

Peter Ondrejko*vič*
Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně

A Study of Intergenerational Relations

Abstract: The article constitutes a reflection on the issue of the relations between generations as one of the important factors of the dynamics of social development. It seeks to create a basis for research on intergenerational relations providing the characteristics of the youth, the process of individualization, loss of traditional certainties, “tribalism and nomadism” by Maffesoli, uncertainty and violence.

Key words: generation, generational conflict, actor, individualization, globalization, youth

The issue of intergenerational relations has been a subject of study for at least three generations of sociologists. It has become a subject of both empirical research and sociological theories in various forms. It is directly related to the notion of the youth and the history of its origin as a sociological category¹ with the questions of the social structure, a place of various age categories within this structure and the questions of the share of power and social mobility. These questions gain a special meaning as regards social pedagogy as a science at the intersection of sociology, social psychology and pedagogy, pointing at the influence of social environment on forming the individuality. Mutual relations of the above-mentioned disciplines are subject to many theoretical studies, often polemical and not avoiding contradictory views. They earn attention of all the three, or even some more scientific disciplines, such as social philosophy, sociology of family, sociology of education, sociology of the youth, political science, andragogy, etc. Within the frame of this article,

¹ Until the industrial era, connected with the use of steam engine, the youth had not been an individual social group. After the childhood, characterised by playing, young people immediately became a part of the adult world, although with different attitude towards them. For further information, see Ondrejko*vič*, 2002, pp. 9—26.

the claim that the intergenerational relations are quite legitimately becoming the subject of study of sociology as well as (social) pedagogy and (social) psychology, will suffice. On the one hand (a), as far as society, its dynamics and development are concerned. On the other (b), from the point of view of education that allows an intervention in this dynamics during the final stage by means of the individuals who are becoming the actors of the social events. Finally (c), regarding the social processes and their experience, characters of people within social situations, groups and their relationships. Thus, strict and mutually independent research of intergenerational relations would not correspond to the social reality.

A crucial thing for the rise of the intergenerational relations, which we will described thoroughly later, is the existence of divergent interests, which are becoming a part of the attitude of the population and its acting as the actors of the social events. A social actor is a carrier, initiator and executor of a social activity. In the field of sociology, it is generally a synonym of an individual. However, it is also used to depict the social groups as the possible carriers of social activities. It is a real and active subject of the social actions and is oriented towards an aim and manipulates or owns the means to achieve it. The notion of social actor is a construct, a unit of the social system in the theory of Talcot Parsons (1968). Description of the social actor as the carrier of a social status and social roles can be also found among other theories, for example in the Max Weber's concept, the social actor is an object of performing, oriented and expecting subject (actor) of the social acts. It has its unique place in the neofunctionalist theory by Jeffrey C. Alexander (culture of acting, which is the ability defining the actor, according to Skovajs, p. 237).

The actors of social events are both individuals and social groups, whose orientation to the aims, the choice of means to achieve them, and, particularly, the selection of the very aims significantly depend on the age category. The differences in the choice of the aims, the orientation towards them but also in the selection of means for achieving them, are becoming the source of a social field² with a certain societal tension, varying in its intensity. It is this tension that causes the social changes, hence representing the dynamic aspect of the society. There is also an actor-network theory (abbr. ANT), a sociological theory formulated by Bruno Latour together with sociologists Michael Callon and John Law in the late 1980s. It differs from other sociological theories in the fact that it does not contain merely the people, but also objects, organizations and concepts. Those are called the actors. In the light of the

² Based on the notion of the social field by Pierre Bourdieu. The social field is defined as a relatively autonomous part of the social space, which is governed by its own rules and is structured by its own system of the distribution of the forms of capital (including the social one — note P.O.). In other words, the social field is a universe which is governed by its own rules of functioning and transformation, [...] it is a structure of objective relations between the positions, which are taken by individuals or groups, which mutually compete for the legitimacy" (Bourdieu, [1992] 2010, p. 282).

The field is defined similarly to the social space as "the space of objective relations between the positions" (Bourdieu, [1986] 1993, p. 181), which fight (symbolically or openly) against each other with the intention of either transforming or preserving the current structure of the field (Bourdieu, [1986] 1993, pp. 183, cf. Bourdieu, Lamasoin, 1986, pp. 110—120).

indicators we use in an empirical research of the intergenerational relations, it is this theory we will henceforward abstract from.

