Hard times create strong youth

The Impact of the Era of Crisis on Future Generations

Ed.: Péter Pillók – Levente Székely

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First edition

Content

"Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, and weak men create hard times."

(G. Michael Hopf)

In recent years, there has been much discussion of the generational effects of the coronavirus pandemic in academic publications and expert commentaries on issues concerning young people, suggesting that the socialization environment has a major impact on the emerging generational character. In the developed world today, the generational impact of the war between Russia and Ukraine is being pondered, while a decade ago experts were discussing the effect of the economic crisis, and around the millennium the information revolution was at the center of attention. Such systemic changes have a powerful impact on the socialization environment and can thus shape identification.

The systemic changes seen over the past decades are largely interpreted in the negative context of war, the pandemic and recession. However, fundamentally positive processes such as the transition towards an information society also have their dark sides. In the present volume, we discuss ten crises in search of answers to how these manifest themselves in the lives of new generations, to what extent do they transform their lives, define their circumstances and shape them into a generation. Consequently, we address the demographic crisis in the developed world and the partly related migration crisis originating in the developing world. Crises of basic conditions of life, including the climate crisis, the economic crisis and the impact of pandemics, are also devoted chapters. Our era, which could be called the information age or even the age of networks, is itself generating crises; examples for this include those arising from technological development, as well as those stemming from cooperation, such as the crises of security, communities, generations and values. Taking stock of all this assortment of global crises, we can expect a generation of confident and resilient young people – one of strong youth. But will they really be?

Péter Pillók – Levente Székely

01

On the Road Again: Transition Strategies to Adulthood

Tamás Domokos

This study examines the adolescents' intention about family formation and steps to adulthood in the EU. Before the 1990s, youth where integrated into the social system and into the career network by primary and secondary socializing factors by beaten track. In the last 30 years, the changing social structure in Europe modified the practice of this conventional way to start adulthood. The purpose of our study is to reveal the adolescents' transition strategies. We focus on the internalization and the realization of the norms offered by society, and the social differences between groups of adolescents following the different strategies. The transition to adulthood is a process containing various steps or events. Approaching this process from the standpoint of phenomenological sociology, the emphasis is placed on imagined reality, the construction and internalization of values and social institutions by young people. We can ask how the construction of reality happens in each phase and what are the instruments of creating new norms, preventative factors against the problems of the unknown adulthood. Many authors pointed out radical changes that occurred in Hungary in the past decades in the demographic behavior of the population, especially in family formation. To understand this change, we can evocate three major schools with regards to the explanation of the radical transformation in family formation. The first explains it with the transformation culture, social norms and values, the strengthening of individualization and the change of values affecting gender roles. The term SDT (second demographic transition) describes these processes. The second focuses on household economics and the deterioration of material conditions. The third approach emphasizes social disintegration, widespread anomie and the difficulty of planning of the individual life course, especially during the millennial crisis.

Preface

Throughout the history of human societies, longer or shorter cycles can be discovered. Some of these are obvious to everyone (e.g., the process of social reproduction, returning of economic crises or the cycles of wars and periods of peace), others only facilitate the increasingly complicated process of understanding the world after detailed analysis. Successive generational cycles are among the latter. In a biological sense, the human community is completely renewed every 30 years, but in a social sense, shorter cycles of 15-20 years can be discovered. The youngest respondents of the series of Hungarian youth research programs started at the turn of the millennium were 15 years old at the time. They are now 35 years old and are of parenting age themselves. The oldest in 2020 are already preparing for a new phase of their lives at the age of 50. However, the maintenance and periodic renewal of local communities in the „risk society" is threatened by many hazards (Beck, 2003). It is enough to think only of the vulnerability of global economic systems operating on a network basis (Sigler et al. 2021),

or of the external effects experienced daily, such as migration pressure in Europe, the local effects of global environmental change, the increasing number of cyber attacks (Kello, 2017, Lucas 2017), or even the COVID-19 pandemic (Ratten 2022, Resch et al. 2023) or social and economic impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Luthra 2022). In the "Popperian" open society and in the world of networks, external exposure is a reality – not only in a generational sense (Castells, 2005, Barney, 2004, Van Dijk 2012).

In addition to external risks that threaten the survival of the community, however, there are internal characteristics – primarily human behaviors stemming from values – which threaten the survival of the given community in the same way as attacks from the outside. Perhaps the most important among these is the demographic behavior of youth. That is why the study of the demographic situation of young people, their family formation strategy, steps to adulthood and especially their role in social reproduction is a priority task as well as one of the priority components of social resilience (Bourbeau, 2013, Longstaff et al. 2010, Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2014, Maclean at al. 2014). The number of young people and their proportion within the population has decreased strongly in recent years, which affects both birth rates and social aging, and this ultimately weakens the expected social resilience.

This paper examines adolescents' intentions concerning family formation and steps to adulthood in the EU based on empirical data. In the European societies before the fundamental change of the 1990s, youth where integrated to the social system and to the career network by primary and secondary socializing factors by beaten track. In the last 30 years, the changing social structure of Europe modified the practice of this conventional way to start adulthood. The purpose of our research is to reveal adolescents' transition strategies in a generational perspective. We focus on the internalization and the realization of the norms offered by the society, as well as social differences between generations of adolescents following the different strategies. The transition to adulthood is a process containing various steps or events. We study the current characteristics of the demographic behavior of young generations, and look at how relationships, marriage and childbearing are developing in their life circle compared to previous periods. Approaching this process from the standpoint of phenomenological sociology, the emphasis is placed on the imagined reality, the construction and internalization of values and social institutions by adolescents. As we will see, some of these events have already moved out of the youth phase, especially in terms of the male demographic. We can ask how the construction of reality happens in each phase and what are the instruments of creating "nomos", preventative factors against the problems of the unknown adulthood.

Creating "Nomos" on the Road[1]
Usually everybody's life will reach a point when society accepts him or her as an equal member. This phenomenon, the transition to adulthood, is seldom a single; it is rather a process,

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spanning over a couple of years. The different fields of social science approached this period from a different view, emphasizing the biological, psychological or social aspects. Transition to adulthood is seen as a social evolution, based on the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984). The structural approach considers this phenomenon as a process of leaving the family as a dynamic system (Parsons, 1951; Parsons & Bales, 1955). In this approach, the successful internalization of cognitive and motivative processes makes young adults able to perceive the social norms and play the adaptive corresponding social roles. Feuer (1997) argues that there are three major points of separation: a) the separation of the physical functions at the infant age; b) the separation of the psychic functions at early childhood; c) and the separation of intellectual functions at adolescent age. A source of conflicts can be the acceptance of new norms compared to the parents' norms and its consequence: the different behavior from the expected one, sometimes leading to disappointment from the parents.

According to Vaskovics's gradatory separations theory, the sexual, intellectual and psychological maturity gained by the end of the adolescent period generates a certain need for autonomy, which in many cases conflicts with the dependent status within the family (Kiss, 2001). This "opposition" position creates a constructive impatience between the ages 14-18 (adolescent period), but this can easily turn into destructive impatience in the young adult age. This is related to the theory of symbolic interaction, where the experiences about the society are rooted in both the relationship to others and the interactions with others (Mead, 1970). A healthy self-esteem is necessary for the security required for fulfilling particular social roles (Barden, 1969).

In the separation process from the parents' life, Vaskovics identified five main dimensions: a) separation in the legal sense, b) moving out from the parental house, c) financial independence from parents, d) autonomy in decisions, e) subjectivity (Vaskovics, 2000).

The direct sources in adolescents' imagination about the most important parts of the adult life course (family formation, choosing the profession, getting employed, childbearing, sexual intercourse, marriage) are the family and school, while the secondary sources are the indirect reality, such as the media. According to phenomenological sociology (Schutz, 1954, 1984b), and its most important successor, the phenomenological sociology of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), these images are filled with experimental contents that significantly change the picture of reality even if the social environment remains unchanged. The changing of this "inner picture" was more radical during the post-socialist transformation in Eastern Europe (Sobotka, 2004; Kowalska & Wroblewska, 2001) when, during a couple of years, the labor market was reduced, age-specific fertility rates decreased, divorce rates increased and house prices skyrocketed.

In general, the discovery of values and social institutions is a continuous process, internalization on higher and higher level at the end of the adolescent period. The impact of social consciousness can be found in the interiorization of values, leading to some sort of social assimilation (Hankiss, 1976). Socialization can be seen as the valuation of adolescents' and young adults' decisions by the social environment. One particular decision cluster that is valuated is the career planning and implementation (Gábor, 1992).

We argue that it is better to approach this question from the construction of the adolescents' knowledge than using the structuralist approach, since this can refer better to the frame of reference about the imagined, but not experienced, reality. Using "Schutzian" terminology, this stock of knowledge at hand is the foundation of the projections about all future behavior (plans for marriage, childbearing, choosing profession etc.), in other words, plans about the transition to adulthood are based on these current knowledge (Schutz, 1984:196).

Accepting that there are phases or events of socialization, we can ask how the construction of reality happens in each phase and what are the instruments of creating "nomos", the preventative factor against the fear of the unknown adulthood. Marriage for example is a known instrumentality that creates nomos, social order in a given transition phase (Berger & Kellner, 1970). We consider three other events as fundamental for placing the individual into a certain social order: childbearing, the start of work and the creation of an autonomous and independent living space. We focus on these four events as the most important ones in self-realization and identity-creation. Obviously, the importance and the actual realization of these events can change over time (e.g., cohabitation or being single vs. marriage, life-long learning vs. finishing studies, childbearing vs. intended childlessness), but studying that change is beyond the empirical scope of this paper.

We can talk about successful socialization if there is a similarity between the objective and subjective reality and identity. If this symmetry is missing, the socialization is unsuccessful (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Perfect symmetry is obviously anthropologically impossible however, as there is always some inconsistency between the two. The difference between the internalized subjective reality in youths' mind and the imperfect realization of the roles (intersubjective reality) is the socialization deficit.

This socialization deficit is produced in a certain time frame. Socialization happens in a biologically and sometimes socially coded order. Adolescents have a certain time period to internalize the social roles and norms, and most of them are aware of this limit. The social environment has an important impact on this time frame, particular social settings can help the realization of the plans, while others can put serious burden on this process.

Conceptual Background

Many authors pointed out radical changes that occurred in Europe in the past decade in the demographic behavior of the population, especially in family formation. To understand this change, we can evocate three major schools with regards to the explanation of the radical transformation in family formation. The first explains it with the transformation of culture, social norms and values, the strengthening of individualization and the change of values affecting gender roles. In most Western European countries, changes in behavior began well before the 1990s, and Van de Kaa (1984, 1997, 2002) and Lesthaeghe (1986, 2002, 2014, 2020) introduced the term "second demographic transition" to describe these processes (Sidorenko, 2019).

The second focuses on household economics and the deterioration of material conditions. This economic approach stresses the change in environmental conditions and in particular the

restructuring of the economy (labor market, housing market), and the major service systems (education). The crisis hypothesis regarding the conditions in Eastern Europe is related to this group. In this sense, the transformation has involved such an extensive restructuring of everyday relations and has caused such a radical deterioration of material conditions that the population of the countries concerned have postponed or renounced having (more) children in order to avoid an even greater decline.

The third approach emphasizes the social disintegration, widespread anomie and the difficulty of planning of the individual life course. While proponents of this view accept that both changes in individual values and the structural changes in the economy play a role in the changes in the characteristics of family formation, they attribute central significance to the integration of society. In very simple terms: the widespread social anomie and the impossibility of planning individual life careers play a decisive role in the fact that individuals do not commit themselves over the long term. That is, they do not form lasting partnerships and do not have children. (Kamaras, 2004; Speder, 2001).

Among the "old" internalized social norms is the accepted order of the events of the transition to adulthood. With the 1990s transformation this order has been changed, placing the emphasis on two important components. One is the decreasing uniformity of this process due to the unpredictable situation and the challenged traditional norms. The erosion of traditional norms is indeed a gradual and natural process, but it was accelerated during the transformation. The other component is the growing inconsistency in this order, like fulfilling multiple roles or the introduction of new norms in the post-adolescent period.

According to Keniston's concept of post-adolescence (Keniston, 1968, 1989, Parameswaran, 2020), during the transition to adulthood various traditional steps (finishing studies, entering the labor force, separating from the parental household, marriage, and childbearing) are realized to become an adult member in the society. Approaching this process from the standpoint of phenomenological sociology (Schutz, 1954; Berger and Luckmann, 1966), the emphasis is placed on imagined reality, the construction and internalization of values and social institutions by adolescents. We can ask how the construction of reality happens in each phase and what are the instruments of creating "nomos". We focus on the following events as the most important ones in self-realization and identity-creation: 1. Acquiring the first profession, 2. Finishing studies, 3. Start of work, 4. Marriage, 5. Childbearing, 6. Separation from the parental house – independent living space.

Adolescents have to internalize the social roles and norms in a given period, which was extended in the past decades with the emergence of the post-adolescence in post-industrial societies. The social environment has an important impact on this process, helping or hindering the realization of the plans. If the society experiences a major transformation, the norms themselves can change. However, in millennial societies this traditional pattern has been changing rapidly. This most radically affected Gen X. Today's economic, environmental and social crises similarly complicate the process of growing up for Gen Z. These transformations could easily lead to anomy, so the role of the instruments creating "nomos" became much more important.

The otherwise quite abundant literature of the social and economical transformation did not pay much attention to the changes in the transition to adulthood, except noting the employment difficulties or the changing social norms. The corresponding demographic aspects in this literature focused on the general issues of declining fertility or delayed marriages, but there weren't any attempts to approach this transformation from the changes in the transition to adulthood. The demographic characteristics of post-industrial societies were observed in most Eastern European countries from the 1960s, so they are not the results of the post-socialist and global transformation. The importance of the last 30 years lies in the increasing unpredictability of the transition to adulthood and the diversity of transition strategies. This can be demonstrated especially in the case of the Gen X, Y and Z.

Youth generations nowadays live in an era of economic and social uncertainty. Outsourcing, automation, and decreased governmental social spending have led to lowered living standards for youth, who frequently change jobs, are more likely to live with other people and have few benefits attached to their employment, thereby preventing them from thinking about their long-term goals. The bio-psychological sciences have responded by offering a new life stage that they call emerging adulthood (EA). The new characterization disempowers youth and naturalizes their new uncertainties as a social and biological condition. The decade starting in 2020 offers little new insight about the experiences of youth generations and limits individual empowerment. In addition, such a conceptualization of youth is indicative of the narrow range of possibilities for adulthood in a post-millennial world that offers few pathways to get there.

Methodology

Generational labels describe large, socially defined groups that differ in significant ways, a generation is defined as being 15-20 years in length (Maloni et al., 2019). Mannheim (1970) and later Strauss & Howe (1991) formulated their theory of generations based on the idea that people of similar ages are bonded by historical events and experiences related to factors such as work, learning, marriage, childbearing, consumer behavior, moving away from home and other family relationships. According to the theory of generations, a person's values are shaped by the major events witnessed while coming of age (Azimi et al., 2022).

Several generations have been identified, including Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1996), and Generation Z (born after 1997). For many years, generational researchers have called for more studies to enhance the understanding of generational group differences (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). Our study examines the transition patterns of generations to adulthood in the European Union. We think youth intentions towards family formation are not explained by a complex model, because social and biological effects/circumstances and "millennial crises" (Walker 2021, Strauss & Howe 1997, Orrell 2009) modify the individual life strategies in different ways. Even so, we hypothesize that this can be classified by their attitudes and based on this can be draw careful projections. According to the conceptual background, first of all we have to reveal the generations transition strategies behind social transformation. We focus on the

internalization and the realization of the norms that society offers, and the social differences between groups of adolescents following the different strategies. After that, we have to examine how these strategies work in reality.

The paper consists of two major parts. First, we present the European trend of demographic characteristics that significantly determine the transition to adulthood based on Eurostat data published in 2019-2023. The second is a national case study based the Hungarian survey of 8,000 respondents in 2020 representing 15-29-year-old youth. For these young people, the socialization process started after the collapse of socialism and they entered post-adolescence during the post-socialist period proceeded to adulthood during the millennial crises. The youth survey serves as a base for revealing the various strategies with regards to the post-socialist transition to adulthood. In addition, we use a database of national survey of 1,000 adult respondents in 2018 which asked two different cohorts to compare the actual youth strategies based on the youth survey with the older generations' models. The first studied cohort was born after WWII between 1950-1969 (socialist consolidation) and they started their adult life in the socialist period. The second was born before the change of the socialist regime, between 1970-1989. This group grew up during the socialist period, but they entered adulthood in the post-socialist period (Table 1). Both surveys were matched with data from the Eurostat and

Table 1. Studied cohorts in the Hungarian case study

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Born:	1950-1969	1970-1989	1991-2005
Dominant generation	Baby Boomer	X, Y	Z
Socialization:	During the socialist period	During the socialist period	During the post-socialist period
Entering post-adolescence:	During the socialist period	During the post-socialist period	During the post-socialist period
Entering adulthood:	During the socialist/ post-socialist period	During the post-socialist period and the millennial crisis	During the millennial crisis
Data source:	Echo Adult Population Survey, 2018	Echo Adult Population Survey, 2018	National Youth Research Survey, 2020
Dominant status at fieldwork:	Adult	Adult, Post-adolescent	Adolescent, Post-adolescent

Source: CSO, Hungary 2022

CSO in Hungary about the basic demographic trends with regard to the various events in the transition to adulthood. After that, we had to examine how these strategies work in the reality.

Demography of the Transition to Adulthood

Not long ago, only a few generations earlier (in industrial societies), the human life course was built up of three periods, the childhood and juvenile period as a preparation, the active earning period and the quieter later life (Somlai, 2002). A juvenile period could be partitioned within the preparation period. This division has changed to some extent during the post-industrial system: a young adult (post-adolescent) period, wedged between the juvenile period and adulthood, appeared (Vaskovics 2000). The constant extension of the juvenile period is a well-known sociological fact (Zinnecker, 1982; Vaskovics, 1993; Gábor, 1992; Somlai, 2002b), the main reason of which is the acceleration of biological maturity and the expansion of school-age (the expansion of the secondary and later the higher education). According to the international literature, the main reason for the elongation of adolescence lies in the fact that due to the shifted years of studies, the choice of career is also postponed, just as childbearing (Hurrelmann, 1994). Nowadays, a 12-15 year-long childhood is followed by a similarly long ju-

Figure 1. Live births and TFR between 1980-2022 in Hungary
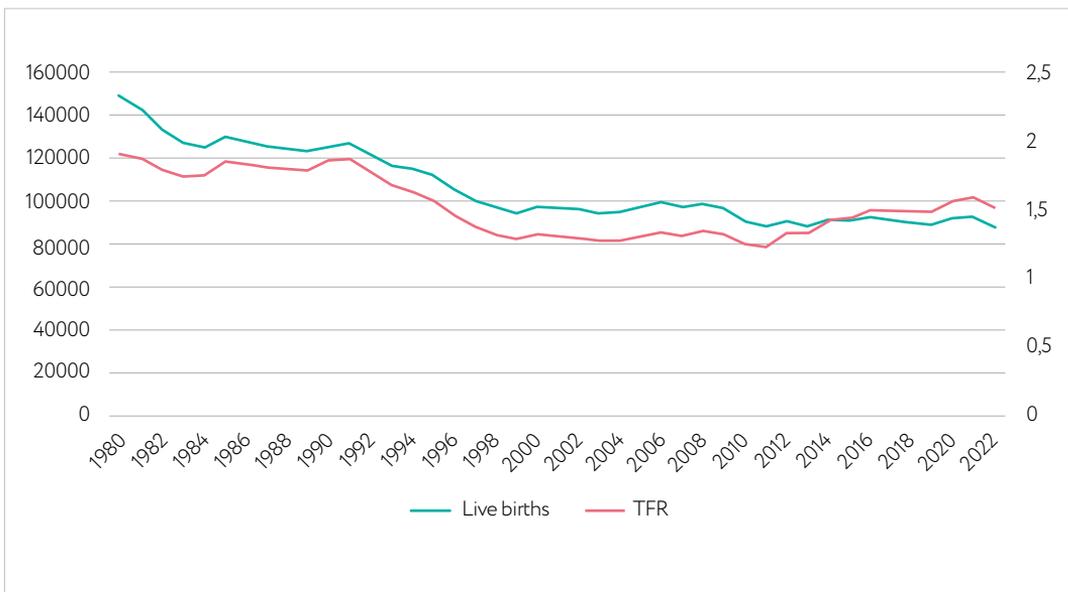
Source: CSO, Hungary 2022

During the past decades, several social and economic changes led to the postmodern industrial society in Europe. The expansion of higher education, the growing participation of women in higher education, expanding career opportunities, postponement of childbearing etc. had

significant effect on chancing of life-cycles in Europe: instead of marriage, growing numbers are cohabiting; the number of births has declined; within the number of births there has been a strong increase in the proportion of extramarital births; the age of mothers at the birth of the first child has risen; the divorce rate remains on a high level. Radical changes in a similar direction have occurred in the former socialist countries and the Western part of Europe since 1990, although at slightly differing paces (Spéder 2001, Kapitány & Spéder 2015, Monostori et al. 2020).

As the result of fluctuation in the birth rates of past 30 years the number of the youth generations shows a diverse picture. In Hungary between 1980 and 1990, the number of 20-29 year-olds decreased by around 400,000 persons; however, it has become 280,000 persons stronger by the start of 2004 (Table 2). During the next decades, a significant decrease is expected by population forecasting, which will result in a more than 500,000 people smaller population of number of 20-29 year-olds in 2024 compared to their current population (Kamaras, 2004).

Table 2. Number of generations by cohort

Cohort	Number of births (thousands)	
	During five years	Average per year
1961-1965	668	134
1966-1970	747	150
1971-1975	841	168
1976-1980	840	168
1981-1985	659	132
1986-1990	627	125
1991-1995	594	119
1996-2000	495	99
1991-2005	481	96
1996-2010	483	97
1991-2015	450	90
1996-2020	456	91

Source: CSO, Hungary, 2022

The decline in the proportion of younger generations is a European trend. While there were 73 million young people, the share of 15-29 cohort in the EU's population fell from 18.4 percent in 2010 to 16.3 percent by 2021. This reflected low and falling fertility rates over several decades, combined with increasing life expectancy. The youth share is projected to fall further, reaching a low of 14.9 percent by 2052. The youth share of the population ranged among EU Member States from 14.2 percent in Bulgaria to 20.7 percent in Cyprus. The European Union is on the brink of a major demographic shift as new projections suggest a significant population decline by the end of the century. Estimates by Eurostat signal that the EU could see its population shrink by 6 per cent, or 27.3 million people, by 2100.

There has been a significant modification in the demographic behavior of young people. The long-term trend in the European Union shows that the number of marriages is decreasing, while the number of divorces is increasing. Since 1964, the marriage rate in the EU has declined from 8.0 per 1 000 persons in 1964 to 4.3 in 2021. At the same time, the divorce rate has more than doubled. In 2021, the EU countries with the highest number of marriages relative to the population were Cyprus, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Hungary (6-8 marriages per 1 000 persons). These were followed by Slovakia, Denmark and Malta. In contrast, the lowest marriage rates were around 3 marriages per 1 000 inhabitants, which were reported in Italy, Portugal and Slovenia, followed by France, Spain, Luxembourg.

Following the European pattern, in Hungary the number of marriages is declining in the past decades: the number of annual first marriages fell back from 85,000 in 1975 to 43,000 in 2000, 35,000 in 2010. The number of marriages increased slightly in 2018 and then exploded in 2019. Although the increase was less strong, it continued in 2020 and the number of marriages reached 67,000 by 2020, which is a very spectacular change. On the other hand, it cannot be said that the young, unmarried or unmarried people have contracted more marriages in recent years. In the case of marriages concluded between 2010 and 2016, the above-average increase in willingness to marry can be observed more in the age group over 35, but the increase affected almost all socio-demographic groups. The tendency may have been largely influenced by government measures favoring married people (Murinko & Rohr 2018, Zugor 2020). Corresponding with this, the proportion of married population under 30 declines since 1980, this decline was especially steep after 2000.

The mean age at first marriage increased among both men and women since 1990, and from the 1970s more and more young adults enter the first marriage with children. Mean age at first marriage in the European Union was 30.9 for females and 33.5 for males in 2020. The territorial difference is quite large: Sweden had the oldest mean average age of marriage in Europe for both males and females at 37.5 for males, and 34.8 for females. By contrast, Poland had the youngest average age at marriage, at 30.2 for males and 27.9 for females. Hungary follows the EU average. Marriages at a later age do not mean a more thoroughly considered choice of partners, because with the current divorces rate for every 100 marriages 42 expected to break up, and the stability of the cohabitation is unknown. The divorce rate has doubled in Europe, increasing from 0.8 per 1 000 people in 1964 to 1.9 in 2010. However, during the past decade, the divorce rate has decreased to 1.6.

Figure 2. Mean age at first marriage in the European Union in 2020
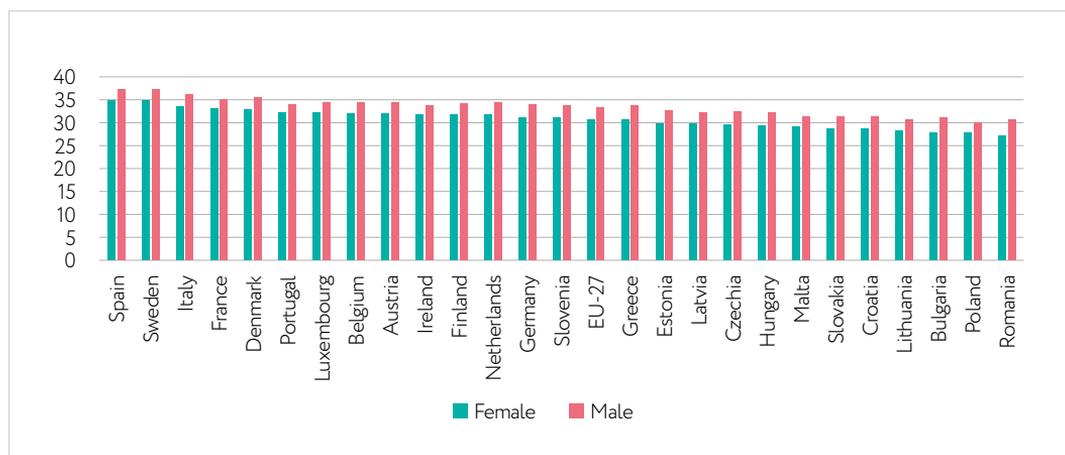
Source: Eurostat, 2020

The Hungarian 20-year data collection of the large-scale youth research confirms that young people are increasingly left alone. In 2016, 40 percent of the 15-29-year-old age group did not have any relationship (neither did they have a boyfriend or girlfriend living in another household), in 2020 this proportion increased to 47 percent. Of course, this is much more common among very young people (81 percent of 15-19-year-olds do not have a partner, four years ago this rate was only 70 percent). Almost half of young adults aged 20-24 are alone, but also among 25-29year-olds, every fourth man and woman lived alone at the time of data collection.

Corresponding with the general European pattern, childbearing has also changed and fertility is declining. In 2022, the total fertility rate (TFR) in Europe was estimated to be 1.49 births per woman compared with 2.7 in 1950. A year ago, 1.53 live births per woman was measured in the EU in 2021, ranging from 1.13 in Malta to 1.84 in France. These figures are far below the replacement level of around 2.1 live births per woman needed to ensure a broadly stable population in the absence of migration. However, all EU countries with fertility rates below the replacement level still have a growing population. France, Germany, Austria, Benelux and the Scandinavian countries, for example, have seen their population grow for the last 20 years. Eurostat attributes this to several factors, notably migratory movements and the increase in life expectancy.

The TFR decline in the western part of Europe started in the mid-1960s and began in the socialist bloc in the mid-1970s. The Hungarian data show in addition to the increasingly smaller childbearing ratios of mothers in their teens, the fertility of 20-24 year-olds has also fallen almost a third of the 1990 ration. Parallel to the drop in fertility the average age of mothers has risen significantly. The delayed childbearing in the 1990s and 2000s overcomes the wave-effect of the relatively large cohorts. As a result of postponed childbearing the proportion of childlessness (intended or unintended childlessness) may rise and the "two child family model" lost its long held hegemony (Kamarás, 2004).

Figure 3. Total Fertility Rate 2020
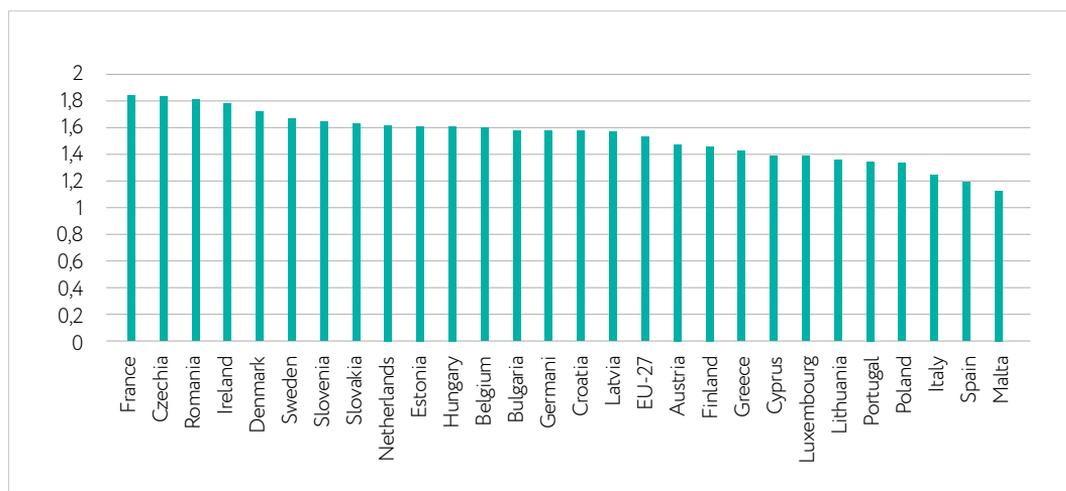
Throughout the 1990s, economic and social transformation across Europe the enrollment in the higher education increases as a social response to the increased difficulties of employment and the changing roles of women. Among people aged 25–34 years, just over two fifths (41.6 percent) of the EU population had completed at least one level of tertiary education. This share was notably higher for women (47.0 percent) than for men (36.3) reported by Eurostat. EU Member States have set themselves a target of increasing the share of the EU population aged 25-34 who have completed tertiary education to 45 percent by 2030. Almost half of the EU Member States have already met the 2030 EU-level target for this indicator: Luxembourg, Ireland, Cyprus, Lithuania, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Slovenia, Portugal and Latvia. In contrast, the lowest shares were recorded in Romania (23), Italy (28) and Hungary (33).

Housing shortages were a fundamental characteristic of the socialist period in the eastern part of Europe. During the post-socialist transformation, and especially during the millennial crisis, it is even more difficult for young adults to separate from the parental household. Although the number of housing units has increased since 1970, units with exclusively young adult residents is actually decreasing since 1980. The transition from childhood to adulthood is characterized by a number of crucial steps, such as leaving the parental home to study or work, being materially independent, moving in with a partner or getting married, and having children or not. However, the path to independence is not straight forward and young people face a range of challenges which may result in some of them staying longer in the parental home or returning to it. Among others, issues that can influence the decision to leave the parental home include whether or not young people are in a relationship or studying, their level of financial (in)dependence, labor market conditions, the cost of housing and more generally living costs. In 2019, on average across the whole of the EU, young people did not leave the parental home until the age of 27.1 years for men and 25.2 years for women. Between 2009 and 2019, there was a slight decrease in the average age at which young

people left the parental home, more so for men than for women; the average age for leaving the parental home decreased by 0.6 years for men (from 27.7 years old) and by just 0.1 years for women (from 25.3 years). In 2021 the estimated average age at which young people stopped living with one or more of their parents was 26.5 years: for women, the age was 25.5 years; for men, it was 27.4 years. The highest average ages for leaving the parental home were observed in Portugal (33.6 years) and Croatia (33.3 years), while the lowest were in Denmark (21.3 years), Finland (21.2 years) and Sweden (19.0 years).

Figure 4. Estimated mean age of leaving the parental househol, 2019
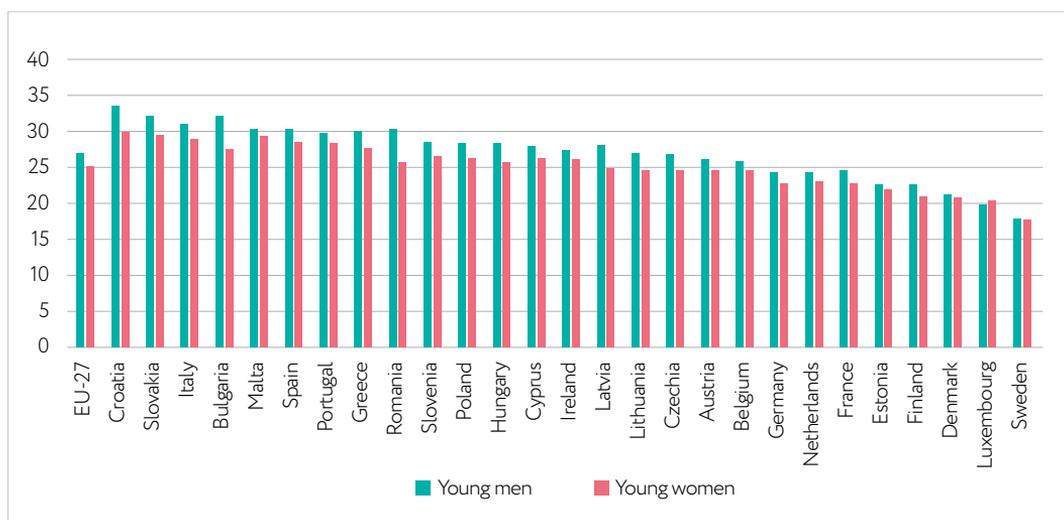
Source: Eurostat, 2019

The economic restructuring that caused large-scale unemployment had an even worse impact on the job opportunities for young adults. Youth unemployment in the 1990s was considerably higher than adult unemployment. The situation of young people in the labor market, dramatically affected by the consequences of the economic and financial crisis which started in 2008, is a major challenge for the EU. In spite of a decrease in youth unemployment in most Member States after its 2013 peak, it remains a serious concern: in 2020, millions of young Europeans could not find work and the proportion facing long-term unemployment remains high. In the EU, more than two thirds (68.4 percent) of people aged 15–64 years were in employment in 2021 reported by Eurostat. For young people, the share was just under half (47.4 percent). The youth employment rate in the Netherlands was more than double the rate in Romania, Spain, Bulgaria, Italy or Greece.

The youth unemployment Rate in Hungary averaged at 17.44 percent from 1991 until 2023, reaching an all-time high of 29.50 percent in January 2013 and a record low of 9.40 percent in May 2018. For comparison, the world average in 2021 based on 180 countries is 19.13 percent. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on labor markets across the world; for the EU, the youth employment rate fell 2.3 percentage points between 2019 and 2020 but recovered some of these

losses in 2021, up 1.6 points; as such, the youth employment rate in 2021 was 0.7 points below its pre-pandemic (in 2019) level. Five EU Member States recorded higher youth employment rates in 2021 than in 2019: the Netherlands, France, Ireland, Germany and Denmark.

Figure 5. Unemployment rate in Hungary (2000-2001)
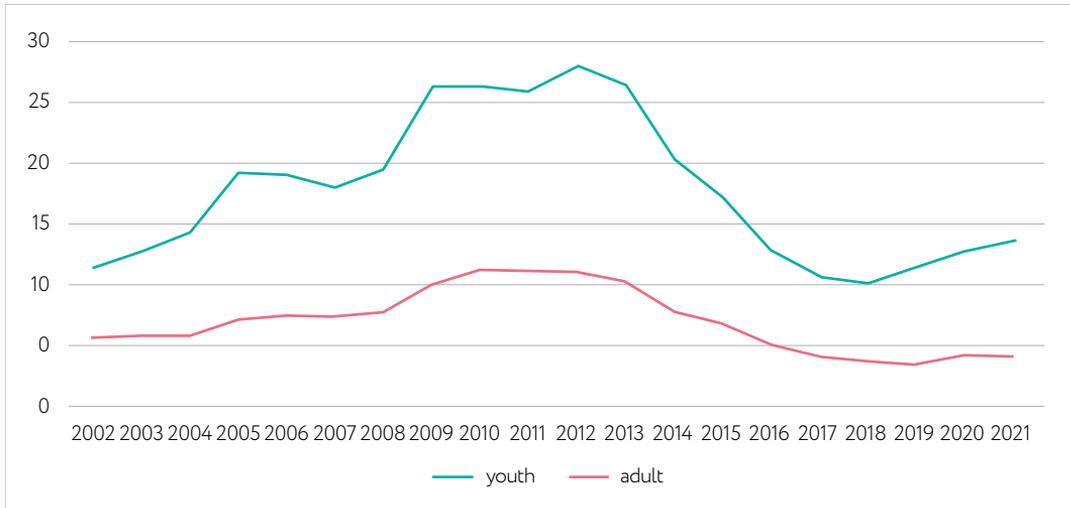
venile period. In Europe as a result of enrollment in the higher education and the difficulty for young adults to separate from the parental household, it seems that starting a family and childbearing have been ranked behind learning, work, carrier and creating livelihood on the importance scale.

The Order of the Transition to Adulthood: Hungarian Case Study
The empirical findings support that adolescents have socialized the preferred traditional order of the transition to adulthood. The first step is the first professional qualification (averaging at 22.3 years), then comes the finishing of studies (23.1) and the entering to the job market at 22.4 years on average. The next step is the separation from the parental household (26.1), before the marriage (24.2). and they plan the first child at 28.7 years on average. The transition to adulthood in this sense really happens in the post-adolescent period, between the ages 20 and 27. With regards to the importance of the particular events, most young adults consider the separation from the parental household as the turning point in the transition to adulthood (32 percent), followed by the first job (28 percent), the first child (17 percent) and marriage (11 percent).

Comparing the planned timing of the transition events with the realized timing of the 1950-69 and 1970-1989 cohorts' transition the delay is clearly seen that even if the order

is similar. In general, the most visible delay can be seen in the marriage, the finish studies and the timing of the first job, and first child, keeping the traditional gender difference. In some cases, however, these gender differences also change: they erode at the household separation as young women delay this with almost three years, but men follow the pattern of older; while in the education the increasing female participation creates a new gender difference.

The correlation coefficients in this planned timing show that in the adolescent age group (cohort 1991-2005) the strength of correlation between the events of transition declines, and in many cases it remains significant (Table 3). Exception is the marriage in three aspects: the finishing studies, entering to the labor market (first job) and the childbearing coefficients became lowers by the post-adolescent period, then by the adolescent plans. Especially important is the decline between the finishing studies – first job pair (from .635** to .130).

Figure 6. Mean age at transition events
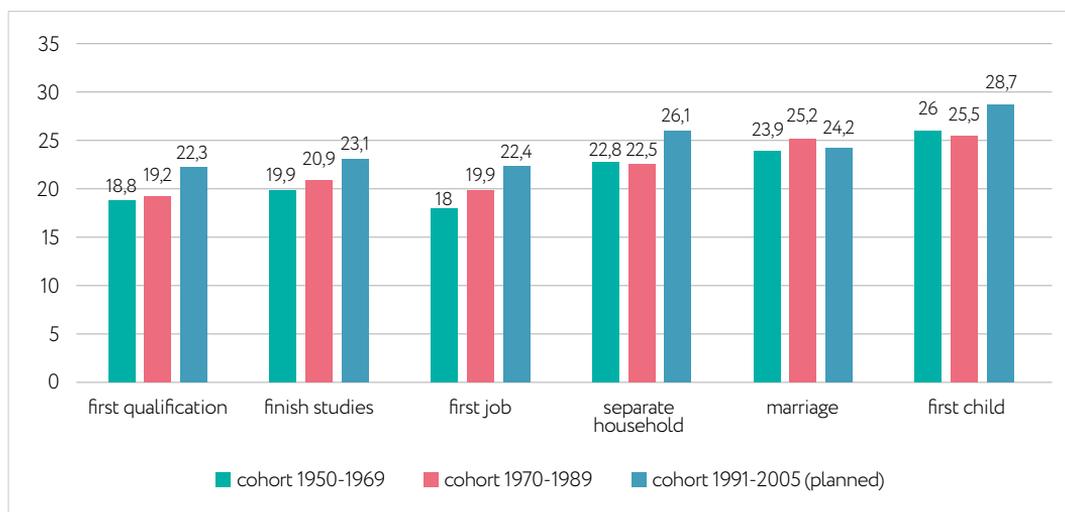
Source: cohort 1-2 - APS (2018), cohort 3 – YRS (2020)

The high percentage of uncertain responses shows the unpredictability of the post-socialist situation with regards to the transition to adulthood, even if the traditional order is accepted. Not surprisingly, young adults (cohort 1970-1989) are more certain in determining the time of these events than adolescents, but gender differences are quite interesting (Table 4). Among the youth in 2020 predicting the time of the first job, separation, marriage and the first child was much harder for males, only less than half of them did choose a time. These differences remained in the millennial crisis period. The separation from the parental household seems more difficult for males.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Coefficients

Mean age at	cohort[1]		Mean age at				
			First qualifi-cation	Finish studies	First job	Separate house-hold	Marriage
Finish studies	1950-1969	Coeff.	.307**				
		N	323				
	1970-1989	Coeff.	.483**				
		N	238				
	1991-2005	Coeff.	.433**				
		N	997				
First job	1950-1969	Coeff.	.304**	.284**			
		N	341	363			
	1970-1989	Coeff.	.278**	.103			
		N	206	234			
	1991-2005	Coeff.	.416**	.635**			
		N	925	812			
Separate house-hold	1950-1969	Coeff.	.068	.140*	.186*		
		N	305	327	349		
	1970-1989	Coeff.	.227**	.185**	.113		
		N	202	210	225		
	1991-2005	Coeff.	.174**	.184**	.274**		
		N	938	746	739		
Marriage	1950-1969	Coeff.	.129*	.214**	.246**	.432**	
		N	300	324	341	316	
	1970-1989	Coeff.	.291**	.230**	.159*	.448**	
		N	204	219	235	216	
	1991-2005	Coeff.	.123*	.303**	.327**	.269**	
		N	784	668	732	687	
First child	1950-1969	Coeff.	.111	.116*	.146**	.406**	.457**
		N	282	300	319	315	295
	1970-1989	Coeff.	.256**	.295**	.053	.457**	.340**
		N	201	205	215	205	208
	1991-2005	Coeff.	.210**	.359**	.380**	.262**	.717**
		N	776	671	721	669	721

[1] In case 1950-1969 and 1970-1989 cohorts: Real age, In case 1991-2005 cohort: Planned age *p<.05 **p<.001

Table 4. The percentage of respondents who were unable to plan the transition events

	Youth sample (cohort 1991-2005) N=2000			Adult sample (cohort 1970-1989) N=312		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
First qualification	47.1	44.9	46,0	5.2	2.3	2.7
Finish studies	41.0	38.7	39,8	8.3	2.0	5.2
First job	46.4	43.9	45,1	7.7	2.0	4.9
Separate household	39.0	38.3	38,7	16.7	4.8	10.8
Marriage	32.4	24.9	28,9	22.9	9.7	16.4
First child	21.8	22.5	22,2	23.2	9.2	16.4

Not all plans fit into the traditional order and norms. 4 percent of the adolescents (cohort 1991-2005) plan to work and 20 percent want to leave the parental home before the first professional qualification. Reflecting to the "crisis wave" reality, entering the job market is delayed: 44 percent wants to leave home and 13 percent wants to marry before applying for the first job. Also, as it can be seen in Table 5, some do not plan to experience particular events at all. About 21-24 percent of male youth do not want to marry and have children. By the post-adolescent period, some of them change their minds about the children, but the proportion who never wants to marry doubles. Females, on the other hand, change their plans in another aspect: while almost none of them in grades 11 and 12 told us they will never leave the parental home, the post-adolescent sample contained 5 percent female never-leavers. Males are sure to leave the parents, they are just more uncertain about its timing as we could see before.

Table 5. The percentage of respondents who do not plan to experience selected transition

	Adult sample, cohort 1950-1969 N=378			Adult sample cohort 1970-1989 N=301			Youth sample (cohort 1991-2005) N=2000		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Separate household	8,8	5,1	7,1	17,3	13,8	15,4	6,8	6,1	6,5
Marriage	10,1	3,5	6,5	20,3	15,2	17,8	24,6	21,0	22,9
First child	12,4	3,0	7,6	15,9	6,3	11,2	21,3	13,2	17,4

The analysis of variance revealed those variables that bear significant explaining power with regards to the transition events. Among adolescents, school grades, the plans about college and the high school type makes difference (Table 6). The school type is an important factor in post-socialist societies (and in the socialist period), since the three major types of high schools follow very different curriculums, and they strongly determine future career opportunities, recreating the inherited inequalities instead of compensating for them. The influence of these factors decreases as we go ahead in time and switch from the career events to the more personal events (separation, marriage, childbearing). High school education (degree) seems to be the most important about the career choices of post-adolescents and young adults too (cohort 1970-1989). However, at the events in the later half of the transition, gender, socioeconomic status and transition strategy also plays an important role besides education.

Table 6. Analysis of variance, R Squares

Transition events	Independent variables	Cohort 1 1950-1969	Cohort 2 1970-1989	Cohort 3 1991-2005
First qualification	Gender	.017*	.001	.019**
	Degree/Type of school	.080**	.201**	.429**
	Parents' degree	.040*	.097**	.102**
	Economic activity	.001	.018*	
	Socioeconomic status[a]	.006	.028	.085**
	Self-comparison to the peer group	.003	.031*	.065**
	Transition strategy cluster[b]	.001	.007	.001
	School grades			.194**
	Value cluster[c]			.004
	Plans about college			.124**
Finish studies	Gender	.001	.004	.012**
	Degree/Type of school	.281**	.353**	.167**
	Parents' degree	.097**	.177**	.047**
	Economic activity	.006	.004	
	Socioeconomic status[a]	.095**	.240**	.147**
	Self-comparison to the peer group	.038*	.064**	.010
	Transition strategy cluster[b]	.010	.013	.023
	School grades			.217**
	Value cluster[c]			.011
	Plans about college			.306**

Transition events	Independent variables	Cohort 1 1950-1969	Cohort 2 1970-1989	Cohort 3 1991-2005
First job	Gender	.000	.010*	.010**
	Degree/Type of school	.312**	.219**	.130**
	Parents' degree	.139**	.111**	.046**
	Economic activity	.015*	.030*	
	Socioeconomic status[a]	.203**	.110**	.028*
	Self-comparison to the peer group	.021*	.049*	.011
	Transition strategy cluster[b]	.007	.006	.034
	School grades			.132**
	Value cluster[c]			.000
	Plans about college			.204**
Separate household	Gender	.067**	.059**	.021**
	Degree/Type of school	.034*	.016	.001
	Parents' degree	.010	.011	.004
	Economic activity	.011*	.014*	
	Socioeconomic status[a]	.008	.051*	.014
	Self-comparison to the peer group	.016*	.016*	.008
	Transition strategy cluster[b]	.015*	.002	.037
	School grades			.003
	Value cluster[c]			.002
	Plans about college			.013**
Marriage	Gender	.067**	.079**	.068**
	Degree/Type of school	.133**	.151**	.030**
	Parents' degree	.050**	.148**	.013*
	Economic activity	.020*	.003	
	Socioeconomic status[a]	.039*	.176**	.023
	Self-comparison to the peer group	.042**	.030*	.051*
	Transition strategy cluster[b]	.004	.039*	.056*
	School grades			.010*
	Value cluster[c]			.027**
	Plans about college			.043**

Transition events	Independent variables	Cohort 1 1950-1969	Cohort 2 1970-1989	Cohort 3 1991-2005
First child	Gender	.032**	.041*	.047**
	Degree/Type of school	.041*	.011	.035**
	Parents' degree	.039*	.001	.020**
	Economic activity	.002	.035*	
	Socioeconomic status[a]	.001	.058**	.048*
	Self-comparison to the peer group	.006	.014	.067*
	Transition strategy cluster[b]	.022*	.058*	.139**
	School grades			.006
	Value cluster[c]			.039**
	Plans about college			.046**

[a] The SES variable was created from the parents' and the respondents' education, the expenditure structure and the employment experiences.

[b] The transition strategy cluster refers to our three model transition strategies: family-, society- and autonomy guided.

[c] The value cluster refers to three groups of students: (1) the active, self-promoting leaders; (2) the conform executers; and (3) the undetermined but unsatisfied students.

*p<.05 **p<.001

The one-way ANOVA analysis showed that the transition strategy classification has explained 2 percent variance from the timing of first child at cohort 1950-69, 6 percent at the cohort 1970-1989 (post-adolescents) and 14 percent variance at cohort youth. Transition strategy has no explaining power for the first qualification, first job and finishing studies, while the economic activity variable has shown limited influence.

Transition Strategies

The main supporting pillars of young peoples' endeavors for autonomy show a varying picture across Europe. The labor market, the family and the social transfers are the three main pillars ensuring the required resources necessary for the independence of young people. The role of these three factors varies across European countries. In the northern countries, the financial welfare of post-adolescent youth is mostly supported by the state. In the UK, this aspect is mainly dependent on the market. In the Mediterranean and Eastern European countries, it is guaranteed by the family background (Gasperoni and Schizzerotto 2001).

Based on the literature, our hypothesis was to find the two distinct transition strategies: traditional early and delayed family formation, with most of the young adults choosing the second one during the post-socialist transformation (Tóth 2002). Using K-means cluster analysis on a long list of attitude and preference questions in the adult sample and in the adolescent

sample we differentiated between three groups or transition strategies: family-guided, auton-omy-guided and society-guided (Table 7) in the sample.

The group with the FAMILY-GUIDED strategy accepts the orienting role of the family, the extended dependence on the parental household, and highly appreciates the marriage and child-bearing. These are mainly males, respondents with higher educational attainment, but also more inactive young adults can be found here. The AUTONOMY-GUIDED strategy emphasizes early separation, accepts childbearing out of wedlock as natural, and rejects the parental patterns. In this group, we can find more relatively older young people in post-adolescent period, economically active respondents with average educational level. The third is the SOCIETY-GUIDED strategy, this is the ideal/traditional model of transition emphasized by the society with some inertia from the socialist period. In the post-adolescent cohort, these are younger people, with a higher pro-portion of students (referring to less life experience), and also more of them come from a lower social strata. This strategy accepts the emphasized model of socialization and does not require any significant adjustment to the post-socialist environment, but in a paradox way this inevitably leads to socialization deficit in the post-adolescent cohort, with its delays and disappointing expe-riences. This reveals another inconsistency: while most of the young adults follow the traditional way, on the other hand 67 percent of them are not satisfied with their parents' life course.

Table 7. Cluster definitions (18+ adult population, 2018)

	Cluster 1 Family-guided	Cluster 2 Society-guided	Cluster 3 Autonomy-guided	F
One has to live in marriage to have children.	4,35	4,46	1,86	731,64**
Marriage is an important social institute, cohabitation does not offer the same family feeling.	4,31	4,34	2,05	522,31**
It is a good thing that young adults live together before they commit themselves for a deeper relationship.	2,56	4,04	4,33	202,51**
There is no shame in divorce, it is a natural end of a marriage if things turn out that way.	2,84	4,16	4,48	174,19**
No one should have children until the separation from the parental house.	2,04	3,44	2,55	104,82**
Just because our parents lived by certain norms, we don't need to follow those.	3,13	4,20	4,21	98,69**

The first child should come only if I have a secure job.	3,17	4,44	3,75	98,21**
Abortion on social grounds should be condemned.	2,99	2,31	1,45	91,25**
We have to separate from our parental household as soon as possible.	3,24	4,34	3,93	89,04**
There are no longer jobs for life, one should acquire new skills continuously.	4,31	4,83	4,80	55,02**
What we achieve in life is fundamentally depends on the family background.	3,99	4,43	3,77	41,45**
It's not worth to plan the family life and career ahead, since there is much uncertainty in life.	3,26	4,11	3,66	36,32**
The skills given by the school are not sufficient for starting an independent life.	3,59	4,28	4,10	31,41**
During socialism the transition to adulthood was much easier.	3,57	4,02	3,25	21,99**
Cohort 1950-1969 (adult)	23,1% N=91	40,9 % N=161	36,0 % N=142	100% N=394
Cohort 1970-1989 (young adult)	16,9 % N=53	33,3 % N=104	49,8 % N=155	100% N=312
Cohort 1991-2005 (youth)	24,7 % N=62	40,2 % N=101	35,1 % N=88	100% N=251

*p<.05 **p<.001

The explaining power of the transition strategy cluster variable is the largest in the marriage and the first child events. However, if we include the gender, degree and transition strategy variables in the model, the interactions increase the explained proportion by the model at all dependent variables (Table 8), especially in the case of first child.

