

**Ilyés Sándor: The Representation of Subcultures in the Narrative Identity of the
People of Cluj. Working Class Clubs in the 1950s and 1960s**

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Synthesis of the major parts

The use of several types of sources led to the revealing of several representations, thus it did not necessarily mean the diversity of representation as well. This was so because of the character of some sources and also because of the influence of cultural and social context. We can speak instead about more or less general representations of different periods of time. Only the collected biographical texts, life stories stood for the possibility of variation, but their collecting hit objective temporal barriers, being applicable only for the period after World War II. In the end this did not turn out to be such a loss, as the studied phenomenon arose from the leisure needs of that period, growing to the level which fixed the forms that are well known for the elder generations up to our present days. All this needed the common influence of several factors: this was the time when trade unions were re-organized, and the related centres, clubs and cultural houses, where leisure activities could be held, this was the time when industrial workers became a social stratum which – due to its size and the support from the central power –was not only present in the space of the city, but starting dominating it, and probably this was when preferences, previous patterns and foreign trends led to the expression of a cultural phenomenon sustained by the youth.

The notion, the category of industrial workers used today appeared already in the interwar period, but in those times neither the labour press, nor other sources spoke about dancing occasions of the clubs, but because of the economic situation about the needs of life, about social problems, about labour organizations and their relations to politics. After World War II we will find these occasions in almost all types of sources, and while the biographical texts reveal their subcultural importance, the historical, journalistic and literary materials, all influenced by the official discourse of power, only signal their

existence, condemning them compared to other more “culturate” forms of education. Although the signals are evident, exactly their evaluative manner is what shows the longevity and importance of this phenomenon within the youth.

Focusing on the 1950s and 1960s we can state that the discrepancy between the phenomena, more exactly the official ideology and discourse presented in the historical works and the everyday practices is manifested in the case of the clubs as well. Behind the supported cultural activities, the mandatory meetings, courses, professional presentations, cultural propaganda there were these occasions and locations of entertainment, not really discussed, but because of which the youth frequented those locations, and taking a part in them, they identified themselves with one certain group. The life stories undoubtedly express the fact that the youth identified themselves with the club because of the group that gathered there for dancing, this is what the club meant for them, and not the mandatory extraprofessional activities.

The biographical texts themselves include two different discourses, an official one, according to which dancing occasions had their importance because of cultured entertainment, elegance and some cultural habits known to the elite, and a subcultural one, revealing the subcultural practices and values that had a meaning in the life of the youth. Physical strength, masculinity, alcohol consumption, dealing with girls and neatness were not exposed and present exclusively within clubbing, but also in the culture and everyday life of the young workers. The individual is bound to several group or stratum-culture, and the dynamic relations between all these are the ones to determine his/her own personality and identity. The enumerated subcultural values can be considered typical, as we can observe them among today’s “labour” as well: professional knowledge, know-all character, neatness and physical strength appears everywhere. Alcohol consumption, dealing with girls, virtue and the expression of strength is also present among those who are not earning their living with physical labour. It is so especially among the youngsters, and the locations of entertainment, the groups gathered by generational and cultural preferences represent a quite suitable place for their exposure and manifestation.

If we consider the analysed phenomenon by the discourse of duplicity, then the clubs manifest themselves as subcultural forms in the conventional meaning of the term,

that is they meant the cultural organization of groups and the specific concentration of cultural contents from different social groups that were judged by the discourse of power, considering it even dangerous sometimes.

The collected biographical data offered a perspective from below, the inner point of view of subcultural groups and cultural consumption, referring to the knowledge about the demands of the official discourse, and to the relations between different group cultures and parental culture or institutionalized common culture. Including subcultural values into stories of success painted the generational – but based on parental culture – attitudes of the youth, through which the individual and group experiences of living their life were fulfilled and got a meaning. These texts proved to be the most interesting and fertile territories of identity, as the gestures of identification exposed numerous forms and situations of identity itself.

