

DOCTORAL (PHD) THESES

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Youth Cultures in North-East Hungary



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1. The field of the study

Since the change of regime in Hungary, several researches have proved that the scientific inquiries about social and cultural characteristics of youth are still in the centre of interests. The research data – as the Youth2000© and the Youth2004© researches show – become obsolete quickly, because the youth cultures accommodate to social changes easily. Because of this phenomenon, researchers ask their questions time by time to get the up to date answers.

We studied youth cultures in regional aspects in North-East Hungary our inquiries could not refer ethnical differences in between youth groups. We were interested in middle class (defined by Béla Bauer) youth aged 15-29 in North-East Hungary. The sociology of higher education gives a frame to our researches in educational sciences, our data call the attention to the more and more numerous and heterogenic users of higher educational institutions. The study of chosen youth cultures is useful for youth-policy, teachers, researchers and higher educational actors as well. Our research data are able to interpret, confirm and explain other data of youth researches because of the applied qualitative research methods, and that is why we can ask new and relevant questions for further researches.

It is necessary to define the frames of interpretation our data, those are the relevant paradigms of the present cultural theories: the characteristics of techno-culture, information-society and consumer society. Beside these aspects, it is also necessary to emphasize the theories of 20th century youth cultures by the national and international literature like the change of era of youth, youth era based on schools, youth centrism, middle classing, and vulnerable youth.

The methodological precedents of our researches were our previous studies of screenager subcultures, the main questions are succeeded from the surveys of the Youth2000©, Youth2004© and The Island© researches. We applied the data of Mihály Fónai's and Gergely Fábián's regional research aspects during our query.

2. The aims of the dissertation

The aims of the dissertation are to introduce the characteristics of youth cultures in North-East Hungary, what contain students aged 15-29 without independent existence. Beside the introduction and characterization, our aims were to oversee the theories drawn up by

youth sociological and anthropological literature, and to prove our hypotheses by the qualitative and quantitative researches among the target group.

The expansion of education provides opportunities to take part in higher education for more and more students, and this affects the character of youth cultures. That is why we can observe those processes in Hungary too, which were peculiarity in Europe before. In the centre of our interests, there is the theory of youth middle classing we would like to interpret the connecting symbols by the cultural narratives and the 'émic' categories those introduce the lifestyle, preferences, leisure time activities, objectives of future, and connection with local society, or educational system. The middle class is interesting because we can obtain an insight to the characteristics of higher and lower social classes too, because the middle class is motivated to get higher social positions and separation from the symbols and lifestyles of the lower social class.

The aims of our researches were to collect and put down those symbols and narratives what characterize the youth cultures in North-East Hungary after the 20th century, and can help to understand the theories of youth cultures, or interpret them.

3. Research methods

The units of our research were those young people (aged 15-29) who did not have independent existence or had only partial existence and lived in a region at a disadvantage (North-East Hungary), and who were full time students of a higher educational institution or wanted to be one. We presumed that the connections with ICT determine the youth culture and because of this, we pointed North-East Hungary where the ICT penetration is lower than other places in Hungary. By the data of Youth2004© research we can find out that the internet penetration, the political and cultural activity and consumption are lower than Western Hungary. We considered the planned and recent higher educational studies as an indicator of middle classing besides the partial or full dependence on parents what can help their life conditions but also can limit their possibilities. Because of this indicator, we can observe the phenomenon of youth centrism, and the school based youth era. During the research process, we composed a new hypothesis and to oversee if it was true we choused young people for interview who stepped out of the temporary youth life period, in this case we let the independent existence.

We composed our hypotheses for northeast Hungarian youth cultures and symbols by the facts of previous research data and connecting sociological and anthropological literature about:

- (1) the connection between youth cultures and local society,
- (2) the techno-places, and the effect of technological and consumer culture or society,
- (3) the future objectives,
- (4) the effect of ICT to the culture, and
- (5) the unevenness and periodicity of middle classing process.

(1) Because of the change of youth cultures, the spread of leisure-time scene, the educational expansion, and the process of middle classing we can presume that the connection between youth cultures and the local society changed. Youth cultures located where the higher educational institute can be found, in the smaller towns, they appear only seasonal at school holidays. We suppose that they prefer those leisure-time activities what they used in the place of their study, in that town where a college or a university situated. It leads to that phenomenon that the small towns loose their youth, because those cannot guarantee an energetic and youthful way of life. By the data of Youth2004© research we can find out that the civil and political action potential is low so we suppose that the decrease of initiative capacity also appears in cultural consumption.

