Chapter 5

The Central Importance of the Mladina Series

Researching Youth and Young People in Slovenia

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Key milestones in the development of Youth research in Slovenia:

1986: Mladina ‘85

1995: Mladina ‘93

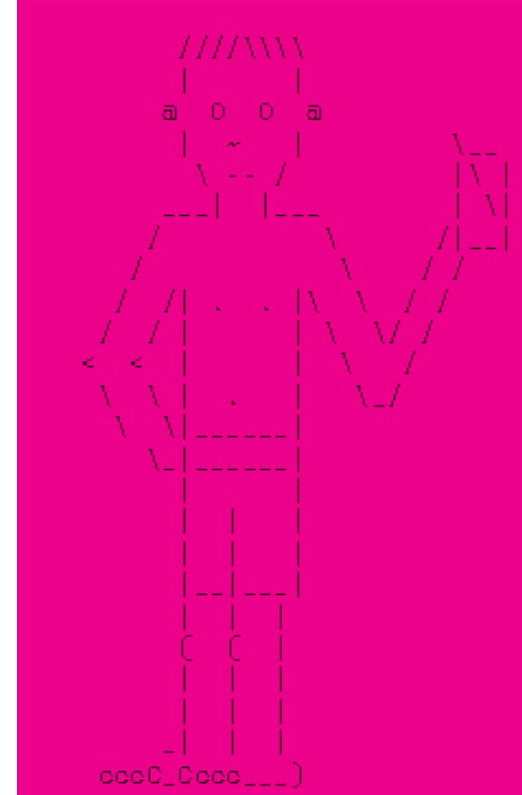
2000: Mladina ‘98

2002: Mladina 2000

2011: Mladina 2010

2014: Slovenska Mladina 2013

2021: Mladina 2020



Young people are defined as a social group in a range of different ways, but the starting point for many of the definitions is what they are not. Comparisons are drawn with other groups, such as children and adults, with the aim of drawing out the differences between them. According to Mirjana Ule and Vlado Miheljak, young people are ‘a generational group situated between childhood and adulthood, characterised by the creation of their own world, one that adults are unable to steer and control in their own way’ (Ule and Miheljak, 1995), while the Council of Europe’s framework definition refers to young people as individuals aged between 15 and 29 — which means that there have been two full generations of young people in the three and a half decades since Slovenia became an independent country. The Slovenian Office for Youth (Urad RS za mladino) and the other institutions that have developed since independence monitor this age group and the population changes within it, usually in the form of studies supported by research organisations at home and abroad.

Numerous studies have set out to describe Slovenian youth, with the earliest of them being produced when the country was still part of Yugoslavia. The research originally took the form of monographs, most notably *Mladina in ideologija* (Youth and Ideology, Ule (1988)),[1] *Prihodnost mladine* (The Future of Young People, Ule and Miheljak (1995)), *Predah za študentsko mladino* (Breathing Space for Slovenian Youth, ed. Ule (1996)), *Mladina v devetdesetih: Analiza stanja v Sloveniji* (Young People in the 1990s: An Analysis of the Situation in Slovenia, Ule (1996)), *Prosti čas mladih v Ljubljani* (Young People’s Leisure Time in Ljubljana, Ule and Rener (1998)) and *Socialna ranljivost mladih* (The Social Vulnerability of Young People, ed. Ule (2000)). These have since been followed by systematic research studies of young people mainly centred around the ‘Mladina’ (Youth) series: Mladina 2000 (Miheljak, 2002), Mladina 2010 (Lavrič et al., 2011), Slovenska Mladina 2013 (Flere et al., 2014) and Mladina 2020 (Lavrič and Deželan, 2021).

Slovenian youth research in the last century

An extensive research study, *Položaj, svest i ponašanje mlade generacije Jugoslavije* (Vrcan, 1986), was produced by CIDID Beograd and IDIS Zagreb in the 1980s.[2] Of the approximately 6,500 young people included in the standardised sample, just over 500 were from Slovenia (Ule and Vrcan, 1986). This prompted Slovenian researchers to produce their own separate study, which focused exclusively on young people in Slovenia and had its own national funding sources. The research was conducted in 1985 and 1986 at the Institute of Criminology the Ljubljana Faculty of Law (Ule, 1988) and produced two studies: a quantitative study of the values and lifestyles of young people in Slovenia, and a qualitative study that examined the discussions around youth that had been published in the *Mladina* and *Tribuna* journals between 1944 and 1985. In-depth interviews were also held with representatives of the social movements of the time.

In the literature, the title ‘Mladina ‘85’ is used to refer to both studies. In her *Mladina in ideologija* (Youth and Ideology, 1988), Mirjana Ule drew on their findings, focusing on topics such as the concept of youth through history, youth as an ideological

1 A large part of this monograph was given over to a discussion of the Mladina ‘85 study, which was the first in the ongoing ‘Mladina’ series.

2 Centar za istraživačku, dokumentacionu in izdavačku djelatnost predsedništav konferencije SSOJ (CIDID, Centre for Research, Documentation and Publishing Activities of the Presidency of the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia); Institut za istraživanja Sveučilišta v Zagrebu (IDIS, Institute of Research at the University of Zagreb).

construct, youth and discipline, images of contemporary Slovenian youth and their values, young people's approaches to and attitudes towards politics, and the 'modernisation' of youth. She also touched on the themes of youth subcultures, individualism among the young and attitudes towards the Relay of Youth,[3] all of which served to point up the differences between young people in Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia. The Slovenian respondents showed less desire to be involved in official social and political organisations than their Yugoslav peers, and indeed were less active within them. The more critical attitude towards the system displayed by Slovenian youth became known as 'alternativism'; this was the overarching term for a range of social practices that took place outside the scope of official politics. It was also evident in the differences in the way Slovenian young people and their peers from the other Yugoslav republics perceived social and youth-related problems. Slovenian youth were not so acutely affected by economic problems or by issues like unemployment; instead they focused on other problems of a more 'systemic' nature.

When Slovenia became independent in 1991, young people accounted for 22.47% of the population, down from 24.2% a decade earlier. This fall continued, to 22.24% in 1994. Mladina '93 (Ule, 1993), the first extensive post-independence study of young people in Slovenia, was related in concept to Mladina '85 (Ule and Vrcan, 1986) and the Shell Youth Study.[4] It was conducted by the youth studies section of the Centre for Social Psychology, which was based at the Social Sciences Research Institute at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FDV) in Ljubljana. The researchers focused on young people in secondary education in all 12 school regions. Three groups of four-year programmes and three groups of three-year programmes were included in the representative sample on a region-by-region basis, along with two groups of two-year programmes in each region. Only those areas that had all the courses and programmes specified in the sample were selected for the study. Owing to the special research interests that were also incorporated into the study, the sample was expanded to include Hungarian- and Italian-language schools, and schools in the Ljubljana region. The average age of the respondents was 17.7 years, with 70% identifying as being of Slovenian nationality. The survey was conducted at an inopportune time, coinciding as it did with the final days of the academic year and the school strike that took place in the last week of May and the first week of June 1993. For the purpose of the study, and because the level of response was less than ideal, two-year programmes were merged with three-year programmes. The sample sizes were nevertheless regarded as solid.

