

REFLECTIONS ON THE QUESTION: "YOUTH AT THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY"

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It is my great pleasure and honourable task to have the occasion for the fifth time to welcome all of you to our Symposium. The series of our Symposiums of Human Biology have already become a nice tradition, and without any immodesty we can state that our preceding symposiums were successful.

In 1976, in Balatonfüred, in connection with the "summing up" phase of the International Biological Programme, the main subjects of our First Symposium of Human Biology were Growth and Development of children as well as the variations of human Physique, themes which had been in the centre of interest long ago. Our intention at that time was to open the Hungarian physical anthropology's/human biology's windows wide at the world.

In 1979, in Visegrád, the main subject of our Second Symposium was the Functional Biotypology, and the overwhelming majority of presentations dealt with different aspects of the human physique. However, several lectures touched on the problems of growth and development of children, and so, we intended to contribute to the success of the International Children's Year.

In 1981, in Bozsok, during our Third Symposium, we discussed the Variations of Human Growth and Physique, especially four aspects of them: the genetical, the clinical, the ecological, and the kinanthropometrical sides of this problem-circle.

In 1986, in Pécs, as main topic of our Fourth Symposium we have chosen the Growth Standards, again a theme which was in the forefront of interest of human biologists as well as pediatricians decades ago.

The multidisciplinary character of our symposiums was ensured.

What are the causes, of this great interest?

Simply two facts, I think. Firstly, a lot of us have a feeling of responsibility for the children's welfare, and secondly, growth and development data constitute a comprehensive and sensitive indicator specific to child health.

In 1991, here in Keszthely, we should like to discuss the problem of youth at the end of the 20th century. I do not think that the importance of this problem can be overstated.

In 1991 we remember some of the great personalities of universal cultural history. I mention here two names: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and the Hungarian Count István Széchenyi.

The whole of mankind remembers W. A. Mozart who died 200 years ago. What does he say to the people of our age full of strain and worries? In one of Platon's dialogues, "The Junket" (in Greek: Symposium) the characters vary the theme of eros and love. This opus in one of the most excellent variation-works in world literature. One of its characters, the sophist, says that eros is an ability of man that he/she should have some inclination towards other men, great ideas, and important things. This is such a great adviser which accompanies one in any fields and situations of life. Mozart is such an accompanist for our lives. He is an amiable companion who keeps alive our confidence reposed in mankind. Mozart's music is our travelling companion from the cradle throughout childhood, adolescence and the whole of life, and it can give some protection against many troubles and hurts.

We all need such a protection, and children especially need such protection. This perception guided us as we founded the Hungarian Forum of Interest of Children, and have chosen the slogan: "With deciduous teeth to stone, ..." We had the feeling that children - generally - are in a defenceless situation.

Dr Árpád Göncz, the President of the Republic of Hungary also establish the fact that during the last one and half years the conditions of the Hungarian youth became worse. I will not go into the details of this problem, however, I call your kind attention to the problem of equal chances.

This is not only a question of right; it is also a general problem of human biology. Allow me, please, to cite some results from our Hungarian National Growth Study (Eiben 1989, Eiben - Pantó 1986, 1987/88, etc.).

The urban environment in Hungary provides more advantageous conditions for children's growth and development than the rural one. Hence urban children grow faster and mature earlier than their rural counterparts.

The educational level of the fathers and mothers the growth and maturation process of their children. The higher the father's educational level the taller are their sons. In this group also the pubertal growth spurt occurs earlier than in other groups of boys. According to the educational level of the mothers, boys show a similar picture, and indeed, in sons of mothers with low educational level, backwardness in growth and development is more evident. This phenomenon is further expressed in girls, especially after puberty, particularly in daughters of fathers and mothers with low educational level who are the shortest, and in daughters of fathers and mothers with university degree who are the tallest. For Hungarian youth the educational level of the parents is a determinant. So, the higher the educational level of the parents the taller are their sons and daughters. These differences in height usually can be observed already in early childhood, and during prepuberty and puberty they usually become more marked. These differences between the two extrem social groups (6–7 cm) are significant in both sexes.

Profession of parents also influences the growth and development process of the children characteristically. The trend of tallness goes from agricultural manual workers through industrial and other manual workers to non-manual workers. However, profession of parents as an organizing principle – at least in present-day Hungary – is less suitable to describe the family's standard of living, or to characterize the child-centredness of the family home. The most important environmental factor seems to be the educational level. We are convinced that the cultural niveau is the most important social factor influencing growth and maturation of youth. Consequently, it seems important to point out the role of the parents, principally the determinative role of the mothers, in creating a better cultural background in the family (Eiben 1989).

To be able to do that, one must be well educated.

And now, in this sense, I return to Count István Széchenyi, to "The Greatest Hungarian", born 200 years ago. He was the builder of the Chain-bridge between Pest and Buda, the establisher of steamshiping on the Lake Balaton, the organizer of horse-racing in Hungary, the regulator of the Lower reaches of the Danube, etc., etc., and last but not least, he was the founder of our Hungarian Academy of Sciences. One of his great and leading principles was: "The quantity of the well-educated heads is the real power of the nation." (You can see his figure and this sentence in Hungarian in your Programme and Abstract booklet, on its second page.)

Here and now, during this special period of change in Hungary, we need to follow this principle. We human biologists work on several problems of youth, we work for the youth, as Count Széchenyi recommended: In one's own sphere of influence everybody according to his/her best of knowledge. . .

I am convinced that we work for a good cause, and that even here at our Symposium the presentations given will make useful contributions to the ambition of "Health for all by 2000!" and for our youth at the end of the 20th century.

In this spirit I wish for a successful Symposium!

References

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