

# SUMMARY

## Youth and the Transformation of Society – Freedom and Life Chances

### Youth Research Conference In The European Youth Centre, Budapest, April 4-5

The Youth Research Section of the Hungarian Sociological Association, the Youth Research Group of the Institute for Educational Research, the Youth Research Data Bank of the Social Research Information Centre and the Association of Young Sociologists organised a joint Youth Research Conference. The aim of the conference was to summarise the findings of youth research conducted in Hungary since 1989 and to promote communication between not only researchers but also civic youth organisations, government experts and MPs. Our book contains the lectures and the discussions of the conference held 4-5th April 1997.

The sections of the conference were as follows:

1.
  - a) The life conditions of young people; child and youth statistics
  - b) The world of work – with the participation of the Work Science Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
2.
  - a) Educational system
  - b) Vocational training
3. Community culture and political socialisation
4. Ethnic relations, prejudice, identity, world view
5. The impact of consumer culture and mass media on young people
6. The social participation of young people
7. Values, lifestyles, future orientation
8. Religion and youth
9.
  - a) Health conditions and deviance
  - b) Juvenile delinquency

### Main Conclusions Drawn At The Conference

Young people between the ages of 14-29 differ more and more markedly from each other as to age, origin and region. The change of regime increased and, simultaneously, decreased their opportunities. Owing to distorted modernisation, the chance of the reproduction of inherited gains and losses has grown. This is also corroborated by the

fact that organisations and mechanisms serving to handle conflicts and minimise social inequalities have still not yet emerged.

According to statistics, the employment rate among youth has dramatically fallen between 1990 and 1996 from 75% to 55%. This can only in part be attributed to the growing motivation to study: a considerably higher proportion of youngsters are now absorbed into higher, secondary, semi-higher and semi-secondary education as ten years ago. However, in the educational system the number of early dropouts with no qualification at all has also grown. Hungary is at the top of the European list of jobless young people who do not study anywhere at all. By contrast, youth in the most advanced countries are characterised by dual activities: they work and study at the same time, so as to be competitive on the labour market. In Hungary, this phenomenon exists, but in a confusing way because statistics do not involve youngsters making money in the black economy:

Due to the inactivity of young people, parental financial support may be extended until the age of 27-29. One of background factors of this extension is the gradual withdrawal of the state from the public sector, including education. In public education, elite (e.g. six and eight year) grammar schools received a green light. Their too early selection increases differences between young people and the implementation of the tuition fee system in higher education reinforces this even more. However, while these disadvantages can be compensated for by studying after hours, the poor and the Roma who do not participate even in secondary education are in a hopeless situation. Its main cause was the collapse of a vocational training system built on „smoke stack” industry. Owing to this, one third of youngsters enter the labour market with no or poor qualification. There are now nearly a quarter of a million of them. Gypsies are the most underprivileged: in the age of 20-24, 23,5% of them are unemployed and 52,8% inactive, so they are totally excluded from any kind of social participation. Simultaneously, a Gypsy middle class is also emerging which lays more and more emphasis on the education of their offspring.

The situation of young women has also substantially changed. Mothers with small children are not well sought after in jobs nowadays. Less and less people can afford nurseries and kindergartens than earlier. Thus, women either get married later or do quite the opposite and escape into the family and bringing up children. The latter is mainly characteristic of underprivileged young people. This creates further disadvantages because it is a serious obstacle in finding a job. „New conservatism” is gaining ground not only among women but also among the youngest, where liberalism concerning sexual behaviour is becoming less popular. They try to retreat under the umbrella of the family from the social Darwinism represented by the marketoriented world outside. Parallel to this, new forms of escapism are emerging among youth, i.e. growing drug abuse, aggression and intolerance.

Regional differences also influence the future of young people. Work and studying opportunities are much less favourable for young people in the depressed Eastern areas or small villages than in the capital, in big towns or in Western Hungary. Their mentalities are different: youngsters living near the Western border are more practical-minded and independent but those in the crisis zones still have paternalistic attitudes.

However, there are also winners of the transformation process. All data show that young people are over-represented in agriculture and they are far more educated than the older cohorts. An ever growing proportion of youth study in the higher educational institutions. For those who grew up after the uncertainty of the change of regime, unemployment and eternal competition are no longer shocking experiences. Accordingly, they are much more utilitarian and flexible. A new, dynamic group of young entrepreneurs is being formed. Its members are not only self employed but have more and more bourgeois and civic virtues: willingness to accumulate and invest, industriousness and a sense of responsibility toward their environment. In the private sphere informal networks play a key role, therefore strong family, kinship and friendship ties are observable. Similarly to Western European petty bourgeois families, the mother, the wife and the children are employed part-time in the enterprise. Young entrepreneurs, in particular in the countryside are dethroning the former intellectual elite in the field of cultural patterns, too. Owing to these changes, consumer culture mediated through the mass media is becoming dominant among various strata of youth the main form of leisure activities of young people is watching TV, especially music and movie channels.

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