The youth plays its unique role within the category of the actors of the social events. Ever since its existence, it has correlated with different age actors and at the same time it forms a social unit called a generation.

Within sociology, we may define the term generation as people born in an approximately same era (usually stretching over 30 years — so-called generation distance) or sometimes in the same year or people with the same interests resulting from the shared time of their birth. The sense of the term often encompasses also the denotation of a certain period as such (e.g. war generation, recession generation). However, from the socio-cultural point of view, it is far more important (Mannheim, 1984, pp. 509—565) that a generation is not based on the birth in the same era, but rather is formed in the process of communication. According to Boehnenkamp (2011), a generation is not a construct. Generations of people are connected through age, values, patterns of behaviour, historic events and their perception. Nevertheless, during sudden social changes, one generation embraces fewer cohorts.³ According to neo-functionalist theories as well as Giddens (1984, 1999), we might think of generation acts that are strongly structurally determined.

We normally speak of the young, emerging generation, the middle and the withdrawing generation. Generational change is accompanied by social (generational) conflicts which may have a various intensity and form. The withdrawing generation surrenders its social positions rather gradually. Such conflicts can be in diverse forms (either latent or explicit) found within families as well. One is often a witness to the conflict situations between generations in public, politics, management (of institutions, organizations), science and technology, art and literature. Generational conflicts are sometimes provoked deliberately and artificially, with the intention of gaining the power. However, to understand the power in its material form and everyday coverage, we must “descend to the realm of micropactice and political technologies, by means of which our practical activity is formed” (Dreyfus, Rabinow, 2002, pp. 281—282). That corresponds with our effort in the intergenerational relations research.

The generational conflict is a specific kind of conflict. It is a clash in the process of development, in which every generation acts as a relatively individual, socially forming power. The reason of the conflict is the acceptance of (or the endeavour to accept) different systems of values, even the norms determining acting of the social actors. The nature of the value orientation has been empirically analysed by Krivý (1998; but in particular by Kusá, Tížik, 2009). The hints of the generational differences were in the above-mentioned research noted by several questions. For instance, (only) 68.9% of the respondents between 18—24 years of age utterly accept their parents on the basis of love and respect (Kusá, Zeman, 2008, p. 168),

³ A cohort is a set of people that in the same period of time (usually a year) experienced a certain demographic event.

but 63.6% of them is willing to fulfil their duty of a permanent care for their parents despite their own standard of living (Kusá, Zeman, 2008, p. 170).

A generation is (through the generational conflicts) one of the crucial factors of the dynamization of society. Generational change provides:

1. The continuity of the development of society, or the continuity of the social change. This delivery of knowledge and experiences is brought by means of socialisation as a lifelong process of active acquisition of values, norms and the patterns of behaviour on the one hand, and the needs, aims, relations (social and cultural capital) and the way of life on the other.
2. Overcoming of the power relations, which may be spontaneous and intense or gradual and loose. It is connected with the rise and the development of subcultures, which throughout the process of generational change quite often set up and become dominant, or they may as well fade and cease to exist.

The forthcoming research purpose is formulated as a sociological study of the Czech, Slovak and Polish youth and its intergenerational links (between the fate and the choice). We consider a necessity to start with the characteristics of the young generation in its relation to the older generation of parents.

As a matter of fact, within Slovakia, the form of existence of the youth as a kind of psycho-social intermediate stage between the sexual maturity and the fully-fledged status of adulthood is a phenomenon with a very short history and its origin is related to the industrialization of the society. The main features of the youth in the whole of Europe, including Slovak Republic and most likely Poland, are **individualization** and **globalization**.

Let us, therefore, try to present the essential attributes of the contemporary youth, which are manifested in the form of recordable and measurable characteristics.