The data provided the press on the one hand offered a far more rich background to the whole research, on the other hand led to the diversification of discourses on labour clubs. This is the forum where labour represented itself the most, although this forum also provided and spread the texts of the initiators, the organizers, that is often the intelligentsia building up the scientific and theoretical framework. Earlier papers, meaning those before World War I, were discussing the dancing balls of the labour in a most natural way, offering a separate section for these. In the interwar period these disappeared, giving place for political and economical fight, reappearing after World War II, but in another, a more diverse form. The press of the socialist era was more like a mouthpiece of the official discourse, referring quite vaguely to subcultural groups and dancing occasions, usually using a condemning voice, with the exception of a daily newspaper of Cluj, which presented the entertainment of the youth as a part of the city life. Generally speaking the press presented the culture of labour, more exactly the official, public image of that culture as a dominant, single culture, rarely comparing it to other, unwanted cultural practices.

Literary texts made the research more enjoyable and the sources, the discourses and the representations of clubs and groups more diverse. Labour writers were presenting the culture of labour, their everyday life and their clubs more like embedded into the official discourse. Other writers, belonging to other social strata or those writing not

exclusively about working class presented labour culture as a subculture, coexisting with other social groups and social milieu, sustaining the possibility of a diversified local society.

In the end there are some theses compiling the essence of this research:

1. Industrial workers, and more precisely working class clubs proved to be a suitable theme for ethnographic research, but only in the case when the researcher is not content with the use of only one type of source, and in the same time is not disturbed with trespassing among different fields of study. Historical works, biographic texts, the press and the literary texts are undoubtedly relevant sources, representing several discourses, which either with their detailed data or with their evaluative speech give more subtlety to the image on the clubs and connecting the common points prove the existence, relevance and function of the clubs. Nevertheless the author has to be conscious of the lacks of his work and of the constitutive and narrative character of it, and also of the fact that his interpretation is only one scientific narrative among many possible.
2. In the period in question the working class was more and more present in the space of the city as a sociocultural group. Its growing importance was due to the official discourse and political, demographic policies as well as to socialist propaganda. It defined itself together with other groups, in relation with them, but within itself it was not homogeneous either, but consisting of several even subcultural entities, the dynamic among which made the living of the so called labour life possible. Labour as homogeneous class or stratum – similarly to the concept of nation – can be better considered an “imagined community” created by marxist ideas, by the official discourse of the central power.
3. Identity itself was in function related to these changing relations, to the simultaneous aspiration to different groups and to the practical dimensions of everyday life. Industrial workers were able to live and to make visible their group identity within different social formations, different relations and locations: in factories, its sections, representational fora, clubs etc. The political or cultural events meant the occasions of manifesting the rigid group or class identities desired by power and ideology as well as of the individual or subcultural ones.

4. The clubs were the locations of the same duplicity. The discrepancy between the ideological expectations of socialism and the everyday practices, the ambivalent discourse is evident in this case, too. Official discourse formulated the function of the club by the mandatory professional and cultural extra activities, constructing the mass, the society of plural. However the discourse formulated by the participant individuals considered the club as the location for the youth's regular entertainment, where group identity was formulated along individual and group relations and subcultural values. The revealed attitudes and values were strongly related to parental culture, and were manifested in other places and with other occasions as well, thus confirming the cultural and contextual character of identity.

5. Following World War II the clubs represented such locations in the space of the city that assured the specifically generational cultural practice of the youth, thus their importance was unquestionable. This importance was manifested in the identifying gestures of the individuals. And this cultural practice was overwritten by the official image of the club, with its mandatory extra activities. Thus these locations ceased to function like subcultural groups, becoming only everyday clubs of one or the other factory, but their names survived through the decades, namely in their subcultural meaning. As historical subcultures they are taking their place in the inventory of culturally important artefacts of local history.