

# Research Report

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## Contents

Introduction.....	2
Findings from Research Among Students.....	3
Findings from Research Among Teachers.....	8
Summary of Findings.....	11
The Educational Programme of the Kurt Lewin Foundation.....	12
Bibliography.....	14

## Introduction

The Kurt Lewin Foundation has been commissioned by the Open Society Institute to conduct a year of research and education in four secondary schools in Eastern Hungary. The project, now concluded, was aimed at studying the effect of the school as an organisational/operational environment on the active citizenship of students.

The choice of topic was motivated by the fact that at the commencement of the project the concept of citizenship grounded in activity, responsibility and democratic values was emphasised in Hungarian educational policy, while the views and opinions of society in general and the younger generation in particular were changing in a direction not favourable for bolstering active citizenship. For this reason the Kurt Lewin Foundation constructed a complex research and educational project which comprised on the one hand an endeavour to enhance active citizenship by means of various **developmental activities**. On the other hand it included two panels of **data collection**, both by quantitative and qualitative methods, to assess the present situation pertaining to the topic of the study.

Our Foundation has conducted a survey concerning active citizenship in two grammar schools, one (AG) maintained by a church and the other (BG) by the government, and two vocational secondary schools (CSZ and DSZ). Questionnaires (students<sup>1</sup> n=321 in panel 1, n=298 in panel 2; teachers n=117), interviews (n=52) and participant observation were employed to explore the school citizens' socio-demographic parameters, everyday habits,

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<sup>1</sup> Since the number of *valid* respondents turned out to be very low in one of the vocational schools, this school was disregarded during data input and thus omitted from evaluation.

social relationships and plans for the future, as well as their awareness, opinion and information-gathering habits with respect to democracy, politics and society, and their knowledge and opinion concerning their schools and, in particular, democracy in their schools.

## **Findings from Research Among Students**

The comparison of the **socio-demographic parameters** of the students yielded significant differences between schools. The vocational school evaluated in the survey (CSZ) has a higher proportion of male students (66%, while the proportion is roughly 50% in the grammar schools), and students at that school are of a higher mean age. The parents of vocational school students have lower educational qualifications: the proportion of mothers/fathers with college or university degrees is 31%/47% and 46%/51% in the two grammar schools, as opposed to 6%/9% for the vocational school. The proportion of actively employed parents is also lower at the vocational school, both for fathers (80% as opposed to 86% to 94% in the grammar schools) and mothers (53% against 87% to 93% in grammar schools). Nonetheless, no substantial difference has been found in either the objective indicators or the subjective experience of financial security. Students generally have access to the goods they need and are largely content with their financial circumstances.

Students tend to be satisfied with their **friendships** (4.3)<sup>2</sup>, but less so with their perceived **future prospects** (3.8). Students at the vocational school have fewer friendly relationships (2.8 friends per respondent) than those at the other two schools (over 4 friends). The growing importance of peer groups is indicated by the finding that students are most likely to be able to discuss their problems with their best friends (95%), followed by family members (mother 81%, father 64%, brother/sister 64%). Less than half (42%) of the students are able to share their problems with their form tutors and other teachers.

The majority of students spend their **leisure time** with friends or use computers for recreation, read books and listen to music. Among organised activities, sports and extracurricular tuition are both common, though vocational students tend to report fewer such activities.

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<sup>2</sup> Students responded on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 stood for “not satisfied at all” and 5 for “entirely satisfied.”

Turning to **perception of the future**, most students have specific ideas about what they wish to do after completing school. The plans of grammar school students largely involve university/college studies (98-100%). Among vocational students it is a smaller proportion (60%) who intend to carry on studying.

As regards **generic questions on society and politics**, it can be observed that most students seldom talk about social and political questions with their form tutors, parents or friends.

How often do you talk...	
Responses on a scale of 1 = "very rarely" to 5 = "very often"	Average
...to your friends about politics?	2.00
...to your friends about social issues?	2.74
...to your parents about politics?	2.31
...to your parents about social issues?	2.86
...to your form tutor about politics?	1.34
...to your form tutor about social issues?	1.94

Here too a difference emerges between different types of schools: vocational students tend to talk less about these topics. Carrying on a more intensive discourse about the topic may be (one of) the reason(s) why grammar school students have more accurate knowledge of social and political issues.

