

# Youth Subculture as Interaction of Youth and Society

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## *Abstract:*

*Based on the results of a sociological study in the Mogilev Region, the state and development of youth subculture as a social phenomenon are considered. The reasons for involvement in subcultural associations, sources of information about them, the positive and negative effects of participation in youth subcultures are analyzed. In modern society, we have a situation of subcultural pluralism when society is a set of co-existing ethnic, professional, religious, territorial and youth subcultures, each of which has its own view of the world, including its own system of norms and values, attitudes, beliefs and interests. The study of youth subcultures gives us a deeper understanding of young people's subjectivity. Traditionally, young people are considered as a social resource of society, the object of socialization adopting the experience of older generations. However, some approaches pay attention to the process of integration into society through conflict. It allows youth to present values that do not coincide with the dominant culture.*

*Keywords: youth subculture, subcultural trends, values and attitudes, non-formal group of youth, socialization, adaptation, integration to the society, norms, deviant behavior of youth*

Youth is mostly sensitive to the socio-cultural phenomena, which in a relatively short period of time spread through mass media, as well as through a face-to-face communication. Young men and women act as the representatives of youth culture, within which different phenomena, appearing as alternative or variation forms of cultural processes, may exist. It occurs through external trends, including global and local trends such as, the successful performance of a local sports team activating the fan movement.

The social phenomenon of subculture began to be considered by sociologists, anthropologists and cultural studies in the middle of the last century, and suggested the concept of subculture as a group of people deliberately choosing styles and values that are preferred by a minority. The British sociologist, Dick Hebdige (HEBDIGE 1979) had a more thorough analysis of the subculture's concept. In his point of view, subcultures attract people with similar views which do not meet generally accepted standards and values. In his work French sociologist Michel Mafessoli used the term "urban tribes" to describe youth subcultures. This connects the spread of subcultures with the changing cultural and historical development of society towards

individualization, widespread urban culture. (MAFFESOLI 1996): “Modernity's strength lies in the framework of History and historical development. 'Centrifugation' is nothing more than the intellectual translation of such a perspective. But what was once strength has inevitably become a weakness”.

In the USSR, members of youth subcultures are termed "non-formal groups of young people", shortly "non-formals”.

In modern societies, anorm is an example of subcultural pluralism, when society is a set of co-existing ethnic, professional, religious, territorial, and, of course, youth subcultures with its own view of the world including its own system of norms and values, attitudes, beliefs and interests (ILYIN 2010: 72). Our researchers have started to pay attention to this problem relatively recently - in the 80-90<sup>th</sup> of the twentieth century. Subculture is interpreted as a system of norms and values, which distinguishes the group from the majority of the society. “One of the varieties is the youth subculture – an autonomous integral formation within the dominant culture, which determines the lifestyle and the way of thinking of its representative, that in their turn are distinguished by their customs, norms, values and even institutions” (SOLODOVNIKOV 2002: 807).

The Russian researcher Svetlana Levikova elaborates on this term. (LEVIKOVA 2004: 34-35):

*Youth subculture is an esoteric, escapist, urban culture, created by young people for themselves. It is an "elite" culture aiming to involve young people into society. It is partial cultural subsystem within the system an "official" system, basic culture of the society that determines the lifestyle, values hierarchy and mentality (i.e. world perception, state of mind) of its representatives.*

Together with this subcultures may differ in languages, behavior patterns, clothes, particular appearance. A music style, lifestyle, political views and so on may create the basis for a subculture. This is of particular interest for cultural studies including the regional level (TOKOVA 2003). Despite the fact that there are large amounts of information and constant monitoring of new youth movements, there is still no clear idea of this social phenomenon, and this problem still remains to be one of the most disputable issues discussed in scientific community and in society.

Subcultures, as well as any other cultural phenomenon appeared not in a social vacuum, but in a culturally rich environment. The society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was overloaded with different ideas, philosophies and other culturological elements. That is why one cannot say that subcultures are isolated or antagonistic to mass-culture, they have complicated relations with both mass culture and other subcultures.

