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Transylvanian Hungarian Youths (2001–2016)



VERES, VALÉR (ed.) (2020): *Erdélyi magyar ifjúság. Szociológiai jellegzetességek és változások 2001 és 2016 között*. [Transylvanian Hungarian Youth. Sociological characteristics and changes between 2001 and 2016] Kolozsvár, Max Weber Társadalomkutatásért Alapítvány – Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó.

DOI 10.14232/belv.2023.1.14

<https://doi.org/10.14232/belv.2023.1.14>

Cikkre való hivatkozás / How to cite this article:

Jancsák, Csaba (2023): Transylvanian Hungarian Youths (2001–2016). *Belvedere Meridionale* vol. 35. no. 1. pp 191–195.

ISSN 1419-0222 (print)

ISSN 2064-5929 (online, pdf)

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Today's world may be characterised in various ways. We may refer to it as the network society (CASTELLS 1996), the experience society (SCHULZE 2000), or the era of scarcity following the affluent society (GALBRAITH 1958). We may highlight the phenomenon of global world risk (BECK 2008), call it the era of instability (SZABÓ 2014), the brave new world of work (BECK 2009) or

the age of industry 4.0. Economic and political crises, increasing poverty, new migration waves, strengthening political populism and technological changes in Europe all carry new vulnerabilities for the age groups of children and youths (GÁBOR 2012; JANCSÁK 2013; SORTHEIX et. al. 2017).

In case of young people, certain factors occur earlier and earlier in their life: they join the information society already in their early teens (e.g. using smartphones, Facebook or TikTok), they are becoming an increasingly valued target group in consumer society sooner, and they decide how to spend their leisure time and have their first sexual intercourse at a younger age. At the same time, the traditional factors of becoming an adult (taking the first full-time job, moving out of the parental home, getting married and having children) are delayed to a later stage of life, to their thirties.

The frame of reference for young people is the world of life in which they exist. The above-mentioned economic and social phenomena also require that researchers studying the rapidly forming world of youth need to be updating and refreshing their research methods to gain a deeper scientific insight. As CHISOLM (2006) puts it, “a sharper lens or a new camera” is needed, that is, the rapidly changing subject of research requires the development of new tools and methods. At the same time, in addition to sharp snapshots, analyses spanning over a broader spectrum in time are also needed to create a nuanced picture. The volume edited by Valér Veres is intended to contribute to this.

The book *A perifériából a centrumba – Erdélyi fiatalok helyzetképe az ezredforduló után* [From the Periphery to the Centre – The Situation of Transylvanian Youth after the Millennium], published in 2006 (see GÁBOR – VERES 2006), may be considered a scientific and specialist precursor to the volume. The authors of both volumes are members of the sociology workshop of the Babes-Bolyai University (BBU) of Cluj-Napoca. The writers of the seven studies analysed the data obtained from surveys (Mozaik [Mosaic] and Magyar Ifjúság [Hungarian Youth]) conducted between 2001 and 2016 among Transylvanian youths aged 15 to 19.

The first paper in the volume, „Az erdélyi magyar ifjúság társadalomszerkezetének és iskolai mobilitásának változásai (2001–2006)” (p. 15–67.) [Changes in the social structure and educational mobility of the Transylvanian Hungarian youth (2001–2006)] is authored by Valér Veres, professor at BBU. In the first part of the study, the author discusses the position of Transylvanian Hungarian youths in the social structure and the patterns of their social stratification based on the 2001 and 2016 data and then analyses the relationship between social mobility and education in the fifteen-year period. The study states that the youth had to face several challenges in the examined period (educational, language and labour market hardships arising from ethno-demographic structure and settlement patterns; the preservation of Transylvanian Hungarian identity in addition to the new challenges and opportunities accompanying EU accession).

The educational attainment of Transylvanian youths improved considerably in the examined period (e.g. twice as many young people obtained a university degree), however, the number of youths with low educational attainment and unskilled youths continued to be significant, and the proportion of unskilled employment remained similar to the previous period.

In the second chapter of the book, Réka Geambasu (senior lecturer at BBU) and Emese Vitai (doctoral candidate at BBU) examine Transylvanian Hungarian youths’ ideas about work–life balance (pp. 69–108). The authors’ objective was to discover Transylvanian Hungarian youths’ opinions and plans about establishing a family, the effects of having children on their private life and the financial conditions of having children. The main finding of the study in terms of values is that there has been little change in young people’s normative family-centeredness and in the consensus

on non-material values related to private life. At the same time, the authors highlight that Transylvanian Hungarian youths “put a price tag” on having children in addition to its positive impact on personal happiness, and a significant group of them see it as a disadvantage in their efforts to establish their social status. “This view is more prevalent among young women and young people with lower educational attainment, while young people who already have a child or children or are religious constitute a higher proportion of those worrying less about this issue.” (p. 100.)

