwin, 1910; Albisetti, 1999; Bubernik, 2012; Rogers, 2025).

An interview conducted with the Benedictine monk, bishop and Archabbot Asztrik Várszegi in Pannonhalma on 31 May 2023 provided a valuable input for the theoretical and historical background of the research. The Archabbot of Pannonhalma looks back at the educational work of the Benedictine Order and the Hungarian and European roots of Benedictine women's education. Partly embedded in the context of the Order's history, partly "mythicalised", the introduction of mixed-gender education in 2008 is presented nonetheless as a crucial measure in the given historical circumstances. Hence, the theoretical construction of the paper is largely informed by the narrative of the archabbot, in addition, with the help of relevant literature (Sörös, 1916; Katus, 1996; Pukánszky, 2006; Barkó, 2011, 2012; Tóth, 2011, 2022).

According to Várszegi, the particular way of life mirroring the relations between men and women in the family was transmitted from antiquity by Benedict, and this tradition has also defined Benedict's relationship with his sister, Scholastica. In addition, the historical development of the nearly 1,500-year-old Benedictine community is inextricably linked to the Benedictine sisters. Scholastica's followers have observed the Regula of her holy brother since the very beginning, hence, Benedictine education and women's education are co-terminous (Sörös, 1916; Katus, 1996). The history of the Order in Hungary began with the settlement of the first Benedictine monks to Pannonhalma by Prince Géza, and was disrupted by the Turkish occupation of the 16th century (Várszegi, 2023).

Várszegi (2023) describes the Order's openness to female students as a universal Benedictine value underpinning the introduction of mixed education: "The shift resulted from our Benedictine habitus." According to Christian teaching, the united love of man and woman provides the security and mercy in which the family can flourish. In the ancient Christian era, the cult of Mary and the heroism of the great female martyrs, comparable to that of men, indicated a respect for women, but also a certain equality between the sexes, whereas the distinction between women and men dates back to the Middle Ages. Benedictines obey to the discrete wisdom of the Regula, which serves as the foundation for their educational activities. "We do not plan in terms of a

school, but a monastery. A Benedictine school is always an addition, since we are not founding a school, but a community, and the community carries out the work. This logic underpins our activities" (Várszegi, 2023).

The personal relationship between the Benedictines and their disciples was not addressed in earlier centuries due to the authoritarian and hierarchical environment (Várszegi, 1990, s. n.). This internal document, on the other hand, points to various biographical works, journals, and memoirs of teachers and their now-famous pupils, which seem to suggest that this personal force connecting spirits can also pervade the rigid academic environment.

To the question of how the challenge of women's education affected the Order at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Várszegi responded by recalling the pedagogical activities of two of his fellow monks, Flóris Rómer² and Jácint Rónay.³ Despite the exclusivity of all-male grammar schools, the two erudite monks "outgrew" the Benedictine order, becoming involved in the education of the male and female offspring of the Habsburg royal family. Rónay was the tutor of Crown Prince Rudolf and Archduchess Maria Valeria. Based on a correspondence between the natural scientist and the archduchess, the Archabbot depicts the father-daughter relationship as a fine example of the nascent Benedictine women's education. In the historical context of mushrooming male grammar schools, "there was no mercy for women", nevertheless, examples of monastic teachers devoting themselves to the education of girls were not uncommon. Ágost Dobrovics and Jákó Blazovich taught history and Hungarian language to Otto Habsburg, but also took care of the education of female children in the family. During the interview, Archabbot Emeritus Asztrik Várszegi evokes the pioneering role of Kolos Vaszary,⁴ the first Benedictine monk to obtain a regular teaching licence in 1867 and to implement measures promoting the education of women.

Pukánszky (2006) provides a detailed account of the status of women in the history of Christianity, and his findings echo the Archabbot's statements. Drawing on New Testament examples, Pukánszky underlines the perception of women as valuable, autonomous beings, whereas the Letters of the Apostle Paul suggest that the Christian ideal of equality did not pervade the everyday norms of behaviour and conduct. Attitudes and perceptions regarding women had already deviated from the Christian ideal in antiquity, reverting back to the traditional Old Testament image of women. This stereotyped image of women dominated the Middle Ages and its influence extended even into the 19th century. Despite the equality of the sexes in matters of grace and salvation, this was not at all reflected in practice.