The research of youth subcultures gives the possibility to better understand the subjectivity of young people. Traditionally, youth is taken as a social resource of society, socialization object that adopts the experience of the older generations. However, a conflict approach pays attention to the conflict characteristic to the process

of integration into society, also does not reject that youth may have values that differ from the values in a dominant society. Theodor Shanin insists that generation is the most important element of a social division. "The basic common features of life experience in a particular period of time, multiplied by its drama, create closeness in understanding and thinking, as well as the statistical commonality" (SHANIN 2005: 8-9). The emergence and spread of youth subcultures in the 50-60th of the twentieth century declared about subjectivity of individual generations and about changes in the criteria for role-based division of society based on the age.

Youth is a social and demographic group which has much more free time than other generations. At that, the free time or leisure does not only traditionally function as rest after work or favorite hobby, but also an important mechanism of self-realization, the search of a social circle, like-minded people, determination of their place in society. A special role in this process is given to the youth subculture as a phenomenon characteristic of the industrial and post-industrial stage of any type of culture. This is a transitional stage of becoming a person who loses its importance during the adaptation to the adult world.

An Israeli researcher Shmuel Eisenstadt in the work "From Generation to Generation: Age Groups and Social Structures" considers youth culture as an institution that regulates the separation of the child from the family, the training of young people to take their status position in the adult social system. It provides a clear set of values, positions and norms of behavior, which are to be followed whatever happens around (EISENSTADT 1956).

S.Levikova claims that for such youth subculture to appear at least the combination of three factors is necessary (LEVIKOVA 2004: 182-183):

*a) the rejection of social standards that were accepted earlier but do not satisfy under the changed circumstance; b) an attempt to create their own independent world-view systems; c) search for reference groups with similar values by young people (teenagers). We mostly deal with basic prerequisites of a youth subculture incase of some malfunctions in normalconditions:*

- *in family (excessive parental control or excessive freedom);*
- *in a formal group: bad relations with classmates, teachers, etc.*
- *in so-called local wars, taking part in which results in the fact a young person acquires an experience so unusual for peaceful life that it gives a mark on there reality and world perception that he does not fit into that peaceful life in which to return;*
- *among the unemployed or temporarily unemployed young people;*
- *in case the real social status of a young person who has already started to work does not coincide with the status he wants.*

Youth is a socially and culturally diverse, and under the conditions of a mixed economy and the transfer to a post-industrial stage of development, its social differentiation and cultural segmentation take place. There is a great variety of

classifications for youth subcultures. First of all, these are the classifications according to the interests and leisure activities (music, sports, and so on), also they can be distinguished by the social and legal characteristic: the pro-social, anti-social. Z.Sikevich gives the characteristics of an informal self-regulating youth movement taking into consideration the fact that belonging to this or that group may be connected with: 1) the way to spend leisure time (music and sports fans); 2) the social position (eco-cultural); 3) the way of life (system-minded); 4) an alternative creative activity (painters, musicians, actors, writers and others not recognized officially) (SIKEVICH 1990: 6).

In most cases subcultures are closed and tend to isolate from mainstream culture. This is caused both by the origin of subcultures (closed communities with the same interest) and by the tendency to separate from the main culture, to oppose it to a subculture. Coming into conflict with the main culture, subcultures may be aggressive and even extremist sometimes. The movements that come into conflict with a traditional culture are called counterculture. Youth subcultures are characterized by both a protest and escapism (escaping from reality), which is one of the stages of self-esteem.

In 2012 the group of Mogilev Institute of Regional Social and Political Studies within the studies to the topic "Life attitude and social values of the youth of Mogilev region under the conditions of a transforming society" studied the peculiarities of attitude and participation of the youth of Mogilev region in subcultures applying sociological methods (standardized interviews). The object of the studies was youth (15-25 years), selected by the given quotas: the schoolchildren, the students of universities, professional colleges, young people who work in different fields, and the unemployed. The total sample consists of 932 people, including 237 upper-formers and 695 older young men and women.