Individualization of the youth

Individualization of the youth is characterized by a distinctive way of life, an effort made to distinguish oneself from the rest of the population and seeking one's own identity. It is a process which to a large extent determines the formation of authenticity and uniqueness of an individual in his or her behaviour, which makes it very important considering the youth as a generation. Thus understood, the meaning of individualization can be realized only on the basis or as a consequence of the previous process of socialization and, seemingly paradoxically, exclusively on the condition of adopting social values and norms. The process of individualization itself is possible only within the society and "towards the society," representatives of which are usually the members of the older generation. In this process, one fully depends on the society (Mead, 1925, 1934). Ulrich Beck (1986, p. 205) states that unlike the classical and historical model of individualization as a change of

one's consciousness and position, the process of individualization is a new way of socialization in relation of an individual and the society. Unstoppable rise of an individual in 1960s in an industrial western society and after 1989 in other countries respectively has brought a high acceleration and new qualities. It is, therefore, literally paradoxical that the existence of individuals and individualization have become a mass phenomenon (Hoffman-Nowotny, 1988, pp. 660—661), particularly in the light of the appearance of “the masses” as claimed by Ortega y Gasset, who stated the necessity of the disappearance of an individual in the mass. In this new, Beck's kind of sense, individualization represents the idea that a biography of a man ceases to be fixed on given models and patterns of behaviour. It becomes open, even dependent on one's decisions and his or her individual actions. Gradually, the number of life opportunities not depending on an individual is ever smaller, whereas the parts of our lives that are open to and dependent on our choices are more and more numerous. **Crucial changes in perception of the strategies leading towards achievements occur within us as well.** Thus, individualization above all means the individualization of the course of a human life transforming itself into more and more formable shape. An individual is therefore becoming a creator of his or her own life, hence also “a consumer of the soup cooked by himself” (Beck, 1983, p. 58).

We may say that a characteristic feature of the life of the modern youth is a tendency towards a cultural self-dependence as well as creating the forms of life personally. The subculture of the youth, specific way of life and value orientations, fashion of the young, new forms of work and partnership are all rapidly evolving. Clear changes are observed in the specification of the gender roles. The youth distance themselves from the traditional environment (professional, denominational, environment of unions, organizations and groups of young people). On the contrary, informal groups and subcultures are becoming more and more popular. High expectations from life and increasingly less time for work (as a result of shortening of work time, requalification, time spent as an unemployed etc.) can be noticed. The more time and money one has for satisfying his or her individual interests and needs during the leisure time, and consumerist needs, personal way of life, living and acting, the more and the stronger he or she becomes independent from the environment of his or her walk of life, family traditions, local cultural and social customs, which has been fully shown in the answers of the respondents in the latest empirical research,⁴ carried out by the Department of Sociology FF UKF in Nitra and the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Silesia in Katowice. It was fully manifested not only in ways of time spending (only 6.5% of the respondents have the same opinion on leisure time activities as the generation of their parents), but also in the matters of professional orientation (the same view shared only by 9.2% of the respondents), and mainly in the questions of trust (17.8% “trust nobody,” out of which 6.9% whatsoever and 10.9% rather). Geographic mobility of the popu-

⁴ The respondents (in SR, N = 522) were university students of the humanities, technical and natural sciences (in SR).

lation contributes to the above-mentioned aspect of individualization as well. An increase in the "action radius" and thus also social contacts is caused mainly by individual activities, since the traditional links that led him or her to such contacts are now weakened. Virtually all authors dealing with the subject of the youth have come to such conclusion. Economic modernization and the expansion of the relative sufficiency (or welfare in some places) result in immense changes in the structure of jobs and employment, expansion of the service sector, restructuring of socio-spatial proportions (from urbanization to depopulating of the country) and particularly in the rising participation of women in the labour market. The growth of cities together with mobility connected with the depicted phenomena also contribute to the extraction of individuals from their traditional life and world, and literally mix specific social and professional classes and circles, which often causes confusion in the stereotypical ways and life plans. The same can be said about the new specification of the family roles, which was in the past determined by the individual gender. In the process of the so-called primary socialization, besides the classical forms of its realization in a core family, further ones, such as kindergartens, communities of the people living within the quarter of apartment blocks, lone-parent families with single mothers etc., occur more and more often. Sexual identification of a young person as a man or a woman still leads towards different expectations and evaluations of the social behaviour. Violent features in the behaviour of boys and girls, for instance, are considered differently, both in area of asserting one's interests, and in an expressive form of their behaviour. Although the violent behaviour is considered as socially-undesirable and is even punished, the violence itself plays an important role in the process of socialization of the male youth. Corporal punishments, even though used only in games, so-called fighting etc., belong to a casual repertoire of laddish behaviour. In comparison with girls, boys "learn" to handle also physical conflicts, so they become potentially more prepared (in certain situations) to behave violently. As far as girls are concerned, the deficit of such experiences goes hand in hand with own sexuality as an object, to fetishize the body, which is further manifested and successfully developed in an interest in fashion.