Table 8. Explanatory model of the transition events - (Adult population, 2018)

	cohort[1]	Variables in common model			Main effect	Model
		Gender	Degree	Transition strategy		
		Beta			R^2	E^2
First qualification	1950-1969	.122	.270	.051	.091**	.134**
	1970-1989	.019	.300	.077	.095**	.143**
Finish studies	1950-1969	.047	.497	.030	.250**	.286**
	1970-1989	.004	.590	.050	.353**	.397**
First job	1950-1969	.048	.572	.025	.330**	.393**
	1970-1989	.041	.462	.064	.221**	.268**
Separate household	1950-1969	.272	.200	.059	.119**	.146**
	1970-1989	.256	.119	.194	.076**	.156**
Marriage	1950-1969	.293	.337	.048	.183**	.249**
	1970-1989	.310	.212	.261	.278	.308**
First child	1950-1969	.179	.178	.100	.074**	.088**
	1970-1989	.236	.128	.232	.110**	.217**

*p<.05 **p<.001

Now we can examine how these clusters work as explanatory variables in relation with transition events as a dependent variable. First of all, we can see that all variables in the models had significant explanatory power at the 1 percent level in all the six dependent transition events variables. The timing of first qualification, finishing studies and first job are explained best with the degree (education level) in both cohorts. In the case of separate household, gender was the most important variable, but the strategy had the second largest beta coefficient. The first child in the post-adolescent cohort was determined by the transition strategy, while marriage was determined by the degree.

Since the interaction effect is significant in the model, we can use E2 to present the explanatory power of the full model.[2] Our models with the new transition strategy cluster have explained 30,8 percent of the variance in marriage at post-adolescent cohort (1970-

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[2] There are actually six models for the six independent variables.

1989) and 24,9 percent variance from marriage at the older cohort (1950-1969). Compared to the cohorts, it can be seen that the transition events can be better explained by the complex model (the models' value higher than the main effect). Also, it is important to note that these indicators explained better the transition events in the cohort 1991-2005 than in the cohort 1970-1989. This means that the young adult cohort is more sensitive to the transition strategy.

Table 9. Comparison of the post-socialist transition with
the parental generation by transition strategies by cohort

	Transition strategy	1970-1989 coh. (n=394)				1991-2005 coh. (n=309)			
		Harder now (%)	No differ. (%)	Easier now (%)	Cram-ers'V	Harder now (%)	No differ. (%)	Easier now (%)	Cram-ers'V
First job	Family-guided	74,7	18,7	6,6		78,0	16,0	6,0	
	Society-guided	90,1	6,8	3,1	.145✿	92,8	2,1	5,2	.181✿✿
	Autonomy-guided	90,8	5,0	4,3		85,7	10,4	3,9	
Entering college	Family-guided	14,6	23,6	61,8		11,5	21,2	67,3	
	Society-guided	30,2	11,3	58,5	.126✿	20,4	11,2	68,4	.091
	Autonomy-guided	20,9	18,7	60,4		17,5	11,0	71,4	
Separation from the parental house	Family-guided	46,0	43,7	10,3		46,2	40,4	13,5	
	Society-guided	65,0	23,8	11,3	.121✿	64,9	23,3	11,7	.156✿✿
	Autonomy-guided	60,9	28,3	10,9		57,9	30,9	11,2	
Child-bearing	Family-guided	44,4	47,8	7,8		37,3	56,9	5,9	
	Society-guided	68,3	26,1	5,6	.134✿	72,4	24,5	3,1	.245✿✿
	Autonomy-guided	58,7	34,8	6,5		60,1	34,0	5,9	
Finding the spouse	Family-guided	15,6	75,6	8,9		11,8	70,6	17,6	
	Society-guided	22,5	67,5	10,0	.074	24,5	71,4	4,1	.185✿✿
	Autonomy-guided	25,9	63,0	11,1		17,0	69,9	13,1	
Family support for the transition to adulthood	Family-guided	50,0	41,1	8,9		52,0	38,0	10,0	
	Society-guided	67,3	23,3	9,4	.118✿	60,4	21,2	18,4	.107✿
	Autonomy-guided	58,5	28,1	13,3		50,7	39,3	10,0	

Self-realization	Family-guided	25,6	36,7	37,8		21,6	35,3	43,1	
	Society-guided	34,4	33,8	31,8	.064	33,0	30,9	36,1	.109
	Autonomy-guided	32,1	29,9	38,0		19,7	30,9	49,3	
Change of residence	Family-guided	20,5	51,1	28,4		15,1	45,3	39,6	
	Society-guided	37,7	36,5	25,8	**.107**	32,3	28,3	39,4	.110
	Autonomy-guided	33,1	38,1	28,8		28,2	36,9	34,9	
Acquiring the proper qualifica-tions	Family-guided	7,9	28,1	64,0		13,2	18,9	67,9	
	Society-guided	25,8	20,8	53,5	**.129**	18,8	14,9	66,3	.086
	Autonomy-guided	16,5	24,5	59,0		11,7	23,4	64,9	
Possibility of foreign career	Family-guided	5,6	14,4	80,0		1,9	13,5	84,6	
	Society-guided	8,9	8,9	82,3	.097	9,4	3,1	87,5	**.181****
	Autonomy-guided	10,8	5,0	84,2		6,6	4,6	88,8	

*p<.05 **p<.001

Younger adults (cohort 1991-2005) (22 percent) think that the transition to adulthood is not explicitly harder or easier in the post-socialist period, there are certain aspects that are easier and others harder. 44 percent considers the contemporary situation harder, while 13 percent consider it easier. Most adults (70 percent) in the older cohort (1970-1989) considered the contemporary situation harder. The different transition strategies, however, have a strong influence on these opinions (Table 9). The largest differences can be found at the society-guided strategy: these young adults consider the first job, the parental separation and the childbearing even harder than the average, but also acknowledge the easier family support for the transition to adulthood after 2000.

Summary

Whichever way we interpret the transformation of youth (new life stage, prolongation, economical force etc.), instead of the clear trajectory, the so-called structural determination of reaching adulthood, we find an increased proliferation of individual routes, which also entails the growing burden of a multitude of options to choose from (Biggart et al. 2002). The choices are restricted by the resources available to people in the post-adolescent ages, based on the transition strategy. In Europe when trying to achieve independence, young adult people can depend on the market beside the transfers received from the family, and also, to lesser degree, on diminishing state support.

We can derive the following conclusions of the previous analysis. First of all, the millennial transformation significantly modified the conventional way of starting adulthood in Europe. Now we can observe a "socialization deficit": adolescents learn the adult behavior from a society, which was socialized by the traditional adulthood-starting norms, but now this way is often unviable because of the social transformation.

However, this "socialization deficit" does not have the same impact on all adolescents. Their behavior reflects different strategies that are more complex than just a simple delay in family formation. We can identify three different groups or strategies: family-guided, autonomy-guided and society-guided plans about starting adulthood and family formation. These strategies are based on socio-demographic characteristics of the adolescents and young adults and also their families.

Young adults do not necessarily consider the transition to adulthood harder in the past. They are aware that certain aspects of the process are actually easier, especially the opportunities in education. But, on the other hand, they believe that the traditional events of the transition are more difficult to achieve now than before 2000.

We identified intended childlessness and remaining single in the millennial context, two modern phenomena that have considerable occurrence in Europe. These two new patterns transform the concept of post-adolescence and might lead to radical changes in adult demographic behavior. This phenomenon is understudied and is a very important further research direction.

The policy implications of these changes are interacting with family formation, fertility behavior, labor mobility and various other social services. There has been a significant shift in emphasis in demographic behavior of young adults. The disposition towards marriage has weakened, partnership outside marriage have gained ground. However, late marriage does not necessarily mean a more thoroughly considered choice of partners. We have little knowledge on the stability of cohabitation in the EU.

Adolescents and young adults have to face many inconsistent situations during the transition to adulthood in the modern world. They are forced to carry out this transition under unwanted and unfavorable conditions. While many of them practices the socially accepted way of family formation, the society and the family in most cases cannot provide the resources for the proper transition.

European policy makers in most cases account only for the traditional transition events (first of all, marriage and fertility) and could be misguided by that. We think that a further elaboration of socialization deficit and the change of transition events during millennial crisis can have a significant contribution to transition to adulthood studies.
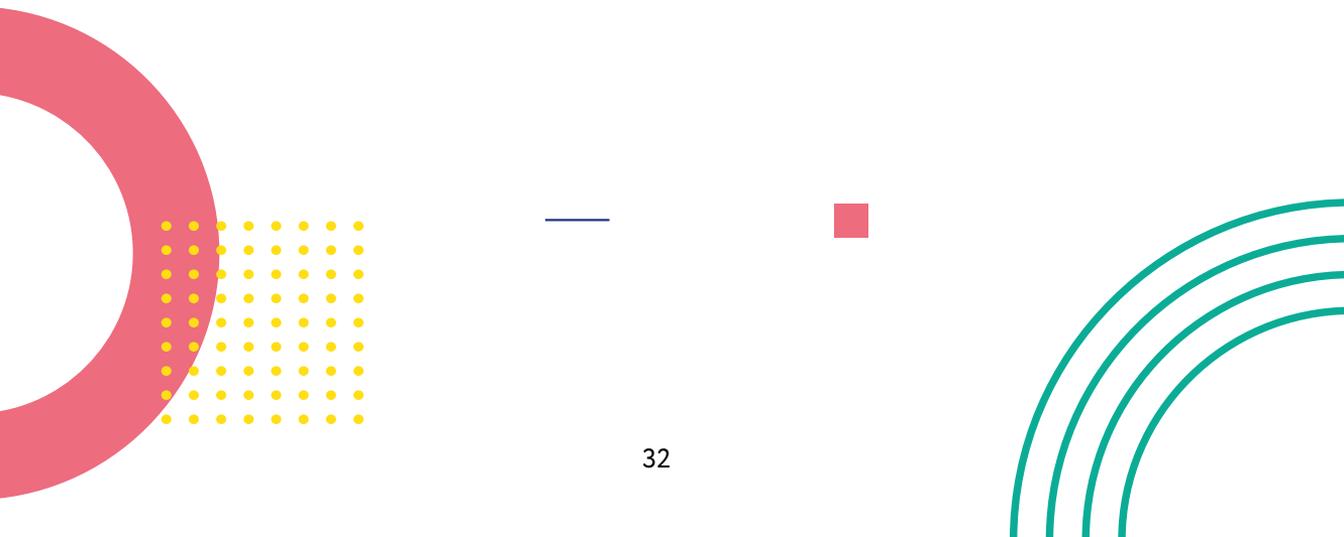
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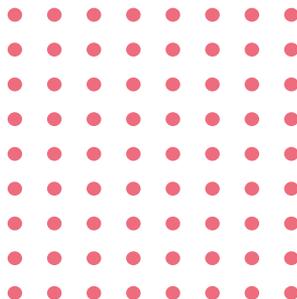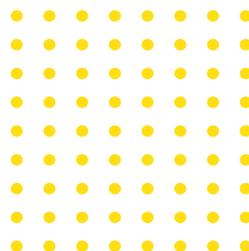
02

Economic Crisis and Youth Housing
Economic Crises and Changes in Youth Housing Indicators in Hungary and Neighboring Countries

Bence Balogh – Tamás Isépy

The Importance of Housing for Young People

In this study, we set out to examine the effect of crises on youth in an economic context. Since the economic context of the relationship between crises and youth is still too broadly interpreted, our study is focused on a more specific area. The focal point of our study is the impact of economic crises on the housing situation of young people in the European Union (EU).

According to research, youth housing is an important issue in its own right. It is the eighth most important problem for young people in Hungary. (Székely & Pillók, 2022) Young people's housing is closely linked to the creation of their own home, which is one of the greatest challenges faced by youth, both in terms of its importance and its financial difficulties. The most important element of this complex problem is that the cost of either buying or renting a home is extremely high; however, the quality and location of housing and housing market trends also play a role. Housing often involves a significant long-term commitment and a number of risks. (Kocsis, 2022)

Methodology

The impact of economic crises on the housing situation of young people can be examined in multiple ways. We have chosen two different, but easily connectable methods based on the analysis of basic statistical data. In the first approach, we identify what is commonly agreed to be a period of economic crisis and look at what happened during and after the crisis period to a youth housing indicator considered relevant, the share of young people living with their parents for the EU as a whole.

In the second case, we use two key economic performance indicators, GDP and employment rates, to go deeper and show the detailed trends of economic crises over time, focusing on a smaller group of countries as a presentation and analysis of all EU countries would certainly exceed the volume of this paper. In the case of these countries, we also examine another youth housing indicator, specifically the housing cost overburden indicator.

In both cases, the analysis is complemented by further scrutiny of housing indicators, which we expect will help to explore and explain the relationships.

Our initial aim was to use the above-described methods and analyze the data presented to determine some of the fundamental relationships between economic crises and youth housing. However, in the course of the study it became clear that the chosen method would only be able to outline, at most, the links between economic crises and some aspects of youth housing.

Young people can be understood as a range of age groups; the age group definitions of the Eurostat indicators selected for our study indicate our options. The share of young people living with their parents is only reported by Eurostat for young people aged 18-34. For the housing cost overburden indicator, aggregate data are only available for a narrower age group of 20-29-year-olds.

In our selection of countries, we focus on Hungary and the Visegrad (V4) nations: the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia and other neighboring countries – Croatia, Romania and Slovenia – that joined the EU with or close to the same time as Hungary.

In defining the reviewed period, we worked on the assumption that Hungary's accession to the EU was marked by three economic crises, which we consider to be sufficiently numerous to identify general correlations. In order to illustrate the trends in the period preceding the crises and to shorten the time series, the period under examination was defined as starting in 2006. The end of the period under study was set at 2021, as there was little annual data available for 2022 at the time of the study.

The membership of the EU and the eurozone has changed several times over the examined period. In this study, the European Union is defined as a community of 27 countries as of 2020 and the eurozone is defined as containing 19 countries between 2015 and 2022, as these are the two formations we consider to be most relevant, and for which the longest time series are available.

The Three Economic Crises

There is no universally agreed definition of economic crises. (Ács, 2011) After reviewing half a dozen definitions of crises, we can summarize what we have read by saying that an economic crisis is defined as a major economic imbalance in the functioning of a country, caused by external and/or internal factors, affecting key economic indicators such as GDP, employment, public debt, solvency, industrial production, etc. An economic crisis typically occurs in conjunction with or as a consequence of other crises (e.g., financial, credit). (Ács, 2011; Mészáros, 2016; Nagy, 2023;)

Following the enlargement of the EU, there were three major economic crises in Europe: the financial crisis of 2007-2008, the European sovereign debt crisis between 2012 and 2013, and the COVID-19 crisis in 2020.

The global financial crisis started in 2007 and entered its intensive phase in 2008, after which bank lending essentially froze, first in the US and then in Europe. (Csortos & Szalai, 2015) The insolvency of banks forced state intervention, while the most vulnerable countries had to turn to the IMF for support to avoid insolvency. The full impact of the financial crisis emerged in 2009. In 2010, most of the EU was already experiencing modest economic growth and, if we look only at GDP, the financial crisis was over by 2010, while employment indicators started to improve more slowly.

The European sovereign debt crisis occurred as a medium-term consequence of the financial crises. During the financial crisis and with the bank bailouts, countries pursued anti-cyclical, stimulative fiscal policies to avoid a deep economic downturn. Fiscal stimulus also put the solvency of specific sovereigns at risk. Austerity measures had to be introduced to avoid sovereign defaults. As a result of the austerity measures and the fall in public demand, growth in the affected sovereigns slowed sharply and the most affected economies fell back into recession in 2012 and 2013.

However, the overall rate of economic contraction during the sovereign debt crisis was more modest than during the financial crisis. (Losoncz, 2011; Marton, 2019)

While the COVID crisis caused a greater downturn in the EU than the financial crisis, this was followed by a rapid economic bounce-back, meaning that GDP levels reached and exceeded pre-crisis levels in a third of member states within a year, and in the EU within 2 years. This can be considered a very rapid economic recovery; in the case of the financial crisis, it took 5 years to reach the GDP level of 2008, due to the emergence of the sovereign debt crisis.

Table 1. The economic decline of EU27 countries in the years of GDP contraction

	Year(s) of GDP decline	Rate of GDP decline (%)
Global financial crisis	2009	-4.3
European sovereign debt crisis	2012 and 2013	-0.7 and -0.1
COVID crisis	2020	-5.7

Source: World Bank

The picture of economic decline at EU level varies from country to country, and in every crisis there was at least one country where there was no economic decline. Poland in the financial crisis and Ireland in the 2020 crisis were able to show economic growth. In the 2012-2013 European sovereign debt crisis, the picture was much more varied, with only ten EU member states experiencing an economic downturn in 2012 and only eight in 2013.

The Course of Economic Crises in the Countries Studied

First, we present GDP trends for the 7 reviewed countries (Figure 1) and employment data for young people aged 20-29 (Figure 2) in order to provide a simplified statistical picture of the economic crises in the reviewed countries. In addition, we invariably present data for the EU and for the eurozone, as this in itself is a useful way to evaluate the position of the reviewed countries in relation to the European average.

As a result of the financial crisis, GDP figures fell in 2009 in all the reviewed countries except Poland, and the GDP downturn was larger than the EU except Czech Republic. Following the financial crisis, the reviewed countries are returning to their pre-crisis catching-up path, but at varying pace. The period of financial and sovereign debt crisis in Croatia was accompanied by several years of continuous economic contraction, while only the Slovenian economy grew slower than the EU average throughout the period.

In the COVID crisis that broke out in spring 2020, the examined countries suffered a lesser downturn compared to the EU and the euro area as a whole, with the exception of Croatia, which experienced a larger economic contraction. The rapid bounce-back in 2021 following the COVID crisis was larger than the contraction during the crisis in all but the Czech Republic and Slovakia; i.e., all countries except the Czech Republic and Slovakia recovered the GDP contraction from the COVID crisis in a single year.

Another feature of economic crises is that a downturn in the economy is accompanied by employment reduction, and employment typically starts to rise as the economic crisis is over and growth gains momentum. These correlations have generally proved to be true again.

Figure 1. GDP growth rate[1]
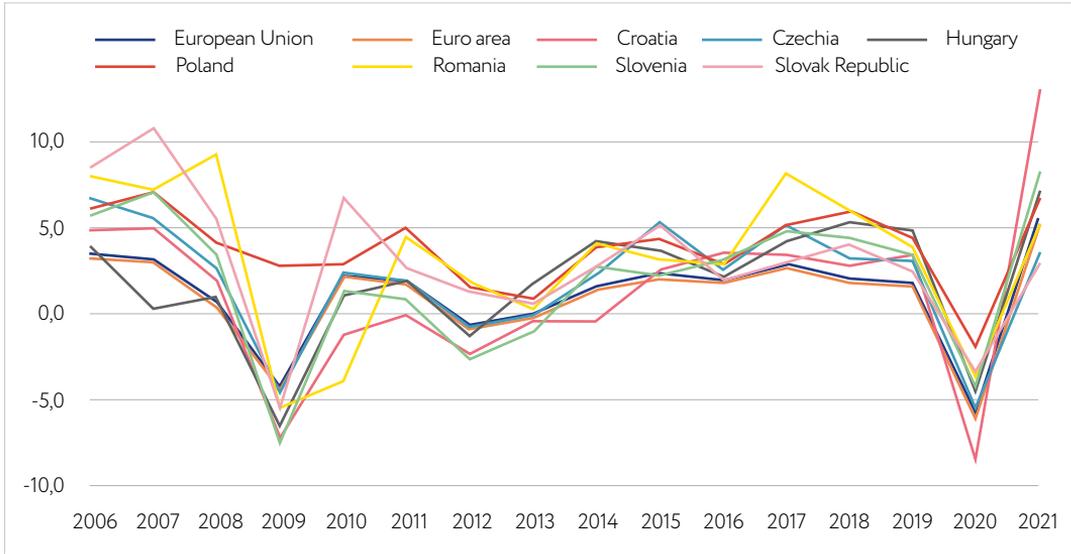
Source: Eurostat

Figure 2. Youth employment rate in the 15-29-year-old age bracket[2]

Source: Eurostat

[1] https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG&country=#
[2] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/TESEM070/default/table?lang=en&category=es.tesem
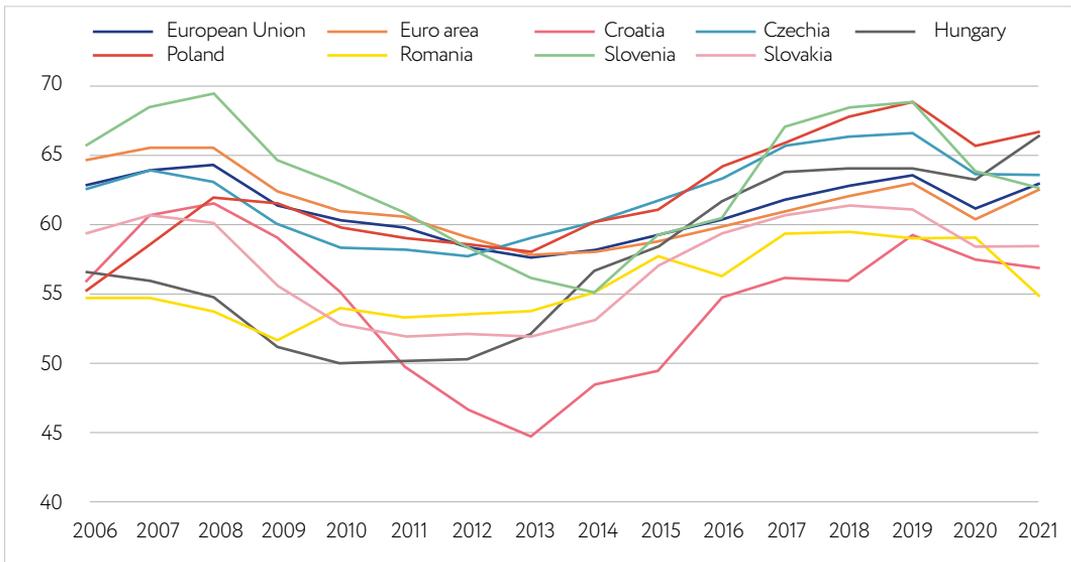
Main Indicators of the EU Housing Structure

When we look at the housing situation of young people in the EU and changes in the housing situation, two additional aspects should be taken into account. One is that the EU housing market is not a single market; it is rather a range of housing markets regulated separately in each Member State. The EU does not have a common policy framework on housing, which is a national competence. Therefore, it is up to the member states to develop their own legislative and public policy framework for housing. (Bajomi, 2021)

The second aspect is that the housing situation of young people is basically influenced by the housing situation of the overall population. This implies that presenting the main indicators of the housing situation in a Member State also provides relevant information on the housing market situation and the housing structure faced by young people in that Member State when they are trying to create their own home.

Figure 3. Distribution of population by tenure status

Country	Tenant	Owner
Germany	50,5	49,5
Austria	45,8	54,2
Denmark	40,8	59,2
France	35,3	64,7
Sweden	35,1	64,9
Cyprus	30,2	69,8
European Union	30,1	69,9
Ireland	30,0	70,0
Netherlands	29,9	70,1
Finland	29,7	70,3
Luxembourg	28,9	71,1
Belgium	28,7	71,3
Greece	26,7	73,3
Italy	26,3	73,7
Spain	24,2	75,8
Slovenia	23,9	76,1
Czechia	21,7	78,3
Portugal	21,7	78,3
Estonia	18,4	81,6
Malta	18,1	81,9
Latvia	16,8	83,2
Bulgaria	15,1	84,9
Poland	13,2	86,8
Lithuania	11,0	89,0
Croatia	9,5	90,5
Hungary	8,3	91,7
Slovakia	7,7	92,3
Romania	4,7	95,3

Source: Eurostat

One of the defining dimensions of the EU housing structure is the tenure status, i.e., the proportion of the population living in an owner-occupied or in a rented home. The EU shows a varied picture in terms of the size of the rental sector: although the old member states also have a higher proportion of people living in owner-occupied housing, they have a larger rental sector, while in the countries that joined in 2004 and later, a larger proportion of the population lives in owner-occupied housing (Figure 3).

Figure 4. Distribution of population by tenure status
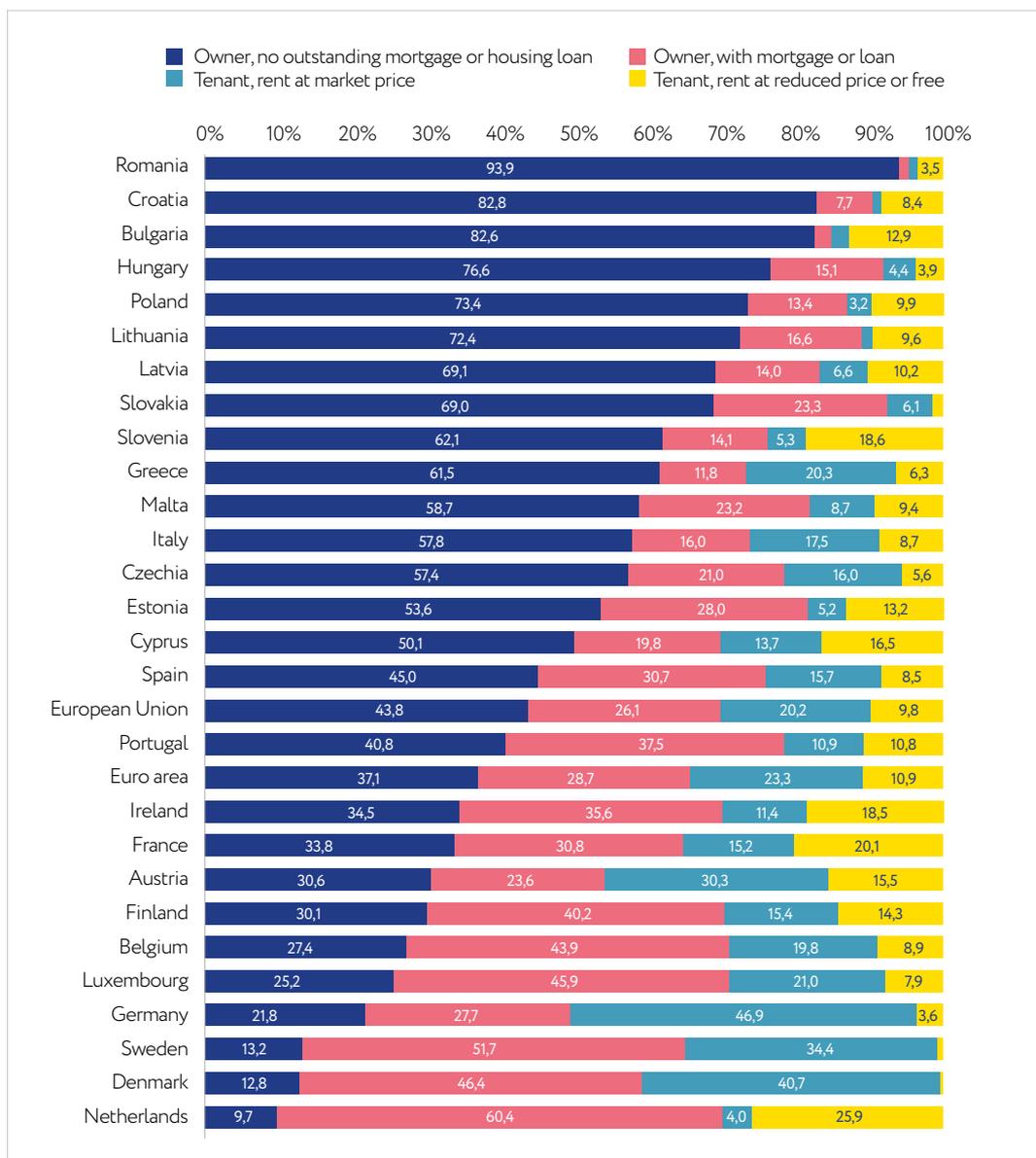
Source: Eurostat

Of the countries surveyed, Slovenia and the Czech Republic have the largest rental sectors in relative terms, while Romania, Slovakia and Hungary are at the bottom of the EU ranking.

In the case of owner-occupation, housing costs are significantly affected by whether the owner-occupied dwelling is subject to a mortgage or a loan. The rental housing market can also be further subdivided according to the proportion of dwellings rented on a market or at a reduced price. Discounts can be both public discounts and discounts based on personal relationships, meaning that reduced price of rentals includes social rented housing.

The following graph shows a more detailed breakdown of the distribution of renters and owner-occupiers, which is important for housing costs. Countries are listed in reverse order and their indicators are slightly different from the previous figure. Figure 4 shows that Romania leads the EU and the countries surveyed in terms of the proportion of unencumbered owner-occupied dwellings that benefit from a low monthly housing cost. This is due to the fact that Romania has the lowest share of both rented and owner-occupied housing with mortgage burden in the EU. On the other side of the European ranking are the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden.

Among the reviewed countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have the highest share of mortgaged owner-occupied dwellings, followed by Slovenia, Hungary and Poland. While there are significant differences in the share of mortgages across countries, the shares of mortgages are low compared to the EU average.

When interpreting the data on owner-occupied housing with mortgages, it is worth bearing in mind that this indicator tends to be high in countries where mortgages are long term for some particular reason.

The importance of structural data on housing is that it gives a perspective on the prospects facing young people in specific countries. So, where there is a high proportion of rented or owner-occupied housing with mortgages, it will be normal for young people to have similar solutions to their own housing needs.

Neither structural housing data nor other Eurostat housing figures show that young people tend to live in a higher proportion in rented dwellings. Among other examples in international literature, Cournède and Plouin showed in their study No Home for The Young? (2022) that the 20-29-year-old age group is overrepresented in the rental sector compared to the total population. In the Hungarian literature, the overrepresentation of young people among the users of the Hungarian rental sector is also considered to be a key correlation. (Csizmady and Kőszeghy, 2022; Hegedüs and Teller, 2007)

**Changes in Price Indexes of Houses and Rentals**

An important factor affecting access to housing and observed by Eurostat is the price of housing and rentals.

Figure 5. House price index (2010 = 100) - annual data
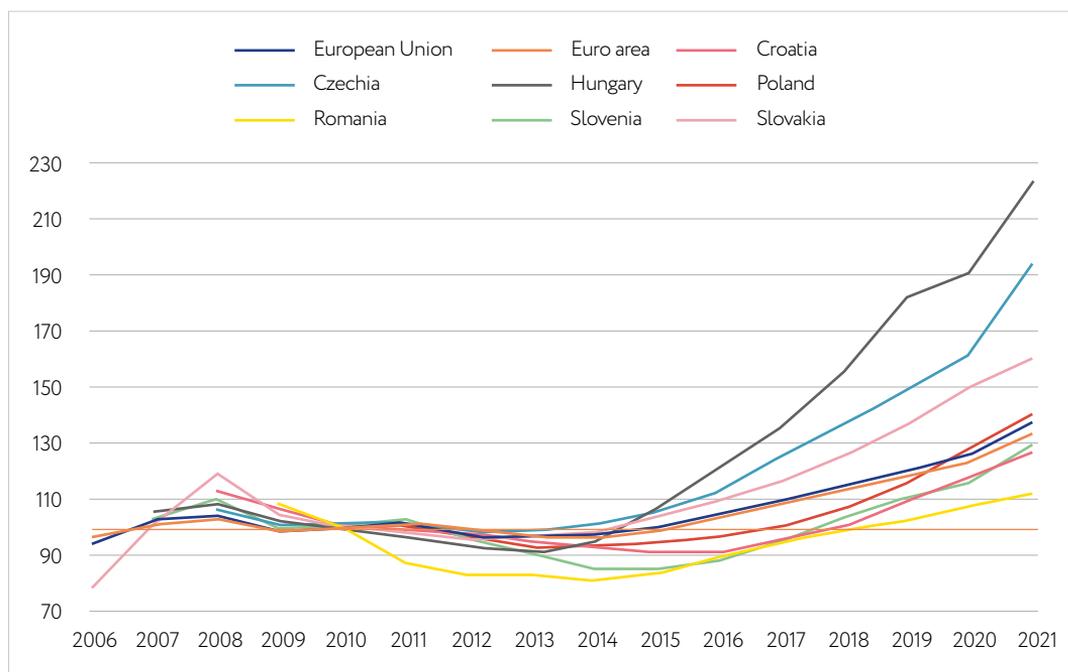
Figure 6. House price index (to previous year) - annual data
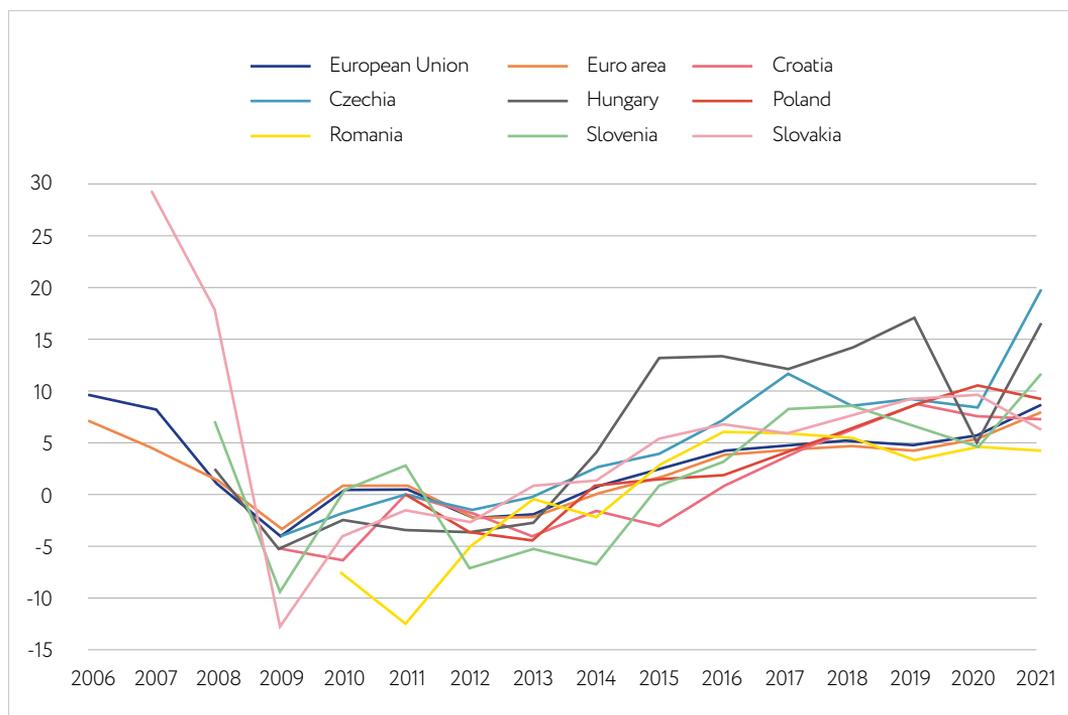
There are two trends in house prices; first, house prices tend to drop during crises. This trend is clearly visible during the financial crisis in 2009 and the sovereign debt crisis in 2012-2013, meaning that the impact of economic crises can be easily identified visually in house prices. The basic economic correlation behind the visible data is that as GDP falls, employment typically falls, household incomes fall and falling household demand leads to falling house prices. The COVID crisis, on the other hand, has revealed different characteristics in house prices than the two previous crises, because house prices have not fallen.

However, there is also a non-crisis specific trend, which is reflected in the long-term increase in house prices. The timing of house price troughs varies across countries, but typically occurred around 2013 and 2014. Since the housing market troughs, house prices have risen above the level of inflation across the EU as a whole. In some countries, house price growth had been particularly high; among the countries surveyed, house prices in Hungary more than doubled (122 percent increase) and in the Czech Republic were 94 percent higher than in 2010.

Rents have also increased, but at a much more modest pace than house prices (Figures 7 and 8). Despite slower growth, the rental market in the EU as a whole has tended to be characterized by long-term stability, with annual rent growth in the EU and the euro area in a range between 2.3 percent and 1.1 percent.

The financial crisis has only slowed down the growth of rental prices in the EU and in most of the reviewed countries surveyed.

Figure 7. Rentals for housing (2010 = 100) - annual data
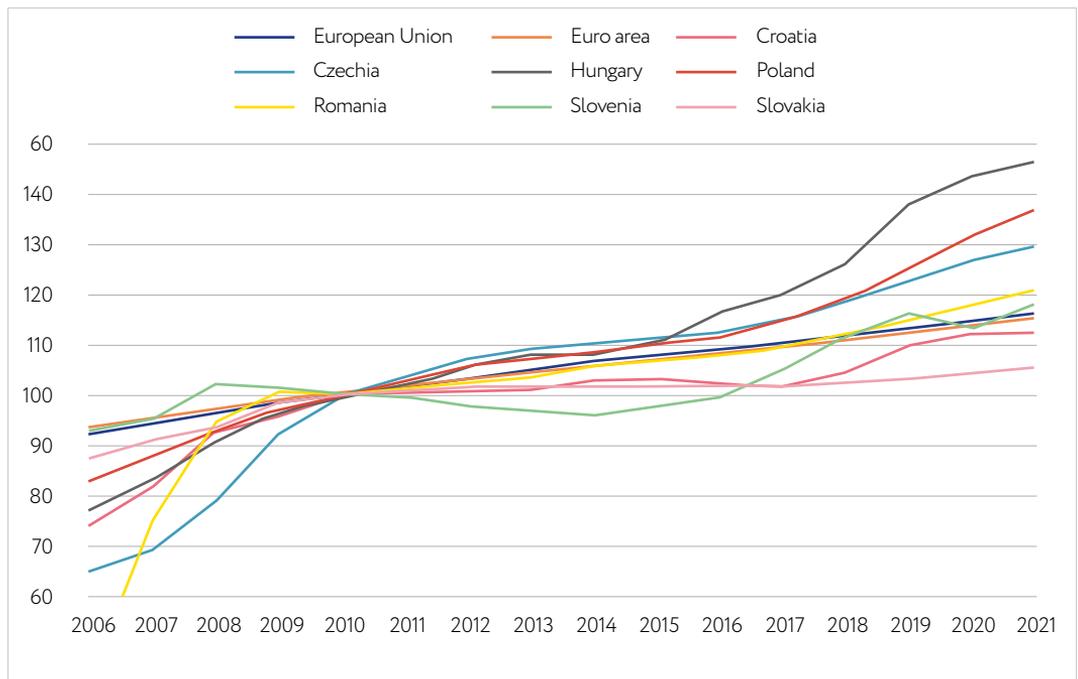
Source: Eurostat

Figure 8. Rentals for housing, Annual average index
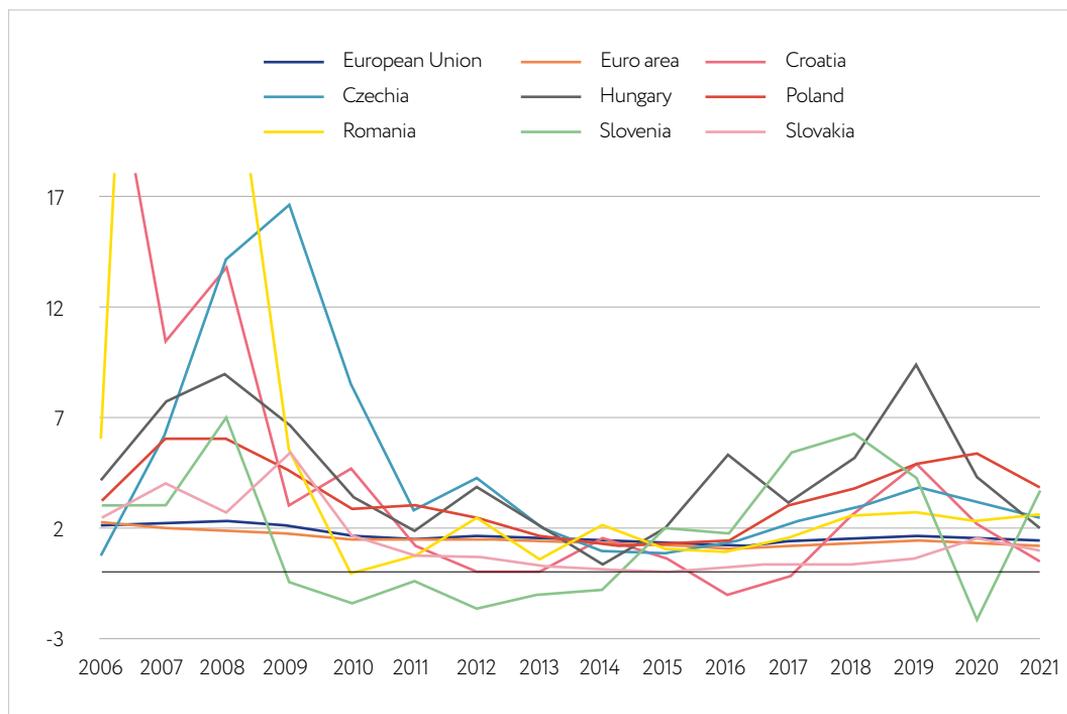
Source: Eurostat

Changes in house prices and rents have a direct impact on young people's ability to buy a home. Where there has been a large increase in house prices, as in Hungary and the Czech Republic, young people's access to housing is becoming more difficult. The problem of housing difficulties resulting from rising house prices has also been identified in Habitat for Humanity's annual report on housing poverty (Bajomi, 2021). The difference between rent and house price increases also has a direct relevance for the housing situation of young people; if rent increases lag behind house price increases in the long term, rented housing becomes a financially more attractive choice.

The annual growth trends of the house price and rental indicators are also interesting because they provide an example of how an indicator can be strongly correlated with economic crises.

According to a study by Anna Bajomi, published in 2021, "Overall, rising house prices across Europe are making it harder to find decent housing, especially for young people and those on low incomes, and increasing indebtedness. High rents place a significant financial burden on households. Residents in eastern and southern European countries are more likely to face more severe housing quality problems or, partly related to this, energy poverty. Poor-quality,

low-energy-efficient housing not only reduces the quality of life of households, but also has a negative impact on people's physical and mental health and on the environment."

However, the rise in house and rent prices is more significant in comparison with the income situation. The National Bank of Hungary(MNB, the country's central bank) has been publishing data on European house and rental prices in its housing market reports since 2021, but only for the capital cities. The house price-to-income ratio shown in the following graph expresses the ratio of the average house prices outside the city center to the national yearly average wage. (Calculation based on 75 square meter dwellings.) The data show that, after Paris, the capital cities of the reviewed countries had to work the longest number of years to buy a medium-sized apartment in the third quarter of 2021: 24.8 years in Prague, 20.3 years in Bratislava and 19.6 years in Warsaw.

Figure 9. Price-to-income ratios in European capitals (2021. Q3)
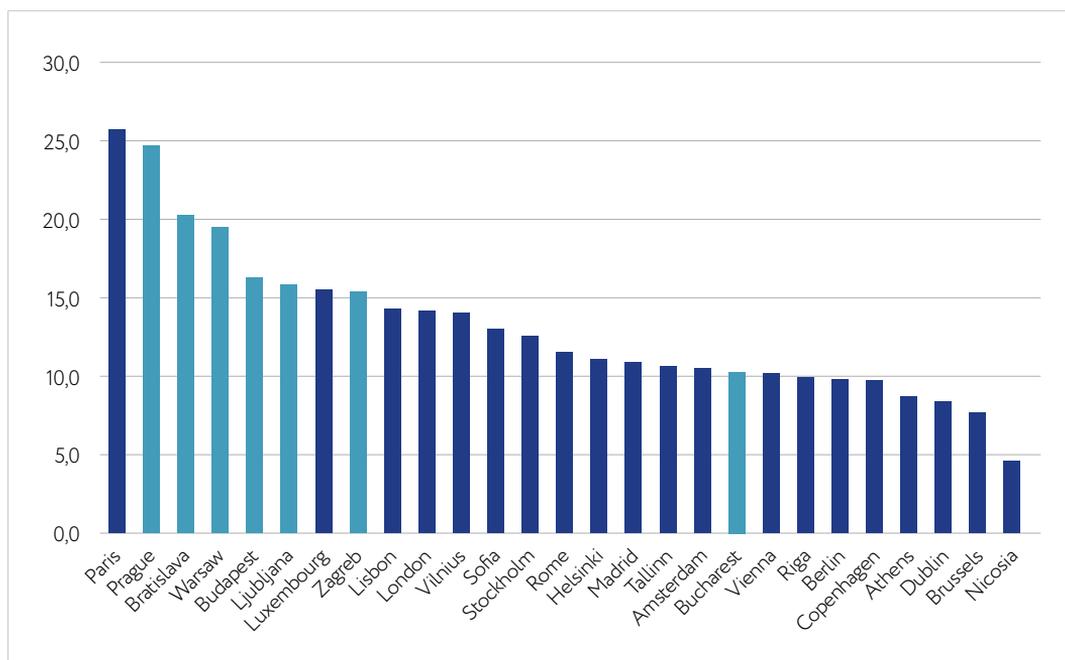
Source: MNB

MNB also measures the ratio of rent-to-income as the quotient of the rent for a typical rental flat outside central Budapest and the national monthly net average income. We also present the more relevant one-bedroom apartments as first independent homes for young people to see the slightly different situation and ranking of rental prices relative to income, but overall, rental prices in the countries under study are also high relative to average incomes.

Figure 10. Rent-to-income ratios (1 room) in European capitals (2021. Q3)
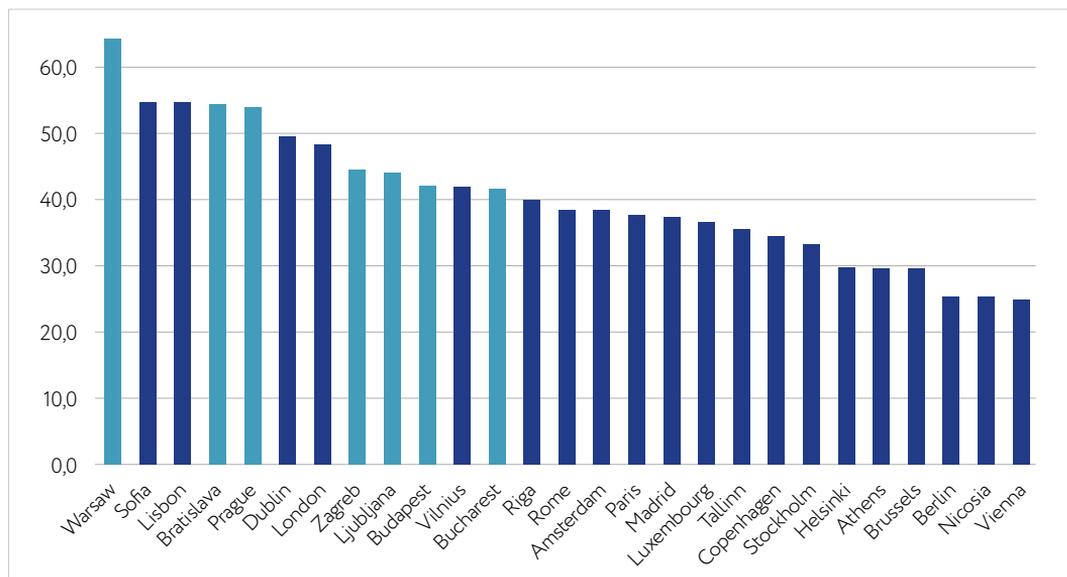
Source: MNB

Housing Indicators for Young People

After presenting structural housing data and housing market prices, we turn to two Eurostat housing statistics focusing on young people or where the housing data collection provides data on young people belong to an age group relevant to our study.

Percentage of Young People Living With Their Parents

Two related indicators of youth housing are the share of young people living with their parents and the average age of young people leaving the parental household. We can talk about related indicators because they both measure young people's housing independence from a different perspective. The ranking of EU countries on the basis of the two indicators differs (Table 1), but the largest difference is a difference of up to 5 places, while two thirds of countries are in similar positions in the two rankings.

Table 2. Leaving the parental household and living with parents

Estimated average age of young people leaving the parental household (%)		Share of young adults aged 18-34 living with their parents (%)	
Portugal	33,6	76,5	Croatia
Croatia	33,3	72,9	Greece
Slovakia	30,9	72,3	Portugal
Greece	30,7	70,5	Italy

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Bulgaria	30,3	65,2	Slovakia
Italy	29,9	64,5	Spain
Malta	29,9	64,2	Poland
Spain	29,8	62,4	Ireland
Slovenia	29,6	60,9	Slovenia
Poland	28,8	60,1	Bulgaria
Ireland	28,4	59,6	Malta
Romania	28,0	55,4	Romania
Hungary	27,3	54,1	Hungary
Cyprus	27,2	54,0	Cyprus
Luxembourg	26,8	49,9	Latvia
Latvia	26,6	49,4	European Union
European Union	26,5	45,6	Czechia
Belgium	26,2	45,3	Lithuania
Czechia	25,9	44,8	Belgium
Austria	25,3	43,9	France
Lithuania	25,2	43,4	Luxembourg
Germany	23,6	37,7	Austria
France	23,6	35,8	Netherlands
Netherlands	23,3	32,8	Estonia
Estonia	22,7	29,9	Germany
Finland	21,5	18,2	Finland
Denmark	21,3	17,3	Sweden
Sweden	19,0	16,0	Denmark

Source: Eurostat

When looking at the evolution of the two indicators over time, quite similar shifts can be seen, reflecting the correlation that the younger the age at which young people leave the parental home, the lower the proportion of young people living with their parents. For reasons of similarity, it was felt sufficient to present a series of data that varied over a wider range of values and showed more graphically visible changes, i.e., the proportion of young people living with their parents. The situation of young people living with their parents is presented in 5 groups of EU countries to make the visual analysis easier.

The highest proportions of young people aged 18-34 living with their parents were in Croatia (76 percent), Greece and Portugal (70 percent and 69 percent respectively) in 2021. Portugal has

one of the largest increases in the average age of leaving the parental home since 2019, with a corresponding increase in the proportion of young people living with their parents. This group of countries includes Italy and Spain, where the proportion of young people living with their parents has increased steadily over the period.

The group's data show that economic crises have no clear impact. What is visible, however, is a growing trend in most Southern European countries. The only exception is Slovakia, where after a peak in 2011 following the financial crisis, the share of young people living with their parents started to decline slowly and then rapidly, which also represents a convergence towards the data for the other countries of V4 group.

