

# The History of the Hungarian Large Sample Youth Survey

## A nagymintás ifjúságkutatás története

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**Abstract:** In this paper I would like to summarize the last two decades of this major research program, which was launched in 2000. In the history of youth research in Hungary following the transition to democracy, the Hungarian large sample youth survey is one of, if not the most, important research program seeking to provide a detailed picture of 15–29-year-olds by regularly collecting data every four years. The last round of surveys was conducted in 2020. It is worthwhile to summarize the findings and experiences since the launch of this research program with respect to a given aspect as so far, this has only been done in part.

In this paper on the history of the Hungarian large sample youth survey, I review the history of youth research in Hungary; in general terms, I will provide a chronology of sorts on the most important research and organizations in this field in the period before the fall of communism. I want to deal with the relationship between the empirical results of the large sample youth survey and the discourses on youth theory to present the major theoretical approaches that the large sample youth survey has been instrumental in developing or empirically testing, and to draw attention to the role of the research program in academic thinking regarding youth. In my study, I will present the history of the research series with a thematic and methodological focus, including the circumstances of the research organization. I want to show how it has evolved and what has remained constant over the past two decades. I also aim to evaluate the research series, i.e. to take stock of its strengths and weaknesses and to look at future directions for improvement.

**Key words:** history, large sample, youth survey

**Összefoglaló:** Az írásban a 2000-ben indult nagyszabású kutatási program elmúlt két évtizedének összefoglalásával szeretnék foglalkozni. A rendszerváltást követő magyarországi ifjúságkutatás történetében a nagymintás ifjúságkutatás az egyik, ha nem a legjelentősebb kutatási program, amely négyévenként végzett adatfelvétellel kísér meg részletes képet nyújtani a 15–29 évesekről. A legutolsó adatfelvételre 2020-ban került sor, az indulás óta eltelt húsz év tapasztalatai megértek az összefoglalásra, amelyre eddig csak részben, egy-egy aspektus bemutatásával került sor. A nagymintás ifjúságkutatás történetét bemutató írásban

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át kívánom tekinteni az ifjúság kutatásának történetét Magyarországon – részletekbe nem menően egyfajta kronológiát kívánok nyújtani a fontosabb kutatásokról, szervezetekről a rendszerváltást megelőző időszakra vonatkozóan is. Foglalkozni kívánok a nagymintás ifjúságkutatás empirikus eredményei és az ifjúságelméleti diskurzusok kapcsolatával, be kívánom mutatni azokat a fontosabb elméleti megközelítéseket, amelyek kialakításában vagy empirikus tesztelésében szerepe volt a nagymintás ifjúságkutatásnak – ráirányítva a figyelmet a kutatási program szerepére a fiatalokkal kapcsolatos tudományos gondolkodásban. Tanulmányomban a kutatássorozat történeti bemutatását a kutatásszervezés körülményeit is érintve elsősorban tematikai és módszertani fókusszal kívánom elvégezni. Be kívánom mutatni hogyan változott és mi maradt állandó a két évtized alatt. Célként tekintek a kutatássorozat értékelésére is, azaz erőnyeit és hiányosságait mérlegre téve a jövőre vonatkozó fejlesztési irányokkal is foglalkozni kívánok.

**Kulcsszavak:** történet, nagymintás, ifjúságkutatás

## Introduction – Youth research in Hungary

Although the history of youth research in Hungary spans the past two decades, the Hungarian large sample youth survey launched at the turn of the century is undoubtedly the most important research program. Bauer et al. (2017) cite Katalin Katona's 1965 study as the first to contain references and raise issues concerning youth sociology.

Following post-1956 reprisals, scholarly activity aimed at getting to know youth was reborn and began developing in parallel with sociology. In a tighter or looser sense, inquiries before the transition to democracy were linked to the institutional system of the party-state; however, their content typically sought to move away from communist ideology. The first professional research centers engaged (partially) in youth research were associated with the communist state party and operated within its structures. These included the Youth Research Group within the Institute of Social Sciences of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) and the Youth Research Group established by the Communist Youth Association (KISZ). Additionally, the Youth Research Unit of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Pedagogical Research Group, the Department of Press and Public Opinion Research at the Youth Newspaper Publishing Company, and the Mass Communication Research Institute mainly carried out basic research on youth affairs in the domain of social sciences (Diósi – Székely, 2008).

To begin with, youth research in Hungary focused on pedagogy, with research projects of the time focusing primarily on the method of integrating members of new generations into socialist society. The focal point of analysis was the political worldview of youth (Csákó, 2004. Bauer et al., 2017). In the 1970s, the scope of research was broadened to cover methodological issues and areas concerning the lifestyle of youth specifically. For example, this was when the first time-budget survey was carried out (Gazsó et al., 1971).

