

Mariann FEKETE – Péter TÓTH – Adam NAGY

Who will save the world? – from the missing hero to the index of Captain Planet

Large-scale youth research has been conducted in Hungary every four years since 2000. The representative sample on age, gender, education, type of settlement, and place of residence (district/city) among 15-29-year-olds are used to learn about the life situation of young people, to follow their lifestyle changes and (in theory) to prepare (typically public policy) decision-making. The most critical events and specific problems of Hungarian youngsters aged 15-29. Eight thousand youngsters were examined in 2020 as well. The research comprehensively analyzes the world of young people in terms of demographic structure, a family of origin, family formation and childbearing. Aspects of social stratification, education and labour market status and life paths. It reviews the characteristics of economic resources, health, consumption and online existence, identity and self-image, value system, leisure space, the specialities of the generational problem map, migration and youth, and the civil world. We use the data of wave the 2020 large-scale Hungarian Youth Research for mapping the "Hungarian Captain Planet"¹.

The most determining person of climate change movements among youngsters is Greta Thunberg, who inspired the Fridays For Future movement, and who also encourages the masses to act to cover and thematize climate crisis. In 2019, the movement attracted attention to the necessity of excessive and superfluous consumerism, the importance of purchasing from local producers, the reduction of industrial consumerism of products of animal origin, the importance of recycling and reusing, to prioritizing public transport and cycling, to minimalizing the use of aeroplanes or even abandoning them appeared in Hungary as well (Fridays For Future, 2019).

In the background of the seemingly radical slogan of "Sacrifice the Present for the Future", reduction of consumerism and change of lifestyle appear as expectations. In the background of climate consciousness, anxiety and uncertainty can also be detected. Not only is this Future uncertain, but also gloomy. The report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018 (IPCC, 2018) raises awareness that we have 12 years to save the planet, according to experts, which would need worldwide, global involvement among governments, large enterprises and civilians. Sociology refers to the mechanism as "the missing hero trap", which hinders members of a particular community from achieving something which would not require too much sacrifice individually; however, this act would mean a lot to the whole community. This is the most dangerous social trap, as the individual's responsibility is almost intangible. "Why exactly me?" asks the member of the particular community, and the question is relatively justified as a worldwide catastrophe cannot be hindered merely by individual goodwill (Hankiss, 1979:48).

In our case, "members of the community" are governments, companies and societies as human groups, and hence, in this regard, supportive regulation, usage of environmental-friendly technologies, and suitable corporate resolutions are crucial; however, it is without a doubt that the individual also has a significant role as (s)he is a constituent of the society itself (e.g. selective waste collection, preference for public transportation or environmental-conscious shopping).

The sixth wave of considerable data youth research questionnaire consists of questions which could examine the environmental consciousness of youngsters aged 15-29, their attitudes and acts towards environmental protection and climate change. The received data reveal that Hungarian youngsters are

¹ Captain Planet is a superhero, who is the main character of the animated series having the same title. The focus is on environmental protection and diverse social problems; the only weak point of the Captain is a polluted environment which noticeably weakens him. Each episode of the animated series deals with environmental issues like deforestation, air or water pollution, overpopulation.

committed to climate protection, especially regarding economic consumption (electricity, water and heating) and selective waste collection.

These two factors have the highest means on a 4-element-grading scale (Table 1). Hungarian youths are the least interested in changing their transportation habits). The value of the mode is three at every item ("rather pays attention").

Table 1. "How much are you concerned about..." N2020=2000²

	number of elements	mean	deviation
Collecting waste selectively	1983	3,08	0,809
Having the least possible amount of waste	1986	3,02	0,781
Burdening the environment to the least possible extent as far as transport is concerned (Bicycle, public transport, railway)	1977	2,88	0,844
Saving electricity, heating and water as much as possible	1983	3,10	0,796

If we take the more general level, the level of the state, large companies, and society and not the level of individual acts into consideration, which is not so tangible for the individual, hence, (s)he assigns duty, responsibility and expenses to others. If we expect only commitment from the individual, we can detect higher means of expressing strong agreement (Table 2).

Table 2. "In your opinion, how important is ...?" N2020=2000³

	number of elements	mean	deviation
Saving values of nature (forests, rivers, lakes, etc.)	1972	3,45	0,715
Usage of renewable energy resources (e.g. solar energy)	1969	3,37	0,734
Banning disposable (single-use) plastic	1962	3,28	0,773
That society/state should be against illegal dumping	1969	3,39	0,724
That enterprises, multinational companies should adopt environmental-friendly technologies	1964	3,36	0,724
That public and individual transport should use electricity	1957	3,24	0,737
That state should finance projects concerning the implementation of environmental protection, conservation and climate protection.	1963	3,38	0,731

The mode value is 4 ("fundamental"), except for replacing public and individual transport with electric vehicles, as in this case, the mode is 3. Protecting nature is the most important for youngsters (mean: 3,45), followed by the increased involvement of the state, society and multinational companies. According to the participants, the least important is the usage of electric vehicles; however, on average, their value is still high.