As for **active citizenship** on a personal level, nearly three quarters (73%) of students intend to vote at the next parliamentary elections, but this proportion is again different among the vocational students at a mere 37%. The examination of **political party preferences** shows that most students find none of the presently existing political parties attractive or very attractive. The radical party Jobbik is generally the most accepted (2.9 for the whole sample). In line with previous research,<sup>3</sup> our survey indicates that the majority of socio-demographic parameters have no statistically significant effect on whether one supports Jobbik.

How attractive do you find...				
Responses on a scale of 1 = "not attractive at all" to 5 = "very attractive"	AG	BG	CSZ	Total
...FIDESZ?	3.00	2.00	2.25	2.45
...Jobbik?	3.34	2.56	2.69	2.91
...MSZP?	1.49	1.66	1.74	1.60
...LMP?	1.71	1.65	1.55	1.66
...KDNP?	2.48	1.74	1.68	2.04

<sup>3</sup> András BÍRÓ NAGY, Tamás BOROS & Áron VARGA (2012): *A szélsőjobboldal Magyarországon / A Policy Solutions politikai elemzése és javaslatai a Friedrich Ebert Alapítvány számára*, p. 20.

The majority of students (59%) have participated in **volunteer work**. A similar majority (60% of respondents) feel inclined to work as a volunteer in the future. The difference between school types can be observed again: the proportion of those interested in volunteer work is lower in the vocational school.

Findings pertaining to volunteer work				
Single choice responses: the percentage of those responding with "yes" is shown	AG	BG	CSZ	Total
Have you ever worked as a volunteer?	66.4	47.4	30.8	52.9
Would you like to work as a volunteer in the future?	60.2	66.4	41.2	60.5

The students' **feelings about politics** are generally characterised by distrust. As regards democratic/dictatorial control of politics, they prefer a stronger-handed, less democratic approach.

Attitudes concerning politics	
Responses on a scale of 1 = "I do not agree at all" to 5 = "I agree completely"	Average
Hungary needs a party that will not just talk but also hit hard where necessary.	4.2
Political parties are only good for politicians to make a career with.	3.9
Obedying the law is more important than anything else.	3.9
Every law has its loophole.	3.8
Participation in politics can bring about changes in Hungarian people's lives.	3.3
Politics has no use at all.	2.7

The questionnaire block summarised above consisted of various statements about society, politics and democracy, including statements of the so-called F-scale. The higher one scores on the F-scale, the more authoritarian they are.<sup>4</sup> An assessment of the students' performance on the F-scale shows that they tend rather towards authoritarianism.

Lowest possible score: 1; highest possible score: 5.	AG	BG	CSZ	Total
F-scale scores (average)	3.31	3.27	3.51	3.31

<sup>4</sup> Our questionnaire incorporated the abbreviated version of the scale. "The F-scale is an instrument devised for measuring implicit anti-democratic and prejudiced attitudes." See Zoltán FÁBIÁN & Endre SIK (1996): „Előítéletesség és tekintélyelvűség” in: Rudolf ANDORKA, Tamás KOLOSI, György VUKOVICH (eds.) *Társadalmi riport 1996*. Budapest: TÁRKI, Századvég. (pp. 381–413), p. 397.

A further point worthy of note is our analysis of correlation between authoritarian thinking as reflected in scores on the F-scale, and tendency to support Jobbik. Our findings allow us to deduce that such a correlation does indeed exist: **those who express explicit support for this party are more likely to agree with statements in favour of authoritarianism.**

Though their attitudes are generally critical and tend towards authoritarianism, certain democratic values are nonetheless important to the students. However, the protection of the rights of minorities ranks very low among their values.