In addition to surveys directly or indirectly organized by the state, Hungary also joined international surveys such as the HBSC (Health Behavior in School-aged

Children), which has overseen data collected among general and secondary school students on health, well-being, and lifestyle every four years since 1985.

Following the transition to democracy, organizations and research groups set up by the party state were shut down or transformed. Private enterprises appeared in the research sector, coinciding with a change in research subjects. Issues linked to the political socialization of youth were joined by analyses on the impact of the transition to democracy (Gazsó – Stumpf, 1992) and research on the life stages of youth (Gábor, 1992). In the middle of the decade after the transition to democracy, two major youth research schemes were launched: in 1995, ESPAD (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs), the European school survey on the alcohol and drug-use habits of young people, was started. In 1997, this was joined by so-called Sziget surveys based on the theory of youth epoch change (Gábor, 2000).

The turn of the millennium brought about a significant change in the practice of acquiring knowledge about youth with the establishment of the National Youth Research Institute, which launched an extensive sample youth survey. The questionnaire survey was directed at young people between the ages of 15 and 29 residing in Hungary using an 8,000-item sample. The survey can be regarded as a milestone because it produced comprehensive findings on changes among youth in the two decades after the transition to democracy on a large sample. The following year, the MOZAIK2001 survey assessed young ethnic Hungarians between the ages of 15-29 in neighboring countries, with young people living alongside them belonging to the majority ethnic group. Throughout the research, 5,500 Hungarians and 2,000 majority respondents were questioned in five regions.

Subsequent waves of large sample youth surveys (Ifjúság2004, Ifjúság2008, Magyar Ifjúság 2012) were confined to the situation within Hungary. In 2016 and 2020, data was again collected on ethnic Hungarians living beyond the country's borders, simultaneously and according to the same syllabus as within Hungary. During the 2020 and 2016 surveys, 12,000 young people between 15 and 29 filled out the in-person questionnaire. In addition to the 8,000-item sample within Hungary, interviews were conducted with 4,000 ethnic Hungarians living as minorities in neighboring countries, thus producing a comprehensive image of Hungarian youth in the Carpathian Basin. Data was compiled in regions outside Hungary with the largest ethnic Hungarian communities. In Transylvania (more exactly, in the regions of Partium, Szekler Land, and Inner Transylvania), 2,000 young people were interviewed. The sample was comprised of 1,000 individuals in Felvidék (Slovakia) and 500 each in Vojvodina (Serbia) and Transcarpathia (Ukraine).<sup>2</sup>

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2 The methodological specifications of surveys conducted outside Hungary were devised by the research group in 2016 in cooperation with the Max Weber Foundation (Transylvania), the Il. Rákóczi Ferenc Transcarpathian Hungarian College (Transcarpathia), the Identity Minority Research Center (Vojvodina). In 2020, it involved the Szekeres László Foundation (Vojvodina) and the Research Institute for Nation Policy.

## Leading narratives in getting to know youth

In recent decades, two frameworks have emerged within international literature that have provided interpretive frameworks for youth-related theoretical work, empirical research, and international comparative studies, among others. These two key themes are the discourse of 'transition' based on the presentation of life situations and the discourse of 'youth culture' focusing on lifestyle (Szanyi, 2018). Three of the most important narratives that fit more or less into international discourses but are specific to Hungary (Nagy – Tibori, 2016) are the theory of youth epoch change (Gábor, 2004), the narrative of youth affairs (Nagy, 2013), and the paradigm of the new silent generation (Székely, 2014)<sup>3</sup>. Empirical testing of all three theoretical approaches is based on the results of the Hungarian large sample youth survey.

Gábor (2004) examined the theory of transition among youth based on Zinnecker, who distinguished between two youth phases: the transitional youth phase characteristic of industrial society and the school youth phase characteristic of post-industrial society (Fazekas – Székely, 2016). Following Zinnecker, Kálmán Gábor considered the two eras worth examining according to three dimensions: (1) the dimension of time, in which the chief question is how much of their time young people spend in their youth life stage; (2) social space, in which the focus of research is the impact of adult society's institutions and groups on the youth life stage; and, (3) the level of cultural autonomy and the resulting issue of the autonomy of youth culture.