The authors (Ule and Miheljak, 1995) expressed the hope that this would signal the start of a systematic engagement with youth research of the kind seen in developed European countries (and indeed in other parts of the former Yugoslavia). In the first section, Mirjana Ule discussed concepts relating to youth and young people, placing them within a theoretical context; in the second, she reviewed and interpreted the results of the study, which she categorised into individual sets of concerns. She was interested in young people's attitudes towards growing up and adulthood,

3 The Relay of Youth (*štafeta mladosti*) was a relay race held every year in socialist Yugoslavia in honour of Tito's birthday.

4 The Shell Youth Studies, which are funded by Shell, the energy and petrochemical company, have been conducted in Germany since 1953. Designed to document the perceptions, feelings and expectations of young people, they are carried out by independent research institutions (Hertie School, 2019).

authoritarianism, traditionalism and nationalism, values and interests, social changes, and the problems they faced, particularly in relation to employment. In post-Second World War Yugoslav society, the role of young people was integrative and oriented towards productivity; in Slovenia as well, the image of young people was a positive one in the years following the war. From the end of the 1970s, however, research indicated that a more 'individualistic' path towards adulthood, i.e. one that was not essentially connected to affiliation with youth or other groups, was gaining ground (Ule and Miheljak, 1995: 76). The role of young people was also changing at this time. In the 1990s, Slovenian youth regarded moral virtue and personal characteristics as two of the values most important to them. Social characteristics, such as education and nationality, were seen as less important, and religious faith and political conviction even less so (Ule and Miheljak, 1995). In the third section, Vlado Miheljak focused on young people's attitudes towards politics and (the new) political practices, mainly at the level of opinions and values.

The Mladina '85 and Mladina '93 studies both showed that two-thirds of young people wanted to remain young for a while longer, or for as long as possible. In 1993 a relatively large proportion of young people were unable to determine how they felt about youth and adulthood, with around 10% still feeling that youth was merely the period of transition to adulthood, and one through which they wished to pass as quickly as possible (Ule and Miheljak, 1995).

Mladina v devetdesetih: Analiza stanja v Sloveniji (Young People in the 1990s: An Analysis of the Situation in Slovenia, Ule (1996)) was drafted for the Office for Youth and served as a national report on young people in Slovenia. Taking the form of a collection of papers by experts in the field, it arose as a response to the Council of Europe's work in the youth field; as such, it was the first to deal with young people as a single group of individuals aged between 15 and 29. Eleven papers discussed topics such as education and employment, values, political culture, health, lifestyles, standards and family status, and criminal activity.

The generation characterised as 'young' in the 1990s experienced its childhood and part of its adolescence at a time when socialism was collapsing. Although they had inherited constant economic growth and a rise in living standards from the older generations, they subsequently encountered unemployment, pressing environmental problems and the information revolution — something their parents had not known. In the first post-independence decade, young people mainly experienced a period of multiple transitions; this was in stark contrast to the decade before that, when they had fought for change and tried to prepare themselves for it. The study was carried out by researchers at the youth studies department of the Centre for Social Psychology at FDV. They relied on official statistical data, complemented by various public opinion surveys and studies previously carried out by the Institute for Social Sciences at FDV. The illustrative graphical presentations and tables of data, with accompanying analyses, were the first in a series of projects that the authors hoped would establish a consistent and growing structure of information on young people in Slovenia.

Predah za študentsko mladino (Breathing Space for Slovenian Youth, Ule et al. (1996)) referred to this study as Mladina '95. To some degree it complemented Mladina '93, as it surveyed young people who were three or four years older than those in the earlier study, although it restricted itself to students in post-secondary education (the 1993 study had focused on secondary school students). The first part of the monograph outlined the 'life world' of Slovenian youth, addressing topics such

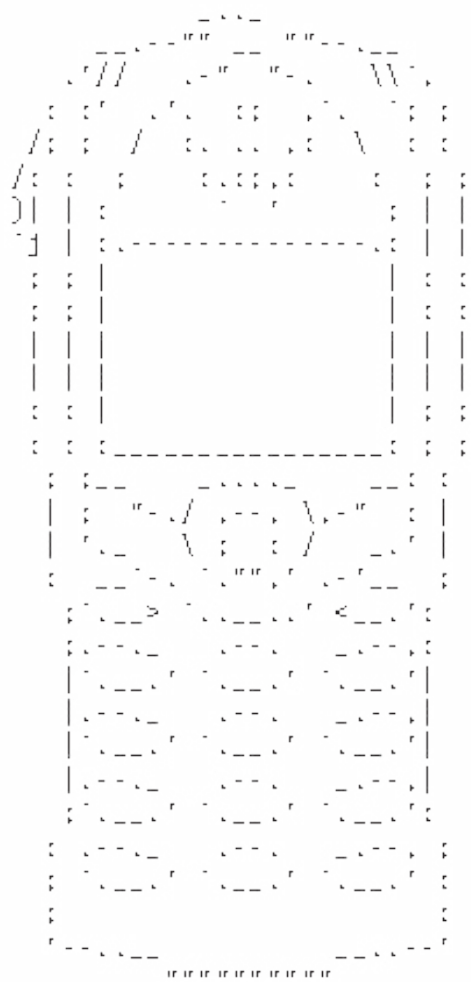
as prolonging youth, identity in post-adolescence, the status of students as a youth elite, cultural modernisation, social circumstances, youth-related problems such as unemployment, attitudes towards adulthood, shifts in values, the triumvirate of authoritarianism, traditionalism and national affiliation, interest in religion, and interests in general. The second part looked at the family and young people's attitudes towards it, with a focus on topics such as the breakthroughs made in socialisation theory in the 1960s, citizenship post Marshall, 'Living Apart Together', generational and inter-generational peace, and family support, while the third part dealt with students' political potential through topics such as immanent radicalism, egalitarianism, trust, heritage, values, self-identification as left or right, positive or negative preferences, the values of the past, and public issues. The fourth and final part briefly examined discrimination based on sexual preference. The monograph compared the Mladina '95 data with the data from Mladina '93, from Slovenian public opinion surveys and from several international studies.

Young people in the new millennium

Mladina 2000

The research of the 1990s continued into the new millennium with the Mladina 2000 study (Miheljak, 2002), which aimed to provide a general overview of the younger generation in Slovenia. It targeted young people who had permanent residence in Slovenia and were aged between 16 and 29 on 20 October 2000.[5] Field research was conducted by the Centre for Social Psychology at FDV in the form of face-to-face interviews in the respondent's home, mainly by FDV students with no particular experience in conducting research surveys. A total of 1,262 interviews took place.

The study focused on political beliefs and on attitudes towards politics and democracy after ten years of transition. The researchers were also interested in young people's shopping habits, social contacts, general habits, activities and leisure, values, and attitudes towards school and parents, as well as their own assessments of the problems they faced. The findings were divided into the categories of family, education, work, politics and everyday life. In the family category, the research showed a decline in parental authority and, at the same time, a strengthening of the position of young people within the family. The average age at marriage had risen, as had the number of young people living alone or opting for cohabitation without marriage. Education had gained in importance, primarily as a gateway to employment and adulthood. More young



5 Young people on military service, in hospital or serving sentences in correctional facilities were excluded from the study.

people were opting to remain in education for longer in order to gain more advanced educational qualifications, improve their employment prospects and/or delay their entry into an uncertain jobs market (Miheljak and Ule, 2001: 51). In the world of work and employment, new links were arising between education, employment (and unemployment) and lifelong learning. There had also been an increase in the importance of individual self-realisation through the practice of a profession.