According to the results of the survey, youth subcultures which can be counted in a few dozens are well known among schoolchildren and young people. The most frequent answers to the question: "What current youth subcultures do you know?" were the following: rappers, emos, football fans, punks, goths, bikers, gamers, skinheads, break-dancers, hippies, satanists and others. Only 2% of schoolchildren and 15% of young people could not name any types of subculture.

Despite of a certain closeness of these youth movements, they are widely represented on television, radio and the Internet. Many of them are connected with music, entertainment and through the mass media one can study all the details of youth style in clothes, manners, slang, and understand their trends. On the Internet, one can find the whole sites, special articles and reviews, as well as groups in the major social networks. This is confirmed by the survey results.

Answer options	School pupils	Youth
Internet	89.0	71.4
Television	57.0	61.4
Friends	53.6	45.6
Magazines and newspapers	27.4	26.0
Watching surroundings	16.0	20.4
Radio	5.1	9.5

Table 1: The main sources of information about subcultures, %

Thus, it is possible to identify any subcultural trend, first of all with the help of Internet. However, they exist not just on the main channels of information but also among the direct surroundings including in the places of living, studies, work. Rappers, emos, punks, gamers, football fans, graffitists and Goths are the most frequently met.

We have considered the closest circle of our survey participants, to be more exact if they have supporters of subcultural trends among their friends. The question is: "What representatives of youth subcultures do you have among your friends, acquaintances?" Among schoolchildren 52% answered that they do not have such friends and among young people 66% answered the same way. Among friends and acquaintances rappers, football fans and gamers are mostly common. In general it can be said that youth subcultures are quite widely spread, as every second person is familiar with them not only from Internet sites, TV programs etc., but communicates with them directly, spends time together and can have sympathy to them, not joining the subculture itself.

How many and what kinds of youth subcultures has our survey in the Mogilev region revealed?

Answer options	The whole group of schoolchildren	The boys	The girls	Schoolchildren from the cities	Schoolchildren from the small towns	Schoolchildren from the villages
No	79.7	69.9	88.8	84.5	78.2	74.2
Yes	12.2	17.7	7.3	10.3	15.4	11.3
No, but would like to participate	8.0	12.4	4.0	5.2	6.4	14.5

Table 2: Distribution of answers to the question of schoolchildren: "Are you a member of a youth subculture?"%

Among schoolchildren, there is only about one out of ten who considers himself as members of subcultural trends. However, based on the definitions of subculture that is an autonomous unit within the dominant culture, we can observe quite noticeable involvement teenagers in it as well as young people in the region. The following groups have most of all representatives: gamers – 2,5%, metal heads – 2,5%, bikers, traceurs, skaters – 2,1% each. They are mostly boys and they are met not only in large cities as it is often assumed. Boys are more eager to join any direction, as well as those who live in rural areas. In total, about 20% of the schoolchildren can be taken as real or potential participants of a youth subculture. Among the major trends the following ones were named: gamers, metalheads, bikers, traceurs, and skaters; a few consider themselves to be football fans, graffitists, punks, rappers, hackers, hoodlums, hardcore street toughs, break-dancers, anime-lovers. In an older age group – among the youth older than 18 years – the situation is similar, though the interest to subcultures and their involvement become smaller.

Answer options	The whole group of youth	The young men	The young women	The youth from the cities	The youth from the small towns	The youth from the villages
No	87.9	15.7	4.6	88.1	86.0	90.7
Yes	9.4	15.7	4.6	9.1	11.9	5.6
No, but would like to participate	2.3	3.0	1.8	2.5	1.6	2.8

Table 3: Distribution of answers to the question of youth: "Are you a member of a youth subculture?"%

The researchers of youth subcultures point out that one should distinguish the concept of "youth subculture" and "culture for the young." Youth subculture is a "elite" phenomenon in the sense that only few young people pass through it; culture for the young is a universal, mass phenomenon oriented to biologically young people, as it affects every (or almost every) young person, regardless of whether they work or go to school. Youth subculture is rather expensive: first of all, if a young person does not have money to provide his living, when he decides whether to join a particular youth subculture or to earn for a living, it is unlikely that he will choose a youth subculture; secondly, different attributes of belonging to a particular youth subculture and activities are not cheap either (LEVIKOVA 2004: 290).