Hungarian youngsters and ecological-conscious consumer behaviour

Youths of Generation Z are often called Greta Generation, who fight fiercely and loudly against climate change; they attempt to make a positive change and are ready to make the necessary sacrifice to solve the problems that previous generations caused.

² The interviewee valued on a 4-element grading scale where 1= not concerned at all, 4= very much concerned

³ The interviewee valued on a 4-element grading scale where 1= not important at all, 4= very important

According to the research results of GWI (2021), Greta Generation is much more concerned about climate protection and sustainability than fashion, their reputation or their peers' opinions about them.

The research also sheds some light on what teenagers expect from brands that they should be committed to climate change and environmental protection, which reveals the vast Impact Greta Thunberg has on youngsters. It seems that theoretically and from a moral commitment point of view, young generations are combative environmental activists; however, as members of consumer society – regarding their consumption behaviour – they are not really⁴.

The participants had to value a 4-element grading scale and how eco-conscious their purchases are. According to Table 3, we can state that they pay attention to products' environmental impact the least (2,55 mean value). To the delight of marketers, they instead pay particular attention to the popularity of the brand itself (2,91 mean value).

Table 3. "When you do the shopping, do you pay attention or not...?" N2020=2000⁵

	number of elements	mean	deviation
To the country of origin (CO)	1994	2,67	0,897
Whether brand of the product is well-known	1991	2,91	0,827
How much environmental impact the product has (single-use product, too much wrapping, manufacture is distant, etc.)	1988	2,55	0,917
To buy Hungarian products?	1995	2,68	0,872

In conclusion, youths pay less attention to the country of origin of goods and prefer something other than Hungarian products too.

Using the question's four aspects, we created a consumer index of an eco-conscious youngster⁶[6]. By putting the consumer index under the microscope, we can state that two-tenths of youngsters (20%) belong to the upper third of the index (between 12 and 16 points), more than one-fifth of them (22%) do not or rather not pay attention to the aspects above during shopping. The Impact of gender is significant on eco-conscious shopping as women primarily consider environmental-conscious aspects⁷; however, this explanation is weak. The Impact of age⁸ and education⁹ is intense, the educational background of parents also has a significant effect on consumer behaviour, especially the educational

⁴ The statements of GWI are slightly shadowed by Shein application, which is gaining a dynamically increasing popularity among youngsters worldwide. In the first months of 2021, Shein application was the second most downloaded app after Amazon. The rates of likes and references related to the brand exceeded all the rival brands' on Tik-Tok, which is the most favoured and used site by youths (Financial Times, 2021). The enterprise has become the synonym of Tik-Tok for the consumers of Gen Z, popular influencers post short clips from "Shein hauls", where they show some cheaply bought clothes for their followers. As a matter of fact, Shein is particularly inexpensive, more than 600.000 items cost less than 7,9 USD; typically, T-shirts cost merely 2 USD. Due to this fact, Shein's trade turnover is almost the same as Inditex's (Zara's) an H&M's. With 24 million active users, Shein is the 1st on the list of iOS apps in 50 countries. The app is easy to use, and it is aggressive enough to make people to check it at least once a day. According to the report of UN, after energy supply, the fashion industry is the most polluting industry in the world. Annually, it uses 93 billion cubic metres of water, which amount is roughly the water supply of 5 million people per year. For manufacturing a single T-shirt, 3000 litres of water are needed, and 9000 litres for one pair of jeans. The industry is responsible for 10% of total carbon-dioxide emission. Shein targeting the youngest customers with its attractive app has become one of the most powerful participants of the fast fashion industry, which has nothing to do with a sustainable economy.

According to the data of Statista (2020a), in 2020, the most popular activity of internet users is the use of diverse chat programmes followed by the consumption of different audio-visual contents (films and videos), the third one is online shopping. The most popular online platform among Hungarian customers is eBay, Ali Express and Wish (Statista, 2020b) and Shein by 2021 (Statista, 2021).

⁵ The interviewee valued on a 4-element grading scale where 1= not pay attention at all, 4= pay attention very much

⁶ The intern consistency of the index is very good; the value of Crombach Alpha is 0,817.

⁷ Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation= ,052.

⁸ Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation= ,110.

⁹ Significance level of F probe, $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation= ,218.

background of the father¹⁰ is determining while the mother's education¹¹ is not that important. Youths living in the capital¹² pay particular attention to the abovementioned aspects during shopping, followed by their peers living in villages. Finally, eco-friendly shopping is determined mainly by personal financial situation¹³, as those who are more well-to-do have 11,8 points on the index. In comparison, those who experience financial difficulties and are in need have 6,6 points.