According to Gábor's (2004) suggestion, the 1990s saw the emergence of an educational youth period, meaning that the change of era among youth was delayed by 15-20 years in Hungary compared to Western tendencies. This is largely due to general belatedness and suppression prior to the transition to democracy. The model calculates with two scenarios, namely the unemployment scenario (the reproduction of the social stratum lowest in society) and the leisure scenario, implying the expansion of the middle class. The youth phase is one of crisis in employment, resulting in unemployment and the relativization of work (consumption and existence within the educational system may also be considered as work). In the case of the unemployment scenario, the sub-society stratum, identified by Kálmán Gábor as the group of young people who become excluded from the school system and, therefore, face hardship in social integration, became apparent very early on. The leisure scenario envisages the increasing prevalence of the middle class in society and examines the increasing social weight of the middle classes in the dimension of consumption. According to Gábor (2004), young people are increasingly becoming market actors and consumers, resulting in their possession of a growing number of consumer assets (entertainment devices). However, the theory does not describe

<sup>3</sup> These theories do not speak of young people along the same dimensions: the narrative of youth affairs seeks to find answers to who the young people are, the new silent generation focuses on what they are, and the theory of youth epoch change mainly seeks answers to why young people are the way they are. At the same time, each of the models can be linked to international discourses: the theory of youth epoch change is closely related to the discourse of transition, while the narrative of youth affairs fits into developmental psychological approaches, and the concept of the new silent generation is formulated along generation theories.

youth exclusively along the variables of educational attainment, labor market position, free time, or consumption. Focusing on social reproduction, it also addresses the delay in reaching milestones such as starting a family and having children and detachment from the family of origin. It acknowledges the contradiction between cultural independence as follows from the model and continued dependencies such as existential dependence upon the family of origin or the state. The theory envisages a life period of youth that is manifold and fragmented, surrounded by a multitude of uncertainties. All this is true despite the fact that, in a certain sense, today's youth lives in a fundamentally safe world; consequently, its vulnerability and the source of uncertainty are presumably largely existential or psychological, such as a possible increase in risk behavior (Gábor, 2004). The empirical confirmation of the theory of transition among youth is provided by the data set of the Hungarian large sample youth survey in 2000. In criticisms of the theory (Nagy-Tibori, 2016), it is raised that in Giddens's (1992) interpretation, the electable life stage is more of a reflexive process. The theory of change of era among youth focuses merely on the protracted period of adolescence prior to entering adulthood, thus excluding the shrinking childhood from its calculations.

The youth affairs narrative (Nagy, 2013) attempts to describe the particular characteristics of youth based on the role of the individual and the group, as well as the competences of individuals to make decisions and accept responsibility. It claims that groups defined by age are not necessarily equivalent to the youth life phase. The maturation (coming of age) of the individual is outlined by taking on responsibilities such as bearing responsibility for oneself (decision-making) and others (responsibilities brought on by decisions). Based on this, three groups can be identified: (1) from the appearance of responsibility to biological maturity, (2) from biological maturity to psychological maturity, and (3) from psychological maturity to sociological-social maturity. This definition of youth may contradict categorization according to age (the traditional statistical model) as biological, legal, and sociological adulthood do not necessarily coincide. Analysis of data produced by the 2012 Hungarian large sample youth survey (Nagy, 2013) reflects the inconsistency between the theoretical youth group between the ages of 15 and 29 and maturity. It can be suggested that young people are biologically mature, psychologically either mature or immature, and socially immature individuals who can be categorized into the 15-29-year-old age bracket.

As opposed to this, data reflect that less than half of 15-29-year-olds belong purely to the group of young people (i.e., those between childhood and adulthood), with the remainder not corresponding to the traditional statistical model. This proves the validity of a definition based on maturity, which may reflect a more realistic image of youth than a categorization solely based on age. In criticism of the model, it can be pointed out that while it is a more adequate solution than the simplistic, single-dimension age-based categorization, its subjective elements mean

that the interpretation of group categorization and measurability is more difficult. A further problem of the model is that its conclusions are based on cross-section rather than longitudinal data.

As suggested by Szanyi (2018), generation theories have reappeared with fresh impetus in international youth sociology discourse over the past decades. The vigor of the generation approach also achieved significant success outside of scholarly circles in everyday public discourse. Books, articles, and lectures on human resource management and marketing that address various facets of generational differences, mainly from a psychological approach, are popular. Paradigmatic changes, due to which we search for points of guidance in the changing world, are the chief driving force behind the everyday interest in generations. Following Mannheim (1969), the imprint of changes in the world can be identified in the character of generations because the differences between these derive from differences in experiences of socialization. If the impact of socialization changes, and these changes prove lasting and their sphere of influence is disseminated into the most important period of acquiring social norms (childhood and youth), this can define the character of a generation. All this means that the origins of each generation's character are to be found in changes in socialization. Mirroring global trends, mass media and spheres of the digital world have joined the similarly changing traditional socialization environments (the family and the school); these have proven to have significant impacts regarding both the intensity of attachment and the norms represented. Based on Mannheim's thoughts (1969), the theory's starting point is that an event or process that, as a (typical) experience or a defining circumstance that separates a generation from others, is necessary to create a characteristic generation. The character of various generations is defined by the social and emotional environment in which their socialization occurs. According to Strauss and Howe's model (1991; 1997), generations follow each other at an interval of roughly 20 years, and consecutive archetypes result in those born from the early 2000s onwards being similar in character to the generation born before World War II, the so-called silent generation; therefore, they can be identified as a new silent generation (Székely, 2014).

