

THE FUTURE ORIENTATION OF HUNGARIAN YOUTH IN THE YEARS OF THE TRANSFORMATION

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The paper shows the findings of surveys done by Futures Research Department of the Budapest University of Economic Sciences about the future orientation of three groups of young generations in Hungary. The picture unfolding from the samples is not favourable from the point of view of accomplishing the transformation process in Hungary. The young generations' attitude to the future can be positively influenced by developing teaching and education, and by futures researchers taking on new social roles.

Introduction

Tracing the future orientation of Hungarian society in the years of the transformation is of utmost importance. The future orientation of the young generations and the changes it undergoes is vital in shaping the future of Hungary as the success and speed of the transformation hinge greatly on these. For futures researchers to be able to exert a positive influence on the future orientation of young people they must become familiar with the youth's attitude to the future.

Future orientation is the characteristic and the capacity, unique to human beings, which enable thinking to be regulated by the past and present, but also to reflect continuously assumptions regarding the future. ... Humankind has a historical view and also has a future attitude, which is, expressed in future orientation. The decisions and actions of the future-oriented person are guided more by his or her intentions, goals and desires for the futures than by his or her experiences of the past. The future inspires the driving force of human activity. (Nováky-Hideg-Kappéter, 1994, p. 759)

The Department of Futures Research of the Budapest University of Economic Sciences has regularly surveyed, since 1992, the future orientation of Hungarian society in groups of varying composition and size. We have endeavoured to learn of the components of future orientation through the following criteria:

- interest in and thinking about the future
 - .why is the person interested in the future,
 - .why are others interested in the future,
 - . what does the person think about (family, place of residence, country, world) and in what timespan,
- .activities carried out in the interest of the future
 - .what does the person do for his/her own future,
 - .what does the person do for the future of his/her loved ones,
 - . what does the person do so that the situation in his/her place of residence, his/her country and the world will be better in ten years' time,
- .expectations for the future
 - .how does the person expect to live in ten years' time,
 - .how does the person expect his/her loved ones to live in ten years' time,
 - . what will the situation be like in the person's place of residence, country and the world in ten years' time,
 - .can certain specific events be expected to happen before the year 2000 or 2020.

Working in an academic environment, we have for many years been able to survey the attitude to the future of various generations of young people. Analysing the outcome and changes in time of the empirical surveys we conducted between 1992 and 1996, i.e. in the initial years of the transformation in Hungary, has been particularly informative.

We relied on questionnaires, the time-honoured method in futures research, to review the attitude to the future, future orientation and how future orientation has changed among:

- secondary modern school pupils between 14 and 18,
- undergraduates of the Budapest University of Economic Sciences and
- undergraduates between 25 and 30 who have had to abandon their engineering studies for studies of economics (so-called engineer-economists).

The review aided by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund was made in the frame of "Renewing Methodology of the Futures Research in the Era of Transition" project (project leader: Éva Hideg) between 1995-1997.

The Future Orientation of Hungarian Youth and the Transformation

The polled young generations in Hungary represent three different types of future orientation. Most future oriented and ambitious are the economics undergraduates, while the engineering-economics undergraduates have a troubled future orientation and secondary modern school pupils have the most underdeveloped (and probably the least elaborated) attitude to the future.

Economics undergraduates tend to be the most future oriented because they do not fear the future and wish to influence it in keeping with their individual goals and interests. Although the future is uncertain, they believe that by thinking about it the uncertainty can be lessened. Beyond their own personal future they are equally interested in that of their families and the world. The future of the country and their place of residence, however, carry less weight for them. They are more and more concerned about the 5-10-year timespan and the future beyond 40 years ahead.

They are increasingly convinced that with their activity they can influence and shape the future, especially their own and that of their loved ones. This is the objective that makes them study and preserve their health. They have less power to influence the future of their country, the world and their place of residence. They have progressed from the passive backing of good causes to recognising the importance of environmental protection, saving and taking on active political roles.

They are less optimistic in their expectations. They are more and more sure of their own personal future, however, because they are preparing for a career that is prospering in Hungary. They tend to see the future of their broader surroundings in an increasingly pessimistic light, though they are still more optimistic than the other two young age-groups polled. They do not trust in a significant improvement in the situation in Hungary as they fail

to see how the process of impoverishment and the deterioration of the state of the environment can be halted even in the long run. They consider Hungary's accession to the European Union before the year 2000 impossible too. They were more optimistic about these questions at the outset of the transformation.