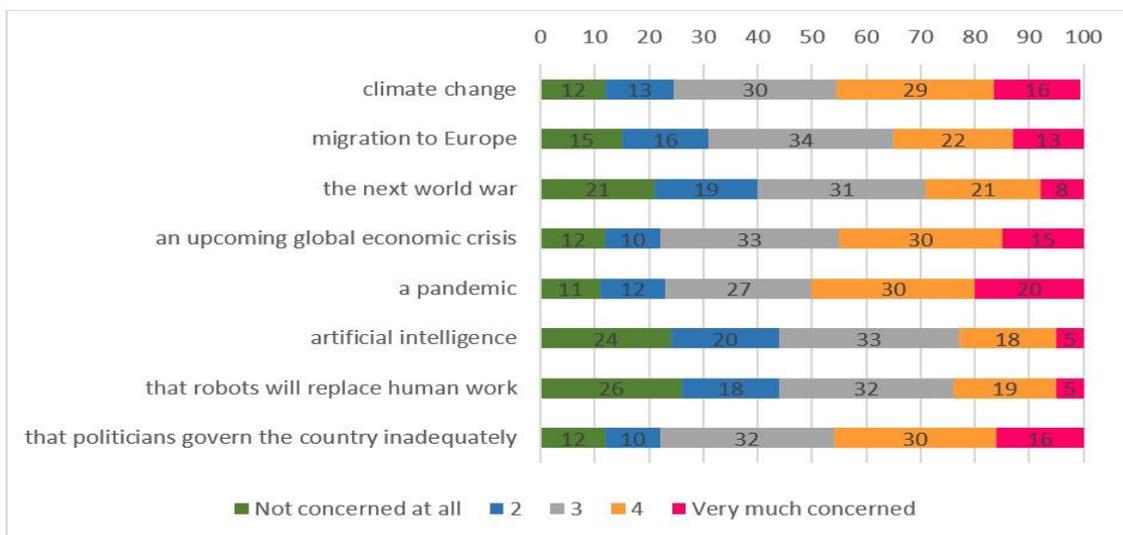
The most eco-conscious customers belong to the age group 25-29; they are well-educated youngsters living in Budapest whose parents also have a degree, are financially secure, and either study or work. Due to their socio-economic status, these youths can take those steps that do not require much individual effort but mean a lot to the community itself. However, eco-friendly shopping involves extra costs, and fewer well-to-do people cannot afford it.

Worries and fears

All waves of considerable data on youth research consisted of questions examining youngsters' problem recognition, revealing the factors youths were concerned about. Objective existential problems (unemployment, financial problems, housing problems) are of changing significance, while subjective existential instability (aimlessness, lack of prospects) indicates a more significant problem (anonim, 2018: 324).

The sixth wave of youth research revealed those factors which make youngsters feel worried or scared the most (Chart 1). As the main peculiarity of the year 2020 was the Coronavirus pandemic, Hungarian youngsters are primarily concerned about it; every second youngster is very or somewhat afraid of it. It is followed by concern about the incompetency of the government (46% are very much concerned or somewhat concerned) and climate change (45% are very much concerned or somewhat concerned), and fears for an impending global economic crisis (45% is very much concerned or somewhat concerned).

Chart 1. "How much are you concerned about?" N2020=2000



It is worth comparing the results with the data of an international survey conducted by Deloitte (2020) in spring¹⁴ 2020. The participants consider that the most burning issue is health care and epidemic/disease prevention, followed by global climate change, which precedes unemployment, the problem of economic growth and income inequalities. The questionnaire of Hungarian Youth Research

¹⁰ Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation = ,223.

¹¹ Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation = ,187.

¹² Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation = -,083.

¹³ Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation = -,234.

¹⁴ International data collection between 28.04.2020 and 17.05.2020 with 5501 participants belonging to Gen Y and 3601 participants belonging to Gen Z.

attempted to reveal those factors¹⁵ which influence Hungarian youngsters' world-views the most in the autumn of 2020. The coronavirus epidemic (mean value 3.3) and climate change (mean value 3.1) have the most influential Impact, as almost half of the participants consider (48%) that these two factors influence their world-views very much or instead influence them.

The interest in social and public life-related issues significantly affects global thinking¹⁶. The more sensitive a youth is to public life-related issues, the more determining role environmental protection and global health risks have in his/her way of thinking or in his/her problem recognition.

Who will be Captain Planet?

