Youth Subculture in Kazakhstan: So Different, So Unlike

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Abstract

An article is devoted to the analysis of youth subculture. It investigates the causal factors of young people's involvement in the informal associations, as well as nature of subculture indentifies. Empirical base of this article consist of sociological studies in the flame of national report "Youth of Kazakhstan-2014" carried out in 2014 by the Center of Youth Researches. In this survey participated at least 2000 respondents aged 14 to 29 from all social group in Kazakhstan.

1. Introduction

Youth – is an experimenter in various spheres of public life, including culture. The originality of youth as a social group is that it is constantly in a state of transition from the predominant property of being an object of public influence to the predominant property of being a subject of a socially transformative activity. This encapsulates the social meaning of "growing up". In public opinion, the operation of youth subjectivity is usually associated with the term "youth subculture".

Subculture – is a system of values, attitudes, behaviors and lifestyles of a certain group that is different from the dominant culture in a society. Some researchers consider the subculture practice the opposition to the majority culture (M. Brake, A. M. Barker, H. Pilkington, E. Omelchenko, est.). The subcultures, as "systems of meaning, ways of expression or life styles" were developed by social groups, that were in subordinate position, "as reply to the dominating systems of meaning: subcultures reflect the attempts of such groups to solve the structural contradictions, that appeared in more societal context" [1, p.204].

Youth subculture as social and cultural system is characterized with the following:

1. It is a part, or even subsystem of the society, youth belongs to (that is why, the prefix sub- is used, as it means the subordination in "subculture" word). However, it always preserves a relevant autonomy and independence. There is no unified, integrated and separated youth subculture. There is eclectic mix of sometimes mutually exclusive positions. Different point of view has hidden strategic discriminating character: it downgrades the importance of youth subculture to the meaning of local social-cultural phenomenon, limited with the youth population, as "ideologically immature par of population" [2, p.228].

2. Youth subculture is a homeostasis which is democratic and mobile. It includes a number of more or less visible features (values orientations, norms of behavior, jargon, ways of spending leisure time, etc), each of which have relatively stable structure, which changes in accordance with the social-cultural realities. The level of visibility of one or another feature and the level of formation of the

subculture in general depends on the age and extremity of life conditions of its carriers. By mid 80-ties the sociologists knew that majority of heavy-metal fans (79%) – juveniles, 59% of which are from disadvantageous and lower-income families. Admirers of punk-rock were recruited from similar youth environment. On the contrary, the styles of rock, close to pop-music ("Bravo", others) had most of the success in the environment of wealthy young people of 18-30 years old [3, p.314].

3. Subcultures of youth of different countries in spite of similarity have own peculiarities. For example, at West, as in former USSR the rock-music, acted as symbol of youth culture, but aspects of this are deeply national: if at West the key of genre was RHYTHM, in "soviet rock" this was WORD [4, p.25-26].

4. Youth subculture is a product of informal (free) communication, and the main regulating principle of relations is a group, or age (generation) solidarity. Social relations as a rule depersonalized in it. With that, all informal "tosses" are the means of self-determination for youth, this referent group, belonging to which, a young person finds his position in relations "ME-US-THEM" [5, p.104].

Main factors, usually pre-defining the appearance and development of alternative ways of socialization, formation of social relations are: demolition of generally accepted picture of the history and culture, collective values; underdevelopment of pragmatic feelings, related to personal responsibility; deformation and helplessness of traditional institutions of socialization and upbringing; push-out of youth to the peripherals of material and spiritual production.

So, the purpose of this article is to investigate the causal factors of young people's involvement in the informal associations, as well as nature of subculture indentifies in Kazakhstan.

2. Methods

Empirical base of this article consist of sociological studies in the flame of national report "Youth of Kazakhstan-2014" carried out in 2014 by the Center of Youth Researches. In this survey participated at least 2000 respondents aged 14 to 29 from all social group, which reside in 14 regions (oblasts) of Kazakhstan, Astana and Almaty cities. The survey involved 1002 males and 998 girls aged from 17 to 21 years - 60.5%, 21 to 25 years - 16%, from 25 to 36 years – 23.4% of respondents. Respondents were presented with the following groups: older pupils- 4.6%; students of specialized secondary school - 13%; students and undergraduates - 61.5% and 20.7% young professionals.

