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What is This?

Bomzhi and their subculture: An anthropological study of the street children subculture in Makeevka, eastern Ukraine

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Abstract
The aim of the article is to outline key elements of the street children subculture in Makeevka, Ukraine, with an emphasis on the functions of a subculture and its manifestations of collectivity. The research was based on qualitative and quantitative data and was conducted from 2000 to 2009. Data analysis suggests that collectivity functions on three different levels: inner-group, group and supra-group levels and that the subculture of street children combines elements of a classical subculture with those of a neo-tribe.

Keywords
Baltushka, collectivity, street children, subculture of street children, Ukraine

Introduction

The aim of the article is to present ethnographic data gathered among street children in the Ukrainian city of Makeevka (Figure 1)[1] and to discuss some of the main features of their subculture.

The ethnographic data aim to add to the very few studies of street children subcultures in former Soviet countries (e.g. Lukašinska, 2002; Stephenson, 2001). Prior to my anthropological field research, street children in Makeevka had not been scientifically observed, described and analysed. During the longitudinal research, conducted between 2000 and 2010 and supervised by Professor Godina, an enormous amount of data was collected. The data show, among other findings, that for street children in Makeevka a non-typical subculture is characteristic.

The analysis presented in this article of the subculture of street children in Makeevka is based on classic knowledge of subculture, produced by the Chicago and Birmingham schools, and on post-subcultural studies. The article also incorporates the findings of

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Figure 1. Map of Ukraine, showing location of Makeevka

other researchers who present different groups of street children as subcultures (e.g. Beazley, 2003a, 2003b; Chitradub, 1998; Stephenson, 2001) and street children as competent social actors (e.g. Aptekar, 1988, 1989; Davies, 2008). The findings of these studies provide the theoretical framework for the analysis of the empirical data. The analysis of the data offers insight into the most characteristic features of the subculture of street children in Makeevka, for instance taking *Baltushka*, as well as into the functioning of the subculture. It also highlights the manifestations of collectivity on three levels: the level of the city (*Guliat'* code), the level of the group (the subculture) and inner-group levels (*Bomzhi communitas*). The study also strives to extend the discussion on the socialization of children into street life, particularly through processes of integration.

Method

The data presented in this article were collected in the years 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. The study was designed as an integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches; the data were triangulated, the main aim being to conduct a complete survey of street children's day-to-day life. A non-random sample of 68 street children was chosen, observed and interviewed. The participants were living in four groups, in four different geographic locations in the city: group no. 1 (see Figure 3) was living in the centre of Makeevka; group no. 2 was living in the Ziljoni quarter, a suburban part of the city 10 km from the centre; group no. 3 was living approximately 8 km from the centre of the city, in the Pushka quarter; and group no. 4 was living near the centre of the city (see Figure 2).[2]
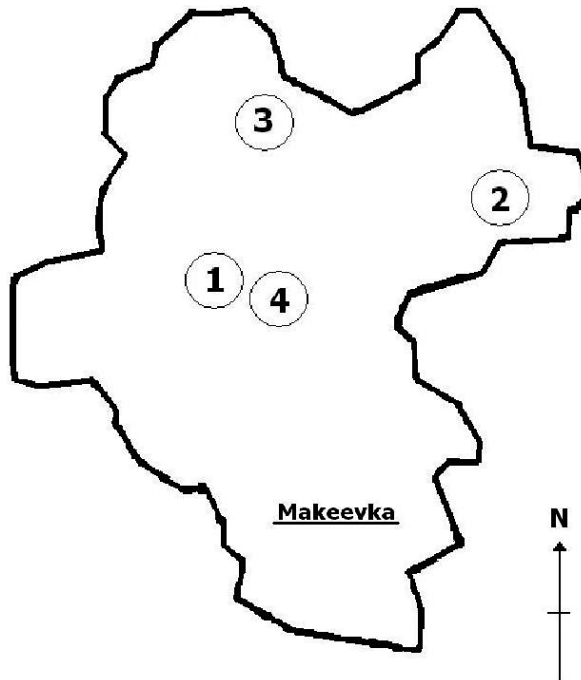
Figure 2. Location of the four groups of street children in Makeevka

Each of the four groups studied has a specific social structure and group organization that is similar to those presented by Lalor (1999), Lusk (1992) and Agnelli (1986).

Data collection was performed at locations that are occupied by street children:

- In the centre of Makeevka: the main bus station, Marshrutka station, the Pasazh shopping mall, the Univermag shopping mall, the central market and surrounding buildings;
- In the Ziljoni quarter: the bus station, the central market and surroundings buildings;
- In the Pushka quarter: the bus station, a restaurant, the market and surrounding buildings.