Youth subcultures may appear and exist as spontaneous process, not regulated by anybody, acquiring the features of counterculture. Russian researcher P.Gurevich believes that in the history of culture there were the situations when local systems of values lay claim to certain universality. They step over the bounds of their own culture, declare new values and practical attitudes for broad social communities. In this case it

can be considered not just as a subculture, but as countercultural trends (GUREVICH 2003: 158).

Despite the fact that mass involvement in this socio-cultural phenomenon among young people is not observed, we can meet the presence of youth subcultures in the settlements of the Mogilev Region and other large cities quite often. This can be seen in graffiti on the walls and roaring motors of bikers at night, loud rap music in public places, "strange" groups of people dressed unusually, etc. To prove the fact that though in general not being a destructive phenomenon, youth subcultures tend to arouse some concern. We can apply the following answers of youth to the question: "Have you ever seen the representatives of youth subcultures do the following?" They saw that the representatives of subcultures drank alcohol in a public places - 41%, were noisy - 41%, were aggressive - 30%, spoiled benches, fences, elevators - 19%, committed dangerous acts against themselves or others - 13% , used drugs - 7%.

Young people's answers show that youth subcultures are not as harmless as one might think, especially in large cities. Of course, those young people which are not involved in these also take alcohol, violate public order, etc., but many of the subcultural movements promote such actions as an inherent part of belonging to it. Drug addiction, cult of suicide and risky tricks are especially dangerous. We also asked young people how people should react to youth subcultures.

<b>Answeroptions</b>	<b>School pupils</b>	<b>Youth</b>
Not to pay attention	59.9	53.9
To support	22.4	27.8
To ban	10.5	11.6
Difficult to answer	7.2	6.6

Table 4: Distribution of answers to the question: "How should the surrounding react to the youth subcultures?"%

In most cases young people are against some interference into the activities of subcultures, for this interference only robs the meaning of aiming to join it. Among the motives to join such informal groups the following can be named: the desire to avoid parental and teacher's control, to get into the circle of like-minded people, to oppose the collective power of a union or a group to the power of adults and society in general. Only one out of ten is for the prohibitions and restrictions. Sufficiently large number of young people mentions the need to supports these youth groups, which means that young people need them; they are an attractive subject for imitation, discussion, etc.

We investigated what aspects attract young generation to be involved in subcultures. The answers were distributed in the following way:

<b>Answer options</b>	<b>School pupils</b>	<b>Youth</b>
Communication with peers	59.5	50.5
The opportunity to express themselves	52.7	47.6
Interesting pastime	34.2	31.2
They do not know what to do	24.5	31.1
Freedom	27.4	25.6
Possibility to change appearance	19.4	18.7
Need for protection	7.6	7.2

Table 5: Distribution of answers to the question: “What engages youth in subcultures?” %

Some other reasons were also identified, such as possibility to attract attention, protest, style, the way of life and lack of good friends. The reasons are connected with age, leading activities of an individual and the needs of the young. Very often in familiar surroundings, for example in a family, among classmates, group-mates and the company from the neighborhood it is quite difficult for the young to find themselves, express themselves and communicate with associates.

Though there is a number of positive functions in youth subcultures, such as, for example, as adaptation of young people to society, enabling a young person to develop personal primary status and assistance in becoming independent from their parents, etc., the society would like to forward the energy of the young in a more constructive direction or at least to protect against risks. Problems are often caused by the excessive free time and lack of leisure organization.