3. Results

It is not surprising that according to a sociological survey, 25.5% of respondents believe that the youth subculture – is a

lifestyle of modern youth, a special form of self-assertion and self-identification - 23.8%. At the same time, 20.6% see it as a temporary infatuation or just a form of self-realization during leisure time - 11.7%, thus emphasizing that the youth community today is not a single, universal and monolithic part of the community. Although a small number, but still some young people, consider youth subculture as a form of anti-social behavior (3.5%), and protest of outsider against social norms (2.4%), while 12.3% of respondents could not answer the question: "In your opinion, the youth culture - is ... ".

Subcultures - result of a conscious search for a new identity, creation of a new style in various fields of socio-cultural life. Young people remain a part of particular subculture and their real interest in it usually lasts only a few years, which causes its instability [6].

The sociological studies show that only 11.3% of respondents indicated participation in informal youth communities, and 88.7% did not identify themselves with the informal movement of young people. However, only 15.1% of respondents consider themselves comfortable with youth subculture practices compare this with the "at home" option (55.6%).

The response results to the question "Who did introduce you to the society?" appear surprising. It breaks stereotype about imaginary dichotomy "children - parents". Parental influence is dominant - 30.2% of respondents said that parents introduced them to the society of their peers, 24.9% - that it was a friend, and only 2.2% deliberately went there on their own.

Sociologists argue that the decisive factors that activate processes of group formation and dominate association tendencies, establishing groups are: the fear of being left out; the need for security, understanding, credibility, usefulness ("where I first felt equal, where I am needed"); a real opportunity to choose the most convenient method of self-affirmation, often an alternative to the traditional, accepted norms of behavior, etc.

So, when answering the question "What is participation in the informal society for you?" the respondents said that it gave them a sense of freedom of expression (28.0%), helped to escape reality (20.4%) and to find like-minded people (19.6%), to break free from everyday boredom (16.0%) and annoying conventional norms (14.7%).

The "subcultural boom" of the late 1980s and early 1990s in the USSR did not affect youth of Kazakhstan, except for Almaty and certain major regional centers (Karaganda, Pavlodar, Kostanay). This is to some extent justified, since, as a rule, subcultural innovation initially spreads among youth in capital cities.

An analysis of empirical data shows that within Kazakhstan's youth community sports is the leading subculture - 42.7% (Table 1). Some of them, for instance, bikers (from English language bicycle - abbr. bike) even have their own organizational structures – bike clubs. In Kazakhstan, the most famous are located in Astana and Almaty.

Table 1. *Youth belonging to subcultures (%, respondents could choose several options)*

#	Subcultures	%
1	Sports (bicyclists, bikers, race car driver, etc.)	42,7
2	Musical (hip-hop, rap, metal, rock, etc.)	27,1
3	Dancing (brake-dance, capoeira, etc.)	17,8
4	Glamour	9,3
5	Religious	8,9
6	Virtual (gamers and other)	8,0
7	Artistic	8,0
8	Animal lovers	5,3
9	Criminal (gopniks and other)	4,0
10	Emo	1,8
11	Unconventional sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, etc.)	0,9

Parkour – an extreme sport, encouraging rapid movement and overcoming effectively obstacles in urban environment, is gaining popularity among teenagers in Kazakhstan. Existing architectural structures (handrails, railings, walls, etc.), as well as specially constructed structures (used during various activities and training) may be considered as places for parkour practices.

Tracers – young people practicing parkour, perceive it as a lifestyle. In Kazakhstan, the tracers movement began in Almaty and Astana, but there are also amateur associations in other cities of the country.

In Kazakhstan these subcultures are in the formation stage, and there is reason to believe that as the welfare of the population grows more young people will be attracted to the subcultures. Not surprisingly, 34.2% of our respondents answered sports and extreme sports subculture to the question: "Which youth subcultures do you sympathize the most?". The second and third most popular youth subcultural trends are musical - 27.1% and dancing (breakdance, capoeira, etc.) - 17.8%. Contemporary popular music is becoming a source of norms and behavioral patterns, a mean of individual and mass psychotherapy. Young people live in a "frantic" pace of life, seek to achieve a lot, that is why they need a modern rhythmic music that would charge them with energy.