At the same time, the delay during socialism and the shock following the regime change can be felt in the lives of young people in Hungary, which phenomena did not or only slightly affected the Western world. It can be deduced from Strauss and Howe's model that the regime change crisis has created the character of a new silent generation in Hungary. An empirical test of the theory was provided by the Hungarian large sample youth survey of 2012, which can be used to delineate three main characteristics of the character of this new silent generation: conformity, uncertainty, and passivity. The main criticism of the theory is that the theoretical basis applies to American generations, so it may not be suitable for describing Hungarian youth. Another problem is that the narrative does not discuss the reasons for the silence (Nagy-Tibori, 2016). At the same time, the narrative of the

new silent generation says no more than that – accepting Mannheim’s along with Strauss and Howe’s basic ideas about the effects of socialization on the generational character, the Hungarian generation born and growing up around the regime change shows quiet attitudes. In addition to the role of crises, it does not analyze the possible causes of silence and accepts Strauss and Howe’s thoughts on the silence of generations born during crises.

Recent Hungarian interpretations of youth build on the empirical results of Hungarian large sample youth surveys both in their original conceptions (Gábor, 2004; Nagy, 2013; Székely, 2014) and during the verification of theories (Székely, 2018a; Székely, 2021a). Thus, the Hungarian large sample youth survey has been an essential tool for empirically testing major Hungarian-related theoretical concepts in recent decades.

## The research themes

The focus of a questionnaire survey is determined by the number of questions per topic and the time it takes to complete each block of questions. A comparison of the questionnaires used in the Hungarian large sample youth survey will show the cornerstones the researchers felt were important when designing the research. A comparison of the questionnaires in the research series shows a range of 161 to 319 questions (*Table 1*). However, when comparing the number of questions in the whole questionnaire, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions because the structure of the questions can be quite different. A simple yes/no question can be asked in a fraction of a minute, while a table with many sub-questions can take several minutes to complete. To get an idea of how the total length of the questionnaire has changed over the data collection period, we can start by estimating the time needed to complete the questionnaire by the interviewer and the length of the questionnaire recorded by the data collection system after the 2012 survey.

For the last two surveys, data recording took 43 minutes (2020) and 41 minutes (2016) according to the data collection system, while the latter indicated 70 minutes for 2012. Interviewers conducted interviews (based on their own administration) averaging 66 minutes in 2008, but no such data are available for previous waves.<sup>4</sup>

The other option is to look at each database to see how many sub-questions, i.e., items,<sup>5</sup> it contains. If we effectively count the items from the first question asked to the interviewee to the last, we find that the questionnaire length was fixed in

4 The 2000 and 2004 survey documentation does not include data on interview time, nor does the questionnaire include such a question. It is difficult to imagine, however, that interview time was not recorded; the 2004 research focused on the effect of questionnaire length on interview quality. This is evidenced, for example, by the questions asked of the interviewer: ‘At [what number of] questions did the interviewee get tired or bored of answering?’

5 It is worth comparing the number of items by bringing the datasets into common denominator, by excluding the different variables trained and by ignoring the interviewer questions before and after the interview.



the previous four waves, and about 1,000 items were included in each database. The number of questions and the number of items are only weakly related; the order of the shortest questionnaires is also reversed if we sort each questionnaire by the number of items instead of the number of questions (*Table 1*).

**Table 1.** *Number of questions and items*

Survey wave	Number of questions	Number of items
2000	161	824
2004	235	772
2008	319	1019
2012	272	1055
2016	237	955
2020	246	965

Since its inception, the Hungarian large sample youth survey has been designed to provide a comprehensive picture of young people aged 15-29. To paint this picture, it is necessary to look in depth at life situations and lifestyle issues, which leads to many topics and, in practice, even more questions and lengthy questionnaires. But to get a complete and comprehensive picture, we need even more, because youth is a specific period of life in which we finish school, start working, get paid for the first time for our work, choose a partner, start a family, and leave our parents. These life events are key to entering independent adulthood, but learning about adulthood involves asking fundamental questions that go beyond the present to reveal aspirations and intentions for the future.