For the purpose of this study, three main methods were employed:

1. *Participant observation* (Burgess, 1993: 143–64; Denzin, 2009: 185–6; Flick, 2002: 139–41): daily participant observation was performed on the street within the group's day-to-day life. Data were gathered mainly from interaction with street children in the form of field notes written as a diary, a field report or conversation record.

2. *Interview* (Burgess, 1993: 101; Flick, 2002: 90–1): a questionnaire with flexible, open-ended questions enquired about the children's current personal situation, family background, interpersonal relationships inside the group, living conditions on the street and their perspective on the future; a total of 68 children were interviewed.

3. *Visual notes* (Flick, 2002: 149–50): using video equipment to create a series of video records of the children's everyday life.

Additional methods employed were:

1. A questionnaire with precoded questions (Payne and Payne, 2004: 186–7) – this was used during fieldwork in 2000 with the main aim of gathering sociographic and quantitative data; and

2. Observation without participation (Flick, 2002: 135–6) – during fieldwork with group no. 3 in 2000, with the main aim of noting any differences between data gathered using participant observation and data collected by observation without participation.

All the data were triangulated in accordance with the procedures suggested by Bemak (1996), Aptekar (2000) and Bryman (2009). The process of triangulation was based on using at least three methods, mostly a combination of participant observation, visual notes and interview.

On subculture in general and street children in particular

Classic studies and concepts of subculture evolved within the traditions of the Chicago School and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (Gelder and Thornton, 1997) and were later realigned and updated by post-subcultural studies (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003). In the early period of the Chicago School, the term *social world* was used to describe complex inter-group patterns of social interaction (Lutters and Ackerman, 1996: 4), and classic studies like Cressey's 'Taxi-Dance Halls' (Cressey, 1932, cited in Lutters and Ackerman, 1996) were based upon that concept. Later, the concept of subculture evolved and was mostly applied in research on social deviance. One of the first systematic modern studies of a deviant subculture is Cohen's *Delinquent Boys* (Cohen, 1955), where the subculture is understood as a specific, collective way of coping with common problems of social adjustment, mostly problems of social status (Cohen, 1955: 28–73). In this respect, by rearranging social criteria the subculture offers a new system of norms and values which enables the participants to escape previously experienced frustrations (Cohen, 1955: 28–65). This concept of subculture was later proven to be insufficient by a number of post-subcultural researchers, like Bennett (1999) and Bourdieu (1993). The need for a redefinition of the concept of subculture was motivated by modern global social trends, like the emergence of *mainstream* and *substream,* and led researchers to the development of new concepts such as those of *clubculture*, *taste* and the *neo-tribe* (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003: 3–4).

When referring to street children as social groups, many authors describe them as subcultures (inter alia, Beazley, 2003a; 2003b; Chitradub, 1998; Davies, 2008), but closer analysis of the two phenomena shows that they are not fully compatible in the strict meaning of the terminology. Classic concepts like Cohen's, for instance, tie the subculture to a class, and see its emergence in a collective perception of and reaction to a perceived problem (Cohen, 1955). Street children do not form a class. Still they manifest many subcultural properties such as a specific image, language and behaviour, and their social organization on the street functions as a common solution for survival in the harsh urban environment (Cohen, 1955).

Concepts offered by other authors, like that of *a social world* by Shibutani (1955), or that of the neo-tribe by Maffesoli (Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003), also fail to explain the subcultural nature of street children. These terms are loose and fluid, but are too exclusively focused on individual perceptions of participation in a social phenomenon and cannot therefore explain the participation of street children, which is in their eyes totally involuntary.

Defining street children in Makeevka

Street children, according to some authors, cannot be clearly categorized as either 'children on the street' or 'children of the street' (Aptekar and Abebe, 1997: 2). They do not form a homogeneous group and therefore avoid universal definition. According to Davies (2008: 314), it is more appropriate to define street children in relation to their well-defined subculture, rather than to the street. The experience of street children in Makeevka corresponds to Davies's definition. Therefore a street child is defined as a member of a street children subculture, living most of his/her time on the street and being well integrated into street life, but at the same time keeping strong and relatively frequent ties with his/her family.