The "Students - the image of the future" international sociological study of youth from Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan and Poland suggests that they prefer listening pop and rock music [7]. In total 5,155 students from 22 universities were interviewed using random sampling in these four countries. More than half of the students in all four countries prefer popular music (Kazakhstan - 57.5%, Poland - 56.9%, Ukraine - 51.6%, Russia - 50.1%). Rock is the second choice in most countries (Poland - 53.6%, Ukraine - 49.3%, Russia - 45.0%). Wherein, the second choice among the Kazakh students was symphonic music (42.1%), which ranked third in Ukraine (27.0%). In Russia and Kazakhstan on the third place was rap music (43.5% and 41.4%, respectively), while in Poland – house music (32.7%). Many young people in the four countries listen to jazz, chanson, rhythm and blues. Ethnic, lounge and funk music are less popular among students.

A small number of young people - 9.3% prefer a lifestyle characterised by luxury, active social life, the cult of "eternal spring", hedonism and glamour. The so-called "golden youth" tries to practice this lifestyle in its entirety.

As if to counterbalance them, there are supporters of asceticism - adherents of various religious streams (8.9%).They are followed by information and artistic youth groups (each 8.0%). Despite the fact that only 4% of survey respondents identify themselves with the criminal subculture, the crime statistics indicates larger presence of crime groups among youth [8, 9]. According to the survey, 5% of the respondents had often to deal with gopniks or neighbourhood gangs, but 62.3% have never encountered them.

The main factors that largely determine the appearance and development of subcultures, as alternative methods of socialization and formation of social relationships are: deformation and weakening of traditional socialization and education institutions; underdeveloped pragmatic attitudes, which are connected with individual responsibility; chance of value orientation towards history and culture, formation of majority opinion.

Answers to the question "Why did you choose this society?" demonstrate young people's focus on the self – self-knowledge, self-assertion, self-expression, self-realization, etc. (Fig. 1).
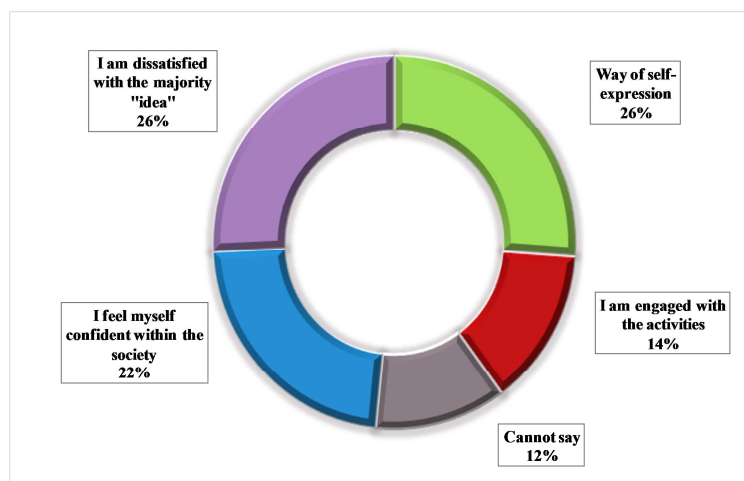
Figure 1. *Reasons, which led young respondents to choose the society*

It is important that adults provide space for the young generation's social experimentation, allow conscious choice – this is the only way to bring up socially active and responsible generation. According to our findings, favorable conditions for positive perception of youth culture are established within Kazakhstan's society, so majority provided negative response to the question: "Does anyone oppose your membership in this society?" - 61.8% of respondents, and only 14.2% answered "yes, parents" (Fig. 2).
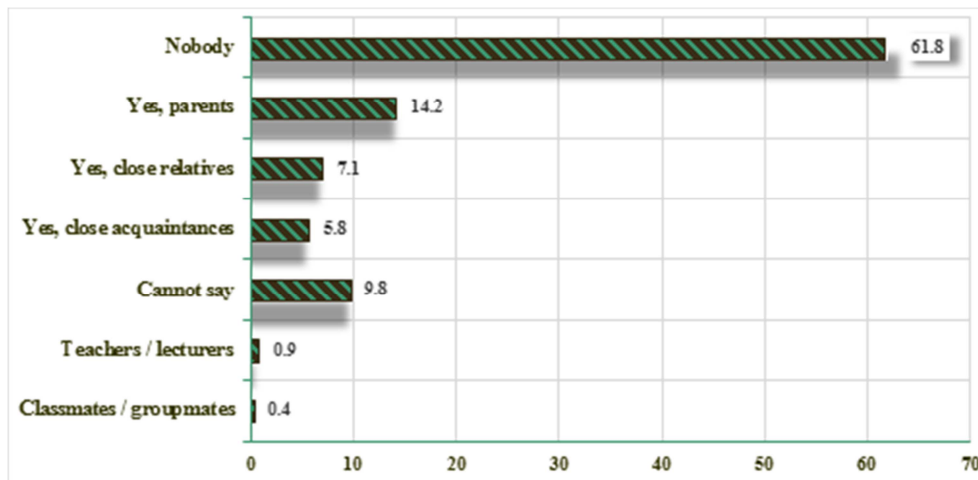