Figure 11. "Young people leaving parental household at the latest" group of countries
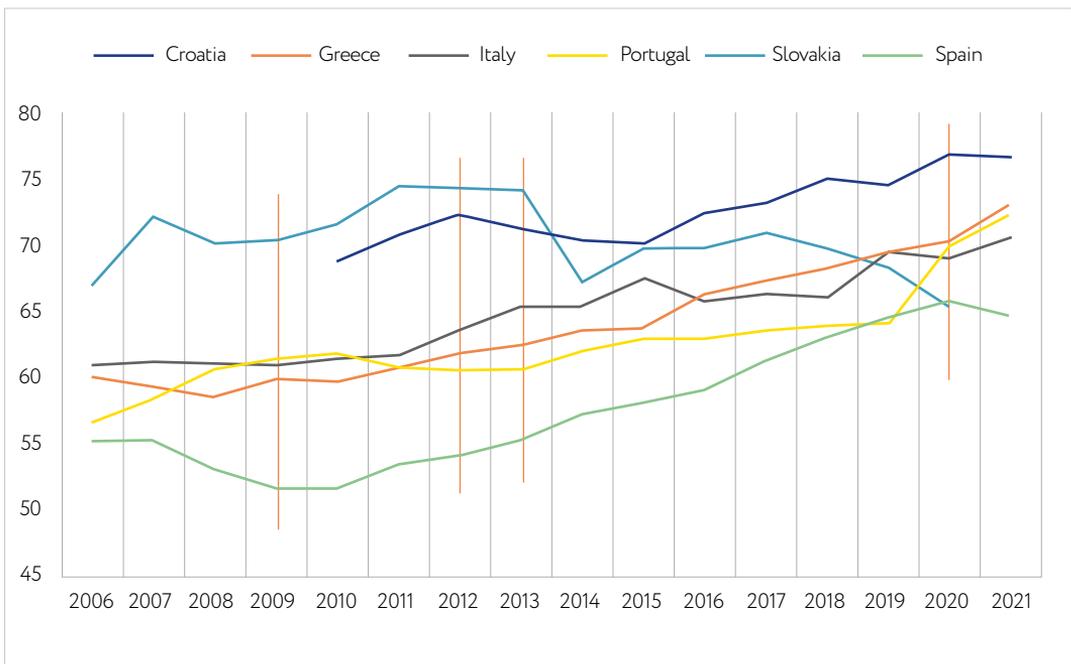
Source: Eurostat

Young people's early departure from the parental householde is a feature of the three Nordic countries. By 2021, less than 20 percent of young people in all three countries were living with their parents. In these countries, young people become independent at a decidedly earlier age than in the next, so called "French-German" group.

Looking for correlations between economic crises and youth abandonment rates in the Nordic countries, we find that the financial crisis is followed by a lagged negative shift (later leaving of parental house) in Sweden and Denmark, and then a return to pre-2008 levels or below over several years. In Finland, a very small shift can be seen during the years of the sovereign debt crisis.

Figure 12. "Nordic" group of countries

Young people in the "French-German" group, named after the two largest member states, are becoming independent later than in the "Nordic" countries, but earlier than the European average. Even in this group of countries, there is no clear correlation between economic crises and young people becoming independent homeowners, while shifts following economic crises can be detected in the trend lines in several places. However, it is worth drawing attention to the graph showing a dynamic downward trend in Estonia, where there is almost no sign of a GDP decline of more than 20 percent in 2008-2009. The case of France stands out in terms of the COVID crisis, with the highest increase of 6.3 percentage points between 2019 and 2020 in the share of young people living with their parents.

Figure 13. "French-German" group of countries
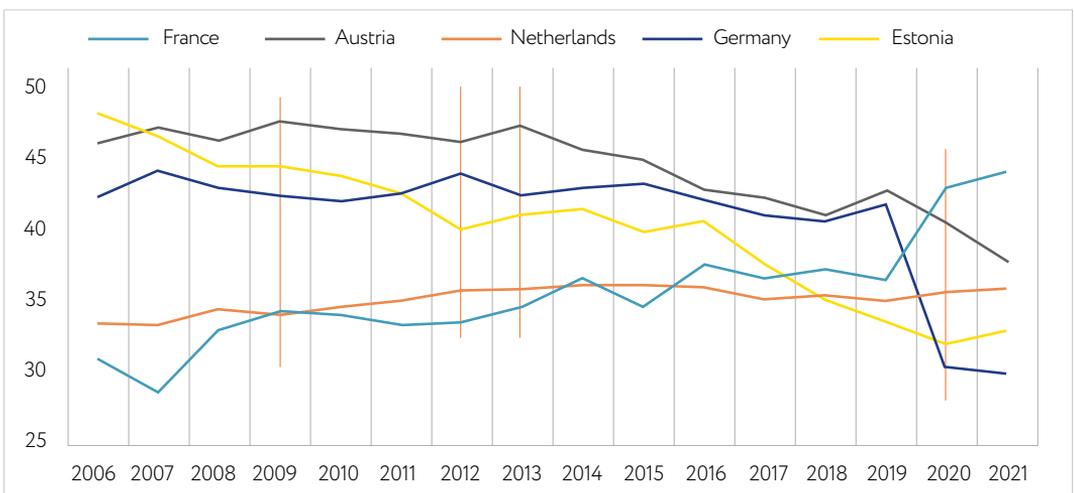
The "Middle" group of countries are those where the proportion of young people living with their parents is close to the EU average but tends to be below average by the end of the period. The shorter EU trend line is explained by the fact that Eurostat calculates the EU average only from 2010 onwards. Latvia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic have followed a downward path in terms of final score over the period. In the case of the Czech Republic, it can be seen that it was already becoming more difficult to leave home before the financial crisis, which may be due to the house price-increasing effect of the pre-crisis cyclical period.

Figure 14. "Middle" group of countries
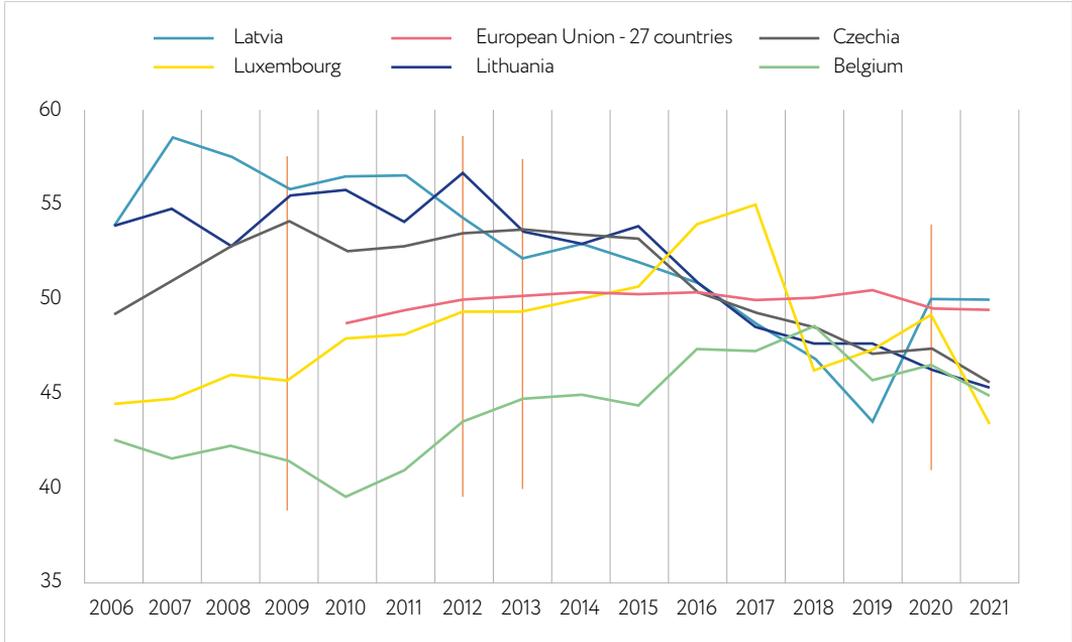
Source: Eurostat

In the "New entrants" group, which includes most of the countries that joined after 2004, the share of young people aged 18-34 living with their parents is above the EU average. The outlier' of the group is the old EU member Ireland, where the rate of leaving home has shifted significantly later after 2012 and is 20 percentage points higher in 2021 than 9 years earlier. The case of Ireland is interesting because it is known that housing has become so difficult in the country that the ministerial foreword to the Housing Strategy 2021 mentions tackling the housing crisis as one of the main objectives. (Housing for all, 2021)

Slovenia has suffered the second longest and deepest economic crises of all reviewed countries. However, this wasn't enough to reverse the downward (improving) trend of young people living with their parents. Hungary and Romania show a deterioration in the indicator during and after the financial and sovereign debt crises.

Figure 15. "New entrants" group of countries
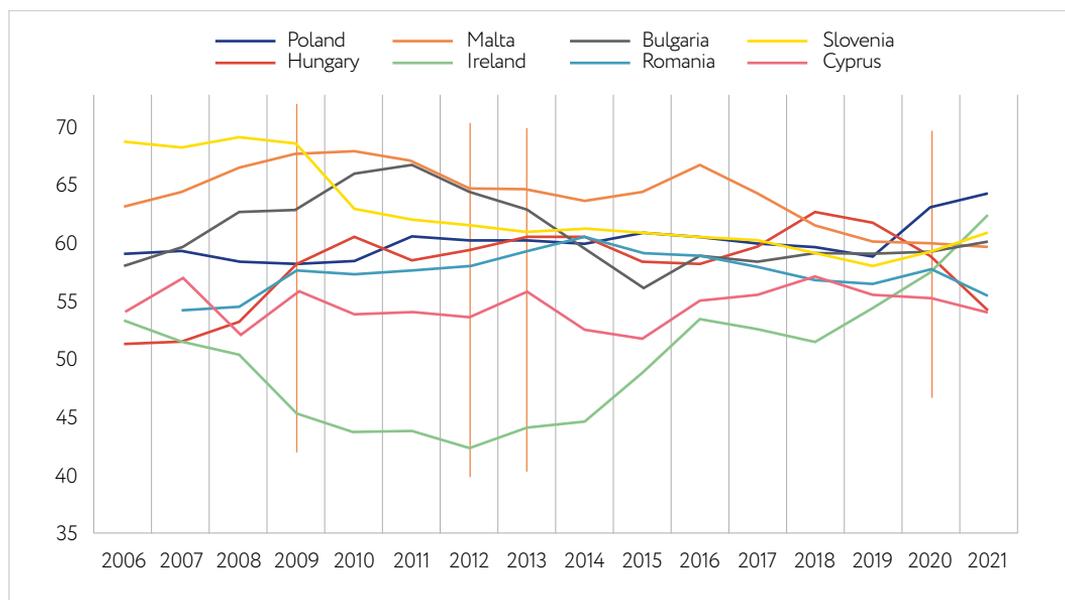
In summary, it can be seen that cohabitation rates and early leaving move with the crises in some countries, so it can be assumed that crises have an impact on the indicator (e.g., Hungary). In some countries (e.g., Estonia, Finland) there is no co-movement at all, while in others there is co-movement for only one of the three crises (Slovenia). The nature of the co-movements is not the same, but there is an immediate identical shift in some cases and a shift with a delay of one or two years in others. In countries where there is no or delayed co-movement, the most plausible assumption is not that the crisis has no housing impact, but that either the policy institutional framework is able to counteract the impact of the crisis, or that other internal housing trends in society, i.e., those influenced by economic and social factors rather than housing policy, have a stronger impact than the impact of the crises. Of course, a combination of these two can also occur.

Housing Cost Overburden for 20-29 Years Olds

Our second indicator selected for detailed analysis is the housing cost overburden indicator. The housing cost overburden is an indicator of the percentage of the population living in households where the total housing costs ('net' of housing allowances) represent more than 40 percent of their disposable income.[3] Housing cost overburden is measured for the total population and for several age groups, but no data are available for the age group of 18-34-year-old young people living with their parents. Of the several possible indicators, data for the population aged 20-29 are highlighted because it is in this age group that young people tend to leave the parental home

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[3] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Housing_cost_overburden_rate

on their own, while indicators for the under-20 age group still predominantly reflect the income situation of parents.

As an alternative to the housing cost overburdening indicator, the indicator of the share of housing costs in disposable income was also considered, which could provide interesting new data for the housing characteristics of the whole population (Futó, 2022). However, Eurostat does not provide data on young people for the previously mentioned indicator.

For the total population in 2021, Greece was the country most affected by housing cost overburdening with 28.8 percent, followed by Denmark and the Netherlands with 15.5 percent and 12.5 percent respectively. Nevertheless, for the young age group in 2021, Denmark had the highest share of young people affected by housing cost overburden (38.5 percent). Greece was in second place with 31 percent and the Netherlands in third place with 23.2 percent. The reason for the swap of the top two places in 2021 was that Denmark's result was significantly worse than in 2020, while Greece's was better. The young people least affected by housing cost overburdening in 2021 lived in Malta, Slovakia and Hungary. For the total population, Cyprus, Hungary and Ireland had the lowest rates of housing cost overburdening.

Table 3. Housing cost overburden rate by age (2021)

	20-29 years (%)	Total (%)
Denmark	38,5	15,5
Greece	31,0	28,8
Netherlands	23,2	12,5
Sweden	16,6	8,5
Germany	15,0	10,7
Euro area	11,3	8,7
European Union	10,9	8,3
Spain	10,4	9,9
Finland	10,1	4,3
Romania	9,7	7,5
Estonia	9,3	4,4
Bulgaria	8,8	11,6
Belgium	8,6	7,5
Czechia	8,5	6,2
France*	8,3	5,6
Austria	7,6	6,1
Portugal	6,9	5,9
Italy	6,8	7,2

Luxembourg	6,7	5,1
Poland	4,7	5,7
Slovenia	3,6	4,1
Latvia	3,4	4,9
Ireland	3,2	2,5
Lithuania	3,2	2,7
Croatia	3,1	4,5
Cyprus	3,1	2,5
Hungary	3,0	2,5
Slovakia*	2,9	3,2
Malta	2,4	2,7

*2020 data
Source: Eurostat

Comparing data for young people living with their parents and indicators of housing cost overburden for young people, it is outstanding that in countries where a high proportion of young people live independently, i.e., leave their parent's house early, the picture of housing cost overburden for young people is less favorable. Early independence often comes at a cost, typically in terms of material sacrifices, when a significant share of young people's income is consumed by living in an independent home. However, early independence and housing cost overburdening in Sweden and Finland are not associated with such a high rate of income deprivation compared to Denmark and Netherlands.

In his analysis of the EU's 2020 housing cost overburdening data, Növekedés.hu author Ferenc Dániel Dajkó concludes that the overburdening indicator is determined by a formula with many factors. Part of the formula is the cost of utilities, which is itself very multifactorial, the general wage level, the level of unemployment, and the advantage of living in owner-occupied housing over paying rent permanently. (Dajkó, 2022) We would add that the cost of repayments on a home with a large mortgage can be an extra cost compared to living in a rented flat. Comparing the housing structure data, we see that Denmark and the Netherlands rank third and first in terms of the share of owner-occupied housing with mortgages, so there also seems to be a correlation between housing cost overburden and high rates of mortgages.

The data for Danish young people seems fairly surprising because it contrasts with the popular image of the Scandinavian countries known for their social welfare state. However, according to the material deprivation indicators[4], both Danish and Dutch young people rank below the EU average, albeit with poorer results than the Finns and Swedes, and also with worse scores compared to the adult age group. This also implies that the housing overcrowding

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[4] ttps://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_MDSD04__custom_4829847/default/table?lang=en

indicator does not automatically imply poverty, but increases the risk of poverty, with other factors (income, social policy) being able to compensate for the income-reducing effect of high housing costs to a different extent across countries.

Compared to the data on housing and rental prices in relation to income in the capital cities, the situation in the reviewed countries is that housing and renting prices are high relative to incomes, while housing costs are low in these countries.

The impact of the economic crises is most clearly visible in the trend line of the EU and euro area averages, because the graphs of the reviewed countries do not show a consistent picture at first glance. The EU and euro area averages demonstrate that the share of young people burdened by high housing costs did not increase during the financial crisis, but then showed a slight increase, i.e., a decaying trend, with one year delay. The deteriorating housing cost overburden rates in the EU peaked in 2014, the year following the sovereign debt crisis, and started to improve from 2015 onwards. The improving trends were broken by the COVID crisis across the EU.

Figure 16. Housing cost overburden rate, age group 20-29
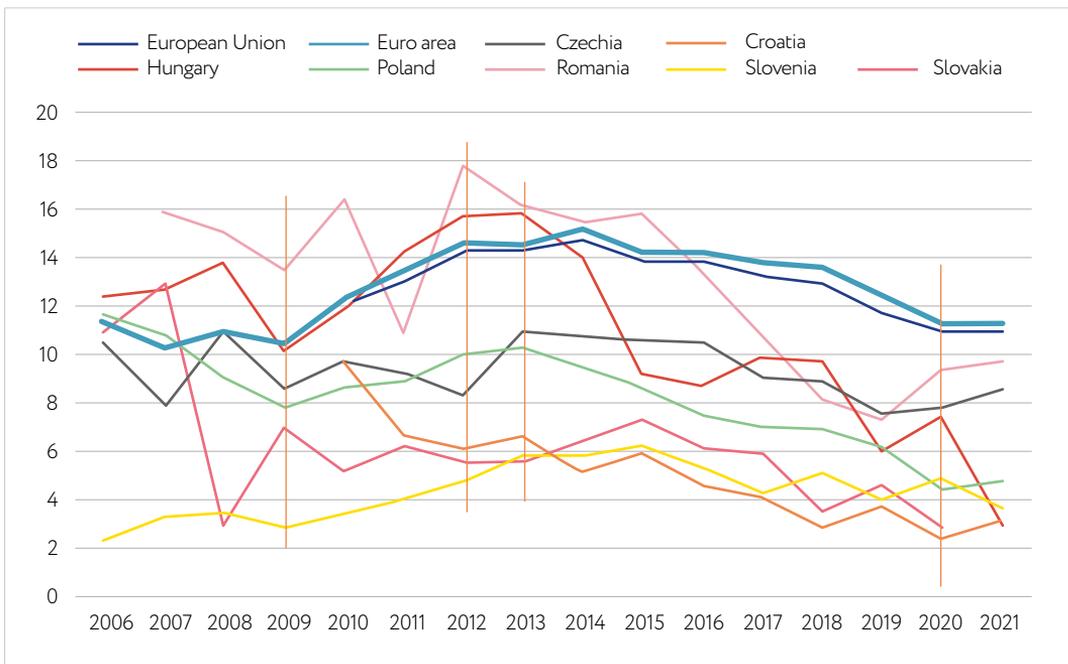
Source: Eurostat

The pattern of hypothetical crisis effects on the EU trend line can be seen with minor differences in the Hungarian and Polish, and with more differences in the Czech, Romanian and Slovenian trend lines. From 2010 onwards, the figures start to deteriorate in all these countries, with an increase in the ratio of young people who have to spend too much of their income on housing. This means that there is a one-year lag after the indicator starts to deteriorate following the

economic crises. What is different is that the EU has the highest proportion of young people overburdened by housing costs in 2014, but the countries surveyed show signs of improvement from 2014 onwards, one year earlier. This is because, as we can see from both GDP growth data and employment data, most of the reviewed countries were already over the crisis in 2013.

Croatian data are not available for the entire time span examined, while the Croatian time series presents a unique picture in that the steadily improving data for Croatian youth show almost no visual evidence of a sustained economic crisis in the country. It is worth comparing the Croatian data with the share of young people living with their parents, which shows a steady increase in the data series, with the exception of a short period of decline between 2013 and 2015. This means that in Croatia, with the exception of a short period, the decrease in the cost of housing for young people has been accompanied by a longer period of young people staying in their parent's house. The data on housing cost overburden for the other age groups and on leaving the parental home show that staying longer in the parental home is a strategy to improve the income situation of the young people involved.

The COVID crisis has been accompanied by a deterioration in housing cost overburden figures for Hungary, Romania and Slovenia, with only a modest deterioration in the Czech Republic in the year of the crisis. After the COVID crisis, only Hungary and Slovenia showed a rapid improvement. In Romania and Poland, only in the year after the COVID crisis did data start to increase (deteriorate) slightly.

In Hungary, the number of young people fell sharply in 2015, coinciding with a change in the regulatory environment, as the National Bank (MNB), which also acts as financial supervisor, introduced debt curb rules from the beginning of the year.[5]

In his analysis, Dajkó (2022) concluded that the overburden indicator is shaped by a formula with many factors. Part of the formula is the cost of utilities, which has in itself many factors: the general wage level, the level of unemployment, the share of own real estate property free of charge. In Greece, for example, the reason why so many households are overburdened with housing costs is that, earnings are relatively low by European standards, unemployment is particularly high, and so household incomes are weak, while on the cost side, average electricity prices and relatively high natural gas prices are combined with a medium share of renters and an average share of mortgage borrowers, and other utility costs such as waste disposal, water, sewerage, etc. are particularly high in Greece. In France, although the tenure structure of the housing stock is unfavorable and unemployment is high, these factors are offset by relatively low overheads and high wages. In many Western European countries, despite high wages, high utility bills and the fact that a large proportion of the population lives in rented accommodation or is paying off mortgages are problems. This is in contrast to Central Europe, where, despite low wages, a high proportion of private housing, lower mortgage borrowing and lower overheads protect households better.

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[5] https://www.mnb.hu/fogyasztovedelem/hirek-aktualitasok/elszamolasi-es-forintositasi-informaciok/forint-szerzodesek/adossagfek-szabalyozas-forint-szerzodesek

Conclusions

It became clear during the study that the chosen methodology would at most only allow us to outline the links between economic crises and certain aspects of youth housing, the most important of which are summarized here.

Economic crises affect young people's access to housing in different ways, rather than deterministically. Of the two indicators examined, there is a clear negative impact of economic crises on the housing cost overburden of young people, which is in line with prior and reasonable expectations. There were two correlations that could be discovered for which no prior expectations had been made:

(1) Specific movements, which varied from country to country, were also observed in high proportions.

(2) In a series of seven countries and EU averages examined in detail, it was frequent for the proportion of young people affected by housing cost overburdening to start to increase, i.e., deteriorate, after a one-year lag, while GDP figures were already increasing, albeit modestly.

We can formulate two main explanatory hypotheses for the specific movements of the countries. Our higher probability hypothesis is that the unique housing characteristics of each country, not examined in this study, have a specific effect and that the effects of crises are not deterministic but follow "local logics". These local logics can be traced back to different housing market policies across countries or to organic processes in local housing markets. Alternatively, there may be one or possibly more causal factors (indicators) that are not included in the analysis. The explanatory hypotheses should be investigated in further research.

The impact of the crises on the proportion of young people living with their parents and the estimated average age at which they left their parents' home appeared to be less definite. This indicator implies that the impact of long-term housing trends is as strong, and in some cases even stronger, than that impact of the economic crises. Whether the effect of the crisis or the long-term trend is stronger could be investigated by a correlation calculation in a future study. However, it would be even more interesting to investigate housing policies in the member states in order to better understand their role in shaping long-term housing trends and, in particular, housing trends among young people.

The research and analytical approach chosen for the study has proved less useful than we had previously expected for examining the relationship between economic crises and the housing situation of young people, especially in terms of finding either clear or truly meaningful novel relationships between economic crises and the housing indicators selected for analysis. Nevertheless, the data presented here provide a useful contribution to a better understanding of the housing situations and its changes faced by young citizens of Hungary, its neighboring countries, and V4 nations, all of which joined the European Union at roughly the same time, as well as the housing situation across the EU over the past decade and a half.

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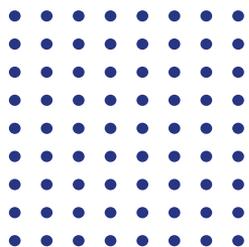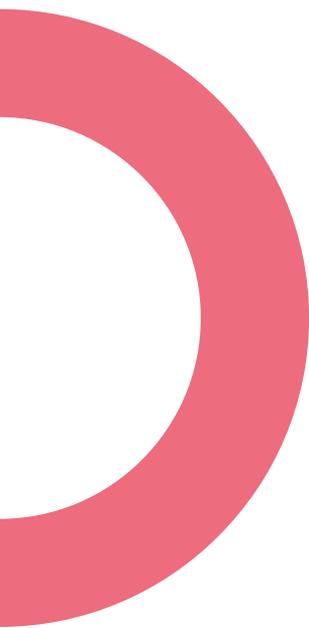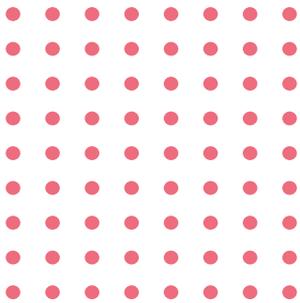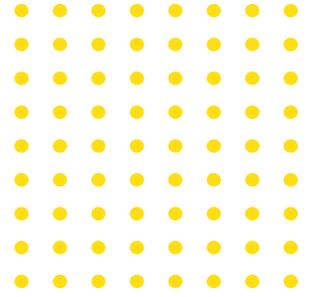
03

Young People in the Age of Uncertainty

Levente Székely

Introduction

Almost everyone has heard of the pyramid of human needs (Maslow, 1941). The model ranks human needs from basic physiological conditions to self-fulfillment, suggesting that our needs can be ordered by importance and that the degree to which they can be met is dependent upon one another. The satisfaction of needs at the lower levels of the hierarchy is - in general - a precondition for the satisfaction of needs at higher levels of the hierarchy. At the second level of Maslow's pyramid are the needs for security, physical protection, and predictability, which illustrate human nature's need for security and predictability.

Looking at what is happening today and the surrounding discourse, we can sense that man in the 21st century is living in an era of uncertainty. However, our world, and especially the so-called developed world, is relatively risk-free by historical standards. If we think about how safe the world was and how predictable the future was for people in the Middle Ages or earlier eras, we have to admit that we are in a much better position when we look at the state of medical science, justice, social care, etc. Yet our age is characterized by a palpable sense of frustration with the future, and even anxiety seems to be commonplace today. The WHO also lists anxiety as one of the most common mental disorders. But what explains its heightened presence in contemporary society?

Humanity's need for security and predictability focuses on the future; wanting to know what is going to happen so that we can react in a timely and appropriate way. Drawing conclusions of the future is not necessarily a prediction, especially if events are foreseeable. Forecasts of the near future are often very successful and regularly used in various production and financial planning methods. Polls on the outcome of elections, however, also draw on past and present processes. These estimates often do nothing more than extend the observed trends over the time axis and produce a future scenario. If, for example, sales have grown between 3 and 5 percent per year over the last few years, why would we think that we will not see the same next year? Sophisticated estimates use more complex models and a multi-perspective approach; in essence, however, they do nothing more than infer future events from past and present patterns[1].

There is little talk about the effectiveness of near-future estimates if the outcome is as expected. That is why no one praises pollsters when they get the results of elections right, and in most cases, they do indeed get the results right. In this context, it is also worth considering the World Economic Forum (WEF) report entitled *Global Risks Perception* 2020, which draws attention to environmental risks in particular, both in terms of the likelihood of risks and their impact. As for the likelihood of risks, the first five are environmental (extreme weather; climate action failure; natural disasters; biodiversity loss; human-made environmental disasters), while the next five are mixed, including technological, economic, social, and geopolitical crises (data fraud or theft;

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[1] See for example Rogers' (1995) theory on the diffusion of innovations.

cyberattacks; water crises; global governance failure; asset bubbles). With regard to their impact, the top five include three types of environmental crisis (climate action failure; biodiversity loss; extreme weather) and one each of a geopolitical and social nature (weapons of mass destruction; water crises). In the second half of the top ten are risks such as information infrastructure breakdown, natural disasters, cyberattacks, and human-made environmental disasters. Only the final one, infectious diseases, is classified as a social risk. Obviously, it is not surprising that the 2022 report weighs the risks slightly differently, citing pandemic-induced global threats in its very first sentence.

Seemingly unexpected events such as the coronavirus pandemic teach us that our ability to forecast is uncertain. Taleb (2007) describes these phenomena as black swans: firstly, they are very different from what we are used to, i.e. unexpected; secondly, their consequences are enormous; and thirdly, we find an explanation for them afterward, or at least think we could have foreseen them. Numerous examples illustrate the phenomenon of the black swan, from the global economic crisis to the emergence of the internet and Harry Potter to the collapse of the Soviet Union (Székely, 2020). The pandemic has also been interpreted by several disciplines in terms of 'black swans', from medicine (Antipova, 2020) to economics (Yarovaya et al, 2022; Hysa et al., 2022) to logistics (Weber, 2022). However, there are also counter-arguments in this respect (Inayatullah and Black, 2020).

We can agree that the coronavirus epidemic, or more recently the Russian-Ukrainian war, have profoundly disrupted the known world, and if not entirely unexpected, have caught society unprepared. Similar observations can be made about the security crisis that erupted after 11 September 2001, the financial crisis of 2008, or the migration crisis of 2015. It may seem an insoluble paradox that, while science has turned to the future and the information available has increased (cf. information society), we do not feel that our predictions about the future have become any more valid. Moreover, it may seem as if sudden crises are becoming more frequent, while predictable crises abound, ranging from simple economic collapses to paradigm shifts due to technology and climate change. In our work, we address crises arising from uncertainty and frustration about the future, with a focus on youth. Our work is based on two main sources of data: the Institute for Economics and Peace's Safety Perceptions Index 2023 report and the research that underpins it[2], and the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2023 and the research that supports it[3].

The Crisis of Security and Predictability
In a time of rising uncertainty, it is important to understand perceptions of safety... - so begins the introduction of the Global Peace Index. While the lack of security and predictability may stem from

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[2] The Safety Perceptions Index is based on a poll conducted by Gallup 2021, which surveyed more than 125,000 people in 121 countries. A representative sample of around 1,000 people per country was used, with the target group defined as the population aged 15 and over. Alongside the report, the Institute for Economics and Peace has made available a database of the survey data for use in our work.

[3] The Global Risks Report uses several empirical data sources. The main input comes from the Global Risks Perception Survey, which collected the perceptions of leaders on the evolution of global risks from more than 1,200 experts in academia, business, government, the international community, and civil society. It also draws on Executive Opinion Survey, which gathers insights from more than 12,000 business leaders in 121 countries. Finally, the report also draws on the views of other leading experts. The Global Risks Report lacks a representative approach, but its extensive data coverage and charts showing the distributions available outside the report make it suitable for further analysis.

specific experiences and may be based on real risks, the sense of insecurity may also be independent in part from lived (bad) experiences. We can limit our understanding of the security crisis to the absence of peace. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) has compiled the Global Peace Index (GPI), ranking 163 countries across 23 indicators, for the sixteenth time in 2023. The report shows that the average level of global peace has deteriorated by 0.3 percent. What makes the slight decline significant is that this is the eleventh time in the last decade and a half that peacefulness has fallen overall. Over the last fourteen years, the average country score has deteriorated by an average of 3.2 percent. Despite the overall decline, more countries improved (90 countries) than worsened (71 countries) compared to the previous value. Of the 23 GPI indicators, 13 recorded deteriorations and ten recorded improvements. The most severe deteriorations were recorded on the scale of terrorism, relations between neighboring countries, intensity of internal conflict, number of refugees and internally displaced persons, and political instability.

According to the GPI, Iceland is still the most peaceful country in the world, a position it has held since 2008. The Nordic nation is followed by New Zealand, Ireland, Denmark, and Austria. Afghanistan remained the least peaceful country in the world, followed by Yemen, Syria, Russia, and South Sudan. The five countries with the largest deterioration in peacefulness were Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Haiti, joined by Russia and Ukraine. Overall, Europe is the most peaceful region in the world, with seven of the ten most peaceful countries located on the continent.

The IEP has disclosed the raw data underpinning the research for the Global Peace Index, meaning that it is now possible to examine the results of both the 2019 and the 2021 surveys in more detail. The simple question on perceptions of security used in the survey asked respondents

Figure 1. Feel More, Less or About as Safe Compared With Five Years Ago
(N_{2019} = 154 195; N_{2021} = 122 411; %)
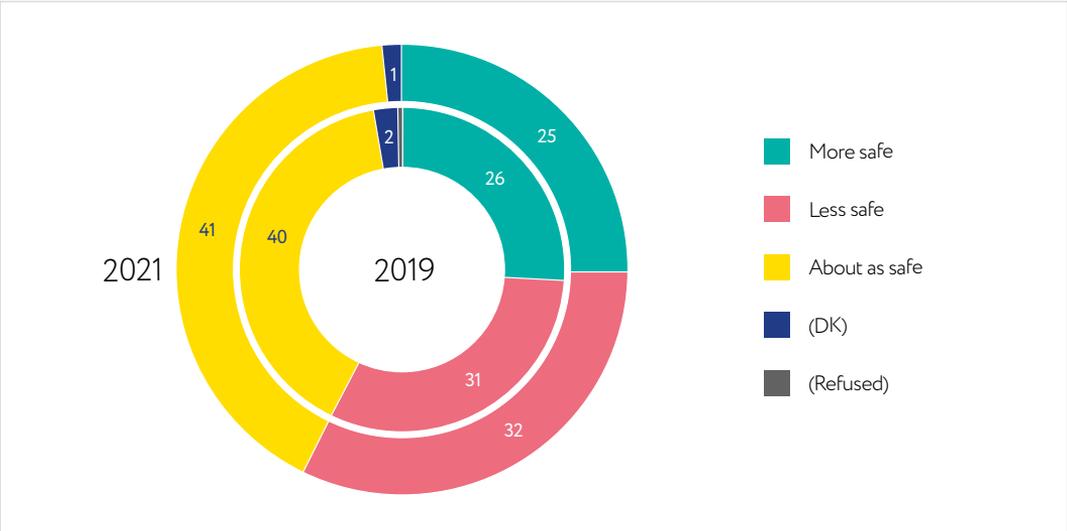
Source: Institute for Economics & Peace – Global Peace Index, 2023

how they felt about their security compared to five years ago. It shows that the majority (40-41 percent) feel the same as they did five years previously, with one in four (25-26 percent) reporting an improvement and one in three (31-32 percent) a deterioration. We also find that there is no significant difference between the data for the years under review (Figure 1).

However, when examined by age, we find differences that are similar between the two data collection dates. We observe that the younger we examine, the higher the proportion who say they feel safer. While one in four respondents in the whole survey group report feeling more secure than five years ago, a third of respondents aged 15-19 say this. By comparison, the same proportion of respondents aged 60 and over said the same thing. Looking at the distribution, we can also see that the proportion of respondents who feel less secure now than they did five years ago does not increase with age, but the number of those who feel the same now as they did five years ago (Table 1).

Table 1. Feel More, Less or About as Safe Compared With Five Years Ago
(N_{2019} = 154 195; N_{2021} = 122 411; %)

Perception of safety by age groups		15-19	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
2019	More safe	32	29	29	27	25	23	19
	Less safe	28	33	33	32	31	31	32
	About as safe	37	36	36	38	42	43	47
	(DK)	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
	(Refused)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2021	More safe	33	30	29	27	23	21	18
	Less safe	28	31	33	34	33	35	31
	About as safe	37	37	37	38	42	43	50
	(DK)	2	1	1	1	1	1	2
	(Refused)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace – Global Peace Index, 2023

Despite the fact that no significant differences can be seen in the perception of security, the *Global Peace Index 2023* report highlights a spectacular increase in the perception of risk between 2019 and 2021. The proportion of people who did not feel their daily security was at risk halved in the years surveyed and the proportion of people who felt at risk but could not say what posed the greatest threat to their security nearly doubled (Table 2). The proportion of people who could not say why they felt frustrated increased in 93 of the 118 countries surveyed. The increase in the feeling of not being specifically at risk was generally observed across society, affecting both men and women, respondents of different age groups, and educational levels.

In addition to the general trend, it was also observed that the proportion of unknown risks was higher in the youngest age group, with one in five 15-19-year-olds in 2021 feeling an unknown risk or not being able to express their fear of it in the questionnaire[4].

Table 2. Greatest Source of Risk to Safety in Your Daily Life

$(N_{2019} = 154\ 195;\ N_{2021} = 122\ 411;\ \%)$

No risks and unknowns risks by age groups	2019		2021	
	Nothing/No risks	Don't know	Nothing/No risks	Don't know
15-19	15	12	7	22
20-24	12	8	6	16
25-29	12	8	6	15
30-39	12	8	6	14
40-49	11	7	6	13
50-59	11	7	5	13
60+	14	8	7	15
Total	12	8	6	15

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace – Global Peace Index, 2023

The GPI's 2023 report identifies the increase in such ambiguous risks as the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, suggesting that its effect on the risk environment was indirect rather than direct. The indirect effects of a global event such as a pandemic are that it can contribute to increased fears related to personal security and create uncertainty by disrupting routines and established patterns of thinking. In the case of COVID-19, the lack of personal experience at the beginning of the pandemic, followed by the unknown duration of restrictions, increased the sense of unpredictability. The loneliness associated with legal or voluntary seclusion and isolation also increased a range of mental health problems, in particular anxiety and depression. Social media has also contributed to the increase in insecurity according to the GPI 2023 report. The pandemic also led to increased use of social networking sites, which helped to share vital information in times of isolation, but social media also served as a tool for misinformation, increasing feelings of stress and anxiety.

The lack of security and predictability can therefore be interpreted in terms of uncertainty. While talking about uncertainty is by no means a novelty, it came into focus after the Cold War (Black - Walsh, 2019) and can be interpreted in a variety of narratives. In the business world, following the global financial crisis, the VUCA model began to be used to describe the economic

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[4] This is why approaches that look at the issue from an artistic perspective can make sense (Guerra et al., 2020).

environment. The acronym refers to the initials of the words Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. Rab (2015), in his doctoral thesis on the natural history of digital culture, also discusses the uncertainty inherent in digital culture in his theoretical model[5]. Uncertainty is reflected in the proliferation of information infrastructures, with equipment formerly used in laboratories becoming everyday tools, conquering ever newer spaces. Partly in disagreement with the risk-society approach to uncertainty (cf. Beck, 1992), he stresses that, in contrast to the man of the information society, the man of the Middle Ages lived in a more vulnerable position not only in relation to society but also to nature (Rab, 2015).

The increase in the amount of information itself may be responsible for the development of frustration (cf. FOMO), and sensation-based news production and consumption may increase the sense of unpredictability. It is easy to see that if the information we receive confirms our prior knowledge, it has less news value. If, on the other hand, it is contradictory or even explicitly negative and threatening, we are more likely to pay attention to it. As a result of the competition for attention (cf. attention economy), sensationalist and negatively charged content is more likely to be disseminated, even if it happens not to be true. Thus, one may come across the news - to pick a more innocent example - that Einstein failed in mathematics (or physics), yet became one of the greatest scientists ever, etc. This shows that even fake information that is easy to verify in terms of credibility can achieve a high spreading success if its content and polarity match the sensation-seeking and negative content-centered attitude. Forward-looking information is also less subject to credibility requirements and can therefore spread even more easily. Data provided by Google shows that there is more focus on uncertainty and insecurity, with the prevalence of both concepts increasing significantly over the last 200 years (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The frequency of the phrases: uncertainty and insecurity
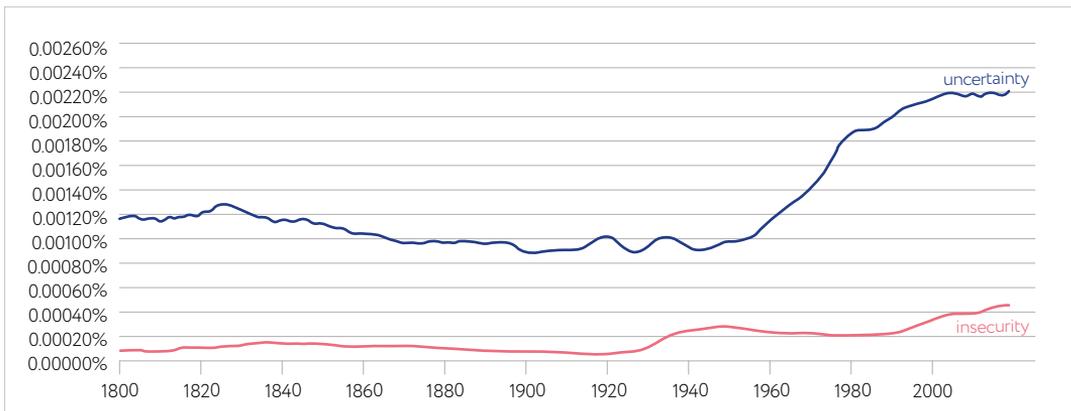
Source: Google, 2023

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[5] The properties of digital culture in the double circle are, in pairs: interactivity and interconnectivity, multitasking and micro-time exploitation, verbal literacy and disconnection from the source, identity and uncertainty, perception and experience, replicability and intangibility, permanence, and immediacy.

Experiences, Generational Frustrations

As we have seen above, the youngest age group has a higher proportion of unknown risks, with one in five 15-19-year-olds feeling an unknown threat in 2021. Looking more closely at the data and including the responses of those who could name the threat, we find that unknown threats are the number one security risk for 15-19-year-olds. This is usually specific for higher age groups. 20-24-year-olds consider violence and crime as the biggest threat to their daily lives, as do 25-29-year-olds. For 30-39-year-olds, traffic is the most perceived risk to their daily safety, while people aged 40 and above perceive health problems as the riskiest (Table 3).

Table 3. Greatest perceived threats to daily safety by age groups

(N_{2021} = 122 424; %)

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
Health	14	15	16	18	20	23	28	20
Transportation	13	15	16	16	17	15	13	15
Crime/violence	19	17	16	14	13	13	11	14
Financial - economical	8	11	12	13	13	11	7	11
Work and household accidents	2	3	4	4	4	3	3	3
Environment	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3
War/terrorism	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2
Water and food-related	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2
Politics	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
Technology	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Other	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	4
Nothing/No risks	7	6	6	6	6	5	7	6
Don't know	22	16	15	14	13	13	15	15
Refused	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace – Global Peace Index, 2023

The presence of unknown threats varies from country to country. In some countries, four-tenths of the population could not say what risks threaten their security (which of course does not mean that they feel safe). It is noticeable that the extreme prevalence of unknown risks is more apparent in Africa and Asia, while extremely low rates are typically observed in European and Arab countries[6]. The comparison of countries also shows that what is typical of society as a

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[6] The ten countries where „don't know" was the most common answer: Laos (43 percent), Mozambique (42 percent), Armenia (39 percent), Jamaica (38 percent), Bangladesh (36 percent), Congo Brazzaville (34 percent), Kazakhstan (33 percent), Bosnia Herzegovina (32 percent), Tajikistan (32 percent), Georgia (32 percent), and the ten countries with the least: Switzerland (2 percent), Venezuela (2 percent), Afghanistan (2 percent), Italy (2 percent), Lebanon (2 percent), Saudi Arabia (2 percent), United Kingdom (2 percent), Ireland (2 percent), United Arab Emirates (1 percent), Spain (1 percent).

whole is also largely reflected in the cohort of young people, i.e. in countries where high pro-portions of young people mentioned unknown threats, young people themselves tended to do so. Vice versa, where few mentioned such problems, young people themselves did so. However, there are countries where young people appear to be significantly more frustrated than the society in which they live. In 21 of the 120 countries surveyed, at least 5 percent more young people mentioned unknown threats than in society as a whole. Ten out of these 21 countries have higher than average uncertainty rates (more than 15 percent of those who mentioned unknown risks). These ten countries are therefore characterized by a higher-than-average fear of unknown risks, but their youth is more frustrated than the average society[7]. There are four countries with an average level of uncertainty and a significantly higher proportion of young people who are frustrated[8] and seven countries where society as a whole is more certain of the risks than its youth[9].

The poll, which forms the basis of the *Global Peace Index*, also looked at specific negative experiences over the past two years. Questions asked whether the respondent or someone they knew had suffered harm in various ways. Typically, personally experienced harm is less frequent, about half to a third of that experienced by acquaintances. The most common injury is related to traffic accidents (32 percent), followed by mental health problems (25 percent and damage caused by extreme weather (26 percent) (Figure 3). Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of respondents have experienced an injury in one of the seven aspects listed, and one-tenth of them can report an injury in at least five different areas.

Figure 3. Experienced harm in past two years (N_{2021} = 125 911; %)
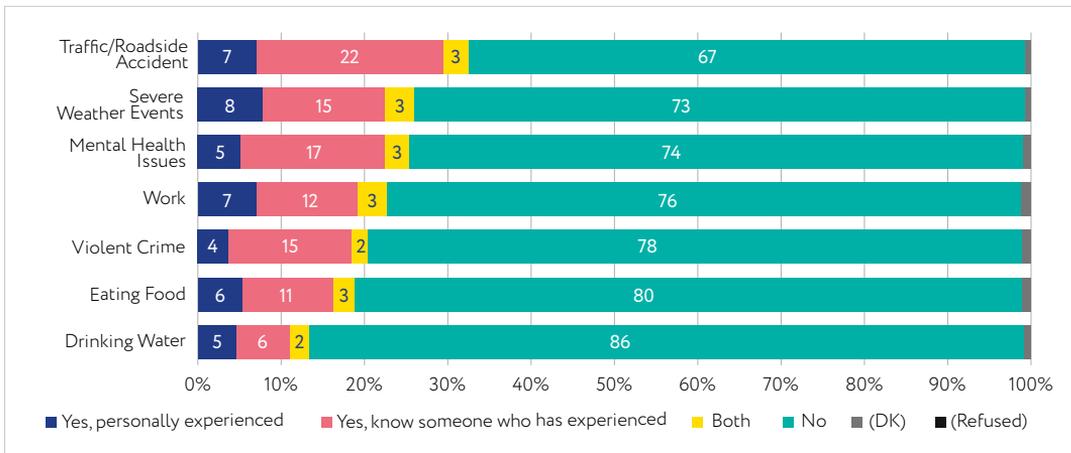
Source: Institute for Economics & Peace – Global Peace Index, 2023

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[7] These countries are: Congo Brazzaville, Bosnia Herzegovina, Tajikistan, El Salvador, Romania, Nicaragua, Cyprus, Panama, Malaysia, Croatia.

[8] These countries are: Brazil, Norway, Uruguay, Portugal.

[9] These countries are: Hungary, Cambodia, Thailand, Denmark, South Korea, New Zealand, Spain.

Worrying about potential harm is more prevalent in society than harm experienced directly or indirectly. Overall, less than a tenth of respondents (8 percent) are not worried about any of the potential hazards listed, but there are similarly few who are worried about all (9 percent). On average, respondents are worried by about 3 to 4 out of 7 potential harms. Traffic accidents are the most worrisome for respondents, with four-tenths of respondents expressing concern (39 percent) and a further third moderately frustrated (35 percent). The second most worrisome is weather-related harm, with just over two-thirds of respondents concerned (68 percent) and a similar level of concern is perceivable regarding crime-related harm (64 percent) (Figure 4). Comparing the actual order of experience with the order of concerns, we observe that, for example, the level of concern about victimization (crime) is prominent.

Figure 4. Worried about serious harm (N_{2021} = 125 911; %)
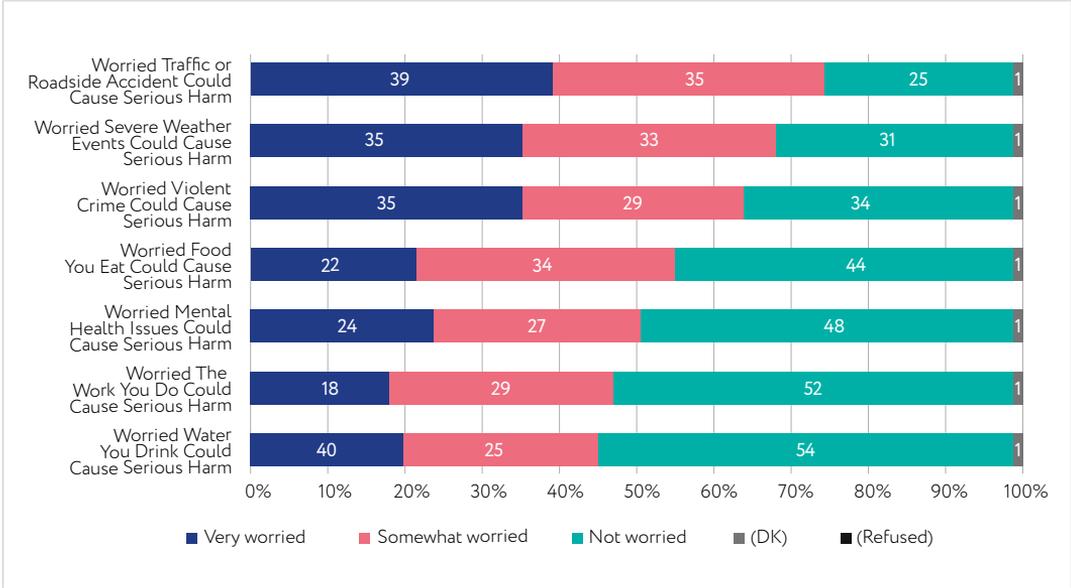
Source: Institute for Economics & Peace – Global Peace Index, 2023

The Global Peace Index 2023 report highlights that the level of experience and concern about direct harm declines steadily with age. According to the results of the survey that informed the report, respondents aged 15-29 years were the most likely to report a recent negative experience and the youngest to be the most concerned, while those aged 60 and over were the least likely to experience harm or be concerned by it (Table 4).

Table 4. Experience and worry about harms (N_{2021} = 125 911; means)

	Experienced harm	Worry about
15-19	1.8	3.8
20-24	1.9	4.0
25-29	1.9	4.0
30-39	1.8	4.0
40-49	1.6	4.0
50-59	1.5	3.9
60+	1.1	3.3
Total	1.6	3.8

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace – Global Peace Index, 2023

The authors of the report explain the age gap by the fact that older people are trying to maximize their well-being in the limited time they think they have left. However, older people are also more prone to higher levels of worry compared to their more recent experience. It was observed that people aged 60 and older had the lowest absolute level of worry (on average 1.1 worried about harm directly or through people they know), but the highest level of worry relative to their own experience of harm (on average 3.3 worried about things), while the difference between the experience of harm and frustration was lowest for young people[10].

Looking at the details, significant differences in the nature of the damage events experienced become apparent. Young people differ from their seniors not only in the frequency of damage experienced but also in the nature of the damage. If we rank the different types of harm

Table 5. Experienced harms (N_{2021} = 125 911; %)

Experienced harms by age groups	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
Traffic/roadside accident	39	41	39	36	31	29	20	33
Severe weather events	26	28	29	28	27	26	20	26
Mental health issues	26	28	28	26	26	25	22	25
Work	22	26	27	26	24	22	14	23
Violent crime	26	27	26	23	19	18	12	21
Eating food	24	24	22	21	18	17	12	19
Drinking water	16	17	16	15	13	12	8	13

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace – Global Peace Index, 2023

[10] On average, 15-29-year-olds have experienced 1.8-1.9 direct or indirect harms and are worried about 3.8-4.0 potential harms on average. It can be clearly seen that while the concern of 15-29-year-olds is twice as high as the concern of experienced harm, the rate is three times higher for the 60 years and older group.

experienced by young people, violent crime comes first. The youngest (15-19-year-olds) stand out for violent crime and food-related harm, otherwise, 20-year-olds are the most frequent victims of harm, either directly or indirectly (Table 5)

The distribution of concerns by age group shows that it is not the youngest, i.e. 15-19 year-olds, who are most concerned, but those in the 20-40 age group. Compared to the average, 15-19-year-olds are more concerned about traffic accidents and violent crime. 20-24-year-olds are also more concerned about their mental health than the average. For 25-29-year-olds, concern about traffic accidents and work-related injuries is higher. 30-39-year-olds also have a higher proportion of worries about their job, but food and water also show higher levels of concern (Table 6)..

Table 6. Worried about serious harm (N_{2021} = 125 911; %)

Worried ... could cause serious harm by age groups	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
Traffic or Roadside Accident	77	78	77	76	74	73	67	74
Severe Weather Events	67	69	68	68	69	70	67	68
Violent Crime	67	69	66	65	64	63	57	64
Food You Eat	51	56	56	59	58	57	48	55
Mental Health Issues	52	55	52	52	51	50	46	51
The Work You Do	45	48	49	50	48	45	38	47
Water You Drink	44	48	47	49	47	45	36	45

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace – Global Peace Index, 2023

A comparison of the damage experienced and the level of concern shows that, on the one hand, the level of concern increases with age and, on the other hand, the extent to which this occurs varies. For mental health, there are no significant differences by age group, while for food, water, and violent crime, the concern is roughly twice as strong among people aged 60 and over as among young people.