The themes addressed in the questionnaires<sup>6</sup> include four priority areas, which were much more prominent than average in each of the previous waves. These are basic demographic variables, issues related to starting a family and having children, school and labor market paths, social well-being, and politics. The emphasis is due to the importance and complexity of the topics, the fact that these are the topics that this research explores most extensively (e.g., addiction research is more concerned with health and risk behavior) and, finally, the identification of the issues to be studied is not only the researcher's competence but also the client's competence, i.e., the topics that are of most interest to the client. Looking at the larger thematic units of the questionnaires used in each wave (*Table 2*), we observe that the weight of each topic varied from wave to wave. A more detailed analysis also shows that since the turn of the millennium, the most significant increase in the number of questions has been in the area of digital culture, while the most visible decrease is seen in the area of risk behaviors, with a particular decline in the number of questions on drug use (Székely, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> The separation of topics may not be perfectly clear-cut; there are some questions that can be grouped into several sub-topics, and there are some summary topics that could be grouped together. Even a single topic could be split into several sub-topics.



Table 2. Themes with numbers of questions

Theme	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
Demography, life events, starting a family	16	41	36	49	37	41
School life	10	21	45	27	24	25
Labor market history	24	24	46	46	31	26
Social well-being, politics	29	23	32	23	29	38
Household, housing, finances	31	41	40	28	20	17
Leisure, sport, health	20	31	54	42	21	21
Culture, (new) media	18	19	28	27	33	27
Values, identity, religion	9	10	9	12	20	18
News, other	4	13	20	10	15	26
Questions for interviewers	0	12	9	8	7	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>246</b>

The number of questions alone cannot show how much the content of the thematic units, the way questions are asked, etc. has changed.<sup>7</sup> The 2020 survey also used recurring elements, e.g., a question based on Inglehart's (1997) value assessments, as well as new questions that were formulated by the experts who proposed them during the professional consultation, e.g., questions on volunteering or youth programs, and some changes were required by the current situation, such as the inclusion of questions on the coronavirus epidemic.

The current Hungarian large sample youth survey aims to meet the need for a comprehensive approach and comparability. Policy-makers and youth professionals expect research to be able to provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis of young people's lives and lifestyles. The 2020 survey, like the 2016 survey, should serve to get to know young Hungarians in Hungary and young Hungarians abroad<sup>8</sup> and should be able to be compared with previous large sample youth surveys in Hungary and abroad.<sup>9</sup> All of this had to be taken into account in the design by examining the areas of research outlined in the tender documents<sup>10</sup> and by considering the suggestions of the client and external experts. This multi-perspective approach was designed to be consistently reflected in the theme of the 2020 Hungarian questionnaire (*Figure 1*).

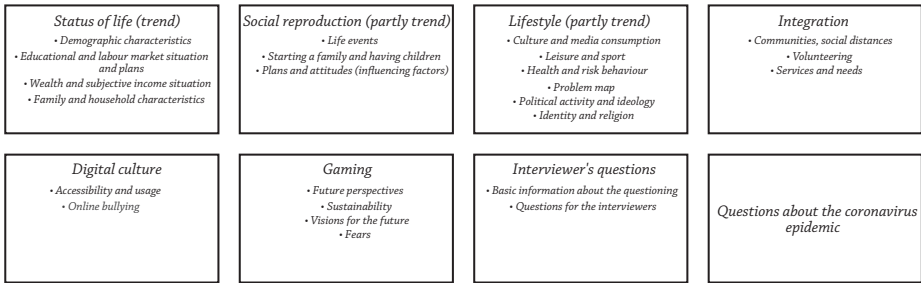
7 For a detailed analysis of the research themes between 2000-2016, see Székely, 2020.

8 The questionnaires in other countries (Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, and Slovakia) are based on the themes of the Hungarian questionnaire and are identical to the Hungarian questionnaire in terms of trend questions. In addition to the trend questions, the questionnaires abroad also contain a common block of questions for the foreign region that is not included in the questionnaire in the home country and can only be interpreted in the foreign regions. This block of questions contains almost exclusively questions related to identity, which tries to relate to the overall theme, thus dealing with the individual's connections to the local Hungarian community, to the majority society, and to Hungary. In addition to subjective attitudes, it mainly examines language use, from the school system to everyday practice and content consumption.

9 The questions used in the questionnaire are based on the previous waves (Ifjúság2000; Ifjúság2004; Ifjúság2008; Magyar Ifjúság 2012; MOZAIK2001 and MOZAIK2011); the themes of the questionnaires were designed to be comparable with previous research and to allow for the identification of trends. In addition to the Hungarian large sample youth survey, we have also taken into account the solutions of the following research studies: ESPAD survey series; HBSC survey series; YRBS 2013; ESS survey series; EVS survey series; Youth Living Conditions Survey KSH, 1996; Youth Survey, 1991.