Averaged across their responses, young people believed that 22.3 years was an appropriate age for first full-time employment, 23.79 years for leaving the parental home, 27.01 years for becoming a parent for the first time and 27.18 years for getting married. The study showed that some transitions had stopped following the traditional pattern — for example, marriage was increasingly coming after parenthood. The researchers found that the 'grand narratives' presented by ideological and faith systems (e.g. religion) appeared to be dead and that young people no longer built their values around them (Miheljak and Ule, 2001: 53). For them, health, true friendship, family life and global values (world peace, freedom of action and thought, environmental protection) were more important. At the same time, the survey indicated that levels of participation in conventional electoral politics were lower than before, and that young people were less inclined to trust political parties and leading politicians. They placed their greatest trust in parents, followed by siblings and friends. In everyday life, fashion, sex and communication, the behavioural patterns presented by the media and then introduced by peer groups tended to dominate young people's lives. The media revolution and new technologies were bringing about global changes and beginning to play an important roles in young people's lives. Their central problem was no longer 'Who am I?' but 'How should I appear to others?' The results of the study confirmed the basic hypothesis: that young people were changing their identity and assuming other social roles.

Mladina 2010

The next important systematic research study of Slovenian youth appeared ten years later. Conducted by the Maribor Faculty of Arts in collaboration with the Interstat company, it expanded the age range slightly, to young people aged between 15 and 29 (previously 16 to 29), and was a conceptual and methodological continuation of the tradition of youth research in Slovenia. The main issues tackled by the study were: demographic changes and intergenerational cooperation; education and training; creativity; culture; leisure; the 'virtualisation' of daily life; employment and enterprise; a sustainable society; living and housing conditions; health and well-being; participation and social inclusion; voluntary activities; mobility; and globalisation. The sample was selected on the basis of data from the Slovenian central population register, and the target population was stratified into 12 statistical regions and six types of settlement. A total of 1,257 young people were surveyed (the sample had originally been set at 2,000, with a 60% response rate expected). Data was collected at face-to-face field interviews carried out between 27 June and 24 September 2010. The researchers also sought to draw longitudinal and international comparisons, particularly with other EU Member States (EU-27).

Mladina 2010 uncovered a strong trend of individualism among young people, where the prevailing belief seemed to be that everyone was responsible for themselves and for their own transition to adulthood. It found that the number of young people was falling in Slovenia — in fact, it had fallen by 11% in ten years. In comparison

with the EU-27, a higher proportion of young people in Slovenia were in education, although they tended to express dissatisfaction with the fact that the education system did not seem to be aligned with the needs of the labour market. The proportion of young people in full-time permanent employment had declined: in 2000 it was around 60% of 29-year-olds, but was down to 48% by 2010 (cf. Figure 1, Lavrič et al., 2011: 17).

The position of young people at the time of the study was defined by a combination of strong family support, prolonged participation in the education system and uncertainty on the jobs market. Other data sources showed that young people in Slovenia were among the last to leave the parental home compared to other EU-27 countries. Independence also had an impact on fertility, as a larger proportion of young people who lived away from the parental home had already had at least one child by age 29 compared to those who still lived with their parents. Opinions of political elites had deteriorated significantly, and young people had less of a sense of their own political influence. In fact, in comparison with the average for the EU-27, young people in Slovenia were significantly less interested in politics and political activism. That said, it is possible to see the period in which the study was produced as a time in which the potential for protest had strengthened, with greater engagement in individualised forms of political participation. As in the Mladina 2000 study, young people displayed a low level of trust in political structures, although they had become more active in voluntary work, mainly in the form of campaigns aimed at improving the position of young people.

The Mladina 2010 study identified an increase in computer use among young people, with 82% reporting that they used the internet (almost) every day. This was higher than the figure for both the EU-15 and the EU-27. However, young people were also devoting more time to sport and to cultural and artistic creation than they had been in 2000. Another interesting key finding was that young people remained as optimistic about their future as they had been 15 years earlier, and had not become more pessimistic (or less optimistic) about the future of society. It is not surprising that there was a heightened degree of dissatisfaction given the period in which the study was conducted: money was scarce, housing problems acute employment uncertain.

Young people in the last 15 years

The Slovenian research community has continued to produce insights into the status and position of Slovenian youth over the last decade. Two larger studies worthy of mention here are *Slovenska Mladina 2013: Življenje v času deziluzij, tveganja in prekarnosti* (Slovenian Youth 2013: Living in Times of Disillusionment, Risk and Precarity, Flere et al., 2014) and the Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019 (Jusić, Lavrič and Tomanović, 2019). The most recent study, Mladina 2020 (Lavrič and Deželan, 2021), addressed young people as independent Slovenia moved into its fourth decade.

Slovenska Mladina 2013

The Slovenska Mladina 2013 research study focused on young people aged between 16 and 27, basing its methodology on the Mladina 2010 study. It sought to obtain a comprehensive picture of how young people in Slovenia lived, but also to offer insights into the lives of young people in Croatia (IDIZ-FES Croatian 2012 Youth Study) and Kosovo (IDRA-FES Kosovo 2012 Youth Study). Data from Germany, specifically the 16th Shell Youth Study from 2011, was also used for comparison purposes. The data was collected between 29 May and 20 July 2013 by the Centre for Research into Post-Yugoslav Societies at the University of Maribor and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, FES). The main areas of focus were determined by the FES research committee, which commissioned the study. They included: young people's living conditions and socio-economic situation; employment and mobility; education; leisure and lifestyle; media use; health, health-risk behaviours and lifestyle; family; anxieties and aspirations; trust and belonging; politics and democracy; and governance and development.

The target population was young people aged between 16 and 27 in 2012 (according to the national statistical office, this population numbered 282,194 at that time). Nine hundred young people were included in the study, and face-to-face interviews were conducted between 29 May and 20 July 2013. The questionnaire comprised oral and written sections.

At the time the study was conducted, Slovenia was undergoing a deep economic crisis; this could not help but have an impact on the final findings. This crisis and the recession it caused affected young people mainly by limiting their employment opportunities. This should be understood as the basic feature of social and economic conditions at the time of the study, with Slovenian young people suffering precarity in living conditions as well as employment. The proportion of young people in full-time or permanent employment had been falling since 1991, but the trend sharpened at this time. The impact was felt more keenly by women, and included those with postgraduate degrees — a group that had seldom previously been faced with unemployment. Young people's earnings originated from permanent employment to a diminishing degree, unemployment rose and wages stagnated. The effect of education on employment prospects became less positive and the Slovenian jobs market remained heavily segmented. Despite all this, the social position of young people could not be characterised across the board as poor or in decline. While some aspects of their social lives had deteriorated, others had improved.