Street children in the former Soviet Union are known throughout the region as *Bomzhi*.[3] The word is an acronym meaning literally, 'without a defined place of living'. *Bomzhi* from Makeevka are mainly boys, between 10 and 16 years old, many of whom have been on the streets for more than 4 or 5 years (Figure 3). Although they spend the vast majority of their time living on the street, they retain close and relatively frequent family ties. The majority of street children in Makeevka have both parents alive; however, from the data, it is evident that parental authority is absent, as exhibited by the matrifocal form of the family, mostly on account of un- or underemployment, imprisonment, alcoholism, addiction or simply neglect as a result of low living standards. The street children in Makeevka mostly have good relationships with one another, performing mutual exchange of information, goods, help and other forms of solidarity.

On the street the children survive by begging, collecting scrap metal or other waste materials, performing odd-jobs, like guarding stands in the marketplace or parking cars and living in the underground heating system called the *teplukha*.[4] Most of the money earned is spent on pleasure: computer games, cigarettes, inhalants and other substances. Nothing is contributed to their families. When reporting on their reasons for escaping to the street, they refer to family violence, alcoholism and other forms of abusive behaviour within their families. It is important to note that street children in Makeevka come from urban areas, which enables them to adapt quickly and easily to their new environment on the street.

Figure 3. *Bomzhi*, group no. 1 (July 2000)

Street children in Makeevka are well integrated into the local life of their micro-region of the city. They are not nomads – each group has its own territory, and they take good care of social relations in the three categories of their space: in public space, in collective private space and in semi-private space.

Public space comprises the broader space of the city within which street children perform the stereotypical role of victimized individuals that are in great need of help and pity. Their strategies of survival within this category of space are either deviant (begging for instance) or delinquent (pick-pocketing and shop-lifting):

> I am not good at it [begging] . . . I am ashamed of it. My sister on the other hand has no problems with it – she sits at the entrance of the marketplace, puts on her pitiful face and stretches out her hand. In several hours she can get a whole salary. . . . If me or one of my friends did this in the same way, people would torment us to go to work! (Informant 1, 10 years, interview fragment, 2000 – commenting on begging techniques)[5]

Owing to the great fluidity of the city population, the relationships are transitory, numerous and impersonal, and these children remain relatively anonymous.

From the street children's perspective public space is inseparably tied to the concept of social control, which is performed by police, social institutions and other adults, all of which could be, since they are not the part of the street children subculture, also a source of income:

Yes, they [social workers] harass us for being on the street . . . but we also profit from them, ha, ha. (Informant 2, 12 years, interview fragment 2002)

In this respect the manipulative and exploitative attributes of street children described by many authors (see espec. Aptekar, 1996; Bemak, 1996, among others) can be perceived as manifestations of their survival mechanisms in public space.

Collective private space is mainly limited to the *teplukha* (Figures 4 and 5). This category of space is tied to their perception of safety, group collectivity and independence and offers escape from formal social control. Since the *teplukha* is well hidden from the eyes of the public, the children can set aside their public role of victim. The role of victim, which is fully functional in public space, is here interpreted as weakness or softness and is therefore dysfunctional. As long as they can keep the *teplukha* hidden, they can maintain their private space. Therefore, they keep the *teplukha* well camouflaged, physically inaccessible and highly mobile. Since most things in the group are collective, there is little room within this category of space for individuality, like one's own delights and pleasures. In the *teplukha* these quickly become the subject of collectivization:

It pisses me off, therefore I hide. They [group peers] would take away my radio the first minute . . . but it's the same with anything else – if you want an ice-cream, you buy it and eat it somewhere else. (Informant 3, 13 years, interview fragment, 2000)

Semi-private space is the space which includes the marketplace, bus stops, shopping malls and other relatively well frequented locations within the micro-region of the city.

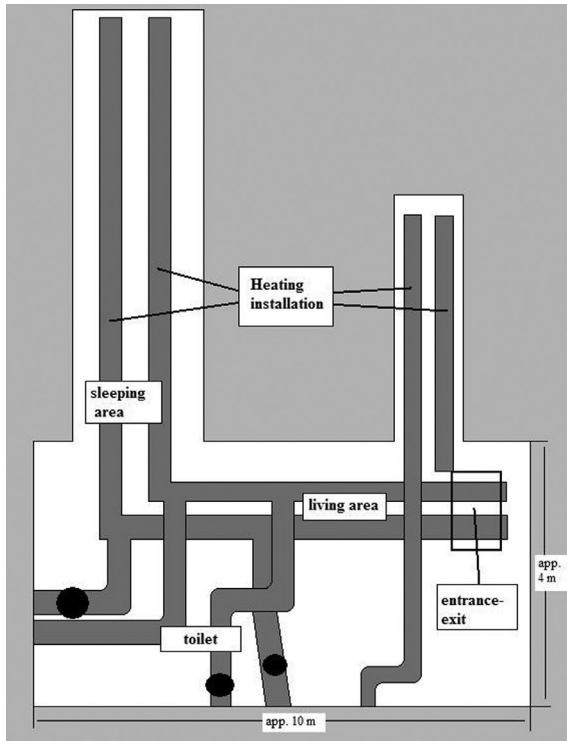**Figure 4.** *Bomzhi* in their *teplukha*, group no. 1 (January 2002)

