

A GENERATION PRESENTS ITSELF: “TEENAGERS” SATISFACTION AND PROCESSING OF THE SOCIAL REALITY IN SLOVENIA

Abstract. *The article examines selected results of quantitative surveys of 9th grade primary school students and their parents in Slovenia. On the basis of the theory and characteristics of contemporary youth and their processing of social reality, it seeks to provide an image of how this generation feels and presents itself as well as how it is coping with the complex modern demands of reflexive life-courses. The empirical analysis focuses on selected indicators which illustrate how students are satisfied with some essential parts of their lives and provides on overall index of the satisfaction of the whole sample of students. Based on the empirical findings it also attempts to define this generation's most common strategy of processing the social reality.*

Keywords: *youth, students, processing of social reality, satisfaction, school, school performance, privacy, self-affirmation*

Youth and social reality

The process of growing up is actually the basic and essential condition for the reproduction of every social community and every culture and historical period has its own way of organising this process. A term used especially by developmental psychologists to explain the growing up processes in the period between childhood and adulthood is *adolescence*. It encompasses the early youth era between 12 and 18 years of age, popularly referred to as the “teenage years”¹. Due to its “in-betweenness” amid two

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¹ The idea of adolescence as a special period of life is initially found in a monumental study by the psychologist Stanley Hall. He tested his hypotheses with a large-scale study of viewpoints and value orientations of then American high school youth (Coleman and Husén, 1985). In his view, adolescence had the following features: “storm and stress”, and rebellions of young people against various authorities. He believed this was necessary for the development of modern individualism and for the independent transitions of young people to adulthood. Hall drew attention to adolescence not only among scientists but also among

relatively well-recognised life periods, namely childhood and adulthood, it is seen as a labile and contradictory period with many “*developmental tasks*”, which demands special care and monitoring by adults (Coleman, 1961; Arnett, 2007). The complexity and difficulty of these developmental tasks makes adolescence a period of trouble and crisis.

The term adolescence predominately encompasses the psychophysical changes in this period and not so much the social position of the adolescent. A more sociological term of *youth* applies particularly to analyses of social changes, which therefore holds a longer indefinite time period of economic dependence and subordinate position of the young in society. *Youth is mostly a social status whereby a young person is getting ready and performing the obligations involved in the transition to adulthood* and can therefore extend over the period of adolescence or psychosocial maturing. But this transition is not only a problem of an individual. It is a distinct *social* space in which the young are shaped in a special way and where they create special forms of culture, spending leisure time, and entertainment, when they choose *referential persons they trust and who represent role models of growing up* (Friedeburg, 1971; Zinnecker, 1988; Chisholm, 1995).

In addition, many researches show that characteristics such as social and economic circumstances or status and forms of social integration exert a much more important influence on the experience of growing up than psychophysical development or age. However, age has become socially important because it enabled a politically constituted method of differentiating groups of people that was needed by the modern capitalistic system. It has become a tool modern capitalist societies use to manage social relations (France, 2007). Therefore, also “working with youth” has become a special social project which combines planned education, monitoring and numerous pedagogical-political interventions of ideological apparatuses of the state.

Managing the paradoxes – the processing of social reality

A young person is not only an object of different factors, institutions or social powers, but also a subject who productively changes the social reality. From this basic idea emerged the model of the *productive processing of social reality in youth*, which connects personal and social development in a dynamic perspective of their mutual influence and modification (Hurrelmann, 1996, Heitmeyer and Hurrelmann, 1992). According to this model, the development of an individual is neither a consequence of

the general public. His findings on the universalism and naturalism of emotional transition in adolescence are still embedded not only in psychological but also in everyday discourse on adolescence.

merely psychophysical nor socio-economic factors. The basic idea is that each individual processes internal and external influences in some kind of *reconstruction* of external and internal reality.

Here we can talk about the processing of the *subjective reality of an individual*; e.g. a frequent consideration of and reflection on one's actions, opportunities, risks and the meaning of life in order to attain certain principles and views on the world. Alternatively, it can also mean *intervention in the world* around them; e.g. creating one's personal environment, taking part in various group activities, in youth centres and clubs. It can also mean *symbolic effects*, for example participation in various forms of youth culture or youth movements which develop their alternative symbolism (Förnas and Bolin, 1995). The important thing here is how much this processing is actually productive, or how much is it merely reproductive, that is to what extent it simply imitates existing external models and patterns.

To successfully address these difficult development tasks, one needs a lot of realistic perception of circumstances and the ability to manage the complex social reality. The less young people manage their processing of reality by themselves, and the less creative they are in that, the greater the risk posed to them by the growing-up crises and the sooner they are subjected to various regressions. Heitmeyer and Hurrelmann (1992) pointed out three different responses or ways the young have developed in recent decades to process the reality and their life circumstances in modern society.