(2) The characteristics of techno-culture and consumption culture or society effect the connections between people and the common life and those characteristics can be found among youth cultures so much more. We presume that the living places of persons and communities were enlarged, and the usage of techno-places became more popular for social life, non-formal education and increase of social network. The literature gives a contradictory answer for those questions about the social effect of internet usage, if it could increase the social capital and network or it made stronger the alienation among people. We suppose that the internet can strengthen the social and information capital of those people whom grown up among technical conditions, and those technologies had a cultural meaning. The effects of consumer cultures appear among youth subcultures, and they turn into commerce values more and more. This resulted the vanishing of underground youth subcultures and the acceptance of consumer cultures. The cultural goods turned into symbols of social state and those motivate the everyday life of middle classing youth cultures.

(3) It is important to emphasize that the effects of technological and consumer culture appear in youth' future objectives and the quality and quantity of aims of life. We suppose that youth cultures with different volume of cultural and social capital have different future

objectives and those who have less social capital are more vulnerable, but optimistic. We presume that the acid perspectivism what characterized the screenager subculture has changed and now it can be found among the groups with lower social capital.

(4) Our previous researches proved that the influx of technology into culture has changed the everyday roles because new objectives and instrument arrived into society. It started accelerating lifestyle and new symbols. To get the technical knowledge was the part of subcultures carrier in 90-s, but nowadays it is mediated by the public education. The ICT became the part of cultural capital as computer literacy and communicational status. That is why it is important to separate the different volume of cultural capital between the youth cultures to interpret the meaning of the technology in their life.

(5) During our research, we could observe the middle classing as a process. This means that the middle classing is not a state but a continuous process and it has not even finished. We suppose that the higher educational qualification is not a guarantee for stepping up a social class, so the cultural capital alone does not help the social mobility. We presumed that the higher educational studies flash the possibility of a more qualified lifestyle and the cultural characteristics of middle class for rural youth, but this way of life does not seem to become a steady state. If they cannot find a job within a year after graduation, they step back to those circumstances what were their parents' lifestyle.

To control our hypotheses we used different qualitative research methods in regional aspect. Every single inquire we used a special way of sampling and during the interpretation of data we had to take researcher's role changing consideration (teacher, or member of a peer group). The basic research was a qualitative observation and interviewing among the target group. It began with a focus group of students of Collage of Nyíregyháza (four female students aged 21-23) who helped to plan the sampling method. We used the snowball method to select the interviewees we paid attention to the ratio of gender and tried to find students from different kind of educational institutions. To know more about the youths' future objectives we conduct focus groups in two different secondary schools: Déri Miksa and Esze Tamás secondary schools in Mátészalka. To know more about techno-cultures and their characteristics we had to observe different techno or cyber places, forums and blogs. To know more about the connection between youth cultures and local society we choused a rural town this has no higher educational institution but struggles with youth policy problems because of the educational expansion. Hajdúnánás is the best for our observations, because Debrecen and Nyíregyháza entice away the youth with the higher educational institutions and cultural and job opportunities. We applied complex research methods in Hajdúnánás both qualitative and

quantitative methods with online survey and interviews with the assistance of a local and very active youth society named Okkal MásOkkal Youth Association. In 2005 and 2006 we conduct an online survey among the rural youth who connected to Hajdúnánás (492 questionnaires) and beside these ten semi-structured interviews to interpret the data. All of our interviewees had no independent existence so the interviews are suitable to interpret middle classing too. The results of these researches made us to draw up a new hypothesis and to verify that we made four interviews (two males and two females) that had finished their higher educational studies and graduated.

4. The results

During our researches most of our hypotheses has verified except that referred to future objectives. We can explain that with the process of middle classing because our interviewees had the characteristics of those who were in between two social classes. All their motives and objects are symbolizing this process, so that is why they are optimistic. We could verify the hypothesis about the connection between youth cultures and local society during our researches referred to time schedule and proxemical characteristics of the target group. Those rural towns that has low service index are not popular among youths because of the insufficient cultural, educational services and job opportunities. Among collage/university students those consumption patterns became general they used to have at the town of the higher educational institute, so they prefer to live those town or cities in the future instead of their previous living place. The internet can help the lower social network and information potential a little bit, but only if those who are looking for the possibilities in active ways. We could observe high communicational status that can strengthen that function, but low computer literacy can weaken it as well. We studied the durableness of socio-cultural characteristics and the higher educational effected lifestyle of middle classing. The results of the complement interviews showed that the most risky period of the youth life is the period of job searching. If they could not find a proper job, it means that they step back to those social circumstances that characterized them before the higher educational studies. Those aspects what help to step back between the social classes show regional differences.

The youth cultures of North-East Hungary have regional characteristics and they differ from the youth cultures of the Island researches, and the youth cultures of Budapest. The differences between the two groups of youth cultures appear in economic and socio-

cultural aspect, good example that the Island researches are about “the new middle class” in youth groups, in North-East Hungary the process of middle classing is faltering and mostly it is not become a determining part of an adult lifestyle.

We could establish by the experiences of interviews that there are generational differences and because of these generational problems can be found among the youth cultures. Just like in 1999 among the answers, there are many paradoxes and contradictory explanations so that is why it is important to use semantic interviews during youth researches.

