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The Risks of the Present Youth Subcultures in the View of Social Pedagogy and Social Work

Abstract

The contribution analyzes the most important risks of the present youth subcultures and the opportunities for social work and social pedagogy with regard to the problems of youth subcultures. The basic characteristics of youth subcultures is described as well as their social development, types and forms. The central meaning is inscribed to the possibilities of interdisciplinary coaction of social pedagogy and social work when solving specific problems of youth subcultures in the process of socialization during free time or at the penetration of social deviations. A specific attention is paid to the definition of the professional roles of social workers and social pedagogues in relation to the risky youth subcultures.

Key words: *youth, culture, subculture, social pedagogy, social work, social pathology, adolescence, family, globalization, individualization, drug addiction, criminality, unemployment, marginalization, lifestyle, socialization, free time, social environment.*

Introduction

One of the most typical social features of youth is a specific subculture; it is an integrated sum of values and patterns of behaviour through which youth distinguishes major society. In fact, within each social system there can be identified smaller culture entities that are usually called subcultures. They are characterized by the following basic indicators:

- 1) subcultures are smaller exactly defined groups within a bigger entity;

- 2) its internal structure involves the same components as the majority culture does, it means material, spiritual, and normative ones;
- 3) a subculture, however, differs from the basic culture at least in some elements of these components,
- 4) a subculture must be relatively steadfast in time.

A constitutive feature of subcultures is their own development. For the beginnings of the formation of subcultures we consider the 50s of the 20th century when beatniks, hoboes, yippies and hipsters asserted themselves in the USA, and later got to post-war England in the form of the Teddy Boys. The 60s were the domain of hippies and of the rockers at the close of the decade. In England of the 70s the style called “mod” appeared which was a reaction to the hippies and opened the way for the Rude Boys and future skinheads and punkers. In the USA, at the beginning of the 70s, first graffiti appeared in the black and Puerto Rican ghettos that, by means of hip-hop, flooded Europe in the 80s and 90s. An important subculture from the 70s till now has been the punkers. Squatter and anarchist initiatives developed in Europe at the turn of the 70s and 80s. The 90s are to a certain extent a mixture of the foregoing subcultures. As a meaningful megatrend of today’s youth can be labeled the rapid expansion of so-called dancing scene accompanied by the rise of new fashion, social political and underground subcultures, e. g. computer pirates (hackers) or techno-punkers (Syrový, 1999).

The term “subculture” is often used in relation to youth because adolescents as well as young adults are perceived as a dynamizing element in society due to their social psychological characteristics. The ability to create subcultures is not an exclusive domain of the youth. The forms of behaviour that are significant for subculture members, e. g. greeting, clothing, relating, slang, and so on, can practically be found in every age category. What is typical of the youth is the disunity of their subculture, which influences the number of various youth subcultures in the social reality.

The relation of a subculture and an individual, however, is not only one of the ways of the solution of generation problems of parents and children, but in a broader context these conflicts move on into the members of a subculture and the respected social norms. Ondrejko^{vič} (2000, p. 42) declares that a subculture differs from the global culture especially by values, norms, a special culture, occasionally also by the way of life and behaviour of its members. As a result, there can appear social antinomies or even conflicts, whose positive solution is the motive power of the society.

In the whirl of present social processes, such as globalization with its parts integration and regionalization at the all-social level, and progressive or regressive individualization at the individual level, the youth subculture finds itself in a dif-

ficult situation. The willingness to allow risks involved in the subculture membership is indirectly proportionate to the natural endeavour of a young man to be independent of the institutionalized conformity of the present world. The extent of acceptability of (some) youth subcultures by the official institutions (e. g. police) is, on the contrary, directly proportionate to the extent of the risks that their leverage in the society can bring about.

1. The types and forms of youth subcultures

Aiming at the more precise use of the term “subculture” we can recommend the understanding of the term “subculture” in three basic meanings on the basis of the analysis of accessible studies of various authors (In: Ondrejko \acute{c} , 2000, pp. 47–48):

1. Subculture in the meaning of a “pre-culture”. In this meaning the term “subculture” involved a phenomenon that should forego the rise and existence of all cultures.
2. Subculture understood as a normative system, or a partial subsystem, of a larger entity.
3. Subculture understood as a result of a conflict of one or numerous groups with a global society or its dominant culture.

The formation of a specific youth subcultures as a self-realization possibility for the youth represents a sum of various forms of youth self- awareness formation. A youth subculture can be understood as:

- **a natural phenomenon** in the period of the socialization of adolescents which is characterised by an emergence of peer groups, changes in families, and gradual takeover of social roles,
- **a matter of social affiliation**; Ward (1997, p. 144) for example points to the fact that subcultures create conditions by means of which young people form their cultural environment standing against the dominant culture of the middle class in particular;
- **lifestyle**; affiliation to a subculture significantly influences the way of life of the youth for instance in the area of value orientation, clothing, listening to music, and the like; the resistance against the stereotypical throwaway life style of the majority can then overgrow into so-called subcultural uniformity.