The first way is offered by the *answers of youth subcultures*, which are a variant of productive or "contra-structural" processing of reality. Their perception of circumstances is inseparably connected to their subcultural style. From here they develop *goal conceptions* which cover a temporary presentation of their special features and diversity from society, and the rejection of the models society offers. Some youth subcultures have developed very *effective tools*, especially stylistic innovations and provocation of the regular understanding of things and events, which make the subcultural identity possible for individuals and groups.

The second type of youth's answer to living circumstances is the opposite, the "*quiet*" and as much as possible *non-conflictive inclusion* in society, along with the simultaneous realisation that there is a big discord between the reality and the supposed values. It means "*muddling through*" (Heitmeyer and Hurrelmann, 1992: 127). The young who apply these strategies think there are no long-term programmes, no social utopias that would help transmit future working perspectives to them. Because they lack long-term goal conceptions, they do not develop individual tools and ways to avoid distressing circumstances, or to reform them anew. Through these troubles they get by keeping their stress due to problems at the lowest possible level. That is the danger of this strategy. It can lead young people to seek shelter

in an imitation of security as offered by various ideologists, extremists of all kinds, who only offer an image of clearly formed answers and options (Beck, 1997). We presuppose that this is how the majority of the young has been reacting to the problems of growing up in the last decade, when “socialisation in one’s own arrangement” has been substituted by consumer and media socialisation which offers quick and substitute solutions to their problems and takes away the means to create their own world.

The third example is seen among young people who *oscillate* between attempts at time-limited *outlines of their identity* on one side, and the *unconditional adjustment to social standards*, mentalities and expectations on the other. They abuse the illusionary perception of the social circumstances, e.g. in Internet-based virtual communities, or at football stadiums. With these imprints and ideas they protect themselves against a specific reality which limits and burdens their everyday life. Still, those strategies and “escapes” seem necessary – paradoxically – for these young people to remain able to function in their everyday lives. In the rest of their lives they are satisfied by adjusting to circumstances, whatever they are. They also do not know any tools and ways to change the reality. These responses mostly typify underprivileged and marginalised adolescents.

These are three quite different youth modalities for the processing of reality. The symbolic processing of reality into its opposite and making it an ironic, conformist adjustment of reality, keeping in mind the loss of global social perspective, and a temporary escape from everyday life in an illusionary community that helps them spend the rest of their time. It is not about judging which of these ways is “better” or “worse” because the young can rarely consciously choose from among them. They simply find themselves in one on the basis of a long chain of conditions and micro-decisions.

It mostly depends on the circumstances in wider society whether young people have the feeling of perspective or not. Without trust in social progress, the wishes of personal progress are abstract and without a basis (Wyn and White, 1997). In any case, the position of a young person in today’s global society as well as in the local environment and on the inter-personal level is *unclear and contradictory*.

Empirical results: The well-being, satisfaction and worries of primary school students

Against the background of these characteristics of youth and their ways of processing the social reality, we will examine selected indicators of data obtained by a quantitative survey of primary school students and their parents within the GOETE project framework (Walther, 2010). The student survey aimed to assess young people’s subjective accounts and experiences

regarding their progression through their educational trajectories as well as their attitudes, expectations and aspirations regarding their future participation in education². The parent survey was used to assess their views in relation to their child's experience of school, problems and support experienced to date as well as to the child's school choice, their expectations and efforts concerning their child's future educational and employment career³.

With the analysis of selected quantitative data we will try to determine which of the presented strategies of processing the social reality is most often used by today's 9th grade students in Slovenia. We will focus our attention on three thematic areas: the general well-being of students in and out of school, how students regard the importance of school performance, and what are their and their parents' worries about the future. We will thereby seek to assess how and if students are satisfied in both a personal and school sense. Further, to round up and deepen the empirical results we will try to construct an overall index of satisfaction of students in the hope this will give us a more comprehensive illustration of their general satisfaction and insights into the strategies they use to process the social reality.

