

Experimental Environment Development for Communications by Researchers, Members of Subcultural Groups and Society

Abstract

The Experimental Environment, where SAL project results have been tested with some of the observed subcultural groups, was performed around a series of academic cultural forums organised by the SAL coordinating team at Vytautas Magnus University. Such a direct engagement of researchers with the object of their academic, ethnographic inquiry is still a novel idea in the social sciences and humanities.

Keywords: experimental environment, subcultures groups

The series of forums involving representatives of subcultural groups was aimed at facilitating communications among different communities, researchers and the general public. As part of the SAL project, four such forums were held during the three years of the project. These were:

1) *Subcultures and Lifestyles* Conference and Forum at VMU (in 2006), held for participation by the 'taste' subculture and New religious movement groups

2) A tent exhibition of subcultures and lifestyles held on Zarasai Island in Lithuania which was the locale of the *Mėnuo Juodaragis* [*Black Horned Moon*] Festival of youth alternative music and art in 2007 August, where all SAL partners participated (see photos by G. Jaronis below)

3) VMU conference and forum in 2008 May, where the DU and VMU teams participated

4) The Anti-pops Festival of youth alternative music, held in Kaunas in 2008 October, with an exhibition of photographs and a series of lectures on metal music presented by leaders of the youth music underground with doctoral students and SAL researchers at VMU.

Generally these Forums consisted of two parts: 1) an audio-visual exhibition which included a showing of filmed material from the fieldwork, notes from interviews, photos and music and academic lectures on subcultures and lifestyles and 2) a scenario open to the public for members of subcultural groups to present their lifestyles, values, religious beliefs and such.

The results of these experimental environments could be summarised under four headings:

- Participant observation
- Influence by researchers on the observed communities
- Facilitation of communications between researchers and subcultural community members
- Impact on formulating recommendations for policy makers.

1) **Participant observation.** The activities and the behaviours of group members were observed during the forums. The important topics included the following aspects: a) whether and how religious community members and 'taste' subcultural groups make use of such a chance to share their values and lifestyles with other groups, researchers and the broader society; b) whether or not they show interest in communicating among different groups and with researchers; c) what ideas they share with other participants and what values are most significant to them; d) how they react to the findings of the researchers and e) whether or not they accept the ideas and values of other groups and how they react to differently-minded people.

Conclusions reached during the observations. Every group has its own friendly and unfriendly environments. Members of a so-called focus group can only evaluate those groups that share similar values as friendly. Alternative values are entirely unacceptable. For example, there is a deep gulf between some New religious groups (such as Hare Krishna) and the 'taste' subcultural groups (such as Skinheads). However, Hare Krishna is friendly to Punks which is quite an unlikely observation given the fact that the two subcultures expose totally different worldviews and philosophies. This evidence was obtained during the Forums by communicating with the members of Skinheads and Hare Krishna communities who participated in the VMU Forum in 2006. Thereby this verified the evidence which had been earlier obtained by researchers directly from interviews and questionnaires.

2) **Influence of researchers on the observed communities.** Tolerance and humanity in general and the values of human cooperation in particular were the underlying themes which appeared in the advertisements, descriptions and posters on the organised forums. The researchers expected the groups to adopt an adequate approach, because humanity and friendship are the values that members of different subcultural groups often referred to, as opposed to the pragmatism and the unfriendliness of mainstream society.

During the three years of the project, new contacts were established among researchers and different community members including the New religious movement and 'taste' subcultural groups. Members of these groups supported the idea of tolerance and communication. For example, the organisers of the traditional Anti-pops Festival of alternative music offered researchers an opportunity to organise

the Academic Cultural Forum during their festival. The exhibition of photos and the lectures on underground music were presented by members of the metal music subculture at the University Club. Researchers were invited to participate in rock music concerts held in different pubs of Kaunas City. Thus, in this case, a unique bond formed between academics and the subcultural underground. These contacts facilitate communications among subcultural communities and researchers and add to the visibility of the project as well as enhance its impact on society.