Reading the *Global Risks Report* reveals striking contradictions, with a different perception of security threats among members of society as a whole than among leaders. Less than a fifth of professionals surveyed expect at least some stability in the short term, but less than half expect stability in the longer term. The online platform linked to the report allows data to be requested by different individual parameters, which can also be used to see how professionals under 30 years of age feel about the same issue. The data show that young professionals are slightly more optimistic for both time horizons, although their overall outlook is also rather negative (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Short- and long-term global outlook (%)

		Progressive tipping points and persistent crises leading to catastrophic outcomes	Consistently volatile across economies and industries with multiple shocks accentuating divergent trajectories	Slightly volatile with occasional localised surprises	Limited volatility with relative stability	Renewed stability with a revival of global resilience
2 years	Total	13	69	14	2	2
2 years	Under 30	19	61	13	5	2
10 years	Total	20	34	26	11	9
10 years	Under 30	19	30	21	11	19

■ Progressive tipping points and persistent crises leading to catastrophic outcomes
■ Consistently volatile across economies and industries with multiple shocks accentuating divergent trajectories
■ Slightly volatile with occasional localised surprises
■ Limited volatility with relative stability
■ Renewed stability with a revival of global resilience

Source: World Economic Forum – Global Risks Report, 2023

Global Risks Report experts were asked to estimate future risks over a two-year and a ten-year time horizon. Responses showed that at least half of the top ten risks are related to the state of the environment, for both short-term and long-term estimates. The first four elements of the 10-year time horizon estimate relate to the state of the environment, indicating that professionals perceive environmental problems as a priority. Social problems also feature prominently in the top ten, but risks of a technological and geopolitical nature also appear. The elements listed by the report as economic problems do not feature in the top ten (Table 7).

Table 7. Global risks ranked by severity over the short and long term

2 years	10 years
1. Cost-of-living crisis	1. Failure to mitigate climate change
2. Natural disasters and extreme weather events	2. Failure of climate-change adaptation
3. Geoeconomic confrontation	3. Natural disasters and extreme weather events
4. Failure to mitigate climate change	4. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
5. Erosion of social cohesion and societal polarization	5. Large-scale involuntary migration
6. Large-scale environmental damage incidents	6. Natural resource crises

7. Failure of climate change adaptation	7. Erosion of social cohesion and societal polarization
8. Widespread cybercrime and cyber insecurity	8. Widespread cybercrime and cyber insecurity
9. Natural resource crises	9. Geoeconomic confrontation
10. Large-scale involuntary migration	10. Large-scale environmental damage incidents

Source: World Economic Forum – Global Risks Report, 2023

The top ten risks cited by professionals under 30 are fairly similar to those for the target group as a whole, but there are differences. Environmental risks also dominate both the short-term and the long-term top ten. However, the cost-of-living crisis is not the most important short-term risk for young professionals and is even overtaken by migration risks. In the short term, geopolitical risks are not among the most important risks for professionals under 30, nor are they in the top ten in the long term. There are also no technological risks in the short term, and economic risks are not in the top ten for both time horizons. The top ten for young professionals include more social risks, with employment crises and misinformation and disinformation being new items. Consequently, mental health concerns are also included in the short and long-term risks (Table 8).

Table 8. Global risks ranked by severity over the short and long term by respondents under 30

2 years	10 years
1. Natural disasters and extreme weather events	1. Failure of climate-change adaptation
2. Failure to mitigate climate change	2. Failure to mitigate climate change
3. Large-scale involuntary migration	3. Large-scale involuntary migration
4. Cost-of-living crisis	4. Natural disasters and extreme weather events
5. Failure of climate-change adaptation	5. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
6. Natural resource crises	6. Misinformation and disinformation
7. Large-scale environmental damage incidents	7. Large-scale environmental damage incidents
8. Severe mental health deterioration	8. Widespread cybercrime and cyber insecurity
9. Geoeconomic confrontation	9. Erosion of social cohesion and societal polarization
10. Employment crises	10. Severe mental health deterioration

Source: World Economic Forum – Global Risks Report, 2023

Summary and Outlook

In this paper, we have reviewed how insecurity and unpredictability are generally perceived in society and how young people or professionals think about them. The two data sources for our analysis were the *Safety Perceptions Index 2023* and the Global Risks Report 2023 and related research data. In summary, frustration with the future has increased in society in recent times, with a typical increase in fear of unknown harm across all social groups. Frustration with unknown risks is particularly pronounced among young people, with some countries showing a marked difference between the frustration levels of society as a whole and those of young people. Age is also a determinant of differences in the experience of, and concerns about, adverse events. Youth are found to be exposed to a higher proportion of harmful events and to be more concerned about them, with a high proportion of violent crime, traffic accidents, adverse weather events, and mental health risks. The expert risk analysis highlights primarily environmental risks, followed by social risks, but mental health concerns are also included among the short-term and long-term risks listed by young professionals. Mental health problems are experienced and worried about in higher proportions in younger age groups, which, combined with concern about unknown future harm events, can lead to serious generational frustration, a kind of *generational uncertainty*.

The international literature on youth has dealt with the challenges of uncertainty in detail, especially in the transition discourse, but also the developmental psychology starting point has produced notable results on this issue, both theoretical and empirical. Uncertainty as a generational characteristic is particularly addressed by the theory of the new silent generation. Since its inception, the large-scale youth research in Hungary that underpinned this theory has examined young people's reflections on the problems of their generation. Over the past decade, the problems identified (labeled) by young people have changed significantly. Based on the data series of the last two decades, an increase in the importance of uncertainty - unpredictability - in the generational self-reflection of young people in Hungary can be clearly identified.

Finally, two questions are worth considering. Firstly, how uncertain is the future in reality, can we believe the forecasts? On the other hand, what is it that seems certain in the face of uncertainty?

The objective limit to the certainty of our expectations for the future is that predictions change the future. If the economic analysis concludes that the company's profits will fall in the coming period due to changing consumption patterns, management will certainly not remain inactive but will change, for example, the product portfolio, suppliers, technology, etc., and reduce the actual decline or even increase profits. Or if, for example, the polls show that a particular candidate is doing badly because fewer people know him, the campaign team will switch up a gear, which may result in the candidate winning after all. Likewise, if experts warn of the risk of an epidemic, authorities will take measures to prevent it or reduce its impact. In such cases, it would be difficult to decide whether the predictions were wrong because the company was still profitable, the candidate still won and there was no epidemic, or whether these events did not occur because the predictions were correct and the necessary measures were taken to prevent them. In an increasingly complex and information-rich world, all these factors can increase the sense of uncertainty and unpredictability.

The futures of the developed world are mostly concerned with the expected state of society, which is moving towards ever greater urbanization. The last century has seen rapid urban development and population growth, which paints a fundamentally urban future, characterized by a technology-intensive environment. For society to survive, it is essential for individuals to form a community, and for social cooperation to exist. Cooperation itself has many prerequisites, but there are three essential areas for thinking about the future. The first is information and knowledge, the second is trust, and the third is the transformation of the power structure (Székely, 2020).

Information and knowledge are not just about dealing with the future but also include knowledge about the recent past. The valorization of information, the term information society itself, dates back decades (Z. Karvalics, 2007), as does the term knowledge society. The accumulation of information and the valorization of knowledge has not stopped since then; rather, it is on the increase. We have to recognize that in a world in which information is growing at such a rate, the development of human skills is essential to thriving, and the means to do this is through artificial intelligence. So-called narrow artificial intelligence is used in our everyday lives, often without us realizing it, and in the society of the future, artificial intelligence will play a much bigger role than it does today, which could fundamentally change the way society works. It can play a role in our decisions in many areas, but not by forcing us to do something we don't want to do - at least not yet - but by simply filtering information to make our decisions easier. In a sense, we have already handed over the decision to algorithms when we accept that they will pre-screen our cultural consumption, our potential friends, and our potential romantic partners. For example, when we edit content for greater popularity, measured in likes, or time a post so that it is liked by the algorithm, we are in effect bowing to the power of limited artificial intelligence. The decision is still ours, but it is reduced to a mere token.

A key issue is also the transformation of trust, which means that trust is shifting to technology, leading to a decline in trust in institutions and organizations, and ultimately a decline in trust in the rest of society. Empirical evidence consistently reports a decline in trust in institutions and organizations, and less trust means that parties, churches, and trade unions, but also traditional social institutions such as the family are under strong pressure (Kiss-Kozma, 2022). Nevertheless, a substantial transformation of the trust structure has already taken place, with the proliferation of information increasing the credibility of technology vis-à-vis humans. Humans cannot remember everything, and cannot tell everything (trust can build on this), but the Internet, as we know, does not forget and knows everything. As a self-exciting effect, trust in technology makes us rely on it more and more, and as a consequence, we trust it even more (Székely, 2020).

The third key area is the transformation of the power structure, which is fundamentally neither coercive nor punitive like previous regimes, but rather empowering and encouraging. External physical and psychological constraints are not replaced by merely internalized rules with the advent of the new power technology, but the need to satisfy desires without limits bends people in the desired direction. Obeying the rules of algorithms can serve, and perhaps most often does serve, the goals of community, self-esteem, and self-fulfillment. In a world built on the logic of, for example, blockchain technology, honesty alone is rewarding behavior (Székely, 2020).

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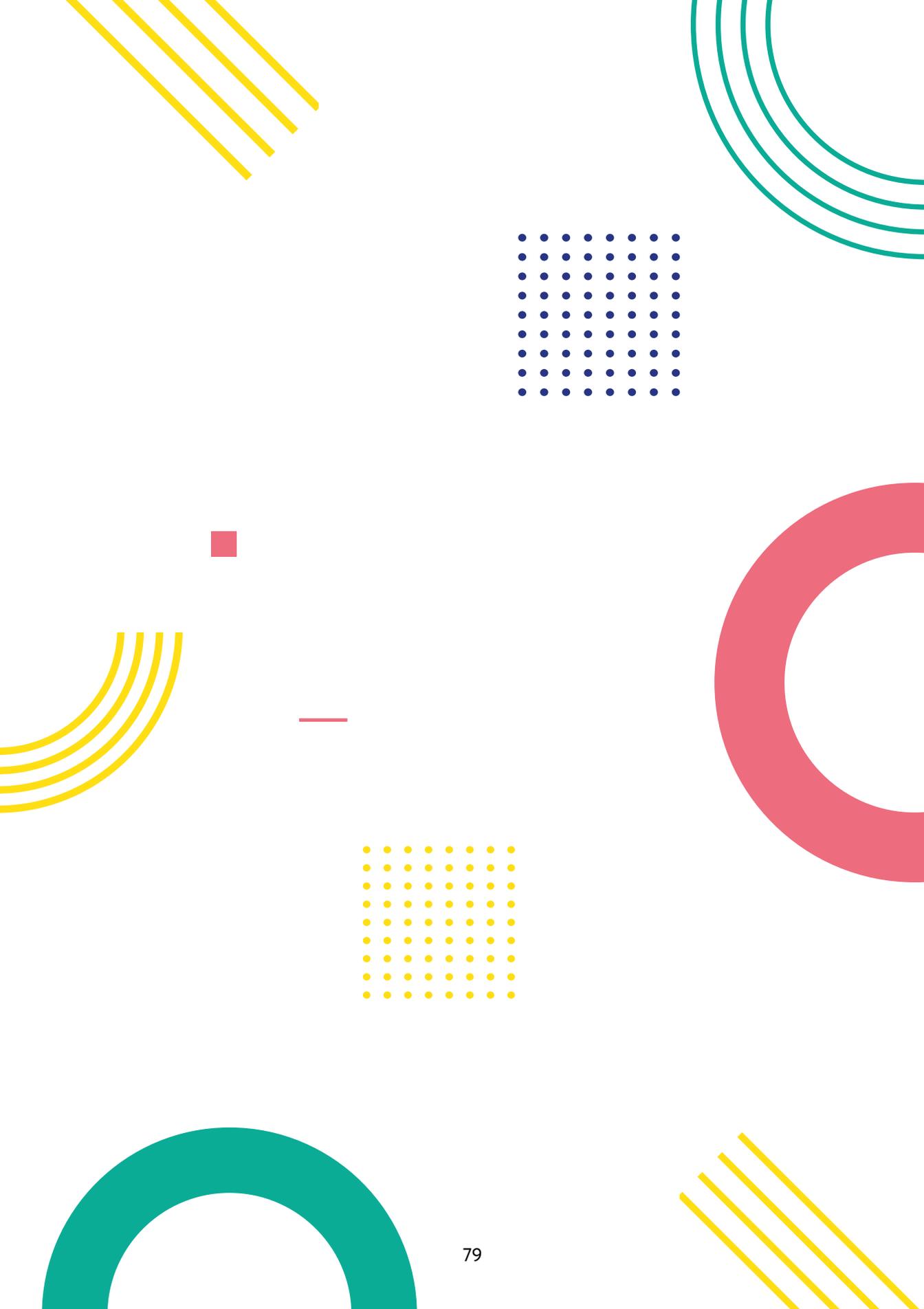
04

Youth (Work) and the Pandemic: Challenges and Responses in Three Central-Eastern European Countries

András Déri – Barnabás Gulyás – Tamar Makharadze – Ilona-Evelyn Rannala

Introduction

The COVID-19 epidemic and the policy responses to it have been the focus of many branches of social sciences, as they have fundamentally changed what previously seemed to be default phenomena of social coexistence, community norms and customs. In many areas of life, normality has been temporarily or permanently challenged and new solutions have emerged that were previously not widespread. This paper focuses on the impact of the pandemic situation on the community life and mental health of young people from a youth work perspective, showing three mosaics of the situation of young people and the responses of youth work and youth policy.

Our study focuses on young people in three post-Soviet countries. Hungary has a population of 9.7 million people. Youth work in Hungary can be characterized as being in a state of continuous discontinuity, and the infrastructure and context of youth work very much fits this discontinuity (Oross, 2015). The relatively weak position of youth work is also related to the low recognition of non-formal learning (Oross, 2016). While university level-education for youth workers exists (the youth specialization of the BA program in community organization), public infrastructure mostly exists at the local level on an ad-hoc basis, without binding regulation and normative funding. This has led to huge differences in the institutionalization of local youth work. In Hungary, state restrictions on citizens' rights reached an unusually high level (Stumpf, 2020) during the pandemic period.

Estonia is a country with a population of 1.3 million people, where, after the occupation by the Soviet Union and regaining independence in 1991, rapid changes took place and many opportunities opened up – including for the development of youth work. Youth work in Estonia is framed legally within the Youth Work Act (1999, 2010) and has been supported by the Occupational Standard of Youth Workers since 2006. Formal higher education in the field of youth work and various non-formal training options outside academia are voluntary and it is possible to enter the profession without prior qualification. Youth workers work in youth centers, youth organizations, youth camps, etc. (Käger, Kivistik, Pertsjonok and Tatar, 2017).

Georgia has a population of 3.7 million people, and has the lowest GDP per capita of the examined three countries. In Georgia, "for the first two decades of independence, youth was not a policy priority" (Ignatovih, Fras and Basarab 2020:47), While more conscious policy planning has been visible since 2010, policy awareness is still considered low, the legal definition of youth work is lacking, and there is no formal youth work education. "The problem also involves

scarcity of funding allocated to youth work from the side of the state, which are not sufficient for long-term projects and only cover single activities" (Dolidze, 2021:36).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many changes took place that affected everyone, including young people. More has been discussed about how education and learning were challenged and how families struggled, but less is known about how youth work changed and how youth workers perceived young people and their needs in the midst of pandemic (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). This is a particularly relevant issue as the primary space for youth work is leisure, and a central factor in the impact of the pandemic on young people is the drastic reduction of leisure opportunities. In general, this stage of life is a fascinating, vibrant period, on which almost every aspect of adult life is based. In this period of life, the defining characteristic of youth, *time to be used freely,* is abundant. Also due to the extended time spent in education, it is supposed to be the time moratorium (Zinnecker, 1995) in which the dominant characteristic of youth culture is "having a good time" (Parsons, 1942:606). It is precisely this trait, branded irresponsibility by Parsons, that has been fundamentally challenged by the pandemic situation.

The paper explores the role of youth work based on three approaches from the three countries examined to illustrate the theoretical relevance. While the results of a qualitative research conducted with young people from Hungary are presented in order to make the impact of the pandemic and lockdowns on young people more tangible and explorable, research with youth workers and youth professionals from Estonia and Georgia is used to show possible responses youth of work to the challenges faced. In the following, we will first summarize the general pandemic characteristics of youth and youth work; then, we will present the three research mosaics, and finally, some summarizing conclusions will be drawn.

Young people and the pandemic

Andrea Szabó and András Déri (2022) have introduced the term *'asteroid effect'* to refer to the complex effects of the pandemic, arguing that it has potential generation-forming force. The COVID-19 pandemic is a cataclysmic external shock, and the metaphor of an asteroid refers to a social cataclysm that alters the previous course of the world, changing the previous conditions of life. However, the changing 'trajectory' does not necessarily unify the diversity of social positions. The authors believe that "as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic period, the youth may develop a collective personality rooted in collective generational trauma. Expanding on the idea of the asteroid effect, we can observe a change in trajectory on macro, meso and micro-levels." (Szabó and Déri, 2022:322) Whether the crises (now supplemented by the effects of the war situation) can be considered truly generation-forming will be understood primarily in retrospect. However, the trajectory shift is evident in many cases, and it is perhaps the micro-level effects that are most visible.

The pandemic overturned social conventions, suspended normality in the cultural sense, and at the same time it may have triggered traumatic processes (e.g. loneliness, anxiety, social tension, intensification of other anomic processes, exacerbation of the effects of social inequality) with long-term effects on society as a whole, and in many respects particularly on young people.

The effects of the pandemic can be considered at different levels (Örkény, 2020). From the perspective of youth work practice, the micro-level is perhaps the most obvious to examine, as mental health, interpersonal issues and lifestyle changes strongly influence the direct activities of the youth profession. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the context of macro-level trends: the significant deterioration in the situation of marginalized groups. "Young people with disabilities; those experiencing poverty or homelessness; asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrant youth; and diverse genders and sexualities experience compounded negative consequences of the pandemic in their day-to-day struggles." (RAY, 2021:2)

The impact of pandemic closures on mental health is important to consider, as youth work can play a key role in building well-integrated communities. However, this essential role is difficult to justify especially in countries where the youth work architecture is less developed (Killakoski, 2018). The lives of young people have been radically affected by lockdowns, closures of community spaces and restrictions on social interaction. There is a constantly growing literature on the impact of the pandemic on young people (Power et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2020). The pandemic has created a number of challenges that have affected the mental health of young people, one of the most significant being the disruption of education. School closures, remote learning, and interruptions of exams have led to high levels of stress, anxiety and depression among young people. Studies also found (see e.g. Kishida et al. 2021) that school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic were associated with an increased risk of depression and anxiety among young people. Another factor affecting young people's mental health during the pandemic has been the economic impact. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in job losses and financial insecurity for many families, which can lead to increased stress and anxiety among young people. A study by Smyth and Murray (2023) found that young people from low-income families were at a higher risk of developing anxiety and depression during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on young people's social lives. Restrictions on social gatherings, travel and other activities have led to increased social isolation and loneliness, which can have a negative impact on mental health. Research indicates that young people experienced feelings of loneliness and social disconnection as a result of school closures, cancelled events and restrictions on socializing with peers (Farrell et al., 2023). Other evidence points that young people experienced a sense of disconnection from their social networks, which contributed to feelings of loneliness and isolation (see e.g. EACEA, 2022).

However, longitudinal studies of young people's mental health seem to be tempering the bleak picture suggested by cross-sectional studies. A 2022 meta-analysis of the available international longitudinal studies found that they "paint a more nuanced picture than some cross-sectional studies from the early stages of the pandemic, though there is reason to believe that there could be long-term impacts on youth mental health, especially in more vulnerable youth" (Chadi, Ryan and Geoffroy, 2022). That said, both longitudinal and cross-sectional data seem to clearly indicate that children and young people were particularly affected by depressive symptoms (see e.g. Tang et al., 2021), although these were also more prevalent among these age

groups before the pandemic. On the other hand, "[p]hysical exercise, access to entertainment, positive family relationships, and social support were associated with better mental health outcomes in several studies" (Samji et al., 2021:10).

In summary, while the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's mental health is complex and varied, there is evidence to suggest that some vulnerable groups may be more adversely affected in the long term. A a study by Loades et al. (2020) found that young people with pre-existing mental health conditions experienced an increase in symptoms during the pandemic, and that those with higher levels of anxiety and depression at the start of the pandemic were more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes in the long term. Similarly, a study by Patrick et al. (2021) found that young people from low-income families experienced more negative mental health outcomes during the pandemic than those from higher-income families.

Qualitative studies of the epidemiological situation report similar findings. An important lesson may be that the aspect of physical proximity has become valorized in community and friendship relations (Larivière-Bastien et al. 2022), as young people reported feeling disconnected from their peers and many experienced a loss of social support networks (Schmidt et al. 2022). An online focus group study in Hungary in 2020 also identified a "lack of interpersonal relationships and community itself". For graduating secondary school students, the lack of the symbolic closure of studies was also interpreted as a major loss (Sztáray Kézdi and Szvetelszky, 2021:99). In addition, studies found that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the use of technology and social media among young people. For example, a study conducted in Portugal found that young people were using social media more frequently during the pandemic, but also experienced increased levels of cyberbullying and social comparison (António et al., 2023). Similarly, studies indicate that young people were using technology to stay connected with friends and family during the pandemic, but were also experiencing increased levels of screen time and decreased physical activity (Marciano et al., 2022).

The studies also highlighted the importance of coping strategies and social support in promoting resilience and mitigating the negative impact of the pandemic on young people's mental health. For example, a study conducted in Canada found that coping strategies, such as exercise and creative activities, were helpful strategies to manage stress and anxiety (Robillard et al., 2020). The study also found that, besides individual practices including proper sleep cycles, social support from family and friends was important in promoting resilience and reducing feelings of isolation.

The pandemic has had a range of other (though connected) effects too that relate to social inequalities, schooling and labor market perspectives. Closures have disrupted young people's social lives and academic progress as well. School closures have resulted in learning loss, which is likely to have long-term consequences on students' academic achievement and future opportunities (Dubey et al., 2021). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with preexisting learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable to the disruption in education (Viner et al., 2021). The pandemic has also created challenges for young people

transitioning into the workforce or pursuing higher education, leading to financial instability and uncertainty about their future (OECD, 2020). In such a context, youth work can play an essential role. Examples of youth organizations' successful transition to the new circumstances (such like that presented by Shaw et al., 2022) show how youth work can play a crucial role in helping young people meet the challenges posed by the pandemic. Youth work can provide young people with the support and guidance they need to cope with the changes. Among other things, youth work can provide opportunities for young people to connect with others and form meaningful relationships, which can help to combat the isolation and loneliness caused by the pandemic.

Youth Work in the Context of the Pandemic

How the pandemic overturned everything was certainly a shock for youth workers. Youth work, and therefore its practice, is very diverse, although it has developed significantly in the last decade. The stakeholders of youth work practice, research and policy meet every five years at events called European Youth Work Conventions. The last Convention was held online due to the pandemic, but still it has engaged about 1,000 participants from about 50 countries[1]. The final declaration of the Convention *(Signposts for the Future)* summarizes the so-called Bonn Process, an ambitious plan that points the way forward for the development of youth work in Europe. It invites the community of practice in youth work for a joint effort in building and developing youth work that values diversity while enhancing quality and professionalism. If political recognition in all EU member states is provided for the implementation of the Bonn Process, the result could be a better built and designed youth work environment (or its foundations), and thus ultimately a "better prepared" professional field compared to when the pandemic struck.

The pandemic, as the need is expressed in the declaration, has had a significant impact on youth work, forcing a significant segment of it into the online sphere. Digital youth work has therefore often resulted in activities being carried out online in a narrow sense. Even in countries where the recognition of youth work was considerable, this posed serious problems, as highlighted by the conclusions of a research report from Ireland in 2021: "Although there is vast potential, much of this is yet untapped because of capacity issues in terms of skills and digital literacy, organizational infrastructure as well as wider structural issues such as the digital divide, and inadequate rural connectivity." (Erwin and Thompson, 2021:87). A striking and presumably generalizable finding of the research was that the vast majority of youth organizations "experienced a decrease in the numbers of young people engaging with their services" (Erwin and Thompson, 2021:9). The success of digital youth work also depended on how much previous experience youth organizations had in this field: "Organizations that

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[1] see The Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, https://www.bonn-process.net/downloads/publications/42/fc160567b9e55215344553792e5b3e0c/EYWC2020%20-%20Factsheet%20Final%20Declaration.pdf (retrieved on 15.01.2023)

started focusing on digital youth work during the first lockdown, see this as purely an online operation, regardless of the theme, activity, or target group. Organizations that have been focusing on digital youth work for some time, often have a clear focus and idea that digital youth work is used to strengthen 'regular' youth work or that it gives an additional dimension to it" (Vermiere et al., 2022:14).

Perhaps the most comprehensive research on this topic was a 2020/2021 survey by the RAY research team, when 1.097 youth workers and youth leaders were surveyed across the Erasmus+ program countries (RAY, 2022). The findings were striking but not surprising: the vast majority of youth workers (70.1 percent) reported that the pandemic had a major impact on their work. Activities and methods of youth work changed fundamentally, while only a quarter of respondents reported a moderate or major change in principles. The most common youth work responses to the pandemic were to offer group chats and online group activities and to share practical advice. Notably, the objective of tackling fake news became much more central in 2021 compared to 2020 (RAY, 2022).

The role and importance of youth work is therefore unquestionable, but the means and possibilities of implementing are highly dependent on the institutional context. Three cross-sections of youth work and the youth sector are presented below. The first is Georgia, where we illustrate the relevance of the macro-level approach and the responses of youth workers to it. In the case of Hungary, we present a qualitative study of young people in a rural municipality with a strong institutional framework for youth work to illustrate the typical problem map of young people, while in Estonia we specifically present the responses of the youth profession to the pandemic situation.

Research Methodology

In this paper, three different and partly overlapping studies are presented.

The results for Georgia are part of a study focusing on six countries in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus (EECA): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The study aimed to gain a better understanding of the situation of young people and the youth sector during COVID-19 and analyze the policy and youth sector responses to reduce the impact of the pandemic (Pantea & Makharadze, 2021). In this paper, the authors analyzed qualitative data collected in Georgia – the results of 5 semi-structured interviews with experts from the youth sector of Georgia.

The data for Hungary are the results of a qualitative study carried out in 2021. The research was conducted in a medium-sized town in southeastern Hungary, where youth emigration is considered to be a major problem. The research involved two focus group interviews with locally educated young people. The composition of the focus groups was as follows:
- Focus group 1: seven young boarding-school students (3 males, 4 females, aged between 15 and 20)
- Focus group 2: four young schoolchildren (2 males, 2 females, aged between 13 and 16)
Data collection took place between 28 and 30 April 2022 with the help and support of Mi egy

Másért Non-profit Association. The main themes of the qualitative research were:
- The image of the city
- Perceptions of local daily life, leisure, local institutions and the youth club
- Mental health, COVID.

The data is analysed using a combination of thematic and discourse analysis. Thematic analysis helps to examine "the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights", (Nowell et al., 2017:2) while discourse analysis is "a research method that provides systematic evidence about social processes through the detailed examination of speech […]" (Wortham & Reyes, 2021:1)

Results from Estonia introduced here are part of a wider research, the first stage of which began in 2019. It saw a research group from Tallinn University focusing on studying the meaning and practice of non-formal learning (see Karu et al., 2019; Põlda et al., 2021). Altogether 17 focus group interviews all over Estonia were held with the facilitators of non-formal learning, youth workers included. For this chapter, empirical data from the first stage of the research has been used: two focus group interviews with youth workers working in different settings. The focus introduced in this chapter is on the everyday practice and perception of young people. This stage allows us to describe the most important aspects of the youth work practice before the pandemic.

To see the changes in youth work practice and situation of young people perceived by youth workers, six individual interviews during 2021-2022 were conducted (second stage)[2]. At both stages, the purposeful sample group was formed from youth workers who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research. In the second stage, youth workers who had working experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and at least two years of previous professional experience to facilitate the comparison of their practice before and after the pandemic were involved. Thematic analysis for empirical data analysis was used (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Main Results

COVID-19 Impact on youth and the youth sector in Georgia

As was the case worldwide, the coronavirus pandemic impacted the well-being of young people living in Georgia. Based on the research carried out in Georgia, this impact has manifested itself most clearly in the following areas: (1) education; (2) employment; (3) social life and mental health well-being.

1. Education – With the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the education system in Georgia was moved to an online format, which created a number of problems and challenges. The research conducted by the ACT – Research and Management Consulting Company in 2020 with support of UNFPA, the United Nations sexual

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[2] Data was collected together with Kristi Jüristo, Junior Research Fellow at Tallinn University

and reproductive health agency, highlighted that online education failed to provide children and young people with high-quality education due to the following challenges: Students and teachers were not ready for online education because of their attitudes and practical skills – a considerable part of both groups did not have adequate technical skills for online learning and teaching; at the same time, the vast majority of teachers and students had no experience of online teaching/learning and the process was often not perceived as "real learning/studying". The process was greatly hindered by technical problems such as limited access to the internet and related technical equipment (ACT, 2020). This data is supported by research conducted by the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) in 2021. According to a quantitative study conducted by the institute, only 60 percent of respondents used personal computers for learning, while others mainly used phones. Many families, especially those under the poverty line, do not even have a single computer – according to the study, about 96,000 students live in such households and many of these families have more than three children (ინფორმაციის თავისუფლების განვითარების ინსტიტუტი, 2021). Distance education has been practised with more challenges in rural areas; despite the fact that in 2015-2017 the Georgian government implemented a project focused on providing internet access to rural, mountainous parts of the country, the most remote parts of Georgia still remained without internet. According to the above mentioned IDFI study, less than 10 out of 65 municipalities in the country had fibre optic internet connection, and during the pandemic restrictions about 3,500 children did not have access to adequate technology for online learning. All of the above makes it clear that the right to high-quality education has been severely violated in online education. It is worth mentioning that over the past decades, the quality of education in Georgia has been questioned in a number of studies; for example, the OECD student assessment has placed Georgia in the bottom eight (70th) out of 79 countries (Avvisati, et al., 2018). Challenges related to the quality of education in vocational colleges and universities in Georgia have been highlighted in number of local studies (ახალგაზრდა სოციალისტები, 2017; განათლების პოლიტიკის, დაგეგმვისა და მართვის საერთაშორისო ინსტიტუტი, 2013). Online education during the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated already existing problems in the Georgian educational system and created additional ones – the overall situation seriously threatened the learning and teaching process in educational institutions at all levels.

2. Employment – Due to restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, most work in Georgia was done online. Online work was associated with some challenges: (1) Working more hours than in the traditional format; in many cases, working hours were extended; the second problem was related to not having enough space at home to perform all professional duties and roles. Fulfilling family and professional roles

simultaneously was another problem of online work; as kindergartens and schools were switched to online mode, parents had to take care of children during working hours, which was a very stressful experience, especially for young parents and mothers specifically (ACT, 2020). According to the same study, many young mothers had to quit their jobs because they had to fulfil the roles of mother and employee at the same time. As a result of the lockdown, many young people lost their jobs; for many, this meant not only losing their jobs but also losing the opportunity to continue education, as they were no longer able to pay tuition fees. Despite the fact that the Georgian government helped students to pay tuition fees at the beginning of the pandemic, it could not solve the financial problems of young people. In the long-term, many of them found themselves in a financial crisis and could not afford to pay tuition fees. The financial allowance for those who lost their jobs during the pandemic was only a temporary relief. Even this modest financial support was not available to those who had been working informally, many of whom are young people; this group was left out of the allowance package.

3. Social life – COVID-19 regulations have severely limited physical activities and social connections of young people in Georgia; as highlighted in the study conducted by ACT, the negative effect of these restrictions on physical and mental health will become more evident in the near future (ACT, 2020). Due to state regulations, young people could not maintain their ordinary lifestyle, such as attending cultural and social events and communicating with each other offline. As mentioned in the expert interviews conducted in Georgia during the work on the analytical paper "Towards a better understanding of COVID-19's impact on young people and on the youth sector in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus", restricted social connections and social life has become a new lifestyle for many young people, who have started to show less interest to face-to-face meetings and activities and prefer to stay home and participate online (Pantea & Makharadze, 2021).

4. Mental health and well-being – Taking into account the above analysis, it is not surprising that COVID-19 has affected the mental health and well-being of young people in Georgia. The increased mental health burden arising from COVID-19 and related control measures has been revealed in the research carried out in Georgia in 2020. The quantitative study showed high levels of symptoms of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and adjustment disorder that were strongly associated with increased concern about COVID-19 (Makhashvili et al., 2020). Four expert interviews carried out in the above-mentioned paper related to COVID-19's impact on young people and on the youth sector in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus revealed that limited physical activities and lack of social interactions commonly caused psychological distress and mental health problems among Georgian young people as the cause of mental health problems during COVID-19; respondents mentioned that young people have become less self-confident with less developed

social skills (Pantea and Makharadze, 2021). The same study underlined that although young people's mental health had been seriously impacted by COVID-19, their psycho-emotional well-being and mental health issues have been insufficiently addressed through relevant support measures across many countries, including Georgia, and there is a need for long-term structured policy interventions and robust programmes addressing social anxiety issues and helping young people develop coping skills and emotional resilience (Pantea & Makharadze, 2021).

Young people's experiences of the pandemic in Hungary
The results of the focus group research in Hungary illustrate the asteroid effect theory presented above. While all our participants reported strong individual impacts of the epidemic, their perceptions and interpretations of these impacts were different. The following discourses of the epidemic were identified in the interviews:

1. Attempts to maintain the previous lifestyle
   Some of our participants highlighted the elements of the epidemic that were left over from their previous lifestyles. Leisure time is central to this discourse, which is clearly linked to the characteristics of the youth phase of life, which it is desired to be preserved:

   Okay, but for us to go out, now we have been on summer and winter holidays, so to speak, in all seasons, […] we have a friend who was in Szeged because of covid because he caught it and almost died. So I would have taken it more seriously (male, group 2)

   The above quote juxtaposes the image of Parsons' irresponsibility with the need and demand for responsibility in adulthood, and illustrates how the pandemic situation limited the experience of youth. At the same time, it is worth noting that the partial maintenance of leisure habits was manageable for the middle-class speaker.

2. Isolation
   For young people living outside an urban environment, pandemic lockdowns were particularly traumatic (Van Beek & Patulny, 2022), as confirmed also by the present research.

   I don't live [in the municipality] and I live out in the middle of nowhere, so to speak, but really, we don't have any neighbours, and I've had a very bad experience of this quarantine. I was really locked up, I didn't really meet people there, just my parents and my sister. And then sometimes when I came in [to the settlement] I would walk down the street and there was nobody and it was so scary. (female, group 2)

   But the sense of being trapped also affected young people in boarding school:

   You couldn't go anywhere, you could only go out if you wanted to go to the shops. It was

terrible, by the way. It was like, I don't know, prison. You couldn't assert yourself. You had to lie at home and then you studied and that was it (...) There was nothing interesting in that year and a half. (male, group 1)

3. Boredom
    The epidemic situation, as noted above, also meant the closure of leisure opportunities, so boredom was a particularly prominent interpretive frame of the period, as confirmed by other research (see e.g., Yang et al., 2022)

4. Trying to make face-to-face contacts
    One of the attempts to alleviate loneliness was to actively seek out social situations, but of course this was rarely successful in times of strict closure:
    I'm a very social person, I really need to meet people and the fact that it was months of being home alone... I went in whenever I could. Not very often. (male, group 2)

5. Keeping in touch online
    Maintaining relationships online is of course a typical strategy, but interestingly, it did not emerge as a very strong discourse in our research, with few participants explicitly mentioning it. This may be because online communication is taken for granted, but it may also be due to a sense of distance resulting from a forced situation. At the same time, there were some participants who interpreted the possibility to communicate via video chat in a positive way.

6. Positive experiences of lockdown
    Both focus groups included participants who reported at least some positive experiences of the pandemic closures.

    For me, it was completely fine. I didn't really want to go back to school (female, group 2)

    Positive attitudes towards closure may also be associated with negative perceptions of school, but (again in line with other research on this topic) a positive family climate may also have contributed significantly to resilience.

Of course, the strategies identified here are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they do illustrate that both the symbolic and practical elements of young age have changed radically. It is also important to note that this was not clearly negative for everyone. The potentially positive effects of the pandemic situation certainly affected only a minority of the population, but a growing body of research shows that there are those who have successfully withstood the potential negative effects: "The resilient group [...] was constantly able to positively appraise the COVID-19-specific events and shows a reduction of straining due to them over time."

(Ahrens et al. 2021:8) Agency[3], the active shaping of conditions, is also an important feature of the youth life stage. We had participants who reported breaking the rules of the lockdown, which can also be interpreted as a strategy to counteract the lost year and a half.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most typical interpretation of the closures was that of a lost period, especially in the group of boarding-school students:

This generation is typically the one that needs to relax. And in that year and a half there was no relaxation (male, group 1)

Youth Workers and the COVID-19 pandemic in Estonia: changes in practice

One of the main themes in the description of the practice both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic is about **'being human and being there for young people'**. Youth workers find it important that their practice is guided by the ideas and needs of young people. The balance between informal learning and non-formal learning is not set in stone – it is negotiated and developed together with young people. The most important starting point is a good contact and relationship, trust, a good and safe atmosphere, feeling comfortable and having fun together, after which activities and doing them together become important. During the pandemic, youth workers paid even more attention to building and maintaining good contact with young people, although they found it difficult to do so online. The lockdown was experienced hard by both youth workers and, according to them, also by young people. As soon as there were opportunities to do activities in small groups outside, for example, they took advantage of them. Youth workers pointed out that it was much harder to notice young people's needs, worries or wishes online because *'you can't see their body language'*.

'Because this is the foundation of the work – if the trustworthy relationship is missing, then you are nobody – you can't 'teach or preach' or if you are not aware what young people want to do – they will just not take part in the activities, that's it.'

Supporting **development of young people** - the theme emphasized before COVID-19 was overshadowed by the need of being human and being there for young people during the pandemic. This meant that some of the non-formal learning activities were put aside and some were modified when youth workers identified a need for young people to just be together and talk.

'Especially during Covid, when we talked about motivation with young people over Zoom, I felt they needed to talk more than they needed to learn about robotics, so that's what we did' (Interview 2, 2021)

Before the pandemic, the theme of supporting development of young people was seen as a justification and explanation of youth work practice towards society. During the pandemic, it became more difficult for youth workers to explain what they were doing and why, especially as many goal-oriented activities were set aside or modified and the

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[3] „Agency is understood as the capacity of acting and willing subjects within existing societal and social structures to exercise choice - ‚to be able to act otherwise' (...).”(Rosengren 2000: 61)

emphasis was placed on the informal relationship with young people. The theme **'pressure'** emerged. They also felt some pressure to carry out tasks to support other specialists, such as – helping teachers by supporting young people with home tasks or helping police by patrolling with them during the lockdown and identifying the places where young people were gathering. Youth workers felt that some of the tasks asked of them during COVID-19 undermined the values of youth work and they felt under pressure – on the one hand, they were suddenly seen as valuable members of networks within the community, but on the other hand, they were faced with some ethical and value-based dilemmas. They also experienced uncertainties and hesitations about their everyday practice – what needs to be changed, which environments can be used, how to reach young people in new circum-stances, how to build relationships online etc. New creative ways were tried out, such as using TikTok and Discord, and some positive feedback for being creative was also received, for example from parents and community members.

'And the others didn't really understand what we were doing, for a long time actually. We rescheduled our days to fit in the time for just interacting with young people in Discord – it was like a tool for talking – you could hear each other's voices at least. In this way my work didn't change so much [...] But what I feel is that sometimes I need to do other things as well – fulfil the demands of society - me being the supporter of young people's development. There are activities we are told to do – no, young people haven't asked for it, no, we wouldn't suggest it, but still we have to do it.' (Interview 1, 2021)

'There was something like a small identity crisis as well, when I think about the first lockdown. Youth workers were asked to patrol together with police. We had many discussions about whether of we do something that is against our values, as the police were often controlling, patronizing and dispersing.' (Interview 4, 2021)

This brings us to the last main theme that emerged strongly in the interviews held with Estonian youth workers during the pandemic: **well-being**. On the one hand, the need to modify and change the practice was time consuming, on other hand the pressure from employers and other professionals, which brought ethical dilemmas perceived by youth workers overwhelming, and finally, the isolation experienced by youth workers themselves and by the young people they witnessed was emotionally difficult. The need to collaborate with other professionals and the need to learn more about mental health issues was recognized.

'Somehow I relive those cases and situations. Last year there were many suicides in our community and then I felt heaviness on my shoulders.' (Interview 5, 2022)

All in all, when we look at how young people experienced the pandemic, we see rel-atively similar examples, even though the state of youth work as such is very different in each of the countries studied. The Estonian mosaic presented here shows a context with a relatively well-established youth work scene (the fact that there has been research in the field of youth work as such already proves this), while the other two mosaics are countries with less institutionalized frameworks. The data analyzed here confirm that the general

problems caused by the pandemic have had specific effects on the youth work scene: on the one hand, the goals of youth work have shifted: the mental health of young people and the provision of community spaces online and offline have become even more central than before. The results also show that there is a lot of work to be done to improve mental health services for young people, as even before the pandemic, several groups of young people were already at high risk of mental health problems, and the pandemic has worsened this situation.

Discussion and Conclusions

There is no doubt among youth work practitioners that youth work is not only about working for young people, but also about working together with them. This is both a value and a principle, recognized[4] at a political level by member states of the Council of Europe. However, this has been a struggle to follow during the pandemic. As seen through the theoretical approach framed by the concept of the asteroid effect, and the different national realities, the impact of the pandemic on young people is serious, and support of all kinds is clearly needed.

The data from the three countries studied provide evidence that youth work, especially at the micro level, should be improved and further developed to reduce the risk of the negative effects of the pandemic. Although the consequences of the pandemic may further evolve, especially regarding mental health (see Székely, 2021), we shall emphasize that youth work as a professional activity can be seen as a preventive rather than an interventional field. In other words, youth work activities create a safe space for being in the community and learning and its services are based on voluntary participation. The nature of youth work should not be changed but carefully adapted to the new demands of young people. These new demands such as reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities to access youth work activities require commitment and further resources and increased capacities both in terms of professional competences and as well as better designed services for all young people.

On the one hand, human service practitioners and providers need to discuss the ways in which this direct support opportunities for young people can be provided. We need to acknowledge that youth work as a field is only one of the key actors to play a role in this. It is clear that youth work is underpinned in different disciplines (Jeffs & Smith, 2010; Coussée, 2012; Nagy, 2016, 2019; Cooper, 2018), although in all models of youth work the primary target group are young people. In other words, while some definitions or notions may be particular, ultimately young people and their wellbeing are at the heart of this profession. This should be the basis for mutual understanding between different professionals working with young people when exploring the ways, means and steps to

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[4] Recommendation CM/Rec (2017) 4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work, Council of Europe

better support young people after the pandemic.

Beyond the field, there is much room for improvement, especially in countries with less developed youth work architecture (cf. Kiilakoski, 2018). Policy and decision makers, together with a broad range of expertise of the community of practice in youth work, need to pave this way. The Bonn Process can be considered as a reference point, while other existing structures (e.g. Europe Goes Local) and processes can be bridged to it. Although the first responses can be provided by professionals and volunteers who work with young people on a daily basis, a systematic impact can only be achieved through a political consensus to support youth work structures, services and practitioners.

The practice of youth work should also be reviewed. There is a certain set of skills that youth work professionals need and these need to be reinforced through professional training/education. However, specific education for youth workers is not available everywhere, but processes are underway[5] to improve the situation. Youth workers should be prepared and trained to support young people in difficult moments (e.g. overwhelming mental crisis) and to provide information about specific support, services.

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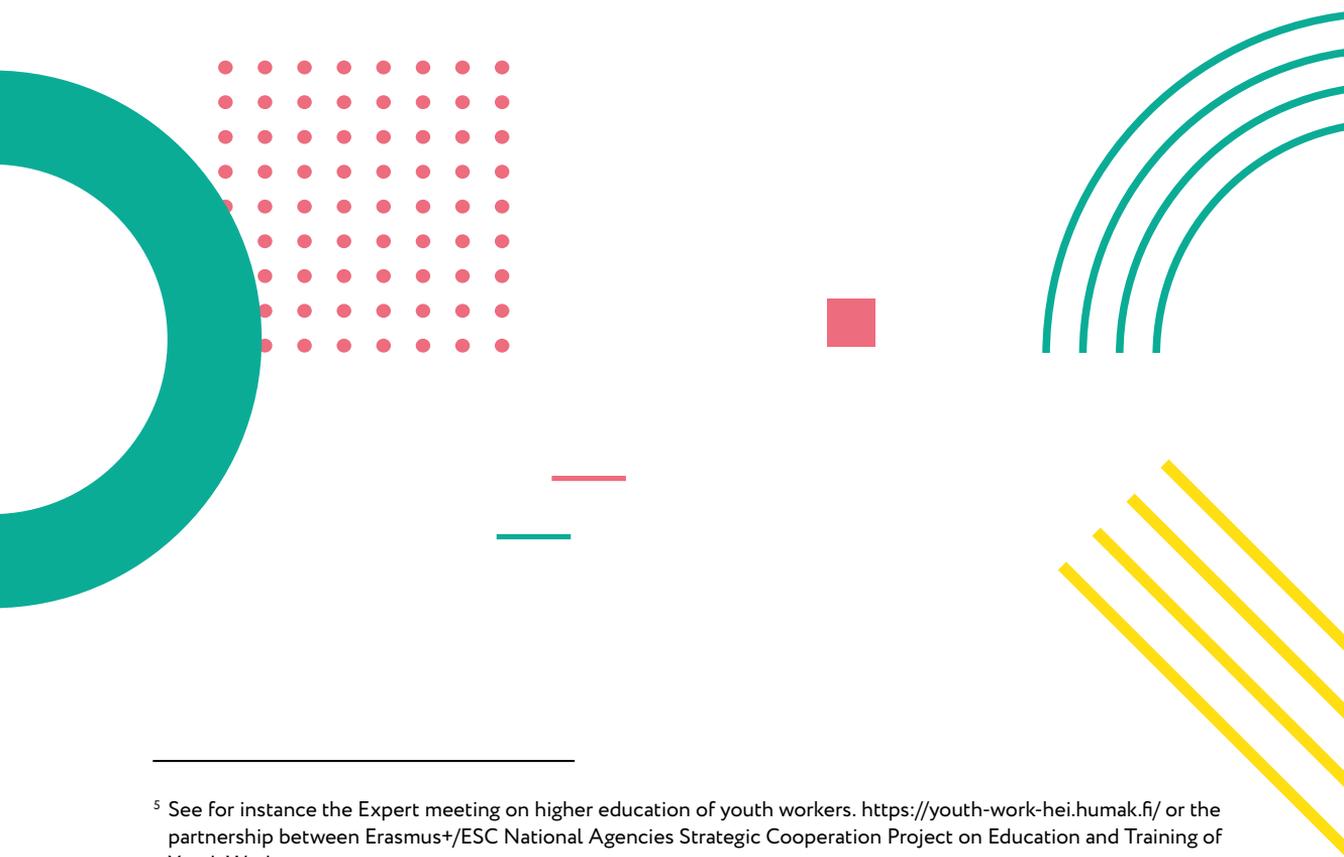
[5] See for instance the Expert meeting on higher education of youth workers. https://youth-work-hei.humak.fi/ or the partnership between Erasmus+/ESC National Agencies Strategic Cooperation Project on Education and Training of Youth Workers

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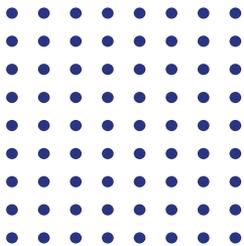
05

If I Stay – Youth Migration in Africa and the Middle East

Viktor Marsai – Omar Sayfo – Meszár Tárik – Klaudia Tóth

Introduction

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are among the youngest regions of the world. Almost 70 percent of the population of SSA is under the age of 30 (UN, 2022a), while this proportion is around 60 percent in the MENA region (World Bank, 2022). Altogether, the two regions account for over 1.2 billion young people, or a seventh of the global population. And while the cohort of youth provides numerous possibilities and opportunities, it also demonstrates major challenges and burdens on the social systems of their home countries. Although demographic transition has already reached most parts of the world, including some MENA countries, it should be emphasized that globally, half of the projected increase in world population by 2050 will take place in no more than eight countries; and from these eight states, five (the Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria and the United Republic of Tanzania) are in the MENA and the SSA regions (UN, 2022b, i). In addition, Sub-Saharan Africa alone will also be responsible for half of the estimated population growth by 2050. While no other continent will experience a natural increase in its population after the mid-21st century, the SSA region will continue its growth until its late decades (UN, 2022b, i). In the upcoming thirty years more than 1.3 billion people will be born in the above-mentioned regions – two times the current population count in Europe. The net population increase of some countries is truly breathtaking; both Ethiopia and Egypt – the second and third most populous countries in Africa – have two million more citizens annually, while Nigeria adds on five million each year.[1] According to certain estimates, Africa alone will need 450 million new jobs in the ensuing two decades to provide employment for the next generation (Abi, 2020). Even before the pandemic and the global food and inflation crises, it had seemed unrealistic that the continent could achieve these goals.

In such circumstances, migration warrants special attention. Whether we are speaking about rural-to-urban migration or migration through legal or illegal channels, it works as an adaptation strategy for communities and individuals. Both in the MENA and the SSA region, in general, cities provide better employment opportunities, social services and education facilities. Nevertheless, many people – mainly youth – choose emigration to enhance their

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[1] Interview with a Hungarian diplomat, Cairo, March 2017

living conditions and employment prospects – even if they lack the skills to be valuable for foreign labour markets (Morsy and Mukasa, 2019: 3-4).

This analysis has hardly ever been more relevant. The Covid-19 pandemic delivered a huge blow to world economies and destroyed social cohesion. In addition, just two years after the beginning of the health crisis which depleted countries, companies, and families, the war in Ukraine significantly contributed to rising inflation and an increasingly severe food crisis. In mid-2022, tens of millions of children were in acute food insecurity, and it is likely that thousands of them have already died (UNICEF, 2022). Since there was no end in sight by December 2022, many people had started to leave their home country; for instance, more than 80,000 Somalis, mostly children and women, arrived to the Dadaab Refugee Complex in Kenya, largely since January 2022 (UNHCR, 2022).

Migration is always a complex phenomenon, and its circumstances are under constant transformation. Therefore, in this chapter we seek to concentrate chiefly on illegal migration from the MENA and the SSA region towards Europe over the past decade. In two separate chapters, we shall examine the main push and pull factors for youth that encourage them to risk a sometimes dangerous journey towards the European Union. While we will find common characteristics (e.g., population growths and unemployment), there are certain differences both between the reasons why youth are migrating from MENA on the one hand and SSA on the other. Furthermore, there are significant differences even within the regions: while youth from the Gulf states are using legal channels to access superior-quality higher education institutions, their peers from Syria are, in many cases, simply running for their lives. Considering the limits of this paper, we cannot highlight all aspects and differences: this chapter is a mere attempt at providing a general – and, therefore, fragmented – overview of youth migration from the two regions. To demonstrate the complexity of the phenomenon of emigration, after the general introduction of the topic of the certain regions, we are also using two case studies, one from the MENA region (Tunisia) and another from the SSA region (Nigeria), which also show the differences between the two entities. The analysis uses mainly primary and secondary sources and literature, including qualitative interviews. Irregular migrants can be divided into three groups: those who come clandestinely (i.e., enter and stay in the concerned country unlawfully), those who arrive legally (for instance, using tourist or student visas) and then overstay the time for which their visas or permits are valid, and asylum seekers whose claims have been refused but who have not left the country (Ikuteyijo, 2020: 54). The present article identifies youth as people below thirty years of age.