Young people in Slovenia were gradually becoming more and more involved in education, particularly at postgraduate level, with Slovenia even reaching the top of several of the relevant EU rankings. Their private lives were generally free of any particular burdens or obstacles; the majority of families offered understanding and support, in housing and other areas. Although Slovenia was in recession, this family support was aided by a decade of progressive family home construction. Relationships with parents were not placed under strain by old-fashioned restrictions, which (generally) helps to create the conditions for freer relations with peers and partners.

However, young people displayed significant levels of political dissatisfaction and pessimism about the future of society at the time of the study. This negative assessment of politics and democracy was part of the general picture across Slovenia in a period marked by the protest movements of 2012 and 2013, which argued strongly that the political system had lost its legitimacy. In defending their social position, young people in Slovenia were not without political power, as shown by the Slovenian Student Union (Slovenska študentska organizacija), which was an active advocate of their interests. Young people remained largely satisfied with their conditions of life and were, in the main, looked after by the social security system, the education system and their families. One of the conclusions reached by the research team was that young people were coming to terms with the idea of casual and fragmented work.

Young people were making full use of the opportunities provided by the new means of communication and new media, which were also having an impact on their lives.

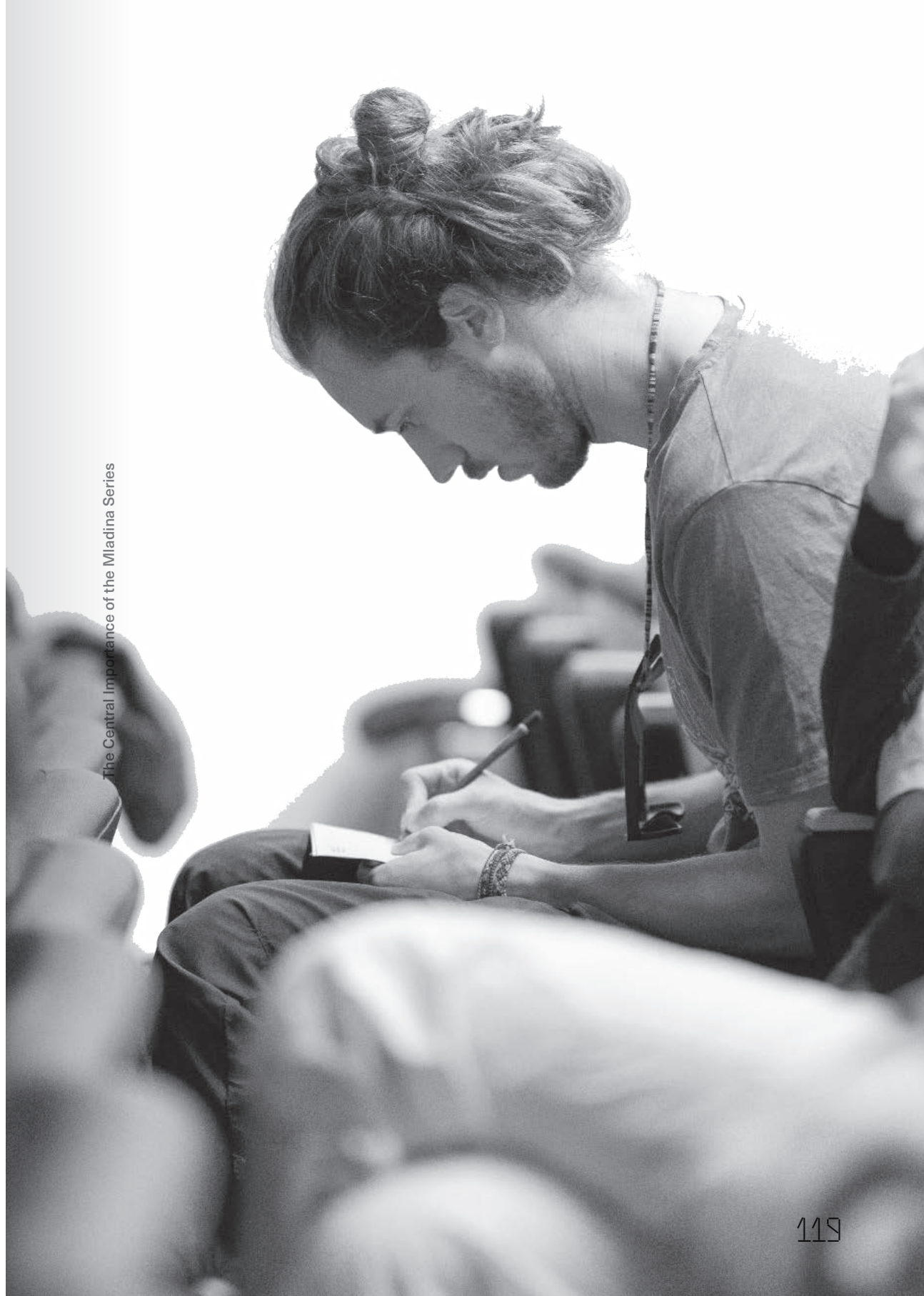
This was also part of the drive towards individualism detected in previous research, with the highest value being placed on 'career' and 'independence' (cf. Mladina '85 and Mladina 2010). Slovenian young people opted for less binding forms of relationship than their peers in Croatia, although the institution of marriage was still felt to be the priority. In general, inequality had increased in Slovenia while remaining at a relatively low level; social inequality within the Slovenian youth population was to some extent hidden by the expansion and promotion of higher education and by the social support measures available to young people. In contrast to the relatively good position enjoyed by Slovenian youth, there had been a deterioration in the process of transition to adulthood as a result of the difficulty in finding (stable) employment. As one of the main forms of youth employment, precarity was already affecting a solid portion of the adult population at the time the study was conducted; and if young people accepted this situation at their time of life, this would mean changes to their adult lives as well. The proportion of young adults (aged between 24 and 27) almost halved in comparison with 2000 (71.4% vs 40.6% in 2013). At the same time, more young people were staying on in education, and supplementing their income with temporary employment and student work.

Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019

More than 10,000 young people aged between 14 and 29 took part in this study of ten South-East European countries,[6] which was commissioned by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. It was the second major study of young people in the region after the FES Youth Studies SEE 2011–15. This new study enabled comparisons to be drawn between changes across the region. Young people responded to survey questions on education, employment, political participation, the family, leisure and ICT use, and values, attitudes and worldviews.

Young people in South-East Europe continued to face high levels of unemployment and precarious working conditions, with a high proportion of NEETs (individuals not in employment, education or training). These figures were particularly high in the countries of the Western Balkans (the Western Balkan Six or WB6), and young people were also faced with anxieties relating to unemployment. Those living in the WB6 reported that they prized public sector employment highly, where membership of a political party was an important precondition for securing a job. Young people from less privileged social backgrounds found it harder to access higher levels of education, take part in social or political activities, become involved in activities in aid of their personal growth and development, use ICT for their educational and information needs, and find suitable employment. Corruption in the education system had always been a feature of all countries of South-East Europe, but had risen in the five years leading up to the study. Tolerance of informal practices, such as use of connections, bribery or tax fraud, was relatively high among young people in the region, and had increased considerably since 2008. A large majority of young people supported the welfare state, particularly those from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds, and there were fairly high levels of support among young people in South-Eastern Europe for 'political leaders who govern the country with a strong hand for the public good'. Indeed, this belief had strengthened since 2008.

6 Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Romania, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia.



