

Matej Sande: Growing up in Risk Society

In the third millennium young people have inherited global society, which can be defined in terms of consumption, relative abundance, and a growing speed of information flow. Young people thus form a part of society in which free time and entertainment represent dominant values in the social structure. In contrast to social values, which are directed towards production and work, free time (freedom and entertainment) aims to regenerate strengths of individual qualities that are hidden or suppressed by working conditions (Calafat, 1999). Calafat defines free time as a potential success in prosperous society, and as a place where individuals break free from all responsibilities connected to work, rules and routine. In their free time individuals can freely decide on activities, which can develop (or not) potentials for their growth.

The world in which young people grow up nowadays is measurably different from the world in which generations before them grew up. The passage from childhood through adolescence to adulthood is substantially longer, more complex and insecure. Due to fast social changes in the sphere of everyday life, young people nowadays feel less secure and protected. It is therefore not adolescence that has changed, but rather the nature of experience of growing up. The correct education and employment choice is becoming more and more important, while risk and accepting risk are gaining significance for each new generation of the young.

Risk has become a part of everyday life in the so-called “post-modern risk society”, where sometimes avoiding risk is - risky. Risk of failure, risk of not getting proper education, risk of making wrong decisions are important factors that influence building of personal identities and dealing with uncertain future. Such subjective choices and a feeling of negotiation during times of uncertainty are a result of individualisation, where success and failure depend on good or bad choices as well as on capability or incapability of an individual. Along with changes in society and consequently changes in the way young people grow up (and spend their free time), drugs (which can accompany free-time night activities) have also undergone a radical change. However, they have not changed as much in the pharmacological sense, as in the sense of transition of their use from marginal to central parts of society. Drugs have become a part of consumer society where they gained an important, the so-called recreational place. By encouraging consumerism, risk society has created a night-life market, which plays

a key role in helping young people to deal with stress and problems that accompany their uncertain and risky life.

In the times when technology, culture and society are advancing relatively fast, young people have to pave their way to the adulthood on “post-modern” field, which is thoroughly different from the one experienced by generations of their predecessors. Their opinion, behaviour, free-time activities, strategies of dealing with problems, risk evaluation, and assessment of their success are changing. All these changes are functionally as well as measurably different in comparison to youth from previous generations (Parker, Aldridge and Measham, 1998). Nowadays adolescence is regarded as a central and strategic stage in one’s lifetime, and terms such as risk, individualisation and uncertainty are related to it (Ule and Kuhar, 2002). These three terms attempt to demonstrate a lesser possibility to predict life, apparent from the fact that nowadays individuals are, more than any other time in the past, creating their own lives in the process of “negotiations”, rather than following predestined set of determinants of life possibilities. Old determinants still have an influence on life and choices, however, only in a multitude of individualised configurations that imply a diversification of a passage into adulthood (Ibidem). Socioeconomic changes have not touched only young people but potentially every, more or less wired individual. Disintegration of traditional moral authorities, influence of international telecommunications and means of transport, influence of the global market on a greater choice of products and services, greater stress on consumption rather than production, changing employment and unemployment status, growing pace of life, compression of space and time, a reformation of relationships among classes and sexes, and a new formalisation and instrumentation of relationships among individuals and institutions, present new influences and characteristics of post-modern period (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, ; Dekleva, 1999; Parker et. al., 1998).

Most young people successfully enter their adulthood and thus achieve financial independence and autonomy, associated with the status of an adult person. Individualisation has given rise to new ways in which young people can equip themselves for overcoming insecurity. “They formalise their biographies into portfolios and wear their qualifications, assessed competencies and experiences, like war medals as they march for jobs in short supply and great demand.” (Balding according to Parker et. al, 1998). An indicator of this state is the fact that most young people highly value successful career and are at the same time extremely worried about not being able to achieve it (Ibidem). However,

despite the fact that the majority successfully manage to enter adulthood, some young people are not capable of dealing with “risk society” and facing ever-changing cultural and economic environment – especially in systems which do not offer sufficient support networks for more vulnerable groups of young people. Deviant behaviour, drug use, xenophobia, and suicide rate rise in groups that have been for various reasons pushed to the margins of risk society (Ule and Kuhar, 2002).