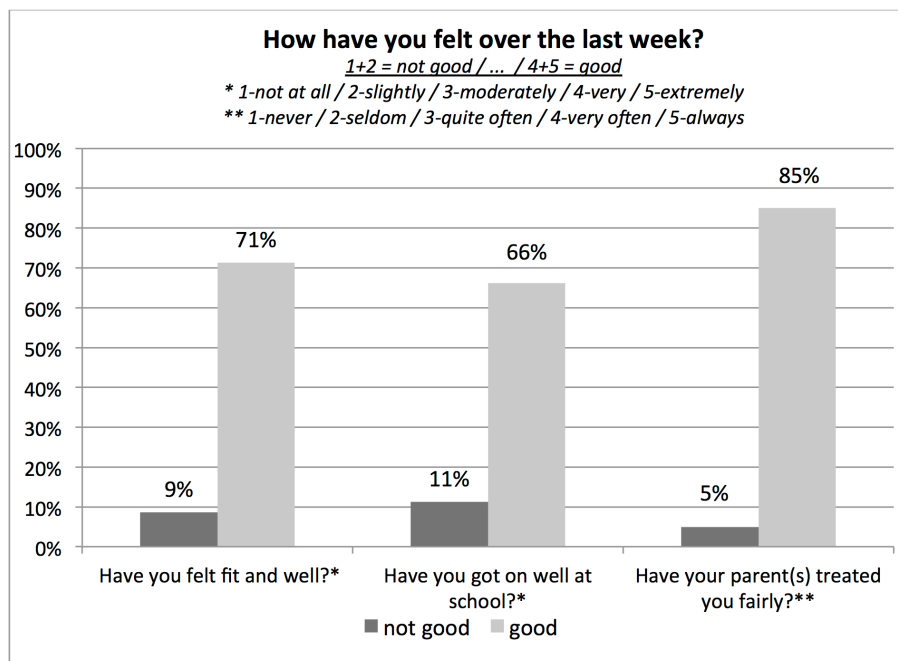
Well-being of students in and out of school

Due to the increasing symbolic significance of education as well as its practical role in the everyday lives of individuals, the "school" has become a common issue in many everyday discussions within families and among young people. The imperative of school performance is indeed one of the most aggravating issues for youth; nonetheless, this does not mean we should only search for faults or solutions in the concrete school environment. Moreover, researches in Slovenia suggest that more than the actual time spent at school or at home on school work, or the curriculum and methods of school work, young people are burdened by the pressures of (too) great expectations and demands regarding their school performance.

² With regard to the general starting points of the GOETE project, the sample of respondents encompasses three typical socio-economic and regional environments which correspond to three pre-determined levels of disadvantage; in the Slovenian case we chose three Slovenian regions: the Central region – Ljubljana, which is regarded as an affluent region, the Coastal-Karstic region – Koper, Izola, Piran – as an average region and a North-East region, Pomurje – Murska Sobota with three surrounding villages as a disadvantaged region. Altogether, we carried out the survey in 20 primary schools in Slovenia and collected 725 questionnaires of 9th grade students.

³ The parental survey was carried out on the original sample of students, which means that the respondents were the actual parents of the students included in the survey. The response rate of parents was, as expected, lower than that of the students yet it reached a solid 57.8% or 419 questionnaires.