Figure 2. Young people note, who is against their membership in un-formal societies, %

Moreover, 51.1% of respondents said that their parents supported their choice of cultural society (Fig. 3). This is not surprising: most of the parents have went through the school of alternative socialization, hence the values of adults often coincide with the values of their children because of their common origin, living conditions, education, religion, etc. In other words, youth has more in common than dissimilarities with parents and adult culture.
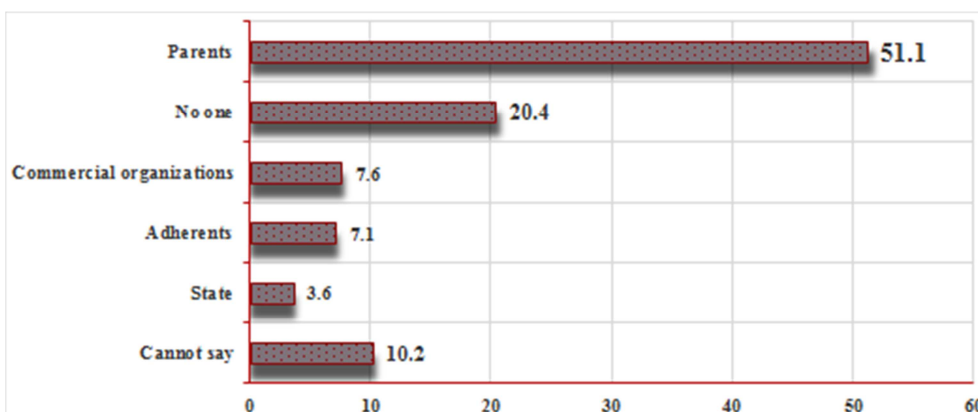

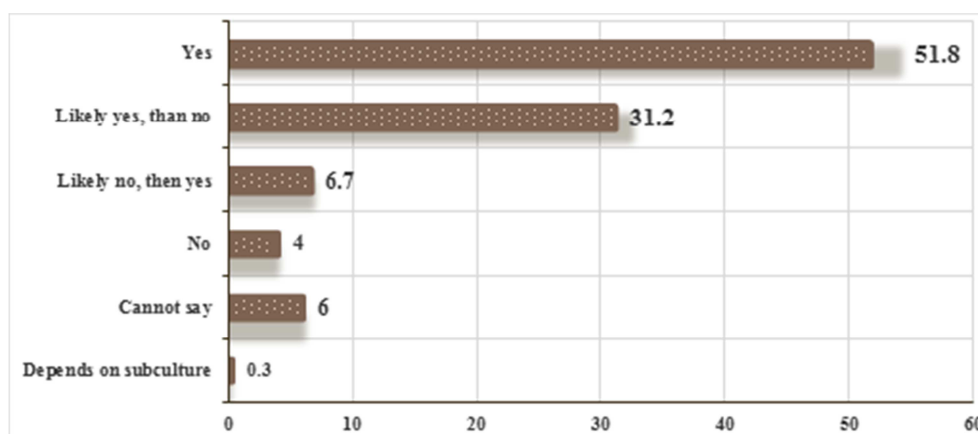*Figure 3. Youth note who support them, %*

Figure 4. Youth opinion about state control over youth organizations

Certainly, support of parents, social environment is important for young people, but 20.4% of respondents do not receive it. Equally important is the support of the state. Only 3.6% of the surveyed boys and girls acknowledge the support of the state. Informal youth groups do not feel support. And this, as the world experience suggests, can lead to extreme forms of consciousness such as youth alienation, a departure from norms and traditions of a society.