Poorly equipped young people are thus excluded from risk society, as despite economic and educational inequalities, choice is not equally distributed. Parker believes this section of young people has set its goals inadequately, as their lives were marked by living away from their families or by abuse and unsupportive family environment (Parker et. al., 1998). Some individuals from the marginalised section of young people are facing problems due to their escape from home, teenage pregnancy, homelessness, crime, or chaotic drug use. Parker is convinced that such “problematic” group of young people can be found within every generation of the young. An endangered group can thus be defined as the one experiencing problems due to drug abuse or drug addiction. Risk society demonstrates its dualism so that, on the one hand, it creates a section of young people pushed to its margins because it cannot keep up with its pace, and is likely to use drugs chaotically and destructively, where on the other hand, the “product” of this society is an integration of recreational drug use into a relatively large segment of young people. Integration can be defined as a combination of illegal and legal drug use with music styles, fashion, dance, and parties, which agrees with global market theories, rising consumerism, mobility, and internationalisation of youth culture (Ibidem). In connection to the previously mentioned integration, Beck (according to Calafat et. al., 1998) discusses the concept of drug users’ social worlds. Social worlds reflect important social changes and development, which in the past decades altered characteristics and dynamics of such groups. With the globalisation of market and of communications, drug use is no longer associated only with narrowly defined user groups. Social worlds in which drugs were used in the past are currently more and more scattered and undefined, with no visible boundaries, and members (Ibidem). The boundaries of social worlds are now marked by faster and faster digital communications. In addition to changes young people experience when entering adulthood, changes in the pattern of drug use have also been noticed recently. Among other, these changes were triggered off by a growing accessibility of synthetic drugs on a so-called new drug market in Europe.

Changes in passage young people experience nowadays vary from country to country, however, they can be discerned in most European countries. General characteristics that can be summed up show that paths of young people have become more scattered, divergent and uncertain, as well as more problematic for some individuals.

Prolonged passage into adulthood is a consequence of new changes and possibilities, being offered to young people. The “traditional” passage into marriage and parenthood is giving way to a new “temporary” way of life, for instance sharing a flat with room-mates or a partner, where partnership typically does not imply a permanent relationship (Parker et. al., 1998). Changes in the educational process as well as on the work market have prolonged the period during which young people are, at least partly (economically and flat-wise), dependent on their parents. Post-adolescents thus have less responsibilities and a reason more not to stay home at night.

Parker argues that in the modern consumer world it makes no difference whether you are male or female, black or white, casual or elegant, hetero or homosexual, as none of these categories disqualify a person to go out and have a good time. Parties play a key role in explaining the recreational drug use (Parker et. al. 1998). Parker believes that greater recreational drug use has recently been associated with social processes and passages described earlier. On the one hand, such drug use is related to risk and entertainment, and on the other, it is linked to self-medication of stress effects and problems, which appear during ups and downs in modern risk society.

In addition, free time in risk society also presents a time for spending money obtained during a working process, hence a relatively large amount of money is spent on a free-time market. When referring to youth culture, this implies the offer of the entertainment industry and its assimilation into the elements of youth culture, such as music, style, and the range of accompanying technology (watches, mp3 players, DVD, computers, mobile phones, etc.). Entertainment industry is constantly developing and plays an active role in creating life styles. Besides radical changes in technology (it has become better and faster), there have also been changes in the way young people entertain themselves. Mass gatherings of young people have never been so massive, loud and frequent as this is the case with modern electronic dance music events (raves, parties...).