Migration from the MENA Region

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is one of the youngest regions of the world. Young people, aged between 15 and 29, make up roughly one-quarter of its 470 million inhabitants, while those under 15 make up a third (World Bank, 2022). Starting in 2011, youth played a central role in sparking protest movements, uprisings, and even rebellions

in countries. Their frustration was driven, among others, by deteriorating living conditions, failed economic liberalization policies, and record rates of youth unemployment, ranging between 20 and 40 percent (Arab Human Development Report 2009, 2015).

Economically flourishing European countries have been receiving labour from the MENA region since the mid-20th century. However, the turmoil of the Arab uprisings turned migration into a general concern for the European Union as a whole. During the migrant crises of 2015 and 2016, a record 1.3 million people applied for asylum in the member states of the European Union, more than half of them citizens of Arab countries (Eurostat, 2016). Around half of the applications were made by young individuals between 18 and 34 years of age, and the number of unaccompanied minors was 96,000 (Pew Research Center, 2016). Indeed, not only Europe is affected by migration. Conflict-generated migratory movements have taken place within the region, as Egypt and Tunisia became hosts of Libyans, while Lebanon and Jordan received a significant number of Syrians. While the influx of people from war-torn countries to the first safe countries of the region slowed down significantly, the number of young people who wish to leave their home country is on the rise. The most substantial push factor behind emigration is economic hardship (Bardak, 2015).

Since the Arab uprisings, the MENA region has been facing a series of challenges, including the decline of oil prices in 2014-2016 that led to a further decline of foreign investments, general geopolitical instability, the resurgence of protests in late 2019, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, a new generation of young people came of age in a context of uncertainty and instability, coupled with the effects of social media (Muasher, 2020). Youth unemployment is now reaching a record 30 percent in the MENA region, up from 25 percent in 2014 (The World Bank, 2022). As a sign of distrust in authorities, less than 6 in 10 in North Africa and barely a fifth (21 percent) in the Levant believe that their government is implementing the right policies to tackle the issues most important to young people. In this line, more young people say they would prefer to work for themselves or with their family than for the government or the private sector (BCW, 2022).

According to the SAHWA Youth Survey 2016, the four main concerns of MENA youth are the lack of professional opportunities, poor living conditions, low income in the home country compared to Europe, and the desire to help the family (CIDOB, 2021). These patterns have not changed significantly since. The Arab Barometer 2022 shows that young people who want to leave their country mainly cite economic reasons as their motivation. Overall, half of the young people aim to emigrate because of the economic conditions, with the highest percentage in Egypt (97) and Jordan (93). Security remains certainly a main concern for citizens of countries still in turmoil, like Libya, Syria, and Iraq. Not surprisingly, young people aged 18-29 are more willing to leave than their older compatriots by an average margin of six points.

The numbers are particularly high in Tunisia (65 percent), Jordan (63 percent), and Lebanon (60 percent). On the other hand, the figures are decreasing in Egypt (-15 points) and Morocco (-10 points) where fewer are considering emigrating in 2021-22 than in 2018-19. In

other MENA countries, levels have not changed significantly. While one would assume that younger people are bolder in taking risks than their elders, polls show that the option of leaving the country illegally is shared roughly equally between youth and those ages 30 or older in most countries (Arab Barometer, 2022).

The lack of professional opportunities has been widely regarded as the fifth reason for migration. More than a decade on after the Arab uprisings, the markets of the MENA region are still struggling to cope with a fast influx of young men and women coming of working age. Young people of lesser education have little choice but to take any work to make ends meet and help their families, while many with secondary and university education enter a period of waiting for an appropriate job. Such a period is best described by economic stagnation, which poses a barrier to meeting the conditions of finding a spouse. In a Middle Eastern cultural context, marriage and family formation are regarded as a transition to adulthood. Traditionally, most young people would be married by their mid-20s. However, given harsh economic circumstances, non-oil-producing Arab countries are facing a marriage crisis, affecting the lives of young people and their families. For financial reasons, by the late 2000s, almost 50 percent of young men were not married, a tendency that can be explained by the social expectation that groom should achieve financial security and – among many others – a furnished apartment before proposing to a young woman. This tendency is also fuelled by rapid increases in educational attainment of female students (Assaad et al., 2018).

While researchers tend to regard political factors, namely authoritarianism and flaws of democracy as a core driver of migration (Etling et al., 2017), available research shows that such motivations have little weight. Two-thirds of the youth agree that they have more freedom as a result of the uprisings. Most probably because of the rise of radical Islamist movements and the Covid-19 pandemic, 82 percent regard stability more important than democracy. General uncertainty is fuelling a religious trend. In 2022, 41 percent of MENA youth regarded religion as the most important element of their identity, a 7 percent increase compared to 2021. Disillusioned with faded dreams of democracy, 65 percent believe that preserving their country's religious and cultural identity is more important than creating a more globalized society. Meanwhile, such notions towards religion show clear generational characteristics, as 76 percent in North Africa and 65 percent in the Levant see that religion plays too big a role in everyday life, and more than three-quarters would be happy to see some reform in religious institutions (BCW, 2022).

Tunisia – a case study

The Migration of Young Tunisians after the Arab Spring
In January 2011, a revolution occurred in Tunisia, sparked primarily by long-standing resentment over social, economic, and political exclusion. It is noteworthy that the revolutionary movement was provoked by the anger and desperation of a 26-year-old unemployed market vendor in Sidi Bouzid, one of Tunisia's deprived governorates. Many Tunisian youth could

identify with the sense of vulnerability, and their mass participation sparked a wave of protests across the country. Examples of this kind of demonstration existed earlier. As early as 2008, non-working youth protested in Gafsa, an impoverished area that did not cause a major upheaval in the country's political leadership at the time (Gobe, 2011)

One of the main reasons for this discontent is the lack of opportunities for young people. In Tunisia throughout the 2011 Arab Spring, underemployment among young people (aged 15-24) was exceptionally high at 30.7 percent, while the general unemployment rate was 14 percent. Public opinion polls have underlined the political relevance of these trends. In the opinion poll conducted after the January 2011 revolution, the majority of respondents considered that the revolution was sparked by the youth (96 percent), the unemployed (85.3 percent), and the disadvantaged (87.3 percent) (Al-Bank al-Dawli, n. d.). Unemployment was far from the only element, however; Arab observers saw the rebellion of Tunisian youth as a reaction to limited opportunities, as they were denied to raise their voice and actively practise their civil rights.

Although young people played a prominent role in overthrowing the system in 2011, more than a decade later the new leaders are unable to meet their needs and ambitions. Frustration among younger generations continues to be the order of the day, as their lives are as difficult as ever. In some instances, conditions have deteriorated. According to young Tunisians who took part in a study, the 2011 uprising has brought them more freedom, but the country's economic and social situation has also worsened. Against this backdrop, migration has become an important approach to surmount difficulties (Araissia, 2019).

More than a decade after the Arab Spring, Tunisia is experiencing a large-scale outflow of young people due to the country's decaying economic and political situation. Their exodus is exacerbating the decline in productive activity and the ensuing economic loss (Holdaway, 2022).

Emigration During the Covid-19 Pandemic and After
Between 2020 and mid-2021, the measure of migration from and via Tunisia augmented to levels not seen since the months following the 2011 revolution. Between January 2020 and mid-December 2021, Tunisian security and defence forces stopped 35,040 illegal migrants in coastal areas and along the country's coastline. Two-thirds of these individuals were Tunisian nationals. During the same period, Italian authorities recorded the arrival of 28,124 Tunisians and about 6,000 migrants leaving the country from other countries (Herbert, 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted migration in ways that aggravated previous trends rather than playing as an independent impetus. Specifically, government-implemented health interventions led to extensive job losses among young Tunisians in some fields, including tourism and hospitality, resulting in increased economic pressures that drove populations to migrate.[2]

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[2] Interview with the staff of UNHCR Tunis, September 2022.

In addition, Covid-19 affected Tunisians' ability to leave the country lawfully, constraining emigration choices for the middle class and driving some to pursue illegal routes (Herbert, 2022).

The changes in the North African region have a direct impact on the European Union's immigration and refugee policies. Therefore, it is crucial how the southern states, which are primarily exposed to migration from North Africa, think about the migration processes since 2011 and how they can put pressure on countries of origin and transit such as Tunisia. For this reason, the migration policy of the recently elected Italian government could bring about a significant change in the future compared to current practices (Kmeczkó, 2022).

However, until this happens, Tunisia will continue to be a major source and transit country for migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. Incidentally, since mid-2017, there has been a notable increase in the number of Tunisians aiming to reach Europe, largely due to high unemployment and the lack of economic opportunities in Tunisia. It is estimated that more than 813,000 Tunisians (about 7 percent of the total population) live abroad, 77 percent of them in Europe. Tunisians currently represent the largest group of migrants arriving in Italy via the central Mediterranean route. They account for about 24 percent of migrants arriving since January 2021 (ACAPS, 2022).

The number of Tunisian immigrants who landed in Italy increased by 23 percent to 13,500 in the first eight months of 2022 compared to the same period of the previous year. Even more worrying for Tunisia is the fact that citizens from all walks of life and of all ages, including children, are joining the ranks of irregular immigrants. However, they are not driven solely and exclusively by unemployment. Many immigrants have jobs but are dissatisfied with the country's political and economic situation, which motivates them to emigrate (Africa in News, 2022; The Arab Weekly, 2022).

Videos posted on social media show young people and whole families boarding boats, and the number of boats leaving Tunisia's shores has soared as the country's economic crisis worsens. Romdhane Ben Amor, a representative of the Tunisian Forum of Economic and Social Rights, said that "2,600 minors, 640 women and 500 Tunisian families have arrived on boats on the Italian coast this year" (The Arab Weekly, 2022). He added that "the number of people who drowned near the Tunisian coast this year is about 570, but it is important to know that not only Tunisian citizens lost their lives (The Arab Weekly, 2022).

Push Factors and Routes

Nevertheless, as Tunisia's economy began to shrink – unemployment was at 18 percent (supposedly much higher among young people), exacerbated by the effects of Covid-19 – emigration attempts increased. The disturbance of wheat supplies as a result of the war in Ukraine and rising fuel prices have further worsened economic circumstances and disrupted some of the usual legal paths for Tunisian immigrants to Europe. In Serbia, the visa exemption for Tunisians was lifted under pressure from the European Union. Moreover, the situation for Tunisians trying to reach Italy has become much more difficult since the election of the right-wing government of Giorgia Meloni (Holdaway, 2022; Schengen Visa, 2022).

Figure 1. The development of the unemployment rate in Tunisia (%)
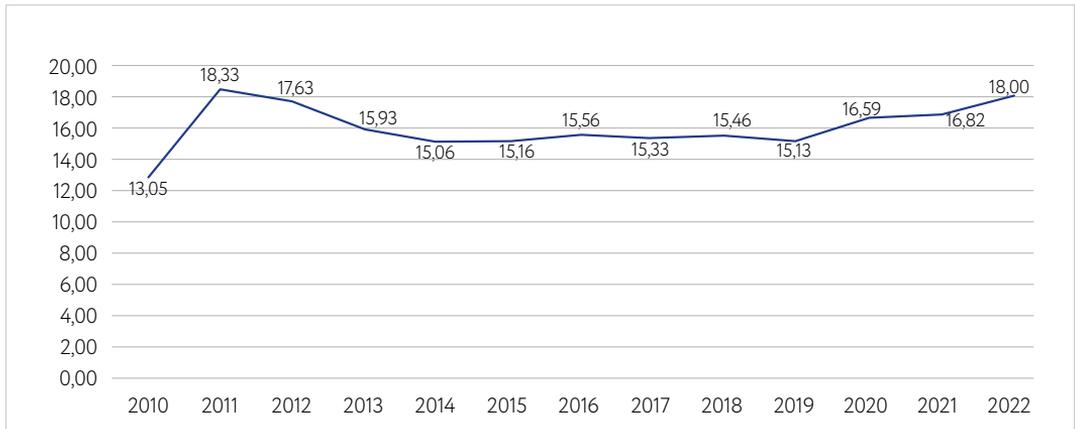
Frontex reported that "the Central Mediterranean continued to be the most used path to Europe for the second year in a row in 2021 as 67 724 migrants were detected on this route. This is a 90 percent increase from the previous year and accounts for 23 percent (or roughly one quarter) of all reported illegal border-crossings at the external borders" (Frontex, 2022).

Furthermore, the report reveals that "higher rate of arrivals from Libya made it the main country of departure, while more departures from Tunisian and Turkish shores also contributed to the increased migratory pressure on this route. Tunisian migrants were most frequently detected in this region" (Frontex, 2022).

Figure 2. Illegal border crossings on the Central Mediterranean route
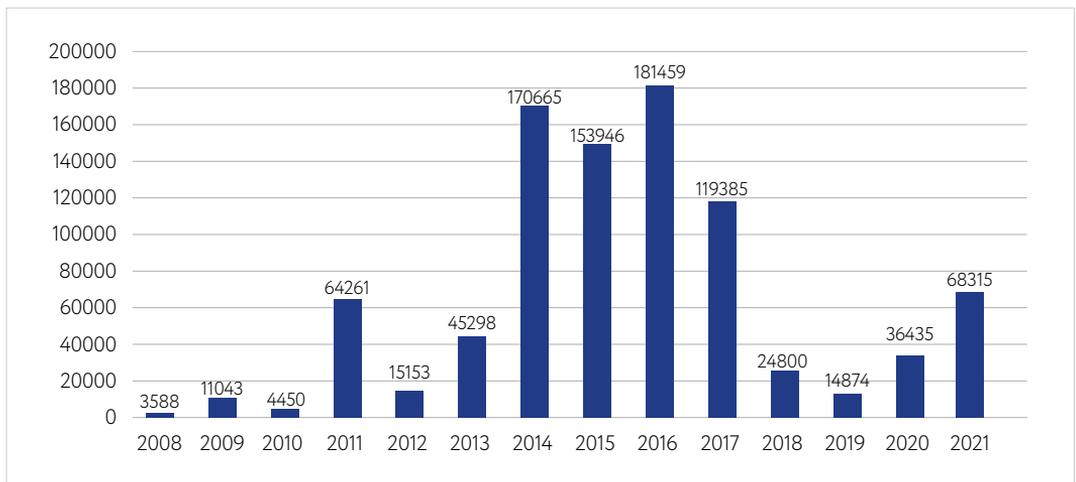
Irregular migration from Tunisia to Europe is a long-lasting occurrence. It has been taking place since the early 1990s, starting from the country's coastal areas. Since then, most migrants want to go to Italy, Sicily or the islands in the open sea. Illegal migration culminated in 2011, when Tunisian border controls crumbled, and the country's revolution led to a mass exodus of Tunisian youth. Since then, the phenomenon has not stopped; on the contrary, emigration of young people continues to be the order of the day. The reasons for this are complex and it can be said that the decisions of illegal immigrants in Tunisia are influenced by the interaction of economic and social factors. These include the deterioration of the economic situation, poor career opportunities and the social consequences of unemployment, as well as the loss of confidence in Tunisia's current political leadership.

Youth Emigration from Sub-Saharan Africa

The Sub-Saharan region is the youngest in the world and still has the highest fertility rate (4.6 births per woman) (UN, 2022b). The expansion of the youth cohort will continue in the coming decades, too, and despite the development of education and employment opportunities, most of the continent's countries are still struggling to provide a satisfying life perspective for their population below 30 years of age. The situation has deteriorated seriously due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with almost one-fifth of young Africans becoming unemployed as a consequence of the pandemic. In addition, 18 percent had to move back home. For many, these challenges came hand in hand—both their educational and their economic prospects deteriorated (African Youth Survey, 2022: 24). As the African Youth Survey highlights, "just under one in three youth think that the continent is headed in the right direction, and less than three in ten feel that their country is on the right track. Overall, only three in ten feel positively about the future of their country, while four in ten feel negatively and a quarter are uncertain" African Youth Survey, 2022: 10). It is in sharp contrast with the results of the previous survey in 2020, when 40 percent of African youth still thought that the continent was moving into the right direction, with 35 percent saying that their own country is on the right path. Furthermore, in 2020, a strong majority (65 percent) across all 14 sample states agreed with the statement that the 21st century will be the "African Century" (African Youth Survey, 2020: 36).

Thanks to rising inflation and worsening food crises in many African countries, the economic and social opportunities of youth have rapidly deteriorated. Therefore, it is not accidental that migration – as one of the oldest adaptation strategies – plays a significant role in their thinking. In 2022, 52 percent of African youth were likely to consider emigration in the next three years (African Youth Survey, 2022: 91). Even if we know that most of these plans will not materialize, the numbers are shocking: more than half of young Africans are ready to leave their home country. Although 69 percent of them are considering relocation only temporarily 27 percent never want to return (African Youth Survey, 2022: 91). Economic factors (44 percent), education opportunities (41 percent) and experiencing new things (25 percent) are the main drivers of migration: political (12 percent) and security (9 percent) concerns play less significant role (Ibid. 92). It highlights that the general narrative on young Africans who are escaping violent

conflicts are not tenable: although there are ongoing wars in the continent, most people leave because of economic and social reasons.

Considering the crisis on the continent, there are limited options for quick recovery. The so-called "perfect storm" which rose in Africa, is too complex and deep. African nations had some of the world's fastest-expanding economies up until the year 2020. The long-fought-for macroeconomic, socioeconomic, and governmental advancements of many decades throughout the continent have been undone by the Covid-19 pandemic. The human development index for Africa has decreased for the first time in close to three decades. Numerous estimates claim that 50 million Africans have fallen into extreme poverty and that tens of millions of people have lost their employment. Young people and women have been particularly hard-hit by the crisis. Disruptions in global commerce have slowed growth, and the epidemic has made financial and social inequality worse. The majority of SSA nations implemented stringent lockdowns in response to the outbreak, leading to negative economic effects. Business activity, transportation, cross-border travel, and large-scale gatherings all faced restrictions. Healthcare systems were overburdened and needed major financial support and careful supervision. The originally brief closures that were implemented in March 2020 are still in place to some extent. The coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine have directly affected the price of food and energy – the global energy market and the crude oil market is witnessing a price increase not seen since the 1970s. Even in nations like Nigeria or Angola, which are the main exporters of crude oil on the continent, the effects of the global energy crisis can be felt more and more. Many governments in the SSA region are compelled to import gasoline and other petroleum products from Asia and Europe since most of the continent lacks the capability for oil refining in the required quantity or quality. The price increase of natural gas, a crucial component of nitrogen-based fertilizers used in food production, has an impact on the agricultural industry as well. Therefore, local farmers must face the truth that growing crops and other commodities required for the production of essential food products is getting more and more expensive. This is a serious problem because the majority of farmers in the SSA region are still small-scale. Various estimates indicate that 60 percent of the population in the sub-Saharan area is employed in agriculture and 80 percent of the food produced there is produced by small-scale farmers. On top of all the problems mentioned earlier, climate change acts as an important and exacerbating factor. We should pay particular attention to the recent droughts in light of the current predicament. The fourth consecutive dry season in East Africa has failed, wreaking havoc on the agricultural sector. In certain areas, 90–95 percent of the cattle have already perished, with no possibility of recovery. Weather patterns and environmental circumstances will alter as a result of global climate change in the near future. In relation to this, a critical issue has to be emphasized. Although the continent has experienced droughts before, the length and intensity of recent hot, dry periods are already unprecedented. Additionally, there is now a higher chance of 3–4-year droughts. The shortage of water will also lead to significant issues across the continent, since there will be an increase in the amount of "day zero" periods, or times when settlement water reservoirs run dry (Marsai & Tóth, 2022: 36-42).

Nigeria – a case study

Nigeria is the most populous country on the African continent with around 220 million in-habitants and is among the seven most populous countries in the world (Worldometer, 2022). Despite the fact that the annual population growth rate was 3.2 percent in 2006 – with ap-proximately 140 million citizens – and now it is around 2.6 percent, Nigeria still has one of the world's fastest-growing populations. Those under 30 make up about 70 percent of the whole population. The current age distribution in Nigeria is as follows: 42 percent of the population is under the age of 15, 54.8 percent are in the working age range of 15 to 64, and 3.1 percent are 65 or older. There are 5.3 births per woman nationwide, which represents the overall fertility rate and half of the female population are in their reproductive years (15–49 years). About half of the population (51.16 percent) lives in urban areas (National Population Commission, 2021). If we look at the trends for the future, India (1.09 billion), Nigeria (791 million), China (732 million), the United States (336 million), and Pakistan (248 million) will be the five largest nations in 2100 according to the reference forecasts done by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation researchers (Vollset, Goren & Yuan et al., 2020: 1285). Young people's fate not only has an impact on the nation's future, but it also brings up the most crucial issue of the present: is the vast number of young people joining the workforce an advantage or a burden? And this is perhaps the most pressing issue for Nigeria, as one fifth of African children under 18 will live in Nigeria by 2050 (UNICEF, 2014).

Nigeria's potential to become the regional economic superpower of Africa—and the world—is greatly enhanced by the size and youth of its people. Due to the correlation between urbanization and economic development and the fact that population increase, and urbanization go hand in hand, a youthful, big population may be an economic benefit. Population growth raises densi-ties and, in conjunction with rural-to-urban migration, boosts urban agglomeration. As a result, businesses may be able to produce things in greater quantities and at lower costs, satisfying a greater number of low-income clients. But in reality – by every socioeconomic metric – Nigeria is falling short of developing its youthful endowment. Millions of young people suffer from a bad quality of life, which includes a lack of education, subpar living conditions, and poor health status. Nigeria's existing population structure is not yielding advantages, and more has to be done to lessen the drawbacks. Another burden on society is a sizable group of young people who lack skills, are economically inactive, are unwell, and have inadequate education (Akinyemi and Mobolaji, 2022). In Nigeria, there are around 18.5 million children who lack access to school, the bulk of them are girls. This number has increased significantly from 2021 when there were 10.5 million such children (Babangida, 2022). On a global list of nations that Bloomberg monitors, unemployment in Africa's biggest economy increased to the second highest level. According to a study posted on the National Bureau of Statistics' website, the unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 33.3 percent by the end of 2021 (Olurounbi, 2021). In 2022, approximately 19.4 million Nigerians were facing food insecurity (Udegbunam, 2022). As reported by the World Poverty Clock, there are almost 70 million Nigerians living in extreme poverty – 60.7 million people in rural and 9.3 million people in urban areas (World Data Lab, 2022).

Before we demonstrate the economic or welfare migration, we must also point to forced migration trends linked to armed conflicts, religious persecution, racial and gender discrimination. Despite being one of the leading economic powers in the Sahel, Nigeria faces a number of internal and external armed threats that affect the future prospects of the younger generation. There are currently around 240,000 beneficiaries of international protection living as refugees in Nigeria. Most of them come from Niger, Cameroon and Chad. There are also a further 2 million internally displaced people in the north of the country who have left their homes due to attacks by Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Although all residents of northern Nigeria face threats and violence, Christians are frequently targeted because of their religion. ISWAP and Boko Haram wish to eradicate Christians from Nigeria, and Muslim Fulani extremists attack Christian communities particularly. Christians in certain of Nigeria's northern states experience discrimination and are treated as second-class citizens due to Sharia law, in addition to the dangers of violence. Nigeria is ranked seventh among the top 50 nations where it is most difficult to follow Jesus according to Open Doors (Open Doors, 2022). One can wonder how the problems of food shortages, unemployment, and jihadist activities are connected. The answer is that the high levels of young unemployment have negative social, economic, and political effects on society in terms of high levels of poverty and reliance, militancy, frustration, marginalization and radicalization (Olubusoye, Salisu & Olofin, 2022: 3). For instance, if a young person's family is on the verge of hunger, they have little possibility of enrolling in school, and their employment prospects are uncertain, they could decide to join an extreme group that promises a stable life, a "career", and a bride. Consequently, expanding jihadist organizations continue to cause regional displacement in their area of influence.

After an overview of forced migration patterns, we now turn to the issue of economic migration, which also has a significant impact on young people's prospects. The recruitment of foreign labour by nations in the Global North – where the main reasons behind that is the problem of ageing population and the falling birth rate – also promotes the migration of youth (Ikuteyijo, 2020: 55). Prospects for higher education, rising earning potential, and improving living circumstances by having access to better infrastructure and public services are other pull factors that influence youth migration, particularly at the international level. In Nigeria, youngsters between the ages of 18 and 35 make up the majority of irregular migrants. Individuals in this age group are more likely to be mobile since they are typically single and have the stamina to move, as opposed to older people who are more likely to be married, have more responsibilities, and have less stamina to survive the rigours of migration. In recent years, the Mediterranean Sea has emerged as one of the most attractive migration corridors that Nigerians use but a rise can be detected regarding the Eastern Mediterranean Route from 2020 as well. According to Frontex statistics, in 2016 approximately 37,554 illegal border crossings were detected at the European Union's external borders that were connected to Nigerian citizens. This was the highest number since the European Border and Coast Guard Agency started this registration method (Frontex, 2022b).

Figure 3. Illegal border crossings on the Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean routes connected to Nigerian citizens
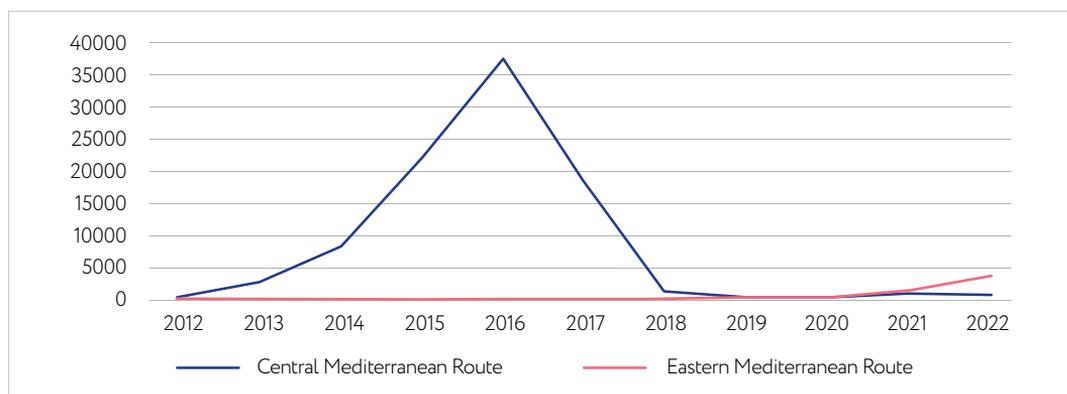
Source: Frontex, 2022b. Own compilation

A study carried out by Lanre Olusegun Ikuteyijo demonstrated that many young people claimed to be familiar with the concept of irregular migration and most of them had personal knowledge of someone who had left the country by dubious means, such as by using a forged passport or paying off unlicensed agents. In the survey the majority of young people had favourable opinions regarding irregular migration and claimed that the end would justify the means. They showed that there was a general agreement that migrants had access to a higher standard of living than those who stayed behind. As a result, the majority of those interviewed did not view irregular movement as criminal but rather as just being practical. Youth who were prone to migration as well as return-ee migrants concurred that irregular migration was a practical plan for youth to endure Nigeria's economic slump (Ikuteyijo, 2020: 64-69).

Conclusions

The MENA and the SSA regions, which are the home of more than 1.2 billion youth, were deeply hit by the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the inflation and food crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. In addition, the prolonged structural challenges of the two areas – demographic growth, climate change, fragile states, political instability – also contributes to the havoc. Among these circumstances, many Middle Eastern and African youth consider emigration as an adaptation strategy which can enhance their living standards and job opportunities. Dreaming is an important feature for the young generation. In the long term, both the leaders of the MENA and SSA regions and external actors must concentrate their efforts to enable young people to realize their dreams in their respective homelands. Many who reached the European Union and are granted some form of protection are likely to stay. Undergone trauma, family separation, language barriers, culture shock, and enduring a wide set of challenges and uncertainties, young migrants and refugees are facing a rocky road ahead. Therefore, hosting countries are encountering growing challenges related to the effective integration of young migrants into societies and the labor force.

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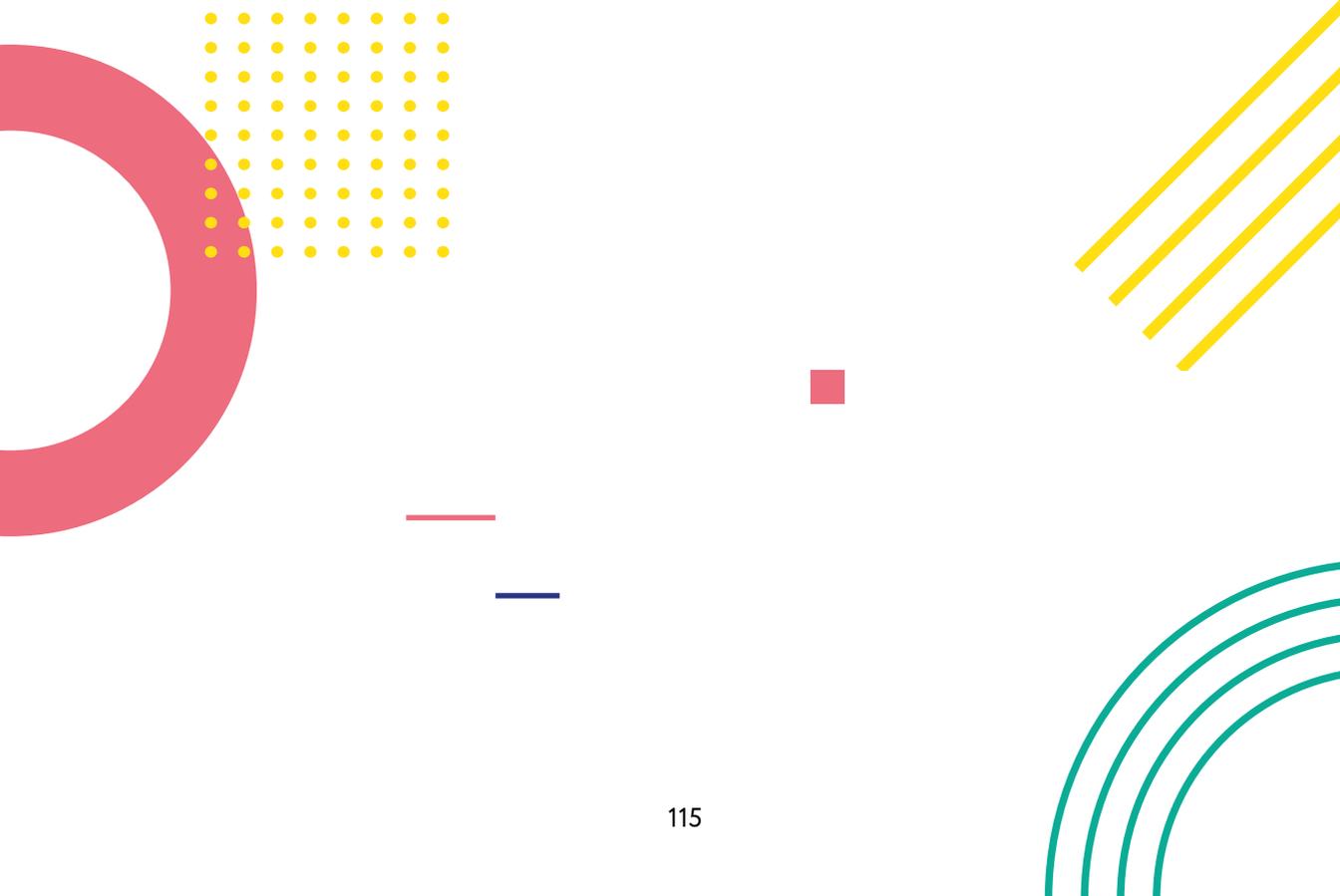
06

Climate Crisis and Youth
Vocal Representatives of the Climate Discourse

Orsolya-Kovács Magosi – Philip Hammond

Across the world, more than four million people marched on the streets on 20 September 2020 to protest against climate inaction. The international "climate strike" organized by Fridays for Future (FFF) was the world's biggest ever climate demonstration. On seven continents, over 163 countries were involved, and in Germany alone, more than 1.4 million people went out on to the streets to protest (Hurrelman & Albrecht, 2021). The September 2019 climate protest (also called the Global Week for Future) was a series of international school strikes which also indicated that the majority of protesters were school children and students aged 14-20. These examples illustrate a new era of environmental movements, in which online communication has the strongest potential to mobilize crowds. The school strikes were organized and popularized on digital media platforms – primarily Facebook, Twitter and Instagram – where billions of people saw call-to-action messages which immediately went viral and global.

Climate change is widely regarded as the biggest challenge faced by humanity. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is considered to be the most reliable source in this regard, warns that if carbon emissions are not reduced within a short time period, we will face multiple unavoidable climate hazards in just a few years (IPCC, 2022). According to European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S), in 2022 the world experienced its fifth-warmest year on record (C3S, 2023). Climate science is settled in the sense that climate change is now widely accepted as a real phenomenon, and the number of so-called "climate deniers" has declined, although ongoing discussion in the scientific community continue to debate the extent to which current climate change is human-induced. Since the second half of the last century, many organizations and networks have been established to fight climate change and other environmental problems, while world summits (such as the annual Conference of the Parties) and international treaties (for example the Kyoto Protocol in 2012 and the Paris Agreement in 2015) have proliferated. Recently, the discussion has been overshadowed by the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war: media framing of climate change in general shifted in response to this critical event towards energy crisis, keeping this topic still on the agenda from another perspective. The general attention to the issue is also reflected in language: in the past few years several new terms have been coined with a "climate" prefix, such as "climate breakdown", "climate refugee", "climate anxiety" and "climate literacy". Climate change has become a permanent element of today's political, scientific and media discourse and it not only influences the future but already determines the present of the younger generations (let be Generation Z or Generation Alpha) who will have to come up with solutions.

The rapid spread of the "new wave environmental movements" and their mobilizing power demonstrates that the issue of climate change goes far beyond the natural sciences: it has enormous impact on society as well. Fridays for Future is just one of a number of recently established youth-focused environmental movements which merit the attention of social researches. Yet climate change is only one of the many challenges today's youth has to confront. They live in an age of crisis – be it pandemic, war, misinformation, economic instability or natural disasters. While Generation Z is far from homogenous – meaning that these movements only represent part of the generation – it is true that in general they have different attitudes compared to their predecessors, the Millennials. They have a very strong social commitment which is very clear and public (Hurrelman & Albrecht, 2021) and they are not afraid to voice their opinions to fight against injustice. They are growing up in a world where they are constantly bombarded with information, everything is speeding up around them and they are under enormous pressure to solve upcoming problems. They have to make a difference in circumstances where they are continually encouraged to spend and consume more. It is not surprising that this all presents a huge mental burden for many young people. Seemiller & Grace (2018) describes this generation as a "worried and stressed out generation" which vision is in line with the latest results of the APA Stress in America Survey (2022) that focuses on the concerns of young people ages 15 to 21. A very high number, 91 percent of the respondents (n=3.458), said that they have experienced at least one physical or emotional symptom due to stress during their life. Gen Zers really tend to worry about world issues such as equality, safety, education and not least climate change and global warming. It therefore also follows what Reyes et al. (2021) found in their research. They proved that there is a significant relationship between climate change and mental health and that the worsening environmental issues can cause "climate anxiety" and "eco anxiety" among young people.

Defining Youth

The general image of youth has radically changed in the 21st century after the spread of new media technologies, but there is also some confusion about who belongs in the category of "youth". The tabloid press is full of Hollywood actors who cannot cope with aging, for example, and many of us will have encountered senior people who try to look like as if they are twenty years old. A cult of youth is fed by advertisers, leading brands and influencers, and it is increasingly difficult to determine who counts as "young". In social science researchers have tried to conceptualize youth using different frameworks. Pioneers such as Mannheim (1952) and co-authors Strauss and Howe (1997) distinguished cohorts based on their similarities and differences. According to Mannheim, a generation is defined as those who are born in the same year and share a common location in the historical dimension of social processes. Strauss and Howe classified four generational stages: the "high", the "awakening", the "unraveling" and the "crisis." According to them, a generational spectrum lasts around 20-25 years, during which the social, political and economic climate is similar. Today, generational research is in its prime and "Gen Z" has become a buzzword for youth. Contemporary generational classifications vary

between countries and regions, but researchers agree on broad categories. Table 1. presents the generational classification in Hungary based on their media consumption habits in which there are statistically significant differences (Székely, 2020).

Table 1. Generational classification in Hungary

Description	Born
Veterans	1939 and earlier
Baby boomers	1940 —1969
Generation X	1970 — 1979
Generation Y	1980 —1993
Generation Z ("GenZ")	1994— 2010
Generation A ("GenA")	2011 — to date

Source: Székely, 2020

This paper focuses mainly on Generation Z, which is the most talked-about generation. They make up today's teenagers and young adults, as indicated above. However, at some points we tried to go beyond the mainstream discourse and include Generation Alpha to this study. They are the first generation to be born entirely in the twenty-first century, and at the time of writing, Gen A consists only of children under the age of 14. We expect that they will show very similar attitudes and interests in terms of environmental questions, as many of them are already involved in environmental activism, see later for example Licypriya Kangujam.

It is legitimate to ask how far Mannheim's generational theory from the 1950s can still be applied today. We face global challenges including the outbreak of a pandemic, the consequences of climate change, mass migration, energy crisis or inflation, which cannot be tackled purely on a national or local level. It may therefore appear that for the first time in history a global generation is coming into existence, facing the very same problems no matter where they live. Generation Z has already been labeled in numerous ways, often reflecting these common challenges and experiences. Today's youth is sometimes called the "NetGeneration", "Zoomers", the "Covid-generation" or the "Greta-generation" as well as the "Climate change generation". The era in which they are growing up is dominated by serious political, economic and social issues, shaping their identity in similar ways. Moreover, their civic identities are heavily influenced by what they consume online. The online platforms they frequently use – Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, etc. – often serve as safe places where they feel understood and accepted, and where they can relate to each other regardless of time and space. Literat et al. (2018) state that today's youth are not "adults in the making", but social agents in their own right who are already active and creative.

The more the scientific community and the media report on the consequences of climate change, the more attention is given to Generation Z. The generational approach in research has become dominant and constant with the appearance of climate activist, Greta Thunberg. *How interested Gen Z is in climate change? What do they do for the environment?* – are just some examples for the questions researchers started to search answers for. This tendency is illustrated by a wide range of blog articles, opinion polls, and academic papers. It is important to note, though, that this association between youth and environmental protection is not new. White (2017) observes that generational approaches to society and politics were well established by the time of the emergence of contemporary environmentalism in the late 1960s when, as Dunaway (2015: 3) notes, there was already "a focus on children as emotional emblems of the future" in environmental campaigning.

White (2017) distinguishes three approaches to generational thinking. The first is the genealogical, in which generations describe the concrete ties of determinate individuals with a common genetic inheritance. The second is the sociological understanding, in which generations are defined as groups united by different ideas and historical events. The third is the philosophical understanding of generations, which is a more abstract approach and describes a society at different moments of existence. In this regard, generations are seen as a conceptual device than an empirical description. White adds that all three stands made their way into environmentalist thinking during the twentieth century. From the very beginning of international environmental summits – the 1972 UN Stockholm Conference – the question of future generations was already raised. At that time the discourse mainly focused on the inter-generational aspects: they thought that cooperation between the current and older generations was indispensible in order to resolve the challenges. Things look different today, when the media tend to offer a daunting vision of irreversible generational conflict and estrangement. The perceived distance between different cohorts has never been as great. Especially in traditional cultures, young people showed great respect towards the elders and tried to learn as much as possible from their experiences. In contrast, now a young person can shut down and provoke an older person without hesitation. In a clear example of what has become known as the "Okay, Boomer" phenomenon, for instance, the way in which 25-year-old New Zealand MP Chlöe Swarbrick responded to Todd Muller MP was anything but respectful.[1]

The State of Youth Research

Young people's pro-environmental behavior[2] and the motivation for youth climate activism have been the focus of much research in recent years. In a thorough review of the academic literature, Neas et al. (2022) note that 2018 was a sort of "watershed moment" in the study of youth climate

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[1] "OK boomer": 25-year-old New Zealand MP uses viral term in parliament, BBC News, 7 November 2019, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50327034.

[2] Pro-environmental behavior, also known as green-, sustainable-, or environmentally-friendly (eco-friendly) behavior, is defined as behaviors in which individuals take protective actions toward the environment. Encyclopedia.pub. https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/2546.

change activism. Reacting to media coverage of the "school strikes", researchers set about trying to discern the mechanisms and future impacts of youth activism. Though Neas et al. (2022) identify some limitations in the research, the results of academic papers, opinion polls and surveys are point to the conclusion that Generation Z is deeply concerned about the environment.

In 2021 the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan fact tank, conducted a representative survey involving over 900 Generation Z participants in the United States, and found that this generation stands out for their high levels of engagement with the issue of climate change. This engagement can take shape in various forms such as donating money, volunteering or attending a rally or contacting an elected official. Despite the fact that most of them are concerned about the same issue, they are fairly divided by their political preferences. A young Republican sees the world differently than a young Democrat and while the latter is, for example, really against using fossil fuels, a Republican voter would not oppose that. Most participants consume climate change-related content on social media platforms on a daily basis, and 69 percent of them express anxiety about the future after reading this news. They express more urgency about action than those who are less active online. Their concerns are determined by a variety of things, as seen earlier, the time spent on social media, political preference, family patterns and upbringing, and the place they grew up. The majority of Generation Z first heard about environmental degradation in their early years of school, and the amount information they know about it is unprecedented. This is hardly surprising given the fact that in the Western school system climate change is part of the curriculum, and after the boom of the new-wave environmental movements, many teachers started to support the school strikes as well.

The situation is very similar in the other part of the world. Ipsos conducted a pan-European survey, funded by the European Commission in which 23 European countries took part.[3] The results show that close to half (46%) of young Europeans – 15 to 35 years old – chose climate change as the top priority from a list of "the most serious problems facing the world". In second place is "environmental degradation", including deforestation, air pollution and the loss of biodiversity and only after that comes the spread of infectious diseases. Similarly, in a cross-generational study of attitudes in all EU countries, Skeirytė et al. (2022) compared the Baby Boomer generation, Generation X,Y and Z. They found that younger people's climate change awareness is higher and they are more likely to take certain climate-friendly actions, for example using environmentally friendly alternatives to personal cars and considering carbon footprint before purchasing a product, as opposed to older generations. If we take a closer look to the local/national level, we see very similar findings. In a longitudinal study, carried out by Prati et al. (2022), they found that among Italian adolescents and young adults, age is the most important predictor when it comes to climate change worry. Specifically, worry icreased from the age of 15 years to the age of 30 years.

The Hungarian data are in line with international findings: young people in Hungary face the same challenges and feel the same way. A questionnaire carried out in the fall of 2019 reveals

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[3] Pan-European Survey Main multi-country report, #ClimateOfChange, https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/IPSOS-Multi-Country-Report-complete.FINAL_.pdf.

that even though a minority (39 percent) of young people aged 12-19 consider themselves to be informed about climate change, they do believe that it has a strong impact on their lives (Kovács-Magosi & Székely, 2022). Another very interesting result of the same study is that young people identified their mothers and teachers as environmentally-conscious people in their surroundings, which contradicts to the "generational tension" often portrayed in the mainstream media. Hungarian youth think that multinational companies, politicians and adults are responsible for the current state of the environment. When it comes to the question of volunteering, the majority of Hungarian young adults (aged 15-29) were most active in environmental and animal protection, based on the large-scale representative survey (2021), conducted every fourth year in Hungary.

The deep awareness of environmental protection and climate change goes beyond the theoretical level and leads to behavioral changes. Many young people are trying to move towards more sustainable consumption and lifestyle decisions which affect a wide range of areas in their life – for example:

- Vegetarianism/veganism: The number of young people adopting veganism has increased in modern societies in the past few years (Giacoman et al., 2021) as they give up buying products of animal origin (food, hygiene products, cosmetics).
- Fast fashion: There is a growing tendency among young adults for choosing "slow fashion" products over fast fashion items (Mandarić et al., 2021).
- Having a child: The fear of the consequences for climate crisis puts considerable pressure on reproductive choices. A survey indicates American young people are factoring climate change into their reproductive plans (Schneider-Mayerson & Ling, 2020).

Changing climate, changing mental health
In this year April (2023) The Telegraph reported devastating news on a 19-year-old Greenpeace activist who took his own life after "losing hope over climate change."[4] He was not the only teenager in the near past who decided to do so because of thinking there was no way out from the "climate crisis." The abundance of information on environmental degradation and apocalyptic climate scenarios that young people encounter in the news and also in schools are not without consequences on their mental health. The psychological term "climate anxiety" was coined only a few years ago to describe "heightened emotional, mental or somatic distress in response to dangerous changes in the climate system" and can lead to symptoms such as panic attacks, loss of appetite, irritability, weakness and sleeplessness (Dodds, 2021). Since children, young adults, chronically ill, and those with mental illness are the most vulnerable to this information and the real effects of climate change, it is of utmost importance to protect them – to teach the youth how to process the news, how to be mentally strong enough and instead of losing hope, using their talent and power to find solitons.

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[4] Teenager took his own life after 'losing hope over climate change'. The Telegraph, 14 April 2023. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/04/14/theo-khelfoune-ferreras-walthamstow-death-climate-change/

Youth Climate Movements from 2018 to Date

The best-known youth climate movement is Fridays for Future, but it is not the only one to mobilize thousands of people. While some campaigns have already become cross-national, others remained on a local level. There are some features that these movements share, for example that all of them started either in Western Europe or in the United States, and that their primary tools for mobilization are social media platforms. Another important characteristic is that they are often leaderless and organized horizontally (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012). Necessarily, age is a key factor in their public image, but an increase in older participants can be observed over time. Regardless of age, the question of personal identification is also significant: in line with Melucci's (1996) analysis, participants have to have personal connections to a cause linked with experience, culture, and identity. Four main factors can be distinguished that motivate young people to join to a movement: connection to nature through outdoor experiences; family influence and mentorship; seeing injustice in a community and the world; and peer-to-peer learning (Dolan, 2019). Despite the fact that not everyone chooses to be an activist, the new movements play key role in shaping Gen Z's identity. Brügger et al. (2020) found that there are two psychological processes that are related to participation in climate strikes. First, it depends on the degree to which one identifies with others who strike. For example, based on Haugseth & Smeplass's (2022) work, Greta Thunberg became a unifying inspiration four young people already concerned with the climate crisis in Norway. Secondly, participation in strikes is also related to risk perception. The more someone worries, the more likely he/she is to join a movement.

Table 2. The most popular youth environmental movements

Name	Year and country of foundation	Description	Present at	Demands	Campaign tools
The Sunrise Movement – We are the climate revolution	April 2017, US	youth movement	n/a	to stop climate change and create millions of good jobs in the process; to end the corrupting influence of fossil fuel executives	demonstrations
Fridays for Future	August 2018, Sweden	youth-led and -organized movement	7500 cities, including Budapest	protest against the lack of action on the climate crisis	school strikes on every Friday

Letzte Generation	2021, Germany	group of climate activists	10 countries	place maximum speed limits on highways of 100km/h; maximum 9-Euro-ticket for public transport	road blockades, gluing themselves to the street/objects
Just Stop Oil	14 February, 2022, UK	environmental activist group; non-hierarchical, operating with autonomous blocks that share resources with each other	n/a	to halt fossil fuels licensing	civil resistance, direct action

The number of the newly-established youth-led environmental movements has grown sharply in recent years. In addition to those presented in Table 2., there are, for example, *Zero Hour, Earth Uprising, Climate Cardinals, Re-Earth Initiative and Growth for Green*. Their most common demand is that political leaders listen to the words of scientists to reduce the effects of climate change. However, there are multiple other ideas and claims integrated into their campaigns under the umbrella of climate change. For example, FFF protestors express not only the need for climate action but also call for deeper societal transformation (Marquadt, 2020). Deriving from the concept of "environmental justice", they invented the so-called "climate justice" referring to the fact that climate change is not only a scientific challenge but also has social dimensions. For this reason, social issues such as gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, the rights of people of color and indigenous peoples are always included during demonstrations. A very striking campaign tool used by more and more movements recently is "non-violent civil disobedience". Disobedience is a wide category that can include any kind of law-breaking, defiance of school attendance laws, demonstrating protest against a law (Mattheis, 2022), gluing oneself to objects or damaging artwork. For example, Just Stop Oil activists threw soup at Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* last year in Italy. While such actions usually spark immediate, but short-term media attention, to what extent they are effective and acceptable is questionable.

"The Greta-effect"

There have been a number of characters who, with their actions and/or charisma, have exercised a key influence on environmental discourse. In the 20th century, for example, one might think of Gaylord Nelson, the creator of Earth Day; John Muir, the father of US national parks; or Al Gore, vice-president during the Clinton administration. After the release of Gore's famous, yet very divisive, documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), his name became synonymous with environmentalism. Something similar is true of Greta Thunberg today. The term, "the Greta-effect" was coined by journalists to reflect the key role that Thunberg has played in creating a world-wide movement (Sorce,

2022). Part of the reason behind her success can be explained by the new media infrastructure we have today. New media such as social platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc.) opened a new door for collective action and the spread of digital activism. By digital activism (also referred as cyberactivism) we mean a form of activism that uses the Internet and digital media as key platforms for mass mobilization and political action.[5] A very important feature of digital activism is that the activists can challenge the gatekeeping-mechanisms of traditional media and call people to action on alternative routes. As presented in the next section *Climate change in the media* we shed light on how much climate change news media coverage has changed in the past few years. Such climate activists as Greta Thunberg became global communicators with professional platforms and content. Thunberg has 14,7 million followers on Instagram, whereas she counts 5,7 million on Twitter as well.

At the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, public attention turned to a 12-year-old Canadian girl, Severn Cullis-Suzuki, who held a speech in front of decision-makers and journalists in which she spoke about environmental issues from the youth's perspective. This was portrayed in the news as "the girl who silenced the world for five minutes."[6] She has remained an activist ever since, but there has never been a "Cullis-Suzuki-effect" mentioned in the literature. In terms of context, the speech she gave back in the 1990s was very similar to the one Thunberg performed at the UN in 2019. Their age was quite similar too when they attended these events. Only one thing differed: the impact they made after that. While almost thirty years ago there were only traditional media technologies available – i.e. television, radio, print magazines – by the turn of the 21st century the world had changed enormously. Cullis-Suzuki did not have any kind of tools to keep environmental protection on the agenda and in the public mind, whereas Thunberg uses interactive platforms on which she and other media users crate, share, discuss and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Thunberg's social media accounts are followed by more than 23 million people, thus providing a base for national and local collectives (Sorce, 2022). Hermann et al. (2022) collected 59,112 posts tagged with #fridaysforfuture and analyzed 91,172 hashtags used therein. They found that these hashtags could be divided into eleven clusters (categories) which provide information about the movement and its focus. Many of the posts concentrated on topics such as climate, lifestyle and health, art or sustainable consumption. This illustrates well how young activists form the discourse with their own content.

"No matter what your age is. You are defined by your action, not by your age."[7]

So says Licypriya Kangujam, the world's youngest climate activist. Kangujam, from India, started to be a climate advocate in 2018 at age the age of six. She campaigns for climate action in India, and to make climate-change literacy mandatory in schools, but also travels internationally and takes

[5] Digital activism. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/digital-activism
[6] Nearly 30 years before Greta Thunberg, a 12-year-old girl shamed world leaders at the United Nations. news.com.au 26 September 2019, https://www.news.com.au/technology/environment/climate-change/nearly-30-years-before-greta-thunberg-a-12yearold-girl-shamed-world-leaders-at-the-united-nations/news-story/8e99d7fce5e0abae106ce73baa5209b7
[7] Tweet by Licypriya Kangujam, 27 November 2022, https://twitter.com/LicypriyaK/status/1596798310936780800.

part in high-level conferences. She addressed world leaders at global climate summits such as the 2019 COP25 summit in Spain, and COP27 in Egypt in 2022, for example. She was inspired by Greta Thunberg to start advocating against climate change and has been nominated for several awards (see for example the Forbes India 30 Under 30[8]). Kangujam's impact is in large part due to her Twitter account and Instagram profile, she has nearly 21,9 million followers. She is obviously extremely busy (see Figure 3) and works a lot despite being so young. Kangujam online presence is key to her popularity's survival. If the mainstream media do not cover her stories, there is a constant and professional content production on her platforms with professional post descriptions and hashtags. However, these social media activities seem contradictory: what is a child doing on these platforms in the first place? How will the "success" created here affect her self-image? Whose interests are served when she is participating in the various summits? Through the examples of the three activists we see how the world changed: young climate activists are sometimes used by adults in order to influence a certain discourse.