Young people from EU Member States emigrated from their countries of origin less than those whose countries had not yet joined the EU. Young people in the region were generally pro-European, but the majority felt poorly represented by their national politicians; at the same time, they had little experience of political and social participation, aside from voting in elections. Most young people in South-Eastern Europe believed that their political knowledge was poor, and claimed that they were not interested in politics. However, longer periods of living abroad did appear to lead to a greater interest in civic and political participation and to a reduction in nationalist ways of thinking. It should also be noted that most young people in South-Eastern Europe had not had any experience of international learning mobility at the time the study was carried out.

Owing to high levels of unemployment and insufficient support from the state, the majority of the region's young people relied on other financial, housing and educational support. This prolonged the transition to adulthood for many young people. Research showed that 36% of Slovenian respondents were in school, 36% were in post-secondary education, 5% were in some other form of education and 23% were not in any form of education at all (this last figure was the lowest of all the countries surveyed). Of all the countries of South-Eastern Europe, Slovenia was the only one to have achieved the goal set out in the Europe 2020 strategy of having 40% of the population aged between 30 and 34 reaching tertiary education level. None of the Slovenian respondents had dropped out of primary education, only 2.7% had dropped out of secondary education and 16.4% had abandoned their tertiary education studies. Slovenia had the lowest unemployment levels between 2010 and 2016, and was not one of the countries with a higher proportion of young people employed under contract (for full- or part-time work).

Mladina 2020

Mladina 2020 continued the tradition, by now well-established, of producing comprehensive research into Slovenian youth. It was the result of a collaboration between the Maribor Faculty of Arts and the Ljubljana Faculty of Social Sciences — the two institutions that have been almost exclusively responsible for this type of research since independence — and involved around 1,200 young people aged between 15 and 29.[7] Since Slovenia does not have a system for monitoring the social position of young people, the Mladina 2000 and Mladina 2010 studies were used as the reference framework for the Mladina 2020 study. However, the research team introduced a number of concepts and methodologies that led to the introduction of new topics within the study (e.g. civic spaces for young people) and research into new approaches to existing topics (e.g. participation).

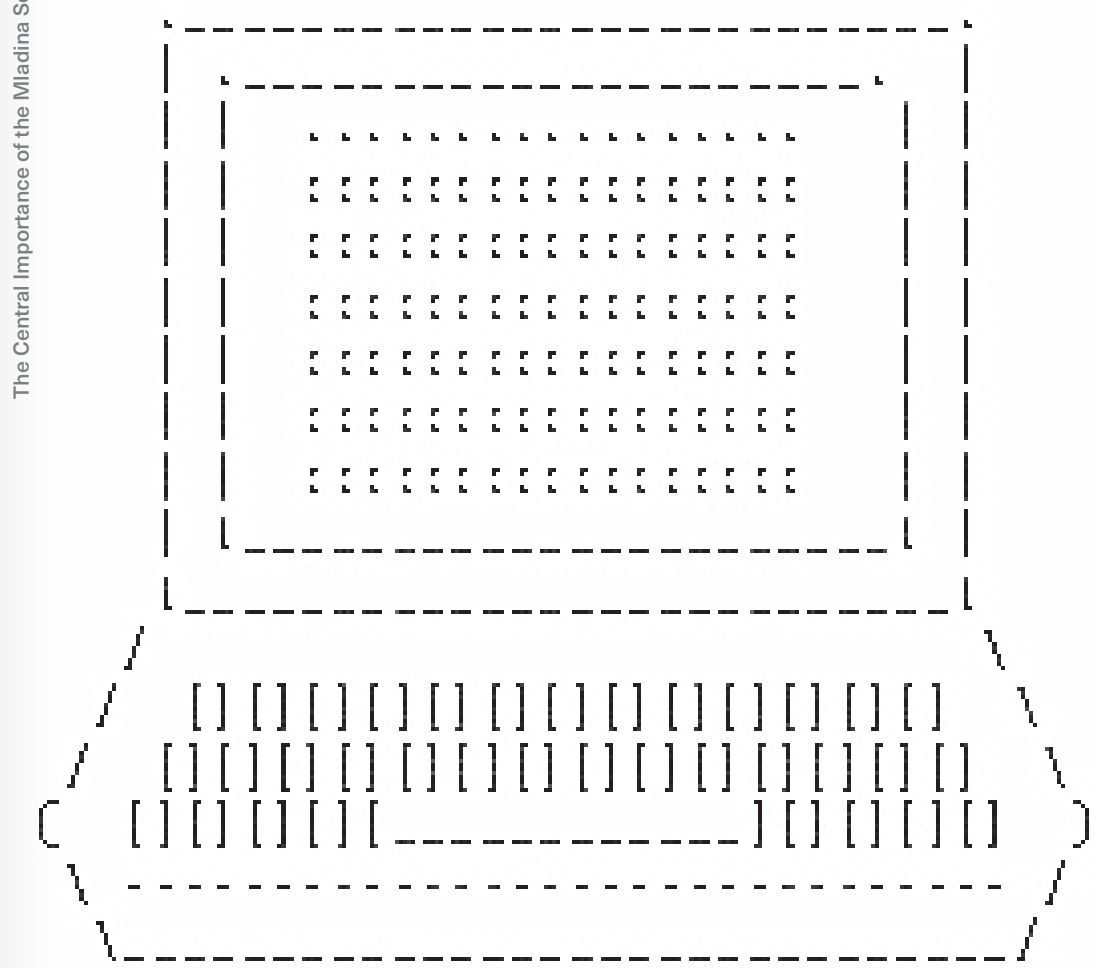
The study was commissioned by the Office for Youth, which needs data for policymaking; the research team therefore focused on ensuring that the study, like Mladina 2010, had an informative value. Evidence-based policymaking and delivery helps political decision-makers make informed decisions on policies, programmes and projects. Youth sector organisations were also invited to help formulate the research plan and identify the specific needs of the sector and of young people themselves (Tanja Baumkirher, interview, 15 April 2021):[8]

7 The market research company Aragon contributed to the field surveys.
8 Source available from the authors (the same applies to all interviews).

As far as research is concerned, we invest a great deal of hope in the Mladina research studies, which are financed by the Office for Youth. Until this most recent one, there was not much collaboration between the researchers and youth organisations. This time, for Mladina 2020, we were invited to take part, and they sent us questions in advance and asked for our opinions. This is progress.

Mladina 2020 focused on similar thematic groupings to those set out in the Mladina 2010 research plan: demographics, education, employment, living and housing conditions, health and well-being, political participation, creativity and culture, mobility, use of ICT, consumption, sustainable behaviour and values, and interests.

The study targeted inhabitants of Slovenia who were aged from 15 to 29 on 5 August 2019. The field interviews took place between August and October 2020, and then via the Zoom video-conferencing tool from mid-October because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Owing to the low number of publicly available telephone numbers and the poor response to the written request to supply contact details, just over a third of the surveys were carried out with the help of an online panel. All 1,200 of the planned surveys had been conducted by November 2020, and an important portion of the data came from interviews with youth sector representatives.