A special contributor to the process of individualization is also a mass access to higher education connected with a longer time period of staying within the educational system and thus delaying economic activity. This fact as well as education and time create together favourable conditions for the processes of self-discovery and self-reflection, which almost always lead to the effort to detach from one's environment of origin, and the effort to reach specificity and uniqueness, hence becoming an individual in its true sense. As a consequence, occurrence of individual motivation to performance and orientation towards the social rise, the choice of one's own career, that no longer positions one in a certain family or social environment.

A long period of education and preparation for life (Ondrejko, 1996a) is not merely a possibility, but also a pressure for successful mastering of preparation for life, which requires an extra endeavour and performance. Nevertheless, a former statement about the youth, claiming that "who denies him- or herself during the

youth, tries hard to achieve good study results, will be later (automatically) rewarded with a job or social opportunities” (Ondrejko 1996b) is no longer true. Considering the demands concerning one’s own performance, individual responsibility for one’s future is increasing. The weaker the power of value orientation towards the original social environment, and upbringing towards conformity and obedience in the family and in the school, the more dependent on personal decisions and competence one’s own future is. The very individual now becomes responsible for success or failure of his or her life. Even in this regard, we may speak of individualization and its rise as well as of requirements for flexibility.

With the rise of the individualization of the way of life and the pluralization of its forms, we may observe also the increase in diversification of social situations, which the youth find themselves in. They overcome the social pressure and regimentation and deny the social interventions. However, all these, especially the rise of the autonomization of life of the youth, are not clearly followed by improved possibilities of individual emancipation. We may also point out the immanent contradictions in the process of individualization which cause that individual independence-gaining, on the contrary, is becoming harder and more difficult. An individual is leaving the traditional bonds and relationships (e. g. commercial), but on the other hand, he or she is forced to a confrontation with the social institutions which he or she cannot considerably influence and therefore tries to retain the connections with family, especially mother. Entities channelling the life career of an individual are labour market, system of education and system of social care etc. The process of individualization of a young person is thus contrary to the process of institutionalization and followingly to the standardization of life. Formally organized institutions and social subsystems control “a new naturalness between an individual and the society” (Beck, 1986, p. 158).

It can be assumed that the reluctance of joining the rigidly organized and permanent associations, which is suspected to represent a hint of totalitarian organisation, is directly connected to the process of individualization. The effort to be original and unique as a part of individualization is thus naturally related to the fear of mass, uniformity and manipulation. It is quite obvious that these facts must be taken into consideration by the creators of the peer programmes. From the contemporary youth associations, the prevailing ones are thus the leisure organizations, especially dealing with sports or conservation. According to Macháček (2000, p. 24), only 1.7% of young people incline to be a member of a political organizations or movements. Preferable youth organizations in which their associativeness is fulfilled are characterised by the relaxation function as the main one, small amount of members and sometimes also short period of existence.

Increasing demands for an independent way of life thus result in the situation when a young person not just can, but must decide for a certain way of life. This choice is concentrated precisely during the period of youth as an ambivalence of the rising opportunities but also problems in the orientation of the youth. After the decrease or gradual end of the control of personal and intimate relations of young people by their families, youth organizations and neighbours and after the

downfall of the traditional tabooization of the premarital sexual life, young people find personal freedom as well as rising interindividual competition. Rapid formation of one's own personality is hence getting a special meaning. Boys and girls are more and more convinced that "they must do something of themselves." An effort to experience one's own importance and oneself as well as to experiment with oneself is growing. Personal identity is being radicalized and is available. It no more means common belonging to something (*patria potestas*⁵), but rather a specificity of distinguishing oneself from all the others. An individual becomes a producer of his or her own identity. This results in cultural search or protests stemming from the loss of close human connections because of the rise of specificity, but also in looking for the certainties and security (often in fundamentalist religions and sects, demonstrations of power and violence, supporting sports clubs etc.).