Graph 1: WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS

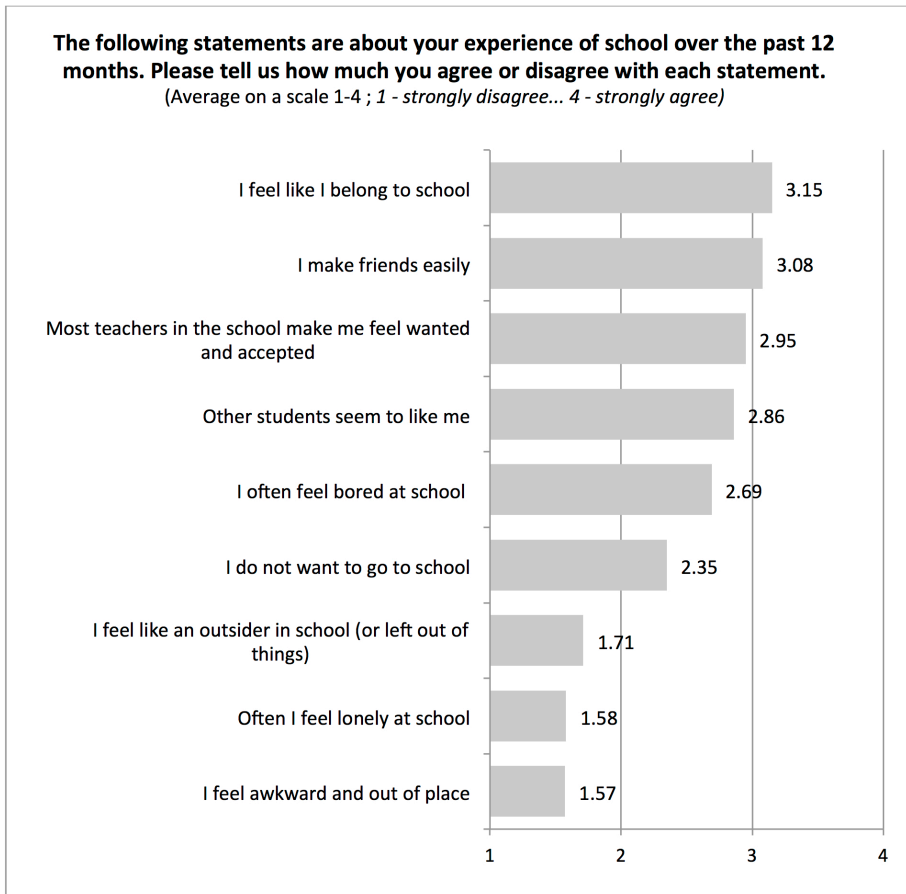


Source: Ule et al. GOETE research (Students), N = 725

The responses show that the students feel quite well at both school and in general. The average value of responses on a scale from 1-5 to the question “*Have you felt fit and well?*” is 3.81. The average value of responses to the question “*Have you got on well at school?*” was just one-tenth lower (3.71). However, the students are most satisfied with their parents and their relationship since the average value of responses to the question “*Have your parent(s) treated you fairly?*” is exceptionally high at 4.43. We can see that all three values noticeably exceed the average value on this scale (3), indicating quite a distinctive positive tendency in the evaluation of all three elements.

In addition, in response to the question “*How have you felt about school over the past 12 months?*” more than 80% of students indicated that they like school a lot or a little. This figure is even higher than that revealed in research conducted in 1998 that considered the same age group (Ule et al., 2000). Nevertheless, we should not neglect the 15% of students who do not like school very much and the 5% who do not like school at all. More detailed assessments of the feelings students have towards school are provided in the graph below.

Graph 2: EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL



Source: Ule et al. GOETE research (Students), N = 725

We can see that the average values are highest for the “positive” statements, which describe feelings of belonging to school in a personal sense, meaning that students are most satisfied with the school as a distinctive “social environment” in which they generally feel good, are able to make friends and feel accepted by teachers. All of the “negative” statements have lower values than the “positive” statements; yet, boredom in school has the highest value of them, suggesting some sort of dissatisfaction with the curriculum or manner of school work. Statements that are “negative” in a way, which point to a general rejection of school or discomfort, have the lowest values. This again proves that the school is quite an agreeable place for the majority of students.

Further, this group of statements about the perception of school also seems interesting because it reveals some distinctions. We were interested in which of these indicators are grouped by similarities according to the respondents' assessment strategies or, in other words, which of these indicators can present a possible common dimension. Factorisation of the above block of variables reveals two factors which, together, explain a solid 54% of the variance. Both factors are relatively equal in their explanatory power. The first one can be termed *factor 1 – attitude towards the school*; this factor explains 29% of the variance. The second one can be termed *factor 2 – interpersonal relations*; this factor explains 25% of the variance.

Table 1: FACTOR ANALYSIS – EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL

Component	Factor 1: <i>Attitude towards the school</i>	Factor 2: <i>Interpersonal relationships</i>
I do not want to go to school	0.79	
I often feel bored at school	0.76	
I feel like I belong to school	-0.66	
I feel like an outsider in school (or left out of things)	0.63	-0.44
Most teachers in the school make me feel wanted and accepted	-0.61	
I make friends easily		0.77
Often I feel lonely at school		-0.71
I feel awkward and out of place		-0.66
Other students seem to like me		0.58
Variance Explained – (Total 54%)	28.9%	25.0%

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.

This analysis enables a closer look at the power of each variable according to defined dimensions (Factors 1 and 2). As we can see, the supporting indicator (the variable with the strongest loading) for Factor 1 is the variable *“I do not want to go to school”*; while for the second factor the strongest variable is *“I make friends easily”*. For the purpose of the overall index of satisfaction we believe it is appropriate that we do not simply take all variables into account but only those with the greatest explanatory power in the chosen blocks. Considering that both dimensions are level in the above factorisation, we would therefore choose indicators with the strongest loadings within each factor. These are *“I do not want to go to school”* (inverse) and *“I make friends easily”*.

The significance of school performance

The qualitative part of the GOETE research (see other articles in this issue) as well as other researches about school and school success ascertain that school performance has become a very crucial issue for students and their parents, along with other actors involved in the educational process. The pressure to be successful at school is one of the biggest burdens and problems facing young students.