Figure 5. Plan of the *teplukha*, group no. 4 (February 2005)

This space represents the space of the greatest social and economic activity of the street children. In the marketplace they engage in different sorts of work, as porters, cleaners or attendants. To keep this type of work continuous and constant requires that street children maintain good social relations with other people. This is why social relations within this category of space are direct, frequent and lasting. There is considerable evidence of cooperation and solidarity between street children and other visitors, like vendors and customers in the marketplace:

> I leave all my valuables with auntie Masha [the lady selling bread at the local marketplace] . . . I have all my documents there, photographs you took last year, a small radio . . .
>
> (*Interviewer*: Is your stuff safe there?)
>
> Sure! We [group members and vendors] are friends. We all know each other by name. . . . We help them, they help us. (Informant 4, 17 years, interview fragment, 2004)

However, semi-private space can also be a space of conflict, especially when it is entered by groups of outsiders, for instance other street children or local drug addicts, who could endanger the system of good social relationships:

> This marketplace is ours . . . we have to protect it. If I came to visit you and stole something, would you invite me again? You would throw me out and never invite another *bomzh* again . . . (Informant 4, 17 years, interview fragment, 2004)

Conflicts with groups of individuals who are not street children are usually resolved with little or no violence – street children rapidly assume their role of victim, and the intruders usually leave. When a conflict includes other groups of street children with whom relations are friendly, it normally comprises different forms of verbal abuse and minor forms of physical violence. More serious injuries or even death as a result of these conflicts occur very rarely.

Street children are aware of the importance of good social relations on those three levels, for their survival depends on the groups in collective and public space, and they defend these relationships fiercely. It is therefore important to note that the vast majority of delinquent acts by street children are performed outside the territory of their group, usually on the territory of some other group of street children. Since this other group also tries to maintain good social relations within its territory, it is obvious that other street children, members of different groups, are not welcome, especially when looking for trouble. Violence among them is relatively common, but it is not limited only to different groups of street children. It is also directed from the group as an entity to its own members, mainly for the purpose of maintaining the social structure of the group or as a means of sanctioning.

Street children in Makeevka are active social actors and not helpless victims, which is in accordance with conclusions presented by other researchers of street children (Aptekar, 1989, 2000; Beazley, 2003a, 2003b).

Subculture of street children in Makeevka

When street children in Makeevka form themselves into groups, these groups can easily be perceived as a subculture. Groups might comprise some 5 to 15 members. The number of members is not fixed and varies according to many factors, from season and weather to the political situation in the country or pressure from the police.

> We stick together during the winter because it is cold outside. Last winter it was –28 [$^{\circ}$C] and down here [in the *teplukha*] it is + 30 [$^{\circ}$C]. (Informant 5, 14 years, group no. 3, interview fragment, 2006)

And:

> . . . when the police chase us, it is better to split. The group is easier to catch than individuals . . . (Informant 4, 12 years, group no. 1, interview fragment 2002)

In 'stereotype subcultures' or other subcultures, present in commercially successful form and influenced and supported by the fashion or entertainment industries – skinheads and surfers, for instance – the image appears in the form of prescription (Stratton, 1985: 182). One must therefore satisfy image criteria in order to enter the subculture. It seems that in the case of street children in Makeevka, the image emerges as a product of a sad necessity, characteristic of their way of life. However, this is no so. First, street children in Makeevka have enough money[6] to buy themselves new, even fashionable clothes, but

they do not. The reason is that dirty and old clothes have subcultural value. If someone is not dressed in dirty old clothes, he or she cannot be a full member of street subculture. Also, in their groups one must satisfy the image criteria in order to enter the subculture:

> . . . I found *Informant 7*, who I hadn't seen for at least a year. I was shocked – he was all dirty, dressed in old clothes, oversized boots and a repulsive bonnet. A genuine *Bomzh*! I knew him for several years, he was so clean and tidy, almost spiffy . . . I asked him what happened. He told me that since he tried *Baltushka* for the first time, he doesn't go home anymore. . . . And I've also noticed that he is more accepted by the group . . . they [group peers] don't see him as *Pisun* [prick] anymore . . . (AN, diary fragment, January 2006)