In their leisure time, young people prefer to communicate with friends or do some work about the house, while those who live in rural areas have much more household duties. About the third of them give priority to television especially girls. But the young men are active in sports and computer games. Often the way a young person spends his free time is limited by such factors as opportunities or conditions to choose something else. That’s why we asked what they would like to do in leisure time. Almost half of the respondents (46%) found it difficult to answer the question. The other prefer to communicate with friends - 10.4%; to spend time with family - 9.2%; 8.9% - just relax; travel - 7.9%; 6.2% - to be engaged in hobbies; to pay attention to self-improvement, self-development - 4.3%; to do sports - 4.2%; outdoor recreation - 3.6%; to visit entertainment establishments - 3.6%; do household chores - 2.9%; visit cultural institutions - 2.9%. Thus, the young people do not demonstrate any special claims to leisure, many of them are quite satisfied with the existing situation. However, adults and social institutions, working with young people should do their best to forward their leisure-time activity to a constructive direction.



Youth subculture is not just a system of symbols, but also a system of values that determine self-identification, behavior and activities of the young. Life orientations of the young people is an important characteristic of values not only for this given socio-demographic group but for the whole society as these orientations are made up influenced by the main social institutions: family, education, state, culture, means of mass communication etc.. Though the attitude of the young to the political events, economy and their own life is some times difficult to understand and explain, it often stands for an attempt for self-identify, evaluate themselves and the opportunities that are given for self-realization in the modern social conditions.

Young age is a period of life start and quite a wide range of opportunities, that is why education, family, labor groups, army and many other social institutions socialize personality actively, identifying socially significant features and abilities. An important factor for the social formation of a young person is his success in this or those areas of society, his achievements that improve his status give more chances for self-realization. As a result of the survey about one-third of young people say that their life develops quite successfully (30.1%). They think that they do not have special success but in general everything is alright (58.7%), others believe that there are too many obstacles in their lives (5.8%).

The young people of today are called a pragmatic generation that is not inclined to take life as a lottery but actively looks for a way to success. Though it is quite unlikely that that the young have ever acted differently, perhaps the ways to achieve success now differ from those that take place previously. Giving answers to the question about the fact that most contributes to the success of life young men and women named the following: purposefulness - 67.2%, the ability to adapt the situation quickly - 42.6%; hard work - 39.6%, reliable life partner - 39.6%, the ability to get acquainted and communicate - 37.4%, high level of education - 30.2%, assistance of parents - 15.4%. So it is important for them to know what they want to get in life and make some effort to do so. We may also note that less than a third of respondents consider their education to be a ticket to their success in future. In sociology, social values are considered as the regulators of social life and behavior of individuals. They serve as the fundamental norms that ensure the integrity of the social systems in view of the fact that they expressed a special significance of certain material and spiritual wealth for their existence and development. The absence or dysfunction of regulators brings society to a state of social anomie, when its members lose their clear-cut guidelines their actions are unpredictable and cause harm to others and themselves. Young people are the most exposed to transition to this state because they do not have enough life experience which is still in the formative stage of their own family, career, lifestyle as well as their own personality.

Youth subculture is a complex, multi-attribute and quite rapidly developing phenomenon with a number of specific features and characteristics. Mass media especially Internet promotes the widespread distribution of subcultural trends. Subcultures in our region are concentrated mainly around the recreational interests of young people. They also create specific mechanisms of solidarity which unite the members of the group or those who are interested in them. The main factor that attracts youth subculture is a desire to find like-minded people and the opportunity to prove themselves. This can also stand for the feeling of being not needed by the society, isolation, critical attitude and denial or review of traditional values. At the moment there is no need to control youth subcultural groups or forbid them in the region but the attention should be paid to the contents and forms of the network of educational, fostering, cultural and entertainment institution for teenagers and youth. The sociological studies of separate subcultures, forecasting of possible social and cultural situations, developing of strategies and tactics for cultural education of the young are especially are of a special concern these days.

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