In a study entitled *Secondary education for girls and nation-building in Dualist Hungary*, Kereszty (2010) notes that women's secondary education was largely shaped by central government's perception of the social position of women. In a politically dominant society, Hungarian women were not assured equal opportunities for secondary education, the goal of nation-building being the education of "Hungarian mothers", and their preparation for female roles. Despite the state's official recognition of the rights of young women to receive private education and to take their school-leaving exam in all-male grammar schools in 1883, this concession

2. Flóris Ferenc Rómer (Bratislava, 12 April 1815 – Oradea, 18 March 1889): archaeologist, art historian, university professor, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In 1830, he joined the Benedictine Order, becoming a Doctor of Philosophy. A teacher of Latin and Hungarian languages from 1839, later of natural history at the Győr grammar school (*Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*, 1994).
3. Jácint János Rónai, Leitzinger (Székesfehérvár, 13 May 1814 – Bratislava, 17 April 1889): Benedictine teacher, writer, natural scientist, the first propagator of Darwinism in Hungary, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He taught in Győr from 1840. In 1841, he became a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Pest (*Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon*, 1994).
4. Serving as Archabbot between 1885 and 1891, Vaszary was responsible for the construction of the secondary school in Győr, but also the Zalaapát nursery and girls' school and the convent school in Szentiván. Vaszary entrusted the Sisters of Mercy with the operation of three girls' classes and a nursery, financed by the Archabbey in Szent-Márton, the present-day Pannonhalma (Sörös, 1916).

affected but a small minority of girls. As demonstrated by a series of measures, giving girls equal access to higher education was not deemed necessary by the contemporary governments.

Kéri (2018) mentions different ideological trends and pedagogical endeavours shaping the evolution of girls' education and images of women at the beginning of the 20th century. The emergence of social scientific approaches in historical research dates back to the mid-20th century, particularly the post-World War II period, when the dominance of male-centric representations of the past in traditional historiography was challenged by a growing number of women entering the historical profession.

The conceptual framework and problem of women's historiography is addressed by a number of authors, highlighting the plurality of approaches in the history of men's and women's education in Europe. According to Pető (2001), history is a place of remembrance, and who and what is remembered or has control over the past and memory is always a question of power. The aim of women's historiography is to place women at the centre of historical analysis, to make them subjects of narratives, to explore their role in political events, movements and social change.

Kéri (2018) sees the purpose of women's historiography as the rewriting of our knowledge of previous eras when the discipline was still in its infancy. She notes that the particular features and documents of the history of girls' formation and women's education in Hungary have received scant scholarly attention in international literature, bemoaning their lack of integration to "universal" studies on the history of women's education.

The international history of education in the 20th century (Pukánszky & Németh, 1996) represented a significant rupture with Herbart's traditional and strict rule-based pedagogical style, the figure of the autocratic teacher with a cane in his hand, and his rigid and closed "book school". American-born pragmatism identifies the capacity to work with practical action. This philosophical current – inspiring John Dewey's pedagogy – represents the school as a reflection of life itself, where children no longer passively accumulate knowledge but are allowed to develop their capacities (Pukánszky & Németh, 1996).

Additionally, the 1929 Encyclical "Divini Illius Magistri" by Pope Pius XI expresses concern about the political risks of moral, social and gender mixing in schools, particularly in secondary education. Pius XI calls the system of coeducation, with its roots in naturalism that denies original sin, erroneous and pernicious to Christian formation. Its proponents confuse human co-existence with promiscuity and leveling equality. The Pope argues in his encyclical that the Creator has ordained the perfect union of the two sexes only in matrimony, and, with varying degrees of contact, in the family and in society. Besides, there is nothing in nature itself, which fashions man and woman quite different in organisation, dispositions and capacities, to suggest that promiscuity, let alone equality can exist in training the two sexes.

Coeducation practices in different Catholic countries have nonetheless shown a large degree of variation. A study of Albisetti (1999) explores the interaction between rhetoric and reality in coeducation, focusing on France, Italy, Belgium, Austria, and Ireland. Commentators in the late 19th century suggested that Catholicism and coeducation were two distinct and irreconcilable concepts. According to a provocative statement cited by the American scholar from an 1887 French dictionary of pedagogy, the introduction of coeducation would be problematic in France, impossible in Italy or Spain, natural to varying degrees in Switzerland, the Netherlands and the North (Scandinavia); but it would necessarily triumph in a Protestant democracy like America.

Albisetti raises two important questions. First, what explains Catholics' nearly universal rejection of coeducation before the papal encyclical on the matter was even published? Secondly, what factors led to the implementation of divergent coeducation practices at primary and secondary level in the predominantly Catholic countries of Western and Central Europe?