That is why it was interesting to examine how students actually assess their own performance compared to that of their classmates; the question was *“Compared to other students, how well do you expect to do in school this year?”* We found that the self-evaluation of school performance is very high and has an explicit positive tendency, with 92.5% of students expecting their performance to be either about the same or (much) better than that of other students. Only 7.5% of students expect their performance to be worse or much worse than that of other students.

We could also regard these results as a confirmation or even direct consequence of the high level of importance the students generally ascribe to their school performance. They also warn us that school has one of the central, most powerful roles in the everyday life of students. A comparison with the results of the 1998 research also shows that this attitude towards school is stable in time and not only momentary. The data from 1998 confirm the thesis about the exceptional importance of school success for youth since on a specific scale which measured the values of the students whereby 77.1% of respondents denoted school performance as very important to them (Ule et al., 2000).

Yet, despite this manifest, crucial influence of school performance on the students' well-being, responses to questions about the relationship between education and work do not fully support this significance. Namely, the perceived relationship between good school performance and a successful vocational career is only slightly above the middle value (on a scale from 1 - strongly disagree to 4 - strongly agree the average is 2.1), which means that students do not regard educational performance as a key factor for later life and a successful career. Our more detailed qualitative research has shown that students do think education is very important; yet, they have also claimed that proper connections and acquaintances are essential for gaining employment in the first place. Therefore, this low connection between school performance and success in later life could also be a sign of the decreasing opportunities in the labour market in recent years.

All things considered, we could interpret these results by saying that the majority of students regard school as something quite self-evident; likewise, it seems that students perceive pressures at school as simply belonging to

school rather than understanding them as something extraordinary, external or even compulsory. In addition, we could suppose that the majority of students find enough satisfaction at school with the help of which they are able to balance the increasing pressures and demands of school workload and performance.

Further, it is important to emphasise that we should not “dramatise” poor school performance. This particular “failure” is only dramatic if it results in a general “failure” in life (Millner, 1992: 44). And this can happen sooner if a lack of success is mythologised and when an unsuccessful child has fewer opportunities to compensate these deficiencies or failures which could prevent a negative self-image emerging and stabilising itself in a child’s perception.

Worries about the future

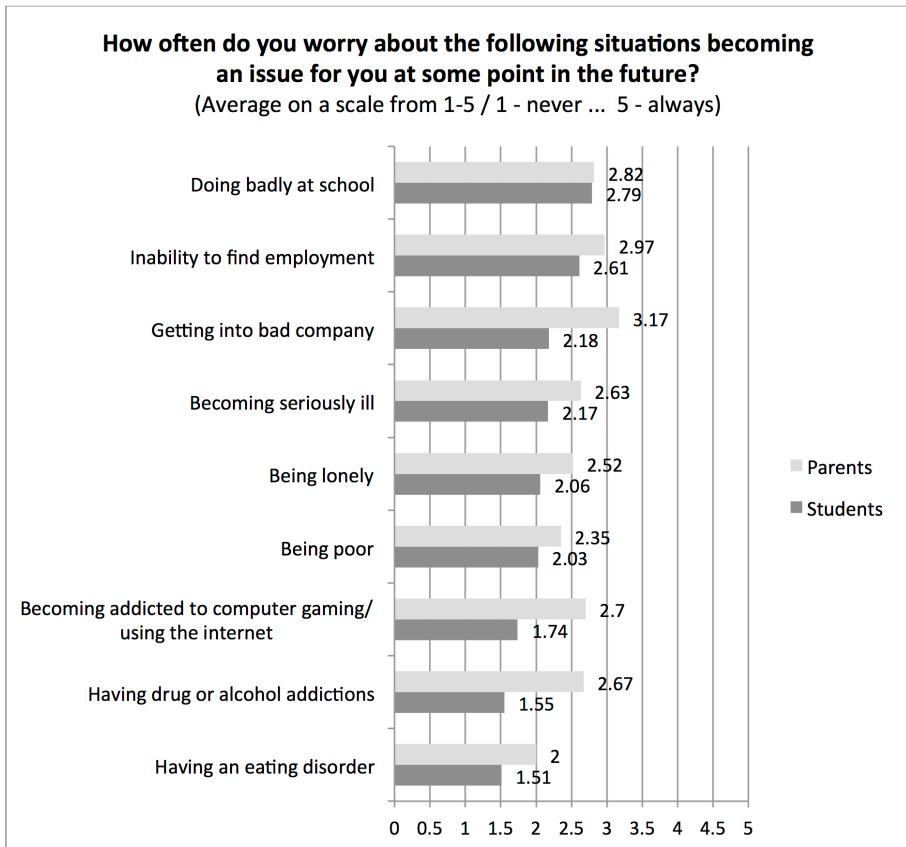
The actual importance of school performance is also confirmed by a review of the students’ most frequent worries; “*doing badly in school*” is their first worry on the worries listed in *Graph 3* below. We assume that this fear is so strong also because school performance is also so important for their parents⁴.