How important is it to you that people in Hungary should...				
Responses on a scale of 1 = "not important at all" to 5 = "very important"	AG	BG	CSZ	Total
...make an active effort for their own welfare?	4.47	4.45	4.21	4.43
...be able to express their opinions freely?	4.27	4.62	4.25	4.43
...be dedicated to democracy?	3.62	3.62	3.18	3.57
...obey the laws of the country?	4.22	4.15	3.94	4.15
...firmly believe that all people are equal?	3.99	3.89	3.89	3.93
...support those in need?	4.03	3.70	3.89	3.86
...respect the rights of minorities?	2.58	2.65	3.65	<b>2.75</b>

We also measured **social distance** as applicable to three target groups. Students keep the least distance from those with a physical disability: they are rather open-minded about this group. However, the majority of the students are disinclined to keep any level of contact with their Gypsy and homosexual peers and can be described as adverse to these groups.

In their **opinions about their schools**, the majority of students are rather satisfied or entirely satisfied with their institutions with respect to the quality of education (4.18) and to their relationship with classmates (4.17). They expressed less satisfaction with respect to the fairness of teachers (3.57), the extent to which teachers recognise the opinions of students (3.49), and the quality of the school community (3.70). In all of the above areas, students at BG were most satisfied and those at CSZ the least satisfied.

BG is also the institution where students participate most frequently in various school events. Furthermore, as shown in the following tables, the proportion of students who were able to give correct answers to questions pertaining to student rights was also the highest here.

What kinds of disciplinary punishment may be imposed at school?				
Aided, single-response question; the percentage of those who checked the provided answer is shown	AG	BG	CSZ	Total
The school may not impose disciplinary punishment on students.	7.6	17.5	7.1	11.5
Any effective punishment if it is accepted by the board of teachers and described in the house rules.	56.5	21.3	71.4	44.5
Only such punishment that is explicitly named in the Act on Public Education. (correct answer)	35.9	<b>61.3</b>	21.4	44.0

When do students have a right to express their opinions at school?				
Aided, single-response question; the percentage of those who checked the provided answer is shown	AG	BG	CSZ	Total
Through the student government, at suitable forums in the course of the academic year.	50.9	32.2	24.0	39.3
When explicitly requested to do so by teachers or the principal.	8.5	1.7	24.0	6.7
At any time about anything, as long as their opinions do not endanger the human dignity of others. (correct answer)	40.6	<b>66.1</b>	52.0	54.0

The questionnaire also explored the extent to which respondents perceive their own school as democratic. Our findings show that CSZ is regarded as least democratic by the students there (2.78), while BG is considered to be the most democratic (4.11).

## Findings from Research Among Teachers

In order to facilitate comparison, results for both students and teachers will be shown in this section.

Our findings pertaining to items concerning the functioning of parties and lawfulness are more positive among teachers than among students, as illustrated by (but not limited to) the following statements.

Attitude items		
Responses on a scale of 1 = "I do not agree at all" to 5 = "I agree completely"	Average, students	Average, teachers
Hungary needs a party that will not just talk but also hit hard where necessary.	4.2	2.7
Obedying the law is more important than anything else.	3.9	4.5

The expression of demand for lawfulness and resistance to an authoritarian party indicates a **stronger dedication to democratic values**. This is confirmed by the following results.

How important is it to you that people in Hungary should...								
Responses on a scale of 1 = "not important at all" to 5 = "very important"	AG		BG		CSZ		Total	
	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	Teacher
...make an active effort for their own welfare?	4.47	4.75	4.45	4.77	4.21	4.77	4.43	4.76
...be able to express their opinions freely?	4.27	4.61	4.62	4.83	4.25	4.73	4.43	4.73
...be dedicated to democracy?	3.62	4.49	3.62	4.57	3.18	4.18	3.57	4.46
...obey the laws of the country?	4.22	4.93	4.15	4.91	3.94	4.95	4.15	4.93
...firmly believe that all people are equal?	3.99	4.12	3.89	4.27	3.89	4.52	3.93	4.26
...support those in need?	4.03	4.42	3.7	4.29	3.89	4.23	3.86	4.33
...respect the rights of minorities?	2.58	4.18	2.65	4.17	3.65	4.00	2.75	4.14

It is evident from the table that a much higher proportion of teachers than of students agrees with the above statements, whether they concern fundamental human rights or solidarity. The difference is the most conspicuous in their attitude to respecting the rights of minorities. It should nonetheless be noted here that teachers may have a stronger motivation to express politically correct attitudes. This may well have influenced our findings, but we have no way of estimating the amount of distortion caused by this factor.