In many cases where the subculture prescribes specific elements for its members on the manifest level, this points to a certain level of social acceptance and commercial success for the subculture at the level of the dominant society. One has, for instance, a wide choice from a plethora of different styles present in today's social and commercial market, and many styles are market-dictated. From this perspective, the desirability of a particular subculture is dependent on the desirability of its specific image in the society. Street children, on the other hand, are a deviant subculture; it is impossible to go to the local shop and buy a set of 'street-children-style' clothes. The direction for entering the subculture level is inverted; first one has to adopt the latent level of this subculture in order to produce the manifest level. Although street children in Makeevka look relatively the same, all dirty and at first glance neglected, their image cannot be reduced to a set of stylistic elements, but has to be understood within a broader subcultural framework.

Much the same can be said about their specific, subculture-directed attitude. This attitude is connected to a system of subcultural norms and mores and appears as a set of individualized actions and perceptions. The attitude takes many forms, depending mainly on the situation or the observer – to outsiders they may appear as helpless victims, to the researcher as manipulative, deceptive and evasive respondents, and to other street children as either friends or foes – but these are all part of their survival mechanism. Their attitude is deviant but rarely delinquent.

Street language is another particularity of the subculture of street children and is a cohesive factor for the group, on the one hand, and an instrument of isolation from the public, on the other. The slang of street children in Makeevka is vulgar across the spectrum, still understandable for Russian-speaking people at one end and totally beyond comprehension at the other. It is based on words created by street children that have been taken from Russian vocabulary, truncated, modified in composition and pronunciation and concatenated into new, subcultural words. Some examples of subcultural language transformations are:

Russian word: *krysha* (roof)   Subcultural word: *kry-ky-sha-ka*

tepla trasa (heating system)   *te(i)plukha*
bayan (music instrument, form of accordion)   *bayan* (injection)

It is important to note that street language represents one of the most important agents of street socialization and that children usually learn it before they become street children. They learn it by 'hanging out with street kids', which means that it is spoken by

street children and non-street children who spend a good deal of time together on the street. Data indicate that this results in a higher probability that non-street children will escape from the home environment to the street and/or see life in a street group as an alternative to home, boarding school or an orphanage.

One of the most important ideals in the subculture of street children in Makeevka is the ideal of solidarity. Solidarity is one of the bases for the collective identity of street children in Makeevka in general, and it applies to every street child in the city. Solidarity is strongly connected with collectivity, which manifests itself on three levels: on the macro, meso and micro levels.

Macro level of collectivity: *Guliat'* code

There is evidence of a collective identity that goes beyond individual groups and applies to street children as a population within the city, sometimes even within the region. The concept of *Guliat'* is one of the most important symbols of general collective identity. *Guliat'* is a Russian word for roving or strolling but is also a subcultural expression pointing to the collective code of the street children. It is a construct of interpersonal relations and represents a system of common values and alliances among street children in Makeevka. When group peers stroll (*guliat'*) together, this has no marked importance; it means that they are particularly good friends or that they have some common errand. The importance becomes salient, however, when contact between members of different groups is established. If groups exist in an indifferent or even hostile relationship,[7] and if one member shares the *Guliat'* code with the other group, this could guarantee a better outcome for the situation.[8] The more time the child spends with children of other street groups, or the more deviant the activity that they perform, the stronger the bond and the code become. The reciprocity and obligation induced by the code of *Guliat'* represent an essential part of the symbolic economy and are widely respected among street children even at the most crucial moments, like a police raid or attack from other groups.

[Four peers from group 4 were caught up in a violent situation with a larger group of street children outside their territory. Two of them were beaten, one escaped and one was left unharmed]

Interviewer:	What was that all about?
Child:	What . . . the beating? They accused us of stealing a wrist watch!
Interviewer:	Who, all of you?
Child:	No, just Misha [pseudonym for a group peer involved]. But everyone would most certainly have got it [the beating]. Sasha escaped [pseudonym for a group peer who escaped] . . .
Interviewer:	What about you?
Child:	They were just yelling at me . . .
Interviewer:	They didn't touch you?
Child:	No . . . but on the other hand . . .
Interviewer:	What? Are you friends?
Child:	Well . . . we know each other. I was *strolling* with them [*Ja s nimi Gulial*]. (Interview fragment, July 2006)

Meso level of collectivity: Subcultural identity and processes of subcultural integration

A number of researchers have directed attention to the concept of street identity (Beazley, 2003a, 2003b; Chitradub, 1998). However, less effort has been devoted to the processes of creation of collective and individual subcultural identity. When subcultural identity is discussed, two major forces of identity creation have to be addressed: the processes of subcultural assimilation and the processes of subcultural integration. Both are evident among street children in Makeevka. Owing to the limitations of the present article, we address only some of the main elements of the processes of integration into the subculture: integration through time and integration through fulfilment of children's needs.