The Covid-19 pandemic had an inevitable impact on the results of the study, with respondents being asked to consider how things had been prior to the pandemic ; it also had clearly had an impact on the respondents' values, viewpoints, feelings and political behaviour. As the survey was conducted before the autumn school closures, researchers carried out a statistical assessment of the impact on the 15–29 age group; they found that while there were correlations, they tended to be weak. Their conclusion was therefore that the pandemic was having an impact, albeit a small one. They illustrated this with the example of the problem of loneliness —namely, that the pandemic was simply exacerbating a trend that had been present already.

With regard to demographic indicators, the study notes the end of the period of rapid decline in the number of young people, which is having an impact on the degree to which young people are represented in the unemployment figures, as well as on their importance as an electoral base (and, consequently, their political power). It also complements the upward trend in the size of the older population. In the Mladina 2020 study, almost three-quarters of young people reported that they saw this as a big or very big problem; at the same time, the proportion of young people who got along with their parents very well had risen since Mladina 2010, although their expectations of parental assistance in key areas of life had fallen significantly.

From young people's point of view, intergenerational cooperation was good. Young people tended not to mention intergenerational conflict, but were strongly aware of the disadvantages faced by older people when it came to social welfare. More than 60% partly or completely agreed with the statement that young and older people were equally disadvantaged. A similar percentage agreed with the statement that the requirements of the current generations had to be weighed against those to come.

According to Mladina 2020, young people were leaving home earlier than they had been at the time Mladina 2010 was conducted, bringing them closer to the EU average: it fell from 29.7 years to 27.7 years between 2010 and 2019. While this was still above the EU average, as well as the average for neighbouring Austria and Hungary, none of Slovenia's neighbours had experienced a drop of that size. Young people's transition to adulthood was changing and could no longer be regarded as a linear process. Young people were active, responsible and autonomous in a variety of fields of action, many of them linked to issues of mental health, housing and youth employment, which they felt were working against them.

Young people were leaving the formal education system more quickly than was formerly the case; on the other hand, the proportion of young people with experience of learning mobility had risen. While it was still only 23%, this was nine percentage points higher than the figure for 2010. More than half the young people surveyed (54.1%) were planning to undertake educational activities abroad in the future, a rise of 7.3% on 2010. Mobility generally has an important positive impact on development, with a rise in readiness to move elsewhere in Slovenia, to another European country or even to another continent (see Figure 1). The biggest rise, of just over 17 percentage points, was in the readiness to move to another European country, which was to some extent the result of the fact that Slovenia had been an EU member for some years by that point. The desire to move away from Slovenia for more than six months had also risen, to 75% in 2020, with the biggest rise coming between 2018 and 2020.

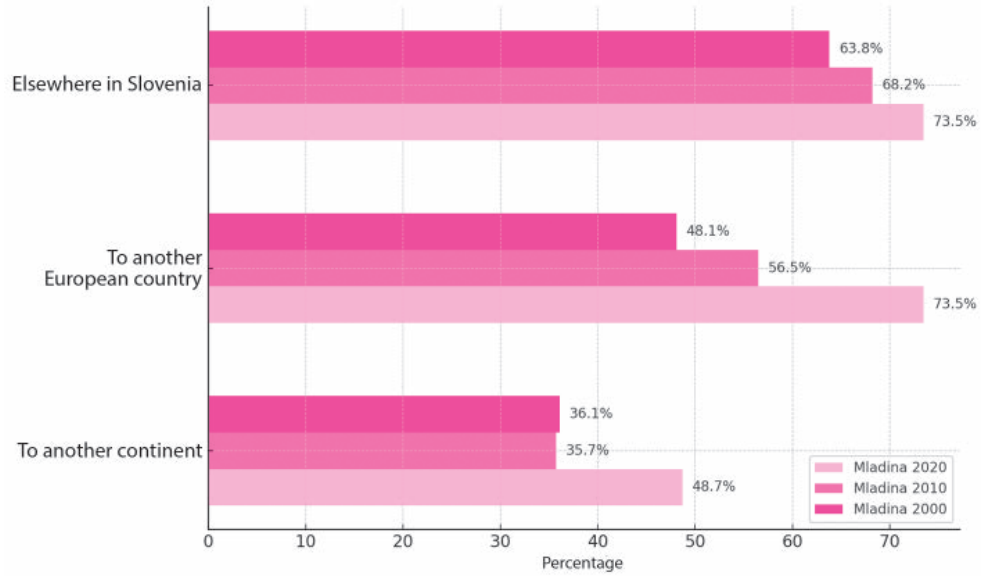


Figure 1: If it offered you better creative and general living opportunities, would you be prepared to move for a longer period or permanently? *Sources: Mladina 2000, Mladina 2010 and Mladina 2020.*

Young people were making greater use of non-formal and informal education tools than before. Outside their regular school education, they took part in courses, workshops and training programmes covering foreign languages, culture and art, undertook preparations for their driving test, and acquired various forms of vocational knowledge. The numbers were up considerably on a decade earlier, by eight percentage points (13 percentage points in case of the driving test).

For informal learning, young people made considerable use of the online tools and new educational opportunities that had not been as available to the generations before them, although the internet was increasingly being used to a significant degree for online shopping. Slovenian young people were in the bottom half of the EU ranking when it came to the proportion of young people with knowledge of computer programming, and their use of ICT tools was generally restricted to basic tasks — all of which suggests that education policy should prioritise this area in the future.

Despite the fact that youth unemployment had fallen as a result of demographic changes, Slovenia still had a higher number of precariously employed young people than the European average. The Mladina 2020 study revealed that young people's position on the jobs market was relatively unfavourable, with two-thirds prepared to take up self-employment in order to stave off unemployment. The notion of enterprise had gained currency among the young, with the researchers noting a decline in enthusiasm for employment in the public sector (cf. the section on the Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019, p. 11). Employment security remained important, but less so than the requirement for work to be interesting, provide a high degree of autonomy and have a clear objective. The percentage of young people who said that they were prepared to accept a job in a lower position with lower pay, temporary employment or employment that came with a requirement to acquire new knowledge or skills had also risen, to around 92%. Fear of unemployment was obviously one result of this, and was felt by more than 40% of young people surveyed for Mladina 2020.

This fear had been higher two years previously (YSEE 2018), when it stood at 43%, but was still very high compared to a decade or two previously (27% and 21.8%, see Mladina 2020, p. 365). There had been a concomitant decline in the popularity of self-employment, down from 43% of those in favour of it in Mladina 2010 to 32.1% in Mladina 2020. To a large extent, the readiness to move away for better living conditions was connected with employment.

One worrying finding in relation to health and well-being was that the proportion of young people who felt lonely had increased. Mladina 2020 found a significant increase in feelings of stress or loneliness from Mladina 2010 (for stress from 17% to 36% and for loneliness from 9% to over 30%), although this comes with a caveat: the later study was conducted after the Covid-19 pandemic and the earlier one ten years before it (see Figure 2). In response to the high levels of worry and stress among the young, Mladina 2020 emphasises the responsibility the current holders of political and social power have in helping them realise their visions and meet the challenges of the future.