It seems that school performance is seen as the only way to ensure “a passport to a different future” as stated by Jackson (in Blyth and Milner 1996: 77), hence the parental worries for their children’s success in school. The second biggest worry of students is the “*inability to find employment*”, which is quite reasonable and not so surprising considering the instability and uncertainty of current labour market trends, but it could also be interpreted as a sign of parental influence and worries, which could be transferred to the children. Yet, the third biggest fear of “*getting into bad company*” is not so rational since it suggests that students themselves believe they have no control over who their friends or companions are or will be in the future. This finding is only sensible if we compare it with parental worries; their fears that their children will get into bad company are even higher and, in fact, is their number one worry. It is not so surprising that parents have this fear as it is usually difficult for them to try to control their children’s company and friends, although children do choose their friends by themselves. Therefore, it is precisely this finding (supported by students’ fear of unemployment) that tells us how strongly children actually identify with the viewpoints and fears of their parents in the present time. If we add that students are surprisingly highly satisfied with their parents (*Graph 1*), then we could

⁴ In the list of indicators (*Graph 3*) this is also the only indicator where the worries of parents and students are relatively equated. For all the other indicators the parents’ worries are considerably higher.

say that the relationship between parents and children is indeed changing from the traditional authority relationship towards a friendlier, more mutual relationship.

Graph 3: WORRIES ABOUT THE FUTURE (COMPARISON BETWEEN STUDENTS AND PARENTS)



Source: Ule et al., GOETE research; Students (N = 725), Parents (N = 419)

Here we were also interested in which of these elements are most related to each other and which have the strongest loadings within given dimensions. Factorisation reveals two factors; factor 1 shows the dimension of *socio-economic fears*, while factor 2 above all shows the *fear of illness and various addictions*. In addition, this model has a considerably high share of explained variance (61%); but with one difference, namely, the first factor is notably more dominant than the second since it explains 35% of the variance, while the second explains 25%.

Table 2: FACTOR ANALYSIS: STUDENTS' WORRIES

Component	Factor 1: Socio-economic fears	Factor 2: Fear of illness or addictions
Doing badly at school	0.81	
Inability to find employment	0.80	
Being poor	0.70	0.41
Getting into bad company	0.69	
Being lonely	0.66	
Becoming seriously ill	0.59	0.45
Becoming addicted to computer gaming/using the internet		0.78
Having drug or alcohol addictions		0.76
Having an eating disorder		0.74
Variance Explained - (Total 61 %)	35.5%	25.7%

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.

Regarding the overall estimation of the students' satisfaction, it seems, first, that factor 1 is more important (also considering its strength), second, within this factor the first two indicators explain the most and, third, the first two indicators "doing badly in school" and "inability to find employment" also turn out to be the students' biggest worries on the summary level. These findings will also be considered when it comes to selecting variables for an overall index of satisfaction.

An attempt to create an overall index of students' general satisfaction

In order not to derive our interpretation solely from points' assessments of elements which are related to the satisfaction triangle of personal satisfaction, satisfaction with parents or family and satisfaction in school, we tried to form an overall index of students' general satisfaction which is comprised of elements from these contents blocks; however, not all in a sum, but only specifically chosen elements. We thus included those indicators which are either directly related to satisfaction or indirectly related, but have the highest loadings within the stated block (e.g. the estimation of school circumstances, worries about the future). Here we employed the results of the factor analysis and the loadings ascribed to each variable. We therefore included the following indicators (with values on a positive pole of the given scales):

- *How did you feel in the last week? / Have you felt fit and well? (+)*
- *How did you feel in the last week? / Have you got on well at school? (+)*

- *Over the last week, how often... / Have your parent(s) treated you fairly?* (+)
- *How have you felt about school over the past 12 months?* (+)
- *I do not want to go to school.* (-)
- *I make friends easily.* (+)
- *Compared to other students, how well do you expect to do in school this year?* (+)
- *Inability to find employment* (+)
- *Doing badly in school* (+)

The overall index of satisfaction, which reflects the general climate of students' satisfaction, is shown in the table below. The index points range from 0 to 9. The overall assessment for the whole sample is 5.73, which is significantly above the middle of the index range. This confirms the above-mentioned finding about the general relative satisfaction of the surveyed generation. In any case, we can see that deviations for specific subpopulations indisputably exist. They are expected and significant, but are here only shown in an illustrative manner⁵.