Integration through time is connected with the fact that the data gathered among street children in Makeevka suggest a significant correlation between the length of the period of life on the street and integration into the street subculture. Children who spend more time on the street interiorize subcultural norms, mores, perceptions and cognition, language, image and attitudes better. This is manifest in their group structure: older street children and street children with longer street careers form a subcultural council or a group core, while younger children and newcomers form the periphery of the group. The data also suggest that older street children are more difficult to resocialize, and for them the process of resocialization takes more time and effort.

There are several activities that are performed in the subculture of street children in Makeevka for fulfilment of their individual needs. All these activities are based on the subcultural socialization that takes place even before a child becomes a fully fledged member of the street group.

The first activity is that of emotional support. A group of street children compensates for the absent family of the children. It provides a new system of social roles and relations and concepts of authority and hierarchy, which in some groups are similar to those of the familial system (Naterer, 2010). The child's need for a structured social life can be observed in the structure of the subculture. For example, group no. 4 had a distinctly family-like social structure, which included fatherly and motherly authority, together with a set of appertaining roles. Both were performed by two male individuals. Informant 4 played the role of the *father;* he was the one to whom children turned for advice and physical protection and who made important decisions in and for the group. Informant 6 played the role of the *mother*, the person in charge of group finances and food acquisition, medical help and emotional support. This specific group organization points to a subcultural simulation of the family. Taking the drug *Baltushka,* discussed later in the article, consolidated the group and transformed its structure by modifying the roles and thus made the simulation of the family even more present.

The next activity is physical support of the child. This activity provides for the child's physical security from police, gang members and other citizens that may harm a member of the group. Although there are many forms of abusive behaviour among members within the group, the function of physical support plays an important role in the process of an individual's development of a sense of security and belonging. In many cases the children perceive themselves as group members, even though they have been physically abused by their peers:

Why does he put up with that? Ask him! You think he wants to be alone on the street? (Informant 8, 14 years, group no. 1, interview fragment 2002 – commenting on severe abuse of a younger group peer, who was beaten and raped by male members of his own group)

The activity of physical support is closely tied to the activity of sustainability. The group possesses a variety of instruments and an infrastructure that help a child to survive in the harsh environment of the street. The first instrument that provides sustainability is group solidarity, which is strong among the children. Members of the group practise solidarity on a daily basis. This is most evident in the sharing of food, cigarettes, inhalants and money. Solidarity is also evident when individuals get sick or injured, and other members of the group provide necessary assistance, mostly in the form of medicine or escort to the local hospital:

Today we had our first *traditional* picnic. I bought some food and we went to the nearby *stavok* [Russian for a small artificial lake] . . . they even forced me to drink milk! 'We share everything' said Informant 1, and pushed the plastic cup into my hand. Although I was sick just by thinking of milk, I drank the whole cup. He was very pleased . . . sharing indeed is at the core of the group. They say that they share absolutely everything, and after this picnic I believe them. (AN diary fragment, August 2005)

By gaining group membership or the status of a street child, an individual gains status and opportunities that are suitable for particular economic activities. Being a street child means that people are more likely to give alms, food or clothes than to a child who lives at home. As already mentioned, there are many unwritten agreements between the vendors on the local marketplace and the street children, which enable the children to get free food and clothes or even to earn some money, and whereby the vendors employ low-cost child labour and simultaneously avoid vandalism and pilfering. The group of street children that lives in a particular marketplace also prevents street children who are not members of the group from participating in any of the economic activities at this marketplace and keeps them out of there.

The adaptive activity is based mainly on economic activities, since economic relations prevail among the types of relations between street children and other subjects. This activity has a major impact on an individual's communication and conforming within the social, cultural and subcultural space of the city. It is evident not only on the social level of participation, but also on the individual level, mainly in the form of social cognitive and motivational functions. Street children have similar interests and similar motives, and they tend to reflect and respond to similar problems in a similar way.

Micro level of collectivity: *Communitas* and *Baltushka*

Bomzhi exhibit a type of relationship which could, at the inner levels of the subculture, be perceived as *communitas*. Street children have developed their *communitas* in a manner similar to Turner's concept of *normative communitas*, which is the 'relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals' (Turner, 1995: 131), 'where, under the influence of time, the need to mobilize and organize resources, and the necessity for social control among the members of the group in pursuance of

these goals, the existential communitas is organized into perduring social system' (p. 132). According to Turner, *communitas* relationships 'are to be found at all stages and levels of culture and society' (p. 113), and street children are no different. Their *communitas* could be described, in Turner's words, as a blend 'of loneliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship' (p. 96) and is one of the core essences of the subculture.