Engineering-economics undergraduates account for a still young generation which has amassed more experience in life but which has had its share of failure too. Their future orientation is laden with a number of problems. They fear the future though will not admit it, and they are disillusioned with the transformation as they had to retrain themselves early on in their careers. They have realised that they must think about the future not only because of the future of their families but in the interest of their own future and a better standard of living. While the future of their families and the world, beside their own personal future, used to be equally important for them, now it is the future of their families and their country that carry equal weight. The future of their place of residence still does not really interest them. Their attitude has shifted from a short-term to a medium-term view, and their need to think about the long-term future has increased.

Many of them, though in a decreasing proportion, think that they can do nothing for the future. Those who believe they can, consider their own retraining the most important. Furthermore, many of them believed in investment and entrepreneurialism following the transformation, but moonlighting has again become important by now. Economising and taking out insurance policies have surfaced as a new field of activity from the point of view of their own future and that of their loved ones alike. Early on in the shift of system they did not consider doing something for the future of their place of residence, the country and the world as their own task but expected that from the state. By today, however, they believe they can make their mark felt in environmental protection, work, tax paying and taking on active political roles.

Their optimism concerning their expectations has also decreased significantly. However, they expect their personal circumstances to improve more than the situation of their wider environment. The majority showed uncertainty when judging the situation of the country and

their place of residence. The number of those who expect the situation to improve within 10 years is fewer and fewer. They manifested similar uncertainty concerning the halting of the process of impoverishment and the improvement of the state of the environment, though they tend to believe more in the latter than the former until 2020.

The secondary modern school pupils, who will obtain their final certificates of vocational training within a few years, had the most unformed future orientation. A great many of them had not even thought about the question why they and others are interested in the future. Those who had thought about it were interested in the future primarily for reasons of a better living standard. They are not particularly interested, however, in continuing their studies or in their future workplace. They are the most materialistic, or perhaps the most honest, because they express the value judgement so forcefully present in Hungarian society today that the future is interesting in order to make a lot of money. At the same time they do not fear the future, but do not think of the future in connection with their eventual happiness. Beyond their own future they are interested in the future of their families and their place of residence. They do not know how to handle the future of the country and the world. For them the future is important in the short and the medium term. They display no long-term conscience of the future, though they watch and read rather a lot of science fiction.

They also fail to perceive the future and its dimensions concerning their activities. Their studies, doing sports and helping in the home are important for them, and work also emerges as a priority. Generally speaking, they do not think that they are or will be able to do anything for the future of others, the community at large, beyond their own future and that of their loved ones. The only exception is their place of residence. They believe they could, in fact, do something for the future of that by protecting the environment and undertaking a role in public life.

Their expectations for the future are also unformed and uncertain. Only half of those polled believe that their situation will be better in ten years' time, while the other half think their situation will remain unchanged. They are completely unsure of the future of their place of residence, the country and the world. Regarding the future of the country they are unsure

because they see both the halting of the process of impoverishment and the improvement of the state of the environment as impossible to solve until 2020. Yet it is this group that believes in the greatest proportion that Hungary can become a member of the European Union before the year 2000.

Naturally, all young age groups embrace opinions of the future differing from the typical in a positive or negative sense, but the number of those holding such views is insignificant. This may, in our opinion, be due to the fact that the surveyed age-groups are closely linked to certain types of schools, and the Hungarian school system is still rather closed from the point of view of social mobility (Hideg-Nováky, 1997/a). School and schooling exert a fundamental influence on people's future orientation. This is also corroborated by studies of the future orientation of different adult groups in Hungary (Hideg-Nováky, 1997/b).

The Future of the Transformation and the Future Orientation of Young People

The picture unfolding from the samples is not favourable from the point of view of accomplishing the transformation process in Hungary.

At the outset of the shifting, especially the young technical professionals starting out in their careers, and even the economics undergraduates of the time, expected fast and sweeping favourable changes not only in the political system but in living conditions too. Their hopes of fast and positive changes both in their living conditions and of everyday life in general have been disappointed, however. By no means did they expect their situation and that of the country to further deteriorate. Pessimism now prevails more and more in Hungarian society, even among the younger generations.