We should particularly mention the differences in the cases of health, employment of parents (especially where both parents are without a permanent employment) and the education of parents (especially the father's). Although we have seen that a fear of illness is not a main concern of students, we should emphasise that those students who do not estimate their health as very good demonstrate significantly lower satisfaction (average 4.20 – not so good and 4.99 – good) compared to the clear majority of the student population who assess their health as very good (average 5.99). Similar significant differences are noted for the group of students where both parents are without permanent employment (average 5.00). Their perception or fear of social deprivation is shown in the quite considerable deviation since the average value of those students whose both parents are permanently employed is 5.87. This is analogous to the case of the parents' education. Although we are talking about a relatively small share of the population, for instance, when looking at students whose father has a primary education (N = 36), we should not neglect the relatively obvious differences in expressing satisfaction. Students whose father has a primary education have an average value of 4.86, while the average among students whose father has a secondary education is 5.70 or is 5.77 if his education is high⁶.

⁵ *A structural analysis of the satisfaction of this generation surely deserves special attention, but the purpose (which measures above all general portray of a generation) and the limited space of this issue do not allow it.*

⁶ *For all of the abovementioned comparisons the distinctive structural differences were confirmed by statistical tests.*

Table 3: OVERALL INDEX OF SATISFACTION (AVERAGE VALUES ACCORDING TO SELECTED SUBCATEGORIES)

Indicator		Average value in index of satisfaction (0-9 points)	N
Sex	Male	5.60	345
	Female	5.84	377
Nationality	Slovenian	5.78	564
	Other	5.55	161
Health	Not so good	4.20	50
	Good	4.99	98
	Very good	5.99	565
Number of close friends	None	5.11	9
	One	4.88	25
	Two	5.29	59
	Three or more	5.81	632
Family type	Two parents	5.79	547
	Other	5.56	178
Employment of parents	Permanent, full employment – both	5.87	434
	Permanent, full employment – one	5.82	184
	Without permanent, full employment – both	5.00	107
Education / mother	Primary	5.28	43
	Secondary	5.70	252
	Higher	5.64	138
	High or more	6.05	243
Education / father	Primary	4.86	36
	Secondary	5.70	248
	Higher	5.77	147
	High or more	6.05	227
Environment / City	Murska Sobota	5.49	208
	Koper	5.81	271
	Ljubljana	5.85	246
OVERALL	WHOLE SAMPLE	5.73	725

Key findings of the statistical analysis

To sum up the empirical results we could say that this generation of primary school students presents itself in a relatively “bright” way which is to some extent in contradiction with the general expectations of the researchers who assume that young people are in a relatively unenviable situation in the light of modern uncertainties and insecurities. Students are generally quite satisfied with the most important conditions of their present life; they feel well, are happy with school and are very satisfied with their parents. Moreover, despite some recognised doubts, they generally believe school success is some sort of a “ticket” to later success in life, which is supported by their worries of doing badly in school being their second biggest worry in general; although they are also mostly quite optimistic about their own performance. On the other hand, they are least satisfied with their employment possibilities but, as already mentioned, this is probably a direct consequence of the employment crises seen in the last two years. Their overall satisfaction level is high, although a detailed analysis reveals that classical socio-economic indicators or conditions (e.g. employment and education) still have a considerable influence on the general well-being of students and are still predicting economic and social stratification in society.

Concluding discussion

The theoretical model of the productive processing of social reality that was presented in the introductory part treats a young person as a productive processor of reality on three distinctive levels of reality: personal, interpersonal and social. These realities are at the same time also three contexts of social development. A characteristic of contemporary societies is that all three systems work simultaneously, one alongside the other, and each in relation to its own intrinsic logic transfers its systemic needs onto individuals who have to find their own way in sometimes contradictory social circumstances, discourses and influences.

Young people are thus, so to speak, forced to “create” or “puzzle” their own social rules, orientations and identities as they go along. But this demands the development of a high level of abilities, as well as a considerably high rate of reflexivity and personal flexibility. Another important specific feature of modern youth is that increasingly more uncertainties and possible threats are coming from expectations for the future, putting additional pressures on young people’s present lives. At the same time, the meaning of social or socialisation obstacles of the past (e.g. various traditions, authorities) is diminishing. Today, the *managing* of one’s own life (from inside to outside) is taking the place of old ideologies and authorities which

previously tried to manage the lives of individuals (from outside to inside). Ulrich Beck was right when saying: *Socialization is now possible only as self-socialization* (Beck, 1997: 272). This is probably the most decisive specific of modern youth compared to traditional youth which could only hardly, if at all, maintain an autonomous attitude and where society tried to prevent it with all available means and to hold youth “under the surveillance” of various pedagogical programmes. Above all, society attempted to decide instead of young people and to model them according to the patterns of predetermined social class, gender or other accepted social identities.