However, thousands of young people do not turn up on these events spontaneously. More than a two decade old tradition of smaller events, and a relatively successful marketing and PR can be found in the background. Smaller electronic dance music events first appeared at the end of 1970s but history of electronic music goes much further back. The familiar electronic dance music events from the 1980s developed from Chicago and Detroit club environment, which featured garage and warehouse acid house music. Electronic music appeared in Slovenia with a slight delay, around 1991 (first evenings with electronic music in club K4). Similarly, bigger electronic dance music events began in 1994 (Rozina, 1999). Since then, Slovenia has witnessed a fast development of electronic dance culture, concurrence with foreign trends, and development of its own specific electronic music styles.

Nowadays we are mainly talking about massive electronic dance music events (parties, mass parties), until recently referred to as rave parties. In the more narrow sense, rave can be defined as a party with loud techno or some other type of electronic music lasting all night; whereas generally, rave is a conviction, a conscience of a global tribe, and a sense of belonging to this tribe – to the sub-culture of ravers. These parties can attract from a dozen to over a million people (for instance Love Parade in Berlin), who spend most of the night dancing on one or more stages (rooms, tents, floors), which offer various kinds of electronic music. Party's main drive is music dictated by a DJ, who is responsible for channelling energy and determining speed of a party.

The concept of rave is based on sensory "overdose", which implies loud music (up to 140 dB), strobes, lasers, and screens, where various animations are projected, etc. Synthesis of loud music and video installations (with or without the use of stimulants) can lead people into altered states of physical and psychic existence. Typically, very little physical violence occurs on these massive gatherings in comparison to more traditional forms of dance occasions.

Living in the present, enjoying the present moment, spending money, using drugs and having maximum fun are all forms of young people's resistance towards the world of their parents. If this is compared to Calafat's alternative concept of success in a prosperous system, defined as an ability to manage and spend free time, rave is thus an infinite hedonistic festivity of the present moment, a means to charge batteries for the following working week, and a realisation of one's latent wish of hidden extravagance. Despite being hedonistically oriented, rave culture unquestionably warns about present dilemmas and uncertain future. Exaggerated

individualism, insecurity, struggle for success, lack of human relationships and warmth were some of the problems exposed by the original sub-culture idea of rave as an object of its pseudo-contradiction. The idea undeniably struck sociologists in the time when they believed all major sub-cultures already disappeared and were living only in their neo-extensions of the nineties.

Electronic dance music events are also associated with recreational use of mostly synthetic drugs (amphetamine type stimulants). Recreational use defines those individuals who use drugs occasionally or in relatively small quantities and are thus not (so) susceptible to harmful consequences and do not develop psychological addiction (Beers and Berkow, 1999). Recreational drug is a mind-altering substance, consumed for the purpose of having fun, relaxation, and for enhancing the intensity of sensations and pleasure. This is exactly why recreational drug use has recently been associated mainly with stimulants, the use of which has somehow adapted to prolonged party weekends.

Recreational drug use most likely occurs at the end of a working week, as this gives users time to regenerate after drug use and enables them a relatively easy transfer into next working week. It is the relationship between “pleasure weekend” and (stressful, boring) working or school week that particularly defines “recreational” life of the young (Calafat et.al., 1999). Calafat believes young people were clearly socialised into organisation of time, which distinguishes between weekends and free time. This new organisation is defined (Comas according to Calafat et. al., 1999) as a new cultural model, in which collective consciousness defines a working day as a tendency towards resemblance (uniformity), whereas the end of the week is perceived as a time for differentiation and social differences. Due to these differences, young people can, during weekends, choose from a variety of activities and places, accessible to or interesting (mostly or just) for them, which allow them to build their own unique identities that separate them from the adult world. In their free time (most easily during weekends), young people can in the (night) entertainment industry find time for themselves and break free from all the norms of rational weekly life, dictated by others (Clafat et. al. 1999).