The *Bomzhi communitas* is inseparably tied to their group, but it is important to note that not everybody in the group is a part of the *communitas*. Their *communitas* is evident mostly at the inner levels of the subculture. Manifestations of the *Bomzhi communitas,* however, are not limited just to common activities like begging, running from the police, playing games, sniffing glue or injecting *Baltushka;* nor is manifestation limited to acts and codes of solidarity or to mutual support and dependence. It also includes severe psychological and physical violence and even rape (as an upgrade of physical violence) among peers. Under *communitas,* these are all tolerated, for the fear of exclusion is far greater than any momentary suffering. The stronger the integration of an individual within the subculture, the longer the period of time children spend on the street and the harsher the conditions, the stronger their *communitas*. This is also valid for the *Guliat'* code mentioned previously, with the main difference that the *Guliat'* code functions inter- and intra- subculturally, while *communitas* seems to be limited to a particular group of street children.

The *Bomzhi communitas* fully complies with Turner's concept, for '*communitas* is of now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom' (Turner, 1995: 113). Their *communitas* has the status of the sacred. This could be observed in many daily situations and on many levels but, above all, in the ritualized consumption of the substance *Baltushka*.

Taking *Baltushka* could be perceived as an important way of establishing and maintaining *communitas*. The word *Baltushka* is a slang expression for a substance that street children take intravenously. The expression comes from the Russian word *baltatj* (to mix, to stir, to shuffle and also to prattle or to babble). *Baltushka* is a mixture of a flu medication called Efect, *Marganets* (potassium permanganate $KMnO_4$), vinegar and water. Children who use this mixture take from 4 to 10 ml, at rates of four to eight times a day. The research has shown that *Baltushka* itself does not produce any direct physical addiction observable from withdrawal symptoms among users when not injected, but does result in high levels of social dependence.[9] Street children who have been using the substance on a regular basis report that while they can quit its consumption at any time without having any withdrawal crisis or other side effects provided they are alone, they cannot resist the temptation when they are in the group.

The taking of *Baltushka* is a highly ritualized and a highly structured social event, from the phase of preparation to the phase of consumption (Figure 6). This is evident from the special tools for preparation, the elaborate and complex vocabulary concerning preparation and consumption of the substance and the system of roles and relations involved. It is never confined to an individual person, but always includes a group. As a result, the taking of *Baltushka* acts powerfully on both the structure and the cohesion of the subculture, but also performs a fusion of the aforementioned family roles and relations and a subcultural simulation of the family (Naterer, 2010).[10]

Figure 6. Taking *Baltushka*, group no. 3 (August 2005)

Processes of rationalization and cognitive dissonance connected with taking *Baltushka* are closely tied to idiosyncratic and subcultural collective cognitive schemes of health, body and safety. Although they vary in content from individual to individual, they all have the same function: preserving individual and group integrity and assuring a minimum level of sense.

According to some authors, substance abuse has important cultural value (e.g. Aptekar and Abebe, 1997), and there is no doubt that the substances consumed by the street children in Makeevka, particularly taking *Baltushka,* influence subcultural life on many, if not all levels.

Conclusion

The data presented show that the subculture of street children in Makeevka could not be understood within a classical sociological conception. Street children in Makeevka exhibit many subcultural characteristics: image, language, behaviour and a specific culture. However, they are not class determined, and their motivations for running to the street are rather individual than collective. Their social formation is not a mechanism for social adjustment or a way of coping with status frustrations, as with the *Delinquent Boys* (Cohen, 1955), but rather a form of alternative to a dysfunctional family.

subculture Cohen (1955):	street children in Makeevka:	neo-tribe Maffesoli (1966):
- collective response to problems of social adjustment, motivated by common perception of situation - determined by social structures (class and gender) - inverted system of social norms - short-term hedonism - specific (ofen delinquent) behaviour - specific language - rigid social structure	- collective response to individual problems and motivations - only partially determined by social structures (class and gender) - partially inverted system of social norms - short-term hedonism - specific (rarely delinquent) behaviour - specific language - rigid social structure	- collective identity not based on social structures (class and gender) - patterns and practices of consumption, which form new forms of temporary socialities - non-inverted system of social norms - short-term hedonism - specific (rarely delinquent) behaviour - specific language - not a rigid structure but a 'state of mind' expressed in form or style