10 The 2016 and 2020 waves were completed under the EFOP-1.2.3-VEKOP-15-2015-00001 priority project.

Figure 1. Themes for the 2020 Hungarian questionnaire



The status of life blocks included basic demographic trend questions, which are included in previous surveys and are usually part of all surveys (gender, age, place of residence, education, labor market activity). Similar to the demographic questions, we also examined the issues of work, unemployment, working abroad, education (studying abroad), income, and wealth in a comparable way to previous waves of research. In the block of questions dealing with learning, in addition to the precise recording of the educational career and level of qualification, a new element was the nature of the institution (provider), the experience with talent management and developmental programs, and the teachers' perception. Questions were also asked about the level and use of language skills. As in previous waves, we also looked at educational plans, including plans for studying abroad. In questions on work, we sought to explore previous work experience. The questionnaire included questions on employment conditions, perceptions of job security, experience of unemployment, circumstances (facts and attitudes) that help job search and placement, and job hopes. In this section, we look in more detail at experiences and plans for working abroad and the incentives and deterrents to working abroad. We have also addressed the potential consequences of a labor-scarce economy in terms of overtime and new forms of activity. We also formulated questions on income and wealth to understand the objective and subjective financial situation, including the presence of debts and savings in young people's lives. In addition, the use of financial services and financial autonomy from parents were also part of the block of questions. The questions focused on housing, conditions, satisfaction with housing, household size, the identification of relationships with household members, and plans to move.

Questions on life events have been included in the questionnaire for several waves, where we can also examine events experienced and plans for the future. In relation to 15-29-year-olds, starting a family and having children is a priority area of investigation for the purposes of the research. Therefore, the social reproduction questions are also primarily suitable for trend analysis. The questions in this theme aim to describe the current situation as accurately as possible and to provide insights into plans, partly by adapting the previous approach to focus on influencing factors and needs for assistance. In line with these two objectives, the current marital

status, the type of relationship, the perception of marriage, and related marriage plans were addressed. In the questionnaire, we looked in detail at the current and desired number of children, reasons for postponing/refusing to have children, attitudes towards starting a family, the related perception of the compatibility of family and work, and knowledge and use of youth and family benefits.

The lifestyle questions in the 2020 survey are grouped into six thematic units, which are also partly suitable for trend analysis, but the nature of the questions gives much more freedom to examine current issues. In the thematic area of culture and media consumption, we examined the consumption of traditional media (electronic and print media and traditional books) and visits to cultural sites, as in previous practice. We examined the amount of leisure time and leisure activities in leisure time. Among the leisure activities, we detailed sporting habits, including examining the incentives to participate in sports. The health questions include a question on mental health and those used previously. At the same time, the module on risk behaviors covers the three areas used previously: smoking, alcohol, and drugs (with a partially related question on gambling and adult content consumption). The module aims to examine the extent of smoking and alcohol consumption, the presence of drug users in the network of contacts, and the possibility of accessing drugs. The problem map has collected the reflections of young people on their own generation since the beginning of the research, so in 2020, it was also part of the questionnaire, with partly renewed content, and a separate volume was also produced on this issue (Pillók - Székely, 2022).

In the context of political activism and ideology, we have looked in detail at young people's political interests, opportunities for youth participation, and participation practices. Along the lines of previous research waves, satisfaction was examined along several dimensions, including the state of the country, the functioning of democracy, and opinions on joining the European Union. This included an assessment of trust in social institutions and an examination of formal and informal relationships with organizations. The details of identity were explored by looking at ethnicity and national identity. The questions on religion were essentially based on previous questionnaires, providing an opportunity for comparison.

The integration thematic unit on belonging to communities explored social distances mainly using the same questions. Two significant new blocks were added to the 2020 questionnaire: volunteering (11 questions) and youth services and needs (4 questions).

In the digital culture section, we have included the characteristics of the ownership and use of info-communication tools and the use of online social media and gaming habits. In this section, we also looked at the perception of the importance of media. A new element that emerged in the last wave is the issue of bullying, and within this, online bullying.

In the 2020 survey, there was a strong emphasis on examining visions, particularly in terms of environmental and sustainability aspects. In addition to the questions used

previously to capture expectations for the future, the presence of fears about the future (climate change, pandemics, economic crisis, etc.) was also part of the questionnaire.

The postponement of the spring fieldwork enabled two broad questions on the coronavirus epidemic to be added at the end of the questionnaire, which sought to assess the impact of the epidemic situation.

Building on previous practice, some questions were asked in a self-completion block, covering risk behaviors (smoking, alcohol, drugs), national identity, and political preference.