Responding to the first question, the author invokes scientific and pseudo-scientific explanations of psychologists opposing coeducation which emphasise the different learning competences of boys and girls, claiming that girls with weaker physical strength would be overwhelmed by the burden of equality in learning, finding science and a common curriculum mentally exhausting. Albisetti notes that Catholics were the most insistent on separating boys and girls (Albisetti, 1999).

The author responds to the second question by arguing that children in primary education, particularly in less populated rural areas, were not segregated by gender. Albisetti (1999) notes that in the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the late 1890s, over 88% of primary schools were coeducational, while single-gender education was accessible only in the larger towns. The abolition of single-sex schools entered the agenda in post-World War I Austria, with coeducation at secondary level no longer restricted to smaller towns in the 1920s and girls allowed to take their school-leaving exam in coeducational institutions.

The issue of coeducation is also examined by a more recent study (Rogers, 2025) focusing on early modern Europe where education took place in same-sex schools, and boys and girls were taught specific skills corresponding to their different lifestyles. Publications on the merits and dangers of the mixed education of boys and girls began to appear in Europe from the 1860s, drawing on similar practices in the United States. French and German educators maintained their disapproval of the moral freedom and independence attributed to coeducation, and its undermining of traditional gender roles. The study notes that the defense of coeducational schools in Europe began only in the final quarter of the century. The American example serves to illustrate the capacity of young women to gain admission to the same upper secondary and higher educational institutions as their male siblings. In the Interwar era, coeducation was perceived in a growing number of countries as a means to reconcile the sexes, overlooking young women's demand for equal rights to education. Rogers (2020) traces back the origins of coeducation in Europe to rural primary schools, pursuant to a French law adopted in 1933. Secondary schools were slower to embrace coeducation, not least due to the aforementioned papal decision of 1929 prohibiting its introduction. Post-World War II, however, the revival of youth culture in Western and Northern European countries and the huge expansion of secondary education began to undermine the ideological pillars of single-sex education.

The research historical overview exposed some key issues of women's education and women's historiography, noting the differences of approaches to coeducation in the first half of the 20th century between the USA and Europe. At the turn of the 20-21st centuries, coeducation was adopted by a growing number of Catholic schools in Western Europe, and in 2008 this structural transition appeared inevitable in the prestigious Benedictine high school in Győr as well.

Research Questions, Sources, and Response Methodology

Research Questions

A domestic, practically implemented example of coeducational education, learned from theoretical and historical frameworks, enables the formulation of the research questions of this case study:

1. What were the circumstances of the introduction of coeducation in the Czuczor Gergely Benedictine High School and College in 2008?
2. How did the female graduates from 2012 evaluate the influence of Benedictine education in 2022?
3. What lessons can educators draw from the results of the content analysis of interviews?

Research Sources

A part of the primary research sources provide limited data on the girl population in focus. To address this lacuna, it is necessary to provide a brief summary of the fate of the school's documentary sources in the 20–21st centuries.

The history of the current Czuczor Gergely Benedictine High School and College is recorded in the annual reports and minutes preserved in manuscript form in various epochs. According to Deputy Head István Konstantin Tóth OSB (2022), the publication of printed yearbooks was compulsory before 1948. From 1948 to 1987, only typewritten yearbooks were produced, in four official copies each, with one donated to the State Ecclesiastical Office,⁵ one to the Pannonhalma Archabbey, one to the Catholic School Authority,⁶ and, one copy was preserved in the high school archives (Tóth, 2022). The publication of printed materials was strictly forbidden in the pre-1990 decades. Three yearbooks were issued from 1995 to 1997, and only "typescripts" were published before 2013. Due to a lack of printed school yearbooks and reports from 2008–2012, for the purpose of the analysis, the director provided access to data on the girl population contained in class registers.

The larger and more recent part of the primary sources are the in-depth interviews I conducted in 2022 with female students who graduated in 2012 (Babbie, 2001; Golnhofer, 2001).

In September 2008, two mixed-gender classes – one with 12 and one with 11 girls – were launched in the 9th grade of the high school. Out of the 23, five former students could not be reached and three declined participation, thus, a total of 15 interviews were conducted. The interviewing process relied on a "miner" approach (Kvale, 2005), which presumes that the interview subject possesses relevant information and that the interviewer's role is to extract it through a set of semi-structured questions. The questions were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of ELTE (2022/476-2) and the young women, aged 28–29 years, responded voluntarily and anonymously. The request also covered the interviewing of teachers and tutors involved in the formation of the girl population.