In the third paper in the volume (p. 109–145), the author, Valér Veres, examines the manifestations of Transylvanian Hungarian youths’ national identity, and the formation of their cultural national and civic identity, based on the data obtained from the Magyar Ifjúság Kutatás 2016, Mozaik2001 and Kárpát Panel [Carpathian Panel]. As a result of the political and social changes that took place during the period, changes in national identification patterns and attitudes are also emerging. “Perhaps the most significant of these factors was the social impact of (Hungary’s) Hungarian national policy.” The author also notes that the possibility of acquiring Hungarian citizenship for Hungarians living abroad and the increasing number of new citizens “has also had an impact on how young people perceive belonging to Hungary and how they define group boundaries”. (p. 142.)

In the following study, Dénes Kiss analyses the main features of the religiousness of Transylvanian Hungarian youths growing up after the regime change and the changes in their religiousness. (pp. 147–162.) A senior lecturer at BBU, Kiss finds that a substantial majority of young people identify as religious, and those regularly practising their religion are in the majority as well. In the observed 15 years, there were no major changes in the proportions of Transylvanian Hungarian youths’ belonging to historical churches. The author highlights: “Being religious is considered to be »normal« among Transylvanian Hungarian youths, a basic attitude that does not need to be explained, a »self-evident« one, even if those who consider themselves religious »according to the teachings of their church« are a minority, a quarter of the age group surveyed.” (p. 161.)

The paper “Erdélyi magyar fiatalok szabadidős szokásai és értékorientációi” [Transylvanian Hungarian youths’ leisure habits and value orientations] was written by Júlia Szabó (p. 163–183). A researcher at BBU Qualitas Institute and a doctoral candidate, the author presents Transylvanian Hungarian youths’ value orientations and leisure habits according to the youth sociology surveys Mozaik2001 and Magyar Ifjúság 2016. According to her findings, among the young people surveyed, “there are no signs yet that young people would have radically broken with their parents’ values in their value choices [...] The most important value in 2016 was the importance of human relationships (family security, true friendship).” (p. 177.) This finding is identical to the results of studies conducted among youths in Hungary. Similarly, there is a kind of parallelism between Hungarian and Transylvanian youths with reference to how they spend their leisure time: in cultural consumption, there is a new consumer group, that of the “omnivores”. According to Szabó, “These youths are characterised by a more colourful and versatile leisure consumption; similarly to the high culture-oriented consumer group, they have higher educational attainment and their parents have higher status.” (p. 177.)

Botond Dániel, senior lecturer at BBU, examines the patterns of Transylvanian Hungarian youths’ participation in organisations (pp. 185–206.). In his analysis, Dániel presents what proportion of secondary school and higher education students belong to organisations in various fields of activity, and what factors determine whether they join an organisation. Examining the

differences in geographical localities, he finds that the proportion of organizational participation is highest in middle-sized towns. A seminal finding of the study is that as age advances, there is a change in joining organisations as well: “while high school students are most affiliated to youth, cultural and religious organisations, the proportion of affiliation to cultural and religious organisations decreases in case of university students and the proportion of membership in youth organisations increases.” (pp. 203–204.)

The last paper in the volume is authored by Szidónia Rusu, a doctoral candidate at BBU. In her paper, entitled “Digitális megosztottság és médiahasználat az erdélyi magyar ifjúság körében” [Digital divide and media use among Transylvanian Hungarian youth] (pp. 207–222.), the author, similarly to other authors in the volume, analyses data from Mozaik2001 and Magyar Ifjúság 2016, and seeks to answer the question of how media and Internet use has changed and what gaps exist in terms of digital inequality among Transylvanian Hungarian youths. For the analysis, she created a digital index consisting of several dimensions and indicators and tested this by including different control variables. The study shows that “among the sociodemographic, social and employment background variables included in the regression model, education, gender, type of settlement, age and subjective income, as well as certain indicators and variables related to cultural consumption and values, showed significant associations with the intensity of digital inequality.” (p. 221.)

The excellently edited and beautifully typographed volume of studies is useful not only for sociologists but also for a wider readership interested in the life of Transylvanian Hungarian youth.

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