Figure 1. Schreenshot about Licypriya Kanguran's schedule on COP26 in Egypt.
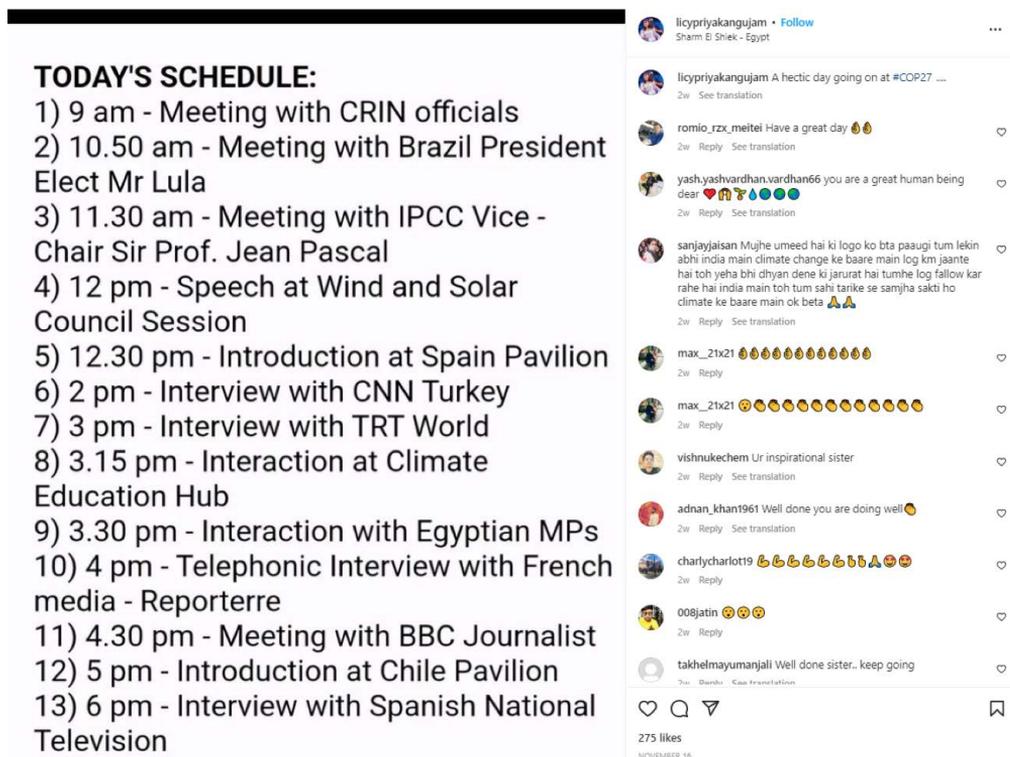
[8] Forbes India 30 Under 30: The ones we had to mention. Forbes India, 8 February 2021, https://www.forbesindia.com/article/30-under-30-2021/forbes-india-30-under-30-the-ones-we-had-to-mention/66317/1.

Clime Change in the Media

In April 2021 an undercover recording revealed Charlie Chesner, the Technical Director for CNN, admitting how the media company had been making up stories to get Donald Trump, former US President, out of office. It was not the only shocking information to be revealed by an investigation group, called Project Veritas, as Chesner also explained CNN's strategy for climate change reporting:

> *"The next pandemic-like story, that we'll [CNN] beat to death, has got longevity. You know what I mean? It's not like, it is definitive ending to the pandemic, or you know like...I'll taper off to a point that it's not a problem anymore...but the climate thing is gonna take years. So, they'll probably be able to milk that for quite a bit." (Farrukhzoda, 2021)*

By the end of the year, his words were confirmed: an international, multi-university-based collaboration at the University of Colorado Boulder, called MeCCO (Media and Climate Change Observatory) found that US climate change media coverage reached an all-time high by October 2021. As Figure 1 shows, not only CNN but every other leading US news organization placed climate change first on their agendas and therefore the number of climate-related articles doubled compared to the previous years (Katzung, 2023). Furthermore, not only did the quantity of climate change news increase, but the language to describe it also changed. MeCCO observed that such terms as "climate change" or "global warming" were replaced with more intense expressions such as "climate emergency", "climate catastrophe" or "climate apocalypse."

Let us take one step back in the history of climate change news reporting to better understand today's media mechanisms. Climate change (often referred to synonymously, though misleadingly, as "global warming") has featured on the global media agenda since the 1980s. The rise of interest in this topic occurred alongside the expansion of the Network Society (Castells, 1996) and the appearance of digital media technologies. Despite the increase in climate change news reporting, it has always been challenging to media outlets and journalists to find the best way to cover the topic due to the fact that the effects of climate change often remain invisible. As one former Environment Correspondent for BBC News put it, "above all environmental stories really need good pictures...global warming is very difficult because you can't actually see global warming" (quoted in Anderson, 2014:66). Without emotive and shocking pictures, it is difficult to sustain public attention. From a visual point of view, it is worth mentioning the tragic incident of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. It was one of the first live-broadcasted events during which the world as one "global village" scrutinized the dreadful consequences of a natural disaster and the suffering of hundreds of people.

Figure 2. Media coverage of climate change or global warming month to month in The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, USA Today, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal in the US from January 2000 through December 2021
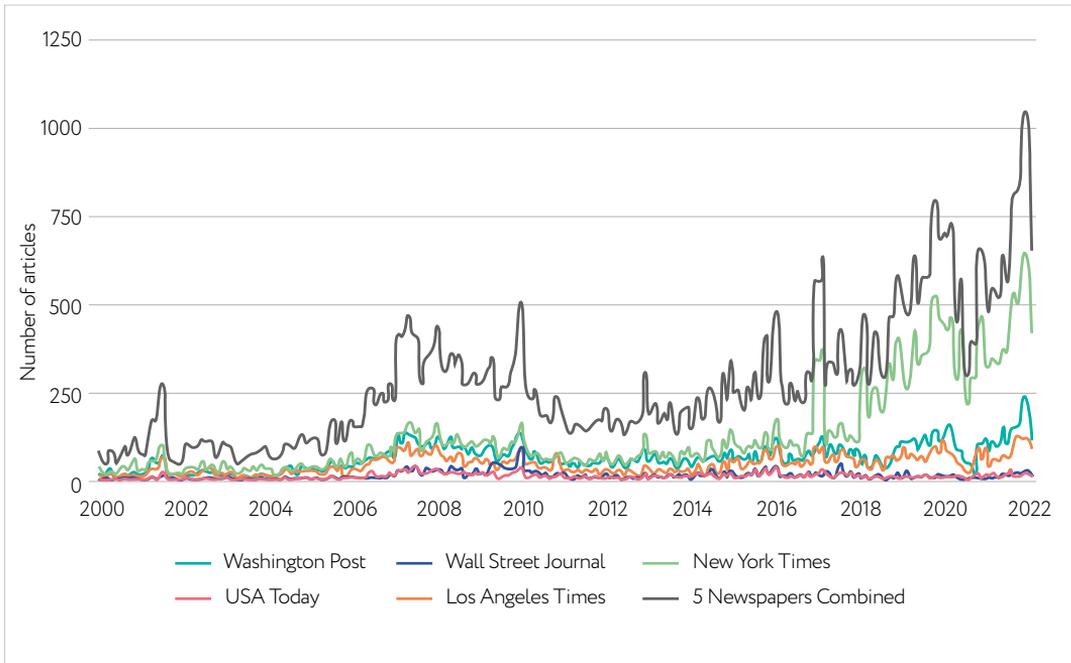
With greater or lesser intensity, climate change has always been present on the media agenda since its debut in the 1980s and has also remained a challenge for journalists to portray it in a fresh and involving way up until 2018. That year can be regarded as a turning point in the history of climate change media coverage as the discourse arrived at two milestones. In September 2018, the previously unknown Greta Thunberg grabbed the mainstream's attention with her school strikes ("skolstrejk för klimatet") to be held every Friday in Sweden. She not only became a world-famous activist-celebrity, but she changed the character of grassroots environmental movements. Ever since her first public appearance in August 2018, she has often been referred as a controversial and divisive person, with a striking number of followers. Catchy phrases such as the "Greta-effect", "Greta-phenomenon" or "Greta-generation" have entered our everyday discourse (as discussed further below). Her presence meant a breakthrough for media reporting on climate change from a very different angle and even the people most indifferent to the topic could not easily avoid it.

In the same year, the IPCC released a special report (SR15) on stating that "limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in land use, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities" (IPCC, 2018). It is often forgotten that the IPCC reports are based on best- and worst-case scenarios. Yet while climate change modeling presents differ-

ent possible outcomes, media reporting often focuses on the most terrifying scenarios and presents them as simple reality. As Boykoff & Pearman (2019) note, after SR15 was published, headlines suddenly turned into "deadlines": reports stated such things as the "planet has only until 2030 to stem catastrophic climate change, experts warn" (CNN), or that "we have 12 years to limit climate change before the world as we know it is lost. How much more urgent can it get?" (*The Guardian*). Some IPCC researchers became quite upset after seeing how their report was reframed in the news (Boykoff & Pearman, 2019).

By 2018 it seemed that covering climate change had stuck and the topic's newsworthiness lost power. Even the phrase "climate change" turned into an umbrella term that is too general and sometimes misused. From 2018 on the rapid multiplication of youth-empowered climate movements have really stirred up still water and at the same time, sparked enormous media attention. It is not the politicians nor the celebrities who represent best this topic anymore, but rather the future generations.

Three Seconds to Mobilize

Robert Cox (2017), a pioneer in the field of environmental communication pointed out that in the last couple of years, social media have dramatically altered the landscape for environmental communication and thus created a "networked public sphere". The fact that environmental and climate change news migrated online has had huge impact on mobilization too. In order to mobilize crowds it is first necessary to catch their attention. There is an ever-growing literature on the different strategies for engaging people in climate action through social media campaigns (Chia, 2021; Brügger et al., 2020; Mavrodieva et al. 2019), while at the same time human attention spans are getting shorter and shorter. In his book, titled *Hook Point. How to Stand Out in a 3 Second World*, Brendan Kane (2020) argues that content creators – whether individuals, media companies or marketing experts – only have three seconds to grab the audience's attention with online marketing. It seems shocking; however, the online world is filled with so much (redundant) information and content that after every third second the users feel the need to scroll down for new stimulus. That raises the question of how such complex issues (such as climate change) can be squeezed into three seconds without losing the essence of what is being said.

Unstoppable Youth: A new Level at Digital Activism

In 2021 the European Greens released a documentary titled *Youth Unstoppable: Another World is Possible* to showcase how youth climate movements have brought climate change public and political attention.[9] The party assumes that the young generation is often misunderstood and struggle to be heard. This film is trying to display a highly positive image about the protesters through presenting the audience a powerful vision for the future of the planet and the youth that will lead us.

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[9] Youth Unstoppable: On the frontlines of the Global Youth Climate Movement. *European Greens.* https://europeangreens. eu/news/youth-unstoppable-frontlines-global-youth-climate-movement

The concept of youth grassroot environmental movements is not a revolutionary one – it existed well before the digital age and preceded today's popular youth organizations such as the Fridays for Future or Just Stop Oil. The difference is that prior movements did not gain as much visibility as the new ones. As Pezzullo and Cox (2017) argue, by the Earth Day in 1970, the ecology movement had begun to change the way in which citizens communicated with officials about the environment. The voice of the public started to matter more and the people became part of the dialogue. Cox (2012) also highlighted that the energy, creative ideas and direct actions often came from the youth at a local level. The local organizing initiative around the environmental and climate justice always came from young activists based in the United States, Western Europe as well as from indigenous people from Asia, Africa and South America who are directly exposed to natural threats. As pointed out earlier, however, the contemporary climate movements would not be as wide-spread and known if we did not live in the digital age and did not have social media. The digital media radically transformed the role of impacts of climate and environmental activism. It is now much more accessible, cheaper, faster and also sustainable to reach and mobilize people. There is also excessive know-how cumulated throughout the years to kick-off a new movement and campaign.

Budziszewska & Głód (2021) focused on Fridays for Future in their research and recorded in-depth interviews with FFF activists in Poland. They found that one of the strengths of Friday for Future is that the movement provides opportunity for learning and achieving new skills if someone would like to become an activist. New members are trained to learn the scientific aspects of climate change, the ways they should organize protests, and how they can be more sustainable in their own lives. They are invited to so-called "climate justice camps" where workshops, lectures and other events are held by experienced activists and professionals. Through this extensive organization, being an FFF activist becomes a pleasant activity. When the participants were asked about work-life balance, they confessed that sometimes they did not even feel that they were actually delivering work because they were so immersed in their tasks. These occasions provide young people a chance to meet their peers and to make new connections and friendships, which is especially important to them after a long period of isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Closing Remarks – a Critical Reflection

Climate change and environmental questions have dominated the media agenda for almost forty years now. Besides the academic circles, these issues appear in political discourses and in the public sphere. From a social perspective, it is the now young generation mostly discussed in connection with the possible effects of climate change. It is often highlighted that Generation Z will be the cohort who will have to face the consequences of environmental destruction. There are several youth-led movements that appeared during the past five years: these are strikingly similar, go viral within a very short time and besides that they are professional both in their rhetoric and marketing. However, the majority of

scientific research features only the positive effects these movements, there is often no information provided about who is behind them. The rapidly growing body of research is disproportionate in terms of geographical location, ethnicity, sex and social class of the participants, which raises important questions. Despite of the abundance of information, the investigated activists are predominantly white, female participants from well-educated families living in the Western-world (the United States and Western Europe). From this we can conclude that Generation Z is presumably way more complex than we imagine them right now. And, however, climate change/environmental degradation is an urgent challenge, it is an exaggeration to state it is what that the entire generation (globally) fears most. Based on UN data (UN,#YouthStat, 2022), for example, currently 169 million youth suffers from, poverty and more than 500 million youth aged 15-24 live on less than $2 a day. As long as we only focus on climate change, we ignore a lot of other areas where youth needs immediate help.

The fact that a wide range of young adults is dedicated to fight against injustice and for a better future is impressive, but it would be a mistake to not mention the growing extent of climate anxiety among youth. Climate anxiety is complex and is not yet recognized as a mental illness, however, it is connected to many emotions, such as worry, fear, anger, grief, despair and guilt (Hickman, et al. 2021). A representative survey, issued by psychologist association, called Very Well Mind (2021) proved that what US young participants are most afraid of is the future of the planet. Constantly hearing news about environmental challenges and disasters puts enormous pressure and mental burden on this generation. Crandon, et al. (2022) show that children and adolescents are the most vulnerable in terms of climate anxiety. In many cases this fear cannot be transformed into action, but is paralyzing. Curry (2022) sees the apocalyptic rhetoric surrounding the "climate crisis" as primarily responsible for climate anxiety. In her argument, the way climate change is presented to children is far more alarming than what for example the IPCC reports say. Young adults and especially children lack the resources to process these messages and thus they fall victim to crisis rhetoric. In my view, one of the most important questions government, researchers, parents and teachers should address is the mental well-being of the youth. Young adults should be prepared and trained on how to cope with constant negative information. They need hope to envision a livable future and to not lose faith in starting a family or having children. It is valuable if a child is open the world and is raised to be environmentally conscious but problems occur when someone intentionally treats him/her as an adult and steals his/her childhood. Despite the fact that climate change is a real challenge, six-year old children, such as Licypriya Kangujam, should not handle these questions and take part in international world summits. The number of young people who decide to join an environmental movement proves that this generation is longing for a community where they are understood and where they can use and develop their talent and competencies. Parents, teachers and the education system have the greatest respon-sibility to listen to and to support them so that Generation Z complete their mission.

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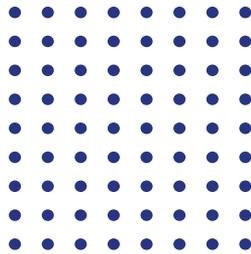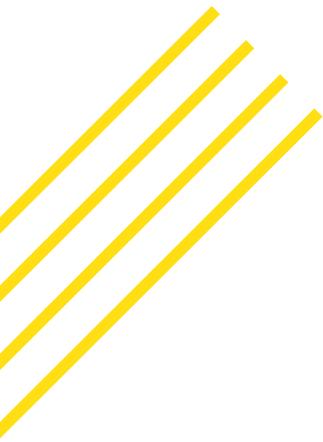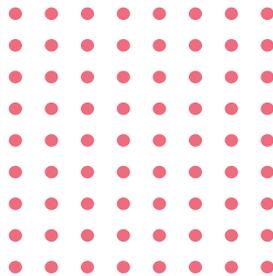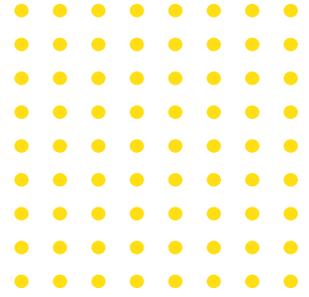
07

Communitarianism Among European Youth – A Crisis of Trust in the Social Environment Surrounding Youth?

Miklós Gyorgyovich

What is "Community"?

Are (youth) communities in modern societies in crisis or at least in transition? If not, why do we feel that in some ways there is a negative trend? If so, what is the cause? As social beings, humanity has always lived in some form of community, whether or not these function successfully and effectively. In order to examine the question, it is of course necessary to clarify what is meant by community or successful community in this study. This is not an easy task because the word "community" has different meanings in many languages, depending on the context in which it is used, its cultural and historical background and its linguistic meaning (Gorman 2002). Thus, the author of these paragraphs may also be under the influence of his own mother tongue. What we can certainly agree on is that the creation of human communities is a biologically innate need. However, it is a broad concept that covers many types of social forms, and its meaning depends on the language area and the way it is used. On the one hand, it can indicate the quality of a society, distinguishing between societies with a strong sense of community and those without. It can denote a willingness or ability to cooperate. It can mean a kind of collective creation – think of (folk) dance movements or even community theatre. It can express the same set of values and the coexistence based on them (e.g., commune). It can express ethnic and cultural belonging, for example when we talk about emigrant communities. It can also refer to a sense of locality (local community, village community, neighbourhood).[1] Finally, the meaning of the word to express imperial unity (e.g. the British Commonwealth) cannot be omitted (cf. Horváth 2020).

According to the Hungarian sociologist, values researcher and philosopher Elemér Hankiss (1981), the community is a human conglomerate characterized by four factors: a common interest, a common purpose, a common set of values and, fourthly, an awareness of these three, that is, the existence of a sort of "we-ness". The "we-ness" is expressed in a sense of belonging, in interest in public or community affairs, in actions for the community, and ultimately in solidarity and caring for each other. (Vásárhelyi 2002). The value-based approach has been addressed by several authors, who identify a number of components, such as solidarity, commitment to each other, reciprocity and trust. (Frazer 1999:76)

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[1] As an interesting experience, if you Google the word „community" in English, this is what most of the results refer to.

Key Role and Key Factors for a Successful Community

There are countless indicators of a community's success that researchers can use. According to Horváth (2020), in historical terms, it is a success if a community survives at all and does not disappear. The recognition of the importance of community goes back to primordial times, when even prehistoric man realized that he could survive longer by forming a community than he could alone, and by working together with other communities, the chances of survival can be increased even further. Already Aristotle pointed out that man is a "zoon politikon", i.e., a living being ("zoon") that has a "logos" (i.e., is intelligent) and lives in a polis (state, city-state, or at least in some kind of political community). However, Aristotle goes further and gives a special importance to ethics, saying that a member of the community has moral duties, which are observed in the form of virtues (positive actions). But the member of the community has ethical duties not only towards the gods (e.g., worship, piety), but also towards the community (e.g., justice, loyalty, care) (cf. Aristotle, 2012, 2013). Man, therefore, can live a full life only in community. According to the ancient philosopher, the primary natural form of community is the family, blood relations and co-habiting people (the household). The family, on the other hand, can achieve its own goals only by living and cooperating (peacefully) with other families, so that together they form a larger community, society, which the philosopher calls a polis, or city-state. So even in antiquity, it was well-established that the existence and quality of community was an essential factor in all aspects of human life, action and ultimately happiness. The idea of the transcendent and "obligatory" ethical behaviour of man towards the members of the community is then also found in Judaism and Christianity. (cf. the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament and the main commandment of Christ[2]). And according to St. Thomas Aquinas, without natural communities, it is impossible for the individual to be fulfilled and live a happy life (Nagy 2015).

But has this natural community been broken up by today? And if so, when did it start to break up and where is the process now? Many consider Ferdinand Tönnies' book "Community and Society" (1887) to be the starting point for this discourse. The author contrasts the natural community *(Gemeinschaft)* and the artificial community *(Gesellschaft)* on the basis of two epochs. The former was more prevalent in Europe until the emergence of capitalism, and the latter became more prevalent afterwards, with the emergence of contractual relations. At the heart of the *Gemeinschaft* is the vital human connection, the unquestioning adherence to tradition, the relationship of subordination and superiority, and religion is a sure guide to all this. In contrast, the *Gesellschaft* is permeated by contractual relations, the world of interests and the importance of personal profit. Religion is replaced by mass communication, mass beliefs and political ideology, and the unquestionable tradition is replaced by the

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[2] "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-4)

convention that can be questioned at any time. Humanity as an "unquestionable tradition" is replaced by humanity as a "changeable convention". Consequently, it is increasingly a matter of individual choice how one relates to members of the community, to other people. And instead of a purely "social instinct", people are increasingly drawn together by social interests or the pursuit of profit.

James Coleman (1990) and Robert Putnam (1993) later added to these ideas by arguing that one of the most important prerequisites for well-functioning and developing communities is "social capital", which provides the means to achieve larger goals for the whole or part of the community that could not be achieved alone or only at great cost. The basis of social capital is, of course, the bonds, networks, shared norms and values that form between members of a community, and the maintenance and quasi "glue" of social capital is the trust in each other. It has therefore become a general fact that where social capital is strong, there is a greater willingness to participate in common affairs and a greater tendency to cooperate, to support each other and, ultimately, a higher level of happiness.

Are Communities in Crisis?

One may notice that there is a certain tension between two theorems: Do happy, trusting communities emerge from a collection of happy individuals and therefore, in the event of a conflict of interest, does the individual interest take precedence over the community interest? Or is it rather the inherently prosperous community that can truly ensure the fulfilment of the individual, and therefore the interests of the community take precedence? While broadly conservative approaches argue that natural communities are disappearing, other approaches argue that communities have not disappeared but have been transformed, and that the people living within them have in fact been "liberated" from traditional constraints. Classical neighbourhood relations still exist in the urban environment, but these relations are no longer so densely woven, and with the emergence of modernization, especially the internet, they are also much more spatially extended, so our relations are far from being exclusively local. This is why we are seeing, especially among young people, the partial disappearance of traditional, local spaces for community life. Thus, while Tönnies' theory is interpreted as "an obstacle in the way of modernity" (Dahrendorf 1968, also cf. Plant 1974), it was later argued in conservative groups that the idea of communality could be preserved in the age of individualism. Moreover, in theories that emphasize individual freedom, there is also a place and a role for the concept of community. (Vercseg 2018) Although our age is characterized by a diversity of choices and individualization, even liberal thought shows that this should not displace a high level of commitment to each other. Zurba and Trimble (2014) argue for a kind of fusion, whereby one value system does not replace the other, but rather they merge. Even the Christian Democratic approach places the emphasis between the two, saying that the individual deserves autonomy and cannot be subordinated exclusively to the interests of the community, but that it is free will that can make someone a truly constructive member of the community.

Therefore, the functioning of communities depends on the maintenance of connection, reciprocity and trust in each other. Many of the studies listed earlier indicate the erosion of social capital. In some countries in Europe, as we will see, people are lonely and less trusting of each other, which is a critical condition for cooperation and community. But elsewhere we see high levels of confidence.

Lack of Trust as an Indicator of Crisis?

The social function of trust is still an ongoing research topic in social sciences. Contemporary specialist writers also deal with the issue in depth.[3] In his study, Ebert (2009, cited in Kováts 2018:532-534) pointed out that while between 1966 and 1992, approximately 10 articles on trust were published annually in higher-ranking journals, the number increased after that. There were 20 in 1995, 60 in 2000 and 109 in 2003, in very different disciplines. After that, I could not find a standalone statement, but if we just set up the search interface of the EBSCO database in detail with criteria similar to Ebert's,[4] we find an average of 348 relevant articles per year between 2004 and 2022 in peer-reviewed academic journals. As Kováts points out, the reason for this is, on the one hand, the growing number of scientific literatures, but on the other hand, some authors point to a change in the way society actually functions. We also may notice that, while the traditional small community (in Tönnies' sense) could more easily impose norms, in modern societies the division of labour and the multiplicity of our nexuses make us dependent on other individuals and institutions, quite unknown to us. For this reason, the role of trust in our communities is inevitably and inescapably enhanced, as it strengthens the bonds of solidarity and reciprocity between community members. It follows directly from this that a lack of trust increases the "cognitive complexity" of social situations. That is, at the level of everyday practices, in trust-deficient societies much more effort has to be devoted to observing the complete behaviour of the other person, simply for the banal reason of not being "cheated". This social "glue" is therefore still indispensable, even in modern societies, because without it, transactions between community members become "expensive" in many ways, because they are forced to over-insure risks, longer checks are needed, verbal agreements must be put in writing, sometimes with more assurances than necessary. Kováts also rightly points out that excessive trust can also work in reverse, since in every community there are individuals of untrustworthy character or who consciously live their lives in an untrustworthy way (e.g., criminals), against whom unlimited trust is not appropriate. "The system of checks and balances or ''organized scepticism' of science in a democracy is a certain institutionalization of mistrust." (Kováts 2018:534)

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[3] cf. Luhmann (1979); Giddens (1991); Fukuyama (1996); Putnam (2000); Hardin (2006)

[4] Peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals between 2004 and 2022, with "trust" as a keyword (and not just containing the word).

Data and Method

Building on the above, the aim of the study is to explore and interpret the interactions, changes and current status of some of the variables of caring, social activity and trust in each other and in the community among European youth (under 30). The most suitable set of variables for this purpose can be found in the European Social Survey (ESS).[5] After much deliberation, I decided not to use the latest SPSS database containing the 10th wave (2020) because at the time of the calculations used to write the article, data were only available for 10 countries, after which the database containing 19 countries was published on 7 December 2022, but there were still 6 countries missing, where the surveyors used a self-completion methodology rather than face-to-face due to the coronavirus pandemic. In contrast, using data from the 9th wave (2018), 29 countries can be analysed, and at that time neither the data collection methods nor the response were affected by the pandemic. The total unweighted subsample of under-30s in Round 9 consisted of 7,837 respondents. Of the ESS weight variables, I used the so-called "post-stratification weight" (see table 1.), given that, unlike the "design weight", this variable was designed to reduce errors caused by sampling as well as biases due to non-response.

Table 1. Distribution of the number of young
European respondents under 30 by country

	N (Unweighted sample)	N (Weighted sample)
Austria	368	513
Belgium	383	391
Bulgaria	234	373
Switzerland	320	321
Cyprus	81	173
Czechia	407	484
Germany	461	479
Denmark	315	386
Estonia	315	376
Spain	296	280
Finland	305	374

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[5] The ESS is an international survey carried out every two years across Europe since 2002. For more information see the webpage: www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about

France	277	406
United Kingdom	259	428
Croatia	262	356
Hungary	264	327
Ireland	236	492
Iceland	140	227
Italy	480	497
Lithuania	183	356
Latvia	80	160
Montenegro	208	307
Netherlands	328	375
Norway	293	356
Poland	310	298
Portugal	137	194
Serbia	246	466
Sweden	240	380
Slovenia	229	232
Slovakia	97	207
∑	7837	10 214

Source: ESS 2018 database

Variables

The following questions were used to capture attitudes about the importance of community caring:

- *It is very important to him/her to help the people around him/her. He/she wants to care for their well-being.*
- *It is important to him/her to be loyal to his/her friends. He/she wants to devote himself/herself to people close to him.*

To understand the power of community activism, the following two questions were considered relevant:

- Compared to other people of your age, how often would you say you take part in social activities?
- How often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?

Finally, to measure "trust", the focus of our research, we used the results of the following three questions:

- Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?
- Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?
- Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?

After selecting the questions relevant to our topic, and excluding non-respondents, for ease of analysis and clarity I used a so-called dimensional reduction method[6] to create three standardised variables and one additional standardized variable. These in themselves are a good representation of (1) respondents' social trust, (2) attitudes about the importance of caring for the community, and (3) the community activity of the young people surveyed. Then, further combining the latter two factors, using the same method, I created the "communitarianism" indicator, which also expresses "community caring + community activity". In other words, both the Kaiser criterion,[7] the explained coefficient of variance,[8] and the eigenvalue graph shows that these questions can express the information being examined in a single variable per topic. In this way, I have the opportunity to present the relationship between trust and communitarianism through two values, rather than separately through the individual questions.

Findings

First examine the evolution of each factor between 2002 and 2018. For ease of understanding, I have also created the aforementioned indicators for the whole database covering the entire 2002-2018 results for people under 30 (only considering the 29 countries that are included in round 9). Hence, for each factor, the average over the 16 years is 0, so Figure 1 shows the variation in each factor over the analysis period as a whole at the time of each recording. The intensity of community activity[9] showed a slight hectic pattern from the beginning of the survey until 2010, followed by a sharp decline in the two subsequent rounds and a slight increase in 2018. The importance of community caring[10] on the other hand, has become increasingly important for young European respondents, albeit with some minor breaks.[11] Interestingly, it is worth noting that the attitudinal importance of community caring increased mainly when community activity decreased. Finally, we see the largest fluctuations in the confidence factor. It did not deviate significantly from the 16-year average at the time of the first three surveys,

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[6] Factor analysis produces so-called latent variables, which are defined by manifest (i.e. observed and measured) variables. The factors generated are standardised variables with mean 0 and standard deviation 1.
[7] that is, the eigenvalue belonging to the factors should be higher than 1.
[8] that is, the variance explained by the factors should be at least 60 percent
[9] socail activities, meeting friends, relatives, colleagues
[10] the importance of helping others and being loyal to others
[11] The combined expression of these two variables is demonstrated by the communitarianism dataset.

but then there was a slight downward trend in 2008, followed by a relatively steep recovery and then a rise above the average, which was only broken slightly in round 9. So although there have been turbulences in attitudes and narratives over the last one and half decades for Europe as a whole, this does not clearly prove that European youth communities are in crisis.

Figure 1. Trends in factor scores of trust and communitarianism between 2002 and 2018 among Europeans under 30
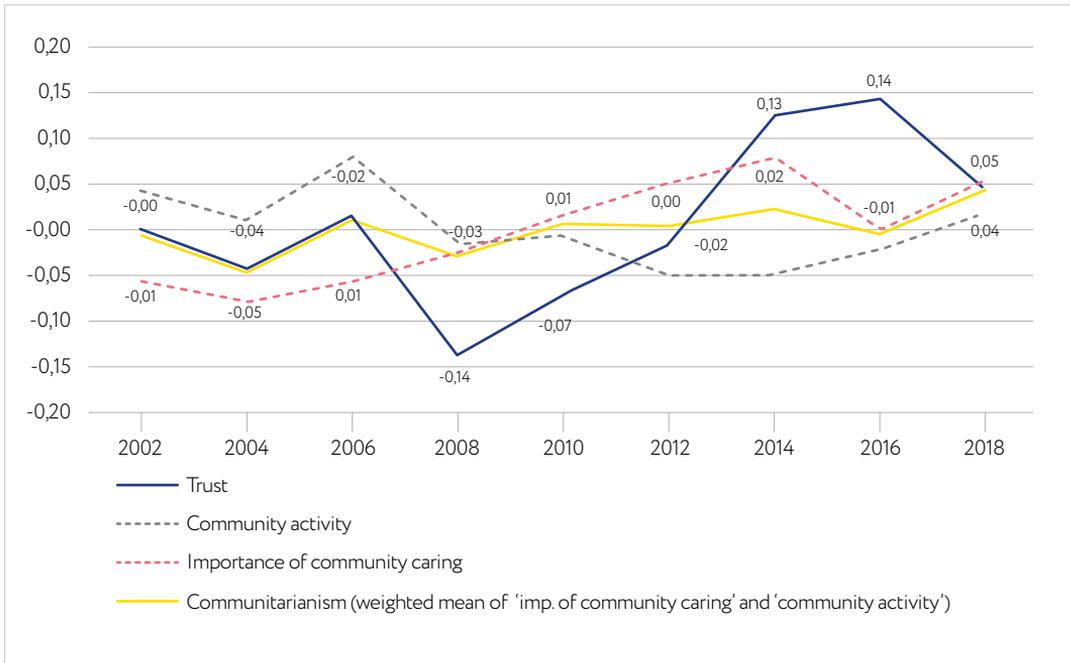
Source: ESS Round 9 database, own calculation

The comparison of the trust and communality factors by country in a coordinate system, however, describes an interesting quasi-U-shaped curve, so the polynomial regression line fits best.[12] The left side of the X-axis in Figure 2 shows countries with low levels of trust, while the right side shows countries where respondents said they had higher levels of trust in their fellow citizens. At the bottom of the Y-axis, we see countries with low levels of communitarianism (where the sense of importance of caring for community members and the level of community activity are lower), while at the top we see countries with more positive results.

The location of the points marking each country highlights a number of interesting facts, but also opens up an equal number of questions. On the one hand, it is clear that in the top-right sector (mostly in Western European countries), the higher the social trust level, the higher the

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[12] R-square=0,3292

value of communitarianism. Denmark stands out, where young people have both the second highest trust index and the strongest sense of communality. At the same place, however, Finnish young people appear as a kind of outliers, who, although they show the strongest trust status, their sense of community is just above the European average.

Building on the same analogy, some countries from the left-bottom sector also fit the pattern, where the Slovak, Latvian and Polish examples show that lower levels of trust are accompanied by a lower sense of communality among young people. Nevertheless, this is not set in stone when looking at the location of the other country markers. For example, it is interesting to note the results based on the responses of Lithuanian and Hungarian young people, but also Estonian and Czech young people who have moved to the right-bottom sector, where we can measure a relatively low sense of communality, with a relatively average level of trust by European standards. It may also be remarkable that we do not see the inverse of the same phenomenon in any country, i.e., a high level of communitarianism with an average level of trust.

On the contrary, it is striking that many countries are in the top-left sector, where, in addition to a lower level of trust, there is a slight but rising trend towards a sense of communality. In this sense, young Montenegrins, Serbs and Bulgarians with a deeply below-average level of trust may have a high sense of communitarianism, in other words, a high importance of helping others and a high level of community activity in their everyday lives. The level of young people in Serbia is comparable to Icelanders, and Bulgarians and Montenegrins to Swiss respondents.

To make it interesting, I have also grouped the countries by colour into three groups based on the results of the Human Development Index (HDI)[13] 2021. (UNDP 2022) Nonetheless, it is important to note that the European countries included in this secondary analysis are basically all rated "Very High" among the UN countries (except Bulgaria, which is rated "High"), for the sake of transparency I have divided the countries into three groups based on their HDI score, and I have marked the top 10 countries in blue, the middle 9 in orange and the last 10 in red. From this perspective, the location of groups of countries at the two ends is particularly noteworthy. The group of countries with a high HDI is clearly visible in the figure, and although they do not cluster around a single point, they are all in the top-right sector, with the exception of Belgium and Ireland, forming a nearly homogeneous group. The main relative difference between them is in their confidence index. Countries with an average HDI by European standards are relatively more scattered in the figure, though most are found in the red and blue groups. The exceptions are Austria, which is in a relatively better position, and Cyprus, which is in a relatively weaker one. Finally, countries with a low HDI are clearly spread more to the left and/or bottom of the graph. A larger group of countries is made up of Serbs, Montenegrins, Bulgarians and Croats with low levels of trust but strong communitariness, and relatively further north are Slovaks, Lithuanians, Poles, Latvians and Hungarians, who have average levels of trust but lower communitariness.

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[13] The HDI is an index that compares countries around the world on the basis of life expectancy at birth, literacy, education and living standards.

Finally, I have framed the countries that were once part of the sphere of interest of the Soviet Union, namely the post-Soviet countries. This separation leads to an even more striking grouping. The imaginary oval circle of 12 countries is only touched by two countries, Italy, which is in a relatively more positive position, and Cyprus on the other side of the circle. And from the post-Soviet circle, there are 4 countries "trying to move away", on one side the Croats with a higher communitarianism, on the other side the Estonians and Czechs with a higher level of trust but very low communitarianism, and in between these two groups, close to the countries with a higher prestige value, we can observe Slovenia.

Figure 2. Relationship between trust and communitarianism by country (ESS Round 9)
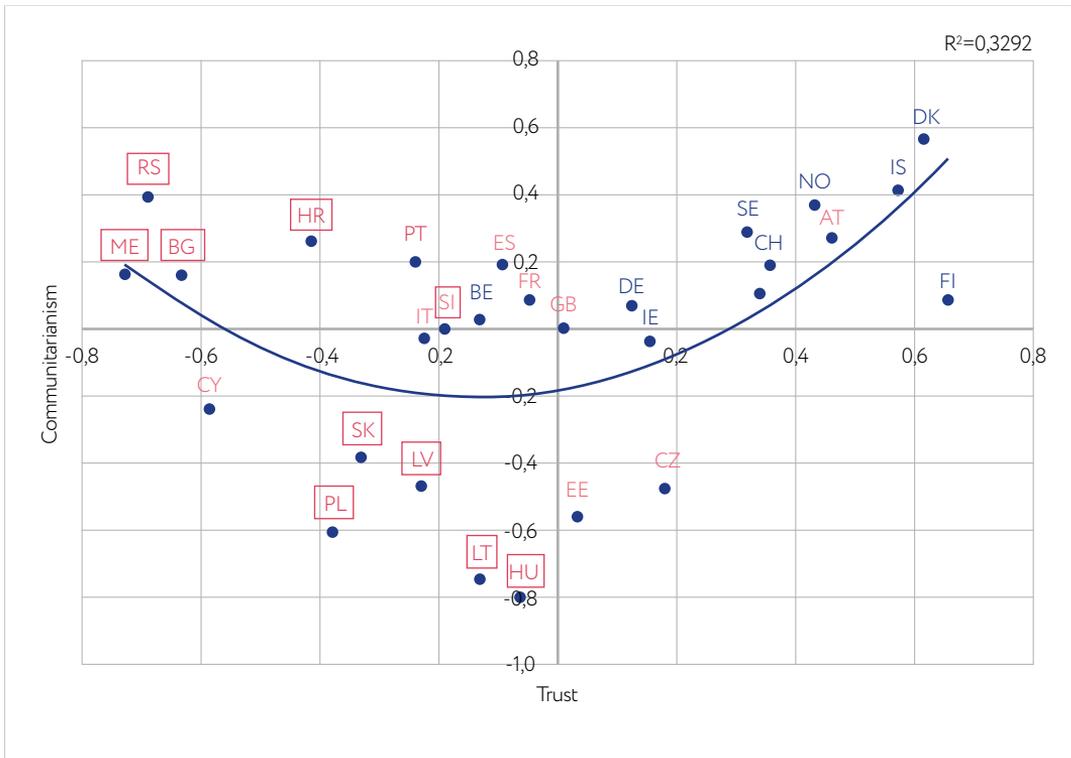
Countries with a relatively high HDI index at European level are marked in blue, medium in orange, low in red; post-socialist countries are framed
Source: ESS Round 9 database, own calculation

Discussion and conclusion - Why is trust and communitarianism low?

The analysis of trust and community spirit in the post-socialist area as well as the search for good practices seems to be of great importance, based on the results. This is perhaps also due to the fact that the Soviet influence in various countries before the regime changes was based on a kind of "state paternalism", and at the same time in many places on an intense, almost top-down, mistrust. In these countries, it was not "profitable" at the individual or at

the grassroots level to "know better than the state" what people or certain social groups needed to achieve a better life. Győrffy (2014 – cited by Kováts 2018) points out that the related distrust towards citizens also implied a response from citizens, that is, circumventing rules and laws, looking for loopholes and legitimizing this at the societal level. All of this has resulted in a distorted set of values which is still probably having an impact on both the population and the state administration, and as the above shows, also on the attitudes of young people who have no personal experience of socialism.

Why do we not see more post-socialist countries in a single group, and why is it possible that in some places the European survey reveals a relatively strong sense of communality with an extremely low level of trust, while in others it reveals a low level of community spirit with a medium level of trust? Probably Fukuyama's (1996) related thesis that there are countries where the level of trust is particular and not universal, which means that a survey shows a low level of social trust, but still a stronger level of trust in the closer social groups (family, friends, good neighbour relations), resulting in a medium to high level of communitarianism, is true. Moreover, based on the results obtained, it seems that a more traditional, archaic set of values is inherent in the Balkans. In addition, the recent history of the war may also play a role in the spectacular separation of the Balkan countries from the other post-socialist nations. During the time of the war not so long ago, the practical importance of community, of togetherness, of helping others, has probably been greatly enhanced, but there is still little general social trust. In the other post-socialist countries, the former system of rule has dismantled classical communities, and trust is low to medium because of paternalism.

However, in modern societies (in this case with a higher HDI and uninfluenced by Soviet power structures and administrative practices), young people find it easier to cooperate with people they know, even with distant acquaintances and strangers. Thus, high community spirit can manifest itself ambivalently even with low levels of trust (especially in post-Soviet societies with suspicious attitudes towards the wider society or social institutions). In an optimal case, however, a high level of trust is matched by a high level of communitarianism. However, there can also be ambivalent results, specific to fewer societies, where average or above-average trust is accompanied by low community spirit and a kind of distancing.

Returning to our original question of whether Europe's youth communities are in crisis, the answer is that it depends on the indicators, where we look spatially, and it seems that the recent history of the society in question is also an important consideration. All of this makes for a very mixed picture in Europe, at least on the basis of quantitative data, which are necessarily very superficial for methodological reasons. This is especially true when we are examining a theme[14] whose interpretative framework and perception often differ considerably from one culture to another, but also along political, religious and other ideological lines.

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[14] What are broadly defined communities of youth and what should they optimally be?

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Appendix

Table 2. Distribution of the averages for each factor by country

	Mean value of trust factor	Mean value of care factor	Mean value of activity factor	Mean value of care + activity factor
Austria	0,46	0,32	0,11	0,27
Belgium	-0,13	0,19	-0,14	0,03
Bulgaria	-0,63	-0,32	0,55	0,16
Switzerland	0,36	0,38	-0,10	0,19
Cyprus	-0,58	0,21	-0,57	-0,24
Czechia	0,18	-0,60	-0,11	-0,48
Germany	0,12	0,32	-0,22	0,07
Denmark	0,62	0,52	0,33	0,56
Estonia	0,03	-0,39	-0,46	-0,56
Spain	-0,09	0,20	0,08	0,19
Finland	0,66	0,28	-0,15	0,08
France	-0,05	0,07	0,07	0,09
United Kingdom	0,01	0,24	-0,23	0,00
Croatia	-0,41	0,15	0,23	0,26
Hungary	-0,06	-0,63	-0,55	-0,80
Ireland	0,16	0,11	-0,17	-0,04
Iceland	0,57	0,43	0,19	0,41
Italy	-0,22	-0,24	0,17	-0,03
Lithuania	-0,13	-1,05	-0,10	-0,75
Latvia	-0,23	-0,41	-0,27	-0,47
Montenegro	-0,73	-0,05	0,31	0,16
Netherlands	0,34	0,05	0,10	0,10
Norway	0,43	0,30	0,26	0,37
Poland	-0,38	-0,45	-0,48	-0,60
Portugal	-0,24	-0,04	0,35	0,20
Serbia	-0,69	0,14	0,45	0,39
Sweden	0,32	0,27	0,16	0,29
Slovenia	-0,19	0,12	-0,12	0,00
Slovakia	-0,33	-0,47	-0,11	-0,38

Source: ESS 2018 database

Figure 3. Relationship between trust and community caring by country (ESS Round 9)
(Post-socialist countries in red)
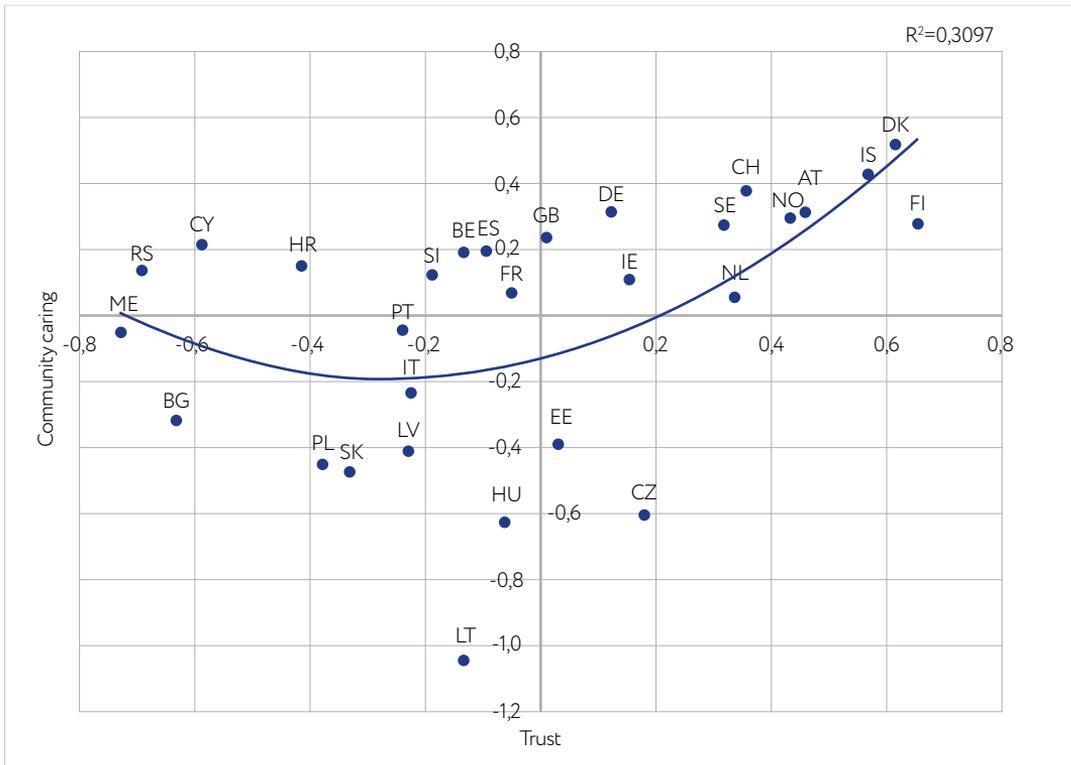

Source: ESS Round 9 database, own calculation
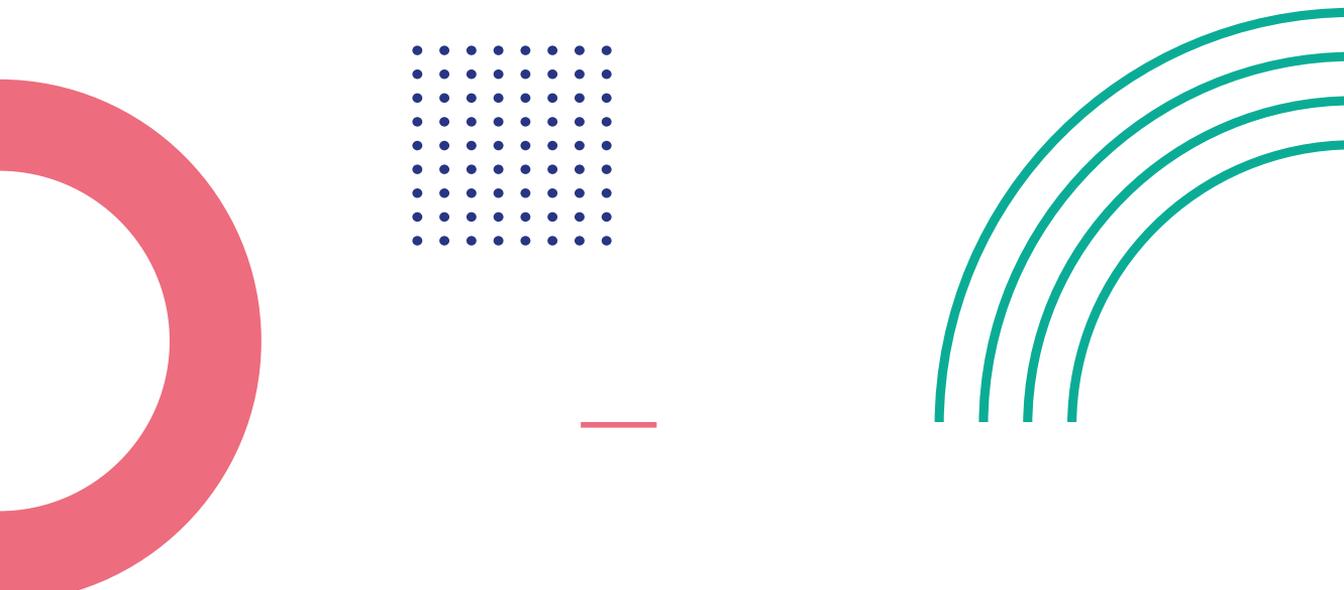
Figure 4. Relationship between trust and community activity by country (ESS Round 9) (Post-socialist countries in red)
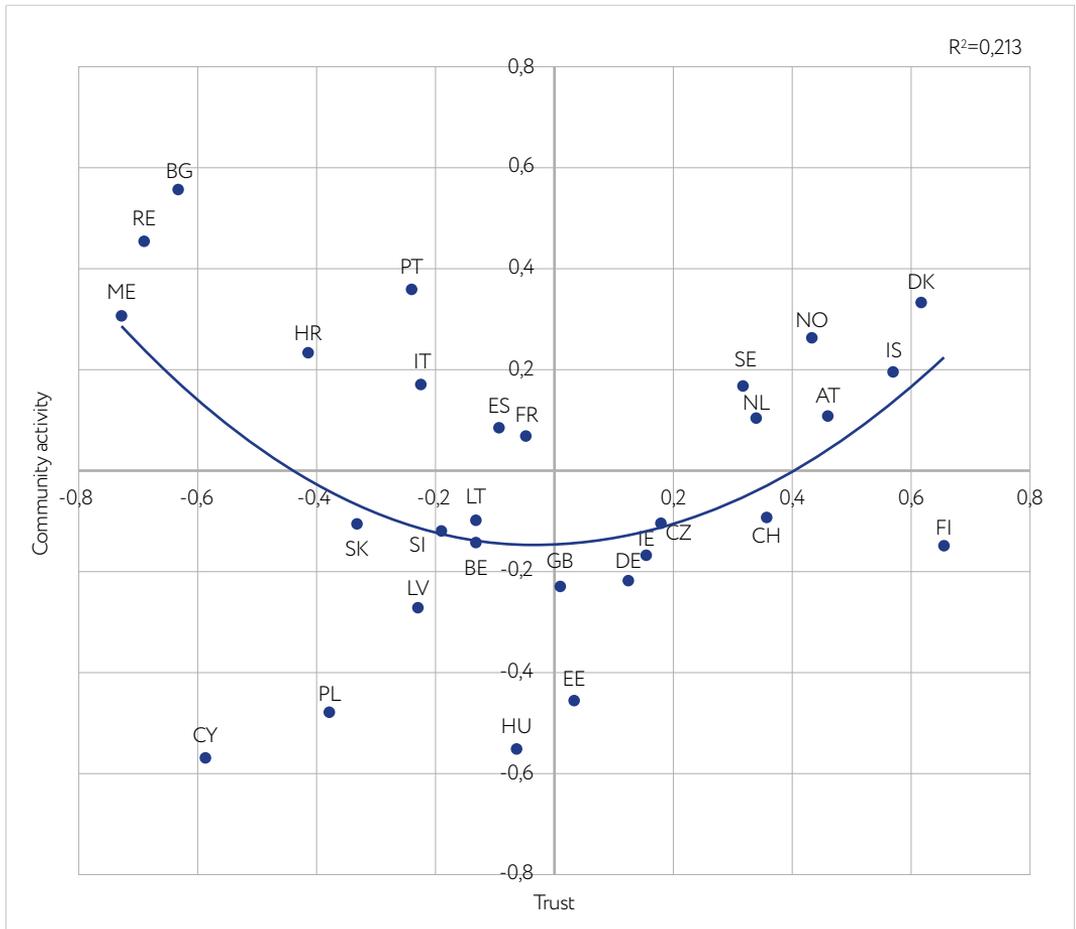
Source: ESS Round 9 database, own calculation
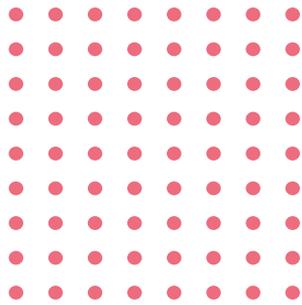
08

A Crisis of Values?
Conspiracy Theories and the Rise
of Post-Truth Culture

Dávid Kollár[1] – Péter Pillók

Introduction

The diagnosis of the value crisis is a well-known topos of 20th-century "crisis literature" (Szakolczai – Füstös 1998: 220, Adorno – Horkheimer 2020, Spengler 2021, Evola 1995, Engels 2014, Kurucz 2022, Byung-Chul 2019), which has come to the centre of attention again in recent years. The rise of crisis culture – and embedded in it the narrative of the value crisis (cf. Scott 1959) – can be seen in professional and popular literature (Figure 1), in the humanities and social sciences, in dominant political rhetoric, and in the narrative frameworks popularly used by the media.