The respondents included 6 day students, 8 Ursuline students and 1 private school student. The interviews conducted with the boarding students raised an unforeseen problem: what other educational influences were at play, i.e. to what extent were they exposed to the dual impact of Benedictine and Ursuline values and pedagogy? Our interviews conducted with the then director of the Ursuline college and Abbess of the convent can thus shed new light on the education of former graduates and open up new research avenues in the future.

Interviews conducted among the female graduates were recorded in the course of 2022–2023, during personal encounters in the school building and when distance required, by video interviews. The interview with Benedictine Archabbot Asztrik Várszegi took place in the monastery of Pannonhalma on 31 May 2023. The abbess and the former director of the Ursuline convent in Győr were interviewed on several occasions in 2024.

The secondary sources of the research were international and Hungarian literature (Babbie, 2001; Golnhofer, 2001).

5. A body responsible for implementing the agreements between the Hungarian state and religious denominations, and state administrative tasks regarding religions between 1951 and 1989. Under the authority of the Council of Ministers, it was presided by the President. The affairs of each denomination were managed by separate departments (Magyar Katolikus Lexikon, 2013).
6. A supervisory body, the successor of the Catholic High School Authority. Besides Catholic grammar schools, all types of secondary-level Catholic educational institutions were under its jurisdiction. Its executive body was the General Directorate for Catholic Education (Magyar Katolikus Lexikon, 2013).

Response Methodology

The processing of interviews with the female students drew on the thematic content analysis technique. Its foundations were laid down by Krippendorff (1995), who described it as a set of procedures that can be summarised in eight steps. The proposed technique is described as empirically grounded, exploratory in process, and predictive in intent. According to Krippendorff (1995), a good content analysis will not only provide answers to specific research questions, it is also expected to pose some new ones, leading to a revision of procedures and the construction of new hypotheses for future applications.

Although Krippendorff's (1995) theory proved to be overly rigorous for the evaluation of interviews, the validity of his conceptual assumption is also applied in this paper. Accordingly, content analysis is regarded as a research tool that enables one to draw replicable and valid insights from the data in various contexts. Lately, there has been a significant upsurge of studies adopting the qualitative research paradigm, which draw on content analysis or aim to detect some kind of pattern among the selected sources by using coding techniques (Frank & Valentné, 2002).

The approach by Saldaña's (2016) provided a valuable basis for constructing a mini-theory. In his handbook, the "code" is defined as a researcher-generated word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute to a piece of linguistic or visual data. The data and hence the coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full paragraph or an entire page of text to a stream of moving images. It attributes specific meaning to each individual datum for purposes of pattern detection, categorisation, and other analytical processes (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4).

For Saldaña, coding is a heuristic: an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas or algorithms to follow (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9). Coding is the initial step towards a more in-depth analysis and interpretation of meaning. Coding is not just labelling but also linking: it allows for the analysis and categorisation of similarly coded data according to their common characteristics. The author also stresses that qualitative researchers are not algorithmic automatons (Saldaña, 2016, p. 16). Even after reading and reviewing the data carefully before formally coding them, one can occasionally overlook a theme (or pattern, trend, or concept).

Another issue that deserves scholarly attention is the size of the data corpus to be coded. As suggested by previous research, many people believed that only the most salient parts of the corpus related to the research questions deserves attention, and that up to half to two-thirds of the total record could be deleted. The potential hazard is that the deleted portions might contain the as yet unknown or controversial units of data that would motivate a reconsideration of a category or code (ibid. 17).

The following coding techniques were deemed appropriate for the analysis of the six interview questions included in the study:

Values Coding, which refers to the process of assigning codes to qualitative data that reflect the participants' values, attitudes and beliefs, representing their perspectives or worldviews. According to Saldaña (ibid. 131), the greater the personal meaning associated to a particular value, the greater the personal payoff; the greater the personal payoff, the greater the personal value. An attitude is the way we think and feel about ourselves, another person, thing or idea. Attitudes are part of a relatively enduring system of evaluative reactions based upon and reflecting acquired evaluative concepts or beliefs (Shaw & Wright, as cited in Saldaña, 2016).

Magnitude Coding, which consists of and adds a supplemental alphanumeric or symbolic code or subcode to an existing coded datum or category to indicate its intensity, frequency, direction, presence or evaluative content. Magnitude codes can be qualitative, quantitative and/or nominal indicators (Saldaña, 2016, p. 86).