3) **Facilitation of communications between researchers and members of subcultural communities.** By participating in the forums, the researchers had a unique opportunity to gain better access to different subcultural groups. Thus they were in a better position to establish contacts with new respondents. Thereby their research has been enhanced with new empirical data and, as a result, the data has become more reliable.

4) **Impact on formulating recommendations for policy makers.** Such evidences about communications among subcultural communities as well as communications between communities known for their distinctive values and religious beliefs and the broader society should be passed-on to policy-makers (including teachers, leaders of different organisations, organisers of public events and others) who are in daily contact with members of different groups.

How these groups of distinctive values and religions can communicate, if at all, is a significant question posed to the researchers.



SAL project report-discussion and audiovisual exposition tents
at *Black Horn Moon* Festival



Preparation for the audiovisual exposition



Presentation on neo-Indians by researcher Dušan Deák



Anastasia movement's corner at the audiovisual exposition



Visitors of the exposition

Photos by G. Jaronis, 2007 August 24-26, Zarasai, Lithuania

Egidija RAMANAUSKAITĖ

Eksperimentinės aplinkos tyrėjams, subkultūrinių grupių nariams ir visuomenei bendrauti kūrimas

Santrauka

Eksperimentinė socialinė aplinka, kurioje tyrėjai turėjo galimybę patikrinti kai kuriuos savo tyrimų rezultatus ir įgyti naujų žinių, buvo vienas iš SAL projekto metodų. VDU Kultūros tyrimų centro tyrėjai kartu su bendradarbiaujančiais grupių nariais organizavo akademinis kultūrinis forumus VDU kiemelyje ir auditorijose, studentų klube, palapinėse Zaraso ežero saloje per jaunimo alternatyvios muzikos festivalį „Mėnuo Juodaragis“ ir kt. Forumuose dalyvavo subkultūrinių grupių atstovai, SAL projekto partneriai, studentai ir visi, kam tai buvo įdomu. Toks netradicinis tyrėjų susipažinimo su kultūrinėmis grupėmis būdas yra nauja socialinių tyrimų idėja. Forumai kėlė ir socialinės sanglaudos uždavinius – palengvinti skirtingų vertybinių orientacijų grupių bendravimą tarpusavyje ir su visuomene.

Pagrindiniai forumų akcentai buvo audiovizualinės ekspozicijos, kuriose buvo rodomi per lauko tyrimus nufilmuoti filmai, pateiktos aktualios interviu ištraukos, fotografijos bei muzika, taip pat akademiniai seminarai / paskaitos / diskusijos subkultūrinių gyvenimo stilių, vertybių, naujųjų religijų temomis.

Eksperimentinėse aplinkose vykę procesai:

- Forumų metu stebėtas grupių narių elgesys: ar / kaip religinių ir gyvenimo stiliaus subkultūrinių grupių nariai bendrauja vieni su kitais, su tyrėjais ir kitais forumų dalyviais.
- Tyrėjų įtaka bendrijoms: per forumus buvo siekiama perteikti tolerancijos ir humanizmo idėjas, žmonių tarpusavio bendradarbiavimo vertybes. Su forumų dalyviais buvo bendraujama jiems suprantama kalba, nes humaniškesnę ir draugystę subkultūrinių grupių nariai dažnai priešina pragmatizmui ir šaltiems plačiosios visuomenės narių tarpusavio santykiams.
- Nauji bendravimo ryšiai tarp tyrėjų ir grupių: forumuose dalyvavę tyrėjai turėjo galimybę susipažinti ir pabendrauti su naujomis grupėmis, besiskiriančiomis nuo tų, kurias jie tiesiogiai tyrinėja; dalyviai įgijo naują „kitokio negu aš“ suvokimo patirtį.
- Forumuose įgyta bendravimo su skirtingų vertybinių orientacijų grupėmis patirtis padėjo atsakingiau rengti rekomendacijas socialinių, kultūrinių, švietimo organizacijų tarnautojams ir kitiems asmenims, dirbantiems ir bendraujantiems su subkultūrinių grupių dalyviais.

Raktažodžiai: eksperimentinė aplinka, subkultūrinės grupės.