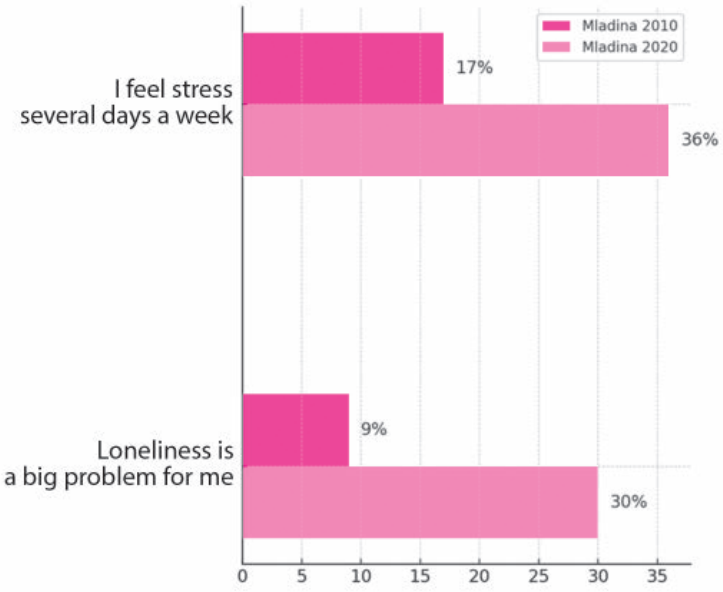
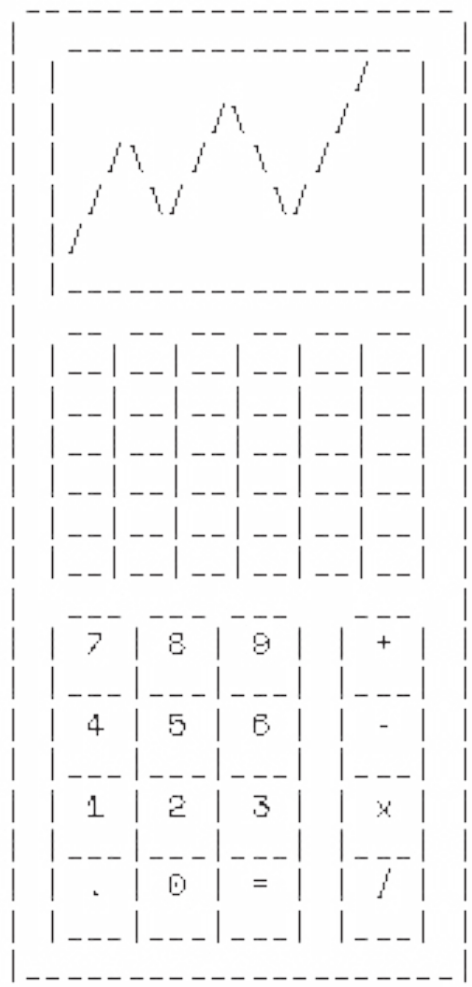


Figure 2: Feelings of stress and loneliness among young people in 2010 and 2020. *Sources: Mladina 2010 and Mladina 2020.*

There had also been a perceptible rise in the number of young people who were pessimistic about the future, i.e. a significant fall in young people's satisfaction with life. Generally speaking, young people were increasingly less satisfied with their health, but also devoted more attention to it, which may reflect the negative impact of wider social conditions. Mladina 2020 highlighted mental health as one of the key challenges of youth policy, both now and in the future. There were noticeably higher levels of abstinence from alcohol, a noticeably lower percentage of young smokers, and a clear increase in the number of young people involved in sport and exercise (Mladina 2020, p. 201). However, these positive trends, as well as objective living factors such as lower unemployment and higher income, do not signal a general

improvement in young people's psycho-physical health. Indeed, the indicators of stress and problems maintaining a healthy weight suggest the opposite: a general deterioration in young people's health. Mental health problems were also highlighted by the strategies used to deal with them. Just over 14% of young people, for example, used alcohol and drugs to ease their problems.

The study also focused on exposure to hate speech resulting from increased use of ICT tools. More than 80% of young people witnessed hate speech on multiple occasions every month, and 70% believed that there was too much hate speech in Slovenian society. As far as the impact on the public sphere and political activism was concerned, Mladina 2020 found that young people were more involved in asserting their civic rights than they had been a decade earlier. There appeared to be little interest in politics, reflecting the low levels of trust in politicians. This was having a negative impact on electoral participation, which also remained low. While there was less focus on institutional politics, young people's levels of social engagement were high, with the personal aspects of political engagement being regarded as important.



They used conventional and unconventional forms of political participation, such as political consumerism, rejecting (boycotting) certain products, making purchases for political, ethical and environmental reasons, and signing petitions. It appears that environmentally responsible consumer behaviour and consumer activism are becoming increasingly common modes of political expression among young people, who also reported that they were more inclined to communicate with politicians directly. However, there were also concerns about radicalisation, with a quarter believing that violence was legitimate if carried out in pursuit of higher ends.

Mladina 2020 found that housing issues were directly affecting an increasing percentage of young people. This was partly the result of the earlier departure from the parental home noted above; it is when they leave home that young people feel dissatisfied with a policy that seems oblivious to the housing pressures they are experiencing (see Figure 3). The study revealed that, regardless of the Living Apart Together (LAT) phenomenon, young people's values were changing in Slovenia, pointing to a gradual transition to other forms of independence linked to global trends and greater internationalisation. If we compare the 2010 and 2020 studies, there has been a sharp rise in the percentage of young people who have personal experience

of housing problems, particularly the financial aspect of purchasing or renting an apartment. Young people's satisfaction with their living conditions is limited, matching their limited opportunities to buy their own home. Home ownership remains a strong aspiration and is linked to the longstanding housing pattern in Slovenia, where levels of home ownership are high and rental apartments hard to come by. However, this has not stopped the rise in the number of young people looking to rent.

Young people from larger cities such as Ljubljana and Maribor gain their independence earlier. Fewer of them live with their parents and fewer expect parental help to resolve their housing issues. Young people's attachment to their home environment and unwillingness to 'fly the nest' persist (this is particularly the case among older young people), although their living preferences are gradually changing. Housing pressures are linked to temporary employment and associated forms of precarity, as they adversely affect young people's creditworthiness — something the financial sector continues to ignore. Young people tend to continue to depend on parental support. According to some indicators, there has been a fall in precarity (by almost 13 percentage points), but it remains very high and affects more than 60% of young people in work.