Figure 1. Popularity of the term "value crisis" in English-language
text corpora between 1800 and 2019
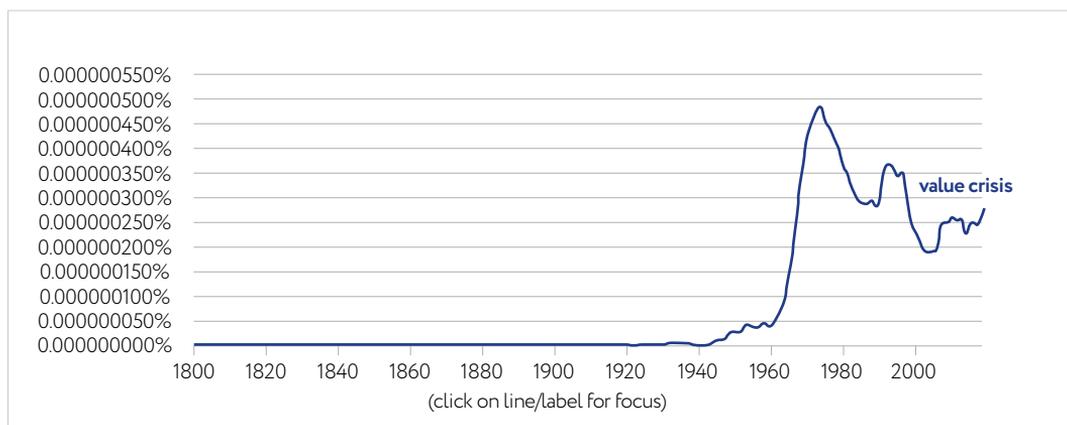
Source: Google Ngram – 09/2022

Despite all this, the concept of value crisis is analytically very vague. Some identify the crisis of values with the collapse of sociocultural foundations that claim universal validity arising from divine providence, the laws of nature, or human nature (Cf. Underhill 1963, Kollár D. – Kollár J. 2020). In this interpretative framework, a 'value crisis' means the marginalization – or at least fragmentation – of universal values.

In contrast, some see the value crisis as a loss of authenticity (i.e., acting in accordance with our values (Kollár J. – Kollár D. 2022, Taylor 2007). This model assumes that different cultures, societies, or individuals have a specific constellation of values (such as national character [e.g., Hungarian virtue]) (Cf. Taylor 2007). According to this approach, a value crisis means that a community or an agent is unable to express its values adequately, i.e., it loses its specific character (Kollár J. – Kollár D. 2022).

Still others see the value crisis as a kind of adaptation dysfunction (cf.: Welzel – Inglehart 2010, Kollár D. 2020). This model is based on the premise that values are linked to specific adaptation strategies. Values, although not determined, are significantly oriented by 'environmental' factors, i.e., different things may be valuable under different circumstances (Welzel – Inglehart 2010, Kollár 2020, Zenovitz-Kollár 2021, 2022). In other words, this approach is grounded in the idea that, although the world can be framed in myriad - even radically different – ways (Miskolczi 2022), our descriptions have to cope with (objective) reality (Rorty – Searl 1999) outside our language games (Wittgenstein). In other words, while we may hold countless things to be true, beautiful, or valuable, these beliefs have to be challenged by the world "outside" us. In this case, we can speak of a value crisis when we hold things to be valuable or even true that do not allow us to take adaptive actions. For example, as valuable as I think driving a carriage is, it is not worthwhile nowadays to drive a carriage in a drag race. Likewise, if I believe that a switched-on oven is an excellent sitting accommodation, practice is unlikely to justify my belief.

Our paper is related to the latter strand and examines the belief in conspiracy theories as a specific form of value crisis. In our reading, conspiratorial theories are maladaptive[2] beliefs that do not allow us to choose the "optimal" (Dennett 1995) actions under given environmental circumstances. In other words, they are the result of false evaluation procedures that are "incorrect" in relation to "reality". In line with this, the primary question of our paper is to identify the factors that most markedly orient the belief in conspiracy theories (among Hungarian youth).

Conspiracy Theories and The Rise of Post-Truth Culture

Conspiracy theory is defined in the dictionary as the "belief that some secret but influential organization is responsible for an event or phenomenon" (Google). From a functional point of view, conspiracy theories respond to the inherent anthropological need to give meaning to events in the world (cf.: Weber 2007). However, in contrast to adaptive world-explanations, conspiracy theories are symptomatic of hyper-intentionality, i.e., they are based on the assumption that some intentional action or interest orients all events in the world (Douglas, Sutton – Chicoka 2017). In sum, then, somewhat simplistically, conspiracy theories are reductive – intentional – explanations, invoked to reduce cognitive discomfort, that offer simple answers to complex (otherwise meaningless at the level of intentional explanations) events such as, for example, a pandemic (Jenne 2021, Douglas, Sutton and Cichocka 2017). The mention of the latter (pandemic)

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[2] An adaptation that is not suitable for the given circumstances.

is not coincidental. The coronavirus epidemic that broke out in 2019 and expanded into a global pandemic by 2020 has become a hotbed of conspiracy theories. This is well illustrated by the term *plandemic*, created by melting the words plan and pandemic (Jenne 2021). According to this folk 'theory,' the virus was deliberately created by powerful people (be it the Chinese government, pharmaceutical companies, or even economic elites) and used as a form of biological warfare (Jenne 2021, Eberl, Huber and Greussing 2021). Many different versions of this "meta-theory" have been put forward: some blame Bill Gates for creating the deadly virus (Shahsavari et al. 2020, Moffit 2021), and others say that the pandemic was created so that powerful people could use vaccination campaigns to implant microchips in the population (Thomas & Zhang, 2020, Erokhin et al. 2022), making citizens easier to control. Still other theories have suggested that it is not the virus but 5G that is actually causing the illnesses (Flaherty et al. 2022).

In our paper, we argue – in line with other authors – that the spread of such and similar conspiracy theories has a significant elective affinity[3] (Weber, 2007, Kollár D. 2021, Demeter 2022) with the rise of post-truth culture. The significance of the term post-truth is illustrated by the fact that the Oxford Dictionary chose it as its word of the year in 2016[4]. The dictionary defines post-truth as *'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'* (Oxford).

In other words, post-truth does not merely question the truth value of specific facts but rejects the conceptual frameworks through which we can debate truth (Kollár J. 2022). "When a statement is held to be post-truth, it is not to say that it is not true, but that in deciding the truth value of a given statement, one can rely primarily on emotions and personal beliefs rather than objective facts" (Kollár J. 2022). Post-truth thinking is thus an extreme form of vulgar relativism (cf.: Williams 1982), according to which everything is subjective, all points of view are a matter of opinion, everyone is right in his own perspective, and science is just one of the myths (Kollár J. et al 2019). This worldview implies that no one is epistemically privileged. So, unlike the liar - who accepts the existence of truth but purposely takes a different position - and the bullshitter

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[3] The term elective affinity is derived from chemistry and, simply put, describes the attraction or repulsion of different elements towards each other, i.e., the process by which elements with different qualitative properties create new compounds (Kollár, 2021; Veszprémi, 2011). The earliest - and most influential - use of the term in the humanities was by David Hume. Hume used the term, simply put, to capture the interactions between parts of the mind (cf. Demeter, 2016; 2022). The concept of elective affinity - in the field of social sciences - became crucial in the oeuvre of Max Weber (Kollár, 2021; McKinnon, 2010). Weber used the concept to capture 'sociochemical' reactions (Kollár, 2020; 2021) in which the 'mixture' of elements with different qualitative properties gives rise to new qualities, emergent patterns, that go beyond the inherent specificity of each component (McKinnon, 2010; Kollár, 2021). The best-known example of this is the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (2012), in which Weber shows how different religious doctrines and narratives can influence factors with different qualities, such as economic practices. However, Weber has also applied the approach based on elective affinities to describe a wide variety of other phenomena, such as interactions between different religious doctrines and other ideas or congruences between certain ideas and social strata. In all these cases, the common feature is that elective affinity describes a kind of usability relation (cf. Kollár, 2021). For example, the ‚purpose' of premodern capitalist economic practice is clearly not to be a field for fulfilling an ascetic vocation ethic. However, due to its specific qualitative properties (e.g., simple quantification of the success of work in the world), it is explicitly useful for this purpose (cf. Kollár, 2021; Kollár & Kollár, 2020).

[4] https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/

- who "doesn't care about the truth but doesn't question its existence" (Kollár J. 2022) - post-truth believers fundamentally deny the existence of "truth". It follows that although – as several currents of research have shown (Huang 2022, Harambam et al 2022, Gibson 2018) – there is a significant elective affinity between post-truth culture and conspiracy theories, their relation to truth may be fundamentally different. However, despite the theoretical (ontological and episte-mological, in philosophical terms) differences, post-truth culture can significantly contribute to the spread of conspiracy theories. In fact, by "destroying the conceptual frameworks that make debates about truth possible" (J. Kollár 2022), post-truth thinking also eliminates the rational (prior probability-based) falsification procedures that select among possible explanations. Be-cause if everything is possible and "there is no objective possibility of judgment" (Nagel, 1998, 11), why should institutionalized facts be true? The relationship between the vulgar relativism of post-truth culture and conspiratorial theories is particularly well illustrated by the example of hypochondria. One of the main features of hypochondria is that the patient loses the ability to evaluate the signals given by their body rationally. In other words, they cannot weigh between different explanations based on their a priori probability. Around 60% of people are front sen-sitive (von Mackensen et al. 2004, Timmermans et al 2014), just over 10% suffer from migraines (Walter 2022) and the probability of a brain tumor is less than 1% (American Cancer Society 2023). If a hypochondriac experiences a headache, they may not be able to consider these pre-existing probabilities. They believe there is a 50% chance of each scenario occurring: either a brain tumor or not. The same is true of the validity of claims made in the context of post-truth culture. If all claims, and all opinions, are equally valid and no one is in a privileged epistemological position, then we cannot objectively assess the validity of the various world explanations. This context, therefore, provides a particularly useful medium for conspiracy theories: in a world without standards, a virology model is just as adequate as a folk theory blaming Bill Gates – or 5G.

The spread of conspiracy theories and the rise of post-truth culture – and the affinity between them – are influenced by other factors. One such factor is the decline in science and scientists' legitimacy or even prestige (Rutjen 2022, Jenne 2021, Chayinska et al. 2021). This is mainly due to the rise of anti-elitist attitudes. Several different authors have shown that anti-elitist (populist) attitudes are significantly linked to images that portray scientists as corrupt and as part of an exploitative neo-liberal elite (Castanho Silva, Vegetti and Littvay 2017, Jenne 2021,). Through this lens, scientists do not appear as "guardians" of objective truth but servants of various interests.

The interactions between anti-scientific attitudes and beliefs in conspiracy theories have been confirmed by several empirical studies. For example, Kohler and Koining (2022) have shown, through survey data from Germany and Austria, that science-related populism has a significant impact on vaccine beliefs. Rutjens et al. (2018) found, through a literature review, that a lack of trust in scientific institutions leads to an increased likelihood of endorsing conspiracy theories. Similarly, Eberl, Huber and Greussing 2021 (2020) using panel survey data from Austria reported that those who do not trust in science show significantly stronger affinity for conspiracy theories.

This anti-scientific attitude, in turn, is significantly associated with a lack of trust in institutions (Algan et al. 2017, Győrffy 2018, Huber et al. 2018), which can in its inherent way contribute to

a belief in conspiracy theories. If we believe that the institutions of society, whether politically oriented or professional, are not trustworthy, we do not believe that the opinions they represent are credible, which could lead to the spread of alternative folk theories (Recio-Román 2022, van Prooijen 2021, Mari 2021). This assumption is confirmed by several international studies. Eberl, Huber and Greussing (2020), in a study cited earlier, showed that mistrust in institutions can contribute significantly to belief in conspiracy theories. And Martinez et al. (2022) using representative multinational sample, showed that belief in conspiracy theories was significantly associated with a lack of trust in political institutions.

All these results suggest that institutional trust and anti-elite attitudes may contribute significantly to belief in conspiracy theories. In line with this, we hypothesize that belief in conspiracy theories has a strong elective affinity with the post-truth orientation, lack of trust in institutions, and anti-elitist attitudes.

Structure of the Model

Consequently, in the following, we attempt to explore the factors that most markedly influence young people's belief in conspiracy theories, with a particular focus on the role of trust in institutions, anti-elitism, and post-truth orientation. In order to achieve this, following Eberl, Huber and Greussing (2021) a multi-component structural model (SEM) was created. The primary benefit of SEM is that it combines the advantages of path models (multivariate regression) and traditional latent variable models (e.g., factor analysis) (Füstös-Kozjek-Gulyás 2018; Kline 2015). This allows us to build a causal model in which we simultaneously estimate both latent and manifest effects.

Four variable blocks are built into our model. The first group of variables includes traditional sociodemographic factors (gender, education, type of settlement). The second block consists of variables measuring institutional trust (trust in the state and traditional media) and indicators measuring anti-elitist attitudes. Block 3 of the model represents post-truth attitudes. Finally, the last variable in the model explicitly measures belief in conspiracy theories.

Data

The analysis is based on a survey conducted by the Századvég Foundation in 2022, interviewing 5,000 people and representing the total adult population in Hungary by gender, age, educational attainment, settlement type, and region. Sampling biases have been corrected by matrix weighting according to the demographic proportions reported by the 2016 microcensus of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH). Data for 18-29-year-olds have been used for the analyses.

Results

Figure 2 shows the results of the model. The model's fit meets the statistical criteria (RMSEA=0.044) and explains 23% of the variance of the dependent variable (belief in conspiracy theories). The post-truth (0,37) variable has the largest direct effect, but there is also a significant direct impact of institutional trust (0,35) and anti-elitist (0,33) attitudes. In addition, the type of settlement (0.06) and education (-0.15) also significantly affect the conspiracy theory belief.

In other words, those who show a higher affinity for conspiracy theories are those who identify more with post-truth attitudes, have more trust in institutions, have a more negative attitude towards (local) elites, have lower education, and live in smaller municipalities.

Examining the variables that shape the post-truth attitude, it can be said that it is most markedly influenced by the anti-elite attitude (-0.32), but institutional trust (-0.05) and the type of settlement (0.14) also have a significant effect. This suggests that those who are less anti-elitist, less trusting of institutions, and live in smaller settlements have a greater affinity for post-truth orientation.

Finally, concerning institutional trust and anti-elitist attitudes, the former is significantly influenced by respondent gender (-0.17), while the latter is significantly affected by the type of settlement (-0.05) and gender (0.06). In other words, the data show that men are more likely to trust institutions, while anti-elitist attitudes are more prevalent among those living in larger settlements and women.

Figure 2. Structural model of belief in conspiracy theories
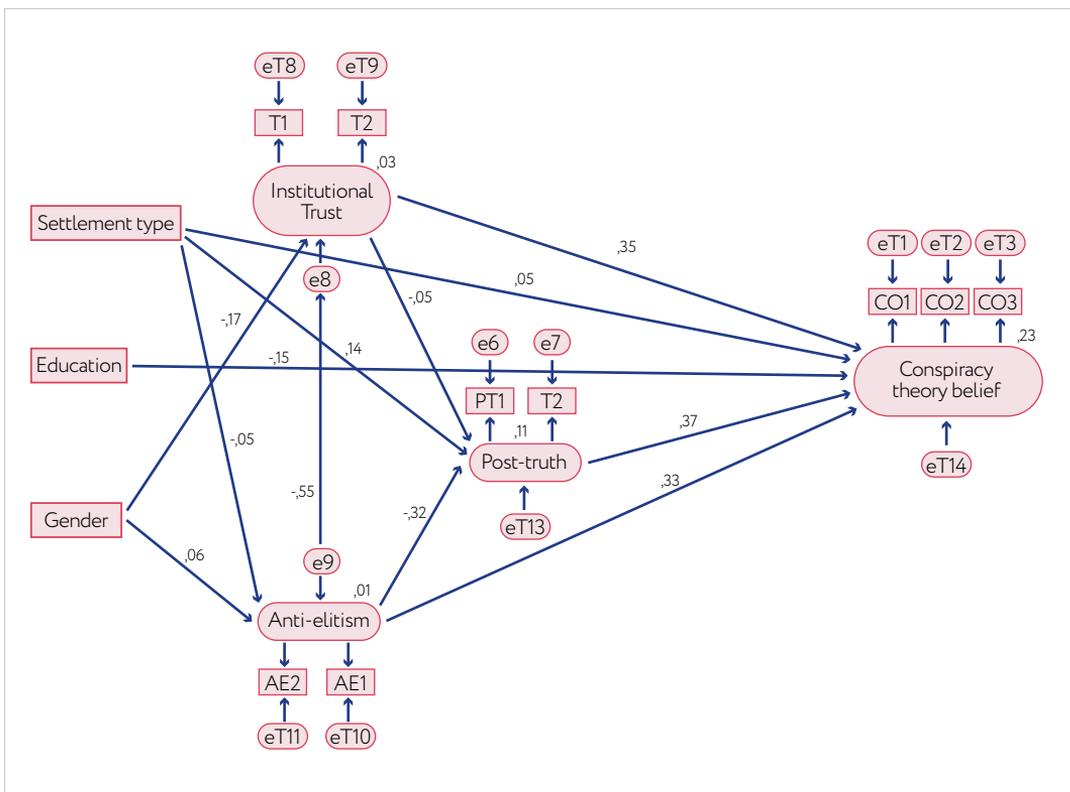
Note: Arrows indicate the direction of the relationship. The numbers next to the arrows (standardized beta coefficients) represent the effect size. Variables e1, e2 are error terms of the estimate.

Discussion

In our paper, we dealt with a particular form of value crisis, conspiracy theories. The primary aim of our study was to explore the factors that determine the belief in conspiracy theories among Hungarian youth. We hypothesized that belief in conspiracy theories has a strong elective affinity with the rise of the post-truth culture, lack of trust in institutions, and anti-elitist attitudes. To test our hypotheses, we built a structural model that partly confirmed and partly nuanced our assumptions. The data show that there is indeed a strong relationship between post-truth attitudes and belief in conspiracy theories. So, beliefs that fundamentally challenge objective truth and the distinguished epistemological position of science provide fertile ground for conspiracy theories to flourish. Likewise, in line with the literature's considerations, it is clear that belief in conspiracy theories is significantly related to anti-elitist attitudes. In other words, those who believe that the rich exploit ordinary people and believe that the media lie to protect the elite are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories.

However, the relationship between institutional trust and belief in conspiracy theories reveals a surprising result. We had previously expected that higher trust would reduce the likelihood of believing in conspiracy theories, but the data showed the opposite. In other words, the more trust one has in the Hungarian state and the traditional media, the higher the probability of believing in conspiracy theories. This result suggests that dominant institutional rhetoric, at least for young people, is a favorable medium for the spread of conspiracy theories.

A similarly unexpected finding is that post-truth attitudes are less common among those who hold anti-elitist attitudes. Indeed, results from the international literature have suggested that anti-elitist attitudes are associated with a devaluation of scientists and science, which in turn shows an affinity with the rejection of objective standards. In the case of young people in Hungary, on the other hand, the opposite results are found. This can be explained in two main ways. On the one hand, it can be assumed that young Hungarians do not consider scientists as part of the (local) elite, or at least they classify them in a different – autonomous – sphere of interest. On the other hand, we can suppose that the anti-elite attitude, which is precisely based on moral oppositions (the elite is bad – the people are good), goes against the vulgar relativism of post-truth culture.

Conclusion

Our results suggest that there is a significant relationship between the flourishing of conspiracy theories and the rise of post-truth culture, and the emergence of anti-elitist attitudes among Hungarian youth. Respondents who identify to a greater extent with post-truth beliefs that question the existence of objective truth and reject the epistemological position of science and who see local elites as exploitative and corrupt are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories. A somewhat surprising result, however, is that we find a positive relationship between the degree of trust in institutions and belief in conspiracy theories. This result implies that traditional social political institutions (traditional media, the Hungarian state) – even unconsciously – constitute narrative frameworks that provide fertile ground for conspiracy theories to prosper. A similarly

unexpected result is that we found a negative connection between anti-elite attitudes and post-truth beliefs. This outcome suggests that if those who hold anti-elitist attitudes do not see scientists as part of the corrupt elite, then these beliefs lead to a worldview that is based on moral opposites (good vs. evil). All these implies two things: first, both trust in local elites (institutional trust) and anti-elite attitudes may contribute to the belief in conspiracy theories among Hungarian youth. In other words, both extreme sympathy for and rejection of the political elite could increases the affinity for conspiracy theories (Appendix 2.). This result shows – as already confirmed by several international studies (Imhoff et al 2022, Enders et al 2022) –, that belief in conspiracy theories is increased by extremist political attitudes, regardless of the political orientation (Imhoff et al 2022).

On the other hand, both extreme relativistic (post-truth orientation) and extreme moral oppositional (clearly accepting or rejecting the truth of the local elite) attitudes can increase the likelihood of believing in conspiracy theories (Appendix 3). The question arises, of course, to what extent these results are influenced, directly or indirectly, by the party preference of the respondents. However, further research is needed to answer this question.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Latent variable	Manifesto variable
Education	What is your highest level of completed education? • Primary or lower • Upper secondary, no school leaving certificate • Upper secondary education with a school leaving certificate • Higher education or higher
Gender	Gender of the respondent? • Male • Female
Type of settlement	Which municipality do you live in? • Budapest • County seat • City • Other municipality
Institutional trust	Please tell us how much do you trust or not trust the following! (1 To a large extent – 4 Not at all) • In the Hungarian state (R) • In the traditional media (R)
Anti-elitism	How much do you agree with the following statements? (1. Strongly disagree - 5 Strongly agree): • Mass media newspapers and TV channels tell lies to protect the elite • The rich make life harder for the rest of us
Post-truth	How much do you agree with the following statements? (1 Not at all – 4 Strongly): • Although facts can be interpreted in different ways, there are true and false statements. (R) • What is true will be decided by scientific evidence. (R)
Conspiracy theory belief	To what extent do you agree with the following statements (1 Strongly disagree – 4 Strongly agree): • Bill Gates created the virus to reduce world population. • The coronavirus is caused by 5 G. • The coronavirus vaccine contains microchips that can be used to monitor people.
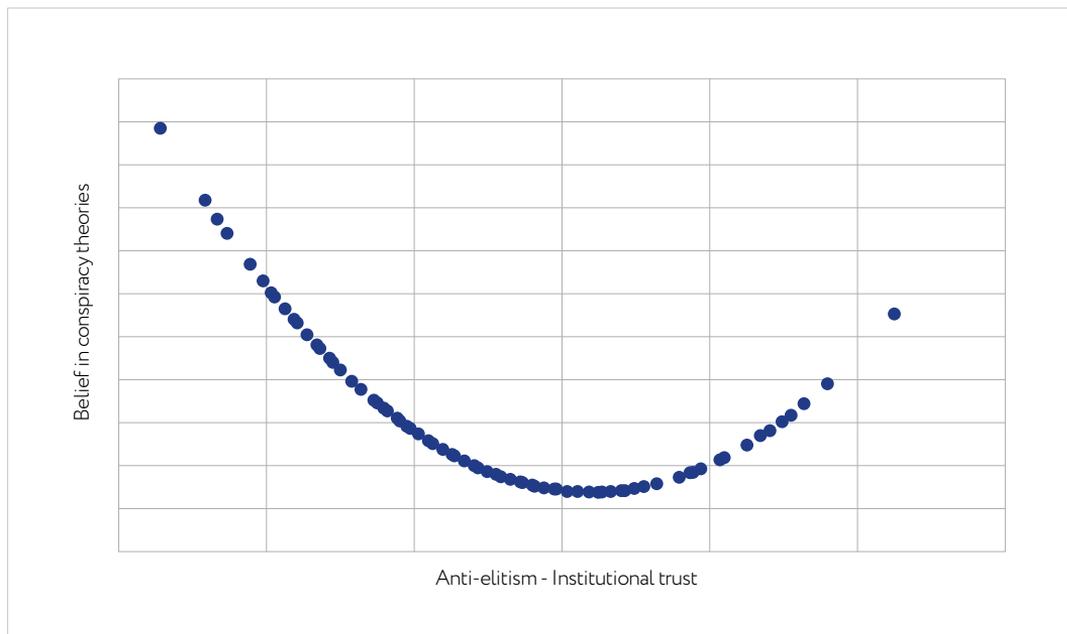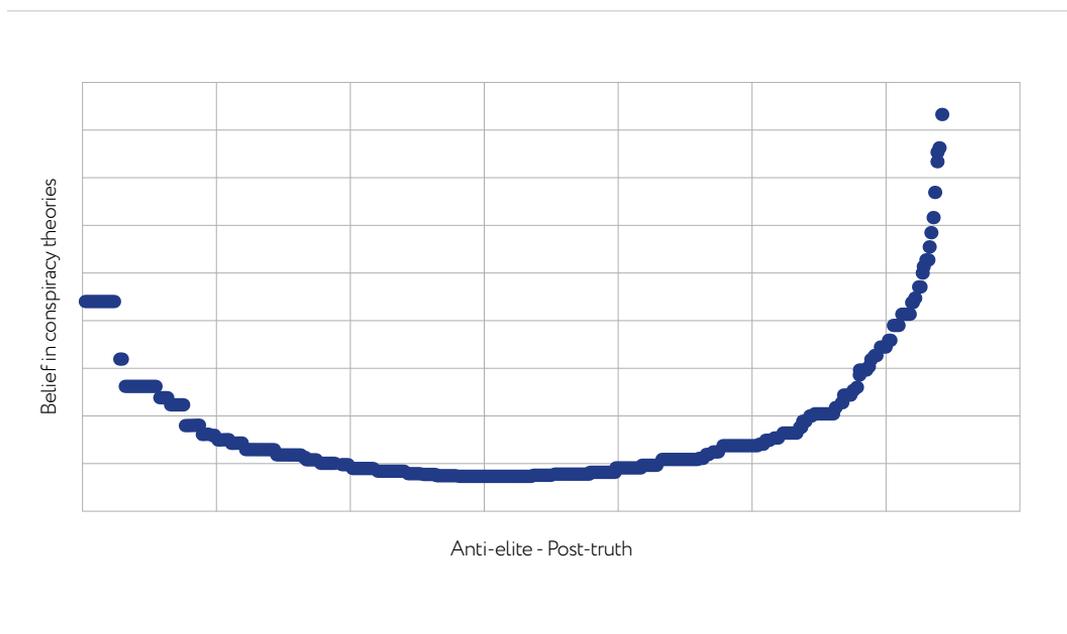
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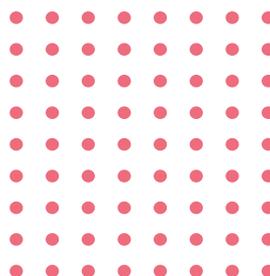
09

Youth on the Threshold of the Era of Singularity

Rudenkin Dmitry – Levente Székely

Introduction

The history of technological revolutions is also one of crises. We can detect signs of crises both before and after technological changes and it can be said that technological innovations typically work as solving previous problems and creating new ones. Beniger (1986) illustrates the symptoms of crises arising from technological progress through the history of the development of the railway network. The spread and development of the railway not only made rail transport much safer than it had been in the early days but also transformed the risk of major accidents into a realistic possibility[1]. This was inconceivable for the 19th century man and, when it did happen, came as a shock, a rare but possible outcome. It takes time for innovations to spread and be adopted; it took a good century for railways to spread worldwide. But the pace of technological revolutions is accelerating, with radio taking half as long to go global and the internet less than 25 years. The accelerating pace of successive technological revolutions (cf. Kondratiev waves) is fuelling frustration with the present, but also awareness and fears about the future. This has also resulted in a growth in interest in young people, although this can only partly be explained by future-oriented thinking. Experience shows that consumption trends are spreading from younger to older age groups, so youth may even be a kind of predictor of the future. On the other hand, the rise in interest in youth is also due to the emergence of youth as an inherent value in our era. Our everyday interest in youth is the result of our search for a way of understanding our future-oriented and rapidly changing world, in order to answer the question of what kind of world and what kind of people the future will bring. If only humans shape history, if the future of our planet depends only on us, the people, it is of paramount importance to know the character of the new generation that will shape the world (Székely, 2021).

Whether we label our period as information or networked (Castells, 1997), we have to agree that ICT has brought a huge change to our daily lives in the last decades. There is little, if any, part of human activity that has been left untouched. The majority of the waking hours of a 21st century human being are characterized by exposure to ICT, but with the proliferation of smartwatches and other wearable digital devices, this is increasingly the case 24 hours a day. It would probably

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[1] Major traffic accidents are part of the daily news for people today. The most recent major train accident occurred on 1 March 2023 in Greece, when a passenger train and a freight train collided head-on. The crash killed 57 people and injured many others. In the days before railways, traffic accidents with more fatalities were limited to shipping. Land-based means of transport were only capable of carrying a small number of people at a time, and their speed was not such that they could cause a large number of deaths or serious injuries in the event of an accident. The advent of the railways, however, was accompanied by disasters, both major and minor, partly due to the rudimentary nature of the transport infrastructure and partly due to the previous habits of the traveling public.

be too bold to say that all these realities indicate the onset of a new stage in the development of humankind and implementation of predictions of science fiction authors. But at the same it can't be denied that such a massive penetration of new information technologies into the daily life of society is happening for the first time in history. Whether we like it or not, it is obvious that growing up and socialization of contemporary young people happen in a rather specific social and technological context, which differs significantly from the conditions of life of previous generations. The socialization of young generations, born into the digital world, is determined by the content and tools of digital culture and their generation cannot be understood in isolation from it. In addition to the more light-hearted works in the field of popular science, there have been a number of academic publications that have focused on the impact of the digital medium on children and young people and have acknowledged the generational shaping effect of the digital transition in the sphere of socialization (e.g. Tapscott, 1997; Prensky, 2001; Rushkoff, 2006). In recent times, narratives concerning youth have been interpreted in both positive and negative extremes, as a result of technological developments. Prensky (2001), for example, talks about digital natives as the ultimate winners of the information society era as opposed to digital immigrants who belong to older generations. Zimbardo and Coulombe (2015), on the other hand, paint a very pessimistic picture of the youth of our time, especially of young men, whose identities they see as being destroyed by technological development. Prensky, however, sees technological progress as a clear competitive advantage for the new generation.

It is clear that today's big questions about the future relate primarily to areas such as the security crisis and the economic crisis that is partly a consequence of it: climate change and pandemics. The former, however, was wiped off the public agenda almost overnight by the pandemic, while the latter disappeared from the public agenda almost immediately by the risk of war. Looking further ahead, we see more fundamental issues for the future for which we currently have no viable answers, such as overpopulation, the migration crisis or the climate change mentioned above. Moving closer to our topic, we also find fundamental questions for the future that arise from technological progress and are still on the agenda, such as the rise of artificial intelligence or robotization. The World Economic Forum (WEF) report *Global Risks Perception*[2] 2023 ranks the risks in terms of their short and long-term impacts. The report works with different risk categories, including economic, environmental, geopolitical, societal and technological risks. The cost-of-living crisis is ranked as the most severe global risk over the next two years, but climate action failure dominates the next decade. The risk related to technology occupies the first place on a ten-item list of risks, while widespread cybercrime and cyber insecurity in both the short and the long-term is in eighth place[3].

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[2] https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2023.pdf
[3] The report finds that technological progress will exacerbate inequalities while cybersecurity risks remain. The central role of the technology sector will be reinforced by economic developments, such as military developments. In the coming years, emerging areas of development such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and biotechnology will gain further momentum, and their benefits will be unevenly shared by societies around the world. Among the risks of technological development, the report identifies misuse of data, disinformation, and attacks on infrastructures exposed to technology. Agriculture, water, financial systems, public security, transport, energy, and communications infrastructure are among the areas potentially at risk.

A remarkable specificity of this context increases the importance of a whole series of questions about social and anthropological effects of the influence of information technologies on contemporary young people. What features are typical of young people growing up amid the intensive presence of information technologies in the daily life of society? How do they organize their lives in the realities of the information society? What risks and threats accompany their lives due to the intervention of information technologies in the life of society? This section will be devoted to finding answers to these questions.

The Growth of Information Technology and the Characteristics
of the Generation of the Information Age

According to the latest data published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)[4], approximately 5.3 billion people – or 66 percent of the world's population – were using the internet in 2022. The increase of penetration was enormous over the past years. Since 2019, 1.1 billion people are estimated to have come online. However, this leaves 2.7 billion people still offline. The proportion of people with a mobile phone is even higher, with three quarters of the global population aged ten and over (73 percent) owning a mobile device. Looking at data trends, we see a linear rise that has made the ICT used by the few into a common basic infrastructure over the last decade or two. There are significant regional differences, with developing countries typically having significantly lower penetration rates than the world average. However, they are primarily responsible for growth dynamics due to the rate of expansion being lower in the developed world. Europe has 93 percent mobile phone penetration compared to only 60 percent in Africa, while internet penetration is highest in Europe (90 percent) and lowest in Africa (40 percent).

Figure 1. Percentage of information technology ownership and usage
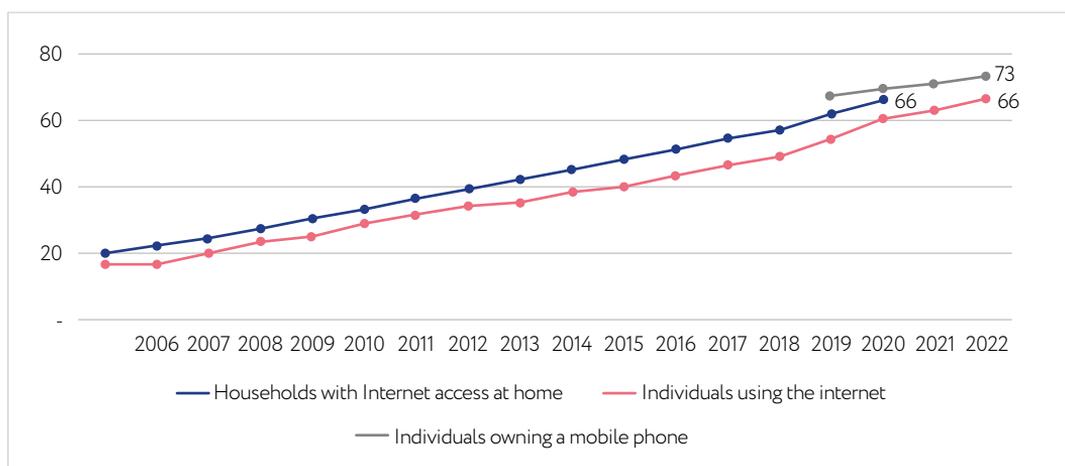
Source: ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database

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4 https://www.itu.int/

In addition to data for society as a whole, the ITU also shares statistics on young people. These show that young people, in general, have also become internet users at a faster rate, especially in more wealthy social groups. According to the 2022 statistics, 75 percent of 15-24 year olds can be considered internet users, ten percentage points higher than in society as a whole. Regional disparities are quite large, with 99 percent of young people in Europe and 55 percent in Africa using the internet. However, in all major regions, young people who are online now outnumber those who are not. Only a few years ago, UNICEF's Children in a Digital World report highlighted that the majority of young people in Africa were being left out of the digital world. Since then, a 5 percent annual growth rate has led to a digital majority in the African region too.

Table 1. Percentage of 15–24 years old individuals using the Internet, by region

	2019	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**
World	66,0	70,6	72,4	74,8
Africa	39,5	45,3	49,5	55,3
Americas	90,5	92,4	93,1	94,0
Arab States	68,0	75,4	76,8	79,6
Asia-Pacific	63,7	69,1	70,8	73,3
CIS	87,7	89,2	90,9	90,9
Europe	96,3	97,0	97,7	98,5

Source: ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database

The growth in access to and use of ICT should obviously not be understood in isolation. The socialization spaces of generations growing up in the digital world have been fundamentally transformed by digitalization. The possibilities for family communication have changed, the way we spend our time together is often linked to digital technology, and the environment for education and learning has changed fundamentally and continues to change. Spaces of leisure, ways of forming and maintaining friendships, and interfaces for content consumption have also changed. Despite this expansion, there is still a lack of completeness and there are still groups that are being left out or need to develop their digital skills. Regional disparities are not only reflected in access but also in qualitative criteria. There are differences along economic lines (e.g., quality of equipment) and language barriers in terms of content. Around half of the content on the internet is in English, with more limited access for non-English speakers.

It should be noted that the question of specificity of growing up and socialization of young people in the conditions of introduction of information technologies into social reality has a long history of analysis in social science. The logic of many contemporary research projects in this

area is based on the idea that young people growing up under the conditions of the introduction of information technologies into social reality have certain features that distinguish them from previous generations. What are these features? A generalization of the results of previous socio-logical projects shows that sociologists most often mention four important characteristics of young people growing up in a situation of ongoing development of information technologies and their penetration into different social processes. These characteristics differ from previous generations.

1) They quickly get used to using a variety of gadgets and information technologies and use them more actively and more confidently than representatives of other generations.
2) They are able to use information technologies in multitasking mode and confidently work with a large number of various sources of information at the same time.
3) They tend to use information technologies as the main tool for communication with people around them and maintaining social ties.
4) They perceive information technologies not only as a means of communication, but also as a tool that allows them to solve a fundamentally unlimited list of everyday tasks.

It is noteworthy that empirical sociological projects confirm that this vision of young people growing up in conditions of intensive penetration of information technologies largely coincides with reality[5]. It is easy to note that all these indicators almost directly illustrate the specific features of contemporary young people mentioned above. Consequently, it appears that the theoretical vision of influence of information technologies on young people corresponds with outcomes of empirical research.

Recent practice of youth research shows that taking into account these peculiar features of contemporary young people can open up a number of new opportunities for specialists in the area of education and public opinion management. The reliance on information technology makes it possible to adapt complex educational content to the communication habits of contemporary young people (Peres & Mesquita, 2018; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). Society may successfully achieve useful results, relying on such features of young people as a steady habit of constantly using information

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[5] In 2018-2021, one of the authors of study carried out a series of sociological projects, devoted to the practices of the internet activity of Russian youth in the age between 18 and 30 years. These research projects allowed to receive a whole number of remarkable results characterizing the peculiarities of the consciousness and behavior of those young people whose maturation and socialization occurred during the period of active introduction of information technologies into the social reality of Russian society. These studies uncovered several important features of young Russians that are relevant to this text. The average time of daily internet use among these young people reached 4 hours. The average number of purposes for which they use the internet has reached 6 positions. It should be emphasized that both of these indicators were almost two times higher than the average values for the entire Russian society at the time of the research (Rudenkin & Rudenkina, 2019). 80% of them perceived messengers, social media and other online formats of corres-pondence the most preferred format of communication with their acquaintances, and 74% admitted that they were ready to use such services to communicate with people they didn't know offline (Rudenkin, 2020). 68% of them admitted that it would be difficult for them to do without the use of the internet and a smartphone in their daily lives (Rudenkin, 2019). 65% of them noted that they did not use television, radio and the press and learned news mainly from their social media (Rudenkin & Trynov, 2021). 52% of them used the internet not only to communicate and search for information, but also for education, work, shopping, entertainment (Rudenkin, 2018).

technologies; processing large flows of information; constant immersion in communication in online services; a tendency to build everyday life on active interaction with a variety of gadgets and services they provide. Proper goal-setting and creativity can turn information technologies into a useful resource for management of a large youth audience.

Risks of the Digital Society

If information technologies are becoming an integral part of the daily reality of contemporary youth, it is quite reasonable to think about the potential problems these technologies can bring to their lives. In its report, UNICEF highlights the risks as well as the opportunities of the digital age. The report argues that digital technology has increased the incidence of child sexual abuse and exploitation by making it easier for sex offenders to contact their victims through unprotected social media profiles and online gaming forums. Technological advances have allowed criminals to take advantage of encrypted platforms, making their crimes more efficient and covert. It is not only adult criminals who pose a threat to young people; online bullying is also a common risk that involves the use of digital technology.

Researchers in the field generally agree that digital tools and content offer a range of benefits that can enhance both quality of life and knowledge, but many also point to the harmful effects of overuse. Research warns that the level of exposure to media content is steadily increasing (Roberts et al., 2005; Foehr, 2006; Roberts - Foehr, 2008), with multitasking being a common media consumption style today, especially among young people (Székely, 2015). Overuse can have detrimental effects on mental health and can be at the expense of time spent with physical activity, which can be damaging to physical health. In addition to quantity, the issue of quality is also becoming increasingly important. The UNICEF report *Children in a Digital World* warns of the risk of websites and apps that promote self-harm, suicide or anorexia, or make other content available that is not aimed at children and young people, such as gambling.

Of course, it would be absurd to categorically accuse information technologies of a deliberately destructive influence on today's youth. However, the question of the risks that arise in the lives of young people due to the active penetration of information technologies into their social reality is more than justified. The importance of clarifying such risks arises also because of the growing interest of social science to potential dangers and problems created by an ongoing development of information technologies and their strong integration into the daily life of humanity. It is remarkable that contemporary sociologists demonstrate growing interest in the research in the area of digital hygiene, which is usually interpreted as a certain system of rules of safe behavior that allows a person to minimize the risks associated with the use of information technologies (Rudenkin, 2022). A significant increase in the interest of researchers in this topic can be seen in the dynamics of numbers of relevant scientific publications. Analysis of Scopus citation system demonstrates that this database includes only 205 scientific papers devoted to digital hygiene which were published in 2011-2016 and 525 publications in this area in 2017-2022. Obvious intensification of research activity in this area demonstrates that contemporary social science is moving away from the former optimistic view of the penetration of information technologies into social

reality and focusing on the problems and dangers that appear because of these technologies.

What are these problems and dangers? Summarizing the outcomes of current scientific publications in relevant areas makes it possible to conclude that there are a number of potential threats created by intensive penetration of information technologies into social reality that can significantly affect the lives of present-day young people. The corresponding risks can be conditionally divided into physical health risks, psychological risks, and social risks.

Physical Health Risks

This group of risks includes a series of potential physical and health problems that may appear in the lives of contemporary youth due to changes in their social reality, stimulated by the introduction of information technologies into the daily life of society.

Reducing physical activity. The widespread introduction of information technologies into social life has allowed people to transfer many of the routine social processes to a virtual or remote format. Current level of development of technology allows any person to implement work, learning, shopping, or communication with friends without leaving the boundaries of their home at all. Undoubtedly, these changes have greatly simplified the lives of people, providing them with many new opportunities and allowing them to be flexible in their plans. But the other side of these remarkable opportunities is the disappearance of the obvious reasons for physical activity that used to be common for previous generations. Of course, no one is saying that the progress of information technologies leads to a complete cessation of people's physical activity: the infrastructure of any modern settlement includes many sports facilities and fitness clubs, which can be easily used for keeping fit and many people use these resources. In addition, it is obvious that, despite the intensive development of remote services and delivery companies, there are probably not so many people who would prefer to stay at home forever – otherwise, we simply would not see crowds of people on the street. However, the introduction of new technologies into the life of society has led to the fact that the degree of physical activity of a person begins to depend on his or her choice, and not on objective external circumstances forcing humans to perform certain physical activities every day. The possibilities of modern information technologies allow a person to successfully cope with his tasks even if they spend all their time on the couch. In any case, this situation provokes an increased temptation to reduce the intensity of movement. And numerous scientific publications on the impact of information technologies on physical activity reduction confirm that many people succumb to this temptation (Lapousis, & Petsiou, 2017; Kwok et al., 2021; Alagoz & Keskinkilic, 2022). Consequently, it can be said that contemporary young people face a need to make additional and purposeful efforts for maintaining their physical activity in the circumstances of absence of obvious necessity to maintain this activity. Previous generations did not face such challenges.

Reducing intellectual activity. A person who has grown up and lives in conditions of constant access to the internet is spoiled by the opportunity to turn to various information resources at any time and quickly get an answer to all necessary questions. Having a smartphone in the pocket and regular access to the internet, such a person can afford to search for the necessary information at

the exact moment when it is needed, instead of memorizing and remembering a large number of facts that may never be useful in real life. Of course, such opportunities simplify life in society: people receive a chance to manage their time more efficiently and find it relatively easy to find accurate answers to precisely the questions they face in their life. However, the problem is that these bright new opportunities make people dependent on the information they find on the basis of online resources. And the point is not only that the quality of this information is not always high. Getting used to living under the illusion that any necessary information is easily accessible, a person loses a convincing reason for independently studying and memorizing new facts that are necessary for training his or her memory and intellect. A likely consequence of the lack of such training is an increased risk of developing pathological effects and diseases associated with the degradation of memory and intellectual abilities. It is notable that contemporary specialists in the area of mental health often suggest the active introduction of information technologies into society may lead to an increase in the number of people suffering from such pathological conditions and diseases in the future (Firth et al., 2019; Small et al., 2020; Hoehe & Thibaut, 2020). Probably, here we can speak about the same type of logic that was described for risk of reducing physical activity. Living in the conditions of intensive development of information technologies doesn't guarantee serious mental problems in future. It mostly depends on the way of life of a person, not on circumstances. But, at the same time, living in such specific conditions creates a temptation of simplification of learning, memorizing, and thinking for every person. And it is absolutely necessary to demonstrate an increased responsibility in relation to his intellect to increase a chance to avoid mental health problems in future. This is also a new serious challenge for contemporary young people.

Probability of information overload. The accelerating development of information technologies and their integration into the everyday life of society create a contradictory and uncomfortable environment for the individual, who feels surrounded by endless flows of information that influence the mind and emotions. A significant amount of these information flows can be completely meaningless for a person and overload his brain with useless news. The problem is also the inconsistency of information broadcast in different sources of information: contemporary humans can often receive contradictory information about the same facts from different sources. Both of these problems create favorable conditions for the formation of psychological overloads which can happen due to the inability of a person to process a large amount of disparate and often useless information. The high probability of the development of such overloads was discussed even by researchers usually mentioned as the founders of information society research: F. Webster (2006), T. Ericksen (2001), M. Castells (2003). Therefore, it is not surprising that contemporary social science maintains strong interest in this topic too (Sklar, 2017; Khazaal, 2019). The risk of overloading a brain with too much contradictory information is becoming quite typical of contemporary young people. Of course, it should be kept in mind that sensitivity to information overload, which may arise due to the active development of information technology, can be variable and manifest itself in different ways for all people. It is also true that a person can always minimize the amount of information flows around oneself and simply stop responding to those messages that

the brain perceives as unnecessary or useless. Nevertheless, the very need to somehow respond to the existence of a large number of information flows is becoming an innovation for today's young people. Previous generations of young people, whose growing up took place before the widespread dissemination of information technologies, hardly faced such a problem.

Psychological Risks

Psychological risks include probable threats and problems that concern the psychological comfort of young people in the situation of intensive penetration of information technologies into social reality.

Addiction to information technology. It has already been mentioned above that young people growing up in the context of the widespread dissemination of information technologies get used to building their daily lives around the regular use of such technologies and find it difficult to imagine their life without their use. Even the simple mention of this fact actualizes the question of addiction to the use of information technology that can be typical of contemporary young people. Such a kind of addiction can be described as a pathological inability to organize everyday life without active use of different devices and services they provide. Everything that was said about contemporary young people in previous parts of the text potentially can be classified exactly as a kind of addiction. If they find it difficult to organize their life without information technologies – it seems obvious that they are addicted. And it is not surprising that the question of the presence of such addiction is quite common in contemporary youth studies (Hundric et al., 2018). However, the matter of addiction is not clear here. It is important to understand that the word "addiction" in its original meaning precisely implies the presence of a pathological inability to feel comfortable without something (Varlamova et al., 2015). There are serious doubts that potential discomfort about absence of access to information technologies in digital society should be described as an addiction. As N. Johnson and H. Keane (2015) rightly point out, it is difficult to say to what extent this characteristic is applicable to people who actively use information technologies if the rejection of such technologies leaves a person outside the bounds of many familiar and necessary social processes. Nevertheless, the logic leading to such a formulation of the question is generally clear. The more actively a person uses information technologies, the more difficult it becomes for him or her to manage without them. Of course, the situation of a complete shutdown of all familiar technologies, often shown in sci-fi movies, seems rather unlikely in reality. However, situations where a person has to do without using new technologies happen quite regularly. Getting into such situations with a high probability will cause at least discomfort for many of the representatives of today's youth.

Vulnerability to manipulative technologies and disinformation. It has already been mentioned above that growing up and socialization in the realities of a digital society puts a person into a large number of diverse and contradictory information flows, which can become a serious psychological challenge. However, a serious problem is not only the number of such information flows but also their content. Contemporary information technologies function as a convenient tool for replicating many messages based on distorted, incomplete, or even deliberately false

information: conspiracy theories, pseudoscientific conceptions, fake news, and other similar content. Right now, the problem is exacerbated by the active development of technologies in the area of artificial intelligence, which already has an opportunity to imitate the judgments, image, and voice of any people and present as true something that never happened in reality. Life in the conditions of such social realities involves constant interaction with a multitude of information flows, many of which can convey unreliable messages. A person living in the realities of such a society is systematically faced with the question of where the truth is and where the lie is. It is symptomatic that the current practice of youth studies demonstrates a remarkable interest in the area of prevention of influence of manipulative information to young people (Deinla et al., 2022; Baptista et al., 2022). The existence of a large amount of manipulative content has become a genuine problem for contemporary youth. Today's young people live in a world that regularly confronts them with false information, which can be difficult for them to distinguish from the truth. Previous generations of young people did not face such a problem.