No significant differences between students and teachers were observed concerning **disappointment with political life**.

Attitude items		
Responses on a scale of 1 = "I do not agree at all" to 5 = "I agree completely"	Average, students	Average, teachers
Politics has no use at all.	2.7	2.7
Participation in politics can bring about changes in Hungarian people's lives.	3.3	3.1
Political parties are only good for politicians to make a career with.	3.9	3.6
Every law has its loophole.	3.8	3.7

Most of the teachers **maintain good relations** with students, other teachers, parents, school management and the technical workers at the school (averages 4.2 to 4.4). **Teachers are generally satisfied** with their schools (apart from their salaries) and have expressed their appreciation for the work carried on there. They also feel that their schools do a good job of education for citizenship (average 3.8). The **most positive** views of their school were expressed by **teachers at BG**.

It appears that teachers lay emphasis on issues of active citizenship (averages 3.7 to 4.6) as well as emotional and community issues in the life of the school (averages 3.9 to 4.7). For these questionnaire items (again) the average values of teachers were higher than those of students.

Statements about emotions and community		
Responses on a scale of 1 = "I do not agree at all" to 5 = "I agree completely"	Average, students	Average, teachers
I like being at this school. / Students like being at this school.	3.49	3.81
The making of new initiatives and the activity of student life are important to teachers.	3.20	3.51
When I have a problem or difficulty, I can discuss it with one of the school's teachers. / When students have a problem or difficulty, they can discuss it with one of the school's teachers.	3.18	4.15
It is important to teachers that students should feel good at school, and teachers make an effort to achieve this.	2.98	3.90
I am often in conflict with my teachers. / I am often in conflict with my students.	1.98	1.71

Teachers generally considered their schools to be democratic (average 4.1). In this respect too, **the highest average value was found among the teachers at BG.**

How democratic do you consider your school to be?				
Responses on a scale of 1 = "not democratic at all" to 5 = "completely democratic"	AG	BG	CSZ	Total
	3.50	4.68	3.73	4.08

## Summary of Findings

Fundamental differences have been found between types of schools. Students at the vocational school have different socio-demographic characteristics, but their population also differs from that of grammar-school students in other factors (leisure-time activity, perception of future, political party preference, volunteer work, importance of democratic values, etc.).

**Students** rarely discuss social and political questions. They attribute less importance to solidarity and respect for the rights of minorities (though the latter factor was given more importance in the vocational school where a high proportion of students are Roma).

Certain democratic values were deemed important by students, yet the respondents are generally characterised by disappointment in and mistrust toward politics. As regards political party preferences, most students find none of the presently existing political parties attractive or very attractive. The radical party Jobbik is generally the best accepted. The school where the tendency to support this party was the weakest (BG) also scored lowest on the authoritarianism scale.

**Teachers**, compared to students, consider the assertion of democratic values more important and are more likely to reject an authoritarian party. Nonetheless this group is also characterised by apathy and disappointment concerning politics and Hungarian political life in particular.

It has further been found that students who consider their school to be the most democratic (students at BG) are also the most satisfied with their school and have the most favourable opinions about it. In addition they are the most active at school events and the best aware of students' rights. Our data also indicate that teachers at the school considered by its students to be most democratic, likewise deem their institution to be democratic, are more satisfied with their school, and are more interested in various issues pertaining to the school.

## The Educational Programme of the Kurt Lewin Foundation

The Foundation has **implemented** both **teacher training** and **student programmes** at the schools involved in the study. The participants of student programmes co-operated with one another in a democratic framework to devise a programme, which they then presented to their fellow students at the end of each session. The participants of student programmes discussed various social issues and the problems of active citizenship and democratic co-operation.