Saldaña proposes the technique of Emotion Coding for all types of qualitative studies, but particularly for those that investigate participants' intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences and actions. Since emotions are a universal human experience, their acknowledgment provides an insight into the participants' perspectives, worldviews and life conditions. This technique enables the researcher to label the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant or inferred about the participant (Saldaña, 2016, p.125).

Drawing on Saldaña's various coding methods, the aim of the analysis was to determine the magnitude and causes of the mixed reactions provoked by the admission of female pupils; to examine how the new situation was interpreted by male students and teachers and its implications on the situation analysis, strategies and self-evaluation of female students.

The Circumstances of the Introduction of Coeducation

István Konstantin Tóth OSB, head of the Benedictine high school in Győr, was the first to publish a study on coeducation in 2011. The positive experiences of the first three years justified his expectations concerning the admission of girls, however, he stressed that the issue should be assessed from a wider perspective (Tóth, 2011). Barkó (2011), in a manuscript related to the latter study, mentioned the pleasant, family-like atmosphere of the Győr Benedictine school and its improved academic and disciplinary standards as major achievements.

The study of Bubernik (2012) focusing on the coeducation of youth up to the 3rd grade of secondary education, recognises the limitations of her research due to the non-representative nature of her results.

This case study seeks to add new insights to the available literature on the contextual analysis of the processes discussed above. Archabbot of Pannonhalma Asztrik Várszegi OSB reflects on the introduction of coeducation on the occasion of the Grand Chapter of 2005.

"After the Grand Chapter it became obvious that we had to do something about Győr, and this was a magisterial responsibility. [...] We operated a school where the number of male pupils was dwindling. Maintaining a school with a teaching faculty and few children [...] is a financial matter." (Várszegi, 2023; auth. trans.)

The decision to adopt coeducation was made through a verbal agreement between Head of School Tamás Horváth Dori OSB and Deputy Head István Konstantin Tóth OSB, since the educational laws in force contained no provisions concerning the gender of pupils (Tóth, 2022).

In an interview published in a national daily newspaper, Horváth Dori pointed out that Benedictine schools around the world had already opened their door to girls, but in Hungary the Győr high school was the first to join in their footsteps (Horváth, 2007).

Gábor Ágoston Barkó OSB (2011) reviewed the history of the Győr Benedictine high school from the mid-20th century. In this period, the institution, alongside some of its 'peers', benefited from a special status in the Hungarian system of public education. This was likely due to the nationalisation of all denominational schools in 1948, followed by the signing of a contract between the Hungarian state and the Hungarian Catholic Church on 30 August 1950, which authorised the operation of eight four-year Catholic grammar schools, albeit with a limited number of pupils. Being an all-male school reinforced the insularity of the Benedictine institution, given that all Catholic high schools were single-sex before the post-World War II era.

According to Barkó (2011), the introduction of coeducation was preceded by a dramatic decline of student numbers: in the academic year 2005/2006 the school had 396 students, one year later 387, dropping to 359 in the academic year 2007/2008, despite the introduction of three classes per grade level from 1989 onwards

and its functioning as a six-grade school since 1994. From the academic year 2006/2007, Saturday schooling was abolished and the vast majority of boarding students were allowed to go home on the weekends. Given the steep decline in the number of students from more distant counties, the only option was to increase the number of applicants from Győr and its agglomeration. Coeducation was perceived as a means to raise student numbers, improve the financial health of the institution, and enhance academic standards and discipline at the same time. In the years following this bold move, the number of enrolled students—including both male and female students—doubled compared to the year before the reform (Barkó, 2011).

Barkó's study draws a parallel between the measures introduced in the Benedictine high school in Hungary and those implemented in the Downside School in England in 2008. On 16 May 2008, the British Catholic Herald published a lengthy article titled Girls bring a "second spring" to Downside, praising the prestigious all-boys day and boarding school of the Benedictine abbey for embracing coeducation without undermining its traditions. The article mentions that England counted five Catholic independent all-boy boarding schools in the previous decade: Ampleforth, Stonyhurst, Worth, The Reading Oratory and Downside, all of which have since shifted to coeducation (*Catholic Herald*, 2008).

The Results of the Interview Analysis

The 15 interview questions included in the research focus on the enrollment, reception, experiences, and difficulties of female students in the coeducational Benedictine high school, and the long-term influence of Benedictine education. For the purpose of the present study, six interview questions have been selected, each being directly related to the introduction of coeducation. The size of the text corpus did not require the use of software for performing an inductive, qualitative thematic content analysis. The coding process follows the instructions of Saldaña (ibid. 29), who recommends that for small-scale studies, coding should be performed on hard copy printouts first, not via a computer.