Formation of distorted ideas about consumption and quality of life. Active use of information technologies immerses a person into a virtual communicative space in which he or she regularly interacts with a large number of people without seeing their real faces and without being able to clearly verify their identities. The specificity of this genre of communication allows each person to create and maintain his or her own image, which he or she can convey to an unlimited number of remote interlocutors. This circumstance has two important consequences. On the one hand, each user of such services has the opportunity to present the most comfortable vision of his or her life to other people; it is always possible to keep silent about problems or shortcomings and focus on the most attractive details (or even come up with such attractive details). On the other hand, every user can only suspect that all other people tend to do the same, but there is no real opportunity to check whether this skepticism towards them is justified. Typical situation of communication in these services becomes contradictory: the user simultaneously sees an objective image of his or her own life (which includes numerous difficulties) and an idealized image of life of other people, represented by them in communication in the virtual space (which can embellish significantly differ from their real life). When a human realizes this illusory contrast – he or she has a big chance to feel disappointment because of the inconsistency between his or her own life and certain ideals that exist in the lives of others. Of course, it is necessary to take into account that not all people develop such an illusion and not every user of modern information technologies will be very upended because of the discrepancy between their life and the idealized image of someone else's life as conveyed by social networks. However, recent studies show that this feeling of discomfort is quite common among young social media users (Putta et al., 2022). And this is another specific problem that the development and implementation of information technology brings to the life of modern youth.

Social Risks

Social risks include the potential difficulties that can appear in the social life of young people because of the development of information technologies.

Likelihood of personal data being compromised. The functioning of modern information technologies is based on the systematic collection, processing, and use of a variety of disparate personal data about people and their lifestyle. Users of these technologies distribute some of this data voluntarily and, perhaps, even deliberately: when people write posts on their social networks about their travels, work, friends, they do it on their own, consciously, and without coercion. Other personal data is collected by hidden algorithms that information technology users may not know anything about; a typical example of this is gathering data about geo-location and history of search collected by users' telephones. An active user of information technologies fills information space with a significant amount of personal data that characterizes lifestyle, habits, plans, travel directions, contacts, and many other related details. In fact, it is possible to say that gadgets and internet resources used by a modern person become a kind of aggregator of large amounts of information that can characterize his or her life in great detail. It is clear that the main users of such information are internet companies seeking to optimize their work algorithms and personalize the content that is offered to specific users. However, occasional reports of data breaches collected by such companies suggest that such information can often end up in the hands of people with a clear malevolent attitude: abusers and bullies (Seungchul and Sungkyu, 2022), stalkers (Soita & Njoroge, 2023), criminals (Shrivastava & Jain, 2021) and others who may harm the user. And although it is obvious that the vast majority of active users of information technology will never face the consequences of their personal data falling into the hands of such people, the likelihood of such a scenario always exists. Modern youth are forced to live in an era when exhaustive information about a person and his or her life can be used against him or her at any moment. This seriously distinguishes the features of the life of modern young people from the circumstances in which their parents entered into life.

Probability of involvement in moral and ethical conflicts. The development of information technologies, especially the internet and social networks, has given publicity to many of those private conversations and discussions that did not go beyond people's personal lives in previous years. The functioning of internet forums, blogs, and social networks is based on the public exchange of messages between users. The architecture of all these services is convenient for posting and public messaging. And the number of participants of the discussions that can happen on their basis is not fundamentally limited. So, it is natural that all of them quickly turned into tribunes for mass discussions and provocative statements. At the same time, communication in such services is fundamentally different from the formats of personalized conversations offline. Many statements made on the basis of forums, blogs, and social networks are fundamentally public and visible to a wide audience. Besides, messages published on the basis of such services are often stored forever and can be discovered by other users many years later. Therefore, thoughtless, or deliberately bold statements made on the basis of forums, blogs, social networks, can create much more problems for people than the usual sharp conversation offline. Having made a careless statement in such services, a person always runs the risk of causing a negative reaction from a fundamentally unlimited number of other users. In the conditions of simultaneous communication of a large number of people with different values, the probability of hurting another user seems to be quite

significant. Scandals around long-standing statements that certain users once made are relatively rare, but they do happen. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the popular areas of risks of information technologies is a search for recommendations that allow people to minimize the likelihood of developing conflicts due to misunderstandings when communicating in the virtual space (Elsaesser et al., 2020; Jagannath et al., 2020). It can be said that young people who grew up in the conditions of the total spread of information technologies have to live in conditions of a fundamentally greater responsibility for their statements than was customary for previous generations.

Communication misunderstandings with representatives of previous generations. It has already been repeatedly mentioned above that contemporary young people became the first (or at least one of the first) generations of youth, who were growing up and socializing in the context of the widespread dissemination of information technologies in society. The specific experience of growing up and socialization of these people significantly exacerbates the cultural, communicative, value and other differences between them and their precursors. It is clear that some kind of misunderstanding between representatives of different generations is an old phenomenon. There is nothing new in the situation when parents and children face difficulties in understanding each other. It is not surprising that serious attention has been paid to this problem even in the first papers in the area of youth studies, which were written almost 50 years ago (Lauer, 1973; Johnston, 1975; Scott & Grasmick, 1979). However, the progressive introduction of information technologies into social reality intensifies and exacerbates this problem. Getting used to using new information technologies from the first years of life and building their daily lives around their use, today's young people are immersed in a special communicative space that is much less familiar and understandable to representatives of other generations. Sociological projects demonstrate that they work with a large number of sources of information and often base their opinions on information from social media, so their beliefs and views often diverge from the judgments of other generations (Glukhov, 2019). They spend a lot of time using their gadgets and often prefer virtual forms of communication that are less familiar to older generations (Way & Shawna, 2017). Even the problems they face in everyday life are specific and little known to the older generations (the risks discussed above are clear examples of this). All this does not make the representatives of today's youth better or worse than the representatives of past generations. Nevertheless, all these circumstances emphasize that significant differences in the practices of using information technologies are fueling and intensifying the communication gap between today's youth and previous generations. In fact, we can say that modern youth live and act within the framework of that specific communicative reality that is little understood by previous generations.

Conclusions

In our study, we have described the spread of information technologies in recent decades, pointing to the fact that new generations are maturing in a very different socialization space as a result of technological developments. Focusing on young people, we have developed a typology of risks associated with information technologies.

Exposure to technology seems to be increasing and with constantly evolving solutions, there is a broader perspective with risks that are not necessarily youth-specific. The freely available tools of artificial intelligence are creating opportunities that were unimaginable a few years ago. Artificial intelligence can write a book report for us and solve maths problems. But that's just the most spectacular part of it - its narrow solutions are used every day, and many applications are based on AI. The key question is what dangers the resulting possibilities also carry, beyond the potential for misuse in school work. The opportunities and dangers of robotization are much clearer, with the emergence of robots in production in the service industry, which will make work more efficient and partly facilitate and partly replace human work, with the potential risk of increased unemployment .

Of course, the described typology of risks accompanying life of young people in the circumstances of penetration of information technologies into social reality can be improved and supplemented. It needs to be admitted that the initial gradation of these risks into physiological, psychological, and social ones is relatively conditional. It is obvious that each of the problems listed above can have a multifaceted impact on the life of a person who encounters it. And of course, the list of mentioned risks can almost certainly be improved and supplemented; the reasoning of the authors of this section was based only on the experience of their own sociological projects and the analysis of relevant scientific literature, so researchers relying on other data will certainly be able to expand and deepen their understanding risks arising in the life of young people under the influence of new information technologies.

However, the presented typology of risks exhaustively describes the key thesis about the contradictory impact of new information technologies on the representatives of modern youth. Opening up many new opportunities for young people and becoming a familiar communication platform for them, information technologies confront them with a number of multifaceted risks that were not known to previous generations. It would be absurd to call for a ban or restriction on the introduction of such technologies into the social reality of young people. As mentioned above, they are so organically and naturally built into the social reality of young people that it would be almost impossible to imagine a prohibition. However, talking about the ambiguous impact of such technologies on the social reality of young people, and the risks they create is very important. Previous studies by the authors of this section have shown that many young people were not accustomed to thinking about the problems and dangers they may face when using new technologies (Székely, 2021; Rudenkin, 2022). And authors of this section would like to believe that this text shows that such risks do exist and need attention.

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[6] The experience of the Hungarian large-sample youth survey shows that young people are much less afraid of the dangers that could arise from artificial intelligence or robotization than of tangible problems such as economic difficulties or climate change, which is also largely a future issue. Overall, young people in Hungary are more positive about their own future than fearful of it, with 45 per cent of 15-29 year olds surveyed confident about the future, 43 per cent neutral about the period ahead and only about one in ten (13 per cent) emphasizing their fears about the future (Székely, 2021).

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10

Once Upon a Time, There Was a Generation

Béla Bauer - András Déri

Theoretical Approaches

The first part of our paper explores the issue of generational theories, primarily from a perspective of the sociology of youth. We examine the reasons for the prevalence and popularity of the concept of generation, its theoretical and historical background, and its contemporary relevance[1]. In the second half of our paper, we use qualitative research to illustrate the relationship of different cohorts to the concept and content of generations.

Attempts to interpret the concept of generation in sociological terms and related research began in the 20th century, and since then a number of approaches have been published on the subject of generations and their characteristics (e.g. Karl Mannheim, Margaret Mead).

The starting point for age-based studies is that there are fundamental differences between individuals of different ages because they were brought up in different socio-economic situations, and consequently they were influenced by different events and experienced historical phenomena differently. Karl Mannheim was the first to approach the issue of generations from a sociological point of view and to examine generational cohesion, rather than doing so from a biological or family succession perspective. He argued that the category cannot be characterized as a specific group in which the participants know about each other and need to be close to a certain degree to avoid disintegration. On this basis, in interpreting generational location, he writes that "[a]lthough the members of a generation are undoubtedly bound together in certain ways, the ties between them have not resulted in a concrete group." (Mannheim, 1952:289)

According to Mannheim, not all generations are generationally conscious, i.e. individuals are not necessarily able to categorize themselves as belonging to a particular generation. Generational consciousness can be reinforced by two factors: a crisis and a social change, whether it be a technological revolution or a demographic transformation. This means that the collective memory of a generation is based on shared experiences (Nemes, 2019:40). Generations cannot be treated as globally homogeneous because different people have

> "different views, thoughts, conclusions, and attitudes as a result of the culture, history and social, political and economic events in different societies" (Nemes, 2019:48).

The academic importance of the concept of generation has been emphasized in recent writings on the sociology of youth as follows: the value of the sociology of generations is that

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[1] The main sources for our study are András Déri's 2023 PhD dissertation manuscript; and Bauer et al. 2022.

"support[s] investigations of how social division, across multiple dimensions including class, gender, race, sexuality, disability, and geographic location, is being made today, in the context of social conditions that differ from those that impacted on the lives of young people in previous generations." (Woodman & Wyn, 2015:108)

The relevance and interpretation of the notion of generation is still debated, as shown by the writings arguing both against and in favor of its retention. In everyday usage, 'generation' refers to the biological dimension derived from the Greek word for birth (γέννηση) and to age groups associated with birth dates. Age groups are referred to in everyday language as 'generations', as distinct from the *social and historical* generations (as formulated in the sociological literature, following Mannheim).

The category used in demography and sociology to describe people born in a given date range is the *"birth cohort"*[2]. Sociology also uses the concept of 'life stages', which are defined by turning points in the human life course. The stages of a 'normal' life course are that those born in a given social space in a given period of time "may have started working, started a family, retired and become old at about the same time." (Somlai, 2015, p. 200). Academic descriptions should take into account that in societies that have lived through the second demographic transition, the boundaries between life stages have become flexible, the sequence and average length of each stage has become variable, and the life paths of those born in each time interval show a variety of patterns (Somlai, 2015), are individualized. According to Ulrich Beck, after the millennium, generations of various countries, nations, ethnic and other groups live in a common present, and the main characteristic of the age is its volatility and uncertainty (Beck, 2008). It is important to note that in a global world, the 'construction' of optional life paths can be validly understood in the context of the opportunities provided by social inequalities, in relation to structure and agency.

Social generation, cohort, and life stage are concepts with different dimensions. Although they are clearly distinguished in scientific analyses, despite efforts to distinguish them, the concepts are often confused (Burnett, 2010, p. 3). There is no consensus among sociological theorists of generations on how generations are formed, how they are identified, or even on the social processes in which they are considered. One of the reasons for the controversy may be that generations, cohorts, and life stages are different in theory but difficult to distinguish in research practice (Caballero & Baigorri, 2018).

This conceptual confusion is compounded by widely known texts whose vocabulary is readily used by the labor and advertising markets and by party politics, especially when stereotypical characterizations of social target groups are seen as a way of categorizing and influencing the values and behavior of these groups.

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[2] The concept of cohort was originally developed by Norman Ryder (Ryder, 1965)

All these confusions and uncertainties may have played a role in the proliferation of objections to the sociological application of the concept of social generation. According to one critic, the concept of generations and the supposed differences between them are constructed in public discourse, with some of the ideas that emerge being created and reinforced by the media, often in the form of sensational news stories[3]. Other critics argue that the superficial and inconsistent use of the concept of generation in sociology is used to avoid the difficulties of scientific rigor. While it is easy and convenient to describe complex age-related differences in social interactions by referring to generations, the judgments made through such use of the concept of generation are generally inaccurate and overstated (Rudolph & Zacher, 2020).

However, critics of the concept of generation also acknowledge that

> "scholars using the concept of 'social generation' are committed to understanding the relationship between social change and social inequality." (Roberts & France, 2021).

Despite all the doubts and criticisms, the various concepts of generation have played a role in the scientific description of social phenomena for more than a century, and this persistence suggests that, with a suitable interpretative approach, generational theory can help broaden our knowledge of society from a specific point of view. For example, the contemporary Australian social scientist Mark McCrindle, known for his bestselling books on the – otherwise controversial – 'ABC generations', believes that generational theory, building on the collaboration of several disciplines, paints a great picture of 'where our society has come from - and a forecast of the shape of things to come'. (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009, p. 34).

In the late 1970s, Hans Jaeger published his work on the history of generation theory, in which he seeks answers to the following questions:

> "1. Assuming that generational phenomena of any type can be established in history: are they primary (that is, biologically caused) manifestations, and consequently do they occur in regular intervals? Or are they secondary manifestations based on definite external events and facts, which therefore would have to occur at completely irregular intervals? 2. Can one treat generations in history as universals, that is, as common entities which shape an epoch and a society? Or can the concept only be used meaningfully to identify a partial relationship, namely of the epochal commonality within delineated social groups?" (Jaeger, 1985, p. 273)

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[3] See e.g. Glazer, 2020 for an opinion piece.

In Western Europe, in the era of rapid industrialization from the mid-19th century onwards, Jaeger argues that, in addition to social class theory, generational theory became an important topic in the social sciences and the humanities. Dilthey, in his study of the generational context of culture, concluded that the social and cultural influences of receptive adolescence and youth had a decisive impact on the culture-shaping artists and creators of each period, an impact that would persist throughout their lives, framing the new experiences they had from time to time. His hypothesis was interpreted by the philosopher-historian author himself as applying only to a select group (Jaeger, 1985, p. 276).

Jaeger classifies generational theories related to social historical processes into two types. He discusses the major works that have shaped the theory of generation, including the ideas of Ortega y Gasset's philosophy of history. The Spanish author argues that a generation is neither a handful of outstanding people nor simply a mass of people. A new generation appears when children "come into the world dowered with certain typical characteristics, certain dispositions and preferences that give them a common physiognomy that marks them off from the previous generation." (Ortega y Gasset, 1960, p. 35)[4] The resulting generations may take up positions of agreement or opposition to the previous ones, but this does not imply a fundamental difference: "it does not matter whether one generation applauds the previous generation or hates it - in either event, it carries the previous generation within itself. If the image were not so baroque, we might present the generations not horizontally but vertically, one on top of the other, like acrobats in the circus making a human tower." (Ortega y Gasset, 1962 [1958], p. 53). The broad horizon of the interpretation of generations is also open to the question of gender sociology.

> "[T]he word 'generation' does not necessarily imply an identity of natal dates- that the women of any one generation are constitutionally, and not merely by chance, a little younger than the men of that same generation." (Ortega y Gasset, 1962 [1958], pp. 58-59).

The "symbolic universe" of beliefs and cultural communities, the rhythm of generational changes in intellectual history, and the repetition of generations every ten to fifteen years prevails in history. Jaeger calls this the "pulse rate" hypothesis (Jaeger, 1985, p. 280).

According to Jaeger, Ortega y Gasset and his followers have developed a theory of the repetition of generations that differ according to cultural characteristics. Jaeger does not consider the claim that generational stages in history can be observed following the order of life processes to be a generally applicable hypothesis, even on the basis of the examples given. (Jaeger, 1985, p. 281)

Karl Mannheim's *The Problem of Generations* (1952 [1928]) is described by Jaeger as a reflection of the social crisis following the First World War, and his historical analysis is char-

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[4] The transcripts of Ortega y Gasset's lectures, given around 1930, are included in the volume from which the quotations are taken, published after his death in 1960.

acterized as a general theory with a different perspective from class theory, but similar to it (Jaeger, 1985, p. 278). Mannheim emphasizes the critical change of external, historical facts as a condition for the formation of generations, which shapes the mentality of individuals in their receptive young life with lasting experiences and impressions, framing their later experiences. In addition to the impressions gained in a formative age in the same historical-social space,

> "[g]eneration as an actuality, [...] involves even more than mere co-presence in such a historical and social region. A further concrete nexus is needed to constitute generation as an actuality. This additional nexus may be described as participation in the common destiny of this historical and social unit." (Mannheim, 1952 [1928], p. 303).

Jaeger calls this approach the "imprint" hypothesis, but stresses that Mannheim is far from being mechanical in his conception of the influence of age on the formation of generation: the change in the Aristotelian "entelechies" which permanently determine the intellectual climate, the clash of different intellectual climates, plays an important role in the formation of the spirituality of a generation. A generation is a community of social and intellectual contents in an intergenerational context, i.e. a complex interplay of factors that characterizes the emergence of a generation from the category of birth cohort.

Mannheim thus sees the socio-historical context-dependency, the change of cultural bearers and their novel approaches as decisive in the emergence of historical generations, to which Jaeger adds that no one would deny that the historical facts and intellectual currents that affect the generations in their formative years play a role in the formation of generations. Ir is hardly possible to assume, however, that the generations of an era with its own particular changes in spirit are uniform, on which Mannheim based his deep and thoughtful theory, and the insufficient differentiation of this description can be illustrated by the ideological division of the young generation of the Weimar era, which was brought about by the First World War.

Overall, Jaeger sees the imprint-type theory of historical generations as timeless, with room for further development, and answers his own introductory question by saying that this concept of generation, properly differentiated, can be used to show "the epochal commonality within delineated social groups". (Jaeger, 1985, p. 274). In his critique of the other theoretical framework, he argues that the assumption of generations based on life processes, occurring at regular intervals, the 'pulse rate' hypothesis of a historical order of intermittent generational changes, seems to be less productive, its validity is not supported by more thorough studies, and that this approach may rather provide more insight into the description of the co-emergence of new phenomena articulated in a theoretical, artistic way. (Jaeger, 1985, pp. 283-284).

Hans Jaeger concludes by explaining that generational approaches, following the accelerating changes in life forms, gained importance from the 19th century onwards - similar to class

theory, but in a significantly different way, approaching the description of social phenomena from a different direction. Jaeger, referring to Mannheim's theory, linked the emergence of historical generations to a period of social crisis. "Pronounced generational breaks which may affect an entire society apparently occur only after decisive historical events, such as wars, revolutions, and economic crises of great proportions." (Jaeger, 1985, p. 291).

Generational theories of the "pulse rate" type, which explore the succession of generations in history at intervals, gained widespread recognition with the publication of William Strauss and Neil Howe's *Generations*, in which they present American history from the 15th century onwards as a necessarily recurring story of generations, and see in their work a basis for predicting future trends. The authors sought to discover waxing and waning eras and cycles in US history, with four or so successive generations, and to provide inventive names and descriptions of these.[5] Using the pattern of four roughly twenty-year periods in individual lives, the authors sought to divide history into a series of cycles, characterized by four 'generational archetypes', the common experience of the creation of these archetypes creating a common identity. (Strauss & Howe, 1991) The authors point to recurring patterns and historical analogies between generations throughout the process. Critics, both historians and sociologists, have pointed out the fallacies and exaggerations of the theory in detailed analyses, some claiming that the approach is more marketing than science (see e.g. Agati 2012). However, the theory and naming of the 'generations' listed in the book has become part of public thinking, regardless of the critics.

The more recent groupings of sociological concepts of generation can be reviewed starting from those given by Jaeger. The theories that can be grouped in a way that is somewhat consistent with the 'imprint' hypothesis described by Mannheim give prominence to the social and historical experiences of those born in a period, their entelechy, which is woven into social activity and has a generational force. Contemporary analysts also emphasize that external relations are experienced in "profound socio-psychological ways by members of that group, and such that their 'group-ness' can be identified by analysts" (Thorpe & Inglis, 2019) (e.g., climate crisis generation or virus generation). The other group of 'pulse rate' generation theories classify those born in a date range into a generation who show a commonality in their attitudes towards and practices of certain new cultural developments, communication and media platforms (Thorpe & Inglis, 2019) (e.g. the "Woodstock generation" or the "ABC generations").

However, there is also an approach which, although not clearly classifiable in Jaeger's typology as it does not clarify the concept of generation (which is why it is difficult to classify), is noteworthy for our topic. Although it is basically presented in terms of the family generation, the role of imprint factors is sometimes also present, especially in the context of technological development. Indeed, Margaret Mead's book, first published in 1970, is not

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[5] The theory was adapted to the 2008 crisis by Steve Bannon's film Generation Zero, with the help of the authors of the book.

primarily concerned with the problem of generations, but (as the title of the book suggests) with intergenerational relations and the generation gap through the lens of cultural transmission (Mead, 1970), which a recent study wittily describes as the 'they-consciousness' of generations, as opposed to the study of generational identity (Bolin, 2019). It is this optics that, for us, makes Mead's theory relevant, even though his work is poorly integrated into the theoretical-historical approach to generations (she herself does not refer to any social science approaches to generations, instead starting from the colloquial meaning of the term). Mead's work is nowadays mainly cited for the insight that a reversal of the logic of pattern transmission is observable (she calls it prefigurative culture), i.e. an *intergenerational* system of relations where adults learn primarily from the young[6], and where, at the same time, the intergenerational gap is the widest, in so far as the young are not linked to the reference system of the elderly. According to Margaret Mead, the discoveries and inventions of the 1940s helped unify the world, and later lead to globalization, a unique process in human history. Mead recognized that new fractures in the divide would continue to appear until the older generation died out, at which point the divide itself would disappear. According to Mead, the generation gap phenomenon was present in the form of social movements in the 1960s (for example, the struggle against the Vietnam War), but this turned into domestic tensions, with youth deviance being blamed on the disintegration of families. In the 1978 edition of her volume (Mead, 1978) The Generation Gap, as it occurred in the mid 1960s was both a historical event irreversible in time and a biological event, as it occurred to human beings who would inevitably age. (Mead, 1978, p. 101) Mead thus interprets the interpersonal effects of social change associated with technological progress in essentially discursive (the discourse of the generation gap) and communicative (issues of mutual understanding between young and old) terms, to the extent that they can be related to the issues of generational discourse that will be presented later. More importantly, however, it reflects on its interpretation-interpretability of generations in a globalizing world.

> "They do have in common a childhood that none of their parents anywhere
> in the world experienced and they can look forward to a shared future, for
> never again will they be completely cut off from the rest of the world for
> longer than the duration of a hurricane, a power failure, or a political coup."
> (Mead, 1978, p. 122)

While it is no coincidence that Mead's work is not institutionalized in the (youth) sociological tradition in the context of generational theories (rather, in the context of cultural

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[6] It should be noted that the time of the book's writing was still partly understood as a cofigurative culture, „in which the prevailing model for members of the society is the behaviour of their contemporaries" (Mead, 1970, p. 25). Mead links the spread of prefigurative culture to the global spread of technological progress, and sees the generational conflict as partly due to the fact that young people already see themselves as representatives of such a culture, while older people are confronted with the social consequences of rapid technological change.

transmission and social change), the question of global generations (as explored by Ulrich Beck), the shared future horizon, which has indeed been created by the development of technology, and the study of modes of communication are important issues to be further explored in the context of generational theories. The underlining of technological development is worth emphasising if only because it is a popular focus of the pulse-rate hypothesis theories that have been emerging since the turn of the millennium.

ABC Generations[7] and Their Criticism

According to the "ABC generation" and "digital generation" theories, it is plausible to distinguish generations on the basis of certain birth date ranges *linked to a common cultural, media and technological environment.* Birth date intervals can of course be linked to certain global economic, cultural, and technological characteristics. Furthermore, while the role of current age in the relationship to technology, and in particular online activity, can hardly be disputed, it may be important to critically examine theories of literacy generation in meaningful analyses because of the common, simplistic stereotypes of these theories in everyday life, regardless of the intentions of the theorists and their proponents, in everyday life, in the economy and on the labor market. They can fuel age discrimination and conflict, and do not provide a flexible way of managing 'generational' boundaries, describing the movement between the groups thus formed, or of addressing inequalities, either spatially or culturally and economically. It is necessary to note here that any notion of generation is of course inadequate to describe individuals identified/identifying as members of a generation, but notions of social groups are used to describe social phenomena - but it does matter in what way.

The first of the theories that consider birth dates as the basis of the relationship with the digital world is the very widely known theory of Marc Prensky. According to him, the cognitive processes of the 'digital natives'[8] born in the digital age have been shaped in a context that has shaped their relationship to the world and that therefore makes them better able to adapt to digital technologies, whereas 'immigrants' from older generations, however familiar they may be with the world of information technology, necessarily 'smatter its language'. (Prensky, 2001; 2005) The author originally used the distinction primarily to describe the difficulties of understanding between teachers and students, but even in this context it is not correct that those born in the digital age are generally characterized by familiarity and a high degree of skill, while older people are uniformly disadvantaged and alienated in their ability to navigate the digital world.

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[7] The term „alphabet soup" is a collective name for social groups in writings that follow the vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxon alphabet.

[8] Prensky himself does not think it is right to use his categories rigidly, sometimes classifying people without digital access as excluded regardless of their date of birth, but he still uses the term „digital native" as a deterministic category referring to date of birth (Prensky, 2005)

[9] The book *Generation* X, by Charles Hamblett and Jane Deverson on popular youth culture, was published in 1965 and was the first book to make the alphabetical marking of successive generations widely known. Howe's real popularity came from the letters starting with X and ending with Z, the series of symbols continuing with the Greek alphabet.

Mark McCrindle has published several editions of his globally successful *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations* (McCrindle, Wolfinger, 2016), which has been published in expanded editions since 2009.[9]

In the introduction, it says that "generational stereotypes and conjecture find their way into the workplace and the press", and simplistic characterizations are at odds with the findings of scientific analysis, which shows that there is now more diversity than ever between generations and that generational theory can play an increasingly important role in the process of mutual understanding. (McCrindle; Wolfinger, 2016, p. IX) One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever - with this biblical motto he begins his explanation of his theory of generation, and certainly not by chance. Although the author does not share the rigid, cyclical tagging advocated by Strauss and Howe, his description does have the character of a 'pulse rate' theory. While distancing himself from 'horoscope-like' descriptions of successive generations, he believes that the 'letter generations' he lists represent a particularly strong social divide today. 'More differences lie between the generations - from age and priorities to values, attitudes and learning and communication styles - than in almost any other divide', which is reinforced by generational identities. (McCrindle; Wolfinger 2016, p. 24)

The majority of theories of the alphabet generation conflate the concept of social generation with that of birth cohort, while the former - at least according to the sociologists' intention - is a concept for understanding social processes, the latter is a demographic, statistical category with boundaries described by years. (Burnett, 2010) Letter generation theories create externally identified, fixed group boundaries by merging the concepts of cohort and generation.

The generalized characterization of generations and their differences is seen by many authors as difficult to reconcile with the representation of social cohesion. Raymer and colleagues (2017) argue convincingly that negative social perceptions of young people are strongly linked to the discourse of generational differences. According to their qualitative research, "although the topic of generational differences has received a great deal of attention, empirical research has failed to confirm many of the ideas. "Yet, stories of generational differences remain prevalent. These stories reinforce preexisting regressionist beliefs, which then lead to reverse age discrimination [on the labor market]". (Raymer M., Reed, Spiegel, & Purvanova, 2017, p. 168) In the elements of the characterization of Generation Y, neo-Marxist critics see a strategy of neoliberal ideology to discredit the aspirations of system-critical youth (McClennen, 2017) or, even more plausibly, the acceptance of social inequalities: 'This discourse feeds into, and in turn draws from, the culture of emotion, especially that of resentment and the abjectification of less deserving others, that is key to the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism'. (Pickard, 2019, p. 382)

The "ABC generation" and similar theories can be classified among the heirs of the generation theories classified by Jaeger in the "pulse rate" group, which can be described in a rough way by the following main features, which are also interrelated:

- *Generational changes are necessarily a succession of intermittent changes* in history and are due to biological factors. Criticizing this, Mannheim writes that an approach that assumes rigid demarcations does not take into account the interrelationships between age groups in society and their dynamics. (Mannheim, 1952 [1928])
- *Technological determinism,* according to which the differentiation of generations is primarily determined by the relationship to a prominent factor of the socio-cultural environment, digital technology, argues e.g. (Selwyn, 2009).
- *Generationalism,* according to which generations can be characterized in a stereotypical, horoscopic way, the groups characterized as generations are undifferentiated, and the consideration of the fragmentation and inequalities of global and local society is un-necessary from the point of view of generations. Critics argue against this, e.g: Rauvola, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2019.
- *Empirical unsoundness,* according to which selective or anecdotal evidence is sufficient to support theories. Critics note that letter generation theorists have not been con-firmed by empirical research and it would be difficult to find such evidence because the operationalisation of generational concepts is also questionable. (Rudolph & Zacher, 2020b)

Despite its conceptual vagueness, the "ABC generation" concept enjoys considerable popularity, with particular relevance in everyday political and economic communication, as analyses have shown. While studies on letter generations are interesting, they fail to include a substantive, nuanced analysis of young people's lives; their approach is simplistic and tends to focus on relations with older age groups ('generations'). (Roberts & France, 2021)

There are also increasingly critical voices in the international discourse of marketing literature, with a UK-based blog by a major international marketing company examining representative UK data from 2019, which found that members of 'Generation Z' are only 0.2 percentage points more homogeneous than the UK population as a whole in terms of lifestyle and values. This data analysis, moreover, confirms that middle-class members of the cohort were indeed more homogeneous. (Shaw, 2020)

Previous research in Hungary (see Székely 2020) also shows a blurred image of the content of the term of generation and its consequences in terms of identification. A quantitative research conducted in 2017 has shown that while the term generation is identifiable and relatable to the respondents, its content is vague, sometimes even contradictory:

> "the most typical characteristics [associated with the respondents' own gen-eration] refer to age, life situation/lifestyle, and only then do characteristics that describe mental or behavioural characteristics occur. Although, overall, the latter category is more frequently used, the content of the characteristics listed is diverse, even contradictory" (Székely, 2020, p. 44.)

As a conclusion, we can say that while the term generation is widely used both in popular and in scientific discourses and, as such, it has consequences in terms of identification, there were few strong arguments that the popular ABC-generational approaches of the near past are indeed reflecting on sociological generations.

Empirical Approaches
The Generations2020 Research[10]

While the pulse-rate approach to generations can be criticised, there are several arguments for the relevance of the generational approach (see e.g. Déri and Szabó 2021), but perhaps the most important one for research is that generational identity (in no small part due to popular generational discourses) can be detected. During the planning phase of the Generations2020 research, a traditional offline focus group discussion was planned, but by the time the plans were in the implementation phase, the social context had changed and the pandemic period had set in. This led to the rethinking of the process. Adapting to the opportunities presented by COVID-19, the groups of six were redesigned to reflect the Hungarian settlement structure, age groups, and educational attainment in a more nuanced way.

In addition to four focus groups in Budapest, the research also aimed to have focus groups in which the opinions of people of different age groups and regions could express themselves in a shared space, nuanced and complementary to each other. At the same time, it was also taken into account that the need to organize age-homogeneous groups where age-related opinions could be expressed more strongly. In the case of age-homogeneous groups, it was ensured that the participants in the discussion came from different regions of the country, because of the nuances of opinion.

The method was also an experimental approach in order to confirm or refute the hypothesis that the population of different age groups, types of settlements and regions, according to their educational level and age, relate to generations in different ways and from different perspectives.

It is important to mention and emphasize that the discussions took place in the online space.[11] This aspect should also be highlighted because of a stereotype of generational research;

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[10] The Századvég Consortium carried out an empirical study with quantitative and qualitative components in autumn 2020. The quantitative large-sample telephone survey (CATI) was conducted among 20,000 randomly selected persons aged 18 and over, and the sample was representative of the Hungarian adult population along the most important sociodemographic factors (gender, age groups, highest completed level of education, type of settlement and region of residence). During the qualitative phase of the research, online interviews were conducted, thus providing the opportunity to select a group from different regions and settlement types. During the research, 72 participants were interviewed in 12 focus groups. Our focus group discussion was structured as follows: 1.Clarification of concepts, contextualisation 2.Mapping horizontal and vertical transfers : a. Value transfer b. Culture c. Digitalisation 3.Living conditions, leisure, vision of the future, COVID19 pandemic 4.Public life, generational events, experiences.

[11] Quotes from conversations highlighted are the results of verbatim, word-for-word typing. Sources below quotes show only the gender and age of the respondent. Respondents who did not provide their age are indicated by their reported status. In the case where several respondents of the same age are quoted, the respondent is indicated by a number next to the age as a distinction.

there are significant differences in the way different generations use digital space. While this approach has not been fully refuted, it has also not been confirmed by our experience.

The Generations2020 research contained survey research too (see footnote 10). As an interpretational context of the results of the qualitative phase, it is worth noting that the data analysis of the survey identified eight generational groups. The 'War-torn Generation's' members are those born between 1930 and 1948 - they make up 11 percent of Hungarian society. They are followed in time by the group born between 1949 and 1957, who were named the 'Ratkó-generation' (17 percent). The 'Generation of Co-Compromisers' (10 percent) were born between 1958 and 1964, and the 'Generation of Organizers' (7 percent) between 1965 and 1969. The 'Threshold Generation' (19 percent) is defined as those born between 1970 and 1979, and the narrower period between 1980 and 1984 is the 'Breakout Generation' - the latter making up around 10 percent of the population. The next is the 'Goose Generation' (15 percent), which is the same as those born between 1985 and 1994, and the adult generation still alive today is the 'Beanbag Generation' (11 percent), born between 1995 and 2002.

Figure 1. Generations in Hungarian society (%)
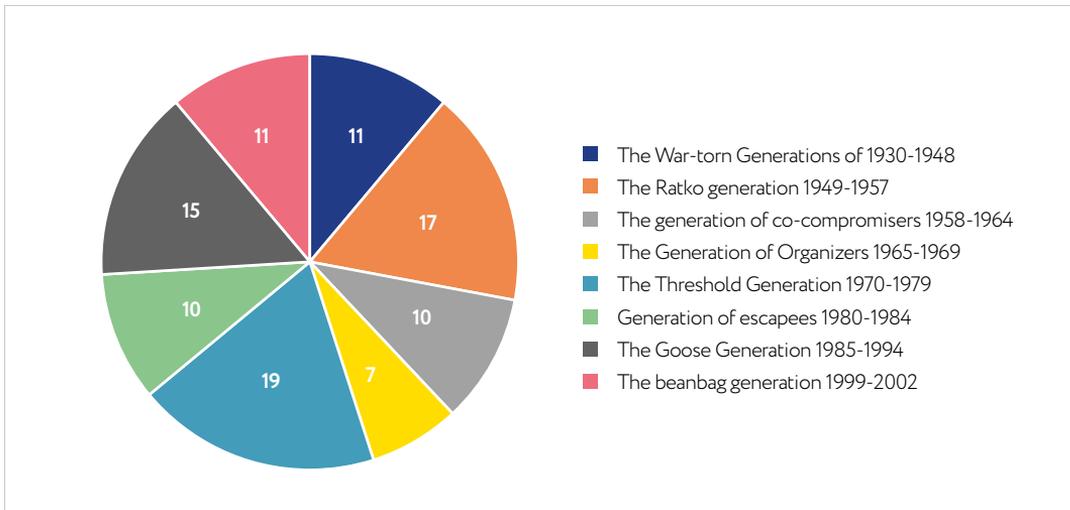
Source: Bauer et al. 2022

During the interviews, we found that our interviewees, of different ages, educational backgrounds, and places of residence, use the opportunities and capabilities offered by online space according to their needs. While conducting the interviews, there were some technical incidents and problems that could be traced back to the possible shortcomings or overloading of the Internet network. However, there were also some that could be attributed to the inexperience of our interlocutors.

It can be said that the changes connected to the pandemic have affected the way we "discover" the opportunities offered by digitality, and how we perceive their usability and applicability. The constraints - which can be attributed to the impact of COVID-19 - have created new perspectives in the perception of infocommunication, which was also evident in the opinions of the respondents.

Results of the Qualitative Research

The qualitative part of the Generational Research was not conducted in the form of a traditional offline focus group discussion. This was due to the pandemic situation. The method used was out of necessity.

The data collection was an experimental approach in the sense that the interviews took place online, giving the opportunity to gather a group from different regions and types of settlements. The research involved 12 focus groups in which a total of 72 participants were interviewed.

There are significant differences in the way different generations use the online space. During the interviews, we found that our interviewees of different ages, educational backgrounds, and places of residence use the opportunities and capabilities of the online space according to their needs.

The events of the last few months have changed the way we "discover" the opportunities offered by digitality and how we perceive their exploitability and applicability.

The concepts related to generation [in Hungarian the terms generáció and nemzedék are used interchangeably] are not separated in the approaches of the participants. They understood the concepts in an overlapping way, which - for them - could not be understood separately.

Some of the respondents highlighted the family in relation to the concepts of generation. Families are seen as a place where different age groups live together, which presupposes diversity, and as an important and inescapable place for the transmission of values and traditions. In respondents' view, the most important arena for the transmission of values is the family. By this, in most cases, they mean not only the parental environment but the influences they received from their grandparents.

The family and the wider family is a crucial starting point for all ages. It is not influenced by the type of settlement or the region in which one lives.

Our respondents interpret technical changes as a positive trend, to which they associate generational behaviors. They also express a loss of value and a distortion of values.

The age of the respondent plays a role in the definition of generations and the link to generations. Less important, however, is the level of education and the region of Hungary in which the respondent lives. The generational concepts and associated characteristics formulated by social researchers were of little information to our respondents.

Generational categories are relevant for the middle class.
For research participants, their birth date (age) and any events or happenings that could be

linked to it were the most important factors. Generational differences and discrepancies were mainly articulated in homogeneous age groups.

The following associations were connected to the concepts of generation. It is interesting to note that some of the respondents mentioned the family in connection with this concept.

> *"I wrote for the generation [generáció] I was in, that 'dad, mum, grandchildren family, time', this came to my mind. And for generation [nemzedék] I wrote children. (Male 40)*

> *"The first thing that came to my mind was Generation XYZ (laughs) with the letters. Anyway, I was also thinking about grandparents, parents, family, what we can learn, what they have lived, what we can learn from their lives (Female 29)*

> *"For generation I wrote differences, so differences, social differences, distortion and loss of values." (Male 41)*

The differences in approaches - noticeably - are those that interpret the technical changes to which generational attitudes are linked as progress, as a positive trend. However, there are also approaches that reflect age, generation and generational differences. It is important to note that, in many approaches, differences are associated with devaluation and distortion. The approach to this concept is characterised by the approach to generation already heard in the media. The age of the respondent plays a role in the definition of generations and the connections to generations. Less important, however, is the level of education and the region or type of settlement in which the respondent lives. It should also be mentioned that the composition of the group also played a role in the approaches and their diversity. It could also be observed that, although they thought that different generations existed, they associated themselves with these approaches more along the lines of age (date of birth). It was also characteristic that they understood the two Hungarian concepts of generation as one and the same concept, which for them could not be understood separately.

Opinions on values are consistent in that they are based on family traditions. A strong emphasis is placed on a values-based mindset, a love of honour, integrity and work, and the importance of health.

Culture, as a value, is linked to family traditions. Attitudes towards cultural consumption were determined by childhood and youth experiences. In particular, childhood has influenced current cultural consumption and attitudes towards culture. The transmission of values from home to offspring is also a value that shows that family transmission is of decisive, intergenerational importance. Age and the type of settlement and region of the country in which one lives do not play a role in the approach. Our interviewees' views also had an emphasis on loyalty, which they argued is not only about family ties but also about belonging to communities.

"The most important values are honesty, reliability, and tolerance. So for me it is very important that someone is trustworthy. Even if we have different views, different opinions, I have to accept it, so I have to tolerate the other person. But for me, these are the values that take human relationships forward." (Female1 56)

"I think it's honesty, diligence, loyalty and uprightness that perhaps sums it up." (Male 60)

"Well, honesty in human relationships, which is important, I'm very family oriented, so what I've brought from the family, these values are very important values. There are a lot of things that I have brought, I try to pass on, there are things that are very much objected to, but I still push it" (Female pensioner)

It was also found that, although the relationship to culture and cultural spaces was dominant, several respondents broadened their understanding of culture.

*(**What is culture**) "Well, everything we don't have time for." (Female2 56)*

"Well, (...) culture for me used to mean theatre and books as a child, so that's where culture came in. But now I would think that it is a much broader concept, rather, it means for me, perhaps, this kind of knowledge (...) because, if I think about it, culture is that if a particular society that has its own culture. The ages have their own culture too (...)" (Female1 44)

"What does culture mean to me? (...) I immediately associate it with art, so I associate it with these kinds of art. So when we talk about culture, I think of folk art, I think of books, theatre, cinema. I immediately associate it with that." (Female1 56)

The "cultural modesty" reflected in these thoughts reflects an approach which, while considering its consumption important, explains why people do not spend more time in this area, depending on their lifestyle.

Theatre is given a prominent place in the approaches. The approaches that dominate are those that consider the specialness, atmosphere, uniqueness and solemnity of the theatre as the most important element of the experience.

"I feel, by the way, that for me, culture is, let's say, going to a theatre or a cultural event, which I feel, by the way, that even now I don't take the time to do because of work. But I would like to, it's true, but we don't really go to cultural things like that, which for me would be a way of relaxing..." (Female 49)

"Well, the theatre, I've been going to the theatre since I was a little kid, so here in the Pécs Theatre a team of Hungarian theatre people came together and played together (…). And I like reading, literature, everything, so all that kind of stuff." (Male pensioner)

The subjects saw culture as the basis of our spiritual existence. They see it as a concept that is present in all aspects of life. They conceive of it as a set of spiritual values, which is expressed in the culture of the individual. Our respondents mentioned that behavior, dress, and culinary culture are part of our everyday culture.

"And, of course, the behavior. Part of the culture is, let's say, the aforementioned name-calling, that I call an inner circle by its first name, and a circle that is no longer inner, I call them by their second name. So now, if someone comes into the shop and visibly looks at me, I don't ask them 'What do you want?' I have no idea who that is on principle so I give them the respect. So it's culturedness somewhere." (Male 42)

"So culture itself is cultural programs and cultured behavior, so that's what I mean by cultural programmes, (…) And if you go to a program, so you have to behave in the right way in the right place, and you have to go out in style, you have to dress in the right way. So that's another thing that I think is part of it." (Female, pensioner)

"I think our everyday behaviour is part of it." (Male1 24)

"Like dressing. The traditions. The food, gastronomy." (Female2 29)

"For me, culture is pretty much a way of looking at things, so for example the culture of a people in terms of food, really in terms of books, in terms of actors, in terms of a journey, so everything, a broader view of things." (Female1 29)

Many of our respondents consider their Hungarianness to be one of the most important values that defines their identity. They mention it as part of their national consciousness, adding that it is fulfilled together with folk culture. The family is also the starting point for these traditions, but the role of the school is also reflected in this approach.

"For me, values, traditions, so that's the value and tradition you bring with you" (Female 59)

"For me, it's about traditions. What is found in a particular people." (Female 20)

"Traditions. For me it's more about traditions. I think tradition includes art. Because my grandmother, for example, loved to do tapestry, the sewing is this kind of able sewing thing." (Female 21)

The diversity and coexistence of cultures is also considered important, although it is emphasized that it should be linked in some way to the Hungarian way of thinking. In developing an attitude towards culture, our participants attribute an important role to school.

lationship with digitalization is fundamentally determined by technical and technological conditions. By this we mean several approaches. First, the age at which our respondents start using computers, the internet (when they have access to it) and smartphones.

Many people associate their first encounter with the internet with the first online social networking site in Hungary, IWIW. The use of digital tools and online space has become part of everyday life. However, this has different meanings for different age groups. Most people use the internet to find information. Another important use of the web is to download and use content online, especially films and music. During the discussions, it was also pointed out that digital devices, including the smartphone, have become a tool for raising children in many families.

> *"No, it's just that... I was... I was a bit older in about 2000, so I... I was a bit late to the computer. I got into a lot of arguments with my mate about, well, what, I didn't know all the different terminology, I said, well, we'll stop here, and then... I went crying... he ran after me, sorry... I'm the generation that didn't grow up on the computer." (Male 62)*

> *"Well, we had a computer science class in primary school, and that's where we first encountered the basic computer and the Internet itself... and then, um, we got a computer at our house, (...) and slowly we started to practise, specifically here with my mum and dad.... I had to learn it better in the computer science classes, so I mastered it better myself, and then, that's how I got... first in contact with the computer and the Internet." (Male 27)*

> *"For me, it came up, my children were... they were studying computer science in primary school and we bought a computer and... slowly, gradually I started to learn it because I saw how many interesting subjects there were on the computer and when they were not at home I couldn't touch it and I had to learn it. They helped me with that, but also my colleagues who were more... er, advanced, so I really learned through my children." (Female 67)*

> *"Well, I only got into computers when I was in my forties. I took a course in word processing... forty hours. I've been working for twenty-two years since then. And... now I have this. Well, I've been working with computers for twenty-two years, so... the Internet is very... very good, and I'm very good at it." (Female 62)*

The role of offline communication has been taken over, by compulsion or by necessity, by the use of online space. Although this process started a decade and a half ago, it became

dominant in the second decade of the second millennium. This process of transformation was reinforced and, in some cases, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In relation to lifestyle and way of life, the relationship with technical equipment was also raised. Today, the use of smart devices is seen as crucial to everyday life, especially by young and middle-aged people.

Throughout our conversations, themes that came up constantly were the relationship between the generations. The perceptions of differing age groups were quite varied. Aspects of the perceptions of the other age groups included what they could learn from each other and which areas they had more or more nuanced knowledge of, depending on the generation. Older respondents were the main ones who said they enjoyed talking to younger people, and there were even some who said they were less at ease with their own age group. A clearly positive perception of young people was prevalent among those who had grandchildren. Perceptions of age also varied, mainly according to the age of people. However, it was also expressed by several respondents that the term 'old' is currently understood to refer more to people over 70.

> *"For my part, I really like any younger age group, so I honestly like young people more than my own age group. And so I'm learning from my grandchildren all sorts of modern things from slang to everything." (Female 67)*

> *"I think the world is very, very open now and we can learn a lot from young people. They can learn from us, from the older people, from the 'I'll know what's good for you'. But I think that our children also have a lot of things to say that are useful for us." (Female2 56)*

Overall, our research overcame a number of stereotypical images, both in terms of older people's attitudes towards the Internet and intergenerational relations. While attitudes towards culture were essentially framed by a 'traditional' understanding of culture and partly by anthropological conceptions of culture, we did not find a uniform and strong rejection of digital culture, perhaps related to the fact that we did not encounter either classical or reverse ageism.

Summary

In the first part of our study, we presented the sociological approaches and conceptual history of generation, and argued that the "ABC-generation" approach is oversimplifying, and that instead more complex approaches that take into account historical-social influences may be justified. Among these, Karl Mannheim's approach is particularly noteworthy, as his theory also considers that exposure to historical events does not in itself encode identical attitudes and experiences.

In the second part of our paper, we presented the relevant findings of the qualitative part of the research conducted by Századvég.

The findings confirm that there is no single interpretation of generation and generational identity, and that the primary understanding of the concept is the context of family generations,

generational interdependencies, and age characteristics, rather than historical events. Opinions are primarily determined by socialization antecedents, with family background being the determining factor. A minority of respondents could give a precise interpretation of the concept of generations. The majority preferred to define differences in relation to their age group. Regional differences are noticeable in cultural consumption. In the attitude to work, differences in types of settlement dominate. For those living in villages and small towns, it is the most important activity.

Globalization and the changes in infocommunications in recent decades have led to more opportunities, more directions, and more complex processes.

Our hypothesis covered the answers of our respondents. The younger age group in particular is better able to take advantage of technological changes, but older people are also learning and understanding the new forms and opportunities created by virtual space.

People of different ages have different definitions of belonging to generations.

This assumption was - in part - confirmed by our research. In the first place, younger, better educated people were able to place themselves in the generational structures known from access to digitalization in Western Europe and the United States. Older people - in general - were not familiar with this approach, so they positioned themselves according to their age or the generational divide in Hungary. Such was the case, for example, with the Ratkó-child or Ratkó-grandchild delimitation.

Educational attainment, cultural habits and place of residence determine generational differences and similarities.

This hypothesis was fully confirmed. Hungary has a very strong "urbanization slope" in a west-east direction. Regional differences and differences in the size of settlements are most noticeable.

People from lower social groups confirm or deny that generational consciousness is not part of everyday thinking. It is not specific to all social groups.

This hypothesis can also be confirmed by the results of qualitative research. Generational awareness is found among the middle class. For those in the lower social groups, it is not decisive.

Is it worth thinking in terms of generations, are there factors that distinguish different generations and age groups, and are there such differences that they define a generation in terms of community experiences?

Our empirical research has shown that it seems essential to redefine the concept of generation(s). The main thread of today's social science approach is the relationship of generations to digitalization.

Our research has confirmed our hypothesis that this approach simplifies thinking in terms of generations. The qualitative results confirm that the values of different age groups overlap in the social space. We need to interpret this difference in terms of different volumes of actions that determine practical life. The modes of action specific to one age group are also used by other age groups, and the difference in the frequency of these activities creates the difference in diversity.

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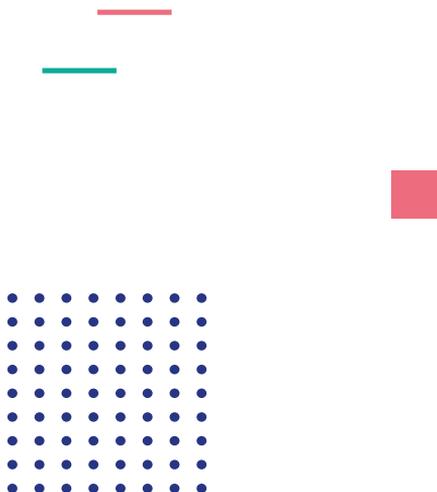
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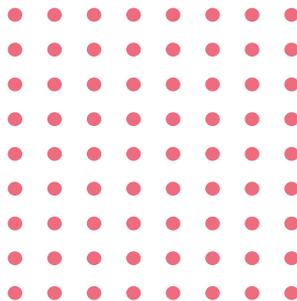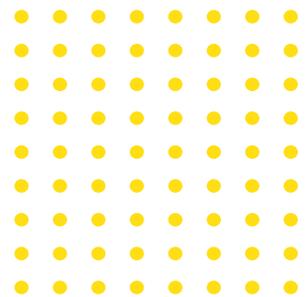
The "Our Unknown Acquaintances: Young People" ("Ismeretlen ismerőseink: a fiatalok") book series aims to present the situation of the youth and youth workers in Hungary and East-Central Europe to the Hungarian and European public. The National Youth Council's book series was launched in 2022, in the European Year of Youth, and we plan to contribute 1-2 publications per year to the academic discourse on young people.

The National Youth Council (NYC) is Hungary's only umbrella organization, which embraces all Hungarian youth and maintains active contact with young people and decision-makers. Since 2012, the mission of our organization has been to represent young people and youth NGOs, to advance youth policy and youth work, to raise young people's awareness of public issues, and to promote youth dialogue.

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