An extra category is represented by the ideas of the girls who seek the patterns of a possibility to merge a family with a job. They do not want to sacrifice their desire to have their own family to a career, but they would like to achieve both. Although this policy is possible with respect to its formal-legal aspect, it is very hard to accomplish it in practice. Young people must cope with the increasing unstableness of marriages, which more and more often represent rather temporary than life-long bonds. As many as 19.6% of respondents in our survey prefer cohabitation (14.6%) or a life in partnership (4.8%) to a marriage, and only 20.5% of them find the marriage of their parents their ideal. The importance of leisure time is increasing in particular. It becomes very attractive without any parental influence, in one's "own hands," often separated from the traditional societal norms, including the growth of the importance of all the electronic media.

As Macháček claims, the individualization of the youth can no longer be understood merely as "progressive," with its freedom of choice among possibilities and opportunities, is very accurate, since there is also a regressive and alternative individualization, with the following problems of the marginalization of the youth. Due to the limited resources of their parents, many young people are not provided with such freedom of choice which would be connected with adequate risk and personal responsibility for the consequences of wrong decisions. "There are simply no right or wrong decisions. There are only wishes and the frustration if they do not come true" — as Macháček (2000, p. 10) puts it.

The loss of the traditional certainties

The traditional course of biographies are losing their importance due to the erosion of the stable family. The dynamics of the labour market often makes the

⁵ The power of a father over his children (*patria potestas*), the power over a wife (*manus*), the power over single persons, who were temporarily due to various reasons dependent on the head of the family (*mancipium*).

experience of the generation of parents in the area of getting a job and work ethic/behaviour worthless. Especially the status of the young females is undergoing a tremendous change in their position within families and professions, in gaining claims to lead their “own life” unlike the necessity “to sacrifice” in accordance with the female schemes of the previous generations. Instead of past life certainties, new necessities and new possibilities are ambivalently emerging. Girls thus not only can, but also literally must take their fate and the course of their lives into their own hands.

Even the former certainty and faith in the technical, scientific and social progress is fading. The youth have been provided with too many negative events by the mass media, whether it has been ecological disasters, local wars or war threats of wider range, devastation of the natural environment, harmful substances in food or demoralised politicians. These all contribute to the loss of optimism and faith in progress. Consequently, a kind of escape on a part of the youth occurs, in an effort to gain new certainties, e.g. into renaturalised ideas of the society or escape into everyday practicising lacking any perspectival future-oriented thinking. The loss of certainties also within this area propels the individualization and emphasises the personal “here and now.” We can also observe weakening of the religious faith, but no more as the result of an anti-religious propaganda of the communist regime. In the above-mentioned empirical research in 2012, 53.6% of the respondents consider themselves believers and only 4.8% deeply religious. However, 19.2% of the respondents regularly attend masses, while 12.1% do it only from time to time. Religious ceremonies, starting with the baptism and ending with the funeral, are becoming secular and the religious holidays now function as casual vacation and religious affiliation loses its impact as a part of one’s identity. Such “gaps” within a life of a young person remain empty and a concern emerges whether these will not be substituted by unwanted or even negative phenomena. Resultantly, the uncertainty in the area of values and value orientations occurs. The ethics of obligations and acting on them, which was based on diligence, discipline, ambition, courage to take risk, ceases to be universally acknowledged. Narcissism, hedonism and orientation towards success are the alternative values, substituting the previous ones. The self and its private happiness represent the ultimate horizon and the last resort. We may observe fully open and obvious pluralization not only of opinions, but also of contradictory values and value orientations. Mixing of divergent value systems seems to be another interesting phenomenon. Their efficiency is then actualized in many ways, flexibly and adequately to the situation, which a young person finds him- or herself in. On the one hand, it contributes to a larger inner space for decision and freedom, but on the other, it is the source of a huge uncertainty, bordering on the loss of integrity and identity. Thus, we can clearly state, that as a consequence of the above-mentioned development, the youth is confronted with the plurality of norms and values, validity of which is limited and the social effect uncertain.