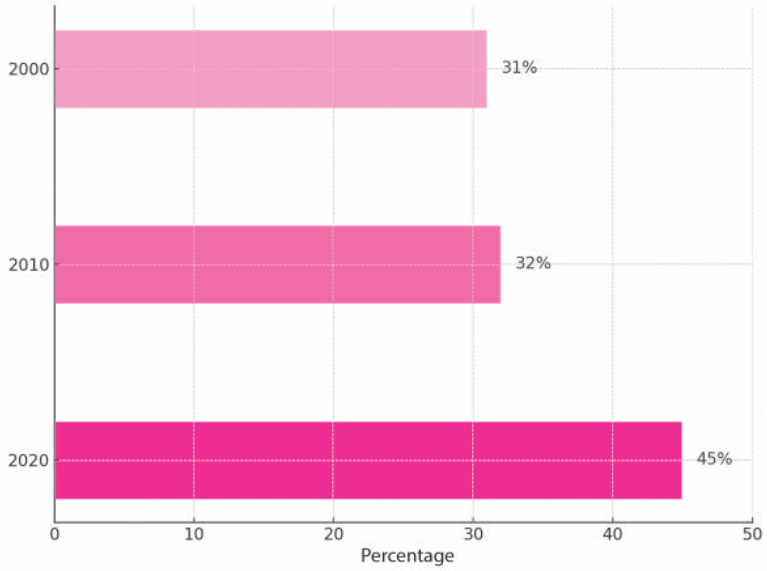


Figure 3: To what extent do the following problems faced by young people apply to you? HOUSING (apply or very much apply)? *Sources: Mladina 2010 and Mladina 2020.*

Mladina 2020 is different in many ways from the research conducted in the 1990s. Slovenia has undergone major social change, a new European context has emerged and the research teams are also different. It revealed a great many advantages to being young in Slovenia, but perhaps just as many disadvantages. The relatively small size of the youth population is a concern, as are its lower degree of political influence, its lower (but nevertheless still high) involvement in education, precarity in employment and elsewhere, feelings of stress and loneliness, the fall in general satisfaction, avoidance of social issues, and the dangers of radicalisation. However, the study does find plenty to be optimistic about: the end of the demographic decline, good

intergenerational relations, earlier departure from the parental home, the opportunities offered by the internet, flexibility in attitudes to the jobs market, care for one's own health, the adoption of liberal values, artistic creation, and unconventional forms of activism and political participation, for example. All of this points to an open society with considerable personal autonomy, but also one that demands a great deal of responsibility from its members.

Needs and future of research

Youth research has a rich tradition in Slovenia — one that has, to a considerable extent, been fostered by the Ljubljana Faculty of Social Science and the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Arts in Maribor. There are also other research organisations and institutes in Slovenia that provide those tasked with formulating public and youth policy with a clear overview of the needs of Slovenian youth. Current mayor of Ajdovščina and former deputy chair of the National Youth Council Tadej Beočanin is concise in arguing for research into young people and their needs (interview, 15 April 2021):

Research organisations, faculties, universities and various youth policy-centred institutions around the country can help to ensure that youth policy is truly based on research, thereby enabling it to respond to the most pressing needs.

The need has also emerged to strengthen youth research in Slovenia. As the research team responsible for producing the Mladina 2020 study pointed out, '[T]he partnership between the two universities [...] can be understood as the basis for the development of a research and analytical structure that will meet this need, which is also set out in the National Youth Programme 2013–2022' (Lavrič and Deželan, 2021). The current director of the Office for Youth Dolores Kores has also pointed out that, for them, research is of key importance to the formulation of youth policies. However, there are also concerns that there will soon be no money for this, as some in the youth sector believe that it is research that will bear the brunt of cuts in the next few years (Uroš Skrinar, interview, 6 May 2021).

Evidence-based policymaking has long been a feature of European documents and organisations. Back in 2009, when the first EU Youth Strategy was published, the European Commission stressed the importance of evidence-based policymaking: 'Better knowledge is a must for sound policy. Current tools (e.g. Eurostat data, national reports, European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP), EU Research Framework Programme) are a first step, as well as the triennial report on Youth in Europe. There is an equal need to share research results and for networking of researchers throughout Europe.' Several European observatories, such as the European Observatory on Infringements of Intellectual Property Rights, embed within their operations the provision of evidence-based papers and data that enable policymakers to formulate effective policies for enforcing intellectual property rights and support innovation and creativity (Cink, 2016).

In May 2017 the Council of Europe recommended that Member States' governments 'foster national and European research on the different forms of youth work and their value, impact and merit.' They also suggested that they 'encourage the use of research, evaluation and continuous follow-up in developing knowledge-based, quality youth work ensuring that mechanisms are in place to measure its outcomes and impact' (Council of Europe, 2017). Kores highlights the same, mentioning as an example the Porto Social Summit declaration of 2021. She argues that it is also

important that 'in the end, we are able to compare ourselves with other countries in which there is some sort of unified system' (interview, 18 May 2021).

In the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, the Commission, in the section on evidence-based youth policy-making and knowledge-building, argued that 'EU Youth Policy should be evidence-based and anchored in the real needs and situations of young people. That requires continuous research, knowledge development and outreach to young people and youth organisations. The collection of disaggregated data on young people is of particular importance to foster understanding of the needs of different groups of young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities. Evidence based policy-making should be carried out with the support of the Youth Wiki, youth research networks, cooperation with international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the OECD and other bodies, including youth organisations' (Council of the European Union, 2018).

'Evidence-based policymaking' is also mentioned in the Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022 (ReNPM 2013–22). Section 1.4, which deals with the monitoring of the National Youth Programme, envisages the 'use of a combination of three types of indicator based on the previously mentioned formulation of evidence-based public policies, with the monitoring and evaluation of the National Youth Programme at the core of the system.' The Resolution also provides for the establishment of a youth research unit within existing research organisations; this is a response to its finding that, despite the intensity of the research financed by the Office for Youth, Slovenia does not have in place a comprehensive system for monitoring the position of young people, even though the European Commission requires one for reporting purposes.

The need for collaboration between youth sector entities was well outlined by one of our interviewees, Tanja Baumkirher, who argued that 'the most important thing [in youth policy] [was] good cooperation between the political sphere (those that make policy and those that deliver it), youth organisations and researchers. They must also work with each other on a "one-to-one" basis' (interview, 15 April 2021). She also stressed that 'researchers [were] necessary mainly in order to cover the wider youth population and ascertain where it stood at any one time. Research provides a suitable basis for policymaking' (ibid.).

The lives of young people have been heavily marked in the last few years by the Covid-19 pandemic. A strong need has emerged for a long-term analysis of its consequences, for young people and for youth as a sector. We will only be able to identify the permanent impacts of the pandemic in a few years' time and for a few years after that, mainly with the help of comprehensive research into young people, their lives and their position within society. It makes sense, therefore, to finish with the words of Dr Peter Debeljak, former director of the Office for Youth, and his vision for youth research in the future (interview, 7 May 2021): 'Evidence-based! Why? Not because this is something we should do anyway, but because it can be the anchor point from which we start.'

Looking towards the future

- Regular and comprehensive youth research is required if we are to gain an insight into and monitor trends in the field of youth and in the values and beliefs of young people.
- To gain an adequate insight into the lives of young people and monitor the achievement of the objectives set out in the National Youth Programme, a mechanism should be established to enable indicators relating to young people and the youth sector to be monitored continuously (such as a youth observatory and youth index).
- To guarantee synergies in the research field, a range of incentives must be created to strengthen cooperation and connections between researchers and research institutions in youth research and youth work, and to encourage cooperation with youth sector organisations and policymakers.
- To make it easier to compare the data and findings contained in other countries' research studies, international cooperation between researchers and research organisations should be encouraged, particularly at European level (EU, Council of Europe).
- To maintain and strengthen the quality of youth research and research into young people, the established quality assurance standards applicable in Slovenia and set out in the Scientific Research and Innovation Activities Act (2021) and the regulation of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency must be adhered to.
- Support must be given to the establishment of a joint repository of data on youth and young people that contains information from all the relevant research studies, analyses and statistical monitoring operations, and is accessible to researchers and other interested parties at home and abroad.

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