After consultation with our interview subjects transcripts were edited, without deleting any passages of text. Having matched the 15 responses to each question, individual categories were attributed to the data by using Exploratory Methods. The process of filtering qualitative data and reviewing the corpus relied on Elemental Methods. Data categories were set up via Initial Coding based on thematic or conceptual similarity. Through subcoding, codes or subcodes were assigned to each category. At this stage, Saldaña (2016) also proposes In Vivo Coding, which allows researchers to use words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes. Provisional codes were revised and modified as part of Provisional Coding, and finally, the codes were selected for application from the 32 coding methods. The analysis of responses primarily drew on Emotion Coding, Values Coding and Magnitude Coding techniques (Saldaña, 2016).

Question 1: How were you received by your male classmates and class-fellows at the start of the school year?

The magnitude of emotions was assessed in the category of male classmates and class-fellows (Emotion and Magnitude Coding). The codes for behaviour included receptive, mixed/variable and hostile. A separate category was set up to indicate whether the interviewee displayed a specific type of behaviour through a concrete example.

The respondents drew a clear distinction between the behaviour of their male peers in coeducational classes and upper grade male students socialised in all-boy schools. Whereas their male classmates demonstrated a mixture of receptive and mixed/variable attitudes, their behaviour was less hostile towards female pupils compared to the older students. Hostile behaviour was deeply engrained in the recollections of our female interviewees: "they behaved like alpha males", "they thought we made a mess in the school", "we des-

troyed male cohesion and their long-standing tradition", "the school turned into an agitated beehive". The receptive attitude of males, displaying courtesy, interest and openness, was described with less colorful images: "only upper-graders came to see us". According to their testimonies, the hostility subsided in later years with the growing number of female students, improving the balance of power. In the words of Mária Emerica Matkovics, abbess of the Ursuline Order: "the first girls were bathing in joy as all eyes turned upon them, becoming somewhat spoiled by the excessive attention" (Matkovics, 2024).

Question 2: How were you received by your male teachers?

In a similar vein, the analysis of responses drew on the Emotion and Magnitude Coding methods, applying the same grades of magnitude to monastic and civilian teachers, and taking into account references to a concrete example. The results demonstrated no differences in the behaviour of monastic and civilian male teachers: despite their receptivity to female students, examples of mixed/variable behaviour were found in both camps. The concrete examples showcase the flexible and supportive attitude of monks toward female students, while civilian male teachers appeared less adaptive in some cases. One head of class was particularly disapproving of girls' integration: "he did not support the admission of girls. He would often call us gentlemen. Why was he appointed to this task?! Whenever possible, he reminded us that this was a boys' school for Benedictine pupils. He said our demeanour was showing signs of deterioration."

The Benedictine Rule's prescription to seek being loved rather than feared offered guidance for the monks. "He should aim more at being loved than feared. He should not be restless and troubled, not extreme and headstrong, not jealous and oversuspicious." (RB 64,15; 16, auth. trans.). The interviews contain several references to positive experiences: "I still keep in touch with our head teacher, who is a monk, or visit him personally", "a father told us that they knew how sensitive girls were, how important it was to use the right words not to offend them or make them cry". Certain responses to the summary questions of the interview conveyed a sense of encouragement: "It's a good idea that someone raises this issue. Nobody has ever asked me such questions." Critical remarks were also made regarding the need for a school psychologist or more female teachers to discuss their problems with more boldly and frankly.

Question 3: To what extent did you consider yourself as equal to boys?

Magnitude Coding allowed us to examine gender equality according to full, partial and zero tolerance codes, while taking into account concrete examples and arguments. The developed grades yielded clear results: the vast majority of girls experienced full equality to boys, not least due to the efforts of their tutors: "our teachers ensured that we were served first in the canteen, which was instructive for the boys", "They welcomed us. All was well in the end. Couples were also formed", "Our head teacher did his best to make us feel comfortable."

What was perceived initially by the boys as a form of excessive attention to girls was accepted later on as an aspect of cultured behaviour. By virtue of their academic excellence, female pupils ended up earning the respect of their male peers.

Question 4: What was your specific contribution to the life of the coeducational community? How satisfied were you with yourself?