Nowadays it is crucial whether the young people achieve reflexive consciousness, or, to the contrary, they regress and do not take advantage of the opportunities

given to them. Will they develop a patterns of behaviour based on an ethnical principle, the one of right-wing extremism, or maybe they will escape (towards a subculture of drug addiction) or similarly oriented behavioural schemes (e.g. in Slovakia, a well-known drug-friendly climate in certain, especially artistic higher schools). The danger of such patterns of behaviour consists in the attack on the equality of people (process of extreme individualization may bring about the same result) or possibly also to the beginning of the degradation of democratic achievements in form of creating “temporary” variants thereof, in which democratic structures and institutions are formally retained, but in their material nature, they become obsolete. One of these orientations is the Machiavellian one.

As a result, the behaviour of the youth is not an effort to act proficiently, that is to be able to make right decisions and act in the plurality of the contradictory situations, but the search, or rather endeavour to regain the certainties, on the basis of which it is possible to “safely” act without a necessity to permanently decide and be conscious of the risk involved. It may be further assumed that by the loss of the traditional certainties and search of the self-identity, there appears a menace that more and more young people will not handle the situation which would lead to their autonomous orientation, since there are no similar schemes and relational frameworks or at least the nodes of the new identity formation. Violence as a form of acting as well as drug use and the like forms of legitimization appear to be very attractive and available solutions to their problems, alongside which they can emphasize their nonconformity, enforcement of their own norms as well as the possibility to deny absolute autonomy, together with a hint of creating their own view of “order” in the plurality of the contradictory social norms, values and relations. Such perspective is related to the development especially by asserting of the male youth, affected by the uncertainty, including their male role, much more, since a part of the individualization process is also the emergence of the emancipatory interests of girls and the important changes in the female role within family.

The young person’s own identity can be in this situation understood as a permanent effort to create self-confidence and confidence in social actions, oriented towards independence within the society. To achieve this, it is necessary for an individual to surrender their rigid self-definition, not to stick to the acquired norms at any cost and, at the same time, to maintain their own identity without being excluded from the society (group). The process of creating one’s own identity also involves the social recognition of social behaviour and professional career an individual chooses (as an autonomous subject provided with cognitive or behavioural competence), and taking full responsibility for such recognition (or lack thereof) (Habermas, 1988, p. 240). However, it follows that a **new permanent tension and uncertainty arise, often accompanied by anxiety due to the search of new securities, but also escape from the reality.**

Questions of globalization or new views on the society and the youth?

Since 1992, when a famous book about globalization by Roland Robertson was published, the discussions about a new character of the society, no longer reducible within a certain territory, nation, culture or a local form of authority (state), but concerned with the whole world and mankind, started. It is suitable here to quote Karl Jaspers, who shortly after the Second World War wrote: “Our technical age is not merely a technically or relatively universal [...], but it is **absolutely universal** (emphasis mine — P. O.), because it is global. The issue here is not only mutual belonging which, in fact, signifies separate events, but rather events taking place in permanent mutual contact. Nowadays, it is realized with the purpose of the universality [...]. There is no longer any ‘outside’.” We often come across terms such as “borderless society,” global society, world society, the globalization of the human behaviour at the turn of the millenium etc. The existence of the word globalization in all the major languages: in Polish *globalizacja*, in Slovak *globalizácia*, in French term *mondialisation*, German *Globalisierung*, even the Chinese term *quanqui hua*, proves the universality of the subject.

Globalization in its various dimensions means a new plurality of the bonds and mutual relations between the state and the society, no more the territorially mutual union. In this sense, it means severing the unity of the nation state and the nation society. Power relations of a new kind, new competitive relationships, new conflicts and new ways of overcoming them, arise. We can also observe new conjunction of the nation-state unity and its actors, actors of the transnational relations, new identities, social spaces, social statuses and social processes.

It is indisputable that even besides economic background, we may recognize several dimensions of the globalization:

- communicative-technical dimensions
- eco-dimensions
- dimensions of the global work organization
- cultural dimensions
- civic and civil dimensions
- social dimensions.

According to Tokárová (1998), particularly the social dimensions bring about many negative consequences (uniformity of products and consumption, Americanization of life and culture, demoralizing influence of mass media, dissemination of socially unacceptable information, diseases of affluence etc.). Paraphrasing Ulrich Beck, we may speak at least of ten causes of globalization of the society, exceeding the original territorial and state characteristics.

We consider a necessity to add to the common, above presented causes of the globalization, at least four accompanying signs, in particular the violence and transnational and international criminality, international tourism, military world order and the youth, which all depict the causes of globalization in a dee-

per sense. With respect to the subject of this study, we will only deal with the youth.