It therefore seems that today young people have been given an opportunity to self-determine themselves and their lives. However, we should emphasise that this is not only an *opportunity* but simultaneously already a *demand* of the modern world. Moreover, prolonged education and perpetual searching for “thysself” which is chiefly limited to the spheres of education, private consumption and free-time activities, can also create an even greater “infantilisation of youth” (Epstein, 2007). Yet these negative effects are not simply an automatic result of this distinct situation where “studying youth is excluded from the sphere of work”, but are the consequence of other important factors. One of these is the regression and withdrawal of the present youth culture and youth scenes from the agents of youth solidarity, the cultivation of collective critical reflexivity and social innovations, to the media of fun, entertainment and consumer lifestyles (Skelton and Valentine, 1998). In this case, young people cannot find support for their productive processing of adolescent identity crises but, instead, find support for an unreflective retreat into the world of privacy, individual consumption and taking care of their personal life-course and career.

This “privatism” is also manifested in striving for independence from the external world and high appraisal of the orderly private world and family of origin. As shown by other researches, above all by the German Schell Studies, this attitude particularly relates to social conformity and non-critical optimism (Hurrelmann and Matthias, 2006). “*Self-affirmation*” is a complex aspiration which in itself unites and merges tendencies of youth to withdraw from social constraints, their desire for autonomy, inclinations towards a fantasy world and dreams and also feelings of self-alienation and social pessimism. Therefore, the characteristic of self-affirmation is a seemingly contradictory combination of, on one hand, feelings of social pressure and determinations and, on the other, the tendency to assert oneself despite these pressures. In general, privatism is regarded as socially passive, while self-affirmation is seen as a socially active pattern of societal orientation. Both types of individualisms are primarily connected by a high valuing of interpersonal relations, personal autonomy and free personal development. Therefore, in the conditions of late modernity the “ideology of intimacy”

could prevail on the level of social relations, while on the subjective level a tendency towards narcissistic subject structures could prevail (Ziehe, 1991).

Our research results also show that young people are truly responding to the modern contradictions with a somewhat non-conflict attitude, even with, in a way a relatively optimistic, distance towards the world and social reality. We could say that the prevailing strategy of coping with reality is a new “updated” version of “*muddling through*”, a new individualistic approach in finding a path through problems of growing up and transitions to adulthood. The new version of “muddling through” is not as rigid as that defined by Heitmeyer and Hurrelmann (1992), but involves softer, more flexible muddling through in the search for a “normal life”. Young people feel relatively good and their expectations and aspirations are not expansive but more defensive. They are indeed oscillating between two strategies; one is a withdrawal into privacy, the other is a need for self-affirmation. These are two modes of individualisation which are mutually intertwining and are not only manifesting themselves in pure forms. Between them there is a whole array of mixed and mingled attitudes, e.g. repressed youth utopias in apparent distanced forms of social flexibility (to be “cool”), incessant circulation among various scenes without firm central grounds, occasional “fundamentalisms” of various sorts etc.

The results of our research are inclined more towards passive forms of social orienting and to some sort of non-critical optimism. Other researchers in Europe also report an increasing tendency and desire of young people to be simply “usual” or “normal”. They take things as they are and want a “usual life”, “usual way of schooling”, and “usual employment” (Beck, 1997). This desire towards normality may also be understood as a withdrawal from the terror of modern times of crises, but it could also be a reaction of coming generations to the changed socio-economic conditions. It may be that “normality” has become something that is very hard to achieve. It could be a refuge from the “terror of individualisation”. And if we think about what “normalisation” could mean in the future, we could suppose it might signify a farewell from all activities which lie beyond the individual in their own, concrete and everyday life situation.

Moreover, the tendency towards “normalisation” could also be an innovative response of young people to the contradictions of new modernisation regardless of the fact that it is no longer manifested through perceivable or traditionally understood social movements. Instead, they have responded in their own way to the contemporary challenges of post-industrial modernisation. If these findings are accurate, this means that new generations of young people are processing social reality in a way that only few can expect or predict.

However, this attitude is anything but a comprehensive moral of life

ideal. It is not supported in a traditional way, by firm or manifest moral principles or universal views on the world, but above all it is supported by a capacity to stand up straight over and over again, to arouse enough healthy feelings of self-worth inside oneself and to set one's own life goals which are worthy following or even fighting for. Further, it contains enough moral sensibility to act altruistically and without hesitation, if needed. And it is precisely this capacity or ability which is already very important today for all generations, but it will become even more so in the future.

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