The elements of the change of era of youth can be observed in the interviews but during the process of middle classing it is difficult to determine who can be the winner or the looser of the change of regime because it comes to light after graduation when the social and cultural capital are exploiting. Among our interviewees, the lifestyle connected to higher educational institutions flashes the possibilities and patterns of middle classing but a higher educational degree is not a guarantee to step forward for rural youth at a disadvantage.

The main characteristic of the education is expansion what seems to end at the secondary level, but if higher educational policy does not change the expansion increases at the upper level. The state of the labor market indicates increasing vulnerability for those who are undergraduates. In spite of this, our interviewees estimated their studies useful though the value of their degree in labor market is not known. We can say that the degree is not important so much because the student lifestyle is the cultural capital for them that can be presented for younger fellows. That is why to study in any kind of college or university is a wishful state for almost every secondary school pupils and that was their main future objective.

It is interesting to observe their expectations connected to higher educational studies these contain independency, freedom, getting practical and useful information and academic experiences, getting on and well paid job after graduation. They want these being ready made without their efforts and active collaboration. The college or university students are dissatisfied with their language knowledge and because of this and the low social capital without practical experiences it is difficult to succeed in labor market. They have to compete for jobs with masses and this makes difficult to change cultural capital into economic capital into salary but during their studies, they do not know much about this.

The qualitative research data shows that many kind of social scene are absent from rural youth subcultures for example the creative and self-accomplishment and those are usual among youth cultures of the Island. Therefore, we concluded that the passive way of life is the consequence of the absence of the self-accomplishing attitude.

The appearances of information society, techno-culture or the way of consumption show a special pattern in the target region. We can say that the presences of ICT instruments are wishful symbols for those who have lower social status. For middle class youth only the new instruments become status symbols and both middle class and elite youth have a neutral or indifferent relation to instrumental knowledge mediate by ICT, the communicational status is high but the computer literacy is low among them. The sub cultural features of techno-culture vanished during last years but the polychronic perception of time and multitasking is still typical feature of youth. The subcultures vanished or changed into overground among our target groups and their musical taste and way of recreation or amusement patterned as a close scheme. They do not know the forms of recreation of the elite and do not even travel for the sake of cultural programs. The creative and self-accomplishment activity as a hobby is not a feature of our interviewees. The patterns of cultural consumption show regional differences characterized by the possibilities of the town or village and not the property of the youth. We could observe the decrease of the intense of cultural consumption social and political activity among our target group what makes an impression of passive youth cultures. May be the political interests among the interviewees were a little bit higher, but it seems to be seasonal for those days when the radical political activity turned into media occurrence and we suppose that because they are totally passive and indifferent with the civil activity.

Our interviewees had very narrow social network the smallest town they live the smallest social capital they have. The conscious development of social capital is not characterizing the collage or university students so they become lonelier in the mass education. Their relations with their parents are balanced, because the main emotional and material support is coming from them. The youth has respect for their parents they are not revolting and if they mentioned a model for their life that was their parents' life. The future objectives of the interviewees were optimistic; there were many contradiction and paradoxes between the perception of their own future and the future of the world. All of their status symbols are from the consumer cultures: the car, cell phone, pc, laptop, internet, a flat and the degree were the most important among them.

They have a special explanation of individual, individual is who does not want to hang out of the others and does not want to resemble to anybody. They are very critical with their peers or with themselves too. We ask them to characterize the youth cultures of today and they mostly thought of the younger age groups. The characterization of themselves showed regional differences those who lived in small rural towns said they had no enough possibilities, those who lives bigger towns said they did not use the attainable possibilities.

The connection between youth cultures and local society showed us the vulnerability of youth issuing from regional differences. This makes youth to move away from small towns to bigger cities where more social, economic and cultural possibilities are available. The reasons of the migration are the low service index and the absence of job opportunities. Because they are passive, they will not create suitable cultural or social environment they want to obtain that ready made. The results of the interviews showed that the appearance of creative and self-accomplishment attitude is more frequentative in bigger towns. The size of the residence affects the cultural and social activity of the person. If someone come to the city of the higher educational institution from a small rural town, it is more difficult to accommodate to the new way of life.

Compared with our previous research results it can be observed that there are differences between the future objectives. The acid perspectivism reinterpreted and it has a protective function in those lives that have difficulties to step into the labor market and it changes the relation to the studies and polices too.

Our research data raise new research questions in Hungarian youth researches. It is important to examine that what kind of variables (economic, cultural, and social) determines the regional differences of youth cultures. How determines the change of educational system of the state of youth cultures and their relations to the labor market or their further studies. The youth cultures change time by time, it results different kind of social and cultural characteristics, and it is important to observe those cultures both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

5. Publications:

2007. (with Ilona Varga and István Szabó)
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