The activities mentioned in the first two questions are related to the planet's relief. First is the question: who will lead the fight against climate change, and who will be Captain Planet? A climate-conscious attitude characterizes young Generation Z, also called Generation Greta, or older Generation Y, which is considered a stable column of consumer society. For evaluating cognitive and behavioural dimensions of attitude towards climate protection, we created an index¹⁷ from the variables listed above¹⁸. The maximum value of the index is 44 points; eight-tenths of the participants belong to the upper third of the index (between 30-44 points). As the high mean values mentioned above may also indicate, they are committed to climate protection.

As a result of the analysis of variance, it can be stated that age influences attitudes and acts towards environmental protection¹⁹.

The older the interviewee is, the more committed he/she is to environmental protection, theoretically and practically, in his/her individual acts. The most noticeable difference is perceived between the youngest (mean value on the index: 34,8) and the oldest people (mean value on the index: 36,1). Similarly to age, level of education²⁰ is also an influential factor: the higher level of education the youth has, the higher points he/she has on the index. The Impact of gender is significant²¹ as women have higher points on the index than men (women: 36,1, men: 35 points); however, this explanation is weak. Type of settlement does not mean a significant difference.²² However, the region does:²³ youths living in the Southern Great Plain (37 points) have the highest points, youngsters living in Southern Transdanubia have the lowest (33,4 points).

Those inactive have lower points on the index than students or working youths. Also, the parent's level of education²⁴ is an influential factor, especially the mother's level of education.²⁵ The more educated the parents are, the more eco-conscious attitude and behavioural orientation the child has.

The most significant discrepancy is between children whose parents have only elementary graduation and children whose parents have a degree, on average, 4 points on the index. Besides the mother's level of education, the second most influential factor is the youngster's financial situation²⁶. Those who live under poor financial circumstances have 8 points less on the index (on average, 28,6 points) than

¹⁵ In the questionnaire the possible factors are climate change, migration to Europe, coronavirus epidemic, Me Too movement, Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The interviewee valued on a 5-element grading scale where 1= not influence at all, 5=influences very much.

¹⁶ $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation= ,165.

¹⁷ Questions with two item lines consists of 11 items, and the participant has to value the importance of the diverse items on a 4-element grading scale. Consequently, the lowest value of the item is 11, the highest is 44.

¹⁸ The intern consistency of the index is high; the value of Crombach Alpha is 0,904.

¹⁹ The condition of homogenous variances is fulfilled (Levene's test=0,191). Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation=,092.

²⁰ Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation= ,154.

²¹ Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation= ,093.

²² Significance level of F probe $p < 0,423$, Pearson correlation= ,103.

²³ Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$.

²⁴ Impact of father's educational level: Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation= ,124.

²⁵ Impact of mother's educational level: Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation= ,194.

²⁶ Significance level of F probe $p < 0,001$, Pearson correlation= - ,168.

members of the two upper groups ("those who are living without problems or burdens" 36,4 points, and "those who are able to make ends meet due to their money management" 36,1 points).

Consequently, Captain Planet does not belong to climate-fighter Generation Z but to youngsters aged 25-29 who are highly educated, who have a stable financial situation, who are not inactive; that is, they either study or work (one-third of youngsters belong to this group (32%)). It may be commonplace; however, it was managed to prove this commonplace scientifically.

References

- Deloitte (2020). The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020. <https://www2.deloitte.com/gr/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/MillennialSurvey2020.html> (last access: 16. 03. 2022.)
- Jonathan, Eley & Eleanor, Olcott (2018). Shein: the Chinese company storming the world of fast fashion <https://www.ft.com/content/ed0c9a35-7616-4b02-ac59-aac0ac154324> (last access: 16. 03. 2022.) Financial Times
- Fridays For Future (2019). <https://fridaysforfuture.hu/> (last access: 16. 03. 2022.)
- Elemér, Hankiss (1979). *Társadalmi csapdák*. Magvető, Budapest.
- Global Web Index (2021). *Global trends among Generation Z*. <https://www.gwi.com/reports/global-trends-among-gen-z> (last access: 16. 03. 2022.)
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018). *Global Warming of 1.5 °C* <https://www.ipcc.ch/> (last access: 16. 03. 2022.)
- Statista (2020a). *Most common online activities in Hungary in 2020, by gender*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1192958/hungary-common-online-activities-by-gender/> (last access: 16. 03. 2022.)
- Statista (2020b): *Most popular online shops for cross-border purchases in Hungary in 2020* <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1104104/hungary-most-popular-foreign-online-shops/> (last access: 16. 03. 2022.)
- Statista (2021): *Most popular free shopping mobile applications in Hungary in May 2021, by number of downloads* <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1237189/hungary-most-downloaded-free-shopping-apps/> (last access: 16. 03. 2022.)
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Captain_Planet_and_the_Planeteers (last access: 16. 03. 2022.).