

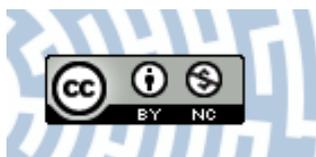


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Community in the Culture of Individualism – Social Dilemma of Our Times

Abstract

The keynote of the undertaken considerations is an assumption that community in the culture of individualism strengthens the individual and the individual's development. Concentration on oneself and on one's own objectives does not exclude consciousness of other people's needs. In the first part of the study I shall present theoretical assumptions of my considerations, in the second part – results of the conducted research actions the concerning meaning of confidence and solidarity in the life of young people, in the third part I will formulate conclusions, pointing out, among others, that confidence is a necessary resource letting oneself manage with the presence of others.

Key words: *community, individuality, confidence, solidarity, intercultural education*

Introduction

The contemporary world is characterized by individuality and "neotribality", which is meant as obsessive looking for community (cf. Bauman, 1995:138). The human being was forced to individualism, as Ulrich Beck observed (2002), by social and historical development. Individuality does not mean simply increased freedom, but it brings also a previously unknown risk of dependence and threat. Its domination undermines the meaning of morality and the duty of acting for the good of the whole. Individual existence is difficult to carry and therefore a need for community is growing.

The assumptions of Alfred Adler's individual psychology, the assumptions of Emile Durkheim's sociologism and Piotr Sztompka's theory of happening of the culture of confidence form theoretical frames of the present considerations. The above-mentioned theories can be a good point of departure for portraying the connection between community-ness and individuality. They pay attention to the dualism of the nature of the human being, dialectically deciding about the internal harmony of life.

The key notions in Alfred Adler's¹ conception are the "sense of social bond" and "aspiration to domination", the basic reason for the psychological disorders of the individual is breaking off bonds with the external world. The renewal or restoration of bonds between the individual and the community is the main purpose of his individual psychology. The sense of social bond for A. Adler manifests itself as the reply to threats resulting from the physical world and leads man to the consolidation of his physical powers. Living within a community has a meaning only when the community gives the individual what they cannot achieve beyond the community: protection against the world tending to destroy the individual. Thanks to community the individual increases the scope of their freedom and real and subjectively felt safety. However the community imposes a sequence of tasks on the individual, e.g. the necessity of reciprocating the satisfied needs and obliges them to comply to the rules applying to the members of the community

Paradoxically, A. Adler also writes about, although seen from different perspectives, a priority of both individual and community's interests. The interest of the individual is their happy life, however this interest can be realized only by the

¹ More on this subject: Adler, A. (1986): *Sens życia [What Life Could Mean to You]*. Transl. M. Kreczkowska. Warszawa: PWN; Adler, A. (1946): *Psychologia indywidualna w wychowaniu [The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology]*. Kraków: Nakładem Księgarni Stefana Kamińskiego; Adler, A. (1998): "Psychologia indywidualna w wychowaniu" ["The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology"]. In: *Źródła do dziejów wychowania i myśli pedagogicznej. Myśl pedagogiczna w XX stuleciu [Sources for history of the upbringing and the pedagogic thought. Pedagogic thought in the 20th century]*. Selected and worked out by S. Wołoszyn. Vol. III, first book. Kielce: Strzelec, pp. 600–608; Markinówna, E. (1998): "Psychologia indywidualna Adлера" ["Adler's Individual Psychology"]. In: *Źródła do dziejów wychowania i myśli pedagogicznej. Myśl pedagogiczna w 20th stuleciu. [Sources for history of the upbringing and the pedagogic thought. Pedagogic thought in the 20th century]* Selected and worked out by S. Wołoszyn. Vol. III, first book. Cited edn., pp. 608–609; Słomski, W. (2000): "Społeczne źródła tożsamości w psychologii indywidualnej Adлера". ["Social sources of identity in Adler's individual psychology"] *Albo albo. Problemy psychologii i kultury – tożsamość [Either – or. Problems of psychology and culture – identity]*, No 2, pp. 37–49.

realization of the interests of the community. The measure of individual happiness is adaptation to living as a member of the community.

The most important subject of E. Durkheim's (1999) work is basic opposition individual – society, generally the contrast between individual and social factors. The universal dimension of that opposition is connected with the conception of dualism of the human nature adopted by that scholar, with the conception of spliced man, constituting the pivot of his entire thought. The opposition of what is social and what is individual, present in each human individual, states the universal dimension of the human world. The concept of the dual human being, "*homo duplex*", indicates two poles of man's psychical life: the sensory impressions (instincts, instructions associated with the physical needs of the organism) and the notional thinking (morality, religion, everything that we share with other people). E. Durkheim investigates social solidarity and he subjects it to close observation as a social fact, he shows transformations of the social solidarity of bonds. He points at the moral dimension of social bonds among people.