A risk feature at the formation of youth subcultures is a potential rise of pathological social adaptation as a result of blocked aspirations of the youth; this way can merge at the rise of several types of subcultures:

- a) **conflict subculture** – it appears especially in the areas with high migration of population; the epiphenomena are disorientation, anonymity, and low social

control up to anomie. Young people from these areas create a subculture focused on street skirmishes, gang wars and the like. In the social environment of a subculture violence is “scuffles, theft, and murders understood as an inevitable result of the coincidence of everyday life forces, which is out of control of each individual” (Schmeidler, 2001, p. 3). On one hand, violence appears to be a solution of everyday problems; on the other hand it represents a problem in itself. Ondrejkoč (2000, p. 105) considers the escalation of youth violence to be a negative part of the process of youth individualization.

b) **resigning subculture** – this type constitutes especially among young people who have fallen for alcohol or drugs. The drug subculture (In: Matoušek, 1998, pp. 88-89) consists most frequently of young people who failed according to the criteria of society and they also failed according to the criteria of stabilized peer groups. This “double failure” has made them outsiders, but through their common drug subculture they find mutual support. What is typical is their over-consumption of alcohol and other drugs, sexual promiscuity as well as non-standard gaining of the means for drugs (begging, theft, and so on). Resignation is here an outcome of the refusal of socially recognized life goals together with the means of getting them.

c) **criminal subculture** – this subculture mostly appears within the most organized parts of city zones. Cohen (In: Ondrejkoč, 1998, pp. 226 - 227) distinguishes six kinds of delinquent subcultures:

1. The most common one is so-called base subculture of male youth;
2. Conflict oriented subculture as a subculture of big organized bands;
3. The subculture of drug addicts;
4. The subculture of “professional thieves” mainly 16 – 17 years old for whom utility-motivated crime prevails;
5. A delinquent subculture of the middle class that is back especially by failures at school;
6. A women delinquent subculture that is back especially by the sexual behaviour.

The subculture of the unemployed youth was analyzed by Macháček (1997, pp. 20–22), who saw within it the lovers of free time, the isolated and deprived, the active seekers of any employment, a type of the pseudo-employed and the so-called followers of unemployment subcultures.

The characteristics of youth subcultures that have more significantly influenced the development of the Euro-Atlantic culture area over the last decades, can be found in the publication called “Kultúra a multikultúrna výchova” (Culture and Multicultural Education) /Mistik et.al., 1997/, in which the authors used the following criteria: social background, ideology, expressional media, fashion, music,

time and geographical identification, and lifestyle, by means of which they specified a list of 31 most significant alternative cultures (for example beatniks, body building, cyberpunk, dance music, hard core, heavy metal, punk, and the like), which witnesses the distinctive diversification of these cultural societal phenomena.

Due to the frequent and sharp social changes nowadays, the process of categorization of the forms of subcultures can be neither finalized nor typologically clarified; however, in relation to social cultural specifics we may abstract two basic types of subcultures:

- the first type represents socially marginalized subcultures that are most frequently made up by socially declassed junkies, homeless people, or criminal gangs.
- the second type grows out of the youth movement; they react to the social political atmosphere in society, to the place of young people within it in particular.

2. Youth subcultures in the view of social work and social pedagogy

The meaning of the youth subculture problems for social work and social pedagogy can be analyzed from numerous angles. Their survey is show in T1.

One of the most important aspects of social educational influence on youth subcultures is its meaning during the formation of adolescent's personality in the process of socialization. According to Višňovský (1998, p. 86) "**socialization** is a process of the integration into society, during which an individual is learning to know him/herself and his/her environment accepting the rules of the coexistence as well as the possible and expected ways of behaviour". Even though socialization is a lifelong process, in this context we emphasize its meaning mainly in the time of maturing. For an adolescent – a member of a youth subculture – socialization has its specific features. The first matter is the decreased influence of key socialization factors of this period, the family and school, on the account of the influence of subcultures. The part of the subculture in the formation of the views and attitudes of young people is also important.

A very important role in the socialization process of the youth is played by **free time**. Its meaningful spending is determined by exogenous factors, too. The social aspects of free time are focused by Hroncová and Emmerová (2004, pp.134–136); they point to the meaning of the formation of children's and youth's right attitudes towards free time as well as toward the possibilities of useful and positive use of free time. Social pedagogy in the coaction with the pedagogy of free time has competence in the area of interventions into children's and youth's free time.

T1 The possibilities of the interdisciplinary coaction of social pedagogy and social work for the solution of the problems of present day youth subcultures

Aspect	Application
Youth subcultures in the process of socialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – supporting the influence of key socialization factors (family, school) – the formation of relevant opinions on the subculture and the membership in it
Social aspects of free time and youth subcultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the formation of adequate attitudes to free time – the formation of possibilities to positively use free time
Social pathological aspects of the youth subcultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the prevention of pathological addictions – the creation of alternative forms to social deviant behaviour
Social environment and youth subcultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the correction of negative impulses within a subculture – the reduction of harmful disparities between the subculture environment and other natural environments of young people
Professional roles of social workers and social pedagogues in relation to youth subcultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – field social worker (streetworker) – social curator – probationary and mediatory clerk – social advisor

Potential controversies in opinions as to the way of spending free time between social pedagogy, the pedagogy of free time and (especially risk) subcultures of today's youth make up a space for the creation of alternative forms of spending free time in relation to its often risky use in youth subcultures.