Based on the responses to this question, the self-evaluation of our interviewees was analysed using the Values Coding and Magnitude Coding techniques. The level of satisfaction varied between "fully satisfied", "partially satisfied" and "not at all satisfied". The vast majority were fully satisfied with their high school performance. The supportive environment facilitated their adaptation to different life situations, enriching them with positive experiences and providing a solid foundation for their future plans. "Learning was above

everything else. I was studying hard. I even helped the boys during exams." "I have good communication skills. I was able to improve the relationship between teachers and students."

By contrast, a dissatisfied respondent argued that the integration of girls was a lengthier process:

"The pressure to adapt was immense, which wasn't necessarily a positive thing. In trying to prove that women can achieve the same level of excellence as men in science subjects, I was never effortless but under constant pressure. I still believe this to be true with my present mind, but it should be taken much lighter. And there is no need to compete and conform all the time."

Question 5: Have your goals and plans been realised? Please elaborate!

Our analysis of the self-evaluation of female students regarding the above question drew once again on the Values Coding and Magnitude Coding techniques. The majority were fully satisfied with the course of their life, their pair selection, career, and current job, and illustrated their responses through concrete examples and life situations.

"The school took care of all my needs. We had our freedom, but just enough so we wouldn't get into bad ways."

"Those four years were indeed formative. How I miss those years! They helped me a lot in improving the relationship with my parents, as I had a very rebellious nature."

"I'm proud of myself. I am studying in Rome. I have faith in early Christianity. In fact, I often feel like running away from the Church and the Benedictine community, but then they always find me."

Likewise, their personal recollections suggest that the priorities were academic excellence and the high standard of education when entering the Benedictine high school, but later on they also recognised the importance of spiritual life. In some cases, their initial goals were unrealistic and their higher educational plans had to be revised, but they ended up being more satisfied in the long run.

Question 6: What Benedictine values and role models have been a lasting inspiration for you?

Based on the responses, codes describing the quantity of values were included in the table first: multiple values – some values – uncertainty – no values. The balance of Magnitude Coding clearly tilted towards multiple values.

Benedictine values such as a balance between prayer and work, solid ethical values, the inclusiveness of the Order, the cultivation of family traditions, a family-like environment, a sense of cohesion and identity, the practice of Catholic faith, consistency, and caring – have remained decisive for respondents in the long run, and many acknowledge that these values have provided guidance in their lives:

"To teach and learn without limits, that's what I have seen here. I knew that I was on the right path."

"It was only in adulthood that I understood the Benedictine motto: pray and work! Before, I did these out of habit."

"Unlike in many other schools, here I was not stigmatised for being a high achiever."

"The fathers tried to speak our language. Sometimes a sermon would take only five minutes, but it would give us plenty to reflect upon at home."

"Benedictine spirituality is not just for these four years."

The Research in the Context of Objectives, Questions and Results

The introduction of coeducation in the Czuczor Gergely Benedictine High School and College, analysed in the present context, is rooted in various causes and social phenomena. The number of male pupils enrolled in the school has fallen dramatically since the academic year 2005/2006 despite recurrent reforms. In 2006, the Director of Pannonhalma Tamás Horváth Dori OSB and Deputy Head István Konstantin Tóth OSB recognised the necessity of structural reforms. The underlying factors of falling enrollment were demographic decline, the proliferation of ecclesiastic schools across the country, and changing family habits, which led to dwindling student numbers and a deterioration of academic standards and discipline in the Győr high school. In the autumn of 2007, the admission of 9th-grade female pupils was approved from the academic year 2008/2009, allowing families to send all their children to the institution. The enrollment of the first female students was described by some of our interviewees as fairly restrictive: those with relatives (father, brother) attending the school were given preference, alongside those with good academic results and exemplary behaviour. The initial security measures were progressively abandoned with the increase of successful applications, and the proportion of female students had reached 40% by 2012 (Tóth, 2022). Student numbers kept growing in tandem with the share of female students; the institution counted 797 students in the academic year 2024/2025. The extension of the school's building complex from the academic year 2018/2019 is a likely reason for this upward trend.

The second research question targeted the influence of Benedictine education. The narrow interpretation of the adjective "Benedictine" refers to the Order of Saint Benedict and those who adhere to the still-relevant, metaphorically interpreted prescriptions of the Rule. Hence, the adjective "Benedictine" is applied first and foremost to monks and tutors of the Order, not to the students of Benedictine establishments.