P. Sztompka describes confidence as the foundation necessary for functioning of society, the factor of democratic politics and economic development, but first of all the factor of safety in everyday life. Social happening of confidence in P. Sztompka's (1997, 1999) presentation means the creation of the culture of confidence (or culture of mistrust). It is probably an example of a more general process, in which cultures, social structures, standard systems, institutions, organizations and all other wholes from the macrosociety level are developing and crystallizing. The process of building the culture of confidence has a continuous character; it develops permanently from the past through the present time to the future.

Individualism, confidence and solidarity in the life of young people

I assume that the community in the culture of individualism strengthens the individual and their personal development. Concentration on oneself and on one's own objectives does not exclude consciousness of other people's needs. The assumption that individualist values are connected causally with egoism, rivalry, isolation from others and alienation towards oneself is unauthorized. It cannot be considered to be correct in the light of the theoretical and empirical achievements of psychology (Alfred Adler, Maria Jarymowicz (1992, 1994, 1999), Allan Waterman (1981:762–773) and Piotr Sztompka's theory of sociology). Individualism does not state an obstacle for functioning in the community. In contradiction

to liberal positions, community does not restrict the individual, but strengthens them supporting the needs of all the members of a community, at the same time it arouses a sense of duty towards other people.

Human existence is characterized not only by its direction toward its own Me, but also by its social character, its relation to other people. The purpose of the conducted research actions was to determine the meaning assigned by young people to their own individuality, to confidence and solidarity. The research comprised 1000 people, aged 19 to 23, students of pedagogy, at the Department of Ethnology and Theories of Education in Cieszyn, of the University of Silesia in Katowice. All those people live in the Polish – Bohemian borderland. The examinations were performed in June 2008. 945 questionnaires, which comprised 94.5% of the assumed sample, were qualified for further elaboration. In the examined group women constituted 87%, and men 13% of the whole population. 47% of the examined people live in the country and 63% in towns. Questionnaires and an interview were used to gather information.

The southern part of the Polish – Bohemian borderland is a very interesting place for theoretical analysis and empirical investigations. The contact and co-existing in this area populations heterogeneous linguistically, ethnically and nationally, mixture of cultural influences, coming from different ethnic or national circles and simultaneous detritions of heterogeneous population assemblies, contributed to shaping the peculiar culture of the borderland – both cultures of confidence, and mistrust towards the others, formed social bonds which have survived to this day.

Within the described research action an attempt was made to find an answer to the question: What meaning is assigned by contemporary young people to their own Me, to confidence and solidarity?

It was assumed that an interest of community in interpersonal relations implies assigning some meaning to confidence. Confidence has a connection with post-materialistic values. An interest in confidence is one of the aspects of the cultural turn in the sociological theory. It reflects the increasing interest of the range of "soft" cultural variables, imponderables of social life.

The result of the research indicate that for 94.6% of the examined people their own Me is an important value, 82.3% of the respondents respect confidence and for 26.0% of the young people solidarity is an important value.

The examined young people recognize confidence as a value without which a life together with other people is impossible, they emphasize that confidence is one of the most important values of their life. In P. Sztompka (2007:69–70) comprehension confidence is composed of two elements: convictions and their

practical expression. Such a way of understanding of confidence (*anticipating confidence*)(cf. Sztompka, 2007:100) is very important for young people, who assume that usually other people's actions will be also beneficial for them, when they establish relationships with them. Young people point also at *mutual confidence* (cf. Sztompka, 2007:99) – such a relation between partners, in which each of them is an exponent and an addressee of confidence and so each of them manifests the credibility towards the other partner. In the students' declarations also the notion of also fiduciary trusting appears – entrusting somebody with some object, a person or other value with the hope for the care, concern, and return in case of our request. Statements point at the fact that young people do not perceive trusting as a dimension of political culture, "of civil culture", confidence does not constitute an important aspect of a civil society for them.

The way of understanding of the notion of solidarity by young people refers to the two different types of solidarity distinguished by E. Durkheim: mechanical and organic. Mechanical solidarity, characteristic of primitive societies, is based on similarity, on the community of feelings and beliefs, based on sanctions and common collective consciousness. Organic solidarity is based on interdependence, connected with social differentiation, increasing role of the individual and with general individualisation of collective life. The ways of understanding of solidarity by young people exhibit transformation of the mechanical solidarity into organic one, together with increasing social differentiation, together with the process of individuals becoming independent and releasing from the influences of other people. Perhaps therefore the solidarity obtains rather low valuation (as compared to confidence) from the examined young people. The order of mechanical solidarity and moral integration is replaced by a new order based on mutual dependence.