We assume that the young generation is worth mentioning in this respect, despite being the term often marked by plurality of approaches in social sciences. According to many postmodern theories, with which the author of this article cannot fully agree, we are witnessing the extinction of the youth as the invention of the modern industrial society, as well as the end of pedagogy. Due to these theories, the youth as a sociological category is a product of an already obsolete, modern, industrial division of labour which assumed the separation of the youth from the labour world, in order to prepare them for and then integrate them with the labour world. With the end of the industrial society, postmodern sociology of education predicts the end of the youth and pedagogy as well. In such a case, the position of the young generation becomes subordinate in the social hierarchy of power among other social groups.

However, the globally increased time of education, childhood and adolescence is an indisputable fact. From the point of view of the youth, the crucial fact is that in the process of globalization of the society, it is the individualization of the youth as a world megatrend, as well as other similar views and spontaneous support for the ideas of globalization (with all its advantages and disadvantages), that are inherently related to the emerging generation. The youth plays a special role in the process of the globalization of the society. We consider as important the fact that the development allows us to figuratively say that the youth nowadays is not merely a romantic “bearer of the morning” (the phrase used by Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav — the Slovakia’s most famous poet), but also the bearer of the globalization ideas. This fact is clearly manifested by the variety of youth subcultures, spreading all over the world. Extremely strong socialization potential, based on the spreading subcultures originating in the USA and England, has uncompromisingly reached also our region and significantly contributed to the change of a lifestyle and values of the young people. The subcultures are not only those concerned with the individual music genres or bands (e.g. techno scene, hard-core, heavy metal, hip-hop), but also alternative or marginal cultures of the lower, middle or upper social classes. Graffiti, punk and skinhead movements as well as the subculture of young successful managers — the subculture of Davos, often nicknamed as “the tie-wearers.” However, the youth as phenomenon pertaining to the globalization is not merely a carrier of the movements’ ideas and its specific characteristics. It is, simultaneously connected to the previous three accompanying signs of the globalization, that is not only to the existence and widespread of subcultures, because within the above-mentioned three accompanying signs it has an important, maybe the most important, share. We could not imagine these signs without the youth, whether it is in the area of violence or criminality, where the youth is responsible for most of the crimes, or tourism but also the world military order (most of soldiers are the young people). This fact means a new challenge to sociology and the affiliated fields of study.

Modern tribalism and nomadism

We do not possess any empirical data concerning the area of Slovak Republic that would illustrate the subject in question. However, the topic cannot be ignored because it further describes the picture of the value orientations of the young generation, thus influencing the intergenerational relations. According to Maffesoli, an individual can preserve a considerable number of more or less stable, social bonds and enjoy the membership in different social groups. It is a result of anonymity of urban life that displays many identities an individual can adopt.

We think that one of the characteristics of a nowadays young generation is an identification with a certain group, tribalism of which functions interactively, in contrast to ethnocentrism. The youth is, however, open to the latter, too. Young people are mostly bound together by a way of experiencing everyday life, based on fashion, hedonism, body cult and the prevalence of the imagination and visual culture. It is evidenced by a form of social grouping. Young people are rather interested in clubs, fan clubs, leisure centres, commercial events, as a manifestation of a certain tribalism, belonging to the so-called neo-tribes. For an inclination to modern tribes (neo-tribes), moments of emotional harmony, when everybody coalesces in a shared vibration, are crucial (Maffesoli, 2002, p. 114). Young people often believe that they mean something as members of a certain tribe and observing its existential rituals. That may take place during common events — concerts, festivals, demonstrations, riots, mass sports events etc., that is everywhere where groups of people create their own historical memory based on common experiences during which the key factors are quality and intensity of the ongoing relations. These happenings symbolize the comeback of the community ideal, the return to the tribalism — the re-tribalization (Maffesoli, 2002, pp. 10). Hatred, heteronormative stereotypes, xenophobia and, in extreme cases, even racism, often play their roles here. In such a case, our view of the society could lead us to see it as a variety of smaller communities or tribes with such opinions that would have been incompatible with generalized social life.