However, recreational drug use, compared to “classical” patterns of drug use, is not completely harmless. Intervals between use can quickly shorten and monthly users can rapidly turn into weekly or even daily users of i.e. stimulants. Such use is accompanied by greater risk

than singular or rare use. In the case of regular amphetamine use (speed), addiction and psychosis-like states can appear, whereas in the case of regular (weekly) ecstasy use, various psychical (and in some cases physical) problems can appear.

EU trends point out that recreational use (of mostly synthetic drugs) among the young is on an increase, whereas life prevalence of marijuana use has reached its peak. This is mostly referring to the use among young people who do not have financial problems and are not socially underprivileged or marginalised (Olszewski and Burkhart, 2002). Recreational drug use among general population is relatively low, however, in special populations (in special environments) it is relatively high. In Slovenia, 86 % of young people (visitors of electronic dance music events) tried ecstasy once or more than once in their lives, 71.9 % tried amphetamines, and 46.7 % tried cocaine, in the years 2000/2001 (Sande, 2002). Studies applying the ESPAD¹ methodology revealed that life prevalence of ecstasy use among Ljubljana third year high-school students during 2001/2002 school year was 10.4 %, and 11.3 % among fourth year high-school students (Dekleva and Sande, 2003). Life prevalence of ecstasy use among Ljubljana first year high-school students in 1998 was 7 % (Dekleva, 1998), and 4.4 % in 1999 (Stergar, 1999).

Due to growing prevalence of drug use and the above mentioned problems (mainly associated with the use of SAT and cocaine), the prevention in the sphere of recreational drug use has focused mostly on synthetic stimulants. In EU as well as in Slovenia this mostly means education of users about the most vital safety measures during the use of synthetic drugs, providing safer and more organised places for night parties, and an analysis of pills on the market. In some European countries as well as in Slovenia, conditions on local dance-floors have improved due to the introduction of standards (or recommendations for organisation) and regulatory decrees in the sphere of electronic music.

In 2002 the Council of Europe and the representatives of member states formulated a resolution on prevention in the sphere of recreational drug use, which will bind member as well as new EU member states to (Olszewski and Burkhart, 2002):

¹ ESPAD - European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Drugs.

- take into account the importance of interactive information targeting wider public and young people;
- enable easy access to information, for instance via the internet;
- promote alternative ways of spending free time;
- reduce risks connected with recreational drug use;
- include (mainly) youth organisations, families, and wider public into prevention in this area;
- encourage prevention programmes and communication strategies focusing on problems in target groups;
- continue with their efforts to reduce supply and promotion of addictive substances to the young and consequently decrease demand.

Multidimensional approach, revealing three methods of work in the sphere of drug (users), is evident from the resolution and recommendations. The first approach deals with harm-reduction (enabling important information, focusing on target groups, safer conditions on events), second approach deals with drug demand reduction (alternative ways of spending free time), and the third approach aims at reducing drug supply (restricting advertising, restricting sales of legal and illegal drugs). The first two models stand out among EMCDDA² recommendations, while the last approach is labelled as less appropriate in the sphere of risk reduction for recreational drug use.

Due to its particularity, recreational drug use demands adjusted prevention programmes aimed at target population, associated with the “scene”, and present as well as recognisable in places where night-life events for the young people occur. “Changing social environment compels professionals and relevant administrative social sub-systems to respond to it diversely. Hence, various risks connected to drug use have to be weighed and differentiated, and a variety of appropriate measures (in ideal case adapted to different user groups) should be developed.” (Dekleva, 1999, pg. 285).

Problems (which may appear due to recreational drug use) cannot be solved only by publishing information on the internet or printing and handing out prevention material; it is important to establish a treatment system (for synthetic drugs) behind the harm reduction

² EMCDDA - European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

programmes. Hence, this implies educating and qualifying professionals from various fields, who will be able to appropriately deal with young people, who became addicted to synthetic drugs and have gone over the limits of occasional recreational use. Although we are currently dealing with a relatively small number of people addicted to synthetic drugs, the above demonstrated trends predict that problems connected to regular use of amphetamine type stimulants (SAT) will become more apparent in the future.

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