The findings of our questionnaires show that those who have participated in such programmes **do not have significantly different views** on politics, society and democracy compared to those who have not participated. The exceptions to this are aversion to Roma people and (to a smaller extent) aversion to homosexual people. Students who have participated in the programmes are more inclined to accept these groups.

Would you be happy to have a young person you think is a Gypsy...						
Proportion of respondents who checked "yes", broken down into participants and non-participants of the programme	AG		BG		CSZ	
	Partici-pants	Non-partici-pants	Partici-pants	Non-partici-pants	Partici-pants	Non-partici-pants
...in the same school as you?	88.9	39.2	57.1	47.9	83.3	88.5
...in the same class as you?	75.0	29.0	57.1	42.9	100.0	88.5
...sharing a classroom desk with you?	62.5	21.2	42.9	32.0	100.0	73.1
...as your friend?	87.5	23.9	42.9	34.7	100.0	80.8

Would you be happy to have a young person you think is homosexual (gay)...						
Proportion of respondents who checked "yes", broken down into participants and non-participants of the programme	AG		BG		CSZ	
	Partici-pants	Non-partici-pants	Partici-pants	Non-partici-pants	Partici-pants	Non-partici-pants
...in the same school as you?	77.8	36.3	83.3	88.5	42.9	36.0
...in the same class as you?	77.8	32.0	100.0	88.5	28.6	32.0
...sharing a classroom desk with you?	55.6	21.6	100.0	73.1	28.6	20.0
...as your friend?	66.7	22.0	100.0	80.8	14.3	16.0

Hence, students who have participated in the programme may in turn become the foundation of further projects to enhance tolerance and reduce prejudice by capitalising on the role and significance of peer groups, and join such future projects as volunteers and staff members.

Furthermore, the experience gained directly in the implementation of the programmes may also prove useful in education for active citizenship. This experience is summarised below on the basis of evaluation sheets filled by the students and of the documentation of the group discussions conducted at the opening and closing sessions of programmes. Our general experience of the student programmes was that participants found them effective and useful, had a good time participating, and felt that the activities fulfilled their original desires and expectations. The exception to this was one vocational school where the principal “banned” the student programme prior to its conclusion. This is the reason why the average values in the table below are lower in the column “CSZ” and, consequently, in the “Total” column too.

Evaluation of the student programmes					
Responses on a scale of 1 = “not at all” to 5 = “completely”	BG	AG	CSZ	DSZ	Total
How effective do you think the programme has been?	4.00	4.00	3.22	4.50	3.85
How useful do you think the programme has been to you?	5.00	4.71	2.67	4.00	3.88
To what extent did the programme fulfil your original desires and expectations that brought you to participate?	3.75	3.71	2.89	4.33	3.58
To what extent did you have a good time in the programme?	4.75	4.86	3.78	4.33	4.35
To what extent did you feel the school supported you in the programme?	4.25	2.71	2.22	4.50	3.19

It is evident from the students’ responses and the feedback from the programme coaches that students have **clearly improved in competences related to active citizenship**, such as social sensitivity, knowledge of society, competence in co-operation and communication, critical sense, reduction of prejudice, tolerance, understanding, empathy and a liking for diversity. It can further be deduced from the questionnaire findings that in two of the schools the intensity of conversation about politics changed subsequent to the Foundation’s programme. In BG, the frequency of such discussions with the form tutor rose from 1.4 to 1.8,<sup>5</sup> while in CSZ the frequency of such discussions with parents rose from 1.7 to 2.3.<sup>6</sup>

The programmes also received predominantly favourable evaluations from non-participating students at the schools involved. Most of the responding students would like to see further such programmes at their institutions and many would be willing to participate in future programmes. It thus appears from the feedback we received that given an environment where such issues are rarely raised, these programmes are effective and much needed.

<sup>5</sup> Responses on a scale of one to five where higher values stand for more frequent discussions.

<sup>6</sup> One can only hope that these conversations aimed at discussing issues objectively and involved the participants. A more thorough treatment of the advantages and difficulties arising from the discussion of social and political issues at school is available in the “Proposal for Educational Policy” drawn up by the Kurt Lewin Foundation.

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