To illustrate Várszegi's (2024) summary of the Order's primary mission as being the following of traditions and a constant re-reading of the Regula, it is worth quoting some relevant passages.⁷ In chapter 37, the Regula calls for taking care of the elderly and the young, regardless of their gender: "Their weakness must always be kept in mind and the strictness of the Rule regarding food should not be imposed on them. Rather, let them be treated with loving consideration: they should (eat) before the regular time" (RB 37,1; 2; 3, trans. auth.). The author of the Rule prescribes that community rank be based on the date of entry into the monastery, and not on a monk's age. An exception to this rule is "boys who are everywhere the disciplinary responsibility of all members" (RB 63,9, trans. auth.). Chapter 70 discusses abuse, excommunication and beatings: "So therefore whoever presumes to punish any adult in any way whatsoever without the abbot's order, or flares up wildly at the children, must undergo the regular discipline" (RB 70, 6, trans. auth.). The Rule contains an obsolete chapter on the education of children (RB 30,1; 2; 3), mentioning various degrees of punishment, which are no longer effective.

The following Benedictine values were highlighted by the interviewees: a balance between prayer and work, solid ethical values, inclusiveness, family traditions and a family-like environment, sense of cohesion and identity, the practice of Catholic faith, and consistency. The school's Pedagogical Programme also includes a quote from St. Benedict, which the interviewees strived to realise and observe: "he should arrange everything so that the strong are challenged and the feeble are not overwhelmed" (RB 64,19), and "When he must correct someone, he should act prudently and not overdo it. If he is too vigorous in removing the rust, he may break the vessel" (RB 64,12, trans. auth.).

7. The relevant passages are cited from a contemporary translation of Benedict's Regula (Kardong, 1996).

Overall, the interviewees assessed the introduction of coeducation from a decade's hindsight in 2022, which allowed for sufficient objectivity. According to the findings of the content analysis, in the first months, everyone, including monks, teachers, and students, experienced the situation as odd, as an untrodden path. The conflicts provoked by the novelty of the practice between religious and civilian teachers on one hand and between the sexes on the other were, however, gradually resolved. The rising proportion of enrolled female students led to a notable improvement of the public perception, academic and disciplinary situation of the school. Despite interviewees' critical comments on their insufficient preparation for family life, child-rearing and sexuality, the supportive attitude of female tutors who encouraged the discussion of such topics during classes or study trips was mentioned as particularly valuable.

The study has demonstrated that during the examined period, the educational work focusing on the population of female students was guided by the Benedictine discretion and the receptive, problem-solving and adaptive method practised throughout centuries.

The fact that as of 1 September 2021, the Győr convent of the Order of Ursulines of the Roman Union transferred the rights of maintenance of its Women's College to the St. Mauritius Benedictine Priory of Győr, thereby suspending the autonomous operation of the female college, offers novel and important areas for further investigation (Tóth, 2022; Koncz, 2024; Matkovics, 2024). A potential aim of future research could be to explore the past, present and future integration of the like-minded "Ursuline approach" into the educational activities of the Benedictines of Győr.

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A nőnevelés ügye egy bencés gimnáziumban

Jelen esettanulmány a győri Czuczor Gergely Bencés Gimnázium és Kollégiumban 2008-ban bevezetett koedukált oktatás-nevelés körülményeit, tapasztalatait mutatja be. A feltáráshoz a nőnevelés történelmének nemzetközi, hazai és Szent Benedek-rendi vonatkozásaira világítunk rá. A historiográfiát a Várszegi Asztrik OSB pannonhalmi emeritus főapáttal készült interjúra (2024, a szerző birtokában) támaszkodva egészítettük ki. A fenntartó a rend újíító tevékenységét és stratégiájának megváltoztatását a társadalmi változásokkal, a hagyományokhoz való visszatéréssel, családi igényekkel, gazdasági okokkal támasztotta alá. A kutatás a 2012-ben elsőként maturált női tanulókkal 2022-ben készített 15 mélyinterjút dolgozza fel Johnny Saldaña *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2016) tartalomelemzési módszerének alkalmazásával. Az interjúkérdések a lánypopulációnak a bencés gimnáziumban való fogadtatására, tapasztalataira, a bencés nevelő hatás hosszabb távú eredményeire irányultak. Az induktív, kvalitatív tematikus tartalomelemzés eredményei azt igazolják, hogy a két nem együttes oktatását és nevelését természetes állapotnak kell tekinteni, s így a koedukációs nevelés nem cél, hanem út és eszköz.

Kulcsszavak: nőnevelés, koedukáció, bencés pedagógia, Czuczor Gergely Bencés Gimnázium és Kollégium