The long-lasting existence of unfavorable (social pathological) consequences of the membership in a subculture represents another possibility how to use social work and social pedagogy in this area. The problem arises especially when the internal self-identification of young people with a subculture values gets a character of a social deviation (Szyrový, 1999, p. 15). Ritualization and habitualization of the socially deviant forms of behaviour within a subculture leads us to the analogy of this phenomenon with some types of pathological addictions, with so-called cultic ones in particular. In Slovakia, the use of social work and social pedagogy for the prevention of pathological addictions and other social pathologies is examined by e. g. Hroncová and her team (2004). The risk youth subcultures are considered as one of the symptoms of an anomic society that questions the existing social order, which gets youth subcultures into a natural conflict with the institutional and legislative background of today's society.

Social environment is an important part of the theory and practice of social pedagogy (social environment is considered to be part of social pedagogy) and

social work. According to Žilová (2003, p. 37) “social environment makes up all what is part of human life in a certain socio-cultural entity”, in which we can include youth subcultures as well. From the point of view of various environment typologies a risky youth subculture is most commonly city or metropolitan incentive defected but, at the same time, natural semi-environment. Due to the fact that the subculture environment can influence young people both positively and negatively, Pelikán (In: Hroncová, Emmerová, 2004, p. 115) emphasizes in this context the necessity of intervention, and he places it in the competence of so-called social assistants (social pedagogues, social workers).

The practical place of social workers and social pedagogues in the work with youth subcultures can be optimally identified through the prism of their professional roles. During social educational activities these professionals encounter numerous risky youth subcultures, e.g. drug subcultures, delinquent subcultures, or the subcultures of the unemployed youth. For the working with the drug subculture we emphasize the meaning of the field social work, sort of more precisely specified streetwork with drug users in the natural environment of their subculture. In relation to the delinquent subculture, social pedagogues and social workers act for example on the positions of social curators that act in Slovakia within the socio-legal protection of children and youth, or recently is the area of probationary and mediatory services as the system of solution of the disciplinary matters of mainly the juveniles and young adults (in detail Jusko, 2003, pp. 118–126). The creation of the subculture of the unemployed youth as the consequence of the overall phenomenon in our country attracts attention to the importance of social advisors

Conclusion

The original meaning of the notion “culture” is cultivation. When cultivating, naturally an aspect of improvement, of perfection is taken into account that gets forward the evaluating moment in the sense of quality and the object formation through culture influence. Through its membership in subcultures the youth becomes part of the relational network which represents incentive broad content of the young generation’s social life. When analyzing the mobilization of the potential that is hidden in the youth through a subculture, we can obtain a functionally ill-assorted result. In this context, it is necessary to take into account the terminological variability and internal structure of youth subcultures. Within certain systematization we can try to define the functions that flow out of the place of youth subcultures as a global formative factor in the time of adolescence:

1. **The selective function** – is in relation to society subculture in a position of a so-called “outsider group”, it is a group which holds a distance towards socially respected norms and values. The subculture of the anarchists can serve as an example.
2. **The substitution function** – according to assessments (In: Johnson, 1998, p. 7) up to 80% of all Americans come from dysfunctional families. If a family ceases to be the firm point in the life of a young man, something must substitute it. The ambitions of this kind are especially held by pseudo-religious subcultures.
3. **The absentee function** – in the context of the process of adolescence, young people feel a certain burden caused by the transition from childhood to independent maturity. Subcultures provide for a “temporary asylum” in the time of inner formation of young people, in an extremely adverse case it may become a drug subculture.
4. **The adaptation function** – in this case a subculture is a solution of the disparity between the acceleration of the biological development and the protraction of the social development in the period of adolescence. Numerically the most important subculture, the result of social adaptation problems, is the subculture of the unemployed youth.

The existence of youth subcultures is not a marginal phenomenon in our country. On the contrary, the present structure of society is directly involved in the creation of the whole system of subcultures. The creation of the individual, seemingly independent, ideologies has its logic in the context of present social development and, at the same time, it expresses the social attitudes of prospective youth groups. The membership in a subculture is expressed by a young man by his/her behaviour (lifestyle, the way of free time use, and the like) as well as by symbols (both visual and verbal). Youth subcultures are part of broader alternative cultures, protest movements and social movements that fight for the right for self-determination and human emancipation. Due to their activities, the majority of youth subcultures get into a natural conflict with the social order; which can reach characteristics of social pathology (e. g. criminality, racism, extremism, radicalism). We do not consider it right to understand subcultures exclusively as a “dangerous extreme appendix of democracy”, but rather as a creation of natural autonomous structures that can (also) fulfill positive social functions.

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