The future orientation of young people who will have a secondary school and vocational certificate and who will comprise the majority of the future society is unformed and underdeveloped. Hungarian schools provide a bad basis for the development of their future orientation as they still teach only specific knowledge and are past-oriented. Even education fails to turn them towards the future; instead, it places emphasis on revering the values of the past. The future orientation of young people is, therefore, mostly shaped by impressions and

information gathered from the social environment and the mass media. And because the latter are characterised by disillusionment, a worsening standard of living, being money-minded and a workaholic, as well as by a feeling of impotence and pessimism, the young people cannot but follow suit.

Although economics undergraduates who are studying for an elite career have a developed and active attitude to the future as far as their own future is concerned, they do not consider the Hungarian environment promising. They apparently accept the fact that in order to become the elite in society they have to accomplish their own positive expectations. Although in that social position they could do something for the future of their wider environment too, they are becoming more and more unsure about just what results their efforts will bring.

This unfavourable picture of the future orientation of the young generations is, however, changing and can be changed too. This is proved by the fact that more and more people realise that they must think about the future because of its growing uncertainty and not in order to find out what the future holds. Passive future orientation is gradually being replaced by an ever-widening circle of activities that can be carried out for the future. Growing activeness in the field of environmental protection with a view to shaping the future of the place of residence, the country and the world is a particularly welcome feature of this trend. The importance of the future for the individual - its individualisation - tends to overshadow the importance of the future from the point of view of smaller and larger communities. The future is more and more ruled by our desire to acquire material things and the growing feeling of these desires being frustrated. Post-materialist values have failed to emerge with the intensity that certain signs indicated at the outset of the shift of system.

The future orientation of the young generations shifted both in the positive and the negative direction during the short period under scrutiny, which also underscores the unstable and chaotic nature of the transformation. In our earlier surveys this appeared only in connection with socio-economic macro indicators (Nováky-Hideg-Gáspár-Vér, 1997). The instability of the socio-economic environment and of future orientation means that they are not only changing but can be changed and influenced too. This gives us hope that the social

transformation can eventually be successful by renewing Hungarian society's attitude to the future.

We think that influencing the young generations' approach and attitude to the future in a positive way is far more important today than achieving spectacular economic results in Hungary in a short time. If society accomplishes those results under duress or the pressure of outside forces and not through its own and consciously undertaken efforts, the results cannot be lasting and cannot serve as the basis of meaningful lives. Nor will they solve the ambivalence and pessimism inherent in the attitude of people, particularly the young generations, to the future. As long as the importance of the future, the variety of activities that can be done for the future and a well-founded optimism do not harmonise in people's expectations, the most human and abstract goal of transformation will be lost, namely creating living conditions and everyday existence befitting human being. In other words the goal of reaching individual happiness.

In our opinion the young generations' attitude to the future can be positively influenced by developing teaching and education, and by futures researchers taking on new social roles.

The latest reform of the Hungarian education system provides an appropriate basis for a view embracing future orientation to emerge in the field of teaching, education and vocational training alike through the reshuffling and elaborating of curricula and the more vigorous linking of academic knowledge with real life. Besides, the earliest possible introduction of futures research in secondary schools would be useful. To this end the research and amassed educational experience of our department would provide great help. Yet the systematic formation of a positive attitude to the future in all walks of teaching and training is but a dream right now. It is no dream, however, that the further training of teachers can embrace relatively soon a way of thinking open to the future too the technology of making it strike roots in teaching and education.

We envisage a new role for futures research and researchers in as much as the futures researcher, a maintenance worker and developer of society's future orientation, can influence in a positive way the further process of the change of system. This he can do by elaborating

futures research products that focus on what environmental conditions and what well-aimed activities can help expose and reinforce certain dimensions of the future. Such future studies must be widely publicised and included in the process of teaching so that young people have the means to reproduce them creatively. This type of future education can help to enrich future orientation and to harmonise the various components (interest, activity and expectation), which can exert a positive influence on changes in young Hungarians' future orientation, and thus promote the earliest possible emergence of the positive components of the shift of system and the transformation as a whole.

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