## Methodology of the survey

The methodological principles of sample selection in youth research have not changed since the turn of the millennium, thanks to the work of the distinguished mathematician-sociologist member of the research team, István Nemeskéri. In all cases, the aim was to ensure that the sample was as representative of the target group as possible and that the research results would characterize young people aged 15-29 as accurately as possible. According to the data and statistics available for each region, the research samples were designed based on similar criteria.<sup>11</sup> The ('achieved') samples are nationally representative of the 15-29 age group in the given survey year – i.e., they ensure the sample validity of population proportions – by sex, age, education, type of municipality, and region. One of the undisputed values of the survey is that all waves of the Hungarian large sample youth survey, launched in 2000, are comparable and can be analysed longitudinally.

For the sample in Hungary, we used the data set of the Ministry of Interior and its predecessors, which contained the number of men and women of the age group with valid residence and the number of inhabitants of the given age group per municipality, split by year of birth. Sampling was done in several stages using a stratified probability sampling method. The primary sampling frame consisted of a list of municipalities in Hungary (PSU), and the secondary sampling frame consisted of young people aged 15-29 living in these municipalities and having a permanent residence in Hungary at the time of sampling (SSU). As a first step, the municipalities were stratified according to their geographical location and the number of young people living in the municipality and then randomly sampled by layer. In the second step, a random probability sample was selected from the address register database in the selected municipalities in proportion to the number of elements in each stratum to choose those included in the sample.

During the 2008 survey, the good practice was developed to sample four samples of settlements (4x2,000 inhabitants), which separately represent the settlement structure of the country by regional location and settlement size. In the sampled

<sup>11</sup> Nemeskéri (2001) based the sample selection on the sub-regions and, in the case of Budapest, on the districts, with the aim of interviewing in each sub-region.

municipalities, the respondents were selected based on two demographic criteria (sex and age) from the address register data. It is important to note that these are the two criteria that allow for sample selection; other criteria, such as marital status, ethnicity, and education, are not included in the address databases used for sample selection. Partly for this reason, education was included in the multi-criteria mathematical weighting procedure to eliminate the slight bias arising from sampling. As a result, the four sub-samples of 2,000 respondents from the most recent waves, taken separately, and the pooled sample of 8,000 respondents, are also representative of the 15-29 age group by sex, age, educational attainment, type of municipality, and region.

The reason for using a sub-sample of 2,000 respondents is that the planned thematic would have increased the average time of the questionnaire to at least 60-70 minutes, which would have clearly reduced the quality of the questionnaire, so in the case of the Hungarian questionnaire, the sub-samples were used to reduce the length of the questionnaire and the sample size along each question or question area. The schematic structure of each sub-sample and questionnaire was as follows (Table 3).

**Table 3.** *Structure of the questionnaire by sub-samples*

<b>Common questions (basic survey data; trend questions; interviewer questions) N=8,000</b>			
'purple' block (N=2,000): political socialization	'yellow' block (N=2,000): life events; labour market attitudes; geographical mobility; volunteering	'green' block (N=2,000): starting a family - having children; health; leisure; environment; religion	'blue' block (N=2,000): youth programmes; digital culture; consumer awareness; cultural consumption

It is important to note that the specific modular structure of the questionnaire and the sub-samples adapted to it also strongly influence the possible angles of analysis, presenting a clear limitation in the combined analysis of the two blocks of questions. The Hungarian large sample youth survey is significant as a research program – the high number of interviews conducted in each wave of data collection is also unique, allowing for a 95% confidence level with a +/- 1.12 percent margin of sampling error. The low margin of sampling error, due to the large item number, means that our reported national distributions may deviate by roughly one percent from the value we would have received if we had asked each target group member. The number of items, the wide range of topics, and the two-decade data series of the Hungarian large sample youth survey provide an opportunity to produce a variety of analyses, not to mention the possibility of comparison with Hungarian young people living as minorities in neighboring countries.

## Professional and Other Criticisms

The past two decades of large sample youth surveys in Hungary have not been immune to debates transported into the professional and political arena. The latest results of the most significant Hungarian research program concerning youth consistently attract attention. The media typically shows considerable interest in brief reports, and the current databases are widely used. However, heightened interest is present not only in the results but also during the planning and data collection phases of the current research.