When asked about the need for state control over the youth informal associations, organizations and movements, 51.8% of surveyed young people gave affirmative response, 31.2% were inclined to support the same view (Fig. 4).

Youth culture – is a zone of self-realization and alternative socialization of the young generation. The main conceptual construct of the modern socialization theory lies in the view of youth, as the subject (and not just the object) of social reality. Thus, the purpose and content of young people's various socialization and self-realization processes have radically transformed. 29.3% of our respondents consider membership in a subcultural society as a means of distraction from everyday problems, and 24.9% - as a meaning of life. 33.6% of respondents consider the influence of youth informal groups as insignificant, furthermore, 21.2% consider them harmful because they "destroy the system of values and attitudes of young people," and only 16.5% report that they have positive impact on self-realization and socialization of young people.

In general negative-indifferent perception of informals within the youth community can also be seen while analysing responses to the question: "What, in your opinion, the main reason for the young people to join informal society?" (Fig. 5). Meanwhile, playful and infantile ideology of most subcultures is close to the worldview and the needs of the "consumerism society".
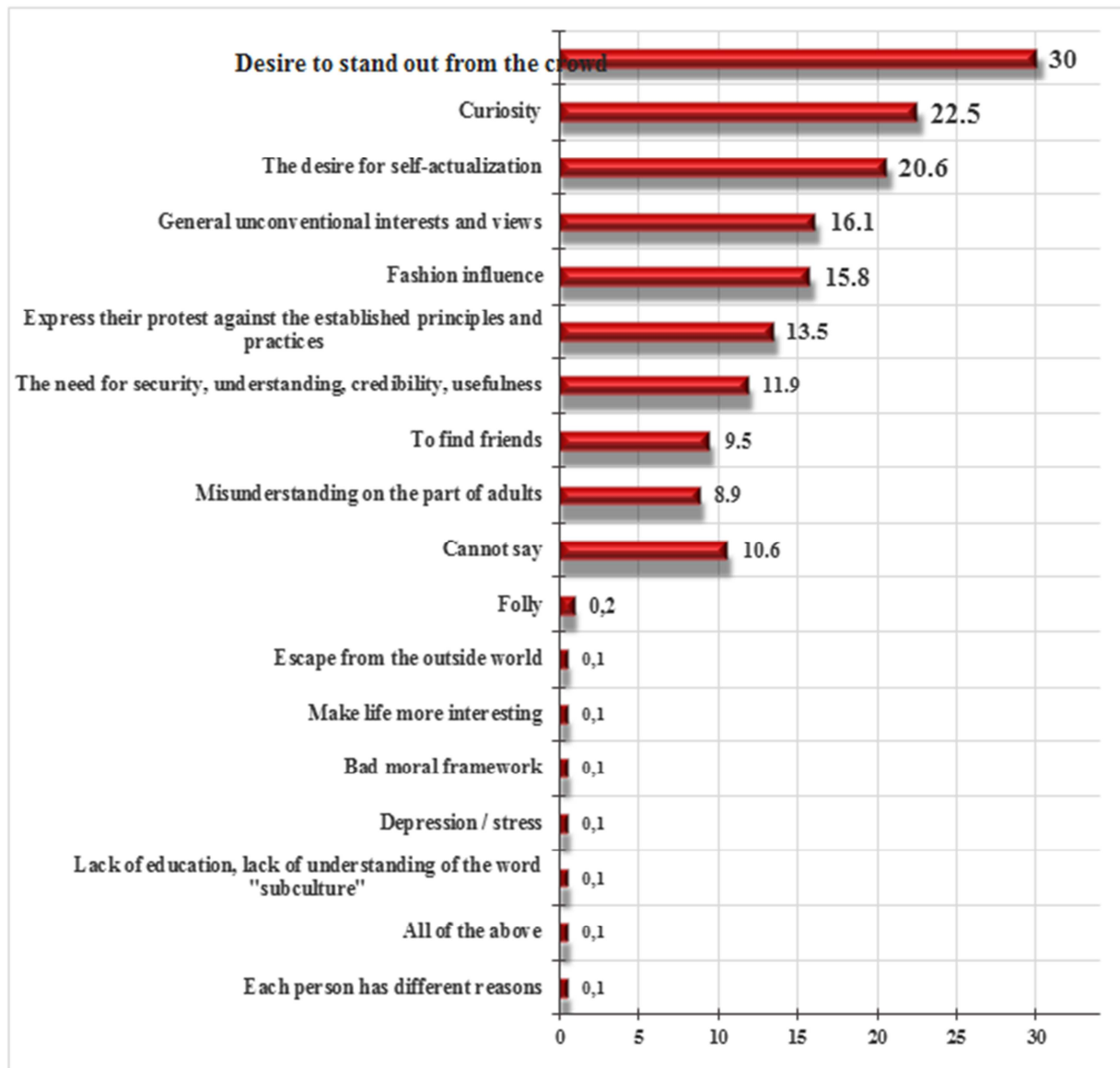