Various identities and “transitions” between them allow to call them nomadism, sometimes even accompanied by the change in lifestyle. It is not concerned only with social mobility, but rather wandering often immanent in young people. The Maffesoli’s term “orgiasm,” conveying the signs of passion and strong emotions, most likely belongs to the nomadism, too. However, longing for exciting activities, even ecstasy, and “enjoying the moment” all certainly belong here.

First conclusion: Ambivalence is becoming the central life paradigm of the young generation

On the basis of above listed characteristics of the process of individualization of the youth, the loss of the traditional certainties, and the problems pertaining to identity, we may state that the ambivalence stems from the rise of the opportunities of the social acting on the one hand, and from emerging threat and risk, following the necessity to take up and transcend more and more complex and difficult life roles without a support of preceding forms of socialization, on the other. This kind of ambivalence is reflected in the following phenomena:

- There are still more and more possibilities to plan one's life, but at the same time, the chosen career path is unpredictable.
- There are even more opportunities for young people to decide, but it is accompanied by the increasing pressure to unconditionally take the decision.
- Equality of the youth, especially equality of the opportunities increases, but so does the individual on the path to secure oneself a social position and social status.
- Individualization of the youth increases, but paradoxically, young people are getting lost in the standardization as a mass.
- The rise of autonomy is often followed by anomy.
- The lack of necessity to choose a lifelong career path is accompanied by the possibility of the loss of social orientation.
- The opportunities of self-evaluation are connected with the destabilization of the social relations.
- By means of the development towards more organized society, an individual is more and more independent. Therefore, the options of leading an individual life increase, but so does the effect of isolated and anonymous forms of life, without a possibility to return to the previous social forms.
- The demise of life certainties continues, but so does the need for them. It is, therefore, particularly pressing to see the peculiarity of the present age, in which one cannot count even on the new certainties.
- The end of traditions opens the way for the new possibilities of the social behaviour. However, the natural ways of resolving and mitigating conflicts are disappearing as well.

Second conclusion: The concept of the rise of the disintegration, uncertainty, violence and drug abuse

The youth may become uncertain:

- in no-win and difficult situations having seemingly no solutions (“I cannot go on...,” “I do not know how to carry on,” etc.);
- when the life events and demands, connected with the emergence of the social phenomena, become unpredictable;
- due to the confusion stemming from their own status (respect and recognition from some, but scorn from the others);
- because of the contradiction between the self-evaluation and the expectations from the others (e.g. parents, institutions, particularly school);
- as a result of the inconsistency between one’s own expectations, the actual position and the behaviour of the important persons;
- due to the lack of agreement or when they are not provided with understanding or recognition for something (they are convinced) they do deserve;
- when they do not know which way they should choose any more;
- when they fail, do not reach their target, or when the behaviour or attitude does not correspond with their expectations.

How does the youth respond? From our point of view, in most cases, it is a positive reaction, a preferable one. However, here might appear some risks that may easily result in deviant behaviour, from the category often termed “behavioural disabilities.” In such cases, the young usually justify their behaviour, hence legitimizing of the socially unacceptable behaviour occurs.

Preliminary conclusions

It is necessary to discard the illusions that by educational or any other (even economic) means we will manage to reverse the process of the individualization of the young people, being a global and a worldwide phenomenon. However, by means of a decisive turn within social pedagogy, social work and social psychology, as long as they take into consideration and subsequently react to the outcomes of the sociological research, it may be possible to intervene in this process, control some of its aspects, anticipate the forthcoming progress and mitigate its expected negative consequences. Some of the current authors show their optimism by claiming that the appropriate solution has been found by the young people themselves, who have come up with the best way to deal with the ongoing problems, that is by means of specific social networks and available educational facilities. “Young people have

proved that they are able to deal with the extended transitions to adulthood, with uncertainty and threat [...]. However, the teachers, craftsmen, advisors, psychologists and others working with the youth [...] need to adjust to the new context,” says Keneth Roberts (1995, p. 55). We agree that it is necessary to provide the above-mentioned professionals with the new knowledge about the youth and prepare them for the new kind of situation which is a megatrend by nature, and to lead the sociological, socio-psychological and pedagogical research in the same direction. Thereby, new perspectives are being opened as well as a new field of experiences not only for politicians (family policy, policy towards the youth), but also for volunteers and professionals, who work with young people. It is the way that can positively influence intergenerational relations and the nature of intergenerational conflicts.

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