The recent waves of the research series allowed the broadly defined professional audience to review and provide feedback on the research plan and tools (questionnaire), influencing the research with their suggestions. The implementation of these suggestions was ultimately decided on by the given research group conducting the study and the head of research, who is also the author of this article. These sometimes challenging decisions prevented changes justified from a professional standpoint and the inclusion of current issues while keeping in mind the integrity and feasibility of the entire research project. Professional debates arise partly from this, partly because questionnaire-based research has been facing severe challenges for decades. A significant portion of these challenges stem from low response rates, raising questions about the applicability of probability sampling and the representativeness of those samples. Another difficulty with research projects based on surveys arises from the fact that some of the answers are, in a sense, erroneous, as demonstrated by studies examining xenophobia with the involvement of fictional populations (e.g., Sik, 2022). Conflicting results do not inspire confidence in the method, especially as elections approach. Despite the criticisms, however, we cannot speak of a consistently better solution for survey-type approaches. Regarding examining election forecasts, the often-criticized method continues to be widely used and delivers valid results. Some of the criticisms of the large sample youth survey stem from the decreasing response rates as we approach younger age groups. The criticism is valid, but innovative solutions (e.g., social media-based recruitment, smartphone applications, big data methods) have not yet achieved breakthrough successes. It is important to note, as a one-time case, that the research in 2020 took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing methodological insights into reaching respondents: due to the pandemic, individuals aged 15–29 were easily reached based on their legal addresses, resulting in above-average accessibility (Székely, 2021b). However, this success should not divert attention from the aforementioned criticisms about questionnaire-based research; the methodological reform of large-sample youth surveys is more relevant than ever.

The timing of a large sample youth survey is also relevant in political terms. The first set of results was consistently ready for publication at the start of the year preceding parliamentary elections – solidifying their political relevance. Due to the unique target group and the high percentage of non-respondents and undecided, the research cannot serve as the basis for election forecasts, and the researchers did not publish data on this

in their brief reports. However, it is precisely this data that interests many stakeholders who are interested in young people. Although access to the research databases is freely available — unlike the practice of the Hungarian research sphere — the form and timing of this access have been a continuous subject of debate. In accordance with the rules established throughout the past decade, access was provided transparently; the data was made public when the study volume was published. Following this, additional publications were released using this data. After the publication of the study volume containing detailed results of the 2016 surveys in Hungary and abroad (Székely, 2018c), an independent publication focusing exclusively on Hungarian data was also released (Nagy, 2018). A comparable situation occurred in connection with the 2020 research. Following the first study volume, which was focused on Hungarian data (Székely, 2021c), another one with a Hungarian focus (Nagy, 2022) was published. The studies processing the 2020 data on Hungarian minorities living in the Carpathian Basin were delayed until the end of 2023 (Vita-Veres, 2023), but this did not cause tension either in professional or political circles. The focus of the publications processing Hungarian research results is relatively similar overall; their results do not show significant differences.<sup>12</sup> However, their media representation and emphasis differ.

## Conclusion and vision for the future

In this paper, we have summarized a brief history of the Hungarian large sample youth survey that started at the turn of the millennium, showing that this is an outstanding research program by international standards. Its uniqueness lies primarily in its sample size – thus the possibility of segmentation and deep drilling – and the possibility of trend analysis. In addition to providing detailed trend data, the Hungarian large sample youth survey has also gained undisputed merit in relation to testing the hypotheses of theoretical work. Over the past decades, two frameworks have emerged in international literature that have provided interpretative frameworks for youth-related theoretical work, empirical research, and, among them, international comparative studies. In addition to the major theories, the research provided empirical data for a number of academic and professional publications. It formed the basis for the situation analysis of the National Youth Strategy and other policy documents. The Hungarian large sample youth survey is also a public good since, in addition to the publications, the unprocessed results are also freely available, which is not at all self-evident in the case of similar research and, indeed, is not the case at all. For the last three waves (2012, 2016, 2020), access has been organized and transparent.

Nevertheless, the most vocal criticism of the research has been about the accessibility of the databases, with critiques of how they are accessed and, even more

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<sup>12</sup> There have also been miscalculations and erroneous conclusions that have been partially discussed in the professional forums.



so, the timing of access. This again points to the importance of research and whether the criticism is justified.

Over the last two decades, the program has provided us with a wealth of methodological experience, the most important lessons of which are precisely those that challenge the framework. With few exceptions, the main characteristic of the Hungarian large sample youth survey – the large sample – is typically not exploited by researchers. The four-year data collection interval is too infrequent, and the measurement instrument and the associated preparatory and processing work are too long. Among questionnaire research, the methodology of the Hungarian large sample youth survey is both old-fashioned with its personal, address-list approach but also highly innovative with the use of 2,000 subsamples built into a core sample of 8,000 respondents and tablet-based interviewing (Székely, 2018b; Székely, 2021b).

The need to follow trends and gain a comprehensive knowledge of youth calls for the continuation of the research, but the renewal of the previous framework cannot be avoided. The ever-lengthening questionnaire and the associated shorter attention span of respondents makes it impossible to maintain high data quality. It is therefore necessary to renew this research program that has been in place for two decades. The study of the new generation is one of the most popular areas of contemporary social science, and there is vibrant professional work going on in several centers in Hungary. I am convinced there is a justification for continuing the research series and that by retaining the virtues and incorporating innovations, research on youth can be given a new impetus.

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