Figure 7. *Subculture* to street children in Makeevka to *neo-tribe* continuum

On the other hand, street children in Makeevka also exhibit many of the characteristics conceptualized by post-subcultural studies. This is why they could also be perceived as a form of neo-tribe. They have a collective identity that is not based on traditional structures like gender or class and have a strong material aspect to their participation in the group on the street. However, they cannot be understood fully as a neo-tribe, for the concept developed by Maffesoli focuses too exclusively on patterns of consumption and state of mind, *expressed in form* (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003: 12). Street children in Makeevka also exhibit a relatively high level of rigidity in systems of inclusion and exclusion, for instance, which according to Maffesoli is absent in neo-tribes.

We therefore propose the alternative concept of a subculture of street children in Makeevka. Their subculture must be understood as an entity on a continuum (Figure 7), with the classical understanding of a subculture (Cohen, 1955) on one end and the concept of neo-tribe (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003) on the other.

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Notes

1. Makeevka is an industrial city in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine, which has amalgamated with the city of Donetsk. Together the cities have approximately 2 million inhabitants. According to the 2001 census, there were 389,589 people living in the city (46 percent male,

54 percent female). Since street children were not submitted to the census, the exact number of children living on the streets in Makeevka is not known; some NGOs estimate the number to range from 1000 to 2000 (Naterer, 2010).

After the attainment of Ukrainian independence in 1991, the processes of modernization, democratization and capitalization caused continuous decline in the national and local economy and living standards, which is particularly evident in urban areas of eastern Ukraine. There was a 47 percent decline in GDP and a 25 percent increase in the adult mortality rate between 1990 and 2000 (*Source:* WHO, 2010; www.who.int) in Ukraine, and in five years, from 1995 to 2000, unemployment soared by another 85 percent, from 1,437,000 to 2,655,800 (*Source:* UNECE, 2010; www.unece.org). One of the local newspapers from the Donetsk region reported in 2004 that the minimum survival income is in fact 40 percent higher than the officially guaranteed income, like minimum wages and pensions, for instance. In this respect the state of transition for many Ukrainians has been one of constant struggle for survival, forcing them to invent all sorts of additional survival mechanisms, from producing their own food in urban areas, to pawning goods or even adopting semi-legal and illegal economic activities.

2. The designations for groups evolved during the course of the research, meaning that the first group investigated was group no. 1 in the centre. The next group encountered was group no. 2, on the periphery of the town. The next group was group no. 3, which is located between the centre and the periphery of the town. The last group encountered was group no. 4.

3. In the past, street children in Russia were known as *Besprizorny*, meaning that they had literally no families or homes (Bosewitz, 1988). They formed groups that exhibited many characteristics and functions of a subculture (Bosewitz, 1988).

4. *Teplukha* is a subcultural slang expression for an underground dwelling within the heating system, occupied by street children. The expression is derived from the Russian *tepla trasa.*

5. No personal names are used to protect respondents' identities.

6. Data show that street children in Makeevka have, on average, from 40 to 150 grivna (app. €6–25.00) at their disposal daily.

7. The relationships could be explained in terms of studies of youth-centrism, which report that up to 30 percent of young people are youth-centric in the strict sense of the term, meaning closely tied to the peer group and, as such, in non-conformist relationship with the broader social environment (Fistravec and Musil, 2008): 'autonomous youth-centric individuals do not strive to achieve their own adulthood, although they try to gain many of adult privileges, before they achieve formal status of an adult' (Fistravec and Musil, 2008: 12).

8. Within the anthropological tradition there are many examples of social codes that neutralize hostilities and enforce alliance and solidarity, the most prominent example being the *kula,* analysed by Malinowski (1992).

9. This social dependence has many dimensions of social addiction, a fact which has been pointed out by Andrej Fistravec.

10. The consequences of taking *Baltushka* are severe. According to observations made from between 2005 and 2009, children who frequently used *Baltushka* developed symptoms similar to epilepsy: reduced mobility, speech obstruction, several forms of mental disturbance and even death, as a result of damaged organs. Children are aware of the danger and potential of death from the use of *Baltushka*. Yet there seems to be a series of subcultural mechanisms, different ways of specific rationalization or subcultural cognitive dissonance that enables consumers to inject the substance, be aware of the hazard and yet feel safe at the same time. For example, when children were picking up used needles from the ground for re-use and were asked if they were not afraid of getting infected with hepatitis or HIV, they replied: 'No, this is why we add vinegar to the mixture. Vinegar kills all the germs, you know!'

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