Conclusions

Social life is filled by an increasing number of threats and hazards; the world offers still grater pool of possibilities. The results of the performed investigations indicate that confidence is an indispensable component of young people's actions; it becomes a strategy of behaviour indispensable in touch with untransparency of the social environment. It performs important functions not only for partners of an interaction, but also for wider communities, groups, associations and organizations. It stimulates sociability, enriches the network of interpersonal bonds, increases the field of interaction and lets establish close contacts with other people. It increases

what was called by E. Durkheim (1999) "moral density"², which is described by contemporary authors as social capital (Putnam, 1995), "spontaneous social behaviours" (Fukuyama, 1997) or civil commitment (Almond and Verba, 1980). Confidence favours tolerance, approval of strangers and allowing the existence of cultural and political differences, which thanks to it are not treated as threats. In this way it damps manifestations of intergroup hostility or xenophobia and civilization disputes.

The individual will approach their goal when it connects their individualism with taking some obligations for the common good. It is not here about getting rid of I and granting the dominating role to society, it is not about converting communities into centres of separate Me. It is about connecting I and we in the understanding of Martin Buber (1998: 631–660) in the complementary and constructive relation, which is possible when the importance of mutual obligation is taken into consideration.

Young people in a natural way feel the need for separateness, accepting and remaining faithful to ideas, they long for morality. Many possibilities of influencing the individual and the community are in education. It is both help in forming and exerting influence, and the help in self-determination and self-development of a given person. The education on the practical layer is both the carrier of ideas of the upbringing, and the means of the organization of learning, of forming self-awareness and promotion of development.

It is difficult to state any generalizations concerning the generation of contemporary young people because as shown by the results of the latest investigations, it is an internally diversified group. It is worth stressing that the examined students form a specific group, they are future teachers, included in the process of academic training within the scope of intercultural education, developing their own identity, but also preparing themselves for dialogue relations with other people. Perhaps, as future teachers, they possess greater sensitivity for the needs of other people in such a way realizing their vocation.

The opinion rejecting the community-ness of social life in the culture of individualism is not possible and legitimate in social and educational practice. Special cultural capital of society is hidden in the potential of strong moral bonds. Determination and creation of favourable conditions allowing full mobilization and full use of the human potential is the challenge of the contemporary pedagogy. It is connected with the increasing role of confidence as a means for domesticating

² Moral density – high density, intimacy of relations filled with strong emotions with a high level of interdependence and long time of duration. Cf.: Durkheim, 1999.

risk and counteracting uncertainty. This connection was already noticed by Niklas Luhmann (1979), who stated that confidence is a means allowing to manage in the complexity of the future produced by technology, also Anthony Giddens (2002:6) recognizes confidence as an indispensable demand of life.

Basic confidence, as called by Erik Erikson (1997), creates the initial splice, which originates the complex emotional-cognitive attitude towards other people, the world of things and one's own identity. Basic confidence formed thanks to taking care of the first carers in a critical way connects individual identity with appraisals of other people. It is connected in the principal way with the interpersonal organization of time and space. Acquisition of feeling of separate identity and ability to determine the identity of other people and objects depend on the formation of this basic confidence. Confidence alone includes the natural element of creativity, i.e. an ability to act and think in a new way in relation to the previously established patterns.

The young people from the Polish – Bohemian borderland become people from a cultural trans-borderline crossing, thanks to education, journeys and language skills, borders of regions, states or continents. They emanate with multiculturalism and Europeanism only partially assigned to their small homeland. Thanks to mass migrations, tourism, and travelling they get in touch with strange people; they are surrounded by others from every side. "The strange represents what is unknown [...] culturally determined space, which separates what remains external from the "known" world shaped by tradition, which community is identifying with" (Beck, Giddens, Lash, 1994:81). The confidence stays an indispensable method allowing coping with the presence of other people.

The individual lives through feeling of the social bond as a need for intercommunication with others, for exceeding one's own isolation, in the aspiration to communicate and improve the system of communication. "A good community is a different-ity", as Tadeusz Sławek (2006: 33) writes, community-ness cannot define itself by excluding those who are received as a "strange body". On the contrary, this "strange body" helps the community to understand the values on which its existence is founded. The strange is waking communities up from the dream of complacency".

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