Figure 5. Youth note the causes of joining the non-formal society (any number of responses), %

The principles of its construct – the pursuit of pleasure, freedom, not only from professional, but also from family and domestic responsibilities, as well as the weakening of institutional pressures on personality, which is confirmed by the young people leisure time activities.

Despite all of the eclecticism of various youth movements and subcultures, it should be emphasized that most of them are focused either on leisure activities (29.8%) or transmission and distribution of fashion trends (2.7%). Young people are almost entirely copying cultural centers and do not belong to local environment. This is productive in terms of social innovations – young people's mobility, their willingness to learn new territorial, professional, scientific and technical, cultural environment, which is of paramount importance for society's modernization, but it creates tangible disharmonies in youth education during the general socialization process. The ability to develop innovations does not favor learning long-term socio-cultural norms and values, the ability to navigate in technological environment – is not useful for general cultural integration.

4. Discussion

Autonomy building of youth culture that serves as a psychological antonym "We - They" is especially clearly manifested at the cultural level (in the narrow sense) stereotypes of the young generation: there is "our" music, "our" fashion, "our" chat, and there is "Dad's/Mom's", which is presumed through humanitarian institutional means of socialization. And here lies the cultural alienation of youth, i.e. separation of the younger generation from the diversity of cultural heritage as a result of a conscious search for a new identity, creation of a new style.

Significant transformation processes affecting self-esteem, behavior, value orientations observed and the growth of the hedonistic and consumer sentiments are visible within the youth society. On the one hand, the gap is growing between demands of young people and capabilities to satisfy them, on the other – there are real opportunities for the actualization of subjective, as a result of socially responsible behavior of an individual, especially in the leisure domain. The choice of leisure activities among youth is directly dependent on age, education level, socioeconomic status, place of residence.

The survey empirically demonstrated that the youth has the opportunity to realize their individuality through participation in subcultures, aside from available public forms of leisure. The socially significant leisure activities contrast to temporary spontaneous communities such as "informal groups", "parties", etc.

An analysis of subcultural factors shows that the structure of youth leisure is affected by general cultural trends. Youth culture is clearly sensitive to techno-evolutionary processes: role of information and computer technology is growing in modern youth leisure activities, displacing such traditional activities as reading and socializing with friends [10].

The problem of providing quality leisure for young people is acute and determined by objective and subjective reasons. Firstly, the passivity of young people, their consumerist attitude, secondly, financial difficulties, thirdly, undeveloped leisure infrastructure in rural areas and small towns.

An important channel of cultural socialization that impacts value formation, role and behavior models is the audio-visual media (radio, television, computer, the Internet) and mass leisure activities (clubs, rock/pop concerts, festivals, shows and other forms of self-realization).

From the cultural socialization standpoint amateur associations and clubs are regarded as a special form of self-organizing activity. They are the most responsive to the age needs of an individual with regard to diversity and expansion of cultural and leisure activities, finding wide opportunities for socialization and relationships and have features of self-organization, self-governance.

As part of the state youth policy there is a need for a shift from cultural-educational model of socialization, in which youth is learning cultural norms, values, and scientific principles, which are central point, to socio-cultural model that would enable youth to realize their subjectivity. Given the socializing influence of peers and youth subculture it is necessary to stimulate self-organization processes among the youth, development of organizational forms of amateur and informal movements, primarily in the fields that of interest for young people.

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